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Guy Chadwick: "You spend 23 hours a day living a shit existence and then you have this wonderful hour on stage..."

SING IF YOU'RE GLAD TO BE GUY

THE HOUSE OF LOVE
DUBLIN MCGONAGLES/
BELFAST UNIVERSITY

WHEN THE Belfast crowd welcome back The House Of Love for their first encore the applause is enough to short-circuit a decibel meter. When the band let the opening of 'Man To Child' trickle silkily from their guitars the noise doubles and when it subsides all you can hear is the fragility of the song and a chorus of lonely souls echoing Guy Chadwick's vocals word for word.

People on piggyback sway like trees in a breeze. I can't tell if they're totally entranced because I can't reach to click my fingers in front of their eyes, but they look lost in a private world with Chadwick's lyricism. It wouldn't be that extraordinary but it's the second night running that an audience has picked the brittle song as an unlikely anthem.

For a track that's never been a single it's very curious. Chadwick, creator of this commotion, turns to one side for a second and affords himself an embarrassed smile.

"WHEN WE finished touring in September we demoed all the songs we thought we were going to put on the next album, spent two weeks on them, but they all sounded crap. It was really depressing."

Upstairs in the student bar before the Belfast show the good Guy folds and unfolds his legs like they are part of an origami lesson.

"We lost all our confidence at the beginning of the year, it was weird, but it's all coming together now. It's partly why we're doing these dates."

"Although I'm very wary about the lack of reality in touring because you completely lose touch with what's happening. You can't help but get self-egotistical and I find that very worrying."

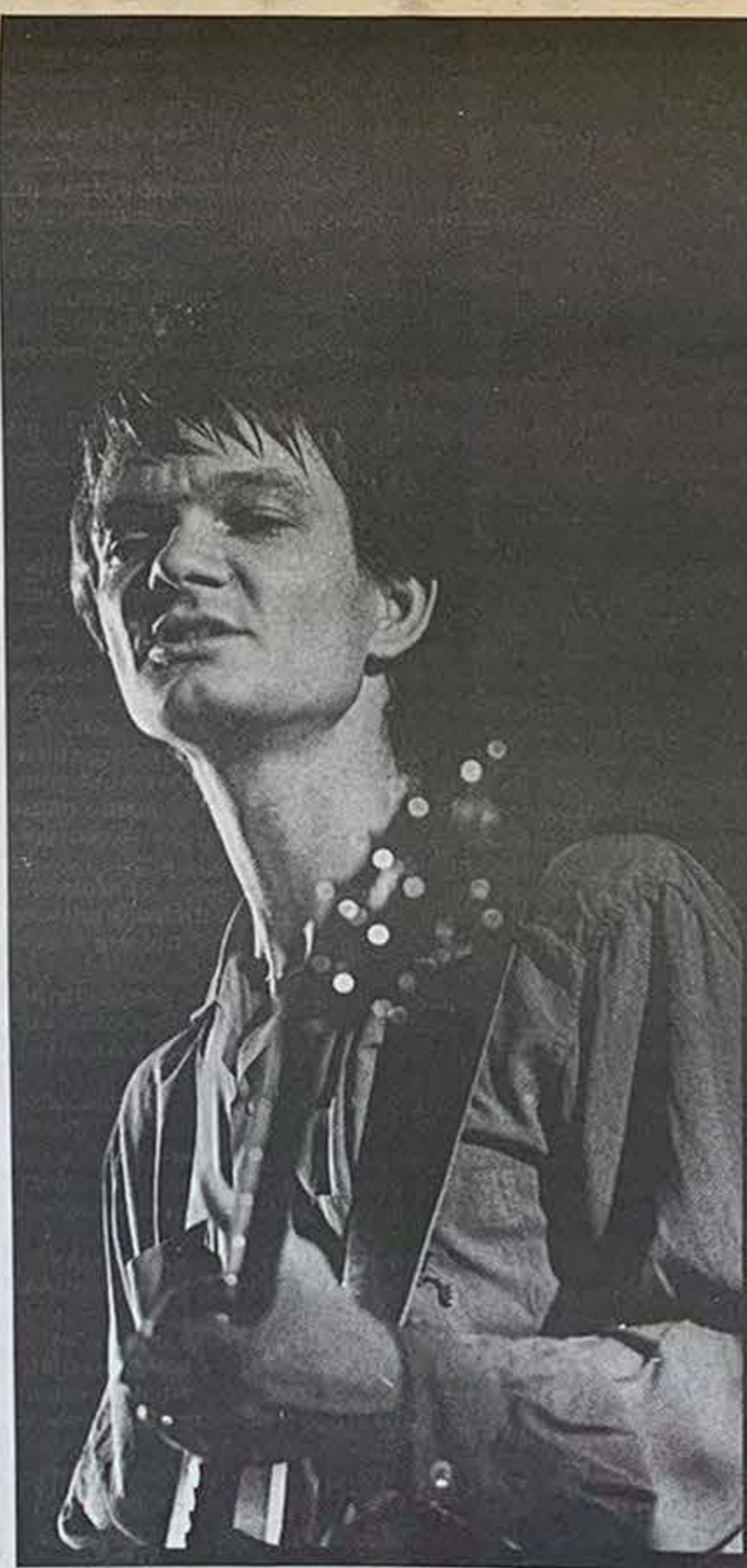
"Touring takes so much out of me because the simple fact is you spend 23 hours a day living a shit existence and then have this wonderful hour on stage."

