

FRIENDSHIPS UNLIMITED invites you to a Gala MARDI GRAS CELEBRATION

SINGLES PARTY & DANCE

NEW TO THE PUBLIC TO COMRADES OF ALL AGES

ABOLIOUS CALYPSO CONCERT BY SIR LANCELOT AND HIS BAND! SEND FROM THUNDER! INSPIRING RASTA DANCING BY TRISA NARA. What other entertainments?

DON'T MISS IT

FRIDAY MARCH 2
8:00 - 12:30 PM

LOBSTER HOUSE
UPPER BALL ROOM
1111 ANAHEIM WAY
MIRAGE DEL REY

TICKETS \$4 AT THE DOOR
\$3.50 IN ADVANCE
CALL 477-7592 (PAG)
340-5877 (DOP)

Pickin'

A Plea for amnesty

LEONARD BROWN

In the days before he became Wavy Gravy, before the plaster cocoon now famous as his cast-of-thousands, Hugh Romney had a mind-wrecker of a monologue which rushed along very high, but still peaking on ultimate flashes such as: Guy wakes up and sees a bird on his dresser. Bird looks at him, then asks very precisely. Can you let me have 25 cents for a pair of bird shoes?

For reasons which I know would never keep me out of Camarillo, that line kept shorting though synapses every time I saw the photo of Our

President leering at ex-First Lady Lady Bird. It was impossible not to know what he was thinking, so, while I don't mind being sordid but eschew the obvious, I won't delve into dirty detail. (But frankly, my bet is that even little old Harry's was bigger.)

Tom T. Hall has a song about a funeral for a guy who died owing him money, and that's somewhat the way I feel about dead politicians. Other than that, I was unmoved by the passing of ex-Presidents, although the deluge of bullshit which ensued really worried me. Political eulogies ought to be studied so that we can maybe establish standards in media pollution.

The Johnson package was pretty neat for historians, who will only have to remember that LBJ died on Monday, and on Tuesday, peace began to happen.

Could we hope that, on the day after Nixon dies, honesty will be declared?

The word "peace" has become holy in our time, and as with all sacred symbols it has been mouthed and abused, like the word "love" on the wet lips of rapists. The victim of that perversion of love — and of the present pastiche of peace? — is made vulnerable by the need to believe.

I can think of only one gesture which would provide substantial relief to my doubts. One small, forgiving, economical scrawl of the executive pen — having scant political and even less diplomatic drama.

And this, in turn, makes me suspicious of those who insist on the complications and subtleties. Thus I can say that the issue of amnesty is my kind of issue, perfectly within the range of my modest political insight. On the one hand I see punishment and cruelty; and on the other I see generosity and kindness. And however childlike that view may be, the issue itself, if drawn out into polarization and debate, is childish — the more so with every passing day.

I also see leverage for amnesty in this particular moment, with all these political curiosities — the pseudo peace, the POW's, the sudden reversal of feeling — on public display. And if it is what you want, as much as do, it can be had. Any child knows to ask for what it wants when the people who run things are smiling.

But then, you may wonder, if I am not a political commentator, what prompts me to this obviously political plea? The answer to your question is music.

I want an invitation in the mail from Warner Bros. which will summon me to the Troubadour to hear Jesse Winchester.

I want to be able to sit down and drink my cognac and look across that familiar room at a musician whom I know but whom I've never been permitted to see. Afterwards I want to climb up to his dressing room, as is my habit, and talk with him. I want to

do this with lightness of heart and ease of mind.

Until there is amnesty, I cannot do these things.

Jesse Winchester split to Canada in 1967, one of hundreds of draft age men who opted for exile as an alternative to grimmer choices of army or prison. Some went to Sweden, as the other of two safe sanctuaries. A few went elsewhere, but Sweden and Canada were the most commonly sought places of refuge.

