

Tender voice

By JUAN RODRIGUEZ
for The Gazette

Jesse Winchester is back this weekend at the Golem, a familiar spot for the singer-songwriter who has played virtually every coffee house and small club in the city since his arrival here eight years ago.

As his compositions — such as Yankee Lady, Brand New Tennessee Waltz, and Mississippi You're On My Mind — have earned him an international following, Winchester has built up steady experience on the Canadian club and concert circuit with the kind of low-key performance that's as unpredictable, in a quiet way, as it is unique.

His tones can be muted or firm declarations of faith, or simple resignation. His subtle touch comes through in a curious synthesis of both country and jazz vocal genres.

Winchester brings with him a deep understanding of the intimacy of a song, a singer and an audience, and his repertoire is wide and expansive.

There are his most well-known songs, including such characteristic assertions as Do It ("Til you're sick of it") and I Can't Be Myself, as well as his grab bag of songs from country, rhythm 'n' blues and the hit parade. He'll add the odd daffy ditty into his set — such as Jesus Was A Teenager Too and Don't Smoke — injecting his own black humor. However, there's nothing foolhardy about his gospel-styled songs.

Whether on bad nights or good, Winchester conveys a closeness to his material with his tender voice and sparse guitar riffs.