Low-key Jesse Winchester is riveting as singer's poetic gift shines at Golem

REVIEW

Winchester at the Golem Concert Room for two performances only Saturday

By LUCINDA CHODAN of The Gazette

Maybe the Free Trade Agreement is not going to be a disaster, cultural-

ly speaking, after all.

When you consider that our neighbors to the south now have loudmouth Ottawa-born impressionist Rich Little while Montrealers are blessed with the presence of honeyvowelled Tennessee native Jesse Winchester, the deal doesn't look so

Winchester, who played a rare pair of Montreal concerts Saturday, has lived in this country for more than two decades - since the day Uncle Sam invited the Memphis resident to lay down his guitar and pick up an M-16 in the service of his coun-

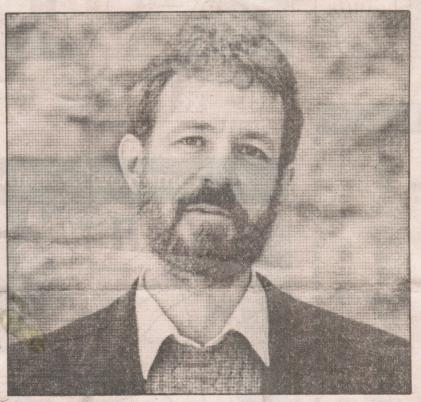
Twenty years haven't done much to erode that courtly drawl, and they don't appear to have impinged a whit on a distinctly Southern musical consciousness steeped in R & B, soul and

country music.

Everything Winchester writes is infused with those elements, and everything he plays and sings is built on a personal metronome that ticks out a lilting, idiosyncratic rhythm.

But what makes Winchester so extraordinary is that those musical attributes are twinned with the sensibility of a poet. Like the God with a "jeweller's eye" in one of Winchester's own songs, the songwriter peers deep into the human soul.

Then, weighing every word, he crafts lyrics about everything from gossip to the human spirit that fall like polished stones from his lips.



Jesse Winchester: Lyrics peer deep into human soul.

In his own soft-spoken, unassum- ment of a relationship: ing way, Winchester is as riveting and towering a presence on-stage as

anyone on MTV.

So in the early show Saturday, the audience listened stock-still to Winchester classics like Let the Rough Side Slide and Nothing But a Breeze and, of course, Brand New Tennessee Waltz - as well as equally strong new works: a sly look at TV evangelists (the chorus began: "Swing low, big old Continental") and a ballad about what happens to a father's heart as his daughter grows

The very best of that new material was a song that parsed the dénoue-

"Don't paint any pictures for me I see for myself. . You don't even care enough To let me know the score Girl, I don't think you love me any

Those devastating words, sketched in Winchester's sweet tenor, were enough to make rueful recognition spring unbidden from the heart to lodge in the throat.

Jesse Winchester's new album, on the Attic label, should be in the stores soon. Truth and beauty should

always come so cheap.