

They play with a full house

ROCK review

By DAN AQUILANTE

THE HOUSE OF Love, the UK's latest export, made its U.S. debut last week — and it's built to last.

This almost unknown guitar-band quartet has one of the hottest collections of original material among rock's rookies. At the Marquee Club, on West 21st Street (a stone's toss from the Hudson River) HOL played a long set to the shoulder-to-shoulder crowd. Despite the muddy mix that muffled the ringing of the guitars (which are quite bright on the band's self-titled record), the performance had the specialness of a coming-out party.

The configuration of the band (drums, bass and a couple of guitars) almost dictates the retro sound that is part Velvet Underground, part Ramones, with some Beatles to smooth the edges. The music is pretty, lyric and flowing — almost totally devoid of anger — yet it has no slug-song quality.

The general musicianship of HOL is better in the studio than in person. This is most apparent in lead singer Guy Chadwick's vocals, although he had his moments at the mike, especially on "Hedonist" and "Beatles and the Stones."

The lighting was pathetic. At no point was the entire band visible, and for all I know the Elephant Man was the drummer. But House's biggest problem is how they build their set. Almost expecting some of the crowd to leave the club before the music stopped, the band riffed through its best material early, saving little for the end-show and two encores. So despite an excellent debut, the show reached a premature climax.

Don't let this hold you off, though. These guys are a winning act; don't miss them when they play the city again.