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AT HOME WITH
**GRACE
POTTER!**



**Q & A WITH
GRACE
POTTER**





STORY BY
BENJAMIN LERNER

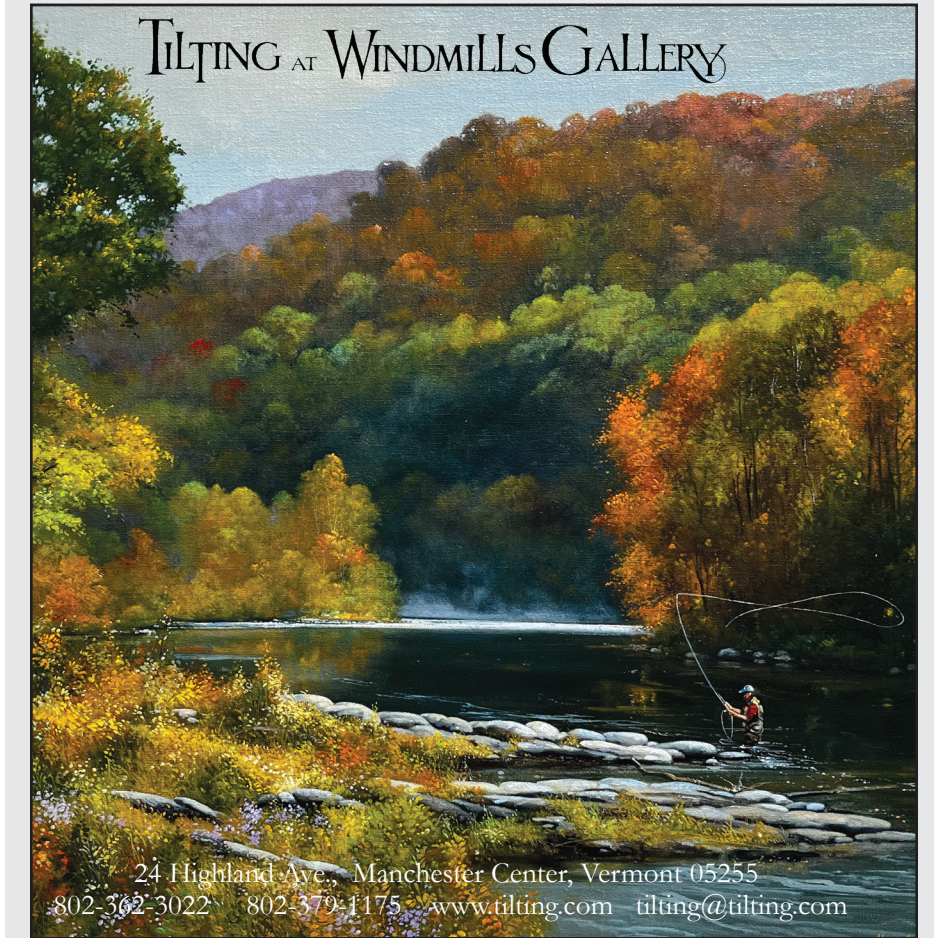
PHOTOGRAPHY
GREGORY CHERIN

Grace Potter is a gifted, three-time GRAMMY®-nominated songwriter, vocalist, and instrumentalist who was born and raised in Fayston, Vermont. After making a bold entry into the music industry through the inspired projects that she released with her celebrated band, Grace Potter and the Nocturnals, Potter branched out on her own and began to focus on her solo career. Since then, the success of her critically-acclaimed solo albums, *Midnight* (2015) and *Daylight* (2019), has brought her to the highest peaks of cultural prominence. Potter is currently touring across the country after releasing her powerful new album, *Mother Road*, on August 18th, 2023. In between performances, Potter sat down with *VERMONT Magazine* to shed light on her artistic process, the inspiration behind *Mother Road*, the creative connections in Vermont that shaped her musical development, and the importance of fearless authenticity.

