

A spy in the House of Love

by Susan Tanner

The House of Love's up and down life history has been well-documented by the British musical press, yet they are relatively new to most Americans. To most Brits, the band came from out of nowhere with a spellbinding debut single on Creation Records entitled "Shine On," released in the UK in late 1986. Four years later, the band have come out of nowhere with their first American single, the infectious "I Don't Know Why I Love You."

Drummer Peter Evans and singer Guy Chadwick had been in a group together in 1981 called Reverb and Barbed. "We kept in touch," says Evans. "Then Guy sort of just came across guitarist Terry Bickers, who's no longer with us, and Terry knew Chris [bassist Groothuizen] and Andrea [contributing vocals and guitars]. Guy just sort of pulled me in later on. And here we are."

That was in South London in 1986. They signed to Creation and released their eponymous debut album in 1988. As quickly as the album was hailed by the music press, the House of Love's second single, "Real Animal," was panned. "It just wasn't a single. Radio 1 didn't do very much with it at all," lamented Evans. The third single, "Christine," caused the critics to do an about-face, calling it "the finest three minutes of white guitar pop since the Smiths' 'This Charming Man.'"

In 1989, their spirits high from such enthusiastic support, they returned to the studio to record the follow-up album. Numerous difficulties arose within the band, and those recordings were scrapped. They began again, only to find themselves surrounded by rumors of drug dependencies, personality conflicts, and the real-life crisis that Guy faced when his daughter became seriously ill. The second set of recordings were finished near Christmastime, and with it came the end of Terry Bicker's involvement with the band. The House of Love seemed to be undergoing never-ending remodeling.

Commented Evans, "Chris, Guy and

myself have always been certain as to what we've wanted to do. We're rather strong. The others couldn't cope with it one way or another."

Determined to continue, they regrouped with new guitarist Simon Walker and set out to prove (once again) that the House of Love was a band worthy of critics' praise. And they got it.

Their Fontana/Polygram debut, *The House of Love*, is composed of twelve mysteries, the lyrical and musical tapestries that fans have come to identify as the House of Love. Old fans may have been surprised to find that the band have



chosen to include a re-recording of their first single, "Shine On," which, Evans remarks "captures a lot of how we sound live." ("Destroy the Heart," their fourth UK single, which has yet to be released stateside.) After all that's gone down the last year and a half, the album shows that the band came out on top.

"We've stuck to our guns, really," he continued. "Last year was a difficult time, getting our heads 'round all the press we had, and also working with producers. Ultimately, that's why this album, a lot of it, was co-produced by a Irish bloke called Dave Meegan who just went along with us a lot. And it worked."

"We like to work really quick. [Producers] work very slowly. They'll spend forever on a drum sound and things like that, which is fair enough. But it either sounds good or it doesn't. Whereas with Dave Meegan, we got it all down in three or four days, each track. We like to just keep going, not spend a lot of time on bits and

pieces. It helps keep an edge." Any of the difficulties due to the pressures of signing with a major label?

Evans dismisses that idea. "I don't really think so, since we still have ties with Creation. Our manager is still [Creation founder] Alan McGee. And the man we see eye to eye with at Phonogram [Polygram's UK counterpart], Dave Bates, he's a music fan, very enthusiastic, and one of the reasons we signed to that label."

While House of Love's guitars can be dreamy and ethereal, as in the opening strains of "Hannah" or "Se Dest," that haunting beauty often turns raw, jarring and abusive. Guy Chadwick's vocals are often interwoven into the accompaniment, making them unintelligible. They become part of the total sound, not merely words over a backing track.

"Guy's not that bothered with whether people can hear the lyrics all of the time," commented Evans. "He likes the sound of the voice mingling with the band. Besides, one lyric might mean fifty different things to fifty different people."

Several days later, at a pre-show meet-and-greet in Boston, we asked Simon Walker, the new "house" on the block, whether there had been any backlash against him for taking Terry's place. "Oh no," he quickly responded. "A few people have even told me that I'm better than Terry."

On stage, the heartbeat drums and psychedelic weavings of "Hannah" ("It's about drugs," says Evans.) wait over the crowd. Although the four men look harmless enough, they produce some of the most haunted and anguished music heard in a long time. It's not just pop music. There's meat to their material that by far surpasses the average 3:30 piece of fluff.

But if any song is representative of the House of Love, it's "Shine On." That hooky chorus, angry guitar, and underlying urgency that make it worthy of an extra listen. To many, this has become the song by which their future material is judged. And it's certainly a House worth coming home to. ♦