



# Nice Place You've Got Here

## NEIL FINN & CROWDED HOUSE

By Chris Bourke

"You sense the dangers of success, but there's a lot more pressure coming from people whose lives depend on your next record being successful too," he says. "There's a feeling that to do anything radical, to suddenly go 'I don't want to do that' is going to effect a whole lot of peoples' lives. That's the pressure."

Speaking from Adelaide during Crowded House's Australian tour, Finn says that *Temple of Low Men* is less singles-oriented than the debut album, as they "let the songs that were around win the day" rather than concentrate on making hits.

"Mind you, having said that, they did put out the most safe choice ['Better Be Home Soon'] for the first single. That wasn't exactly my idea. It's very poppy, but it's not particularly representative of the rest of the record — there's more variety and atmosphere on this album. But they wanted something they thought was a dead ringer in America, though nothing is a dead ringer."

Do you like taking risks?  
"I'd like to take more than we do, actually. It seems like you're constantly being drawn to the safest

"I don't want to be one of those wankers who falls apart the first time they get a bit of success," says Neil Finn.

The man from Crowded House must thrive on working under pressure. Hit records? Everyone wants them, depend on them. Finn does too, but he's determined to get them with songs that he's proud of. So instead of writing "The Dream's Not Over, Yet" he has coolly produced an album that's one step ahead of the choc-full-o'-hits debut.

choices and decisions all the time, because that's what everyone wants for you, or they want for themselves, because it makes their job easier."

### Hard Road

Neil Finn has taken the hard road in popular music, the one marked

"highest common denominator" — trying to reach the widest audience with the best music possible...

"Um, yeah," he says. "I'm certainly not elitist as far as what my desired audience should be. I'm quite happy for anyone to like the record." Finn says this attitude dates back to when

he first got into music. "The thing I most enjoyed was sitting around in a party having a singalong. In those situations the songs that suit best are usually the *everyman* songs, the ones everyone knows the words to, can sing the melody of... you can usually get a great chorus and feeling out of it. So I'm drawn to that, and I don't feel very snooty about my audience.

"But I'm pretty desperate to make as good a record as I can, and not be following too many formulas — apart from my own. I think it's possible to do both: to do something worthwhile creatively and actually be successful as well. It's not easy but it's possible."

### Honesty

After the rousing pop of the debut, *Temple of Low Men* seems to reflect a more mature Crowded House, in contrast to the amusing, unassuming aspects of the band's character, especially live. "I like the idea of thumping 12-year-olds with 30-year-old themes," laughs Finn. "Our audience is quite a broad one, but includes a lot of young people, and it's good to expose them to things other than the teen stuff

they're hearing. Like the sex trip that most bands are on: 'come on baby, give me your everything'."

The songs on *Temple* have a soul-baring honesty, examining the various phases of a relationship: temptation, guilt, remonstrance, joy, commitment, loss. Any thematic links are unintentional though, says Finn:

"I often feel one-dimensional in that respect. This album is quite introspective. But people should always understand that in any song you try to enlarge on life a little bit, and things that I describe in songs often follow their own tack rather than being directly related to what's going on with me. Many times you remember things from years ago that steer you in a certain direction."

And as the writing for an album progresses, the music gets focused...

"Yeah, you go through phases when you're writing songs. You have certain chord progressions or melodies and stuff, and they suggest atmospheres. I can write something that might sit around for three years, and at the time I wrote it, it didn't suit."

Does he ever feel he gives too much away in a song?

"I feel like people think I do. I feel a bit vulnerable because of it, in the sense that people would relate it to my own life. And I suppose I have concern for my family in that respect. It's not pleasant for them sometimes to see the way people perceive my songs, and that's a pressure in itself. But I seem drawn to it and I'm always telling myself that next time I'm going to write a positive simple statement about something which is not necessarily my own life. But out of the concern to sound like I mean it, it's easier to dip into my darker emotions."

### Temptation

Balancing the brooding 'Into Temptation' and 'Never Be the Same' is 'When You Come,' an ecstatic moment of commitment:

"I was pleased with that one. It's a fairly positive song. Like a lot of them, the lyric came quite subconsciously, and it doesn't really make incredible sense. But there's a lot of imagery there which I really empathise with."

Finn's lyrics are occasionally obscure, but full of imagery, with their meaning only coming clear through the *feel* of the music, after many listenings.

"It's the same for me, too. A lot of the time I don't really understand what the songs are about till months and months later. I have a sudden realisation that, 'Oh yeah — I know where that would have come from'."

The swampy 'Mansion in the Slums' comes from observations of life in LA, says Finn.

"The twin quest for glory and success, and they're hopefully

married, but people con themselves that they've got spiritual values as well. It's that New Age Shirley McLaine stuff: 'You are God, it's okay to be wealthy and successful and just love yourself.' I dunno, it's me taking a whimsical look at that. The isolation tank reference is directly from hearing talk from people in LA. There was a spate where people were getting into isolation tanks for relaxation. I've never done it, probably I should give it a chance, but I always thought I'd rather bounce round on a trampoline for relaxation."

### High Fidelity

The arrangements on *Temple* have a complexity and wit that producer Mitchell Froom gets across with a natural clarity.

"That's probably Bob Clearmountain in many ways, the guy that mixed the record. He's done a very fidelic, very clear mix. But Mitchell was good at stripping back arrangements, so obviously he was involved."

The record seems so much your voice — why didn't you co-produce?

"People seem to take more notice of that production credit than I actually do. Of course I was as involved in the arrangements as Mitchell, but I've never been particularly precious about taking credits. As long as the music ends up close to the way I imagined it."

Although all the songs on the album were written by Finn alone, the band is playing more as an ensemble now. "Yeah, I think we've got more subtlety in the feels, we stretch out a lot more," he says.

"Mitchell was a lot more aware of what we were capable of doing, and we were a much better band from having played so much."

Finn admits that he's the leader of the band. "Because I write the songs I have much more concern with the way they turn out, I suppose. Nick and Paul are happy to play, get into it, and try and avoid as many interviews as possible."

Why didn't Eddie Raynor play on the album?

"It was difficult with Mitchell also being a keyboard player. But I think we were stupid. We probably should have got Eddie on the record, because then he probably would have been available to tour with us all year — instead of being a difficult bastard and only wanting to tour a month or so here and there! He's incredibly valuable person to have around, and we beg on our knees for him to tour with us. He's with us at the moment!"

### Fab 'free

All the critical references to you-know-who must get tiresome ▶



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