Only the first night of their first tour of '89 wasn't a wonderful hour at all — and there's two gawping reasons for that. For starters, it wasn't loud enough, which sounds shockingly glib until you understand that the essence of The House Of Love *live* comes with volume. And there wasn't any. McGonagles' caved walls and low ceiling smother the sound like a woolly muffler round the PA, stifling its wild and edgy atmosphere.

And secondly, creaking with the first signs of rust after some time in the recording studio, the band let all too many songs end indecisively, as if they couldn't remember what to say at the end of a sentence.

There was some disillusionment in the pokey dressing room afterwards, but as ever the diehard fans have made the most of the band's appearance, cavorting *en masse* for nearly an hour — HOL virgins hanging onto every word and scything melody — knowing that the band will probably never play this sized venue in their town again.

It's certain that The House Of Love are climbing away from the bottom of the ladder at an ever-quickening pace. A year ago they were still sitting round London watching their first two singles selling lethargically, pinning their hopes on their third Creation single 'Christine' as it worked its way through the release schedule.



When it made the shops the results were promising — and that's when everyone realised they were fed up with looking for anemic pop bands in toilets and wanted a rock band with a sense of panache, with a precious sense of exhilaration.

Now signed to Fontana/Phonogram the band are about to open the next chapter of the book of love. Their new record 'Never', a deceptively endearing and challenging track, will be out in a matter of weeks, with an unhurried and potentially excellent LP to follow at the end of the summer.

New songs like 'Safe' and 'Soft As Fire' show the music, and in particular Terry Bickers' guitar, discovering new territory, while retaining the HOL hallmark. Meanwhile Guy, writing in fits and bursts is not low on ideas or imagery. His acidic lyricism is beginning to take effect.

WE TAKE the mini-bus cross country to Belfast with a stereo switching from New Order's 'Technique' to the "brilliant but depressing" Talk Talk, arriving in Belfast with not even a hint of a reception committee, except the security guard at the hotel.

The Belfast gig has sold out a week in advance and when the doors open in the evening all the T-shirts are sold within 40 minutes. There is one thing missing though, alcohol. Whereas McGonagles attempted to make up for not having a beer licence by selling wine and something akin to Pomagne, Belfast Uni has gone alcohol free. Though judging by the vomit-stained toilets people overcame this by getting smashed before they arrive.

But whatever. This is the gig of the weekend. The House Of Love are in searing style. Terry's intuitive guitar flashes with golden sparks, like a trickster with a welding gun. Pete Evans' drums are evened out and nicely bolshy while Chris Groothuizen's bass emits a glowing heat ray and Guy's vocals rise to the top, sometimes boiling, sometimes shivering and cool.

Guy has turned out on this trip to be vastly different to the intense figure often portrayed in interviews. Some of the driest wit of the weekend comes from his mouth, though he's still lost for words between songs.

Instead the music does all the graft. It's a BIG and robust set — a hungry rock set that stalks and runs and stops and starts. One moment it will be creeping up on you from behind, the next it stares you in the face, leering.

Opening tonight with 'Never' ("I've never sinned but maybe I should try") and 'Don't Know Why', they move swiftly into 'Safe' with its darting undercurrents of guitar and the tetchy 'Shake And Crawl'. Of the newies only 'Se-dest' sounds anywhere near crap, though even that's salvaged from its mellow dribbling by a savage instrumental end.

'Shine On' for the second night running, surprisingly makes little impression, but 'Destroy The Heart' stamps all over the previous night's weedy version.

They encore with 'Man To Child' and then 'Christine' before being called back for a sultry 'Love In A Car'. Off-stage everyone's happier, relief mixing with cigarette smoke. No one says "Thank God we've got a good gig under our belts" but that's what you get if you fill in the gaps.

In soccer terms "they've done the business" and they leave you thinking, how the hell would we get by without them right now?

Steve Lamacq