

Q&A



CROWDED HOUSE

Neil Finn and company return with some very intriguing new music

UPON ITS REUNION IN 2006 AFTER A decade of inaction, Crowded House and its fans alike took some time getting used to a reality without original drummer Paul Hester, who passed away the previous year. But the new *Intriguer* album, recorded in the group's native New Zealand and producer Jim Scott's home base of Los Angeles, is very much the work of an act whose now-stable lineup has proven its mettle on the road and is eager to keep building upon its estimable legacy. We caught up with Crowded House founder and frontman Neil Finn as he and his bandmates prepared to hit the stage in Barcelona, Spain.

Do you still get nervous before a show?

There's always a degree of apprehension, but I'm not nervous. I'm not one of those people who throws up before a show. *(laughs)*

You worked out some of the new songs on tour. Had you always done that?

We did it more on this record than we have before. I'm not sure whether the process was necessary, but it served us well. A couple of the songs got completely transformed. There were a few hardcore fans out there who got bootlegs of those shows and couldn't believe what they were hearing when they

finally got to hear the finished record. It doesn't sound anything like what they were expecting, so they had a little catching up to do.

What is your writing process like now?

It's really the same as it always has been. I noodle around on guitar and make sure I've got a tape recorder going. I hum a few tunes and get a few lines popping out. I'll have a moment of, "Oh, something good happened there." I'll check it back and take my lead from that—even if it was just 10 seconds where I was hitting something. I'll learn that and advance on it, then I'll tape it again. Eventually I'll make a demo and stick some harmonies on it. That's quite loose around the edges, and the band sometimes makes it sound completely different.

Is there a guitar you prefer to write on?

Not in particular, it could be any guitar. I do have a lovely old Gibson acoustic that I do try to use a lot. I actually write on piano just as often as guitar.

Why did you pick the album title?

The *Intriguer* is a mythological character discovered by myself and an Australian friend of mine, a cartoonist named Michael

Leunig. Late one night in a bar in Sydney, we saw a shadow moving across a window on the top floor of a hotel. Every time we saw the shadow move, something happened in the bar—like a woman had a screaming match with her husband, things like that. We realized he was shadowing us and creating intrigue and trouble, so it's a little nod in his direction. Even though we've never seen him and he always goes away, he makes life interesting.

Have you had any sightings lately?

There's always sightings here. In Barcelona there's always a mystery around every corner—you'll take a wrong turn and end up in a blind alley. It's always something.

How does it feel to be in Crowded House now?

It's a great thing to have Crowded House active again, and I think we're playing better than we ever have as a live band. We like the fact that we now have moved on and made a couple of new records. We aren't just a band available for nostalgia events, we're actually a band that's moving ahead. It's something we can feel good about.

—Chris Neal

'We're actually a band that's moving ahead.'

