

**By JUAN RODRIGUEZ
of The Gazette**

It seemed strange that Jesse Winchester was making his headlining "debut" at Salle Wilfrid-Pelletier last night. After all, Jesse has been a part of the Montreal scene for the past nine years, after moving here from Memphis to avoid bearing arms for Uncle Sam.

Since then, the singer-songwriter from Tennessee has carved a unique reputation despite not being allowed to tour in the U.S.

His songs, such as *Yankee Lady*, *Brand New Tennessee Waltz*, *Black Dog*, *Defying Gravity*, have become classics. He is an artist with a craft and sensitivity that rank among the finest — yet he is not a "star;" only now, on the heels of his fourth album (*Let The Rough Side Drag*), is he becoming a going concern.

But for the faithful who turned up last night at Place des Arts, there was doubtless a flood of memories of hearing Winchester's performances around town over the past years.

The times when he trembled in solo performance at the defunct New Penelope coffee house (just a couple of hundred yards away from PdA); the night he played the first half of The Band's concert in the same hall after Robbie Robertson had produced his first album; and the many nights — alone or with a band — gigging around town in any club that would pay him.

When he first arrived, he said he was "treading water." Today, despite a fine international following (he has recently returned

from a very successful British and European tour), there is still some of that quality in his performance — that is Winchester's mystery.

There was no doubt, however, that he was up for last night's show. The songs were familiar, but the renderings were crystalline.

Winchester captures a variety of moods with a clarity that is practically non-existent on the song scene today. He sings of the *Midnight Bus* ("those fools on the midnight bus") and *Mississippi* memories and burdens and loves and follies — and he does it better than just about anyone.

His band has added plenty to his performance, spearheaded by the solid bass structures of Marty Harris, the sublime electric guitar of Bob Cohen, the lickety-split steel guitar of Ron Dann and the steady drumming of Dave Lewis.

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unstoppable!
ONE AFTER ANOTHER
EVE From 10 00 a m

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