

# Rebirth Of The Song

Hot House are modern pop missionaries. Their plan: to revive the ailing art forms of the song and singing. Both have become endangered species, lost amid the flurry of beat-heavy, technologically-perfected dance music styles - Washington's go go, hip hop, Chicago's house - on which 'the groove is everything', and sacrificed on the altar of the cult of the producer.

The influences and inspirations of the multi-racial London trio - Mark Pringle, Martin Colyer and Heather Small - cover black music since the 1930s: jazz, gospel, r'n'b and soul. Hot House were born in 1983 when the two Chelsea art students recruited the Paddington schoolgirl with the remarkable voice through a music press ad seeking a modern Aretha Franklin or Gladys Knight.

They struck lucky. Petite singer Heather, still only 22, has already been hailed by the *New Musical Express* (*NME*) as 'the best female soul singer in Britain'. She boasts a powerful, expressive voice, marked by her full-blooded, emotional delivery and precise phrasing - a classic instrument in the mould of the queen of soul herself or, more recently, Anita Baker. Flattering comparison indeed for the west London girl who's had no formal training.

*NME* cover stars earlier this year, Hot House have released two excellent singles: the slow-burning *Don't Come To Stay* and a bold, brassy follow up *The Way That We Walk*. Neither has gained the commercial success it deserved. The debut album, partly recorded in the historic soul powerhouse studios of Muscle Shoals, Alabama, is unveiled this month.

Smooth-talking Mark Pringle describes the trio's music as: 'Song and singing-rooted r'n'b, rather than dancefloor-orientated stuff. In the 60s there was a balance between dance sounds and

ballads. But black music has become far too dance-centered in the last few years'.

So are Hot House trying to recreate an old, classic soul sound? 'No. It's values more than sound - songwriting values and the quality of the singing.' They regard the late 60s/early 70s days of Motown/Stax/Philly as a golden era of songwriting. 'We want to transpose the values of that era today.'

Judging by their debut album, its mission has been accomplished. A surprisingly mature collection, it illustrates the depth of songwriting talent within the trio, while Ms Small's enormous confidence in front of the microphone should leave only listeners with hearing problems unmoved.



### **Bringing back the blues**

Until the 1984 release of Cecil and Linda Womack's seminal *Love Wars* album, Hot House thought they trod a lonely path. 'We thought we were really in the wilderness,' explains Martin. 'We seemed to be the only ones doing songs of real character that weren't bland, with straightforward production'.

With Anita Baker, Bobby Womack and, closer to home, Paul Johnson, all joining the 'renaissance of the song', they know they're not alone after all. 'Too many people have taken r'n'b and put the emphasis on rhythm and forgotten about the blues. We're bringing back the blues,' says Martin. •

*Denis Campbell*