

Brief encounter

“THIS IS the biggest one we’ve ever done,” said The House of Love bandleader Guy Chadwick. As he and his colleagues were on and off the Town and Country stage before the hour was up, it cannot have been the biggest set they’ve ever done. When they began to wind down the proceedings after half an hour, it occurred to me that it was the biggest wind-up they have ever done.

Actually it was their biggest-ever venue, replete with the kind of rock-show paraphernalia that they have not worked with too often before. As they walked on in the dark, one of the band dragged on a cigarette, whose gleaming red ember gave a glimpse of the level of lighting sophistication they are perhaps more used to. Maybe the flickering strobe made them nervous: Chadwick, for one, whose eyes look haunted anyway, quickly dropped into the habit of dropping his plectrum. Give or take the occasional poultry-like strut around the stage, picking it up again was about as much movement as he could manage.

Still, it was good while it lasted. The House of Love do quite a lot with a slim collection of chords, which, between the

four of them, they blare and blur into the sonic smog we call psychedelic rock. Echoes of The Bunnymen? Fall-out from The Teardrop Explodes? Whatever the answer *Christine*, which got the biggest cheer of the night, is about as good a song as you get in the post-adolescent moan category.

The House of Love do offer variety, however. Sometimes you hear guitar heroism howling and growling in the closet (Terry Bickers had fun with *Shine On*, their other big anthem), and sometimes that authentic just-handed-the-instrument-for-the-first-time sound (*Love in a Car*, very rudimentary).

About halfway through the show, the band started going off regularly between songs. At first it looked like they had synchronised their bladders to frequent use mode, but it turned out that they were practising for their departure. For the last song Chadwick plucked his way through a solo version of *Secrets*, and said: “Thank you for staying with me.” A shame he didn’t give us a chance to return the compliment.

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