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Focus On . . .

THE HOUSE OF LOVE

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It was back in 1987 that The House Of Love broke from Camberwell, south-east London with their "Shine On" single for Alan McGhee's independent Creation label. With its huge guitar sound and strar gely offbeat lyrics — *"In a garden in the house of love/There's nothing real just a coat of arms"* — the singl was one of *the* debuts of the eighties. Two more singles followed on Creation ("Christine" and "Destroy The Heart") along with a fine self-titled debut album.Looking as if they could do no wrong, The House Of Love signed a major deal with Fontana/Phonogram. Perhaps they were too lucky early on in their career, but the period leading up to the release of their second (again self-titled) album in 1990 saw th relationship between singer/songwriter Guy Chadwick and guitarist Terry Bickers completely fall apar Amid rumours of raging arguments and spiralling recording costs, Bickers acrimoniously quit to form Levitation.Recruited from The Dave Howard Singers, Bickers' replacement was Simon Walker. Despit their problems, the band's public profile continued to grow in strength both within Britain and abroad A re-release of "Shine On" gave the group a coveted British hit, while foreign labels such as Phonogran USA saw the HOL as a band capable of making the transition from alternative to mainstream success This year opens a new chapter in the group's history, but not without some echoes from the past. Simo Walker has quit the band to be replaced by former Woodentops' guitarist Simon Mawby. Maybe som things never change... *The Hard Report* spoke to The House Of Love's Guy Chadwick about the band's new album and got his reflections on recent personnel changes.

To begin at the obvious point, perhaps you could tell me a little about the recording of the album.

Guy Chadwick: Yeah, it was recorded over 16 weeks — four sessions of four weeks each. We started in October and finished in February. The last studio album took over a year to record and we were in and out of the studio the whole time, scrapped lots of stuff and it was a bit of an ordeal. This time, we prepared all the songs and I spent a year writing and preparing stuff. So, we were pretty well prepared and the recording was relatively smooth. We worked with Warne Liversey and recorded at Eel Pie Studios in Twickenham. That's owned by Pete Townshend.

How does this album differ from the last official House Of Love album, excluding the A Spy In The House Of Love album of out-takes?

GC: Well, I feel it's the best album we've done by a long way. It's the most consistent. There's ten songs and I think it's the reason. But, I'm always wary about that as I do write in a very personal way.

Was there anything specifically influencing the feel of these songs?

GC: A lot of anger and a lot of questioning. It's been a really difficult period for us, the last two years. That has come out on the record. As a band, we had to state a lot — we had to justify a lot of our own expectations and other people's to an extent. It's 100 per cent full-blooded emotion, the whole thing. It's very passionate.

Are there any personal favourites on the album?

GC: "Cruel" is probably my favourite track because of the power. I think it's the best thing the group has ever done. I love it. I think it's a very original track and very powerful. But, I like it all. There's no filler whatsoever. The ten tracks that are on the album were chosen from about 35 tracks. There was a lot of writing done and as an album it works very well.

what's coming out of America, but England I'm not sure at all. I can't ge handle on it personally. I spent a ye going to a lot of gigs just to get some s of perspective and check things out for r own reasons. God, I just went to so ma crap gigs and got fed up with it. But, I s of switched off about four months a when we got into the mixing of the albu although I've always been an avid mu fan.

How did the recent gigs go? At the To And Country Club in London, for instan who did you find was turning up? Wa back to a hardcore of fans?

GC: It was pretty much a serious Ho Of Love audience. The thing was that gig sold out about two or three we before the actual night, so the people t were there were the people that re wanted to go. We didn't get a cross-s tion of people who might have walked to it. Because our profile has been so l it was to be expected. It's at that kinc stage for us, you know?

definitive version of what we could have done. The reaction of everyone has been that it sounds like a very, very good House Of Love album. I don't really know what that means, but the album's very beautiful, very powerful. It doesn't sound particularly like a contemporary English rock band. It's got a lot of clarity to it, it's very pure in the sound. There aren't many effects used. There's a hell of a lot of guitars and percussion and overdubs. But, in terms of performance and dynamics, it far exceeds anything we've done previously – I'm seriously happy about it.

In the past, the best House Of Love songs have had a sense of yearning about them. Does that continue over into this album?

