

# platter chatter

## junkies lose their ambient sound



by Brian Tait

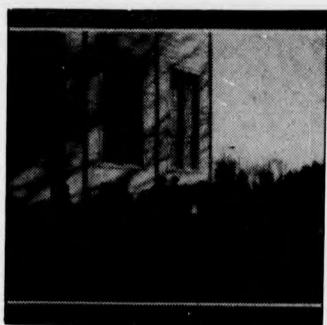
The Cowboy Junkies  
The Caution Horses  
BMG

Reviewing an album that has been preceded by as much media hype as *The Caution Horses* always proves difficult. There are always expectations, both on the part of reviewer and on the part of the artist(s). This album has been talked about for months and has been the subject of so many

recent interviews that it is virtually impossible to have not heard of the Cowboy Junkies, even if you have never heard their material.

For the uninitiated, the Junkies must seem like an unlikely musical phenomenon in an age when bands like Motley Crue and Aerosmith dominate the charts. The amazing success of their last l.p., *The Trinity Sessions*, proves that there is room for bands who defy the regimented pop formula.

Their moody, countryesque style defies classification, and herein lies the art of the Cowboy Junkies. The last album forged a niche for the melancholy sound of the band.



*The Caution Horses* is essentially a sequel to the first l.p. and does not represent any new direction. While there are a few more obvious influences and some songs do have a definite kick to them, for the most part, this new

album relies on the Junkies proven formula.

There is nothing really wrong with this approach, but it does give me the sense that I've heard it all before. This conflict makes it infinitely more difficult to pass judgement, regardless of whether it be positive or negative.

One of the pleasing things about *The Trinity Sessions* was the way in which it was recorded. In one day, all the tracks were recorded using one microphone. There are no overdubs and the entire album cost less than \$250. This technique captured the essence of the Cowboy Junkies because it was so 'real.' One could

hear the mistakes and get a feel for what the band was all about.

On *The Caution Horses*, the band has moved into the studio and this ambience is lost. This leaves the listener groping to make the connection with the band that their earlier releases allowed. If this past connection is lost, then clearly a new one must be found.



# the writer's block

by Ira Nayman

The bad news is that there are no heroes in my writing. The good news is that there aren't any villains, either. Well, not as such...

As a rule, I don't like writing "formula" stories (westerns, spy stories, etc.), so I don't have much opportunity to use the white hats/black hats formula. Moreover, when I do use formulas (I must admit, I have a weakness for mystery stories), I try to play characters off people's expectations.

A large part of it is that I like to give my main characters some kind of motivation, no matter how simple or ridiculous, for their actions. Motivation tends to lead to understanding, which tends to weaken moral absolutes. I can't help it: I find purely "good" and "evil" characters impossible to take seriously, and not worth the effort of creating.

Not that my characters don't do morally unjustifiable (read: "bad") things. They certainly do. But, it is in the context of a universe full of moral ambiguity, where right and wrong aren't determined by which side you're on (or, more cynically, whether you're left standing at the end).

Furthermore, my protagonists

are no more likely to be "noble" than my antagonists; I do not see human behaviour in such black and white terms. Basically good people can do bad things, and basically evil people can do good things. Positive and negative characteristics are distributed, to a greater or lesser degree, to all.

Any other method of writing would not satisfy my sense of what human beings are really like.

This is not to say that I treat all my characters and their actions equally; in fact, all are subjected to moral judgements. (It's common knowledge that satirists are moralists who would otherwise be ignored.) It's just that when I write about an action I believe is morally unjustifiable, I try to make it an understandable part of the psychology of the actor, rather than sloughing it off as absolute evil beyond human comprehension.

I probably shouldn't knock formula writing. A lot of people watch formula films and read formula novels. Formulaic art makes a lot of money, far more than individualistic works. Why do good guys/bad guys conflicts have so much appeal?

Part of the answer lies in the Hollywood ending: the bad guys are defeated, the hero gets the girl, all the wrongs are righted.

Joseph Campbell, in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, wrote that the hero wages a symbolic battle against the evils that face society; by vanquishing them, social order is restored. I might add that the villain in this interpretation would represent the "other," the personification of all that we are not, all that is bad and wrong.

Thus, formula art becomes a form of emotional purgation: by identifying with the absolute good represented by the hero (and against the absolute evil of the villain), the viewer is purged of the evil within himself. While there is nothing wrong with this in small doses, when it is constantly, consistently reinforced, it gives people an excuse to avoid dealing with their own emotional problems, their own impulses to do wrong. Moreover, it tends to create a social atmosphere of moral absolutes which bears little relation to the real world.

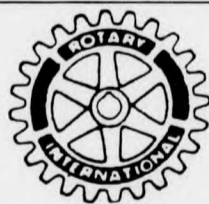
This need for absolutes, especially in villains, carries over into real life: drug dealers and takers, Communists, the poor, the French, Jews (always Jews!) take their turn in the scapegoat role. Unfortunately, the effect on the body politic is the same as it is on individuals: society stagnates, its real problems not being addressed.

I have other reasons for not wanting to use the good guys/bad guys formula. By definition, heroes are male; in fact, the whole formula can be seen as an elaborate fable revolving around control of the material world. It is a particularly male conflict, necessarily excluding women.

I, on the other hand, like to explore female characters, and have made a conscious effort to make a substantial number of my primary antagonists women. To do this, obviously, I have had to go beyond male-oriented formulae.

There are also a lot of values inherent in the formula with which I disagree. The use of violence to solve problems is especially troubling; in the real world, cooperation is a much more useful strategy. In the real world, problems are usually too complex to be solved by violence in any case.

I believe that everybody wants to be the hero of her/his own life; my characters certainly believe themselves to be. But, but their actions, they are revealed to be no more (or less) heroic than you or I.



## THE ROTARY CLUBS OF TORONTO

### THE ROTARY FOUNDATION SCHOLARSHIPS for the 1991-1992 Academic Year

The purpose of the Rotary Foundation Scholarships is to further international understanding and friendly relations among people of different countries.

Applicants must be prepared to accomplish a year of study or training in a foreign country where Rotary clubs are located.

Scholarships may be awarded in five areas:

- Graduate Study
- Undergraduate Study
- Vocational Study or Training
- Teachers of the Handicapped
- Journalism

Detailed applications must be received before June 1, 1990. For further information and application forms, please contact immediately:

Don Schelew (office) 759-7195

(home) 736-0511 Khaliq Khan 481-5745

## 順來風飯店

小菜、粥、粉、麵、飯、堂食、外賣

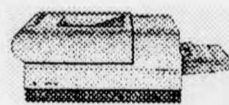
### THE WINDS RESTAURANT



SUPERB CHINESE FOOD  
DINING, TAKE-OUT & HOME DELIVERY  
UNIVERSITY CITY PLAZA  
59 FOUR WINDS DR., DOWNSVIEW, ONT  
PHONE: 736-4646  
SUN-THURS, 11:30 a.m. - 12:00 midnight  
FRI & SAT, 11:30 a.m. - 1:00 a.m.

## An Apple a day for the power of

Word Processing, Graphics, Database and Desktop Publishing



Need we say more.



Authorized Dealer

Micro York  
T104A Steacie  
736-5274



Apple, the Apple logo are registered trade marks and Macintosh is a trade mark of Apple Computer, Inc.