

It was still relatively early days for the Neil Finn-led Crowded House, when at a show at the Logan Campbell Centre in 1989, they were joined for the encore by a dishevelled Brian Timothy Finn — looking nothing less than a whisker away from the edge. The support act that evening was Schnell Fenster, a band that not only boasted original Split Enz guitarist Phil Judd, but also the former Enz rhythm section of Nigel Griggs and Noel Crombie. At that point in time it wasn't often every-

ber of Crowded House, to record with the band on their third album *Woodface*. In between came massive commercial success for the Enz in Australasia, with the release of *True Colours* in 1979, Tim Finn's first solo album, *Escapade* in 1983, the eventual disbanding of Split Enz the following year, after the sell-out *Enz With A Bang* tour, two further Tim Finn albums, and worldwide success for Crowded House, sparked by the US success of 'Don't Dream It's Over'.

This latest Finn manoeuvre began during

flowed from the very first day. We just talked about lots of stuff, and in between strummed away and fished things out of the air."

In four days the duo had written almost a dozen tracks, including 'Weather With You' and 'There Goes God'. With things moving at such a rate, former Crowded House drummer Paul Hester was called in to assist with the recording of demos. Due to the ease with which they slipped back into the dual songwriting process, the plan to record a "two part harmony" Finn album was hatched. But the proverbial spanner was thrown in the works when Crowded House resumed the *Woodface* sessions.

Neil: "It was a pretty amazing little run with Tim, and it was after that I became really confused. That had been so much fun, and the songs seemed so strong and undeniable. Then I got back into Crowded House, and it just felt really tired. It was hard work, we struggled, and we didn't have enough songs to finish the album. I thought the songs Tim and I had done would tie up all the loose ends."

Both Tim and the songs were incorporated into the Crowded House line-up, but it was a short-lived affair. Within the year they had parted ways once again, but with a promise to pick up the project at a later date.

Tim: "When we thought: 'Let's make it all one album,' it felt really positive. The place where it unravelled was on stage. The dynamic was somehow a bit contrived. I didn't feel that I could be fully myself, or they could be fully Crowded House. It was odd. But we parted very amicably, and we knew that because that rising had been so intense, and so quick and spontaneous, the door was open and we could do it again."

The intervening years saw Tim release his fourth solo record, *Before And After*, and Crowded House deliver their fourth also, *Together Alone*. While Neil returned to New Zealand for rest and relaxation

Crowded House albums have been rewarding in the end, but they were bloody hard work. This one wasn't overworked by any means. We just went on a course and didn't divert from it. The songs were only half formed when we got them in the studio, we were making it up as we went along, and we didn't go back on anything. We were really into it the moment the songs went down, and we said: 'That's the way it is, that's the way it's going to be.'"

The degree to which the Finns desired to make the album on their own terms extended to paying for the recording themselves, and keeping their US record company totally in the dark regarding the project — a practice universally frowned upon by major labels, who are notoriously anal in their attempts to keep up with their artists' each and every move. The luxury of secrecy meant the duo were under no label pressure to write a 'hit' single.

Tim: "We didn't feel that at all. We just did what we did. It was a really naive, innocent approach. There was no: 'Have we got a single?' We just said to them: 'Here's the album.' The hits are flukes when they come, we don't know. We've both been in the business for 20 years, we've had a smattering of hits through that time, and we've had lean periods where there's been half hits or no hits. We survive and still do it, so you realise after awhile it's not the be all and end all."

With the album in the can and about to hit the shelves, it's only now the Finns are prepared to toe the company line. A promotional visit to the UK took up the last three weeks of September, then it was back to the Southern Hemisphere where they will repeat the process in New Zealand and Australia. The fun part comes in January, when they expect to rope in a few friends and tour nationwide, this time confident there'll be enough room on stage.

Neil: "We can create the right dynamic again without having to worry about any other strong personalities. With Crowded House, there were three people who were used to shouting their mouths off on stage, and suddenly there was another person to add to that mix, and at times you'd end up talking over each other. We understand what goes on between the two of us in a much more simple way."

And perhaps *Finn*, and the circumstances surrounding its creation, will put to rest the stories that have become almost folklore regarding the 'feuding' Finn brothers. Tales borne from Split Enz's demise, the junior Finn's meteoric rise, the elder Finn's departure from Crowded House, all pale when you watch them together in conversation, or on

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one could be on the same stage, and the result was magic. They (minus Judd) blasted through 'I See Red', 'Dirty Creature', and 'Six Months In A Leaky Boat', as if a berth in heaven or hell depended on the strength of their performance. Even in the midst of this unforgettable spectacle, the chemistry between the Finn brothers was thick in the air, and lifted the reunion far beyond the description by words. Today, the partnership is together again, sitting on the verge of releasing *Finn*, an album of their first ever recordings as a duo.

When the elder Finn invited 18 year old Neil to join Split Enz in 1977, it began a journey that turned full circle 14 years later, when Tim signed up as a fully fledged mem-

ber of Crowded House, to record with the band on their third album *Woodface*. In between came massive commercial success for the Enz in Australasia, with the release of *True Colours* in 1979, Tim Finn's first solo album, *Escapade* in 1983, the eventual disbanding of Split Enz the following year, after the sell-out *Enz With A Bang* tour, two further Tim Finn albums, and worldwide success for Crowded House, sparked by the US success of 'Don't Dream It's Over'.

Neil: "For a long time Tim and I talked about trying to write some songs and doing a Finn brothers record, because every time we got together, such as that time at the Logan Campbell Centre, there was a definite energy and such strength. It just happened that Tim was in Melbourne with not much on, and I was waiting for the birth of my second son. We went every day to this little place next door to the house, and things just

after the rigours of album promotion and touring, Tim went back to Ireland and became the T in ALT, alongside Irish singer/songwriters Andy White and Liam O'Manola of the Hothouse Flowers.

Upon Tim's return in September 1994, the Finn Brothers album was given priority status. The duo spent 10 days in the open air of Bethells Beach on the West Coast and in the basement of Neil's Auckland home, fleshing out combined ideas to produce a dozen half-finished songs. As with the writing sessions three years earlier, the creative juices flowed freely.

Neil: "The manifesto for this record, if we had one at all, was to make every aspect of it as painless as possible. The last couple of

stage. Ultimately, each is their brother's keeper.

Neil: "People are inclined to paint the sibling rivalry thing larger than life. We are resilient to that completely. That's never ever been a reality as far as we're concerned, for more than 20 minutes at a time possibly. We probably could have manipulated it quite well and made it bigger than it really was, but we've never been inclined to play that game."

Tim: "Obviously we're two totally separate individuals with different natures, personalities, et cetera, but we're blood brothers and come from the same soil, but we are inseparable."

JOHN RUSSELL