

Jesse Winchester's quiet musical genius shines at the Egg

By MICHAEL HOCHANADEL
For The Sunday Gazette

REVIEW

His new "Gentleman of Leisure" album is his first in 11 years.

Almost everything was written in an easy waltz-time and sung in a whispery Tennessee/Mississippi drawl. Yet Winchester's melodic ingenuity, emotional insights, bone-dry wit and unflinching candor offered surprising variety. He was so quiet, so anti-show-business, such a clandestine, subtle wizard about it all, that the power of his music snuck up on everyone.

He started with "Talk Memphis" and "Brand New Tennessee Waltz," deeply southern/nostalgic, then examined the workaday world in "Nobody Told Me About this Part," about the hassles of stardom, and "Gentleman of Leisure," outlining the world's laziest mission statement/job description.

Winchester's love songs spanned a startling range, from the wheedling betrayer in "Love Is Hard, But Love Is Fair" to the despair of several poignant breakup laments, the grateful celebrations of "Little Glass of Wine," "Foolish Heart" and

"Yankee Lady" and the adolescent joy of "Shing-A-Ling," a new song that used 1960s dances for context.

He got everybody singing some gospel, spoke of God as a big dad who only wants his kids to get along after "Let's Make a Baby King" and reached uncommon depth with "If Only."

If only this genius were the star he deserves to be.

Kieran Kane of the sadly under-rated 1980s country band the O'Kanes wandered with casual ease through a tremendously charming, extra-long opening set. Engagingly laid-back in his tem-

pos and banter, he made graceful music that was consistently sharp in its musical and lyrical focus.

He opened things up for requests right away, saying that nobody knew him at a recent concert so he sat silent for 45 minutes, waiting. No waiting at the Egg Saturday. He responded to fans' called-out song titles with obliging joviality although he faltered in a French-language song and had to restart.

When a fan called out a train song, he hesitated before reluctantly choosing one. Then he stopped playing guitar and gave an expansive gesture to em-

phasize the single reference to a train that the typically superb song contained.

He sang of a painful breakup in "Four Questions," of happy, devoted love in "I'll Go on Loving You" and "Honeymoon Wine." He lamented small-town conservatism in "A Town This Size," but also celebrated homecoming in "Eight More Miles." And he sang everything with deceptive ease and a quiet strength.

The show drew a very appreciative crowd of 40- and 50-year-olds that about two-thirds filled the cozy Swyer Theater at \$22 a ticket.