

POTTER from page 1

You can't just be doing this by yourself. You're playing all of this mellow music, but I can tell that you have a fire under your ass." He suggested that we start a band, so a few months later, the Nocturnals were born.

S.Z.: *Some folks may think you had overnight success, but in fact you have been making music and touring relentlessly for years. Can you talk a bit about what it has been like for the Nocturnals to pay their dues and grow into the super successful band that you all have cultivated?*

G.P.: I think that is something that a lot of people miss when they first hear about us. They think that we're new. But it was a slow, slow burn and we wanted it that way. The music we've been creating for the last, almost, decade really has helped us to sculpt what type of band we want to be. It's ever-changing and ever-growing. We never really have settled into one genre. I think that's worked to our advantage because it's allowed us to cross over into so many areas of music. The music community is so broad. We really love the idea that we are undefinable.

S.Z.: *The new album, "The Lion The Beast The Beat" is your fourth. You co-wrote Loneliest Soul with Dan Auerbach of The Black Keys.*

G.P.: We actually co-wrote three songs with Dan. "The Lion The Beast The Beat" is a record that kind of catapulted us into many different settings. Co-writing with Dan was one really amazing creative process because it did take us out of our comfort zone.

I was in Nashville for the country music awards and I called the band and said Dan has a couple days in the studio, let's just go and see what happens — without any real intention of it winding up on the album. We made three songs in three days. The Loneliest Soul is the one song on the album that is actually the recorded result of what we did in his studio. That's all straight from the studio.

S.Z.: *It would seem that the game has changed. Last week NPR intern for All Songs Considered, Emily White, wrote an article claiming that, at 21 years of age, she had purchased only 11 albums, though her iTunes collection holds over 11,000 songs. What do you think of what musicians are facing — in terms of distribution and reaching the public — to make a living?*

G.P.: When we started out, we were selling CDs out of the back of the car and that was a viable form of income. Now, everything has changed because it has become a song-by-song culture. You pick the music you like and you can edit your own playlist, so albums have sort of fallen by the wayside. My goal as a musician is to always create bodies of work much like a photograph. It's a moment in time and it's something that will never be the same again. Everything changes; fashion or art or music they are all ever changing, they're fluid. So, in a way — as negative as it is to think it — albums are a lost art. I enjoy the future because I'm a part of it, but I think I firmly keep my creative impulses in the past. In that historical sense, an album is still important to me.

S.Z.: *You have lent your success to a variety of causes including cancer, homelessness, fair trade and the environment. How significant is that in your career?*

G.P.: It's a fine line because I don't

believe in preaching. But we're given a very rare opportunity to speak out about things that matter to us. Some of my favorite songs are political songs. I think Bob Dylan is a genius — but as a songwriter. I don't choose to overtly make (political) statements in my music. I think it makes the music suffer and I think the message can often be lost. You can only do so much and I choose to do it in my personal life and in association with the band, but also in my free time, when I am not on stage.

There are many causes that are close to my heart. My brother has epilepsy. And so we've worked closely with the Epilepsy Foundation. I don't have kids, but when I do, I don't want to hand them over a tar-colored world. I want to hand them over a green, beautiful world with inspiration and music around every corner and something growing. So, you just do your part.

S.Z.: *The Nocturnals are chameleons in terms of genre. What is the driving force behind that?*

G.P.: Well at the heart of it, we are five people in a band where one voice needs to be created. Whether I realize it or not, I am deeply inspired and sort of subliminally affected by everything that everybody in the band listens to. We live around each other, we are in a bus together. Everyone comes back from walking around a new city and they've got piles and piles of vinyl and CDs and new songs to listen to. I like to feed off of that burgeoning bucket of influences. If one of us comes back from a record store with a pile of amazing old soul gospel music, all of a sudden, whether I know it or not, some of that stuff is permeating into a new song.

S.Z.: *What are your thoughts about sexual power as it applies to musicians?*

G.P.: It starts with people like Memphis Minnie, Elvis and James Brown. People saw how they moved on stage and it was startling.

As I have grown into the performer that I've become, I've become more comfortable with my body, more comfortable with dancing and being an idiot on stage and sort of shaking around and realizing that it's the music that's making me do that. It's been an interesting journey for me because I didn't start that way. I started standing very still. I throw it back to starting with Elvis and James Brown and moving up through the '60s and '70s with people like Mick Jagger and David Bowie. These are huge influences on me and my movement on stage. If I put out a spa music record of nothing but whale noises, then I'm certainly not going to move the way I move on stage now.

