

Cowboy Junkies lasso own mellow, moody style

By Russ DeVault
Staff writer

After selling more than 1 million copies of their major-label debut album and nearly that many of their follow-up LP of moody country blues songs, the Cowboy Junkies aren't about to suddenly kick out the jams.

However, songwriter-guitarist Michael Timmins is quite tolerant of fans and critics who suggest the band should rock out once in a while — especially during small-hall shows such as tonight's performance at The Roxy with Townes Van Zandt.

"We do have our style," Mr. Timmins says from the RCA Records office in New York during a day of phone interviews. "If people don't like it, that's fine. They can go see another band — there's a lot out there."

But none can match the Junkies when it comes to mixing ringing, 1960s-style guitars and creamy vocals (courtesy of Margo Timmins, Michael's sister). The band, which includes brother Peter Timmins on drums and long-time friend Alan Anton on bass, has both created and completely filled a unique pop-music niche.

But it was easier for the Junkies to get their sound right with "The Trinity Session," an independent LP rereleased by RCA in 1988, than with "The Caution Horses," which has been out since February. Neither the band nor RCA particularly liked the first version of "Caution Horses,"

MUSIC PREVIEW

The Cowboy Junkies

With opening act Townes Van Zandt.
The Roxy, 3110 Roswell Road. Tonight at 9.
\$16.50 at Ticketmaster and the box office.
249-6400

recorded near Toronto in the same simple way the Junkies cut their previous LP — recorded in a Toronto church at a total cost of \$162.

So the Junkies entered Toronto's Eastern Sound Studio and rerecorded the 10 songs with more elaborate equipment. The result is 10 atmospheric songs — eight originals and a pair of non-originals that includes Neil Young's "Powderfinger." The music doesn't fit country or Top 40 radio formats, but the tunes — mostly about love and other emotions — are played on alternative-rock stations and sales have pushed "The Caution Horses" to No. 47 on the Billboard pop list.

The only problem now is fans and interviewers who'd like Mr. Timmins to explain his songs. He demurs. He even hedges when asked if lyrics that touch on boredom, loneliness and aging stem from his life.

"Every song has a kernel of my own experience in it, but they're certainly not completely about myself, because I start with a grain of truth and embellish it," he says.