

Cowboy Junkies are spurring along nicely

By DIAHANN NADEAU
Herald Special

The critics' darlings of the Canadian music scene, the Cowboy Junkies, played their Toronto homecoming gig at Ontario Place last week. A uniquely talented octet with silvery voiced Margo Timmins on lead vocals, the band plays music that sounds unlike anyone else's - even when they do covers of such familiar songs as Patsy Cline's "Walking after Midnight."

The Forum was packed, and the group seemed totally relaxed and happy to be home. The set was

decorated with little candles and a small vase of flowers, setting an evocative and quietly romantic mood for the songs.

Timmins has an exquisitely pretty voice, wispy and dreamy and willowy, which is a delight when she sings, but hard to understand in her between-songs patter. The tempo was laid back and low-key, sometimes a little too much so. On a hot steamy night it can be too easy to nod off.

The musicians were terrific, especially Michael Timmins on guitar, and the marvellous Jaro

Czerwinec on accordion. With bass, bongos, drums, keyboards and various other instruments, the band achieved a complex, rich, and lush sound. The Cowboy Junkies are a band with a great deal of promise, an enormous originality. One just hopes they won't become too laid-back or clever for their own good. There were times during the evening when these pitfalls seemed to lurk in the shadows between the candles.

At the other end of the spectrum from budding stars the Junkies is veteran Bob Dylan. Dylan and Steve Earle were at Kingswood at the weekend.

Earle plays wonderfully raucous country rock, lively and immediate. He is an open, friendly performer, making incisive and witty political comments between songs. His set was excellent, featuring political material, ballads, and hits such as "Copperhead Road."

Dylan on the other hand, said not one word for his all too brief one and a quarter hour set. Backed by Saturday Night Live guitarist G.E. Smith, a bass player and a drummer, Dylan moved through a set

that included "Early Morning Rain," "Tears of Rage," "I Can't Believe (She Acts Like We Never Have Met)," "Just Like a Woman," "Silvio," and "Like a Rolling Stone," among others.

He reinterpreted most of the songs drastically, so that few sounded like any of the recorded versions. While this in itself is not a flaw, Dylan never really cut loose, never seemed to make the connection with the audience. His performance was tight, but so was the spirit; he was unwilling to give anything of himself.

It was not a bad performance, but it was hollow and ultimately

unsatisfying. Given the unbelievable hassles we encountered trying to reach the theatre from the parking lot (it took about an hour because of astounding levels of incompetence at Canada's Wonderland), an hour and 15 minutes of the headlining act was a disappointing payoff to say the least. And because of the troubles we missed the opening of Steve Earle's set. While the performers cannot be blamed for the venue, a smashing show could have made up for a great deal of grief. Dylan just didn't overcome the headaches involved.



Silvery voiced Margo Timmins delivered a great performance with her band Cowboy Junkies at Ontario Place last week. The Junkies' first album has spurred the Cowboys to greater heights. (Photo submitted)

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