

MUSIC

Taste of Spring. With *Teen Dream*, indie-rock duo Beach House warms up

BY GILBERT CRUZ

THE SOUND OF THE BALTIMORE DREAM-pop duo Beach House has always run counter to its name. Full of cold, echoing vocals and propelled by a lulling drone, Beach House songs are more March in Montauk than July on the Cape. But *Teen Dream*, the band's third and most accomplished album, takes one step closer to the sun. Warm guitars, swoon-inducing melodies—why, the whole thing's positively springlike. You can almost forgive the pair the cruel joke of releasing it in the dead of winter.

With its 2006 self-titled debut, Beach House instantly established one of the more recognizable sounds in indie rock, equal parts breathy and slightly bruised, with Nico-like vocals from singer Victoria Legrand and atmospheric instrumentals by bandmate Alex Scally. Each song was wrapped in a thick, dark haze, all lazy drum-machine beats, ghostly organs and retro synth lines. If you were ever to hear



Life's a beach Bandmates Legrand, left, and Scally

one in a movie, it would be as background music to a mysterious woman dancing in the twilight. By album No. 2, *Devotion*, that sound was so rigidly set that it seemed as if the duo had run slowly but beautifully into a dead end. Why mess with perfection?

Thankfully, Legrand and Scally haven't. The great musical innovators notwithstanding, it's generally disastrous to effect a

radical stylistic shift. (I know there are hardcore defenders of U2's electro-experiment album *Pop* out there somewhere ... but they're wrong.) No, the key is change *and* more of the same. So while Legrand's voice, easily one of the most beguiling ones in rock

today, has until now been weighed down by the band's reverb-heavy atmosphere, *Teen Dream* simply lightens the load. The results, as on "Lover of Mine," are vocals that soar with joy while breaking your heart.

Most significant, though, is Scally's move from a drum machine to what appears to be actual percussion. It helps Beach House sound like a real band instead of just a couple of talented people making music together. "Used to Be," with its crashing cymbals

and plinking piano, builds to a series of crescendos unlike anything the duo has done before. And though the two never spell out what's meant by the titular teen dream, you can imagine it to be that elusive high school crush who draws you in while somehow keeping you at arm's length. That, more than anything else, is Beach House at its foundation. ■

