

Mark Hart says that occasionally he would get frustrated at the lack of progress being made – ‘We’d just be getting ready to do something and a thunderstorm would roll in’ – but then he realised ‘We were under the influence of the project: we weren’t controlling it, it was controlling us.’ Although Neil had most of the central ideas before they started recording, they started to change in character. Songs that were particularly affected by the climate at Karekare include ‘Fingers of Love’, recorded on a rainswept, melancholy day; similarly ‘Distant Sun’, with Nick and Paul in separate rooms inside the house, while Neil and Mark played acoustic guitars on the porch shrouded by a cold mist; ‘Private Universe’ changed from a swing song to a panoramic guitar wash; and of course ‘Kare Kare’, credited to all the band because it emerged during a jam. ‘Locked Out’, originally a slow ballad, became what Nick describes as a ‘Mancunian thrash’; ‘Black and White Boy’ was similarly delicate – like ‘Into Temptation’, says Mark – until one day Neil started playing it like the Ramones.

Both the physical and emotional climate at Karekare were always extreme, says Hester. ‘Every day there was something going on, as people settled into the joint. They’d go off for walks and have these intense things happen. A lot of stuff has gone down in that area of New Zealand, and I think that rubbed off on us.’

‘It was quite tough,’ agrees Neil. ‘It was a weird combination of people and there was quite a bit of stress around. But there were a lot of really good things about it too. There were very good days where we made some good music. But it was torturous to some degree.’

As the weeks dragged on in the intense environment, energy became drained and tempers frayed. ‘Towards the end, Youth wasn’t functioning particularly well, but then I’m pretty relentless,’ says Neil. ‘I regard the experience as a loss of innocence. It brought a lot of hostile things to the surface.’

Nick found that, to his chagrin, Youth the dance/remix guru was ‘a bit of a dosser. But I was very happy about the left turn Youth took us on, definitely. Before Youth I don’t think Neil had even a tolerance for dance music.’

Having Youth as producer meant they were less ‘pedantic about the details’ of what they were doing, says Neil. ‘That’s what we wanted, and I wanted more of it. In the end, he was quite conservative with us. I was hoping he’d really challenge us, but he still made quite a ‘Crowded House-y’ record with us. I don’t think he really wanted to be the known as the guy who screwed up Crowded House.’

‘The album sounds really good in hindsight, it turned out really well. So in a way you can’t knock Youth. Whatever he did, somehow it worked.’



photo by Youri Lenquette

didn’t seem to be going anywhere. ‘It was like we needed to jump in a cold bath and get out and do one,’ says Paul. On the way back from dinner, he suggested the answer was to shed their inhibitions with their clothes.

‘I thought we’d go nude, run around the house a couple of laps, then stand on the hill and howl and scream at the moon for a bit. Then we’d record a take. So that’s what we did.’

‘Me, Neil and Nick were nude within about a second, ready to go, and Mark was diligently taking off his trackshoes and socks, then putting his shoes back on. He was being sensible, and we were going, Mark – *we’re having a wild, abandoned moment here*. Don’t get sensible. What are you doing? And he’s going, “I-I-I’m putting my shoes on.” *We almost lost the moment*. Mark had this doubt about his nudeness. Eventually we got him out there.’

‘So there we were,’ says Mark Hart. ‘Neil playing keyboard, me playing guitar. Everything strategically placed. Of course, the real hippies – Youth and Greg – wouldn’t have anything to do with it, being British and modest. But we didn’t use those tracks! There might have been a bit of self-consciousness that you could detect. We ended up keeping a track we cut before dinner. It was funny – but we tried.’ They listened to the takes – still nude – in front of the mixing console. ‘It was great,’ says Hester, ‘we were all smiling, and someone snapped a couple of photos from behind: the true arseholes of Crowded House.’

Youth’s experimental recording methods reflected his new age leanings. On ‘Pineapple Head’ he asked Mark Hart to stand in a circle of volcanic stones while recording a guitar part. He obliged, stretching his leads 100 meters from the desk to the stone circle sited on the hill above the house. Youth then gave Paul his instructions for recording the vocal.

It was at this point that Parlophone promotions manager Malcolm Hill, visiting from London, happened to call by to check out the exotic location. ‘When I got there, they were going along with everything Youth suggested,’ he says. ‘As I arrived, Paul was sitting in an upright flight case, holding in his arms lots of crystals, singing backing vocals. I said to him, what the hell are you doing? He whispered to me, “Well, Youth wants me to. He’s barking mad, but we’re getting some great results.” There was a lot of wackiness going on, but it was very funny.’

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