



The Cowboy Junkies' debut album "The Trinity Session" gained the Canadian group instant acclaim when it was released in 1988. Their latest effort is "The Caution Horses."

# Taking the slow road

Cowboy Junkies are a little bit country, a little bit rock

by Philip Booth

### MUSIC PREVIEW

**“THE TRINITY SESSION,”** the 1988 major-label debut from Canada's Cowboy Junkies, was greeted with more than a little praise.

Reviewers, many of whom included the album in their year-end top 10 lists, mostly were bowled over by the lean, elegant collection of country ballad covers.

The round of critical approval, in fact, amounted to a near-deafening roar, says Margo Timmins, whose breathy, whispery vocals center the group's inimitable sound.

"It got to a point last year that it was a little too much," Timmins, 29, said recently from Toronto. "We were surprised at the amount and the intensity of it."

The singer, her older brother guitarist-composer Michael Timmins and the other six members of the Junkies' expanded road band were taking a break, following a European road trip. The group's new United States tour touches down at Tampa Theatre Monday night.

"People were raving about it, which was great," says Timmins, a former legal secretary who didn't sing in public until she was 25. "Obviously, we are very proud of 'The Trinity Session.'"

The inevitable critical backlash stung the Junkies sooner than might have been

- **WHO:** Cowboy Junkies
- **WHEN:** 8 p.m. Monday
- **WHERE:** Tampa Theatre
- **HOW MUCH:** \$17.50 plus service charge, available at the box office and all TicketMaster outlets

expected.

The group, on tour, kept the pace dirge-speed slow, allowing plenty of open space for Timmins to apply equal amounts of pathos and passion on album cuts that included everything from "Blue Moon" and "I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry" to a cover of Lou Reed's "Sweet Jane."

Many reviewers found that quiet, still-of-the-night approach deadly. And they said so.

"I'm never surprised by reviews," Timmins says. "It's one person's opinion. If somebody comes to our show or finds it boring or too much of the same, that's OK."

The obvious next move, or so band members thought: Make the follow-up album in much the same manner as that of "The Trinity Session," which was recorded live-to-tape for less than \$200 in one day at a Toronto cathedral.

"Sharon" was recorded at a Quaker meetinghouse in northern Ontario. The group's producer, Peter Moore, has said

that RCA refused the album. Timmins says that she and other Junkies were simply dissatisfied with the product.

"We were very happy with what we got ... but when we listened to it (later) we found it wasn't exactly what we wanted," she says. "It was a little bit too similar to 'The Trinity Session.'"

"When I came back from Europe my vocal style had changed quite a bit. I knew I could do them (the songs) a lot better. It didn't sound like the album we had in our heads."

So in October, the band settled into a real recording studio — Eastern Sound in Toronto — and began work on "The Caution Horses" (the title was borrowed from signs tacked on to horse-carrying trucks). "We rented it (the studio) for a couple of days so that we could sort of fool around in it and feel comfortable in it," Timmins says. "I brought in flowers and candles, because I found it was really ugly inside."

The studio setting didn't change things much. The new album, by many accounts, offers too much more of the same, this time on lesser material, much of which was written by Michael Timmins.

The band also takes on covers of Neil Young's "Powderfinger" and Mary Margaret O'Hara's "You Will Be Loved Again."

The next Junkies album may offer a more even mix of up-tempo songs with the expected molasses-speed stuff, Margo Timmins says.