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MAR 10 Wild Flag, Superchunk and Bright Eyes at Radio City Music Hall

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Tuesday (and Wednesday) night, Radio City hosted a mouth-watering line-up of veterans who've been crafting various manifestations of pop-punk-rock for decades.



Though Wild Flag is brand new, its members comprise a supergroup of some of indie rock's most talented and well-known ladies—Carrie Brownstein and Janet Weiss from Sleater-Kinney, Mary Timony from Helium and Rebecca Cole of the Minders. Wild Flag sounds exactly what fans of those groups might imagine. Brownstein and Weiss bring the same punk power as they did in Sleater-Kinney, but Timony and Cole sweeten the pot. On "Glass Tambourine," they sweetly sing the song title over and everything but the keyboard fades out, and just as you think it's about to end, the guitar leaps back in, the drums rise and the song transitions into an all out psychedelic assault.

Next up, Superchunk took the stage with complimentary words for label mates, Wild Flag. "I have some of their songs stuck in my head. I don't know if I can remember our songs," joked frontman Mac McCaughan. Remember the songs, it did, powering through a set nicely split between the band's back catalog and Majesty Shredding, its newest album after a nine-year gap. The pop-punk brought a playful air to the rather stuffy and still sitting down Radio City crowd, particularly when the band closed with "Slack Motherfucker," after McCaughan quipped, "I never miss an opportunity to swear in front of my parents."

Contrasting Superchunk's casual and fun demeanor, Bright Eyes took the stage to the spoken-word intro to "Firewall," a strange new-age-biblical monologue about the Garden of Eden, the Superuniverse, multiple dimensions and the Devil. For the group's latest album, The People's Key, frontman and songwriter Conor Oberst wanted to break away from the folksy, country labels attached to the group and try something more aggressive. Boasting two drummers in an eight-piece ensemble, Bright Eyes made good on that declaration. Oberst turned his gaze away from his navel and began weaving dark, obtuse narratives about prisons, alternate realities and rebirth. Amid the biblical references and the apocalyptic intensity, Oberst occasionally seemed like an indie rock preacher of sorts, channeling a powerful energy to rouse his worshipping devotees, who took every quiet moment as a chance to yell out "I love you, Conor!"

But the evening wasn't just a post-modern reflection on spirituality. The fleshed out ensemble brought new arrangements to the earlier material, improving songs that didn't even need improving. The already heart-breaking "Lua" was rendered even more melancholy with the addition of subtle trumpet parts between verses. Perkier tracks like "Four Winds," "Hot Knives," and "Road to Joy" became downright barn-burners. Who would've thought Bright Eyes could be danceable? Over a two-hour set, the boy wonder previously known for his whiny voice and emo lyrics proved that he's grown into a man who's still full of surprises.

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