



Crowded House (L-R): Nick Seymour, Neil Finn, Paul Hester.

## Getting Mighty Crowded 'A South Pacific Combo'

It's appropriate that Crowded House's breakthrough into the lucrative American market should coincide with *Rip It Up's* tenth anniversary. It's 10 years ago that Neil Finn replaced Phil Judd in Split Enz at a time when punk demanded that the band adapt or go under. They replied with 'I See Red' and *Frenzy*; two years later Neil's 'I Got You' sparked a Split Enz rejuvenation and sealed their identity as a fully-fledged pop band.

The rest is history. Suffice to say that with the band's dissolution in late '84, there were great expectations of Neil Finn, who along with Dave Dobbyn, had come to be regarded as one of the country's best mainstream writers.

### Full House

At the time of this interview early last month Crowded House were, naturally enough, in the middle of an American tour. Neil Finn had about half an

hour before he was due on stage in Gainesville, northern Florida.

"The reception's getting better and better as the record gets bigger," says the man whose song 'Don't

Dream It's Over' had just peaked at number two in the American charts. Satisfying at any time, but particularly when you consider the song came from Crowded House's first album, which when it was released a year ago scarcely paid its way:

"The single took a long time to come out because record companies don't like putting out a ballad first and it took so long to make up their minds. Finally they applied a bit of common sense to the whole thing and released 'Don't Dream It's Over,' which was the song that everyone felt was the strongest.

"But once it was out the record company believed in it and worked on it for more than the token three or four weeks. They kept at it for

about eight weeks until it was starting to show some sign of life and then it just snowballed. And we had quite a lot of good reviews and everything just happened at once. The timing was right too, as the charts were lacking in anything new and the Americans tend to let the odd thing through and we just happened to be the lucky ones."

On merit alone 'Don't Dream It's Over' would grace any chart, and it's a sad reflection on the business stranglehold of rock and roll that only the odd diamond shines through the dust of formula.

"There is a formula in the way they work them over here, as it's such a huge conglomerate of an industry you've got to go about promotion in certain ways. They have to get the right stations early on and they have to get these stations to add the record at the right time.

"You pay an independent promoter and they basically control stations — they have good relations with the stations, maybe as a result of shoving coke up radio programmers' noses.

"They had a scandal over here a year ago and ironically enough, the guy from our record company (who's since been sacked) was filmed by the FBI giving money to an independent guy who was connected to the Mafia. So the whole thing blew up in his face.

"Since then that sort of thing has been substantially reduced and that's good, because it gives those people who can't afford a lot of money on promotion a better chance. But it won't go away entirely because America's built itself on consumerism and being experts at selling things, so

there's no way that people who've been making big money on records are going to roll over and die."

### Down Under

Has the commercial success of bands from this part of the world like Men At Work opened any doors?

"If they've had an effect it's been a very subtle one. I think you should ultimately be judged on your own merits, and because somebody is from Australia isn't going to make that much difference. In fact it's probably a disadvantage, as bands from [our] part of the world are unaware of what it takes to get a record happening in America. I reckon every record decides its own fate, at the end of the day it doesn't matter where it comes from."

Has the American media been tempted into comparing Crowded House with every other Australasian band like, again, Men At Work?

"No, surprisingly we haven't had much of that at all. Men At Work were noted for their Australian-ness because of things like 'Down Under,' plus we're a little unsure what to call ourselves [Hester and Seymour are Australians] as we're neither an Australian or a New Zealand band, we're just a South Pacific combo. And the song has happened on its own merits, so the people aren't focusing that much on the fact that we're from Australia.

"Live, people hear the accent and Americans love it — you can't underestimate the charm a bunch of Antipodeans can have for the average American, because they don't get to hear people talk from our end of the world very often. It's quite pathetic in a way."

By all accounts you could dine out on the strength of an English accent in the States ...

"Yeah, they think we're English most of the time, and if it's not that, then Australian. We stump some people when we say we're from New Zealand and they go, 'Lemme see, Norway, Sweden, New Zealand, right?' The only things they know about us are the America's Cup and the nuclear-free stance. The Americans aren't all that interested in the rest of the world."

### Hooklines and Singles

The Crowded House album was pretty well what we expected from Neil Finn — a solid core of unpretentious, well-crafted honest pop songs suspended by hooks that deserve to be in the charts.

"Capitol have just released 'Something So Strong.' I think it will be a good followup as it's pretty immediate, and it's 52 on the charts."

The album was recorded in Los Angeles. Any particular reason?

"We wanted to get a deal directly with an American or British record company so that our album would go out everywhere and we could talk to them directly instead of through an Australian record company. Capitol expressed the most interest, so we thought we'd go over to get to know them."

"That was the real reason, and partly because I'd never recorded in America and I thought with a new band it would be good to go somewhere with a new atmosphere."

Mitchell Froom, known for his work with the Del Fuegos and his brilliant Hammond organ additions to Costello's

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