
Out from under the Stones

○ THE HOUSE OF LOVE

Fontana (Fontana 842293-2)

Like The Sundays, The House of Love were hotly tipped at the end of 1988 to cross over from the indie ghetto to mainstream chart success, but were wrong-footed by the Manchester acid-rock resurgence. 1989 was going to be "their year", but it turned out to be a fallow one, fraught with frustrations and sidetracks — guitarist Terry Bickers, for instance, is no longer in the House. That they haven't ended up sounding as dated as The Sundays is largely due to singer/songwriter Guy Chadwick's adherence to the perennial virtues of pop rather than the superficialities of style.

Fontana leans heavily on the enduring appeal of the guitar, but in a variety of applications. "Hedonist" is all swagger, stomping along like "Jumpin' Jack Flash"; "Blind" is as bleak and tender as Leonard Cohen; and "32nd Floor" operates strictly in Velvet Underground territory, the root influence of most indie guitar bands. There's a pronounced Sixties effect in operation throughout, particularly in the bleary psychedelic reverberations of "Hanah" and the cute paean "The Beatles And The Stones", which begins with spoken frag-

ments of Lennon and Jagger and jogs gently to a conclusion of *Astral Weeks* strings. It could be The Stone Roses; there's a similar feeling that *Fontana* could have been made at any time in the past two decades.

Whilst few in recent years have managed to fuse the clangour of rock guitars with the melodic potency of pop as well as Chadwick does here, his mannered, slightly pompous approach can be off-putting. His songs are so measured and coldly self-conscious they seem at times to be processing emotion by numbers: he's always singing about emotions, but in an unemotional manner that precludes both surprise and any sense of personal involvement. Perhaps this is the secret of the band's appeal; in uncertain times, they offer the security of enjoyment without commitment.

(Andy Gill)