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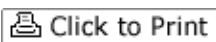
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## Nocturnals play the daylights out of rock

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By Sam Hemingway, USA TODAY

**Up from Nectar's:** Grace Potter and The Nocturnals have been on a credibility fast track lately. In the past year, they have gone from being the house band at Nectar's, a nightclub in Burlington, Vt., that was the launchpad for jam-band giant Phish in the 1990s, to touring with the likes of the Dave Matthews Band, Taj Mahal, Robert Cray and Phish's Trey Anastasio. Grace and the gang (the supporting cast includes guitarist Scott Tournet, drummer Matthew Burr and bassist Bryan Dondero) were nominated for two Jammy Awards, the jam-band world's answer to the Grammys. The band just performed at the Bonnaroo Music and Arts Festival and will play at the Newport Folk Festival Aug. 6.

**Major re-release:** The band's 2005 independent breakthrough, *Nothing but the Water*, has been re-released by Hollywood Records. Bob Cavallo, a producer who has worked with Prince, Little Feat and the Lovin' Spoonful, says there is a bluesy wisdom and confidence in Potter's music that belies her age. (She just turned 22.) He now runs Hollywood Records and says he was sold on the band after one listen in 2005. "Her voice has a smoky flavor that moves you," he says. "It just doesn't quit. It absorbs traditional blues, gospel, and yet it's Grace Potter."

**A vision thing:** Not bad for a band with a lead singer who can't read music and is legally blind. Potter says she can see adequately until things get more than 15 feet from her. "I don't want to wear glasses or contacts, but it's OK," she said. "It's just blurry objects, but I love it that way. I can tell people from shapes, hair color, voice, their vibe."

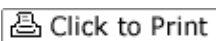
**Small-town sponging:** Potter says growing up in Waitsfield, Vt. (population 1,659), benefited her musically. "Coming from a place that's neutral grounds in terms of music means you've got to be a sponge for all the culture around you," Potter says. "It makes you earn your credibility."

**A spectral fan:** Performing before crowds comes naturally to her, and for that, Potter credits talks she had as a teenager with her great-uncle, Spiegel Wilcox, a Dixieland trombonist who played for big-band leader Tommy Dorsey and kept on performing until his death five years ago. "He'd tell me that some people are not going to like your sound, but that it was their problem, not yours," she says. "Sometimes now, when I'm on stage, I feel him up there, checking out to see what's going on. I feel like he's in my soul."

*Contributing: Sam Hemingway writes daily for the Burlington (Vt.) Free Press.*

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