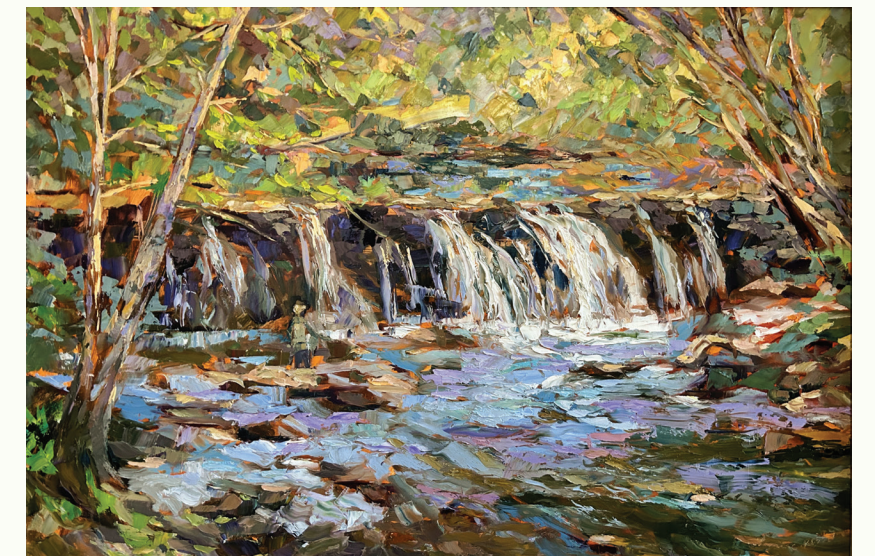
Q: Thanks so much for joining us, Grace! We're loving *Mother Road*, and its lead single, "Good Time," has been in heavy rotation on our playlists. Starting off, let's talk all about the new album! What was the primary inspiration behind it, and what was the statement that you wanted to make?

A: When I grew up here in Vermont, I was always aware of the mountains, the horizon, and what was waiting around the next bend. From every angle in the Mad River Valley, you can see curving roads and hidden drives. It wasn't a wide and open place where you could look out and see expansive landscapes—it was more cloistered, and it felt more like a hug from a protective mother. Driving across the country over the course of my career and seeing all of the different terrain, it made me realize that every type of land tells a different story. In terms of American folklore, vagabonds and hobos are the only people who would never accept any one landscape as their own—it was almost like nothing belonged to them. Therefore, by shedding that feeling of protection from the land like I experienced here in Vermont, I discovered that I could create a different kind of "mother" from an amalgamation of all of those different horizons. They can add up in our minds as something bigger, and something that's more planetary in nature as opposed to tribal or regional. I never felt like I belonged anywhere, but having said that, I think that there's also a timeless charm and novelty to the American dream that was chased from the earliest days of American history. I wanted to explore that theme, as well as the genres of music that came from that lifestyle.

Q: Those varying musical influences are wonderfully interwoven with the theme of going out on the road and being truly aware and grateful of wherever you are throughout the album. To that end, how would you say the time that you spent in Vermont—as well as the time that you have spent on the road in other places—has influenced your artistic development?



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A: I was deeply influenced by my upbringing and the location in which I grew up. To be honest, I didn't realize just how rare it was to grow up in a Vermont ski town. Other people who came to town to visit would see our small-town Vermont lifestyle as a novel, idyllic, and magical existence. I'm very proud of where I came from, but I wouldn't say it defined me. It wasn't my whole identity. I grew up around working farmers and people who did define their lives by the land they lived on. Their way of life and the manner in which they made a living was entirely wrapped up in the care of that land. I think I came to see artistry as something that could flourish here in Vermont fairly early on in my life. So many of the folks who live in the Mad River Valley are architects, artisans, builders, makers, dreamers, and inventors—and the same thing applies to the entire state. There's an

exploratory energy that accompanies the mental state of being a Vermonter, but until I traveled outward to other towns and cities across the United States with my band and started seeing the stark contrast of lifestyles, I didn't really recognize the uniqueness of the cultural autonomy that people were seeking out here in Vermont. I recognized that it wasn't as prevalent in the other places that I traveled to, and it deepened my gratitude for the place that I came from. It reinforced my understanding of the importance of humility. Even in a swashbuckling career such as mine, staying humble and remembering your roots is key to staying afloat in the world and in life as you grow older.

