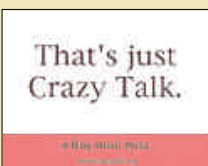
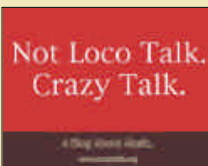
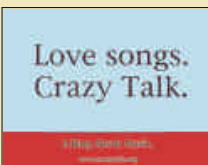


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Saturday, 19 March 2005**SXSX: Grace Potter & the Nocturnals**

Yesterday I went to Indie 911's showcase at Momo's. I grabbed a water bottle (hydration in Austin is very important I've learned) and looked around to see what I could see. I saw Jerri Hall (Mick Jagger's ex-wife) and behind her was Ken Irwin, head of Rounder Records.

As I settled in for the act, the band that took the stage was fronted by a young woman (21ish) with long dirty blonde hair who alternately sits at the keys playing organ and stands at the mic, tambourine at her side. What poured from her mouth was powerfully resonant blues rock. Her name is Grace Potter, and she perfectly channels a soulfulness usually reserved for much more established and experienced artists in this vein - Bonnie Raitt and Patti Griffin.

Her lyrics are decent, not overly derivative and maintain her own personal sense of songcrafting style. But Potter & the Nocturnals definitely wear their genres on their sleeve, and each song can be fairly neatly boxed into traditional blues rock ala Raitt or progressive folk rock ala Griffin, or even loud progressive blues rock with a tinge of John Paul Jones in the organ and Page in the intentionally sloppy electric slide guitar.

The Nocturnals have a well realized sound - their sound shows that they know where they've been in terms of their influences and they know where they're going in terms of their chemistry. They don't overpower Ms. Potter, unless the guitarist is sharing solos with her on organ. The rhythm section kept things nailed down and was content to hang out in the pocket, exactly where they need to be for this type of act. The sounds coming from the kit were average and did the job fine, although the band would benefit from a bit more subtle artistry working within the space of "the pocket" would help take the Nocturnals to a more nuanced audio landscape.

Listening to Ms. Potter, one might think she learned her trade from working the concession stand at the King Biscuit Blues Festival in Arkansas. But no - surprisingly she and her band mates are from Waynesfield, Vermont. At 21, she's been kicking the blues jams since she was 16. A couple of years ago she did a solo album, & then she met up with the Nocturnals at St. Lawrence college. They have recorded a new album at the Hay Barn (for all you Phish heads out there).

By the way, this is the purest essence of festivals like SXSX. Dropping into some random bar for a random showcase and you see a random band that really has their shit together. At the very least, its great live music & at best, you find a young artist or band that gets you all fired up to see what happens next with them. Grace Potter & the Nocturnals delivered on all the right levels, and if there is any justice in this universe, they'll get their desserts.

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