

Cowboy Junkies weave magical, mystical spell

By Erica Smishek
of the Star-Phoenix

The Cowboy Junkies made addicts of its audience, leaving the appreciative crowd craving more of its musical magic Tuesday night at Centennial Auditorium.

For 90 minutes, vocalist Margo Timmins and her seven merry men wove a mystical spell with their eclectic mix of

Review

blues, jazz, rock, folk, country and assorted other strains. Solid musicianship from all players — on guitar, pedal steel, mandolin, accordion, percussion, bass and drums — created an intriguing tapestry of sound to wrap around Timmins' deep, provocative pipes.

While some critics have inaccurately slammed the band for being just too *mellow*, those in attendance were treated to a spirited, flavorful smorgasbord.

The performance began strongly with the moody 'Cause Cheap is How I Feel, the second single off the band's latest album *The Caution Horses* — just declared platinum in Canada. Enhanced by a

simple stage design — white drapes hanging from an implied ceiling, a large window, white table and chair and a screen backlit with purple light (later used to project slides upon) — the track set an evocative, soulful atmosphere for the evening.

With a diverse range of subject matter — a psychedelic Satan, a black-eyed man, a shining moon, southern rain and the like — the songs had lives of their own, drawing the listener into each descriptive tale.

I Don't Get It was a loud, jazzy, hard-edged slice of life; *You Will be Loved Again* a hauntingly beautiful ballad accompanied only by guitar and harmonica; *Sweet Jane* a sensual, velvety sway.

Timmins commanded the stage throughout the evening with her amazing vocal authority. In a black skirt and burgundy blouse, kinky brown hair framing her pretty face, she took the mike stand in hand as she sang of love and dreams and loneliness.

If she was the heart, the musicians gathered around her in a semi-circle were the soul, using

varied instrumentation and rhythms to great effect.

Rock and Bird, which Timmins called "our dance number," proved to be as snappy as promised. *Southern Rain* went from stormy and dangerous to a traditional country rock sound. *Escape is So Simple* was a slow, melancholy examination of lost love.

Particular highlights included *Sun Comes Up*, *It's Tuesday Morning*, a soothing, optimistic tale of waking up alone the day after breaking off a relationship, and *Misguided Angel*, a mythical track that helped vault the Junkies' last album *The Trinity Session* to the top of the pop charts.

The strongest piece of the night was *Five Room Love Story*, a brand new song based on an elderly New Yorker who covered the walls, cupboards and other spaces of his apartment with seashells, painted stars, lima beans, cardboard hearts, etc., to pay homage to his late wife.

Townes Van Zandt opened the show with a package of honest folk songs done in a pleasant Texas drawl.