

Music: Kaiser Chiefs Power Their Way Through Short, Sharp Set

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The Kaiser Chiefs returned to New York City on the final leg of their world tour promoting the 2014 album *Education Education Education & War*, [one of the best albums of last year](#). I first saw them a decade ago; they were playing a tiny club in Brooklyn, I think, on a postage stamp-sized stage. I hit the bathroom right before the set and there was a guy in what seemed a British schoolboy uniform (not quite AC/DC, but definitely not New York); well, either summer vacation had come early or here was one of the band members, playing in a club so small the act didn't even have a dressing room. They took the stage and blew through an impassioned set, lifting the audience off the ground during an extended jam on their hit song "I Predict A Riot." The set was short, but heck, they only had one album.

Now, here they are a decade later and with five studio albums under their belt. Lead singer Ricky Wilson made the intimate venue of Irving Plaza feel like a stadium as he prowled the stage, climbed up anything not tied down, played to the crowd with a showman's abandon (he definitely picked the right career) and generally felt like a conquering hero, even though the band has inexplicably not matched the commercial smash of their first CD. This time they had plenty of terrific songs that are proven crowd-pleasers and after a fully satisfying set and encore, the night was over. I glanced at my watch and to my shock only 80 minutes had passed. Never confuse quantity with quality; if you'd told me they had played for two hours I would have believed you and besides, one thing was clear -- Kaiser Chiefs had given their all.

One of the smartest bands around, they began with "The Angry Mob," a wonderfully cheeky sing-along in which the crowd happily chants: "We are the angry mob/ We read the papers every day/ We like who we like/ We hate who we hate/ But we're also easily swayed."

Throughout their career, the Kaiser Chiefs have skewered too-cool irony and quickly distracted attention spans. Their music matters, always, even when having a laugh, which made their late set cover of the Who wholly appropriate. "Everything Is Average Nowadays" and the terrific put-down "Every Day I Love You Less And Less" continue in that vein, punching through their generation's default setting of indifference to demand that everything doesn't have to be average and maybe it's yourself you love less and less, not your girlfriend.

Wilson amusingly introduced their new single "Falling Awake" by saying only four people in the world can do it justice live in concert... and he's not one of them. He paused before some of the big notes, almost making you wish he'd saved it for the end since the tune threatened to stretch his voice to the limit. While not as slick as the studio take, it had an energy and vulnerability that made this ready-made single more vulnerable and interesting to me.

This is a real band, with the tight crew delivering throughout. But clearly Wilson is the ringleader, the center of attention, as all rock star lead singers must be. He joked with the crowd about them being hip and thus too cool to take part in audience participation. "So if I said, 'Woo-hoooooo!' then you would go..." And of course they chimed right in. Drawing waves of applause with raised arms, twirling and kicking over and slapping down the mike stand, playing and tossing aside tambourines, Wilson was fully in charge of the night.

The parade of great tunes continued, climaxing with their smash hit "Ruby," a thunderous "I Predict A Riot" and

an excellent cover of "Pinball Wizard." (Will rock fans in the future need footnotes to know what pinball is and why never tilting is an impressive accomplishment?) Then they capped it with the emotional track "Coming Home" from their new album, followed quickly by a too-brief two song encore of "Misery Company" and "Oh My God."

They've had a curious career, marked by massive immediate success that calmed down to a solid core fan base. Their latest album debuted at #1 in the UK but only "Coming Home" scraped into the Top 40. In the US, they've never broken through, despite a tight, hook-laden sound that would fit neatly alongside everyone from Fall Out Boy to Green Day. And like the best bands, they deliver in concert, even if they didn't play "The Factory Gates," an album track from Education Education Education & War that would be [a perfect campaign song for Senator Bernie Sanders](#).

Fans can't help feeling a little spoiled. Wilson and his bandmates should be prowling the stage of Madison Square Garden behind multi-platinum success; instead we get to see them up close at Irving Plaza. You never know when that will change and a song might suddenly click and skyrocket them up the charts again. [So catch them on tour](#) in Boston or Canada before they head back to the UK and some final dates. Eighty minutes rarely feels so satisfying.

Note: Michael Giltz WAs provided with tickets to the concert with the understanding that he would write a review.