

Artists:ALT
Album:Altitude

When you get three artists of the calibre of Tim Finn(Ex Split Enz, Ex Crowded House), Liam O'Moanlai (Hothouse Flowers) and Andy White getting together you either get a clash of egos or some great music. Fortunately in the case of ALT, named after the initials of the participants rather than the computer keyboard key, it's the latter.

ALT recently released their debut album, "Altitude" on Parlophone, in the UK as well as supported it with a few live dates. Whilst the band were over I gave Andy a shout to find out more about the project.

#A=Andy White #N=Neil King

#N How did ALT come about ?

#A Really through friendship. No one in a big office in the 16th floor of a corporate tower block said, "These guys'll be great together." Liam and Tim met in a cafe in London and asked him over to Ireland. Tim's family tree goes back to Ireland and he thought it might be a good idea to find out about where his family came from. Liam and I used to share a flat and Tim came and stayed upstairs. We hung out and found we had a lot in common. We wrote the song "Many's The Time" which was on both mine and Tim's last albums. We knew from that that it could work.

#N You're all signed to different record labels, has that caused any problems ?

#A ALT is a free and a loose format. We never actually sat down and said 'we've got to do a record'. We all went our own ways and did our own things. The in February of last year Tim came back to see if we could write some more. We ended up writing half the album in a very loose form. Tim invited us to Melbourne, where he's got a recording studio. Liam and I played Glastonbury together. I left Liam in the Acoustic Tent and went back to London. He later woke up in the Greenfield with no money and no socks. He got back to the acoustic tent. He got the stage manager there to drive him back to London, lend him some money and get him some socks. We met at the airport and arrived with half an album. It was a beautiful winter in Melbourne, warm and relaxed. After all that time we discovered the album was a possibility. It all kind of flows on really. Writing it's been brilliant. If you write on your own, like we tend to, it's a complete joy to be able to relax and have inspiration coming from other people as well. The themes of the records, such as they are, if they were just tackled by one of us the feel of the album would change. These are all songs about shared experiences.

#N How casual is ALT for the future ?

#A We decided to release it in Australia and New Zealand first because sort of where it was born. We toured it over there, which was like a family moving around. We decided that we would also do Europe. We might do a short time in America later on in the year. This time we'll be thinking about the next thing. We leave a lot of gaps between things. We own the record so we're not tied up to do things. If you're told to tour, you see your life slipping away. You can tour for three years, but what you'd like to do is a month here, a month there, which is kind of the ALT attitude to things really.

#N Can you see other musicians getting involved ?

#A We did a song in Australia with Kevin Comedy, the Aboriginal singer and... it could fit in with a lot of things. It's great when we play live there's just the three of us, but we've got all the instruments out. Tim has been a closet drummer, it was a condition that he be allowed to play the drums on at least two songs. He turned out to be a great drummer. The gigs range from something very traditional, very ancient to a garage band. It's very eclectic really.

#N Briefly, switching to your solo career, it's been a while since your last album.

#A They come out at different times in different countries. I was really happy to be back on Cooking Vinyl again. When I played at Glastonbury last year it was roughly when it came out. I toured more last year in England than I'd done for a while. It's indicative of being on a good independent label. So we'll see how this goes. Hopefully ALT will spread the word about the solo work as well.

#N Did you find it difficult to adapt to writing as a group ?

#A It's a different thing. When you're writing on your own you have to think about the whole song. The thing about this is you might have a good idea for one bit and someone else'll come in and add to it and take the idea along. Liam works on a really spontaneous basis, he'll suddenly come out with a verse. There's a song on the record, "Favourite Girl". If you listen to that it's being written as it's being played. We've all had the experience of the life being sucked out of a song during recording.

#N You can over polish.

#A Absolutely. It's good to keep those things in or everything becomes a Tina Turner record. It's not really what we're after. It works because it's not worked out, it's not a Phil Collins record. There are so many oddities and things that happen. Quirks of the structures of the songs. It's like if you go to a play and someone cracks up on stage, it's real.