

MORE *MUSIC*

JOHN PEEL on House of Love

NO, I don't pick up as many hitch-hikers as I used to. Well, there are so many, you know, weirdos about, aren't there? And there are those hikers whose eyes you see in the rear-view mirror, eyes that make you wish more than anything in the whole world that you had just kept driving. Guy Chadwick looks like one of those — and the way his head flops over on to his left shoulder as he sings is hardly reassuring.

Academics disagree, but I am of the opinion that Shakespeare's thing about a tide in the affairs of men is English literature's first surfing reference. I mention this because there are parallels between surfing and the pop process. Most bands, alas, paddle miles out to sea, waiting for that one big wave, the impending arrival of which you can feel rather than see, and it never comes. But if it does, there is no logic to the timing of its arrival and it must be taken on the instant. I suspect that the House of Love's wave is here.

Two weeks ago, even a week ago, the House of Love was just another Creation Records' band that people, including me, quite, you know, liked. But now there's an especially strong debut LP, some hot reviews and the sense that we are only days away from pretending that we have liked them immoderately all along.

Guy Chadwick sings with the House of Love and I was deflected to their gig at the Irish Centre, Leeds, at the last moment, when I learned that Simon Frith was musing on Fairground Attraction, also in Leeds on Thursday, elsewhere on this page. I am glad that he was and I was.

Taking the stage to a smattering of applause reminiscent of that heard around cricket grounds before the all-day ale-heads took over — and in the wake of the Lemon Ice Screams, saddled with a frightful name, gawky but not without hope, and St Christopher, who have it in them to remain one of York's top bands for as long as they choose — the House of Love showed within seconds that they have that inner tension that makes for a great rather than a merely good band.

This greatness may not be, often is not, translated into commercial success, but with the House of Love it is there in moments of song that, as with whispered asides, seem to be for you and you alone; in the preoccupation of the musicians with establishing something individual which, almost accidentally, becomes part of a greater whole.

The greatness is even there in the way in which Chadwick, looking as though dressed in the first clothes, not necessarily his own, that had come to hand in the morning, seems to hang behind the microphone like forgotten washing.

There are, inevitably, echoes of earlier heroes — all the usual ones — but they are faint and will grow fainter. There are so many moments of spooky, elusive beauty in the songs and in their playing but you cannot allow attention to wander for a second. This was one of those rare performances that I wished I could have taken away with me.