Q: I saw a recent interview that you did for Senator Bernie Sanders' YouTube channel where you touched on how you explored extracurricular

creativity during your teenage years in Vermont. In your own words, you said you sometimes felt like a "square peg trying to fit in a round hole." You also talked about the Governor's Institute for the Arts and how it helped you. What role did the arts organizations in Vermont play in catalyzing your creativity?

A: Governor's Institute had a huge impact on me. It was also, on a foundational level, a change in my social understanding of myself. When I got there, I realized that there were so many different catalysts for creativity. I found myself connecting to many people my age and professional artists of all types who made their way in Vermont. Verandah Porche was one of those people. Geof Hewitt was another, and I learned about the poetic essence that they were seeking out when they came and lived in

Vermont in the 1960s and 1970s. It turned me in a new direction that leaned more towards storytelling, as well as the literary and theatrical worlds within Vermont. For me, it was my moment where I realized, "This is where I belong." I understood that I didn't need to be a traditional craftsman dedicated to a single trade. I could be an artist and find those performative and existential elements within myself. I was also invited into a beautiful world there with Peter Gould, Jim Sardonis, Robert De Cormier, Chuck Meese, the Bread & Puppet Theatre, and Village Harmony. There were so many amazing people that I connected with that influenced my trajectory through high school and college. They connected me to people who had similar passion and excitement about things that weren't necessarily associated with the traditional

paths that a creative person might take in Vermont.

Q: That sounds like a wonderful creative community. You're a passionate and outspoken advocate for artistic programming and education in Vermont. Are you currently working on any initiatives with the Vermont State Government, or any other Vermont-based public or private organizations, which will help developing artists find their creative path in the same way you did?

A: Absolutely! It's the next step in my process of understanding what I can do that goes beyond my own journey, takes it back to the world I grew up in, and nurtures creative people from all walks of life that are seeking artistic outlets. Bernie Sanders and I hosted several events in August. We held town hall events where we traveled

around the state and invited members of the community of all ages to share their stories, their creations, their music, their poetry, and their art. The initiative that I'm working on with Bernie is something that is very close to my heart, but I think it's just the beginning of a long campaign of trying to give back and provide Vermonters with a better sense of what is possible in this state. So many of the creative types that I know in Vermont hide in the woods. It's not that they don't want to share what they have created with the world—there just aren't enough outlets for it, because there is less cultural access here than a more metropolitan area would have. That means that we need to pull people out of the woodwork and invite them into the conversation in order to propel it forward.

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Q: Vermont has always been a sanctuary of innovation in every sense, and its music scene is certainly no exception. As you mentioned, there are a lot of talented people here. As someone who has successfully taken their creative gifts to the global stage, what do you think is the best way to help other Vermont creatives bring their art and music to a wider audience?

A: When I started Grand Point North at Waterfront Park in Burlington, my aim was to show the whole world just how amazing Vermont really is. Yes, Vermont is charming in a classic sense—it has cows, pastures, delicious ice cream, maple syrup, and cheese—but Vermont is also propelling multiple generations of creative and innovative people, and they don't necessarily have an immediate access point in Vermont. It is harder to make a splash in a big city than it is in a small town. But, if you really want to reach people on a global scale, you do need to not be afraid to step into those larger places like Chicago, Nashville, Austin, and New York. The tiny corners that Vermont provides serve as seed pods for creative development, like the Bread Loaf School. There are many places like that in Vermont where people incubate unimaginably big concepts before they bring them out to the world. I think there's a need to go beyond the mountains and hidden driveways, take our creativity beyond our brave little state, and become brave individuals who understand that the metaphoric womb that we grew up in here is just the beginning. It's a great gift to have that protection, peace, and tranquility to grow these big, wild ideas, but there is a moment where we need to take it beyond that.

