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EXTRA ENTERTAINMENT

It's no funny business, but these Cowboys laugh

By **DAVID HINCKLEY**
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HEARING THAT THE Cowboy Junkies are "basically happy people" isn't at all hard to accept, assuming you also believe Keith Richards is a choirboy and Michael Jackson hates to dance.

Now the Junkies, who play the Beacon tomorrow night, are a wonderful band. It's just that they're more commonly described in words like ethereal, reflective, melancholy and wistfulness permeates their work, in both the songs of Michael Timmins and the voice of sister Margo, the lead singer.

Their latest album, "The Caution Horses," includes songs that positively throb with ache, like "Thirty Summers" and "Where Are You Tonight?" and "Cause Cheap Is How I Feel." It's no accident one of the band's concert staples is Hank Williams' "I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry."

Yet for all this, subtle humor is also a motif, and that's where Margo Timmins says the balance comes in. "We don't sit down and deliberately say, 'Oh, let's put something funny here.' If it's there in our personalities, it will come out in our music. We laugh a lot."

The Cowboy Junkies' distinctive sound has spread without much help from radio, since even many "alternative" formats find it hard to fit in. "I don't really understand the world of radio," says Timmins. "So I wouldn't quarrel with a station that won't play us because our sound is too slow... I just think it's a little sad... radio should provide a wide range of music."

There's a top-40 station in Toronto that plays us, and that's wonderful, because it shows you don't have to be Milli Vanilli. We'd love to be played on country stations, too, because there's a lot of country in what we do. I think that would be an honor. But we're not going to change our music to get on. 'The Trinity Sessions'

[the band's first major-label album] has sold close to a million copies worldwide now, and that's not bad."

Sure isn't. It's also kept the band busy, which Timmins says is a part of success she wasn't fully prepared for. But she's glad to ride it. "Over the past year the Cowboy Junkies have taken over my life and my brain, which surprises me. But for now, we're all willing to do what it takes. We don't plan much further than our next album. To me, that's the exciting part — doing the records. But I figure we should try to enjoy all of it. Many bands don't get even this far."

When Timmins is home, she listens to a lot of country music and Bob Dylan. But she also says that she will slap on a sad song now and then. "If I'm feeling down, I'll put on 'Nebraska.' It doesn't make me start dancing around the room, but it makes me feel better. Somehow it eases my mind."

Welcome to the Cowboy Junkies.



MOOD ENHANCERS: The Cowboy Junkies, with lead singer Margo Timmins (second from l.)