

The House of Love
The House of Love
(Polygram)

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I find raving in record reviews to be somewhat distasteful. There's only so many ways to say that a band is the greatest thing since the Beatles. But what do you do when a band like the House of Love comes along with an eponymous album that makes you want to quit your job, put the damn thing on a tape loop and listen to it to the exclusion of everything else?

The House of Love's second album (the first to be released stateside) is a phenomenon. With its savagely lyrical pop tuneage, lush is too tame a word for the verdant tangle of sound that the House of Love grows in their



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musical garden. It's vast and majestic, combining the drive and intensity of, say, the Waterboys with the '90s English pop polish of the Stone Roses.

But trying to find antecedents in the music is a useless task. Sure, there's enough of the Velvet Underground in "Blind" to make a valid comparison and if I search hard enough I can find Echo and the Bunnymen and the Only Ones lurking behind just about every song. It's not so much where singer/guitarist Guy Chadwick got his musical education, but what he does with it. He and his fellow bandmates meld their influences into a hot, sticky-sweet mess of musical mayhem that teeters along the edge of dissonance, ultimately forming songs so addictive they've got a street value.

The House of Love ranges over a wide variety of emotions, going from the understated, slightly drippy "Beatles and the Stones" to the harsh, arrogant tone of "Hedonist" in the space of a single track. This is a packed album, the kind of record you have to sit down and untangle a couple of times before falling for it.

It may be distasteful to rave about a band. But if rave I must, then I choose to rave about the House of Love, a band who has surely made one of the best records of the year.

-David Micko

Depeche Mode
Violator
(Sire/Reprise)

I think now we realize that we're at the stage where if we want to remain interesting, and push forward, we've got to do something different. We've sort of perfected our formula over the last three or four albums."

- Martin Gore

esting. But whether Depeche Mode will push forward with this album remains doubtful.

As a transition album, *Violator* comes with all the according delights and disappointments: it features some of the band's best songs — "World In My Eyes," "Enjoy the Silence," and "Policy of Truth" — while containing some of their worst. But while the band has made transition albums before (*A Broken Frame*, *Some Great Reward*), and successfully uncovered new styles, *Violator* is a conscious attempt at change, overly forced and cosmetic.

Lead singer Martin Gore wasn't wrong to move on from the band's synth-heavy, bittersweet pop "formula," though it was great while it lasted. His solution of dumping guitars all over the record doesn't change much though, even if it would seem so for such a prominent synth band. The guitars are so heavily processed they might as well be synths. At other times the feedback and wah-wah get so conspicuous, it takes on a "Look, Ma, no hands!" dimension that insults the listener's intelligence.

But it takes a lot of guts for a serious musician to write a happy song. Suffering and angst are romanticized in bohemian circles, and Depeche Mode takes the easy way out with this pose, merely trading gritty synth angst for gritty guitar/synth angst and hiding in the safety and shelter of their leather jackets and attitude. *Violator* has an uneasy undertone, suggesting Gore's worry now is that his well is running dry.

If he really wants to change, he should listen to his early albums. Why not return to the cheeriness of "Just Can't Get Enough" or the optimism of "Everything Counts"? Or step out, lyrically, with the sense of humor evident in their recent tour movie?

Still, after all is said and done, Depeche Mode continues to deliver. This album may be the same old stuff in a new wrapper

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