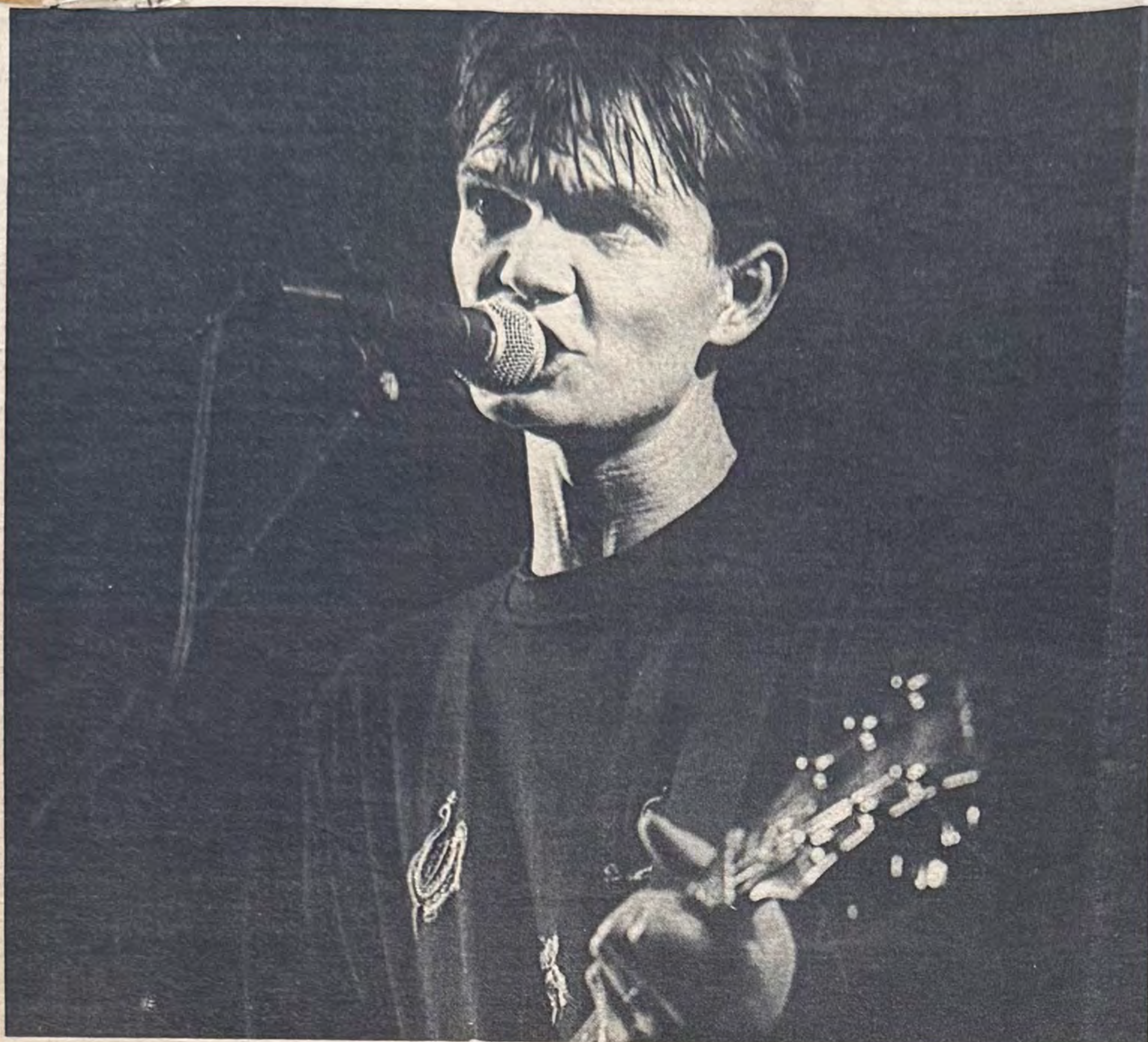




LOVE HURTS

THE HOUSE OF LOVE HULL UNIVERSITY

ALL this waiting around for The House Of Love to realise their potential is getting boring. Every time they look poised to do the business, they go and release a duff single or put back their album by another 10 weeks. Guy Chadwick's reluctance to get his tunes in the shops doesn't exactly inspire confidence. People are being heard to ask: how good can these songs be if even their composer doesn't want us to hear them?

This reticence says a lot about The House Of Love, spilling over into their look, sound, performance, everything. To repossess and paraphrase that line about Tanita Tikaram: they're not exactly sexy, now, are they? They must be one of the most reserved, dispassionate collectives in modern pop. *Frigid* is the word. Not that they achieve the detached, imperious splendour of, say, Cocteau Twins, far from it. Rather, The House Of Love are tepid, lukewarm, off-the-boil.

After one of the least ecstatic receptions ever given to a leading rock band (there's actually a ruck to grab a place on the tee-shirt table at the back), The House Of Love play the first song, a new one called "Hanah". And that's the point. They don't unleash it, burn it up or tear through it. They *play* it. To call this a tentative start, however, would be a lie. They go on at this speed all night, a pace that can only be described as a plodding canter.

There must be more thrilling ways to bombard a crowd than tonight's sleepy walk through "Shine On", complete with meandering instrumental passages and the odd feedback-for-feedback's-sake scrawl. A year ago, this song typified HOL at their best, an electrifying meeting of noise and melody, and the

obvious vehicle for infiltrating the rampant guitar hedonism of bands like Spacemen 3 and My Bloody Valentine into the charts. Back then, HOL were far-out, but commercial.

Now, though, The House Of Love are about as far-out as an old Echo And The Bunnymen record. They're certainly not commercial, a fact borne out by the steadfast refusal of recent single, "I Don't Know Why I Love You", to go anywhere near the Top 20. Hearing the song tonight brings back all the reasons why. This is so leaden and morose it sounds like a parody of every lugubrious student rock band ever accused of being deliberately miserable.

"I Don't Know Why", along with "Destroy The Heart", "Christine" and too many others, also highlight the sad fact that, like The Smiths in the early days, or The Jesus And Mary Chain today, or The Wedding Present all the time, HOL only have one song. Occasionally, Chadwick manages to go some way towards disguising this, as with the scrambling harmonious thrash of "Nothing To Me", but mostly what we get are variations on one melodic theme.

Hence the milling about in the audience, the steady flow towards the bar area, the unstifled yawns and bored conversations. Precisely three people are caught dancing. When the lights go down during "Love In A Car" the awful truth dawns that you can't enhance an atmosphere that doesn't already exist. The House Of Love are constantly being heralded as the next mega-successful stadium-type rock band, the new U2, all set for world domination. The reality is that, any more of this and they'll soon be playing to themselves.

PAUL LESTER