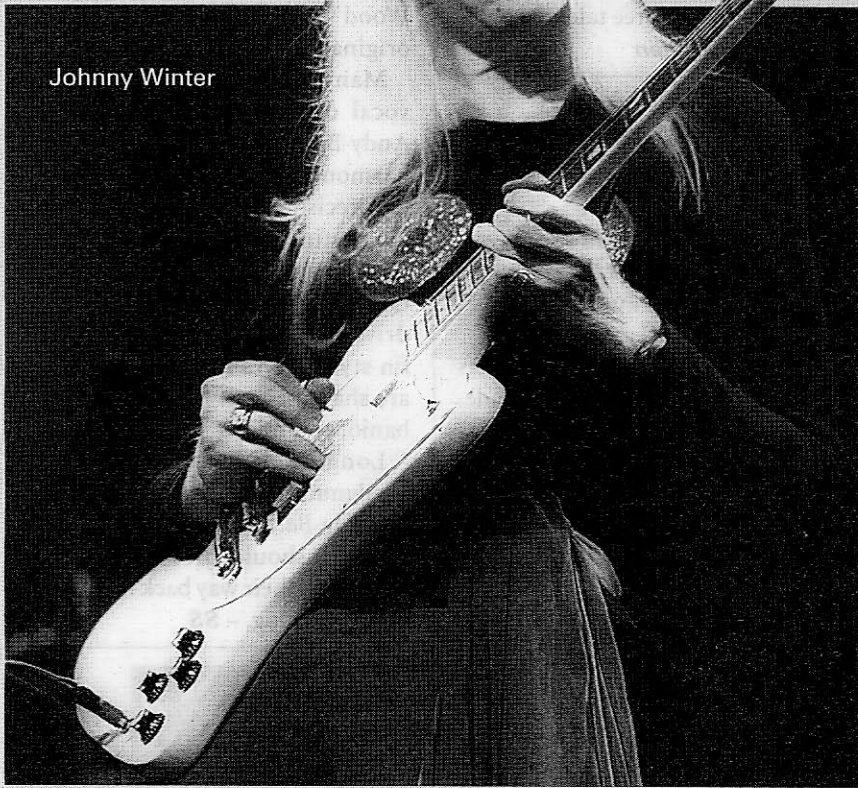


By Dan Forte



Johnny Winter

DVD Blues

THE JOHNNY WINTER DVD compilation *Live Through The '70s* (MVD Visual) is an eye-opening feast from the outset. Teeing up with three songs live on Danish TV in 1970, the nearly-original edition of the band performs "Frankenstein" by the guitarist's brother, Edgar, who is not only featured on keyboards but moves to a second drum kit to trade solos with Uncle John Turner, as Winter and bassist Tommy Shannon look on.

Playing a solidbody Epiphone Wilshire, Johnny then delivers a great slow blues, "Be Careful With A Fool," with Shannon employing the same two-string, Jimmy Reed technique he'd later use with Stevie Ray Vaughan.

Edgar then switches to alto sax and Johnny opts for a goldtop Les Paul for "Fast Life Rider" (inexplicably mis-titled "Drop The Bomb" here), from Johnny's 1969 album *Second Winter* in the intimate, beautifully filmed set.

Segments from a 1970 interview following Winter's set at the Ann Arbor Blues Festival are used to separate the chunks of live footage, including a lesson where Johnny teaches new bassist Randy Jo Hobbs "Key To The Highway."

Other standouts include a '73 version of "Rock And Roll Hootchie Koo" on "Don Kirshner's Rock Concert" and a "Soundstage" tribute to Muddy Waters featuring Winter playing "Walking Through The Park" backed by Junior

Wells, Buddy Miles, Dr. John, and Mike Bloomfield.

But the price-of-admission performance is a 1970 version of "Mean Town Blues" on German TV, with Edgar laying out completely and Turner and Shannon leaving Johnny to play unaccompanied, standard and bottleneck, for much of the tour de force – on the Fender electric 12-string he converted to a six-string.

Though filmed from 1970 to '79, this DVD is the best illustration of just what a phenomenon Winter was when he burst out of Texas onto the blues-rock scene in the late '60s.

