

Winchester Returns Home To Appreciative Audience

By WALTER DAWSON

"I sure do 'preciate your making my homecoming to Memphis such a wonderful, warm evening."

That was Jesse Winchester's summation of his opening show at the Ritz last night as he played his first concert appearances in his hometown. The two sold-out shows last night, which drew more than 800 per-

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sons, were part of Winchester's first American tour, made possible by President Carter's recent amnesty of Vietnam-era draft evaders.

For seven years, since his first album came out, Winchester has enjoyed the adulation of American critics while his 1967 decision to move to Canada kept him from touring this country.

His live performance last night before a crowd that's known him only through records was, quite simply, what you had pictured from listening to his albums. Despite his decade in Canada, Winchester has retained his accent and his Southern tastes. On stage, he seems not like a

professional singer as much as he did simply a Southern boy sitting around listening to his late-night country or blues radio. It was like he wasn't performing. He was listening to the music just like the audience. It was a kind of an innocence.

It is the same type of innocence that Winchester has brought out so purely in his songs, like "Isn't That So," a questioning song about religion. Other songs, particularly "Yankee Lady" and "Mississippi, You Been On My Mind," bear witness not only to Winchester's Southern upbringing, but his typically Southern view of romanticism.

After each song, Winchester seemed ill at ease with the applause and screams. Grinning ear-to-ear, he managed a few "thank you very much" remarks, *while looking like he could barely swallow.*

He came out to a standing ovation and he appeared genuinely touched by such a response. Obviously the crowd was equally touched by his music, for it remained still throughout his quiet songs, something a Memphis crowd rarely is capable of doing.

Winchester's four-piece band — drums, bass, guitar and steel guitar — was adequate, but the focus was firmly on Jesse's voice and his lyrics, just as it's always been on his albums.