

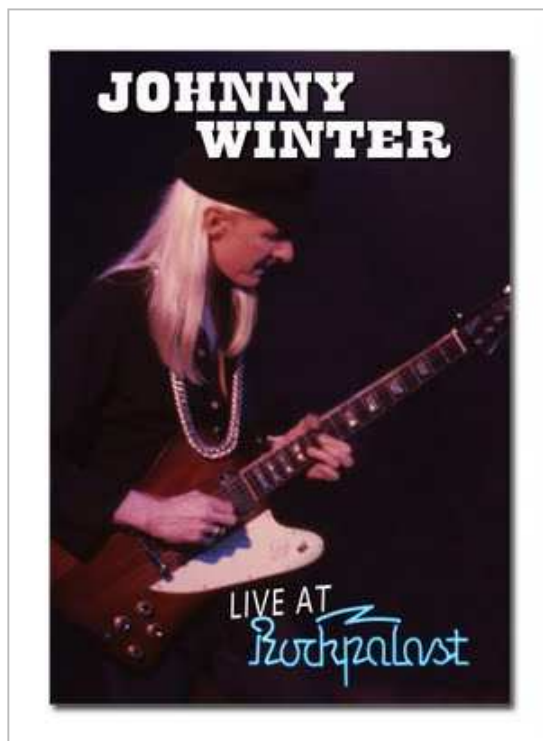
FFanzeen: Rock'n'Roll Attitude With Integrity

Through the writings and photography of Robert Barry Francos, a view of the arts and culture, including everyday life.

THURSDAY, AUGUST 25, 2011

DVD Review: *Johnny Winter Live at Rockpalast*

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 Images from the Internet



Johnny Winter Live at Rockpalast 1979

Directed by Unknown
 MVD Visual, 1979 / 2011
 90 minutes, USD \$19.95
 MVDvisual.com

This April 1979 oft-bootlegged show has finally been released on DVD, thanks to the good people at MVD Visual. Broadcast live on German television, it was filmed at Grugahalle, in Essen, Deutschland.

Previously to the show, and after having been raised in the swampy sounds of Delta blues in Texas, Johnny Winter made his name playing

Blog Archive

- ▼ 2011 (66)
 - ▼ August (7)
 - [DVD Review: Johnny Winter Live at Rockpalast](#)
 - [DVD Reviews: Mellodrama: The Mellotron Movie](#)
 - [DVD Review: Here We Are in the Years: Neil Young's...](#)
 - [DVD Review: The Death of Andy Kaufman](#)
 - [Club Flyers and Invites from 1970s and 1980s: Part...](#)
 - [Twelfth MEA Convention, University of Alberta, Edm...](#)
 - [Book Review: Sheriff McCoy: Outlaw Legend of Hanoi...](#)
 - ▶ July (11)
 - ▶ June (6)
 - ▶ May (8)
 - ▶ April (11)
 - ▶ March (8)
 - ▶ February (8)
 - ▶ January (7)
- ▶ 2010 (152)
- ▶ 2009 (78)
- ▶ 2008 (70)
- ▶ 2007 (22)

About Me

[Robert Barry Francos](#)
 Currently living in Saskatoon (email at RBF55@msn.com for address). From 1977-88, I used to publish a print version of a music

blues rock in the late '60s and early '70s. After a famous bout in rehab to get rid of an addiction, Winter basically used that fulcrum to find his way back to the blues, which expressed the internal frustration that was most likely raging side. He understood the blues and was feeling it strongly, so it seems apropos. As shown here, he tries to get away from rock'n'roll somewhat, but *they keep pulling him back in*.

For this concert, Winter is part of a power trio. On bass is afro'd Jon Paris, who has worked with the likes of Elvis (on *Roots Revolution*), Dylan, Robert Gordon, Jimmy Cliff and Peter Tosh (not to mention his own solo releases). He seems to be having a blast here, as he has a wide open smile almost throughout, and he gets to play both harmonica and, for two songs, lead guitar and vox. On drums - many, many drums, including a double floor bass set - is Bobby Caldwell, who has played in (or with) the likes of Captain Beyond, Armageddon, Rich Derringer, and (as has Paris) Johnny Winter during some of his rock period. He plays okay (not magnificently), sometimes in a slashing motion, but seems out of place for a blues show with his complex kit, spandex sleeveless red shirt, and red silk boxer shorts (aka, a rock drummer clothing cliché).