American blues fans (those dedicated enough) first became aware of **Tony "T.S." McPhee** via various anthologies of British blues from the mid/late '60s and his backing work on English releases by American blues pianists Eddie Boyd and Champion Jack Dupree. His band, John Lee's Groundhogs, later shortened to Goundhogs, were so named for accompanying John Lee Hooker, but eventually served as virtually the U.K.'s resident backup band for numerous touring American acts.

The band evolved into a harder-edged blues-rock trio, and the collectors' edition of *Live At The Astoria* (Eagle Vision) features McPhee backed by drummer Pete Corea and bassist Eric Chipulina. The guitarist was 54 in '98, when the concert was recorded, after the band had cut *Hogs In Wolf's Clothing*, dedicated

to Howlin' Wolf. This DVD/CD set is a reissue of a video originally released on VHS in 2001.

While McPhee's vocal bursts are far from lyrical, his playing is impressive if not revelatory – ranging from Muddy Waters' "Still A Fool" to more extended, envelope-pushing jams. Unfortunately, it isn't until the last two songs, "Groundhog Blues" and Wolf's "Down In The Bottom," that he switches to slide and displays some masterful technique and tone.

After 40-plus years, the Groundhogs are still very much together; their latest CD is *Hogwash* (on United Artists).

The problem with Dion's *Heroes* CD (Saguaro Road) is the only fault one could cite of his 2005 foray into acoustic blues, *Bronx In Blue*: too many warhorses. But whereas *Bronx* sounded fresh because it was a new context for him, here, the rock and roll legend picks the most obvious standard hits to pay tribute to his mentors and contemporaries – like "Be Bop A Lula" by Gene Vincent, "Summertime Blues" by Eddie Cochran, and "Jailhouse Rock" by Elvis. He puts his own stamp on the songs (it's impossible to imagine that he wouldn't), but it would have been nice if he'd dug a little deeper and chosen a few obscurities.

The premise here is to pay tribute, not necessarily to the stars who sang the hits, but to their guitar playing or, in some cases, the guitarists who backed them – Cliff Gallup behind Vincent, Scotty Moore behind Presley, etc. Assisting in this admirable venture is lead guitarist Bob "Crow" Richardson, who is both versatile and reverential.

The CD is enjoyable, but the real payoff is the bonus DVD, where Dion and Richardson play snippets of the songs as a duo and talk about the artists. A few facts may be blurred, but Dion's passion for, and first-hand relationship with, the music (and Richardson's demonstrations) are illuminating, and his unaffected knack for storytelling is a real treat.

Don't let the title of Art Tatum – *The Art Of Jazz Piano* (MVD Visual) dissuade you if guitar is your only instrument; there's plenty to absorb from this hour-long documentary, whether you play six strings or 88 keys.

Art Tatum possessed quite probably the most awesome technical facility and inventiveness in jazz history. As the nearly equally colossal pianist Fats Waller once said when Tatum came to a club he was playing, "God is in the house."

Tatum's story should be enlightening for any jazz musician, but of particular interest to guitar players is the presence of tenor guitar great Tipy Grimes (a member of Tatum's stellar trio), shown here in rare performance footage with Tatum. Grimes is also interviewed, as is Les Paul, not to mention piano giants such as Hank Jones, Dick Hyman, George Shearing, and Marian McPartland.

Likewise, the appeal of *Pounding Surf! – A Drummer's Guide To Surf Music* (E.G.O. Productions) extends far beyond percussionists. In fact, the DVD begins with a mini history of instrumental rock and surf culture courtesy Paul Johnson, guitarist/co-founder of the Belairs, who recorded the now-classic "Mr. Moto." Johnson and Slacktone guitarist Dave Wronski are then shown in a recent live performance, with bassist Ron Eglit and drummer Dusty Watson. Like Eglit, Watson is an alumnus of the Surfaris and Dick Dale, not to mention Jon & The Nightriders, Slacktone, Agent Orange, and a few other bands – usually simultaneously.

Other featured drummers are the Reventlos' Lee Six, the Rhythm Rockers' Tracy Longstretch, and Dave Myers & The Surftones' Bob Colwell, in addition to Reventlos guitarist Matt Quilter, the Torquays' Steve Soest on bass, and others. Intercut with performances are also anecdotes from Richard Delvy (the Belairs, the Challengers) and a lecture by the Surfaris' Jim Pash on the origins of "Wipe Out."

Guitarists should also pay attention to the instructional bonus "Art Of Surf Drumming" feature – if for no other reason than to be able to tell your drummer

where he or she messed up.

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