

JESSE WINCHESTER : NOTHING BUT A BREEZE

It was a long time coming, but in April 1977, after ten years of exile, Jess Winchester returned to the United States. He says that the experience of being just half-an-hour from the American border, but not being able to cross it, had never irked him. He'd had his life to get on with. Now, though, he could go back to Memphis, stand at Union and Main and look down at the Mississippi once more, eat some good barbecue, and stand where Elvis stood. He hadn't liked the word 'pardon,' but he'd wept a little when it came through. And why not?

He was perhaps the most famous draft-evader, and – as such – a lightning rod for much of the media interest in the pardon. Still, when *Rolling Stone* contacted him in March 1977, he said he hoped to make his first foray home private and personal. "He said he would go along with anything if it wasn't too tacky," said a spokesman for Bearsville Records. Albert Grossman, owner of Bearsville, got Jesse on NBC's *Weekend*, and both he and Jesse saw the pardon as an opportunity too good to be missed. Grossman hit on *Time*, *Country Music*, and *Rolling Stone* for covers, and wanted to schedule an appearance at the White House.

"Memphis was my first stop," says Jesse. "I went back almost immediately. Of course, Albert wanted to do a tour and capitalize on everything. I was all for it, too. I had a real good band. We rehearsed in Woodstock for a while, then went out on the road. It was a promotion kind of thing instead of a real tour. It was pretty unsatisfactory." He encountered surprisingly little in the way of negative feedback. "At one phone-in radio show, a lady got pretty angry with me, but most people were very nice to me." Then, in a very Winchesterian way, he added, "To my face anyway."

The tour was designed to support "Nothing But A Breeze", and Grossman had assigned the task of producing this high-profile album to Brian Ahern, a Nova Scotian who had produced Anne Murray and had then taken on Emmylou Harris, later marrying her and moving to California. The album was recorded at Eastern Sound in Toronto, but most of the overdubs were done at Ahern's portable Enactron Truck in Los Angeles. James Burton, Glen Hardin, and Ricky Skaggs (all present or past members of Emmylou Harris's Hot band) were called in,

as well as Anne Murray, Emmylou herself, and Nicolette Larson. Emmylou sang back-up on "My Songbird" and liked it well enough to cover it on her *Quarter Moon In A Ten Cent Town* album in 1978. Nicolette Larson sang on "Twigs And Seeds" and "Pourquoi M'Aimes-Tu Pas," and when she got the album she picked "Rhumba Man," reversed the gender and cut it. It was a Top 50 hit for her in 1979.

As if his own writing didn't have enough variety (consider that the Aznavourian melodrama of "You Remember Me" was followed by "Twigs And Seeds"), Jesse brought in three non-originals. Stoney Edwards, the black country singer who had made something of a career out of covering Jesse's songs, wrote "Seems Like Only Yesterday." Phil Everly (writing under his wife's name) and his British bass player, Terry Slater, wrote "Bowling Green" about the Everlys' home state of Kentucky. Jesse had found "It Takes A Young Girl" on a B.B. King album. Talking to Doug Pringle right after the album came out, he said, "I was so moved by that song because to me it meant my little daughter, and the father-daughter relationship is so special in this world, such a ray of sunshine in an otherwise bleak landscape."

The album's title song, "Nothing But A Breeze," got up to number 88 in the Hot 100 in the Fall of 1977 while Jesse toured and hopes were running high. Still, when Doug Pringle interviewed him later in the year, he found Jesse still waiting for the earth to move. "The pardon hasn't made a real substantial change in my life," he said. "*People* magazine is just another interview. I'm still waiting on the cheque." The trip back to Memphis had left him with mixed feelings as well. "I still have American tastes, and I still think the Southern way of speech is the most mellifluous. But it took going back to Memphis to realize that I'm far gone as a Canadian from Montreal. I'd known I'd always live in Canada, but I didn't realize how much I'd changed."

Jesse found Memphis an uglier, and certainly a more violent place, than he had left it. "It's terrible," he said. "Sometimes I think the well has been poisoned and you can't fix something like that. My mother can't walk to go to the grocery store. You can move out to the suburbs, but how far can you run?"

Nashville beckoned; Memphis beckoned. Jesse stayed in Montreal.

– COLIN ESCOTT, Toronto, July 1994

1. Nothing But A Breeze
2. My Song Bird
3. Seems Like Only Yesterday
(Stoney Edwards) Central Songs - BMI
4. You Remember Me
5. Twigs and Seeds
6. Gilding The Lilly
7. Bowling Green
(Jackie Ertel/Terry Slater) Bowling Green Music/Acuff Rose Publications-BMI
8. Pourquoi M'Aimes-Tu Pas?
9. It Takes A Young Girl
(Ron Rose/Dave Rouner) Very Important Publications, Inc/Fat Chance Music-BMI
10. Rhumba Man

All selections written by Jesse Winchester except as indicated. Published by Fourth Floor Music, Inc/ASCAP except as indicated.

PRODUCED BY BRIAN AHERN for Happy Sack Productions

Recorded at Eastern Sound, Toronto, Canada
 Engineered by Ken Friesen, Brian Ahern, Stuart Taylor
 Key Grip - Doug Neal
 Overdubbed and mixed in The Enactron Truck
 Engineers - Brian Ahern, Bradely Hartman, Ken Friesen,
 Stuart Taylor, Donovan Cowart
 Re-issue producer Holger Petersen
 Re-issue design by Rob Storeshaw
 Photography by Peter Cunningham

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© 1977 Bearsville Records
 P 1995 Stony Plain Records

Made in Canada

Manufactured by Stony Plain Recording Company Ltd.
 P.O. Box 861, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada T5J 2L8
 Write for a free catalogue.

MUSICIANS

Jesse Winchester - piano, guitar, organ, marimba, vibes
 Marty Harris - bass
 Dave Lewis - drums, percussion
 Bobby Cohen - guitar, mandolin
 Ron Dan - pedal steel, dobro

With

Mickey Raphael - harmonica
 Ricky Skaggs - fiddle, viola
 Tom Szczesniak - accordion
 Jon Clarke - recorder sax
 James Burton - slide and guitar solo on "Nothing But A Breeze"
 Glen D. Hardin - strings on "Bowling Green," "It Takes a Young Girl" and "My Songbird"
 Nick deCaro - strings on "You Remember Me"

SUPPORTING VOCALS

Emmylou Harris and Herb Pedersen on "Nothing But A Breeze" and "My Songbird"
 Anne Murray and Herb Pedersen on "Seems Like Only Yesterday"
 Anne Murray on "You Remember Me"
 Dianne Brooks on "Gilding The Lilly"
 Nicolette Larson on "Pourquoi M'Aimes-tu Pas?" and "Twigs and Seeds"

Special thanks to Arnie Naiditch, Albert Grossman, Paul Fishkin, Linda Wortman, Bob Hunka, Paul Cummins, Cliff Bonnell and Leslie Winchester.

Dedicated to you Mother, the well that flows forever.

Emmylou Harris appears through the courtesy of Warner Bros. Records; Anne Murray appears through the courtesy of Capital Records; Herb Pedersen appears through the courtesy of Epic Records and Mike Post Productions, Inc.