

Draft Exile Jesse Winchester Learns to Love It

By Bill Mann

MONTREAL – Pardon or not presidential pardon, probably the best known of all U.S. musician/draft exiles is staying in Canada.

It will be ten years ago next January that Jesse Winchester, then 21, boarded an airplane in his hometown of Memphis after receiving his draft notice. He landed in Montreal and has lived there ever since. Now, with president-elect Jimmy Carter having promised a pardon to all draft exiles, there is talk at the New York offices of Winchester's label, Bearsville Records, of plans for a grand comeback tour of the States.

Ironically, it may now be even more difficult for Winchester to play in the U.S. He became a Canadian citizen in 1973 and says, "Sure, I could have gone back on the pardon; probably with no sweat. But now that I'm a Canadian, how will the U.S. immigration officials feel about me, a former draft dodger, coming to work – as an alien?"

Winchester is best known for pleasant ballads like "Yankee Lady": his version of "Third Rare Romance," on his *Learn To Love It* album, predated the Amazing Rhythm Aces's hit version. His latest album "Let the Rough Edge Drag, is doing well in the U.S., and Winchester admits, "I probably would sell more records if I toured....so I'll have to see about the legal thing.

"Once I came up here," Jesse explains, "I never really thought of running back. I love it here – even the winter. I like the life of mind and spirit you see up here. I haven't really even allowed myself to think about living in the U.S."

Winchester has made his living, aside from albums, by touring Canada and playing an endless succession of coffeehouses. (For performance review, see page 110.) He was on the road when he was pleasantly surprised to learn that fellow Southerner Carter had been elected.

"If I had been an American," Winchester says in his easy Tennessee drawl, "I would have voted for Carter."

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