

Johnny Winter— Saint or Sinner?

By LORAIN ALTERMAN

SAINTS & SINNERS (Columbia KZ-32715), Johnny Winter's sixth album, may prove to be his biggest seller and finally justify all the hoopla that surrounded his signing by Columbia five years ago. At the time he was touted as the most fantastic white blues guitarist alive and given a large and well-publicized advance.

Like any hype, the expectations created could never be satisfied and though Johnny won fame and fans, he never really attained that superstar status of a Jimi Hendrix or an Eric Clapton. The pressures of constant touring hit him hard and threw Johnny into a battle with drugs that finally caused him to drop out of the music scene for a year.

It was no accident that his first album after he emerged once again was called "Still Alive And Well." Now almost a year later "Saints &

Sinners" presents Johnny in a driving rock and roll setting. Certainly his guitar screams out bluesy strains and his throaty voice hollers out the lyrics with intensity, but the over-all sound is more varied thanks to Rick Derringer's super production.

Johnny's voice and guitar attack the Leiber and Stoller "Riot In Cell Block No. 9" with fire and Chuck Berry's "Thirty Days" packs a hard driving punch enhanced by Edgar Winter's tinkling tack piano. On "Blinded By Love," written by Allen Toussaint, Johnny gets into a lowdown funky mood vocally and echoes that spirit in his guitar solos.

The material, which includes a new Van Morrison tune called "Feedback On Highway 101," shows Johnny off to his best advantage. Most important, "Saints & Sinners" has the kind of excitement that will hook even those who haven't previously tuned into Johnny Winter.