

# MUSIC NOTES

BY MARK MORRIS

Grace Potter And The Nocturnals have followed up their excellent 2010 self-titled breakthrough album, and it has some unexpected changes in addition to the departure of bassist Catherine Popper. Royal Southern Brotherhood is a new band formed by Cyril Neville (Neville Brothers), Devon Allman (Gregg Allman's son & leader of his own Honeytribe band) and blues rocker Mike Zito. Their debut album takes advantage of the members' musical versatility, yet it is surprisingly cohesive. The Grip Weeds is a band that is named after John Lennon's Private Grip Weed character in the anti-war movie How I Won The War. After twenty years of recording, the band has just released their first live album, and it demonstrates what is so great about the band.

## Grace Potter & The Nocturnals – The Lion The Beast The Beat



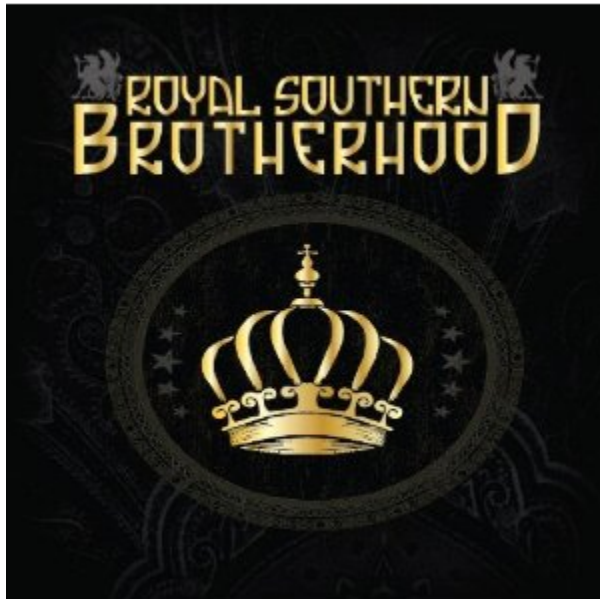
Grace Potter And The Nocturnals had a huge task to fulfill in following up their successful self-titled album from 2010. Grace wasn't happy with the first two weeks of recording, so she took a road trip to clear her head and get some fresh ideas. She wound up writing some new songs as well as completing some that were already in progress on her excursion. She and The Nocturnals also collaborated with Dan Auerbach of The Black Keys on three songs at his studio in Nashville. The Lion The Beast The Beat is the resulting album, and it is a great album, though it's probably not what most people expected. Grace's awesome soulful voice is versatile enough to sing anything and make it sound great.

Expectations were for a harder rock sound or a swing in the country music direction as the band has progressed to a harder rock sound live, but they are set to be the opening act for the Tim McGraw/Kenny Chesney tour after Grace recorded a duet with Kenny. Though there are some hard rocking moments, the album is primarily a combination of rock and pop with a hint of dance element. There is no country music to speak of, except on the Deluxe Editions, which include guest performances from Kenny Chesney and Willie Nelson.

The Lion The Beast The Beat kicks off with what appears to be a modern rock song that might be expected from Florence And The Machine, and then it kicks into high gear for some of the hardest rocking moments the band has ever recorded. The second song, and first single, Never Go Back, starts with a drum machine, a huge red flag, as I detest drum machines. Fortunately, acoustic drums are used in the song as well, so the drum machine only dominates the opening of this song. At first, I didn't like this song at all, and couldn't believe that Dan Auerbach and Grace Potter, two of my favorite artists, came up with it. Grace has said that she and Auerbach were tooling around in his studio, just to get acclimated, and the song was written within forty-five minutes of her and The Nocturnals' arrival. She was playing the keyboard part on an old Casio keyboard of Auerbach's, and he had her keep playing as he moved the keyboard close enough to plug it into the sound board for recording, and then joined in himself, totally off the cuff. Grace said that they added just enough "cheese whiz" to it to make it funky (thank goodness she knows that drum machines are cheesy). Never Go Back grew on me after hearing it three times, as did the entire album. Lonliest Soul and Runaway are the other two Auerbach collaborations, and are closer to what I expected from them, though there is only a slight resemblance to The Black Keys' newer songs. The whole album is strong, and it translates well live, as the band played it from start to finish at the album release party, which was streamed live on the internet. Grace Potter is a great songwriter, capable of writing both lighthearted rock and heartfelt ballads. Sometimes, her lyrics are cheesy as well, but make no mistake, she knows that they are cheesy.

