

Winchester makes his big return

By Lee Edwards

When the city's newest coffee house, Opus 170, opened its doors for the first time in October the featured attraction was Montreal-based blues singer Jesse Winchester. So strong was Jesse's music that ever since people have been asking to hear him again. Friday night they got their wish.

A large, enthusiastic audience was on hand for Winchester's return visit to the Metcalfe Street club, and the singer-guitarist responded with an exhaustingly kaleidoscopic presentation, touching every emotional base.

A hypnotic performer, Winchester eschews the usual flippy extramusical chats most singers seem to consider prerequisite to the craft, preferring to focus his talents — and they are considerable — on the music, most of which he writes himself.

Richer

As a composer Jesse is head and shoulders above his contemporaries. There is in his music neither the elephantine symbolism nor the harmonic unsophistication that are the chief characteristics of most young white folk-blues singers, most of whom are richer than Jesse for reasons that are becoming increasingly clear.

His songs like I Feel Good, Yankee Lady, Nightmare, and Let It Go are "originals" in every sense of the word. There's a lot of meat, a lot of music, to everything he writes.

Yet for all the scope of his material, which ranged from ephemeral jazz chording on Smokey Robinson's Fork In The Road to trenchant humor of Think Positive Blues, there remained throughout a purity of purpose to everything Winchester did.

This honesty is Jesse's strength, and it comes across. Today is the last chance to hear what I mean.