

SPIES IN THE HOUSE OF LOVE

Birmingham Barrel Organ

ANOTHER NEW name with which to give your tongue some exercise. A meringue of a name, pregnant with self-importance and authority but lacking in any real meaning – a mouthful of hollow. Thankfully, the band itself has more substance.

They build their songs with a delicate touch, giving the impression that every note, every beat of the drum has been debated over long and hard. If they weren't such consummately accomplished musicians, they would be in grave danger of killing the spirit of their work. As it is, the juxtaposition of fast-flowing guitar with an almost lethargic bass and drum rhythm, held together by an attractively discordant vocal, is very much alive and kicking at the doors of your soul. All you can do, faced with such insistence, is to open up and let them in.

Unfortunately, once there, they soon begin to outstay their welcome. Their songs are all a little too long and – because they are concentrating so very hard on making the music work – they make no effort to keep your attention with anything other than perfunctory stagecraft. About halfway through the set, even *they* seem to lose interest and resort to the same old tricks which musos in pub bands have been using for years without number: the extended instrumental breaks, the long and intricate guitar exercises.

The Spies may not yet be fully licensed to thrill – they're still wearing their L-plates like a badge – but there's a kernel of noteworthy talent within them which is worth nurturing. It will be interesting to watch it grow.

GEOFFREY S KENT