The Lion The Beast The Beat is available on vinyl, download, and three CD variations: standard, Deluxe Edition, and a Best Buy-exclusive Super Deluxe Edition. The Best Buy Super Deluxe Edition is the way to go, as it includes the two bonus tracks found on the Deluxe Edition as well as a one hour concert DVD of Grace Potter And The Nocturnals Live From Lollapalooza 2011, which is worth the price of the entire package alone. It is a fiery performance that the band has become known for, and is the best example of the band live on video that I have seen to date. The last album came with a Best Buy-exclusive DVD as well, and it sold out pretty quickly, so don't wait on this one.

## Royal Southern Brotherhood – Royal Southern Brotherhood



Royal Southern Brotherhood is a new band fronted by three soulful vocalists in percussionist Cyril Neville and guitarists Devon Allman and Mike Zito. The band is rounded out with a great rhythm section in bassist Charlie Wooten and drummer Yonrico Scott. The band formed after a discussion about why The Allman Brother Band and The Neville Brothers never toured or collaborated together. Devon Allman and Cyril Neville began writing songs together via email, and two months later, the band was rehearsing. Not only did the band come together quickly, but the album was recorded in five days and released roughly one year after the initial discussion about the Allmans and Nevilles took place.

The band's sound is blues rock based, but there is a lot of musical diversity, including a healthy dose of soul, a little bit of world music and some jazzy elements as well. Both Allman and Zito are excellent guitarists with individual styles, but they can also play together in unison, much like the Allman Brothers Band. The two guitarists met while working at Guitar Center in St. Louis in 1999. Having three great lead singers compliments the diversity of the band's sound, and adds more texture to the music. The album is surprisingly good, and there isn't a weak track on it. Devon Allman, a one-time Memphian who has recorded two albums at Ardent Studios, contributes the earthy ballad Left My Heart In Memphis, which suits his vocals perfectly. Moonlight Over The Mississippi is a tribute to the Mississippi River, which ties the band together (Allman and Zito live in St. Louis, the rest of the band in New Orleans). The last track on the album is Brotherhood, an instrumental that allows Devon Allman to stretch out with his Allman

Brothers influenced guitar soloing, though his tone is closer to Dickey Betts than that of Devon's uncle Duane Allman, whose specialty was slide guitar.

Royal Southern Brotherhood is on Ruf Records label, a German label that is dedicated to keeping the blues alive, and is available on CD or download.

## The Grip Weeds – Speed Of Live



The Grip Weeds are a power pop rock band with psychedelic leanings from New Jersey. Brothers Kurt Reil (vocals and drums) and Rick Reil (vocals and guitar) formed the band in the late 1980's, and they have been making records since the early 90's. Secret weapon lead guitarist/vocalist Kristin Pinell has been with the band since 1993, and she is an integral part of the band, skillfully playing vintage guitars and assisting with great three part vocal harmonies. While the band is heavily influenced by British Invasion bands, they also combine some American garage and folk rock elements with psychedelia, resulting in a retro sound that has enough modern edge that it comes out sounding unique. Speed Of Live is the band's first live album, and it shows that the band is just as good live, though rawer, than they are in the studio.

Speed Of Live is made up of songs from four shows recorded between 2007-2010, and captures the band in fine form. All of the songs are Grip Weeds originals, except for a cover of the Byrd's (So You Want To Be A) Rock 'n' Roll Star and Johnny Kidd and The Pirates' Shakin' All Over. The bulk of the songs are from their criminally overlooked 24 track double CD Strange Change Machine album from 2010. The band was still refining these songs live before they were recorded in the studio, and the band's songs continue to evolve even after they are recorded, which keeps them fresh and vibrant. This technique works well for The Grip Weeds, but it would be disastrous for many bands. Speed Of Live is very well

recorded, sounding like one show instead of being pieced together from several shows that were recorded over a four year span. I don't often recommend a live album as an icebreaker to learn about a band, but this album is an exception. It includes the bulk of the band's best songs, including Astral Man, their most recognized song, due to heavy airplay on Little Steven's Underground Garage radio show and satellite radio station.

Speed Of Live is available on CD or download (both include a great download bonus cover song of Cream's I Feel Free), and there is a deluxe package available at [www.gripweeds.com](http://www.gripweeds.com) that includes the Live Vibes DVD, which is a combination of the band playing nine songs live in their home studio, discussing their history and do-it-yourself mentality, and four music videos. This package also includes a download of the Speed Of Live album and the audio of the nine live songs from Live Vibes DVD as well as the cover of Cream's I Feel Free. The download is in both mp3 and high resolution WAV files, and is a 3 GB of music! The package also includes an autographed 11" x 14" poster of the Speed Of Live album art. It's a cool package from a cool band.