

CROWDED HOUSE TO THE BEAT

The Auckland Waterfront Motel in Remuera looks out over the often muddy water of the Orakei Basin.

Today is one of those typical early winter days in Auckland, when the sun shines brightly yet there's a cold bite in the air. The blazing sunlight plays tricks on the water, and from Neil Finn's motel room there's an uninterrupted view of what appears to be a sizeable lake of sparkling spirulina. Finn likes this place. He stayed here a lot as a boy, when the Finn family travelled north from Te Awamutu, and little has changed here since then. It's a comfortable zone for Finn, and his chosen venue for a round of press interviews to lift the lid on his life post-Crowded House, and the inner workings of his debut solo album, *Try Whistling This*.

In November 1996, when Finn called Crowded House to a halt following a magnificent farewell concert on the steps of the Sydney Opera House, he made a few teasing noises as to where his music might surface. "It's unlikely I'll form another band that's like the combo Crowded House was," he told the *Sydney Morning Herald*. "I would love to think that whatever happens next is more exotic than a band."

This month, Finn and his new band (that includes 14 year old Liam Finn on drums and guitar) embark on a seven month world

tour on the back of an album that although bathed in technology, shines with Finn's timeless, radiant melodies—the quality that made Crowded House the best pop band of their time. Finn's initial plans may have gone awry, but today, ensconced in his favourite motel and a week shy of turning 40, he is cheerful and relaxed, and totally ready to talk about and take care of his own business.

When you decided to form a band to tour this album, what were you looking for in the players?

"Whatever the band was, it needed to have character and not be a bunch of session musicians who I wouldn't get anything from, or who wouldn't have their own spin on the music. Having been in bands so long, I'm pretty devoted to the notion of people having character in the way they play, and also a sense of struggle. An element of struggle keeps you honest and it means you can have transcendental moments where everyone is really listening to each other, it's not just this faceless technician looking back at you blankly playing the parts. Right now the band has a really good integrity to it and I'm quite confident."

I was surprised you assembled another group after saying

you wouldn't form another like Crowded House.

"I was more referring to not having to make decisions by committee, and not having the feeling of responsibility for a bunch of people outside of the family. In that sense, the band now doesn't feel like any kind of responsibility, it feels like a little support group that I don't have any long-term responsibility for — they're jumping on for the ride and they'll be great to travel with. But short of playing solo gigs, the album needs to be carried by an ensemble. In some ways maybe it's not that different [to Crowded House], it's still guitar, bass, drums, and keyboards, but the characters are different and the sound of the band will be different."

Is the album and the band as 'exotic' sounding as you'd hoped?

"There is an element of traditional combo arrangement on the record, but there's also a lot of cases where loops have started the process off and there is a different approach to rhythms. Certainly in terms of the textures of the album I don't think it's as simple as guitar, bass, and drums, there's a lot of other elements in the mix. But I also found during the process of record-

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