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## Chairlift, Willis Earl Beal, Natalie Bergman, Polica and Class Actress at Tomorrow Never Knows | Photos and live review

Posted in Audio File blog by Gavin Paul on Jan 17, 2012 at 3:29pm

Aside from anti-folk Chicago enigma Willis Earl Beal's opening slot, up on the venue's mattress-sized stage with just an old reel-to-reel as a backup band and a pair of bluesman shades to keep him company, woman-fronted indie outfits reigned supreme on the five-band bill at Schuba's Saturday (January 14) edition of the Tomorrow Never Knows Festival.

Back to Beal for a minute though. After delivering anecdotes about working security at Willis Tower when it was still owned by Sears—"Those bastards fired me," he said to a silent crowd—he poured a cascade of soul over the hiss of a heel-stomp recording or two. This was one of his first performances ever since posting an ad for friends at Myopic Books earlier this year. Watch out for this urban poet laureate, and the chorus from the second-to-last track he debuted sans sunglasses, "Wavering Lines": "I got the low rinse solitary cool like a fool in the summertime."

Enter the women, all leading from the hips, all with their own dance to tunes about various underbellies of love. Fellow Chicagoan Natalie Bergman led the pack with her brother Elliot emphasizing her Kate Bush-isms with some deep bass sax and some Jah guitar when the funk was appropriate. "Same song, again and again/You rob me twice and I keep coming back" she finger-snapped with a thousand-yard stare on "Keep You." The sold-out crowd, finally in full attendance, spun when the singer did the same.

Twin-cities Gayngs spinoff Polica tweaked the hue a bit darker as songstress Channy Casselle Bjorked her way into the spotlight, auto-tune caked on in full reverb layers as the dual-drummer and bass guitar set-up propelled her into erratic shoulder-shimmies on "Lay Your Cards out," howling "I am waiting" in cyclical cathartics. The side door to the venue kept exposing people to temperatures in the teens. But with Casselle as the centerpiece, it didn't matter.

And then there was Brooklyn's Class Actress, taking 10-minutes out of everyone's lives to make sure the "in-house electronics" were "louder," "no louder," "just a bit louder" demanded vocalist Elizabeth Harper, in full 80s power businesswoman regalia, puckering a glistening set of red lips for effect. It was worth it, though, through every hair tussle, trench-coat twirl and Human League evocation.

Though if the preceding bands were to be taken as pop peers—aside from Beal—to Caroline Polachek's output in headliner Chairlift, also Brooklyn incubated, they were but ripples in the crystalline exactitude of the buoyant spring of "Bruises"—yes, the iPod Nano tune—that the duo saved for the end of their set, Polachek medleying "I tried to do handstands for you" into Modern English gem "I Melt With You" and back into the plunky "Like A Virgin" keys of "Evident Utensil," the other half of Chairlift, Patrick Wimberly, call-and-responding to Polachek's "How hard must I try for you." Will 2012 be the year women dominate indie pop?

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