

The new music

An accurate picture from inside his head

By Dick MacDonald

UNCONSCIOUSLY, but with some indefinable compulsion, one listens intently to the songs of Jesse Winchester.

And you wonder whether you're intruding, peeking into a room where a man is alone with himself, with his thoughts. It is with a feeling of uneasiness that you find yourself sharing his mood, find yourself searching for that elusive inner strength, discovering that the lamps he lights with his intensity do mean something to you, the individual.

Artists, by their very nature, pull different responses from different people. An occasional stab of anger, a pulse of sensuality, a lonely emptiness, an ever-present tenderness — these are the reactions to Winchester, a 24-year-old native of Memphis, Tenn., who has been living in Montreal for the past year.

HE PERFORMED last weekend at the six-month-old Yellow Door coffeehouse at 3625 Aylmer street. The cosy basement is a forum for the better-known folk idiom musicians of the city — Penny Lang, Dee Higgins, Sean Gagnier, Fran and Gilles — but capably serves as a platform for lesser-known singers. It is open seven nights weekly, including Sunday for a hootenanny.

Yellow Door manager John Foley says ideas and performers now are being exchanged with Le Monde in Ottawa, the basis of a proposed folk coffeehouse circuit which eventually may include a spot in Toronto.

Winchester filled the Yellow Door for his three-night engagement; the reasons were obvious.

"I try to give an accurate picture of what's going on in my head. It is personal... nostalgia, topicality, love — whatever relates to me."

There is a constant mood, no matter the subject of the poem-in-song. Perhaps it is the mood of the Deep South, which obviously has influenced his themes and presentations. A slow, easy, driving-in-a-soft-way sound, drawing on rhythm and blues, gospel and country. The contribution of the rock of the 1950s and early '60s also is readily apparent.

Winchester is a sensitive person and his writing, as a result, breathes of sensitivity, striking sensitive chords in the listener.

THE WORDS FLOW forth as a series of graphic, gripping pictures, the sort which would bring a man, without physical contact, closer to a woman.

There is this feel of honest depth, of understatement, understanding, communication. And unashamedly comes a tightness in the throat, a blurry eye.

Although Winchester's repertoire includes songs popularized by Chuck Berry, Ray Charles, Sam Cooke, Smokey Robinson and Bob Dylan, 90 per cent is from his own pen. "Yankee Lady" is a recollection of times on a Vermont farm, "Pretty Lily" is a song of romance and desperation.

He may choose to present "I Was the One" with an uncanny duplication of Elvis Presley's

voice, or further mix the act by singing "Earth Angel."

His guitar accompaniment is as a second person, adding refrains, cries, echoes. He has been performing professionally, singly and with bands, for eight years. Locally, he has appeared at the New Penelope and Matter of Opinion coffeehouses and the Montreal Folk Workshop.

Winchester attended university in Massachusetts, then returned to Tennessee. When the American military machine beckoned, he abided by principle and came to Canada.

There is a theory that it is impossible to return home, to go back to what went before and to pick up the pieces. For Winchester



Jesse Winchester

this is doubly true. He can't, and "under the present circumstances in the United States, I'm not sure I want to anyway."

Thanks, Uncle Sam, for the draft. Jesse Winchester is an important artist; we're glad to have him here.

Television jottings

NEW YORK

ANDY GRIFFITH and Jim Nabors will star in separate one-hour variety shows to be telecast on the CBS network during the 1968-69 season. Guests on Nabors' special will be Carol Burnett, Debbie Reynolds, Mary Costa and Vikki Carr.

* * *

CBS comedian Jonathan Winters has planned a fishy summer. In May, he went fishing along the Minnesota-Canada border. In June, he will participate in the Cabo San Lucas Classic, an international light tackle angling tournament in the Pacific off Baja California. July will find him competing in the Bermuda International Light Tackle Tournament.

* * *

The ABC network has signed the singing Lennon Sisters to an exclu-

sive contract that calls for at least one starring special and availability for booking on various ABC variety programs. They will make occasional appearances on "The Lawrence Welk Show," on which they made their debut in 1955 and were regulars for years.

* * *

Patrick McGoohan, the British star who became popular here in the "Secret Agent" series in recent seasons, will be back on the CBS network beginning today in a new British-made one-hour adventure series called "The Prisoner." It will fill the 7:30 p.m. spot Saturdays while Jackie Gleason is off the air for the summer.

* * *

Jack Benny will present the UCLA library with his personal collection of scripts, tapes, motion pictures and kinescopes of his performances during the years.

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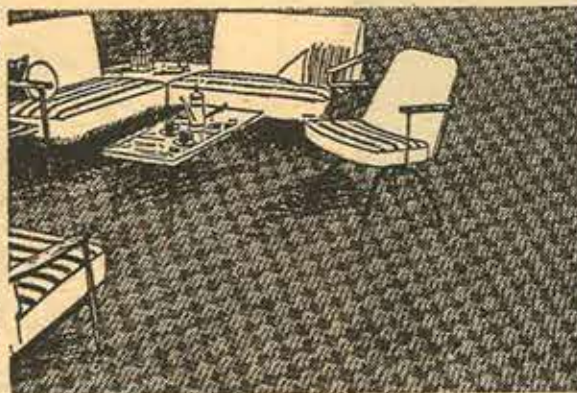
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