

soundcheck



CONCERT REVIEW

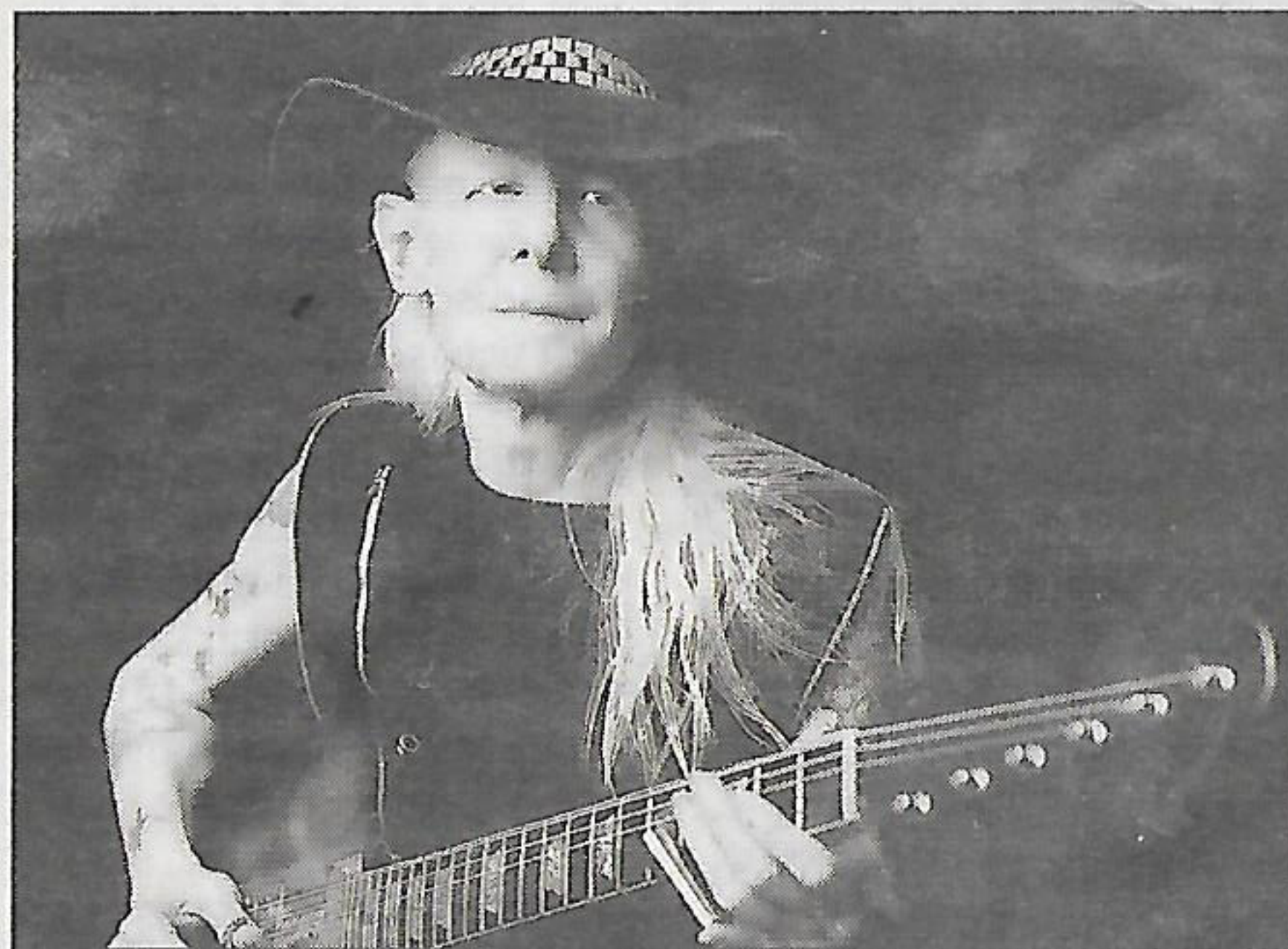
A Winter tale of hot blues at Clearwater

BY JIM WORMINGTON
For The Courier News

"No Moshing, Stage Jumping or Crowd Surfing." So said the signs taped to the backs of the monitors at West Dundee's Clearwater Theater.

Considering that the average age of the audience for the sold-out Johnny Winter show was probably about 47, there seemed to be little danger of such risky, acrobatic shenanigans. These middle-age ex-hippies may have brought a little mischief with them to the show, but moshing was not likely to be on anyone's agenda.

Fortunately for the shoulder-to-shoulder crowd, Winter's agenda included rocking the house



Johnny Winter

with his inimitable guitar playing and distinct, gritty singing style.

Winter walked slowly, carefully onto the stage, sat down and strapped on his guitar. You could tell he

wouldn't be leaving that chair until he was done playing. He looked fragile. He looked his age and then some.

With his thin frame, his long white hair under a

black hat, and his ultra-pale skin (arms thoroughly tattooed), he looked more than a little like a character out of a Harry Potter book — perhaps a guitar-wielding sorcerer in league with Serious Black. If there had been any doubt about the 63-year-old's ability, it was banished shortly after he took the stage. When his first lead solo began, his thin, bleach-white fingers erupted into motion with surprising vitality. Winter's love for playing and performing rose from those six strings as if he were possessed by some kind of benign blues-voodoo.

Whether doing a slower traditional blues number like Willie Dixon's *Hoochie Koochie Man* or a speedier,

rockier tune like his own *Johnny Guitar*, Winter snapped and stretched strings into submission, making notes sting and screech, his fingers deftly marching, scaling the frets of his guitar — on a mission from the blues.

In those brief moments just after a solo, or when Winter's grainy voice was the only sound, the audience expressed its appreciation of his thoroughly-intact, legendary talent with shouts, whistles and applause.

At the end of the night, Winter broke out the slide. He masterfully eased it up and down the neck of his guitar, making the strings howl and moan with the energy of a far-younger soul. He finished up the

night with his version of Dylan's *Highway 61*, and it just served to cement in place his reputation as one of the great living blues guitar players.

How much longer can this pale rocker keep playing and touring? It's a fair bet that he will do it just as long as he can get himself in a seat on a stage without falling over. What can anyone say to such singular tenacity but "Go, Johnny, go."

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▶ **ONE MISSED CALL** (PG-13) 2:10 4:50 7:20 9:50;
FRI - SUN MATINEE 11:50AM
▶ **WATERHORSE** (PG) 12:50 3:50 6:50 9:30;
FRI - SUN MATINEE 10:00AM
▶ **ALIEN vs. PREDATOR** (R) 1:10 3:40 6:20 9:00;
FRI - SUN MATINEE 10:40AM
▶ **JUNO** (PG-13) 2:30 5:10 7:50 10:15;
FRI - SUN MATINEE 11:50AM
WALK HARD (R) 10:20PM
CHARLIE WILSON'S WAR (R) 1:40 4:10 6:40 9:20;
FRI - SUN MATINEE 10:50AM