

VERITAS VAMPIRUS

LEFT OF THE "LEFT"

News from the Undead

The *Rude*-imentary Truth

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by Mark S. Tucker

Provocateur, hector, meta-anarchist; "Have brain, will use; have pen, will poison."

JOHNNY WINTER WITH DR. JOHN - Live in Sweden 1987 (DVD - MVD Video) (CD - MVD Audio)

Well, Johnny's gone to The Great Blues Jam In The Sky, where Jimi, Janis, and the cream of the 60s crop have been patiently waiting for him, and I'm thinking I'd better start cleanin' my act up so's I can glom what's sure to be non-stop festivities as more and more Baby Boomers shuffle off the mortal coil and into eternity; the way I'm going, if'n I don't tame my tongue and chasten this poison pen I've been wielding in political commentary corners, and every so often in music reviews, for a very long time, I'm likelier to wind up tangling with that lot of snarky-assed horned demoniacs down below. You know what that means: Rush Windbagge, Donald Dukktrumpe, and George Bushleague Jr. singing Republican fight songs in a broken-down roadhouse on the banks of the river Styx. The mind recoils.

Speaking of odd situations, when I received this DVD and its companion CD (separate releases), I thought "*Whaaaaat???* Rip-The-Frets-Off Johnny with The Honky-Tonkin' Zydeco Doctor?? It doesn't make sense! The two are from different blues houses!" I mean, could ya see Johnny with, f'rinstance, Leon Redbone? No! Leon'd be clawing his way out of the burning concert hall, bombs and bullets flying all over the place from everywhichwhere, as John remained calm on-stage, peeling off incendiary riff after incendiary riff, all of which caused the tumult in the first place, so.....*Dr. John???*

Well, my qualms were immediately set to rights as the DVD kicked in. Johnny and that buzz-saw guitar of his may have eaten gators whole, uprooted kudzu from state line to state line, chased bears through the back woods, and pulled the sun back up blazing as it tried to get its rest in the West, but, hey, the blues is the blues, and, as he says, "the good and happy blues" are just as valid as anything else. 'Sides, all blues make ya feel damn good anyway, and he'd known Mac Rebennack from *waaaaay*back, had been dying to sit down and wail with the esteemed gent, so, at the behest of the good folks across the waters, he did.

Live in Sweden starts with just John and his backing trio, the guitarist hotter 'n a pistol from the git-go, always an uncompromising force of nature, eternally caterwauling in that trademark voice as he put his, in this case, Steinberger through the paces. I caught the guy at the Hollywood Bowl a couple years earlier than this revived issuance (at least I *think* it was the Bowl, I was pretty ripped - Lee Michaels was on the bill, so ya hadda be schnozzled, what with the ol' 70s harmony of spirit and all - but it coulda been somewhere else), and so I can attest that he, as Tina Turner put things so eloquently, nevah evah did nuthin' nice 'n easy. By the incendiary second number, "Don't Take Advantage of Me", not an audience member in the small TV recording venue but that had his/her hair on fire, and I mean *smokin'!*

Watching this, or listening to the CD, one can't believe what one is seeing/hearing. It's as though the legendary slim fireball is playing a switch-blade, not a guitar, notes conjured, sliced, peeled, and put back together in juggernaut fashion, but let's remember: Winters made rock history in being advanced \$600,000 on signing to Columbia Records in 1968, the biggest sum ever in the field, 'cos Columbia had every confidence he'd more than return the investment. He certainly did. From that point forward, the guy improved in every possible way. Here, eight years later, he's pristine, untouchable, note perfect, a meteor come to Earth.

Dr. John arrives half way through, in "You Lie Too Much", slipping right into a groove he's never out of. Winter dials things back just a touch but not all that much, in order not to overwhelm the environment as the good doctor and he trade off

comping and soloing beside one another. Rebennack sings "You Lie", but the pair duets the vocals in "Sugar Sweet", bass player Jon Paris to the side with his trusty harp. Winter cranks into a solo and the groove gets so infectious I had to jump up from the typewriter and start sugarfootin' around the living room. Didn't hurt, either, that the set and tone reminded me very much of brother Edgar's White Trash gig.

The affair ends on a raver, "Jumping Jack Flash", the touchstone Johnny always cut loose on for extended periods, here slinkin', whirlin', twirlin', and struttin' as the audience seat dances, time-claps, cavorts in the aisles, and digs the hell out of the entire fracas. Then something I've never seen happens: Johnny slips around behind Paris and reaches around to play his bass as Paris reaches back and plays Johnny's git-fiddle! Hell, Hendrix, Townshend, Gentle Giant, Blue Oyster Cult, none of those show-cats ever thought of that one! The two saunter to the front of the stage while jamming, seeming, from the front, to be a multi-limbed rough Hindu god, tatoed and hairy, in an arcane music ritual. The crowd goes nuts, and Dr. John, though it's not shown, had to be grinning like a monkey.

The CD ends there while the DVD features a bonus cut, "Prodigal Son", a very short, WAY too short, vintage, jittery, jumpy studio document that's actually just a two-minute toss off showing only half the composition, mildly interesting historically but much more an annoyance than noteworthy in any fashion. Skip it, I say, and hedonize on the main event...more than once.