

Jesse Winchester's songs have an old fashioned air to them, a genteel atmosphere that comes out of the benevolent side of the Old South. His lyrics are subtle, almost antique at times, and his themes are often classically bittersweet – lost love, desire and guilt, the entire spectrum of feelings that come when you realize that "you won't live forever" as he says in "Little Glass of Wine." No one is better at expressing the poignance of mortality in song than Jesse.

But he also has a playful, funky, side and can be downright funny in an understated way. When he appeared on our gala 500th show in February of 2001, his quiet delivery and candid personality stole the show. That was no mean feat since the other guests included Steve Earle, Bruce Cockburn and Amy Ray. Jesse congratulated us and then continued to lay the compliments on a bit thick before admitting, "Now I'm just suckin' up. I don't have a sincere bone in my body." The audience roared.

The truth is that Jesse ranks with the few truly great mature songwriters of our times like Randy Newman, Richard Thompson and Elvis Costello and even though his songs are not obviously pop and are certainly not formulaic they have been widely recorded by an impressive list of disparate singers from Emmylou Harris, Bonnie Raitt and Wynonna to Costello, Jimmy Buffet and Joan Baez. But Jesse's own versions, his pure tenor accompanied by his elegant, if quirky guitar style, are gems of unmistakable originality.

Some of his best known songs are included here such as "Yankee Lady," "Brand New Tennessee Waltz" and "Songbird," but if you think his best days are behind him check out "Just Like New" from his most recent album. We present this collection in response to anyone who thinks the art of songwriting died with Porter, Gerswin, Arlen and Carmichael. It surely lives on in Jesse Winchester.

Larry Groce, Host and Artistic Director for Mountain Stage

ALBUM PRODUCTION:

Executive Producers: Al Bunetta and Dan Einstein

Associate Producer: Billy Prine

Production Coordinator: Karen McWhorter

Digitally edited and mastered by Erik Wolf, Wolf Mastering

Art Direction and Design: Angela Haglund for Second Sight Design

Photos: Brian Blausen for B and B Studios