

Winchester turns in laid-back show

By RICHARD F. BINDER
Telegraph Music Critic

Low-key is almost too low-key a description for Jesse Winchester.

Featured at Saturday's Downtown Live concert at the Nashua Center for the Arts, Winchester turned in a performance of monumentally laid-back proportions.

Winchester's light, often airy tenor was pleasant to hear against the background of his guitar, and he used it effectively, throwing in a spoken word from time to time to add interest.

His guitar, too, proved enjoyable; he may not know it, but after Guy Van Duser he's probably the most

Review

skilled exponent around of what Van Duser calls "stride guitar." Winchester's skills don't stop there, though; he can do, and does do, light jazz, country, and even the sort of inobtrusive stuff you hear on Muzak.

Winchester is possessed of a trenchant wit that he exposes in the same laid-back way he sings; it sort of pokes around the corner now and then. Saturday he rambled a little about evangelist Jimmy Swaggart, remarking that he was a little disappointed in Swaggart's choice of sins. With all that money, said Winchester, Swaggart could have checked into a high-class hotel. . . He

followed that monologue with a song called "Extreme Unction," whose refrain runs "Swing low, big Continental."

Judging from the way he fumbled momentarily when witty remarks occasionally fell flat, Winchester seemed to be working a little to assemble a program that would please his audience. As a result, he spent perhaps 95 percent of the evening singing, with very little patter between songs.

Some of what he sang was amusing ("It's a Shame About Him"), and some was touching ("Little Glass of Wine") — but the majority of his songs were soft, ballady comments on love, or lost love, or yesterday; and these were of a sameness that left the evening a

little flat until his finale, a loose-limbed shambling dance that said Michael Jackson and Bill "Bojangles" Robinson and Donald O'Connor all in one mix that was alone worth the price of admission.

Like several other recent Arts Center performers, Winchester seemed to have brought a small following with him; there were people in the audience who obviously knew and liked many of the songs he rolled out. But unlike some of those others, Winchester appeals to people who are as laid back as he himself is; instead of a stomping, hollering, and whistling crowd, the Arts Center played host to a much less vocal assembly Saturday. It was a delightfully enjoyable quiet evening out.