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Grace Potter and the Nocturnals

Grace Potter is hot. And not just because she changed her hairstyle and now faintly resembles a younger Jenny Lewis from Rilo Kiley. "I did not choose to cut my bangs," declares Potter, the legally blind, guitar- and piano-playing frontwoman of Vermont-based Grace Potter and the Nocturnals. "I was in Kentucky at a bourbon tasting, and I tasted too much bourbon. I had done my hair in this Southern belle, debutante, wafting thing - very June Carter. And later that night, I was having fun with a lighter and POOF!"

Off-stage salon pyrotechnics aside, the 24-year-old is raising, if not singeing, eyebrows with her vocals. Potter has been compared to Janis Joplin and Lucinda Williams, and she's drawn praise and inspiration from Bonnie Raitt. Now on a two-month run opening for jam-rockers Gov't Mule, Potter, guitarist Scott Tournet, bassist Bryan Dondero and drummer Matt Burr are winning over crowds with a fittingly fiery live show and critically acclaimed new CD, "This is Somewhere." (See my Words & Deeds blog for video of Potter at Red Rocks):

Being better known in the East, do you feel like you're just breaking into a lot of these markets where you're opening for Gov't Mule?

Oh, for sure. Absolutely. Mule is great to tour with. They pull in people that wouldn't come to our shows. It's a good opportunity to get out there and not fake it. I don't want to do a headlining tour if we can't quite sell all the tickets. I'd rather be an opening band and play to a full house.

You just have to be careful not to blow away the audience and upstage the headliner.

I think that's why we're a good match with them, because we do have that high-energy thing, and we are a little more thrashy than them in terms of our physical performance.

Thrashy?

Oh yeah! Dude, we're headbangers.

Like Slayer.

We're very much like Slayer. We're like Slayer but with a girl.

Are Mule fans so different from your fans?

I think it's a different fan but it's the same fan. They just don't know it until they get there. (Mule) fans are more rough around the edges. There's a lot more biker dudes. And it's lot more of a Southern thing, too, and that's good for us because our music has a Southern twist to it. It's soulful with gospel, blues. All that s--- is what we're feeding off of. It's our lifeblood, but we just happen to not be from Mississippi. But I do think the fans, once they do see us, they realize that they're exactly our kind of fan. It's like trying on jeans. You can't know until you f---ing put 'em on!

Your Wikipedia bio has it all wrong about you. It makes it sound like you're not really legally blind.

I am legally blind. But I'm not in an exclusive relationship with drummer Matt Burr. (The Wiki entry says Potter is.) I already called my manager about it twice.

Wiki makes it sound like the legally blind thing is a rumor that got started at a concert when you were joking because you couldn't get a guitar cable plugged in.

I actually don't wear glasses for corrective vision on stage. And that's why I couldn't find the cable all day. I'm like rolling around on my f---ing hands and knees.

Why not just wear glasses?

You can't headbang with glasses on. You just can't. That's why indie bands are so f---ing stagnant!

Your songwriting on this latest CD is story-driven. On the last track, "Big White Gate," you talk about being a bad mom, having had three children with three different men. ...

That's about my grandmother, actually. This record was a much more narrative record for me. It's not all true. There's a little bit of fiction in there to spruce it up a little. But all the songs are personal in some way or another. Without sounding too Faith Hill-y, like (goes into phony voice), "This is my most personal record ever. I really dug deep for this one." No. No. No. That's not what I'm saying. But I am telling more of my own truth this time around.

Does it make the songs more interesting to sing every night?

You get really emotional. There are definitely times when I don't know if I'm going to be able to finish the song. It gets to me.

Do fans appreciate that?

I hope people can get hit by it. I've looked out it in the audience and seen a lot of people with tears in their eyes. Women who will come up to me and be shaking still. There's intense stuff that happens to people when a song hits home. Whether their mom is dying or a sister. Or some story within my lyrics hits them and makes them think about something they've done. Like the song "Apologies," for some reason, really hits guys in a weird way. So these guys are always coming up to me, "Oh, my god, I just broke up with my girlfriend, I'm going to call her tonight." It's just crazy s---. Part of it is complimentary, part of it's. ...

Art. You can't control how people will interpret your art.

Don't divorce you're wife just because I said one line.

You said this Gov't Mule run is your first tour on a real bus. Are you on the bus now? It's so quiet.

I am. And I'm not wearing any underwear.

You could have told me that earlier.

That would have made a different interview.

Gig of the week: Grace Potter

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http://voices.idahostatesman.com/2007/11/09/mdeeds/concert_pick_for_week_of_nov_9_15_grace_potter

Vermont-based Grace Potter and the Nocturnals are drumming up a national buzz with a fiery roots-rock show. They'll open for Gov't Mule on Tuesday, Nov. 13, at The Big Easy. Potter, 24, has mad stage presence. She sings and plays guitar and keys. Below is video of the band rocking "Stop the Bus" (from their latest CD, "This is Somewhere") at Red Rocks Amphitheatre. If you want to see another cool clip, search YouTube for "Grace Potter and Joe Satriani cover Cortez the Killer."

P.S. I swear I'm not smitten with Potter just because she told me on the phone that she **wasn't wearing any underwear**.

Gov't Mule, Grace Potter and the Nocturnals, 7:30 p.m. Tuesday, Nov. 13, Big Easy. \$22.50. TicketWeb

