

Summertime Blues

Winter brothers offer nothing new in weak album

By Deb Gray

Johnny & Edgar Winter, Together; Blue Sky

For all you renegade rockers out there, here's one to help get the ya-yas out. On this recording the Winter brothers, backed by Rick Derringer, Chuck Ruff and Dan Hartman from Edgar's band, return to their roots. No new material here. This is stuff that every budding guitarist learns to play when he first dreams of becoming a rock star.

The album has its obvious weaknesses. But at those moments when everything's together, the music is a free-wheeling testament to the power (and longevity) of rock'n'roll. The album was recorded live, which presents its own obvious problems... mike feedback, buried instrumental parts (Dan Hartman's keyboards are often practically nonexistent.)

But the live recording works for the most part. The general sound is raw, powerful and exciting.

The most glaring of the muff-ups is "You've Lost That Lovin' Feeling," which begins with out-of-tune guitar playing. The Winters never seem to regain their composure. They sound totally uncomfortable with the music and it defeats them.

"The Harlem Shuffle" suffers in comparison to the version that the original Fabulous Flippers used to play in Midwestern clubs in the late 60's.

Side One closes with a nine-song medley of rock'n'roll classics. The first portion of the medley is rather spastic. There's minimal snatches of tunes, held together by some abrupt transitions.

But by Edgar's baritone sax solo on "I'm Ready," things are really cooking. (Since the back-up band has recorded with Edgar for several years now and are more accustomed to his playing, they give him the most inspired support.) The end of the medley is sheer blockbusters—"Jenny Take a Ride" and "Good Golly Miss Molly."

So much for Side One. Side Two begins with "Let The Good Times Roll," followed by a rather blasé "Mercy, Mercy." (Not to be confused with Mercy, Mercy, Mercy, which the Buckingham made famous.) The fault here is not so much the performance as it is the weakness of the song. The last cut is well worth the wait, and I recommend this album on its strength.

The Winter brothers go back to the Texas blues tradition from which they began, recording "Baby, Whatcha Want Me To Do." It's the kind of stuff we haven't heard from them since "Tobacco Road" of the "Roadwork" LP. Edgar's vocals are at their wrenching, aching best; Johnny's solos are inspired; the band is really together. There is some of that cadenza, Edgar-and-Johnny-trading-licks stuff, which is quickly becoming an overused ploy from these guys. But it's still an amazing performance of no-holds-barred blues.

The Guess Who, The Way They Were; RCA

Recod companies can be the most bloodthirsty of purse snatchers, and here's another example where the mongols of capitalistic lechery rape their artists.

RCA, which only recently put out a series of albums that contained botched-up Elvis Presley recording sessions, is the culprit. Now, several months after the

Guess Who have disbanded, we have the same sort of thing... seven cuts, recorded in 1970, from the same Guess Who lineup that became a virtual hit factory: "These Eyes," "Undun," "Laughin'," "No Time."

If material has not been released before, it's probably for a very good reason—the artists concerned have some sense of pride, or common sense, or both. This is no exception. There are a couple of good things here, but not enough to make the album of interest to anyone but the diehard Guess Who fan.

Vocalist/keyboard player/flutist Burton Cummings is responsible for anything of merit here. His vocal on "Take the Long Way Home" rescues a banal tune from complete boredom; he even generates some excitement. On the ballad "Runnin' Down the Street," he has never sounded better, his voice at its crooning, sensuous best.

Other cuts include two other ballads, "Silver Bird," which has a couple of nice hokey cadences that make you almost hate yourself for being hooked by them, and "The Answer."

A much more inspired version of the rocker "Miss Frizzy" exists on the group's "Rockin'" album.

The other two rockers—"Species Hawk" and "Palmyra"—are destroyed by Randy Bachman's presence. Bachman uses the same techniques that he later employed while assaulting our ears as the leader of Bachman-Turner Overdrive.

The emphasis is heavy on the bass lines, with endlessly repetitive, doubled guitar parts. On "Palmyra" we hear from Bachman a guitar solo that should convince rock dreamers—that you don't necessarily have to have a whit of sensitivity or musicianship to be a star.



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