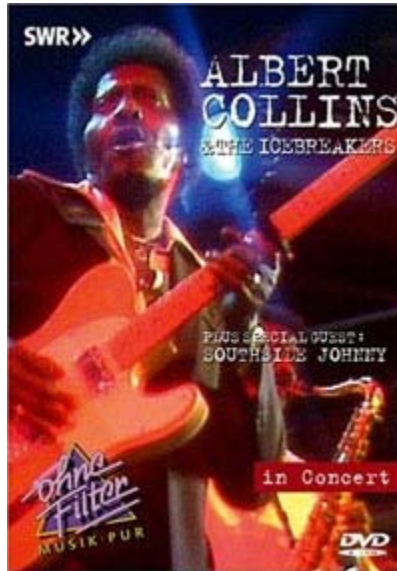


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## In Concert

### Albert Collins & The Icebreakers



One of the great tragedies in blues and rock history is that Albert Collins, the famed "Master of the Telecaster" whose wry songwriting and biting guitar attack inspired a legion of rock players in the 60s, 70s, and 80s, just as his career was hitting its stride. Though he had been performing and recording since the late 50s, commercial success didn't start clicking until nearly 30 years later, and just as he was starting to reap the rewards of three decades worth of work, he was struck down by liver cancer in 1993 at the age of 61. For the blues legend, it comes as a pleasant surprise that the German label Inakustik should be releasing **In Concert**, a DVD of Collins' 1985 appearance on the German music show *Ohne Filter*. A chance to see the "Iceman" in his prime seems too good to be true. In spite of a rather rough presentation, it manages to a living up to this billing.

On the positive side, viewers are given the chance to see a truly unique musician and get a closeup encounter with his homespun technique. Unlike most guitarists, Collins tuned his instrument to the key of F minor and choked up on the neck with a capo — something more akin to Joni Mitchell than your run of the mill blues guitarist. The sounds he produces, however, are unmistakably tough and stinging, as he plays with his thumb and forefinger; another trademark of his style. Furthermore, Collins is backed by a solid band. Abb Locke satisfactorily greasy saxophone and backup guitarist Rob Noll plays well enough in his own right. The rhythm section of Johnny B. Gayden on bass and Casey Jones on drums are rock solid. The Icebreakers lay a four somewhere between roadhouse blues and R&B funk and compliment Albert's frosty tones like grits with grit.

Special guest Southside Johnny makes a lackluster appearance on "Brick," blowing an uninspired harp through the air out of an otherwise excellent tune. And to further lament, the set was fairly lean on the humor that Collins applied liberally to his songwriting. Songs like "Too Many Dirty Dishes," "I Ain't Drunk (I'm just Drinkin')", and "Don't Go Reachin' Across My Plate" — tunes that showcase his wit as well as the wicked guitar playing — are staples of the Collins catalog. It's too bad that this eight-song performance left these select out. The DVD package itself also leaves much to be desired. Complete with typos in the captions and looking though it was videotaped in a high school gymnasium (loved the dry ice effect), the DVD doesn't offer much for fans other than a solid performance by Collins and the Icebreakers. The "extras" on this DVD include a written Albert Collins biography and an interview with the producer. Pretty tepid stuff. In the end, though, it's the performance that makes the DVD worth viewing and — for blues fans — owning. Watching the infectious Collins perform is its own reward, and sadly, makes us miss him even more so many years after his death.

~ Andrew Todd

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