

Winchester's PdA concert like a reunion of friends

By DAVID FREESTON

It's been quite a few months since Jesse Winchester performed in Montreal, and on that count last night's concert at Salle Wilfrid Pelletier could be reckoned an event of sorts.

Considering the nature of the Louisiana-born songwriter, his songs and his audience, however, it was the kind of low-keyed event that's more appropriately described as a quiet reunion of friends.

Doubtless there were a few who'd never seen Winchester live, and there were some new songs to be performed for those two had; but the traditional Winchester qualities prevailed, and the audience took it all in with the knowledge that some things don't change so much as get better with time.

Winchester sings with more confidence these days, but he's perhaps no less reserved than ever; and as he moved from acoustic and electric guitars to keyboards, singing in his taut, unaffected style, he remained an intense man



Jesse Winchester

communicating in the only fashion he really knows.

The songs ranged from old standards like Brand New Tennessee Waltz to things from his new album — Let the Rough Side Drag and Lay Down Your Burden — but all drew on the same spirit and exhibited the same virtues: simple but poetic, rustic but elegant, and pristine but penetrating.

Winchester has a knack for the candid and atmospheric lyric, and the spare but evocative melody, and these

things have sustained him since his debut four albums ago, in 1970. Last night, whether working with a four-piece band — Ron Dann on steel and Dave Lewis on drums, both borrowed from Ian Tyson, as well as regulars Marty Harris on bass and Bob Cohen on lead guitar — or whether performing solo with just an acoustic guitar, it was these things that were projected, and nothing more.

The band was adept but unobtrusive, providing a little color here and some rhythmic punch there, but always at the service of austere arrangements that exist only for the lyrics and melody.

Opening the show was Bim, a singer-songwriter from B.C. who lacks, among other things, a stage sense and a decent repertoire. He's

blessed with a phlegmatic but strong voice and an adequate guitar style — but these things were ill-spent on inane songs and coy pointless digressions which reflected insecurity rather than a sense of humor.

It was only with a couple of standards — I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry and Sweet Misery — that Bim found something, however mawkish, that he could sink his teeth into and carry off with a little conviction.