

# JOHNNY WINTER FROSTED BY NIXED KEYSTONE HYPE

by Robert "Razor" Blades

After two ecstatically-received sets at Keystone Berkeley, and a run-in with club-owner Freddie Herrera, Johnny wanted to do an interview to get a few things off his chest. Acting road manager Jerry Landry hustled us out the back door into Johnny's huge black motor home.

Albino Kangaroo was the name to be used in any advertisements. Besides Johnny, the band consisted of drummer Richard Hughes from the last J. Winter album, "Still Alive and Well" (Columbia KC 32188), and Peter Kaukonen on base. Peter is the brother of Jefferson Airplane/Hot Tuna guitarist Jorma Kaukonen. Black Kangaroo was the title Peter used for his last band. They had one LP on the Airplane started record label, Grunt. Hence . . . Albino Kangaroo.

Sitting down, I noticed how frail Johnny was. He needed help getting on and off stage. His eyesight, like most albinos, was notoriously poor, probably suffering from near-sightedness, an exaggerated sensitivity to light, and cross-eyedness. Johnny's being slightly drunk didn't seem to help his bearing. He sported a short, unkept snow-white beard. His abnormally thin hair hung down far below his slim shoulders.

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Johnny: After completing our tour in June and living in Manhattan awhile, I decided to buy this thing (his mobile home) and drive across the country. There aren't any clubs in New York for new bands to play, and I just wanted to get a band together, have some fun, and play around without it having to be "The Johnny Winter Show," but what happened here tonight makes it real hard.

Jerry Landry: We phoned up Freddie and explained there couldn't be any advertisement using Johnny Winter's name, and that we wanted the door charge to be about \$2.50 or \$3.00. Well, he explained to me how he typically charges \$3.50, so we said okay. We just wanted to come in and play, take our money and leave. You know the money isn't the point, but the Orphanage gave us a check that bounced, and we don't like being ripped off. Anyway, we get here and Freddie is charging \$4.00 at the door.

Johnny: Yeh, that's cracy man. That's a concert price, and I didn't want to get into doing a concert

scene. I wanted people to pay \$2.50 or \$3.00, but \$4.00 is just absurd.

Jerry: Johnny isn't even taking any of the money you know—the money doesn't mean anything.

Johnny: Peter and the equipment man need the bread so they can keep their house. See, people come in and have to pay \$4.00 and then they think it's me that's makin' them pay it, and I didn't want that.

I came to San Francisco because there are a lot of small clubs around we could play, but so far people have just taken advantage of us. I wanted it so the band didn't have to be great. Clubs can be a lot of fun because I can get better communication with the audience and people pay less.

Concerts and rock 'n' roll shows—the people don't come for the music. I've tried it both ways—playing well, and jumpin' around, and people always seem to like me best when I jump around. That's why I wanted to play some clubs, I didn't want to have to jump around.

Jerry: Freddie was supposed to give us fifty percent of the door, so because he charged \$4.00 instead of \$3.50 like he said he would, I figured he shouldn't profit from it. So, I said to him after we finished the first set, "You've got \$2000 in the box office; we want \$1300!" and he got furious and started screaming at me. He talked to Johnny, who said he would play for \$1000, because Johnny wants to play for the people and have a good time, even though he's getting burned himself.

Robert "Razor" Blades: Just for comparison's sake—how much do you usually make for one performance?

Johnny: Well, on the last tour the least we ever made was \$15,000 a night, and the most was at Madison Square Garden where we made \$50,000.

Anyway, I said to him (Freddie), "You've ripped us off, and the people who paid to see us, and I don't like you, but we'll play anyway." All the time I was thinking I'd

like to smash my guitar over his head. I was really glad he didn't say goodbye—I don't know what I would have done.

Blades: You know while I was watching you, I was thinking how unfortunate it was there couldn't be any young kids in the audience, because you were giving off a lot of energy and younger crowds really soak it up.

Johnny: Yeh, I'm getting close to thirty and I'm beginning to really feel a generation gap. When I started playing big concerts, about four years ago, it seemed the crowds were about 19 years old. Geez, now it seems like they're 14 (laughter).

You know, I played clubs for eight years, and the owners are almost all like Freddie. At this one place in Houston the owner told me I had to learn five new songs he'd tell me each week. He said, "If you learn em ya get the job. If ya don't I'll find somebody who can."

