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**Grace Potter roars back into SLC for victory lap**

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By [Pat Reavy](http://concertconnection.blogs.deseretnews.com/author/preavy/), Wednesday, June 12, 2013

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SALT LAKE CITY — Grace Potter and the Nocturnals recently did something they rarely ever do – took some time off.

GPN have not only established themselves as one of the hardest touring bands in rock, but one of the most exciting and energetic live acts on the road today as well. All of it fronted by rock’s current leading lady, Potter, and her dynamic stage presence. After a run of stadium dates last summer opening for the Kenny Chesney/Tim McGraw blockbuster tour, followed by a lap around the U.S. with their own headlining dates and then a tour in Europe, Potter and crew unplugged their guitars recently and took a month off.

Now, rested, refreshed and re-energized, Grace Potter, Scott Tournet, Matt Burr, Benny Yurco and Michael Libramento will make another lap around the U.S., and down to South America, for the final leg of their “The Lion, The Beast, The Beat Tour,” the namesake of their latest album that was released over a year ago. It debuted at No. 17 on the Billboard Top 200 and #10 on the Billboard Digital chart.

“To say that the record came out a year ago is just bizarre because even though it did, I don’t really think about it coming out until the fall when we were headlining,” Grace told the Deseret News as she was preparing to start the new leg of the tour that night in Arkansas.

“(The Chesney/McGraw tour) really overshadowed the fact that we had an album out because it was such a great talking point. Everybody was like, ‘What the (expletive) are you doing on the road with a country act?!’ So now, even though the record is a year old, it still feels really fresh and it’s not like this is the last gas. It’s more like a victory lap and enjoy the music that we made and enjoy the songs that came from this record that are finally infused into the fans’ DNA so they can really sing along and enjoy.”

“It’s like school starting again. We’ve all got our best outfits on,” Tournet added about opening night.

For this tour, the band is playing places they either haven’t been to in awhile, or ones where they had memorable experiences the last time they were there. This Sunday, Red Butte Garden falls into the memorable experience category as the band returns for a second summer to rock Salt Lake under the stars.

I talked to both Grace and Scott on a wide range of topics to find out what the band has been up to since their last show in Utah at The Depot in October.

**European Tour**

Touring in Europe was a completely different experience from touring in the U.S., particularly in eastern Europe, Potter said.

“They are quiet as mice, which totally makes me nervous. I hate that. I like it when people are talking and screaming and yelling. There’s where I came from. That’s the DNA I came up in,” she said.

The audiences treated the concerts almost like a spiritual experience, according to Potter. In the States, Grace said she tries to never play more than two ballads in a row. On the European tour she found she could put three ballads in a row on the set list and still have room to do more.

“They really are looking for that gem, that one song that just stirs you from the bottom up,” she said.

Slower songs like “Big White Gate,” “Apologies” and “Stars” – when played by Grace as a solo on acoustic guitar – went over well with the European crowds. As well as anything by Tom Petty.

**Time Off**

Before Potter, an avid Twitter user, went on break, she tweeted to fans that she was going into hibernation for a month. But did anyone expect the fiery Potter to really sleep all of that time?

“That didn’t happen,” admitted Potter, who maybe took the first day or two to rest.

During her time off, Grace did a lot of traveling, including France, the Caribbean and “went on a lot of massive amount of hikes,” she said.

She also spent time at home in Vermont with her family. When she’s home, Potter does all the cooking.

“That’s my happy place. It’s favorite thing in the world to do,” he said.

Her signature dish? For outdoor cooking, it’s paella. Indoors, she’s a “big meatloaf fan” using ingredients such as Yak meat. Just how serious Potter is about cooking is evident when she begins talking about having the right kind of fire and the right coals for outdoor cooking.

Potter said when she’s home, she is not Grace Potter the rock star. Instead, she can be found doing, “Anything other than what I do for a living. It’s a good exercise in humility and getting back to who I grew up as.”

“Grace is like a chameleon,” Tournet said when asked to describe his longtime bandmate. “Everyone gets to see her as Grace Potter, this incredible, singer, front woman, entertainer. She’s beautiful, sexual, talented. kind of all the things under the sun. I think everyone kinda knows that about her already to a degree. But beyond that, she’s like this crazy talented person who’s talented in ways you wouldn’t even realize. She’s one of those people who’s good at everything she does. She’s an incredible painter and an artist and like a sketch artist. She has painted the interior of a house with her sister. She cuts all the hair for the band. She cooks food, she knows all about that. She knows about film-making.

“I still look at her and I’m not surprised when she does another crazy good thing.”

