

On the road with Grace Potter

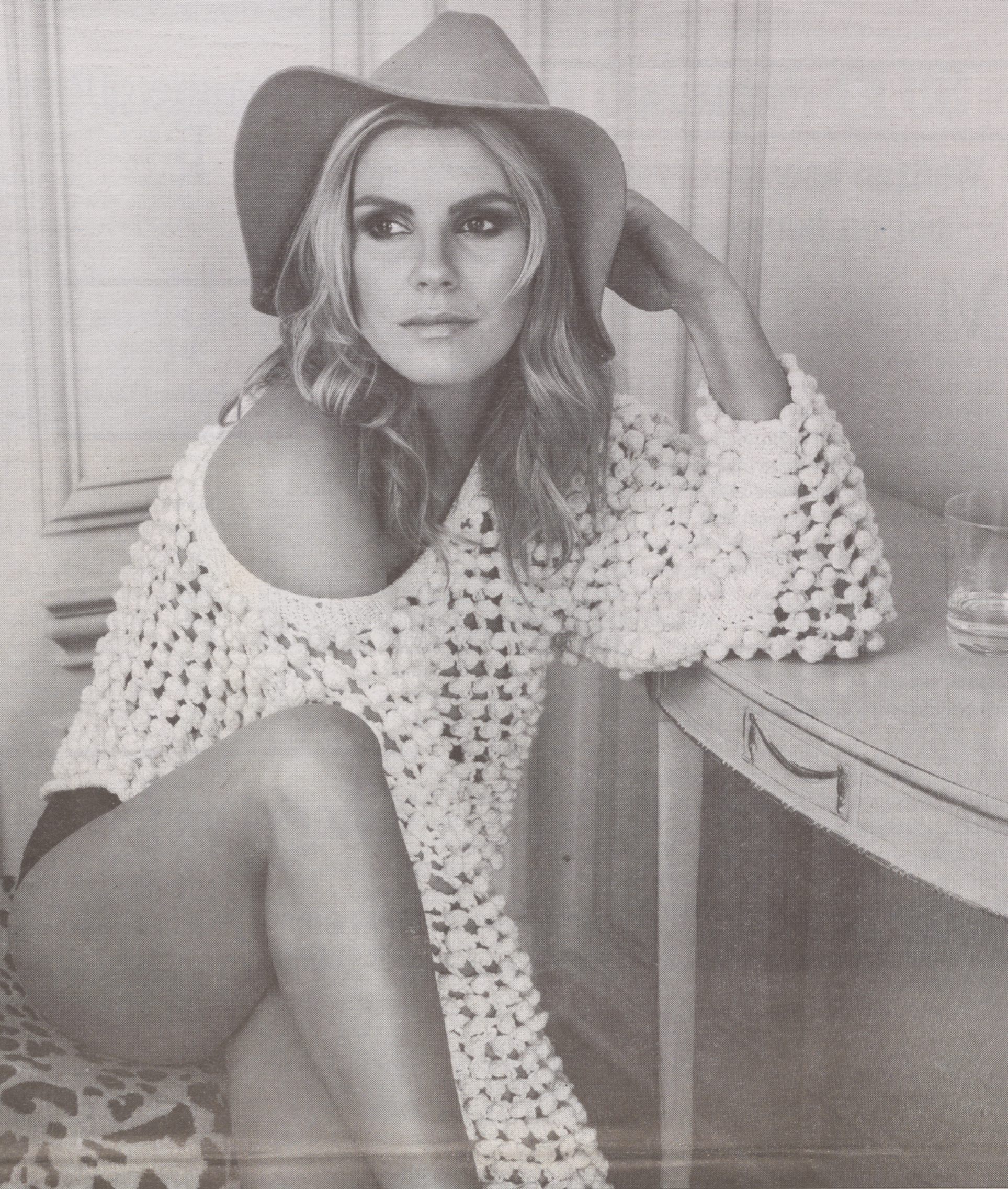


PHOTO BY WILLIAMS+HIRAKAWA

The Nocturnals' frontwoman talks about finding her own place in music

BY SUE ZALOKAR
STAFF WRITER

Last year, a fresh face hit the country music scene when Grace Potter recorded, and later performed "You and Tequila" with Kenny Chesney at the VH1 Divas Support the Troops concert. It was a tipping point for Grace Potter and the Nocturnals, a band that had its own successes, but nothing like the tsunami of interest that followed the show — fans crashed the band's website in its wake. For a few days last summer, their self-titled album even nudged out The Beatles as the top selling artists on iTunes.

Viewers who made it through online quickly learned that Potter is far from a country singer. She and her band are mercurial performers, having made a name for themselves with raucous, lively, rock 'n' roll performances.

Last week, this dynamic frontwoman, multi-instrumentalist, songwriter and producer celebrated her 30th birthday on stage surrounded by her favorite people, a marching band, and a margarita in hand. This spring, the band released its fourth album, "The Lion The Beast The Beat." She took time out from her tour, which includes a show July 19 at the Oregon Zoo to talk about her music, sex appeal and the power of a good meal.

Sue Zalokar: How did you and music find one another?

Grace Potter: I fell in love with music by

watching movies and cartoons as a little kid. My parents just had videos and so I watched movies. There was a rule in our house that we couldn't just watch TV, we had to do something. So my sister would paint, my brother would dabble in some kind of crayon situation and I would sit at the piano and play along to the movies. I realized very early on that I had an ear for catching whatever was happening in the sonic landscape and recreating it in my own way.

