NEIL IS IN DA HOUSE

Crowded House, Eden Sessions, Wednesday 12 June

'Every child is a mystic having visions of a new dawn' is how Crowded House's 2024 album *Gravity Stairs* starts, and there is a certain childlike element to Neil Finn, the front man's, view of things. On stage he is a confident, seeming casual, commentator, chatting to the crowd, asking questions about Cornwall, responding to catcalls and comments, and generally seeming at ease with himself and his bandmates.

It's the first time at an Eden Session that parking has felt like a real hassle. We ended up in a field that seemed miles away from the venue, and the packed shuttle bus seemed to take forever to drive down the hill. And there were queues for everything: security, drinks and especially food. I've always thought that Eden managed their summer gigs really well but it didn't feel as organised or smooth-running yesterday, and the early mass exodus pre-encore suggested that others felt nervous about potential exit traffic jams too.

Anyway, the music. Crowded House now features two of Neil Finn's sons and keyboard wizz Mitchell Froom, along with the original member Nick Seymour. They are almost too subtle a band for an outdoor event like this, not really stretching out the music or giving it much ooomph until well into the set.

They started with a trio of new songs before gradually introducing better known numbers, and slowly won the crowd over with their charm, Neil Finn and Nick Seymour's relaxed double act and hit songs. Two thirds of the way through, as the light faded, the whole thing really took flight, with some really groovy organ swells, funky bass and soaring guitar solos and musical textural interplay.

By the time the band ended their main set with 'Distant Sun', 'Don't Dream It's Over' and (of course) 'Weather With You', everyone had been won over and the band were in their element, busily reinterpreting their classic hit songs with ease. (Earlier versions of 'Fall At Your Feet' and 'Four Seasons in One Day' were also despatched with a fluid ease.)

I'm sure Crowded House work hard to overcome mostly being known (in the UK at least) for their greatest hits but for a while there were audience mutters around me hoping the band would play something the audience knew. Whilst the group clearly don't simply want to be a retro outfit on tour, I do think they could reconsider the pacing of their gigs and rearrange a few more tracks to allow greater dynamic contrasts. Saving three songs (+ a brief improvised rap!) for an encore also seems questionable, especially when two of those are 'Something So Strong' and 'It's Only Natural'!

If this all sounds negative, I'm sorry. By the time the band brought things to a close, they had us all in the palm of their hands and had given us most of what we wanted to hear. Any band that can produce the number of classic songs Crowded House has is pretty amazing, and if the band continue to work this hard at entertaining and playing, then even without hit singles some of the more recent songs will also become well loved. This was a great start to the 2024 Eden Sessions.

Rupert Loydell

(540 words)