**New Music**

One area Potter said she did not put any focused energy into during her break was writing new music. However, fans did recently get a new GPN song when the band contributed to the soundtrack for the upcoming Johnny Depp movie, The Lone Ranger. Grace tried at first to write some original music to put in the movie, but she couldn’t quite find the right feel. Potter said she went on iTunes and purchased the original Lone Ranger radio series from the 1930′s and 1940′s in its entirety and listened to every episode in chronological order. She also noted that her dad was a big Lone Ranger fan from the Clayton Moore-era 1950s television series. So felt like she needed the write song that captured the era.

The theme of a train kept coming up as she listened to the radio series. And that’s when Potter also discovered an old record by Roy Acuff called “Devil’s Train.” She instantly knew it was the right song.

“I felt like the idea of a journey and the story of a train. In some way a moral connection between a train and humanity was a cool way to go.”

**Tournet’s new album**

One person who did put out an entire album of new music during the break was guitarist Scott Tournet. Tournet released his third solo album, *Ver La Luz*. The album of folksy/earthy songs is more mellow than a GPN album. Tournet found time writing and recording bits and pieces of it while GPN was on the road. He recorded parts on the bus, in his room and in hotels. Grace added vocals to “The Longing” which were recorded in a football stadium locker room prior to a GPN show last summer.

Writing and creating music, Tournet said, is something that he loves to constantly do, even during his “down” time.

“It’s like playing a video game for someone else. It’s truly where I’m happy,” he said. “Some people go for a run. Some people go to a self help group, I think I write a song.”

The songs that Tournet wrote are deeply personal. He admitted he went through some personal struggles in 2011, some in part to the ending of a long term relationship, and a small part due to adjusting to life on the road and GPN’s skyrocketing popularity.

“What came out, that was what I was feeling. I was kind of going through some personal stuff, and that came out in the songs. I think I’m old enough and mature enough that maybe I don’t need to try and hide everything. I guess I haven’t really tried in the past to hide stuff. What feels different about this now and why I’m pleased with it, is maybe the way I presented it.”

The way Tournet presented it was by not side-stepping the darker moments, “but casting an eye on the positive and optimistic as well, which is kind of what keeps us going in some ways day to day.”

While Tournet says there is a place for fun party songs, “that’s not where I was at. GPN, we make people party, we make people dance all the time. That’s what we do on a lot of levels….some days you don’t feel like that, I guess.”

“There are so many words coming into my mind,” Potter said when asked to describe Tournet. “I think the first thing I’m thinking of is he is kind of accidentally spiritual. He’s not one of these people who fancies himself as any kind of shaman. But he’s an explorer. He is seeking at all times. He is constantly looking and feeling and touching and discovering and learning and growing. His whole conquest in life is to discover and to learn and to grow. It’s never just sitting back and lazily being what he is. He is constantly growing and improving himself, and not in an annoying Tony Robbins kind of way (laughs). I’m just so constantly amazed at his ability to reflect on the good, the bad, and the ugly of himself and the situations he has gotten himself into and out of, and how he has grown as a person, is such an amazing tale, someone should write a book about it. If doesn’t, maybe I’ll have to write about him.”

**Ready to Rock**

About 2002-2003, Tournet was going to St. Lawrence University in northern New York. His car had a Vermont license plate, which was immediately spotted by another St. Lawrence student with a Vermont plate, Potter.

“She had a red Saab with a Vermont plate. So that was the first order of business was to find out who the other Vermonter in town was,” Tournet recalled.

While Potter was doing the singer/songwriter coffee shop/open mic circuit, Tournet and Burr were playing in a band together. It was Burr, Tournet said, who put GPN together.

“He saw her and figured it out,” he said. “He kind of had this mastermind plan all along. Grace and I were just pawns.”

The original version of the band included Potter, Burr, Tournet and bassist Brian Dondero.

After Dondero left, Tournet admitted it was hard on the band. Rather than simply replace him, the band decided to make a shift in musical style.

“Let’s try a different thing, Let’s go from a four piece to a five piece, and just have it be almost like a new band, to some degree,” he said. “It made everything fresher in a way.”

Catherine Popper took over bass and Benny Yurco was added as a second guitarist. The first album from the newly formed quintet was the band’s self-titled break through that included the singles, “Paris (Oh La La) and “Medicine.” Even some of the older songs were given a more rockin’ makeover in concert.

For *The Lion, The Beast, The Beat*, Popper exited and Libramento entered. The album included the great title track, “Never Go Back,” and “Stars.”

Despite the personnel changes, one area that hasn’t changed for the band is their tireless touring.

“We’re never the No. 1 flavor of the month, but we stick with it and we work hard,” Tournet said. “The band is healthy and happy and really getting along. We’re excited to be where we’re at.”