# Jesse Winchester at the New Penelope

**By JUAN RODRIGUEZ**

Jesse Winchester, an American singer now playing at the New Penelope until Saturday, is probably the finest newcomer to emerge on the scene since the early days of Bob Dylan. His style is unique from today's fashionable pop bards because Winchester plays his own music, without regard for fads, trends or "commercial potential." And he performs with an expertise and strength that is uncommon in today's new music.

Winchester hails from Memphis, and his music shows a mastery of the rock-blues style that emanated in the fifties. His amplified guitar playing is heavily tinged with jazz-inflected riffs, and his music is further indented by country and gospel influences. Winchester manages to combine all these styles into a marvellously fluid type of music. His vocal style is just as stunning. He mixes the professionalism of a top night club singer with the intensity and depth of a poet. Winchester's voice is a supple instrument: his modulative qualities are remarkably flexible. He is able to convey anger and pity, harshness and tenderness, all with equal facility, with a strength that penetrates the listener's soul.

Winchester unearths brilliant renditions of such long-forgotten hits as Lenny Welch's Since I Fell For You and Smokey Robinson's At the Fork of the Road. It is as a songwriter, though, that he shines most brightly. His songs evoke many moods — sensuality, praise, loneliness, religion, damnation and humour. See Your Own Self About It is a harsh recollection of a selfish love affair, while Nightmare is an apocalyptic vision of human fallibility.

Perhaps his finest composition is the beautifully liberating love song Tam-illitchka. Winchester has also written a deliciously sacrilegious song called Jesus Was A Teenager Too, and his lampoon of Elvis Presley's version of I Was the One is hilarious.

All of this adds up to a refreshing and moving experience for the listener. You won't find many singers around like Jesse Winchester. He is too important to miss.