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## Johnny Winter - Live Through The '70s (2008)

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By [Reverend Keith A. Gordon](#), About.com

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For better than forty years now, blues-rock guitarist has thrilled fans with his onstage exploration of traditional blues music and houserockin' originals. The Texas native made his bones playing gutbucket blues in greasy Lone Star bars and recording old-school styled blues singles for fly-by-night labels before moving to New York City in the mid-1960s.

Hyped by an enthusiastic *Rolling Stone* article, Winter signed a major label deal in 1968, followed quickly by releasing six studio and a two live albums over the next eight years. Winter enjoyed his greatest commercial success during the decade of the 1970s, a fruitful period captured by the video documentary *Live Through The '70s*.

### Johnny Winter's Live Through The '70s

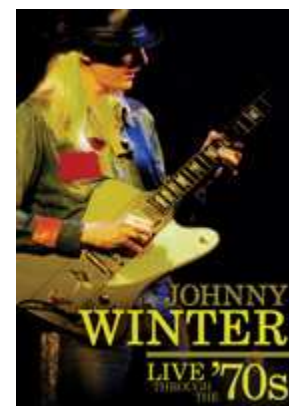
Oddly enough, *Live Through The '70s* kicks off with a song identified more closely with Winter's brother Edgar. This early version of Edgar Winter's classic "Frankenstein" is a critter of an entirely different color, more of an improvised jazz-fusion flight of fancy than the synth-heavy rocker we all know and love. This 1970 Dutch TV performance has Edgar blasting the drums during an energetic and lengthy solo, while brother Johnny injects short starfire bursts of blues fretwork into the mix.

Winter ventures onto pure blues turf with an inspired reading of [B.B. King's](#) 1950s-era hit "Be Careful With A Fool" (listed here as "Be Careful Of The Fool"). Displaying deliciously languid fretwork and a trebly, soul-shaking tone not unlike King's, Winter's rougher primal vocal growl is paired with a shuffling rhythm.

### Live At The Royal Albert Hall

One of Winter's signature pieces is his cover of Chuck Berry's classic "Johnny B. Goode." Performed at the Royal Albert Hall in London circa 1970, this take has obviously been culled from a concert film and thus not as intimate as the three Dutch TV clips. As is the story with the rest of *Live Through The '70s*, the footage here varies in both visual and audio quality.

The performance of "Johnny B. Goode" is every bit as incendiary as any of the songs on the Dutch playlist, however, Winter and crew blowing the roof off the hallowed British institution with a raucous cover that does Chuck proud,



Johnny Winter's Live Through The '70s  
Photo by Peter Stupar,  
courtesy Music Video Distributors

Winter's guitar ringing clear as the proverbial bell.

### **Interviews With Johnny Winter**

Interspersed between the musical segments are interviews done by Dennis Frawley after the Ann Arbor Blues Festival in 1970. Filmed at the Detroit Tubeworks in Walled Lake, Michigan - the original home of *Creem* magazine - the conversations shed a light on Winter's creative process and his evolution from the blues to blues-and-roots-rock, and back to pure blues again.

During one interview segment, Winter talks about levitation, outer-space, and other drug-fueled mumbo-jumbo before cranking out an extended and very cool reading of Chicago blues legend [Big Bill Broonzy's](#) "Key To The Highway." Wearing an oversized floppy velvet hat that obscured his face, and accompanied by bassist Randy Hobbs, Winter brings more Texas soul and Delta blues vibe to the song than any version short of Broonzy's original. It's an impromptu moment, not listed on the DVD's cover, but the informal setting and passionate playing of the song is one of the disc's finest moments.

### **Don Kirshner's Rock Concert**

*Don Kirshner's Rock Concert* was a favored weekend diversion for many a wayward rock-n-roll youth during the early-1970s, and this 1973 appearance by Winter features another of the guitarist's trademark tunes, "Rock And Roll Hoochie Koo."

Sporting a black leather top hat and a freshly-grown, stark white beard, Winter was fronting a power-trio that included bassist Hobbs and drummer Richard Hughes. The three jump on "Rock And Roll Hoochie Koo" like a tiger tearing into its dinner, Winter throwing off razor-sharp notes like mushrooming lead from the barrel of a machine gun. "Stone County" is equally feverish, the band adding a roots-rock twang to its bluesy bluster. Sounding like a Texas blues version of Molly Hatchet, Winter lays down solo after piercing solo while the band choogles along with rabid intensity.

### **Walking Through The Park**

A lone 1970 performance from the Beat Club in Bremen, Germany has Winter and band tearing through "Mean Town Blues." A classic example of what the late critic Rick Johnson called "booger rock," the song's locomotive boogie-blues rhythms are driven off the tracks by Winter's gravel-throated vocals and broken-glass guitar riffs. Above a throbbing TNT drumbeat, the guitarist lays down one napalm cluster of notes after another, a hypnotic and smothering tsunami of sound.

The other highlight of *Live Through The '70s* is Winter's 1974 reading of [Muddy Waters'](#) classic "Walking Through The Park" at the Chicago Blues Summit. Winter was backed by an all-star band that included Phil Guy and Michael Bloomfield on guitar, legendary Chicago blues harpist [Junior Wells](#), and Dr. John on keyboards.

Sadly, the sound is a little muddy here, but the performance is phenomenal. Wells' harp dances across the mix, drummer Buddy Miles beats the hell out of the cans, and Winter, Guy, and Bloomfield bob-and-weave like heavyweight prizefighters, guitarist intertwined in a sonic clench like a mongoose and two cobras in a musical death match.

### **The Reverend's Bottom Line**

*Live Through The '70s* is an excellent collection of film clips featuring fourteen vintage Johnny Winter performances from the decade. Most of the songs - half of 'em, by my count - date from 1970, an especially creative and successful period of Winter's career.

This is not to say that the later performances on *Live Through The '70s* are chopped liver...the two *Don Kirshner's*

*Rock Concert* clips are hard-rocking; the two 1974 songs from Chicago and Bremen, are both great; and the three performances from 1979 are high-voltage examples of Winter's trademark blues-rock sound.

Altogether, *Live Through The '70s* is a fine document of a seminal period in the guitarist's lengthy and impressive career, sure to appeal to both Winter's long-time fans and those that enjoy their blues music with a rock-n-roll chaser. (Music Video Distributors, released October 28, 2008)

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