

Jesse Winchester and The Band

# A night of memorable music

By JUAN RODRIGUEZ

**BACKSTAGE**, in between the two Band concerts at Salle Wilfrid Pelletier last night:

Jesse Winchester was trying to get rid of the nerves, quietly picking on his unplugged guitar, not saying much, wondering whether his next performance would be any different from the one previous.

In another room, Jaime Robbie Robertson, lead guitarist for The Band, was going through with the task of answering, as politely as possible the rather unnecessary questions that people invariably ask.

Robertson was enthused about Winchester's forthcoming album, which he produced. "It's going to be one of the best sounding records you'll ever hear. I mean, we wouldn't do just any old thing, we wanted everything to be right for Jesse."

So did the assembled audiences. It's taken a long time, but Winchester is finally being recognized as the fine singer that he is. He was nervous the first time, but during his second appearance he really eased into his songs; the audience received him with enthusiastic applause, not the perfunctory clapping that inevitably greets the "lower half of the bill."

Everyone knew that Jesse was someone extra special and that soon, very soon, he would be the top half of a

show. He has a distinct, clear, haunting voice that carries the beautiful phrasing of his songs. He is quiet and tender on some, such as "Beloxi" and "Black Dog," reflective and warm on "Yankee Lady," and downright catchy on rock 'n' rollers as "Snow" and "Moonlight Bus." The songs themselves are marvellous, so uncomplicated and subtle that one knows it takes a precious kind of talent to write them. Add to this the starkness of his voice and his adept, evocative guitar style and one finds a person who is capable of giving out rare things. Today, Winchester is an excellent singer; he may well turn out to be a great one, and every step along the way is an adventure.

The Band step into their

music in such a way that you know they are the music; you can see it in the manner in which each of them performs. Richard Manuel peppers away at his piano; bassist Rick Danko never stops bobbing up and down; Garth Hudson sits back behind his bushy beard, pensively and meticulously getting sound out of his organ; Levon Helm bashes at the drums, the rhythms and his arms going down at the same time; and finally there is Robbie Robertson, going into fantastic contorted balancing acts with his guitar.

The Band stuck almost exclusively to their recorded material, sounding very much like the records, proving that they are great because they neither need nor desire the tricks of a studio to make

them sound good. Indeed, it is the depth and heaviness of that sound that impressed me most. It is, to me, a huge forest of sound; things are going on in there and you can hear everything separately or as a whole. Voices and instruments all blend together, pouring forth an amazingly wide range of very human, down-to-earth thoughts and sentiments. It is a pure, straight sound, one that makes great sense on any number of levels. They are incredibly good musicians individually; as a group they are tight, controlled and completely professional. But they are also loose and funky and radiate a bonafide feeling of enjoyment.

It was a night of really superb music. The Winchester-Band concert was one to remember.