

NZ Music 1977 To 85

neil finn the prodigal perspective

"New Zealand doesn't tolerate mediocrity very well. It might tolerate appallingness!"

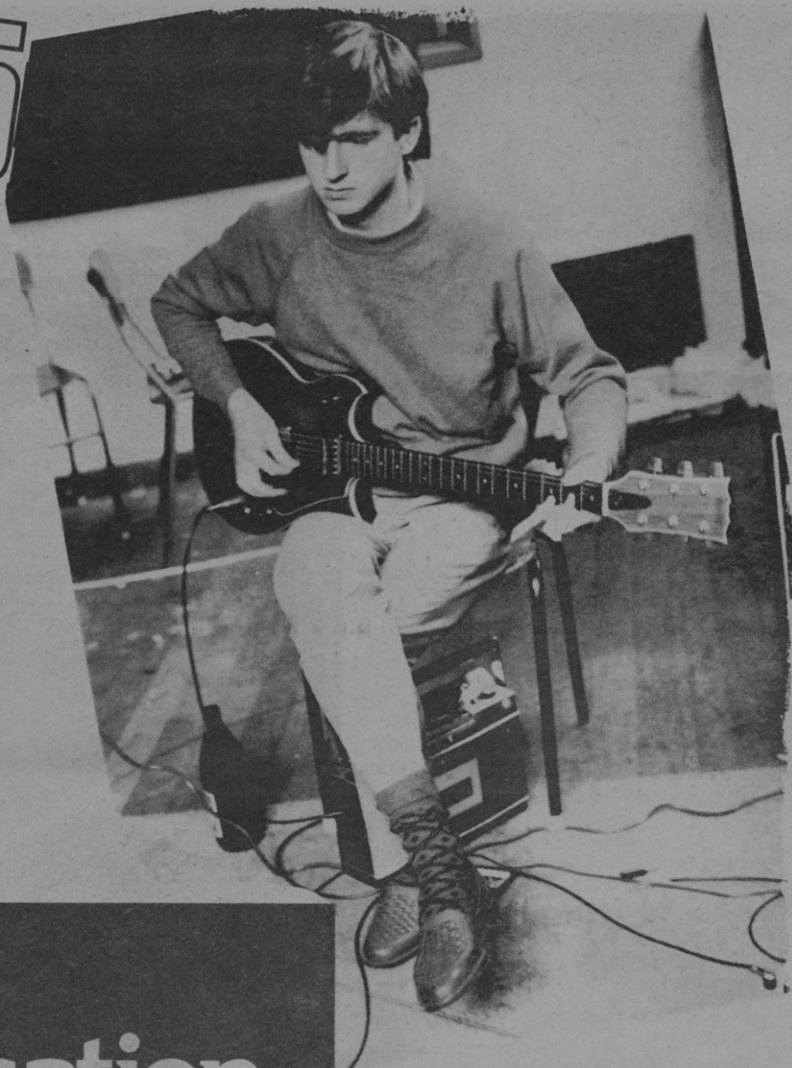
Thus speaks Neil Mullane Finn, former Split Enz lieutenant (described in *RIU* when he joined the band in 1977 as "a talent still to evolve"), now about to embark on his new venture, the Mullanes. With eight years in our foremost popular culture collective under his belt, he's well qualified to speak on the state of the art here, coinciding with *RIU*'s centennial issue and

the imminent departure for the UK of our next bright hope, the Chills.

Having Been There and Done That, Finn finds New Zealand attitudes defensive and precious.

"I'd have to say I'm ignorant of the day-to-day problems facing bands here. I couldn't express my opinion on that. It seems a shame New Zealand doesn't get any flow going, it always hiccups, it has an odd peak when it seems something is really happening, then falls into a trough.

"I'm just longing for some sort of centralising figure in New Zealand to come along and unite



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Insist on seeing the TT250 in action soon. However, you can take the exhilaration for granted.

things. That has to happen in a small country like New Zealand, you have to unite to make something work. Perhaps we need something like a good (trade) union that would look out for opportunities.

"There's a lot of bitchiness in bands, about the industry and from the industry. It happens everywhere, but in other places the minorities are strong enough to look after themselves. Here, it seems that everybody needs everybody else. There should be less dissension, more overall cooperation.

"The worst thing, it seems to me, is that when bands are at their creative peak, there's very little support available. Things like *Rip It Up* are probably one of the very few consistently supportive areas of the industry. You've managed to walk a thin line between being objective about quality and keeping everybody happy. It's a tribute to Murray in that respect."

While our charming, generous and appallingly handsome editor goes to buy himself a new hat, Finn reflects on another of our sins: insular attitudes.

"Musicians here are able to convince themselves that their idea is everything. Isolation creates that view. You're convinced that your idea is 'it', but there's no contrary opinions, so you just carry on, feeling you don't have to do any more. It seems people are more concerned about what their friends think here than trying to get any overview of what everybody thinks. It's a shame that bands don't want to get better, or that they don't want to learn from other people, they feel it's OK to keep within the same garage level."

"Garage" being the operative word, when talking of the current obsession.

"It seems very regressive, in a way. I reckon it's good for a band to have that mentality when they start off. It's healthy to hate everything else and think that what you're doing is divine (tiny smile), because it gives you that impetus to get over the real problems of getting your first gigs and stuff. But pretty soon you've got to start accepting that you're not the cat's whiskers.

"The standard of production of records here is never going to be anything that makes an impact overseas, as shoddy as it is. That's a source of great disappointment.

"Having said that, it's not the band's fault. It's lack of direction, there are no managers, maybe one or two. But generally speaking, the management here is terrible. It's a really important area. Managers can supply direction to a band and keep them aware of wanting their music to reach people.

"I think it's a rare musician that doesn't want his music to be embraced by a lot of people. I'm a bit suspicious of people who say they never want to be commercial. Because I know deep down that when they're in front of an audience that's going nuts ... it's a brilliant feeling. It's what you're there for."

Finn feels "nervous" for the Chills as they head off on their Great Adventure. Speaking from personal experience, he says Britain is likely to be a foggy road.

"It's almost constantly in a state of flux, it seems. There's a constant turnover of people who dominate or manipulate the fashion world, and occasionally they do it well enough for the whole country to go that way for a while. Like Adam and the Ants (who?), everyone was King of
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