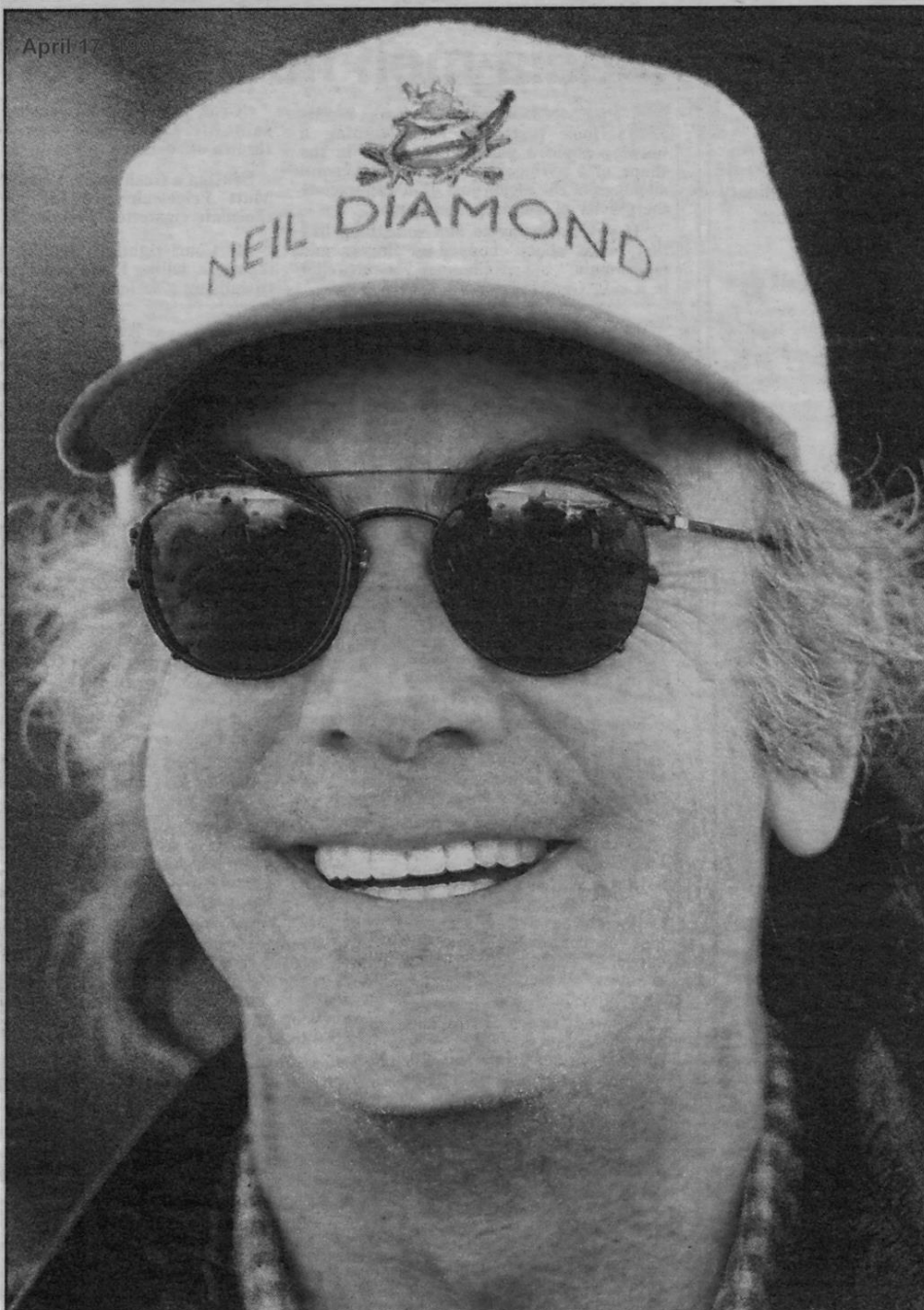


April 17



Low-key: Neil Diamond arrived in Perth yesterday for two concerts tomorrow and Friday. He has fond memories of his last visit 20 years ago. PICTURE: GUY MAGOWAN

Diamond grey but sparkle remains

BY VANESSA GOULD

THE private plane arrived at an entrance gate of Perth airport so secretly it tricked even the local promoters of superstar Neil Diamond.

A big security guard emerged first to pounce on a teenage autograph seeker, followed by American-accented people who looked like they made a lot of money bossing other people around.

Then out strolled a 56-year-old man of very human proportions in a black leather jacket to joke that we'd stolen his Californian weather.

"Lucky he's wearing a cap with his name on it," said one onlooker, as one of the world's middle-aged popular culture heroes stepped on to Perth soil for the first time in 20 years.

The sideburns were a little greyer and a little less lamb-chop but the banter seemed spontaneous. Of course, he remembered the last time he was in Perth.

"They didn't throw anything, it was a definite positive," laughed the man who has sold 100 million records over a 30-year career.

"I think it's a pretty high-intensity audience and they've been loyal for a long time and they know most of my music, so we'll just try to give them everything that we can, oldies and songs from the new album. I think they'll respond positively."

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Fans take a shine to star

He was the old friend everyone had in their family-room for years, uniting the Baby-Boomers and now the twenty-somethings in hearty sing-alongs, his songs forming part of the collective memory bank whether you like them or not.

How did he feel about crossing the generation gap and bringing twenty-somethings raised on his music and their parents to the same concerts?

Through the hideaway dark sunglasses, the big brown eyes looked sincere.

"You know I really like that," he said in a measured tone, adding with a surprisingly expressive flourish of his hands: "I find that really rejuvenating."

Would he ever consider doing what Bruce Springsteen has chosen to do and play to smaller, more intimate audiences?

Diamond said he had got "a lot off his chest" recently with his latest country-influenced album, *Tennessee Moon*.

He looked a little taken aback, saying he certainly didn't want to go back to where he started from by playing in clubs. "There's still a lot of people that want to come to my shows, there's still an audience there," he said.

Diamond has previously

said he considered his sellout 1976 tour of Australia, after the success of the 1972 concert album *Hot August Night*, to be almost perfect. His insecurity about attracting the same audience kept him away for 16 years, before his last sell-out Australian tour in 1992. It didn't make it to Perth.

Luckily, he finds Neil Diamond impersonators flattering and funny.

"My mum saw one of them in Miami. She went to see him and she called me after and she said, 'I never realised you had that many mannerisms'," he said.

He denied getting into too much trouble as a boy in New York, saying his parents started him on guitar lessons very young and demanded he practise to keep out of trouble.

He wouldn't mind getting out on one of his beloved Harley Davidson motorcycles on his day off today. He is staying in a big house on the coast.

Then a fan charmed her way through the autograph police to give him a rose and receive a kiss on the cheek. "Isn't he gorgeous," swooned Jan, 50-ish, who went to his last Perth concert at the WACA Ground.

All tickets to Diamond's concerts at the Burswood Dome tomorrow and Friday night are sold out.