

'NEIL' FROM PAGE 1

the Wild Frontier for a while, then dumped it like a hot potato.

"Occasionally there's a general Swing To Good. I think punk was the last time something healthy happened. The constant irony of England is that some of the best emotional music comes out of there and yet when it's bad, it's the worst!

"I wish the Chills good luck. I think it'll be very good experience for them, and they'll be shocked by what they see. I'm looking forward to hearing them produced well. It'll be good for them to record in England, because a song like 'Kaleidoscope World' or 'Pink Frost' would sound a hundred times better if it was produced properly."

The Mullanes, despite the collective title, are very much Neil Finn's band, with his material and personality upfront. The four-piece which toured for a month in Australia earlier this year is now down to three, guitarist Craig Hooper having departed at the end of that tour ("Just didn't work out"). Still there are ex-Enz drummer Paul Hester and bassist Nick Seymour, a Melbourneite whose brother Mark is a Hunter and Collector ("He'd probably prefer I hadn't said that").

"There is a vacancy to fill, but we'll probably end up recording as a three-piece," says Finn. "I don't mind that, because I want a fair bit of flexibility to force my own ideas on the whole thing."

There is some ironic laughter in the wake of that remark, but Finn is deadly serious about being a leader this time.

"Split Enz was an incredibly democratic band and everybody had to have their say, which was great, but I'm looking forward to getting a few more of my own ideas on vinyl.

"I don't want to just have a band lineup for the sake of it, I'm enjoying having no rules for a change. Ideally, I would like to have a permanent fourth person, but I have a picture in my mind of what that person is going to be like. I haven't found him, or her, yet."

The Mullanes, whatever shape they might take, have about 20 songs to work with right now, Finn having been through a lengthy burst of songwriting. By the time you read this, Finn will probably have signed with Capitol USA, and the trio will be recording in LA. David Tickle, producer of *True Colours* and *Waiata*, looks set to work on this one. Finn admits there was a falling out with Tickle during the *Waiata* sessions, but he still regards the man as a genius, despite a "huge ego". Tickle has recently been live mixing for Prince, so he may have met his match in the ego stakes.

Signing with an American label rather than on Downunder has distinct advantages.

"It cuts out a lot more middlemen. I'm a great believer that the more middlemen there are, the harder it is to get to the bloke who's going to buy your record. If you've got an American record company dealing with an Australian manager, an Australian company dealing with an American firm, and so on, you just end up with a great big hotch potch. You also tend to lack identity.

"I think a lack of management experience cost us some success with *True Colours*. 'I Got You' would probably have been a hit in America, had certain things been done. The record company also blew it in America. A&M just didn't feel like they were involved. They were always dealing with Mushroom or dealing with Nathan (Brenner, former Enz manager), they were just getting a slab of vinyl, but they didn't really know what to do with it, they didn't feel like they were getting any input.

"It's bad to get too tied up down here. It's good to get a start and work out all your problems, because you're out of view of the world. A lot of bands make the mistake of allowing themselves to be swallowed up in an organisation down here. That's very restrictive overseas. It's easy for me to say that because I've got no organisation at all at the moment. I'm floating free and trying to cover everything at once. But I sort of prefer it, in a way, making my own decisions. I'm happy without a manager at present, but I don't want that to continue forever. It distracts me too much from music."

So how will the Mullanes sound? Probably like Neil Finn is the simple answer, reached in a roundabout way. Finn only knows the songs himself as rough demos right now, and is keeping an open mind about the finished product.

"It's obvious that the songs will have a continuous factor to them. I'm changing, but not abruptly. The sound will be different. The Split Enz sound was very much a sum of the parts. I think it'll be more guitar-oriented, and a little heavier because of that. It's not going to be like Midnight Oil or anything, I'm not that sort of writer. But it'll have more 'weight', I think."

Finn displays the family trait of enormous self-confidence, bolstered by his experience in this country's greatest popular music group. It's funny how subjective a plain fact like that looks on paper. While having regrets on what might have been, Finn is also enthusiastic about the lessons learned for the future.

"It didn't occur to any of us at the time, but now there are certain things you miss, personal things, being with that bunch of people. It was great. But the split was a spur to me, starting a band myself. I'd always had that thing about joining a band that was already established, there were certain ways of doing things. I inherited a lot of values and methods of doing things from Split Enz. Now I'm stuck in the deep end and I've got to find my own way. That's a good challenge."

Duncan Campbell

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