S.Z.: *You exude an image of a liberated and self-actualized woman, which is beautiful. But women, sex and show business doesn't always mix so positively. Last year, a Parisian version of Vogue was criticized for featuring a 10 year old model in stilettos and the show, and "Toddlers and Tiaras" is under fire for the sexualization of young girls. Is there, in your opinion, a link between pop culture images such as these and the objectification and sexualization of young girls?*

G.P.: I'm from Vermont. Being sexy was not a part of my awareness growing up. It was actually not cool to wear make-up to school where I came from. The more dreadlocked my hair was, the cooler I was. I think if I had grown up in a city or in a place where there was more exposure to pop culture maybe I would feel differently. But from my perspective, I think it's the choice of the parent. I see that happening ... stage moms really believe that by hyper

sexualizing their child that it's going to let them live that youth that they never had. It scares me that they are actually taking that youth away from their kids. I think there is something beautiful about the innocence of being a young girl. I just ran around naked all of the time, as a small child, and there was nothing sexual about it. So it makes me scared for the future to think that running around naked would hold a completely different meaning than it did for me as a barefoot kid, covered in dirt running around in Vermont.

S.Z.: *What words do you have for young girls who are trying to unfold and celebrate their own identity as women?*

G.P.: You find your talent and your integrity first. I wouldn't be dressing in the clothing that I'm dressing in, and I wouldn't be dancing and moving the way I do, if I wasn't confident in my songwriting and my performance and my singing and my grit and integrity and the work that I have done to get to this place. For years I was hiding behind blue jeans and cowboy boots and men's T-shirts. I needed to hide and incubate my skills in order to come out of my shell and become more comfortable and own my womanhood. It took a long time. There is no reason to rush it. And there is no reason to not value, first and foremost, your talent and your art and whatever it is that makes you happy. You want to be a biochemist? Figure that shit out first.

S.Z.: *You have said that often you drag the band to a local farmers market and then bring your finds back to the room/ tour bus and cook dinner together. What is the importance of good food in your life?*

G.P.: Food is family and that's what gives people a sense of unity. If everybody eats the same thing, then we are all running on the same gas. I really believe that there is a sense of community in sharing a table or a dish or understanding where your food came from. A carrot that you're eating out of a plastic bag, you don't know where it came from. But you go to a farmers market, you come back with all of this produce and it came from within 30 miles of where you are sitting. It just tastes better, it just feels better. It completely rubs off on everything that you do and so, for me, food and the art of being together as a band is what makes this whole thing work. I don't think the machine would be running at the speed that it is if we weren't nourished by what we're doing. And that's not just on stage, that's off stage as well. That's my way of creating when I'm not on stage — cooking food for the people that I love.

S.Z.: *What is your favorite meal to make?*

G.P.: On my birthday last week, I made wood-fired paella. It's my favorite thing to make right now because it's fresh on my mind .. the smoky flavor and the saffron and the seafood ... it's so good. I'm a complete carbaholic. Anything pasta-related and I'm happy.

S.Z.: *You must have a great metabolism! (Laughter) You and the Nocturnals and other musicians joined The Flaming Lips in their*

attempt to break Jay-Z's record for the most live shows played in 24 hours last week. How did you come to be involved in his project?

G.P.: I've known Wayne (Coyne) from The Flaming Lips since last summer. We met at a music festival and he took a hilarious picture of me. I was actually electrically shocked on stage. And I ran and hid behind my Leslie (amplifier) to try and tell my crew what happened. And Wayne took a picture of me and tweeted it out to his 100,000 followers, or whatever, and said, "Grace Potter is on acid." Really, I was just shocked and I looked crazy. Ever since then we have had a fun rapport where we would communicate back and forth a lot. When I heard about this record-breaking attempt, I freaked out and I begged Rick Krim, the head of VH1. I said I have to do it. Oddly enough, I had just been working with Wayne on a song for a new Tim Burton movie. I wrote this song and then when I was done writing it, I thought Wayne's voice would be perfect. So the show just kind of came up in conversation. Wayne thought it was great. It all came together. It was really beautifully timed and I am so excited to be a part of it.

S.Z.: *You've collaborated with Wayne Coyne, Kenny Chesney, Dan Auerbach, Ann and Nancy Wilson, Warren Haynes, Joe Walsh. What are you learning from this network of relationships?*

G.P.: I just learn respect. I think there are so many people that don't understand the intimacy of a performer, and the importance of real chemistry. You think that this whole industry works like a manager calls another manager and says you have got to get these two together. But that's not how it works. I mean, yes, that happens, but sometimes it's a nightmare, a complete disaster, and two people don't actually get along. All of the people you just listed are people who I feel deeply

connected to because it wasn't someone making a phone call and putting us together — with the exception of Kenny, who literally heard my voice, picked up the phone and said let's try this. These connections are made over time and you build up trust and respect for these people who have worked so hard to create their own careers. Hopefully I can put the same amount of care into my career because I think it's the right way to live your life.

S.Z.: *What is your trajectory for the Nocturnals and your future in the music business?*

G.P.: It's hard to ever set goals beyond today. I'm just so happy with what we have now, I feel that we've really accomplished so much. I had a very long bucket list at the beginning of my life, and I've crossed off more things than I ever thought I would. And this road has taken me down roads that I didn't expect — I've done things that weren't on my bucket list. I feel very grateful for that. The world is going to need music forever. So I hope I get to keep bringing it to as many people as possible for as long as I live.

sue@streetroots.org

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