It was a real movement, spontaneous, numerous, and diverse. Amongst it were exiles in conscience as well as the contumacious. Some were resourceful and skilled, whilst some were indigent. Some were duped into returning, some drifted home in defeat, and some remained, survived and adapted. Because of this heterogeneity, I would certainly not presume to appoint a single man as representative or symbol of their cause. I choose to write about Jesse Winchester because he has kept in touch, in a manner of speaking, through his art.

And, in point of fact, I would say that he probably had an easier time than the average of those conscientious gypsies. A Memphis-reared professional, he played keyboards and guitar. Music being as renescent in Canada as elsewhere, he found

(please turn to page 22)

Pickin'

Come home, Jesse

(continued from page 21)

work, and in 1970 made his debut on records.

That first album, *Jesse Winchester*, established him as an important new writer. It was produced by Robbie Robertson and engineered by Todd Rundgren, which gave it appropriately resonant credentials, and carried

the Bearsville private tag. Bearsville product was then released on the Ampex LP label, and my impression is that while Ampex is the heavy tape moniker, they just never learned the difference between playing Frisbie and distributing records. Since I am often berated for refusing to drink at the muddied main stream of top pop, I have to justify this reference to a three-year old album by pointing to the fact that it is still in press. Warners, who certainly are not in the habit of picking up old masters just to have a fat list, retrieved it from Ampex in their Bearsville package, and evidently it continues to enjoy movement, as retailers are wont to remark. (There's so much analism in this business!)

Among the songs on *Jesse Winchester*, several have had extensive coverage by other artists — notably, "Yankee Lady" and "The Brand New Tennessee Waltz."

Quite a lot about that debut album is memorable. Ampex mounted a major ad campaign, and for weeks one opened one's paper to be confronted by the grim look of a bearded young-but-not-young face. The same

unsmiling photo of *Jesse Winchester* appeared four times on the album cover, seeming to express an anger which was not remotely relevant to the music within. Apparently the device succeeded in attracting attention, as it was meant to do, but I was never comfortable with it. After all, you take the record out, prop the sleeve up somewhere, and while you listen, you may glance from time to time at the package. I, for one, would rather the package didn't glare back.

With the release, three years later, of his second album, *Third Down, 110 to Go* (WB-Bearsville, also having a photo cover, *Jesse Winchester* appears to have shed years, and to have divested himself of the hostility which characterized the 1970 portrait. He looks younger, certainly happier and more pleased with himself, and obviously he has reasons for the latter.

The three years lag between albums may mean that he is a slow writer, or that the inconveniences and hardships of being a displaced person have impeded his work. These two albums are, I think, the work of a perfectionist, in itself time consuming, but often worth the wait. We have more than enough prolific writers, but always a scarcity of those who are of quality.

For even though he has not been able to consolidate his successes as a writer and recording artist, by means of personal appearances, he is un-

arguably among the handful of first rank creative performers. *Jesse Winchester* claimed that distinction for him, and *Third Down* validates the claim.

Now there are a number of artists in the world today who cannot, or will not, for one reason or another return to their native lands. The greatest musician of our time, Pablo Casals, is one of these exiles; and he will not return to live in fascist Spain in protest against the oppression in his country. Because of his renown, I would suppose that he could go back, if he chose, probably to great public and official acclaim. In doing so, Casals would by association impart to Spain's government an aura of integrity it can never earn on its own merits, and this he will never do.

A couple of questions remain in the case of the American political exiles versus the United States.

One of these, of course, centers on the issue of amnesty. Will the government of, by, and for the people discover a way to forgive the people (and I have put it thus because a strong and valued representation of the American population is involved)?

The other question, of equal merit, is this:

Given amnesty, will the exiles want to return? Or have they turned from the immediate passion of protest to the perspective of distance, perceived the extent of the rot, and as the consequence of having been driven off, are they now permanently alienated?

I must ask, then: Would you come home if you could, *Jesse Winchester*?

Because judgement has always been a two-way road, having at either end a tragic and intolerable termination in what is called guilt.