The song list of blues is pretty strong, including Freddie King's "Hideaway," Junior Wells' "Messin' With the Kid," and Willie Brown's "Mississippi Blues." He sets (figuratively) fire to his Gibson Firebird as he floats around the stage, or plays sitting on a stool. Truthfully, he's looking pretty frail, his wispy frame moving around the stage like a corn stalk blowing in a wind. His long, thin fingers snake over the neck with a passion, whatever it is he is playing. Actually, he looks like hell, his teeth gray and his albino skin looking more sallow than usual. And is it me, or is he a bit testy, as well? He seems to have a few words for Jon Paris here and there (both of whom ignore Caldwell until the very end), though Jon's joy of what he is playing never seems to wane.

But then again, Winter is also self-deprecating in his brief comments between songs, as well as perhaps a bit condescending to his audience who want to rock. More than once, he comments to the audience that he knows they're expecting rock'n'roll, but he's going to play the blues, if it's "okay" with them, while extolling the virtues of the genre.

Meanwhile, there are some songs he plays in the middle that border (or perhaps overlap) on rock, such as "Divine Duck" and the staple, "Suzie Q." At this point, for some reason, Jon Paris takes over the guitar and vocals for some ole time rock and roll and rockabilly with Muddy Waters' "I'm Ready," which he starts with a solid Chuck Berry-sounding guitar riff, followed by Johnny Burnette's "Rockabilly Boogie." No wonder he played with Elvis. While he is riffing away decently, Winter is relegated to the bass, which he plays without much flaunting. However, there is one brief shining moment where both Paris and Winter seem to be enjoying playing each other's instrument (now, *now...*).

magazine in New York called FFanzeen, which dealt with the wide-ranging independent music scene. I also photographed many bands from the period (and since). Now I write this blog, and have a column at [jerseybeat \(dot\) com](http://jerseybeat.com) (slash) [quietcorner \(dot\) html](http://quietcorner.com). And the beat goes on.

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As a partial digression here, the original program was two hours long rather than the 90 minutes here, and included a cover of Berry's "Johnny Be Goode," and a Caldwell drum solo with a soon-to-be-retired Patti Smith, of all people, on clarinet! I've read some reviews that complain that these two numbers could have (or should have) been substituted for the Paris-led ones. I admit I agree, even though I enjoyed the Paris performance. Heck, why wasn't it *all* here?

After these '50s rock and roll throwbacks, Winter comes back to the lead with a unyielding and seamless blues medley of "Stones in My Passway" (Robert Johnson), "Leaving Blues" (Leadbelly), and "Rollin' and Tumblin'" (Muddy Waters), which you can see he is totally enjoying as he sits on the stool and marinates in the sound, some of which is played with a slide on his pinkie.

The audience seems a bit bewildered by the blues stuff, albeit they seem to be getting pleasure from it. Paris comes over and says something to Winter, obviously to encourage / cajole him, and Winter unwillingly concedes (note: author Sean McDevitt stated that it is "best to think of this offering as a reward, not a concession"), saying "If you don't dig quality, at least you'll get off on volume. *Here we go!*", and then breaks into the last song, the Stones' "Jumpin' Jack Flash," which the audience eats up. I started to feel a bit uncomfortable actually, even though he played the shit out of it. The reason? Winter starts rocking - nay, mocking - the whole rock star on-stage image with the grimaces and false bravado he obviously isn't feeling. In fact, at one point he changes the line from "Jumpin' Jack Flash / It's a gas" to "Jumpin' Jack Flash / It's a fuckin' drag." I do have to comment that he shows *why* he was considered such a strong rocker as he wails away at the guitar.

Considering when it took place, this concert was most likely taped in European PAL format, and then transferred and adapted to the North American NTSC system. The image is not bad, considering its age and the technology at the time, though when in the right light, there are thin horizontal lines that appear from time to time, but I didn't find it much distracting. Perhaps I'm old enough to remember just how crappy some video was back then. The sound, however, is pretty crisp and in full stereo, making it enjoyable to give a listen. If the visual are off-putting to the viewer, this is also available in CD. For me, no matter how this is played, hearing Johnny sing and growl is a joy. His lateral "S" lisp works well with the style.

Johnny Winter is a delight to listen to, and for me, also to watch, as he wrings the neck of the guitar, twisting out sounds and bending the notes. The camera wisely focuses on him and often on his playing in long enough shots to actually see what he is doing (as opposed to much modern concert footage where, in MTV mode, the editing doesn't allow the eye to rest on the fingerwork).

The blues is what Winter needed to be playing that night after a

grueling period of his life, and while he had the opportunity to express it, it truly is a celebration of his talent and love of the blues.

Track Listing:

- Hideaway*
- Messin' With the Kid*
- Walking By Myself*
- Mississippi Blues*
- Divin' Duck*
- Suzie Q*
- I'm Ready*
- Rockabilly Boogie*
- Medley*
- Jumpin' Jack Flash*



Posted by Robert Barry Francos at [12:01 AM](#)

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