

# THE HOUSE OF LOVE

AT first, it was almost too easy to marvel at The House Of Love. The impossibly incandescent "Christine" was a riff of sufficient ecstatic glory to rank alongside Pil's "Rise", U2's "Pride" (credit where it's due) and The Smiths' "How Soon Is Now?". Guy Chadwick, its perpetually bedraggled creator, looked the part of the messy beat rock messiah down to the last misplaced strand of neglected hair. Perfection.

Then, as familiarity bred contempt at a rabbit-like pace, The House Of Love became almost too tempting a target for ridicule. Parading his fourth-form bohemian's reading list (Nin, Salinger, Nabokov) and record collection (Velvet Underground, early Stones, Only Ones) like badges of artistic merit, Chadwick did little but apologise at embarrassingly frequent intervals for the lack of delivery on promise and seemed to disappear under a hail of well-aimed adjectives. After that, there were some flurries of revival, but by then it was almost beyond the human will to summon up sufficient strength to give a toss.

Here's the clever bit: that's both career summary and synopsis of tonight's proceedings. And you'll note that in both, the key word is "almost". The House Of Love remain the nearly men of the recently rekindled six-strings-that-drew-bliss ideal, and while you stand there and watch and think of the debt their 1988 debut LP is owed by the likes of Ride, Chapterhouse, Slowdive and Swervething, it's hard to decide whether to cultivate fury at

the injustice of Hol's present ignominy or impatience at their continual failure to get it together. Or anything at all. In today's relatively healthy pop climes, the quick are going to have it over the dead every time.

What does need to be said at this point is that the first four or five songs of tonight's set are thoroughly astonishing. After an awkward start, which sees the band make a triumphant entrance only to stand uselessly around for five agonising minutes while the Radio 1 people behave technically and the crowd swap smiles with Guy and chant "You fat bastard" at the gratingly jocular DJ/host, they launch straight into "Christine" and "Marble". "Christine" remains a supreme paean to flaming obsession and "Marble" doesn't disappear in the shadow. Even the stunted "Never", a couple of songs on, is delivered with the frenetic urgency of a man who's been given 60 minutes on national radio to state his case for appreciation and is therefore fairly powerful stuff. "32nd Floor", likewise.

After that, and I do hope you're referring back to the first paragraph so as to better appreciate the symmetry of the whole thing, it all starts to go not so much wrong as nowhere. The distinctly Go-Betweens-ish "Hope" is fine enough, but the new songs and whatever the hell else is in there are a morass into which the show becomes all too readily bogged. To compound problems, Chadwick takes it upon himself to strut about in the

approved preening rocker mode, and resembles nothing so much as Mick Jagger with his knees tied together. This is a shame, because apart from such aberrations, his tousled-schoolboy-with-attitude presence is really rather appealing.

So it's a set with a beginning to rival that of "A Stranger Calls", a middle like Liz Taylor's, and an ending that answers no questions and draws no conclusions. How fantastically non-sequitural. The Hits - "Shine On", "I Don't Know Why I Love You" and "Destroy The Heart" - all affect like they always do when bands play the favourites and everyone grins stupidly and bounces (I'm a complete sucker for this kind of cheap reaction, so long as it involves a crowd numbering less than four figures and no cigarette lighters. Otherwise I get scared), and we are mercifully spared the cringeworthy mawkishness of "The Beatles & The Stones". By now, though, it's a matter of waking up again rather than staying up longer. If you get me.

The House Of Love leave having, as ever, only partially satisfied. They're a potentially breathtaking band, but nothing becomes so wearisome so quickly as someone who does nothing but Keep Trying Until They Get It Right. It's high time The House Of Love put up or shut up. I'll be keeping any spare fingers crossed, however.

ANDREW MUELLER

*Radio 1*

## THE HOUSE OF LOVE LONDON MARQUEE

IT'S AN early season start for the Radio 1 Roadshow this year. Instead of sand in our shoes, we've spilt beer down our backs. By my side, six non-specific primates bellow Vic Reeves' cast-off catchphrases. All around, bewildered gig-goers clutch Radio 1 car stickers and try to avoid the Joe Bloggs promotional posse. And on stage, The House Of Love loiter nervously while Mark Goodier struggles with his headphones. It is not an auspicious start.

But when the orchestrated cheering's over, when the DJ's retreated to his secluded box, tonight's guests reveal a more determined, ruthlessly efficient nature. The House Of Love have plenty to prove; unseen and unheard in Britain for several months, this may turn out to be their only home date of 1991. And, with Radio 1's fickle millions tuned in live, it's also the most important small venue gig they'll ever play.

The transition to Rock Band is complete now. Where once The House Of Love shimmered bewitchingly, liable to implode at any moment, they stride confidently, even conventionally, to perfectly deranged climaxes. 'Nothing To Me' and 'Shine On' - more stirring than ever - benefit from the extra muscle, as does '32nd Floor', complete with a brief acoustic interlude that stresses its closeness to the Bunnymen's 'Higher Hell'. But 'Christine' is all out bludgeoned away, and the attempt to make an epic of 'Hannah' only results in ill-judged meandering.

That apart, it's a purposeful show. Rushing around between songs, rarely speaking, Guy Chadwick seems intent on packing full the hour of airtime. Somewhere in the middle, five new songs are unveiled: notably 'The Girl With The Loneliest Eyes', a serene, sophisticated glide during which Simon Walker finally lays the ghost of Bickers to rest; and 'Cruel', which balances a 50s-ish, Eastern-tinged swirl with a grittier, barked chorus.

So what did you miss at home? Guy's familiar, awkward ostrich strut. Bassist Chris Groothuizen's dramatically flailing feedback surfing. One solitary stage-diver brusquely dealt with. And two crowning encores, 'Destroy The Heart' and 'Love In A Car', unnervingly focused.

This time next year, the outside broadcast'll be from Wembley.

John Mulvey



Radio 1 FM rock: Guy Chadwick in full stadium mode



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