S.Z.: You grew up in rural Vermont on, as I have heard you call it, the Shire. Can you tell me a bit about Potterville?

G.P.: My parents built it when they were crazy hippies dropping acid in the early '70s and they were reading "Lord of the Rings." My dad had this vision of building a house that kind of reflected a lot of the storyline of the book. It's part Shire, part Rivendell. It's a beautiful place and as it grew, as the family grew and my parents businesses grew, they just kept building little buildings. They just sort of sprouted up like mushrooms. It turned into a little bit of a compound. It also was a place that the whole band moved back to and we all slept and ate and played music together for the first couple of years as we were coming up as a new rock 'n' roll band.

S.Z.: Tell me the creation story of the Nocturnals.

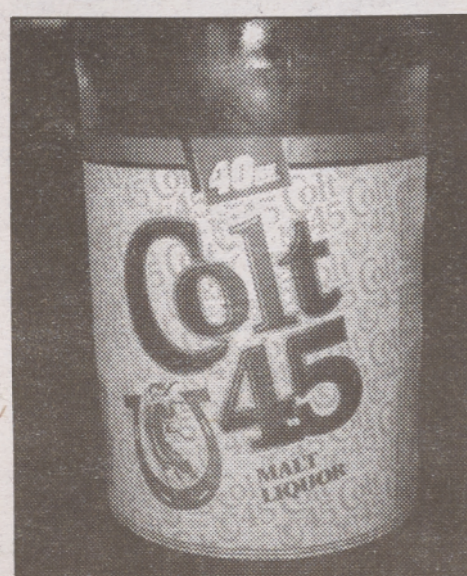
G.P.: I didn't want to go to college, but my grandmother made me. I took a gap year between high school and college where I dabbled in music a little bit and played some gigs. But it reached a critical mass where my grandma just sort of put her foot down. So I went to the same college that my parents, my uncles, my aunts all went to: St. Lawrence University up in Northern New York. Within the first week of being there, of course, I pulled out my piano and started playing in the local coffee house. There was a place called the Java Barn where all of the music-oriented and arts-oriented kids would hang out. It was really just sort of an idyllic, utopian society.

Matt Burr, who played in a bunch of different bands on campus and was a senior in college, saw me play. I was kind of wheeling out cover songs and occasionally sliding in my own original music. I had written this song called "Apologies" and he came up to me and said, you need to be in a band.

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