

AT THE PALLADIUM

# Fast-Fret Fireworks From Johnny Winter

The rock audience's passion for the electric guitar as the star of the show has pretty much dwindled, but all the excitement and magic that surrounded Beck, Clapton, Hendrix et al in those glory days was conjured by Johnny Winter at his Monday night Palladium concert.

The fierceness and power of his playing and the inescapable charisma of his presence (a quality that even some unconvincing movements couldn't efface) were the twin components of the incredibly fast-moving, uncomplicated display of rock 'n' roll fireworks, a show in which visual and musical flash coexisted beautifully with intense and skilled musicianship.

Winter seemed to be sucking the music from the guitar with his fingers, generally at a pace so torrid that you were almost seeing smoke and inevitably imagining something like an athlete running a 9-second 100-yard dash on a tightrope.

While Winter's singing is negligible, that guitar of his flawlessly communicates the basic energy of rock 'n' roll and unflinchingly creates an invigorating, piledriving emotional thrust. That's at least as important and valuable as being an innovator.

The blues is always at the heart of his music, but

he has sense enough not to dwell on hackneyed patterns, instead tearing through closely allied spinoffs ("Rock and Roll Hootchie Coo") and distant relatives ("Jumpin' Jack Flash"). At every point in the set the surge was upward, his band was superb, the sparkle of the costuming added to the spectacle rather than diverting one's attention, and Winter's regal, pale appearance eventually became close to noble.

Johnny Winter is definitely alive and extremely well, a condition for which we should be very grateful.

Second-billed Foghat is a rising British blues band, a genre that has some built-in limitations. But it's already one of the best players of the game, and its set was never less than at least interesting.

—RICHARD CROMELIN