



Western Australian electronic music trio Crooked Colours perform at the Life is Beautiful Festival, Las Vegas, US. Photo credit: Zachary Lefevre

# Western Australian band Crooked Colours plays on

## International recording deal sees Perth band through pandemic.

When international touring suddenly stopped in March 2020, Western Australian electronic music trio Crooked Colours had to abruptly leave their tour in North America and head home to Perth.

The band's equipment was already en route to Texas for their next scheduled show and it was not until months later they were able to get it back.

Overnight, Crooked Colours went from having one of their busiest years, touring through North America and Europe performing at over 60 festivals and headline show performances, to having everything cancelled.

The band consists of Leon Debaughn (keys, production), Liam Merrett-Park (drums), and Phil Slabber (vocals, guitar, production).

While all members are from Western Australia, they have been working on music recording,

publishing, and touring internationally since 2012. Their biggest international markets are the United States, Germany, Switzerland, Austria and the United Kingdom.

"The last show we did on this tour was the New Orleans show, and that night only half the people came to the show, because people were scared of COVID-19," Mr Merrett-Park said.

Mr Slabber remembers the moment they decided to fly back home to Perth.

"I think our biggest fear at the time was that we wouldn't be able to get home, we could see so many flights getting cancelled," he said.

Two weeks later, all flights from the USA were grounded. It became clear the band was now unable to promote their music to a global audience in the way they usually would – via touring.



## International success

» "IP creation, such as music recordings and publishing rights, are the perfect export commodity in that they materially cost nothing to produce but then generate revenue from around the world."

- Band manager Ben Robinson (FRNDS MGMT)

- » The band received support through the Australian Government's Export Market Development Grants (EMDG).
- » The EMDG scheme is a financial assistance program for aspiring and current exporters. Administered by the Australian Trade and Investment Commission (Austrade), the scheme supports a wide range of industries.



Crooked Colours band members Liam Merrett-Park, Leon Debaughn and Phil Slabber. Photo credit: Michael Rees-Lightfoot

## Going global

In 2019, the band signed an international recording and publishing agreement with Atlantic Records in North America.

During the worst of the pandemic their deal meant they could afford to take time and focus on writing and recording, getting ready for when international markets opened up again.

"This deal has set the band up long into the future and, because of it, they were able to build a studio in Perth and weather this current storm created by COVID-19," band manager Ben Robinson (FRNDS MGMT) said.

Mr Robinson noted the importance of having a strategy, and the value of going global, with the band having received support through the Australian Government's Export Market Development Grants (EMDG) scheme.

"It took us around five years to turn North America into a profitable market. And now, it is such a huge market for us, and our potential audience is about ten times what it would have been if we had just focused domestically on Australia," he said.

"The first five tours we had in North America were all money-losing ventures, but we knew they were an investment to build up an international audience. These tours would not

have been possible without the EMDG grants we received for the past three years."

Mr Robinson noted that a lot of intellectual property (IP) exporters go unnoticed in the business world because it can be more of a gradual return.

"IP creation such as music recordings and publishing rights are the perfect export commodity in that they materially cost nothing to produce but then generate revenue from around the world in perpetuity," he said.

## Pivoting during the pandemic

Prior to the pandemic, each of the band members was living in a different location – from Perth, to Melbourne, to Los Angeles. Interestingly, the travel restrictions actually brought them back together in Perth where they opened their studio earlier in 2020.

"The most difficult thing for us was not so much not being able to perform, but not being able to plan anything, as we didn't know if things would change again in two weeks or even a few months' time," Mr Slabber said.

Crooked Colours had a big Australian tour planned for March 2020 that, due to COVID-19 restrictions, had to be postponed to September 2020 and is now planned for 2021.





Crooked Colours perform at the CRSSD Festival in San Diego, USA. Photo credit: Zachary Lefevre

“These things were outside our control. All we could do was focus on what we could control and that was writing and recording music and making sure we stay positive and ready once things do recover,” Mr Robinson said.

“If we didn’t have people believing in us this year, I don’t think we would have gone as far as we have,” Mr Merrett-Park said.

“Our Australian fans have been holding on to their tickets, even after we had to postpone the tour two times already. That is dedication, and we really appreciate it,” Mr Debaughn said.

With domestic and international tours on hold indefinitely, the band decided to find new ways to connect with their fans and started doing fortnightly DJ streams on Instagram Live, adapting to social media platforms, and using Instagram reels and TikTok.

“We’ve had a lot of fun doing these videos. I’d love to keep doing that, but I am not sure if live streaming will be as big anymore once this is over. I think people want to have that human interaction, and I think watching it through the computer screen doesn’t really give you the same experience,” Mr Debaughn said.

To date, the band has had over 200 million combined streams across their debut album ‘VERA’ and sophomore album ‘LANGATA’. In 2020, they released two singles – Love Language in August, and Falling in November,

both performing incredibly well on the streaming platforms.

“In one big way this experience has brought us together in the same place for the first time in a few years, which has been really positive for our writing,” Mr Slabber said.

“We’ve gotten into a good habit, to approach things differently, in more of a unique way. I think moving forward when we get given the opportunity that we had prior to COVID-19, we will have definitely a new outlook on everything.”

The band was getting ready to release their next single in early 2021 and their new album in August-September 2021. The plan is to take off where they left off and continue their world tour in 2022.

## Get in touch

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