Putting their House in order

Alastair Mabbott meets a band which, despite its unstable reputation, has weathered the trends of the past few years

LAST question first. Do the House of Love still go in for almighty rucks in the dressing room?

"Do we still fight?" Guy Chadwick studies the dregs of his pint, considering this carefully. "It's a very volatile band, yes. It's stupid, really. But we're all very close and have the same ideals about music. Although our musical tastes vary quite considerably, we do have a common belief in what makes good music, which I won't bore you with, but that's what keeps us together as a unit."

Guy Chadwick had a less than typical background for the front man in a Nineties rock band. A Forces child, he grew up in places like Malaya and Singapore, with servants, in an environment which discouraged officers' children from mixing with those of the squaddies. He's now in his mid-thirties, with a five-year-old child of his own, but has yet to shake off completely a late-teenage gangliness.

His band, The House of Love, was formed in 1986 and, unlike most bands from that time, has weathered everything that came since — rave culture, Manchester mania, "shoegazing", techno — without altering their basic approach. Their early song *Christine* has attained the status of an indie classic and singles like *The Beatles And The Stones*, *Destroy The Heart*, *Never* and *Shine On* demonstrated that even the most downbeat and angst-ridden bands could come up trumps with a sparkling

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tune now and again. There's every reason to believe they will outlive Suede.

"We've always had a strong musical identity in the sense that we don't need a movement," Chadwick insists. "Bands who weren't part of a particular scene were either forgotten about or slagged off," says bassist Chris Groothuizen. "It's strange how that'll happen and really affect your career, then all of a sudden those bands aren't around any more."

There is no single or tour to herald the arrival of their new album, *Audience With The Mind*. It is simply being launched boldly into the market while Chadwick and Groothuizen — drummer Pete Evans is taking a break — prepare to promote it worldwide.

"When we were in America," says Chadwick, "the core of the playing got really good and we realised that we were a much better band than a lot of people thought we were. We'd reached a point where we were playing so well that we felt we had to get into the studio and exploit it now, rather than be dissected by a producer and spend two weeks recording a drum track — all the usual business."



House of Love (from left, Groothuizen, Evans and Chadwick): the band may well outlast Suede

And, indeed, there's a tremendous feeling of confidence and buoyancy about *Audience With The Mind*, an expansiveness that belies the group's reduction to a three-piece after the loss of yet another guitarist. It even boasts a tongue-in-cheek sequel to one of their finest early moments called *Shining On*, which really sounds like a hit.

"I got more interested in lyric-writing this year than I've ever been before. I started thinking about what I was trying to convey and all the power you have as a lyricist. I got into a frame of mind where I thought I could say much more than I was actually saying."

Audience With The Mind's title track — like *Shining On*, it's "a song about writing songs" — came about when a drunken Chadwick picked up his guitar in the middle of the night. Without a clue as to what he was actually singing about, he forged ahead regardless to capture "a representation of the mind of a drunkard. That was the idea. I've always had an interest in the ego and how ridiculous it can be, and the whole process of writing is pretty much — I think it has to be, anyway — a state of delusion. To leave yourself and just be able to become someone else an . . ." The words Chadwick cherishes so much begin to prove unequal to the task of conveying what he wants to say. "It's just a rant," he says, returning to his pint.

Chadwick's renewed interest in lyric-writing seems to have brought greater discipline to his work, as well as sparking off

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a closer examination of the written word in general and poetry in particular.

"I started reading books quite late," he says. "It was only about ten years ago that I started reading avidly, and two years ago I'd suddenly reached a point where I was quite a well-read person. And I was beginning to think more about the process of writing than I'd ever thought before. It never used to cross my mind how a person arrived at writing a book; I would just read blindly and marvel at the images and whatever else was good about it. I just started considering writing more. It's probably part of . . . maturing, I suppose." He pauses, Theakston's poised. "They say you go into that phase, don't they?"

☐ *Audience With The Mind* is on Fontana Records.