GC: Yeah, it does actually. It's something that I'm aware of to an extent – a lot of songs I write are written on acoustic guitar and late at night (laughs). So, they're quite self-orientated and then they end up as rock tracks. This time 'round, the general lyrical and emotional tone is pretty strong. I think the fans will really like it for that

Having not released a new album for two years, how do you think The House Of Love fit in with things? The whole music scene has changed radically.

GC: I don't know. Obviously, we have got ground to catch up. We've been doing a few gigs and we haven't been forgotten. But, we do need to get this album out and re-state our case. It's a difficult one that, because I feel a lot of people are buying a lot of fucking crap records at the moment – in England anyway – and it's a bit confusing.

What do you think of new music over the last couple of years? Do you think it's been positive?

GC: I think it's been positive from America. America has been producing some blinding music for the last ten years. It's become emphatically the most important music producer right across the board, whether it's k.d. lang, Public Enemy, Nirvana or Hiphoprisy. I love

To go back a little and talk about America again, how important is it for you to do well in America?

GC: Really important. I mean, no more important than anywhere else, but it's such a buzz playing over there, Boundaries seem to be wider, longer and they're not quite so fussy. It's a bit more honest over there. It's a great place to play, great audiences. Americans are serious music fans and they don't stop being music fans just because they reach a certain age. They get into music and they're always into music. It just seems more like that than it is in England. It's always refreshing. I think most English bands would tell you that. Obviously, It's a lot of people that live there and you can sell shit-loads o records. But, it's not really that. It's really nice to do well out there, it's just nice. The only problem is that when you go out there nowhere else exists. It's so far removed from any other culture that, when you're i



America, that's the only country in the world.

What happened with regard to Simon Walker leaving the band?

GC: It's always been a bit of an off an on situation. Because we were keeping out of the limelight and we weren't releasing records, I thought it was something we could sort out in terms of integrating him into the group and getting his ideas involved. But, when we came to record the album, he and I were arguing all the time and it just got to the point where he was hardly doing any guitar playing. He was getting frustrated and I was getting frustrated and he sort of left the group during the course of the album. I tried to readdress the situation after we'd finished recording the album. I had this really bad argument with him and he left.

Are there any parallels with Terry Bickers leaving?

GC: Yeah, there are. There's absolutely no hard feelings even though Simon did walk out on us nine days before we were due to do a gig. But, it was a really bad argument we had, so I did accept that. It's just me, really. It's something that I've had to come to terms with. It's one thing liking guitarists with attitude in a band, It's another being able to work around your own ideas and getting them to incorporate their ideas. It probably seems as though it's a clash of egos, but with me I've never had an ego problem – I just believe I'm right (laughs). It was very similar, except that it wasn't acrimonious in the way that it was with Terry. The thing with Terry had been going on for a year. With Simon, it was always talked about and we always tried to sort it out. It was frustrating for me because I think he's a great guitarist. I just used to say to him, "Look, it's time you got your own fucking group together", because I felt very strongly about the way that he approached his guitar playing on top of my songwriting. But, at the end of the day, his guitar style didn't suit my songwriting style and that's why it didn't work. We were very lucky because someone put us in touch with Simon Mawby who used to be in The Woodentops and he's almost perfect. It's incredible the way he just slotted in and the way it's developing now – much more quickly than it ever has with anyone else. His guitar style is much more similar to mine, so it's a bit easier.

How would you describe your own guitar playing in that sense? Simon Walker, for instance, always seemed very American influenced, particularly by Tom Verlaine. Is your guitar playing more English?

GC: The guitarists who really influenced me and started me in what I thought to be quite a creative way were people like Robert Smith, The Edge and John McGeogh [Magazine, Siouxie And The Banshees, The Armoury Show, and Public Image Limited]. It was that sort of era of guitarists who really influenced me. Also, Keith Levine because I was really into early Public Image. It just sort of evolved, but I don't really have an opinion about my guitar playing other than that I can play the guitar pretty well. I've always seen it for myself much more as a studio instrument. I find it incredibly difficult playing live and singing, so I've sort of stuck to working in the studio.

The House Of Love's *Babe Rainbow* album will be released by **Fontana/Phonogram** in July.

Jonathan Wright