



An indie success story: Guy Chadwick (second left) and the cult South London group, The House Of Love

A House built to blast

Rock/Pop

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The House Of Love: The House Of Love (Fontanna 842293)

THESE days it seems remarkably easy to be an A&R man — provided, of course, that you work for a major British label with ample cash. No longer do you need to hang around in dodgy clubs hoping desperately to spot the next big thing.

Oh no. Just check the indie charts, listen to what Peel is playing, and then sign up the best bands when the tiny companies that discovered them can't afford to compete.

This is a grossly unfair oversimplification, maybe, but it just so happens that the best releases this week are from bands that built up sizeable cult reputations while recording for the indies, and are now making their well-publicised debut albums for big companies.

The band with the biggest cult reputation, which have only now broken through into the non-indie best-sellers, are the South London four-piece The House Of Love.

Like their debut set for the Creation label a couple of years back, it matches gently gutsy, well-textured guitar work against the cool, well-mannered vocals of Guy Chadwick. Despite their title, they are not a

dance band or neo-psychedelic outfit, but pop traditionalists with one eye on the mainstream, and the other taking note of the fashionable melodic swirl of R.E.M. (a combination they manage to neatly bring together on the current hit, Shine On).

The band started out as followers of the classic guitar bands, from the Stones through to Television, and much of their material is based on well-tested techniques. So on up-beat songs like Shake And Crawl or Blind they match chugging riffs or fluid, confident guitar work against the easy-going vocals, and I Don't Know Why I Love You (an earlier single that surely deserved to be a hit) mixes some controlled wailing guitar work into an efficient, straightforward, tuneful pop song.

Elsewhere, on Hannah, they drift off into a mesmeric, laid-back tinkling riff, and on the less happy Beatles And The Stones they acknowledge their early influences with a drifting burst of nostalgia that starts with a predictable montage (a bit of Lennon, a All You Need Is Love) followed by a tribute to the bands who "made it good to be alive" that makes it sound as if everyone in the Sixties was happy but half asleep.

It's almost an exercise in classy background music, but it's saved by the shuffle of drums and the fine light guitar lines.

On this showing, The House Of Love are going to be a successful, classy pop band. They are special because of the vitality of their playing, and the tension between singer and guitarist. It's the combination that made the Morrissey-Marr relationship so successful in

The Smiths, and it remains to be seen how the band develops now that guitarist Terry Bickers has left.

Their tour next month includes a show at the Albert Hall on March 9 that will be their biggest test yet.