



What do you create when you take four musicians who have only sporadically worked together, add their songs and place them in a sparse 8x8 practice room in Portland, Oregon that leaks sound through the air vents?

Answer: musical magic. When Rebecca Cole, Carrie Brownstein, Mary Timony and Janet Weiss joined forces as Wild Flag, the supergroup went from just another newbie band to indie critic darlings in just 18 months - a response that left the foursome puzzled.

"It is weird actually," said keyboardist Cole of the band's rapid acknowledgement, thanks to a breakout performance at SXSW and gig success that built into a colossal rogue wave. "It's an interesting experience to start a band and have people interested in it before they hear it. It's a new experience, one I really like. I spent a lot of time in bands playing to 40 or 50 people. Now we're going to those towns and playing to 500 people."

Those that aren't familiar with Wild Flag might know the individual members from elsewhere. The female indie titans are something akin to a recipe created

when taking tried-and-true ingredients and randomly mixing them into an entirely new dish. For Wild Flag, the group comes in the wake of decades spent in former bands including Helium, Sleater-Kinney, Quasi, The Minders and other notable ensembles. Together, they blend the punk attitude of Chrissie Hynde and Debbie Harry and cut it with the peppy spirit of the Go Gos and growl of Patti Smith.

It's little wonder that the quartet, which recorded its self-titled debut in April and readied it for release this September via Merge Records, has created this wave of buzz that continues to grow. What *is* surprising is that three of the members live in the Portland area (with Timony living in Washington, D.C.), giving them a chance to get to know each other over the past decade, yet creating their music during sporadic sessions whenever Timony traveled to Portland.

"We knew going into the album what we wanted," said Cole of the ease of song selection. "We did the basic tracks live with a couple overdubs...then went back and recorded vocals. [We recorded fast] because we wanted the record to have the same energy you find at live shows, something honest."

Timony adds that the album's spirit is a product of blending your love of art and bond with kindred spirits, considering the easy, breezy manner in which the group formed and works.

"It was pretty casual. We just took it one step at a time," said Timony of the band's formation. "They all got together for a soundtrack and it went really well, and they decided they wanted one more person [to contribute vocals] and they called me up and that was awesome. And the next step was to get together and write music. It went pretty well and the next step was, well, let's do that again. Then, the next step was to try to play some shows. I don't think we had gigantic goals."

And why would they need them? After all, the longtime friends discovered a magical synergy almost from the start of their collaboration. "When we were working on the soundtrack and needed vocals, we sent [the music] to Mary," said Cole. "When [the tracks] came back we were all laughing saying, 'Wow, we already sound like a band.' Now, a couple years later, we are a band."

by Nancy Dunham
Photography by John Clark