

Canadian band Cowboy Junkies at Keswick Theater

By Scott Brodeur
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Shhh.
It was hardly a typical welcome for an eight-piece band taking the stage. But after a smattering of appreciative applause, the near sell-out crowd of about 1,200 people at the Keswick Theater in Glenside last night started asking for silence.

That's how subtle the music of Cowboy Junkies is. Fans of the enigmatic Canadian band don't want to clap too long; They may miss some-

Review: Music

thing.

Though it was just the group's second night on its U.S. tour in support of *The Caution Horses*, its second release on RCA, the band was fine-tuned throughout the set of more than 90 minutes.

Unlike the stark beauty of the first album, *The Trinity Session*, the latest release is filled with embellishments

such as piano accordion, steel lap guitar, mandolin, violin and harmonica. And last night's delivery, complete with an added percussionist, gave the band an added depth.

Taking turns soloing with the unorthodox instruments, the group concentrated heavily on dynamics for its power to showcase the strong material songwriter Michael Timmins has been writing.

"Sun Comes Up, It's Tuesday Morning" and "'Cause Cheap Is How I Feel" are two of the finest songs the

band has recorded to date, and aided by the country-folk feel of the large band, the songs were delivered with a lot of passion.

Singer Margo Timmins appeared much more comfortable behind the microphone than she did last tour, tinkering with vocal lines and talking to the audience more often. She really let loose on blues classics such as Robert Johnson's "Me and the Devil" and Lightnin' Hopkins' "Shining Moon," bouncing between her airy smooth vocals to a dirtier wail

on the songs.

Equally enjoyable though driven with a much lighter hand were cover versions of Neil Young's "Powderfinger" and the Rolling Stones' "Dead Flowers." The band pulled the songs apart and reassembled them with its more delicate deadpan style.

Opening the show was Texas country-folk singer Townes Van Zandt. With a lot of touring experience behind him, Van Zandt sang for 45 minutes his stories about life on the road.