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REVIEW: Winter still can turn up the heat

By James J. Gillis/Daily News staff



Blues men Johnny Winter, right, and James Montgomery share the stage Wednesday night at the Newport Blues Cafe. (T.J. Kirkpatrick/Daily News staff)

These days, his sidekick is blues harp player/singer James Montgomery, the local lad who's toured with Winter for four years.

Like B.B. King, Winter plays sitting down these days. But if you're tempted to call him "Old Man Winter," listen to his blistering take on Freddie King's "Hideaway" first.

Winter grew up in Beaumont, Texas, where he and brother Edgar (both as pale as turkey meat) used to sneak into black blues clubs in the late 1950s. And his Texas roots still hold fast - a little Freddie King here, some T-Bone Walker there.

Winter and Montgomery are road-tested pros, and they played off one another in nasty fashion, with a kick-in-the-pants rhythm section adding ballast.

In the '70s, Winter was as much a rocker as a blues man, but the emphasis is on the blues these days. Not that Winter has turned down the sound. A few patrons sported earplugs.

Note to Winter: You're not playing the Civic Center anymore.

Winter played about 90 minutes with no dull patches. He roared through Lazy Lester's "Sugar Coated Love" and paid homage to Muddy Waters with "Hoochie Coochie Man."

Winter produced Waters' last albums, giving the blues giant a career jump-start five years before his 1983 death. Waters referred to Winter as "my son."

With the crowd ringing the tiny stage, Winter ripped through Bob Dylan's "Highway 61 Revisited," one of the first songs he recorded, playing slide guitar as if punishing his instrument.

This was a night mostly for the old-timers, the faces that used to catch Roomful of Blues in the early days at Harpo's or Albert King at the Blue Pelican, the folks who seldom hang out in clubs anymore.

NEWPORT - Johnny Winter still kicks up a storm.

Offstage, he looks a bit frail, until he plugs in his guitar. Then, the fireworks start.

Winter played the Newport Blues Cafe - which is bringing in name acts this summer - Wednesday night before a packed house of more than 200. In his 1970s heyday, Winter traded fierce guitar licks with Rick Derringer.



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The show proved there's a Newport audience for authentic players such as Winter, even if some of the fans sport earplugs.

Winter played no encore but after a ferocious "Highway 61 Revisted" there was nothing left to revisit.

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