Earlier in the year I played at the Playboy Club in Chicago. I walked

in and said "I'm uh, Johnny Winter and I wanna play." So I played at the Playboy Club (laughter).

Blades: Who did you play with?

Johnny: (laughter) I can't remember, . . . I was too drunk. Usually I don't like to play when I'm drunk, because I don't want to embarrass myself. I can sing when I'm drunk, but I can't play.

Blades: Have you done any of the late night television shows?

Johnny: I did the Midnight Special. They told us we could play as loud as we wanted, but we decided to turn down anyway. I also thought I'd jump around a whole lot because I figured everybody would dig it. Anyway, the minute we start playing all the camera men and the stage crew from the network run away holding their ears. So they told us we'd have to turn down. I told them they'd have to get another band, because we were playing way softer than usual to start with. So all the guys come back, and then they tell me I can only move in a four-foot area so as they can keep the camera on me. We did the set and the crew pertended everything was okay. It turned out they couldn't hear anything through their headphones. It came out pretty messed up.

When Mama Cass was guest hosting for the Johnny Carson show she wanted to put me on, but NBC insisted I use the NBC orchestra. I couldn't bring my band, so I didn't do it. That was about a year ago. I think I might do it if I had the chance again! (laughter)

Blades: I heard you were working on an album with Greg Allman.

Johnny: We got together and cut three songs on a demo in L.A. (laughter) Buddy Miles was going to be the drummer in the group. They didn't turn out too well.

It also never happened because the record companies were fighting. Columbia, my company, thought I was worth more, and his (Greg), Capricorn/Warner Bros., thought he was worth more. They should have split the money evenly.

It's a shame you can't play with who you want to. Actually, CBS has been fair. After I finished being a junkie for a year, and got ready to record an LP again, CBS wanted it on their label.

Blades: What did you think of your performance tonight?

Johnny: It wasn't polished or nothin'. It's just supposed to be a fun band. We got together and practiced a few times before we started playing anywhere, but you can't expect it to be very tight—we've only been playing together for a few weeks. Boy, there wasn't one guy in that band that knew what was happening during the last half of the last song.

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After talking with Johnny for over an hour I was convinced he was one of the most friendly, personable people I've met—superstar or not.

## A DANGLING DIARY...

# GOD TELLS ALL!

"God's Diary" by J. Price.  
Millet Books, \$2.00.

On the absolute last page of "God's Diary" we are told not only the meaning of the book's title, but helpfully, that we have not really read a much-too-blabby novel, but a diary. The excuse isn't a strong enough case for substituting action for indulgent introspection.

A stock-character narrator leads us sighingly through the nineteenth-century romantic viewpoint of present day New York City. Nar-

rator is a writer and soon-to-be Columbia University professor. As we tune in he has been living in a tacky New York hotel on a grant from the University, gets himself and his thesis kicked out for rent evasion and vounces through New York madness on a philosophical pogo stick as he awaits his fall teaching gig.

He winds up living with a guy who tried to mug him, and they, and shabby wife and two angelic little girls, maneuver themselves into

intellectual discussions for one hundred and forty-two pages. Later our character unassumingly bumps into some curious religious events, spins into conflicting notions of love, good and evil, poor and rich, and happily shoots himself.

The reader is not only burdened with the narrator's digestion of every event and sensory stimulus which confronts him, but durdoned as well with pointed dialogue and ineffectual devices, the worst of which is a distracting . . .

. . . a dangling sentence which supposedly we are to finish. A more sophisticated reader-participation is what gives literature impact, and where "God's Diary" falls short. It does all the work for us. It lacks control. We should be tantalized, guided and shown, not lectured and confessed to. The viewpoint character can show us his thinking, but listening to it is tiresome.

Mr. Price has a sotyr to tell, and the writing does show progressive improvement. The first two pages

take nearly one thousand words of winding us through classical imagery to eat an éclair, but the last pages give us real drama that moves. The scenes strongly provoke feeling and thought, and by the book's end a sensitive awareness of scene design and pacing is realized.

"God's Diary" is a workbook, not really for us, but for Mr. Price. It's the book every writer whose talents gallop ahead of his skills must write.

—Dick No-ah