

HOUSE OF LOVE

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Spy In The House Of Love
(Fontana)

IF NOTHING ELSE, THE HOUSE OF LOVE HAVE admirably fuelled bar talk and fanned gossip column flames over the past 18 months. Since leaving the Creation station, the Housies have toed a line of Dynasty-style twists and traumas, building towering tales of Third World debt-style recording costs, volatile internal Bickering and the kind of alcoholic over-indulgence which would make Andrew 'Vomit Fountain' Ridgeley green with envy.

If, as the stories go, the 'Fontana' album set the record company back by £400,000, then 'Spy In The . . .' represents a kind of carboot sale, a lowkey tactic to recuperate a fraction of the losses thus far incurred. This is the Housies' 'Hatful Of Hollow', their 'Barbed Wire Kisses', a mid-price compilation of b-sides, left behinds and improvisations. Fortunately, rather than reeking of last year's leftovers, it still contains a plethora of smart righthanders.

'Safe' - at one point destined to be the foursome's first Fontana 45 until paranoia presumably took a hold - is a fine entrance, Bickers' scorched guitar bolstering chadwick's Monasterial moans. Equally endearing are the four 'new' numbers on display, like the breezy-but-uptight 'Marble', the excellent 'Ray', which rings purposefully and forcefully, and the tortured elegance of 'Babyteen', which attains almost celestial status.



Other stabs miss the mark, for sure: on 'Cut The Fool Down', with its excessively meandering fretwork, they sound sorely disinterested in the whole affair; much of the nigh-on conceptual 'Love' tracks (parts II to IV, by gum!) resemble half-completed blooze pastiches; and when his religious and emotional lyrical preoccupations falter, some of Chadwick's utterances are almost excruciating, although sheer craftsmanship pulls 'D Song '89' and the sublime 'Phone' through with glowing colours.

Ultimately, 'Spy' works because, hell, House Of Love's fatty off-cuts are better than many of their contemporaries' prime meaty parts. Mid-price it may be, but it's hardly mid-table ☺

Simon Williams