

J MAHAL

NEVER

THE HOUSE OF LOVE SEASON LONDON ICA

IT'S TUESDAY, minutes before showtime on the second of The House Of Love's five nights at London's premier temple of art-wank and I'm nervous. Nervous in the way parents are nervous as they watch their offspring take part in their first public ice dance or wait for them to return from their first day at work.

You see, a lot of people in this office claim I invented The House Of Love (acclaiming 'Shine', writing their first big league cover story, overseeing Guy's wardrobe, that sort of thing) so I'm naturally concerned now they've blown the cosy confines of the indie coop.

The more so since their major label debut, the untypically plodding and unfocussed 'Never'. That single, simultaneously self-indulgent and lacking in confidence, was something dragged from those nightmares you have about what'll happen to your favourite bands when they get their mitts on them.

Was 'Never' a one-off aberration? Can the band survive new pressures, expectations and temptations? Have they already blown it? This week at the ICA will, the anxious parent in me reckons, go a fair way toward resolving those questions...

AND AN hour later, The House Of Love are providing the first half of a fairly emphatic answer. The second part will come with Thursday's unveiling of several new songs but tonight they unleash an unstoppable huge—though still strictly controlled—barage of familiar faves that send the doubters cowering to their shelters.

Opening with, and building through, 'Flow' and the beautiful, vocal-less 'Love' the set suddenly crests with a preposterously massive 'Christine', a great cliff of noise onto which Guy's vocal, indeed Guy himself, cling like some optimistic weed. It, 'Nothing To Me' and a hair-raising two-minute clatter through the mighty 'Destroy The Heart' effortlessly crush the life from the worms that 'Never' had set free in my brain. This is a gigantic uncompromising rock music, tattoo-tight and tank-tough, yet big and brave enough to be chinking china when the need arises.

There's a devotion to scale and volume here, to sheer dynamics that's always set the HOL apart from their indie brethren. Their newly acquired light show adds to the impression of something attempting to explode out of the confines of this place.

The inventor/parent walks into the cool of the night a relieved and happy man, if Thursday's new songs are up to scratch then his baby, he knows, will make it...

IT'S WEDNESDAY afternoon in the ICA's bar and Guy Chadwick, ungrateful sod, is laughing at his mentor, giggling at the suggestion that this season displays a fear on the part of him and his band to get to grips with the big halls that are now their natural home.

"There's a reticence, yeah, but not fear. We're doing Reading in front of 30 or 40 thousand people. We're not scared of big venues and they work for us. The idea of this was to provide a really intimate night with the band. We just felt that having done the deal and having had only one single out since last August, it was important not to alienate our audience."

How is the Major Label Deal working out?

"Things are getting better," Chadwick sighs, hinting at teething problems that he'll later detail. "It was very shaky at first but things have improved. It's a lot of hard work but very exciting. I've no regrets..."

Not even about 'Never'?

"Erm... no," he hesitates, "but we didn't feel that it was a single. Phonogram really wanted to get something by us out and it was the first thing we recorded for them. 'Never' was never a great song. It was recorded at a really bad time for the band—everybody was on such a real downer (this was in January), I don't know why. We were all really depressed. For a start we'd spent twice as much money doing nine demos as we had on the whole of the first LP, and we didn't end up with a single thing we liked. That was a lot of hard work with no end product."

How far away does that leave us from a possible LP then?

"That should be out some time in the late summer, maybe September. I think it's going to be really good, though a sign of the troubles we've had is that it will have been produced by six different people. It's very ambitious; I just hope it works..."

THESE SHOWS have been a breakthrough for the House of Love in that the use of lights make the band look part of the big league without suggesting that they're about to star at Batley Variety Club. They're being done with Paul Normandale (who also lights New Order, The Cure, the Mary Chain and The Sugarcubes) and Guy, while admitting that he'd as soon play in darkness, concedes their importance.

"We want them to look brilliant. Chris the bassist is heavily into lights and he's worked on getting them together with Paul. It's just something we were prepared to spend time and money on."

"All the people that Paul works on—Barney, Jim Mary Chain and thingybob from The Sugarcubes are just not into being 'pop stars', not into projecting something that isn't real. There's no narcissism about what these people do. That suits us..."

Despite the new toys, Guy remains a nervous, slightly cold performer. I've seen him enjoying himself at several dance clubs recently (House Of Love in love of House shock!!); there's no evidence of this in his band's music, but maybe he could at least incorporate a few of his moves into his stage show. The suggestion brings the wryest of grins.

"Hmmm... I've got into dancing over the last couple of years."

Before that I was always very shy about it. And dance music is

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what's about at the moment. But I'm not obsessed with . . . I don't play it at home."

So no vogueing in the foreseeable future?

"I'm not the sort to start idiot dancing or anything onstage, but I've started to move a bit . . . I think. Last night was an unbelievably athletic night for me . . . from what I remember . . ."

IT'S THURSDAY night and while he's definitely still no Bobby Brown, Guy Chadwick is definitely doing *something* right. In a set heavily laced with the songs on which their future success, rather than their past reputation, depend, the House Of Love are again in vast, defiant, form.

After an unscheduled interlude caused by a fire alarm (the new, stadium-friendly House Of Love also employ an over-enthusiastic smoke machine!) they powerglide through a set that includes 'Don't Know Why I Love You' ('Christine's grown-up sister and the next, Stephen Hague-produced, single), the cavernous 'Happy', and '32nd Floor' which comes armed with two guitar chords that'll probably be banned at some future arms convention.

These, along with another mesmeric version of 'Love', are simply *immense*. This huge, marbled, baroque music is seeing the band grow out of their original, never inconsequential, foundations into the Taj Mahal Of Love . . .

And into a future that may well see them in the superstar league (for what that's worth). On the evidence of this week the House Of Love have overcome the early problems in their big new world and are about to confirm all that they've ever promised. Better late than 'Never' . . .

Danny Kelly

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