

Brothers In Arms: The Finn Brothers

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On most weekends during the 1950s and '60s, the house was crowded. Friends, neighbors, family members and even the local priest gathered with musical instruments in the Finn family's living room, sharing spontaneous music and laughter in the grand Irish tradition. This scene, however, was not in Ireland but in a New Zealand hamlet called Te Awamutu, where transplants Dick and Mary Finn carved out a life for themselves and their four children.

While the couple merely intended to pass on their strong sense of family, humor and love of music, these weekly parties ultimately provided the foundation for two world-renowned musicians. Thirty years of bands and international hit records have since come and gone for both Tim and Neil Finn, but it has once again become a family affair for the Finn Brothers: They've pooled their talents to re-create a series of intimate musical evenings across the United States this month.

Taking the stage at Mr. Small's on Feb. 27, the Finns launch this midwinter tour a mere six months after touring the States last summer to support their latest release, *Everyone Is Here*. This leg will incorporate smaller venues, which Neil Finn says allow more flexibility and connection with audiences. While the former tour included a full four-piece electric ensemble, the upcoming concert will feature the pared-down lineup of Tim Finn on drums and guitar, Neil on electric guitar, and also bassist Tim Smith. "I think we'll be able to make a big noise," says Neil. "When there's two or three of you, you've got the whole job yourselves, so there's never a wasted breath or a wasted note. You can always hear what you're doing, and everybody relies on everyone fully, and I like that kind of performing."

In his native New Zealand, February marks the middle of summer. Yet this year, Neil will be taking the weather with him when visiting frostier climes. "In a way, touring in winter is great because the bus feels more cozy and more like a place you want to be, and you don't have to be living in air-conditioning all the time. We did the summer tour last year and we played outdoors in Texas and it was like 105 degrees, and it was great, but it puts a strain on things."

Most veterans of Finn shows can attest to the interactive nature of the evenings, with the brothers trading quips as easily as harmonies. It's an evening in which you're likely to find yourself entertained by

anything: from Crowded House and Split Enz favorites to selections from the pair's self-titled release and even impromptu '60s covers.

Tim and Neil Finn have enjoyed critical acclaim both together and alone, but Neil admits the brothers' individual writing styles strike a certain balance when they work as The Finn Brothers. "[Tim] likes to be more specific and more clear about what he's writing about, whereas I'm quite happy to leave it a little more open-ended and abstract," Neil says. "In the end, I'll always pull him back from spelling it out too much, and he'll pull me back from being too obtuse." The type of compromise inherent in family relationships is central to *Everyone Is Here*, which melodically but honestly reflects on what it means to be part of a family, and encourages listeners to draw strength from those closest to them.

As for the Finn family itself, relatives were supportive when the brothers initially decided to turn their weekend hobby into a lifetime profession. "Looking back, they must have had some anxious moments thinking it would not work out, and probably [some] concern about the extreme haircuts that Tim came home with," Finn says, laughing. But equally important as the support of his loved ones, he adds, was his ability to involve and connect with his audiences. "You can make music by yourself in your room and entertain yourself, but to me, that's only half of music's power. In front of an audience, you get greater power from it, and a greater presence."

The 12 tracks on *Everyone Is Here* are dedicated to Mary Finn, who passed away in 2002 but never lost hope that her sons would write and perform together again. "She was a strong, opinionated, humor-filled, caring woman," says Finn. "So we were inspired in every possible way as human beings and in terms of our music. She had a great love of the moment, too. People singing for fun, in a room — that was her greatest thrill."

Concertgoers may develop similar smiles at Mr. Small's this Sunday. "If somebody's gathered some kind of comfort or strength or inspiration from a song," offers Finn, "it's all part of the greater mystery, and I feel blessed and thankful for it."