Q: You've done just that in your career, and it's inspiring to say the least. You and your husband, Eric Valentine, have also constructed a gorgeous artistic sanctuary of your own here in Vermont with a multi-purpose studio space, which you dubbed the "Sonic Forest." What was the primary inspiration behind its construction, and what was the vision for the space that you wanted to create there?



Grace dancing in her woodland Goddess cap (Made here in Vermont).

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A: Eric and I wanted a creative playground with absolutely no boundaries. We both had issues with other kids and peers when we were growing up, trying to find and exercise our freedom, and trying to fit in. I was the fourth of five very outspoken, magical family members, but we lived in a very modest home with a modest life. I think in understanding the importance of humility in Vermont's culture, one finds that many amazing and creative places are hidden behind barn structures. Eric and I thought it would be really fun to create a whimsical world, where absolutely anything is possible within the confines of our home. The aesthetics are certainly important for me, but for Eric, as a record producer, it's more about the sonic aspect. Having a big, beautiful, expansive barn space to work in has really smashed all of the ceilings in terms

of what's possible for both of us. We've been able to find an efficient and honest way to tap into the creative resources within ourselves without being stuck in West Hollywood traffic. Another deeply-influential part of this move and transition from California back to Vermont is that we wanted to raise our child, Sagan, in a place where we could really connect as a family. We moved back amidst the COVID lockdowns, and it was really important for me to be able to see my family and the people that I cared about. By the year's end, we had a farm!

Q: In context with your return to Vermont, *Mother Road* seems like a triumphant declaration that even though you are embracing your childhood roots and building this new life here, that your home is still everywhere the road takes you. Would you say that's a fair interpretation?

A: That's exactly what I came to understand as I was writing the album. *Mother Road* is the beginning of a new creative chapter for me. I'm hoping that in the midst of the process, I can get out on the road, reconnect with fans, and become comfortable with the choices and lifestyle changes that I've made. So much of the record is about exploring regret, understanding of self, mental health, and longing. It's the promise of the American dream that's just waiting around that next corner and doesn't ever end. I think by the time that I'm done with this particular project, which has a lot more to it than just the album, *Mother Road*, there is a lesson to be learned within myself. It's been waiting like low-hanging fruit, but I just haven't been able to grasp it. I think that the journey I'm embarking on with this record, as well as touring and stepping away from the farm, is going





"When I grew up here in Vermont, I was always aware of the mountains, the horizon, and what was waiting around the next bend."

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to cement the understanding in my heart of exactly what this place that we have built in Vermont means to me and why it matters to me. I need to do some deeper exploration into that, and yet, I don't judge that impulse. I very much enjoy the process of exploring what it means to be a Vermonter who is proud of coming from Vermont, and who is certainly "of" Vermont, but who has also been touched by places and cultures and people who don't necessarily have the understanding of the place where I come from. I hope the project will provide some truth and texture for everyone, but if nothing else, at least it will for me.

Q: I think it can be argued that any worthwhile journey involves some degree of deconstruction and rebuilding—both in a literal and metaphoric sense. Coincidentally, Vermonters all around the state are channeling their industrious, creative, and hopeful energy into rebuilding their communities in a different way after the flood. You performed a beautiful, livestreamed flood benefit concert in partnership with Vermont Community Foundation less than a week after the waters receded. What inspired you to partner with them for that livestreamed engagement, and how did it feel to give back to your home state in such a time of need?

A: It was devastating to see what happened to the place where I grew up. I didn't understand until I felt it and was really there. Landing at home after returning from California in the wake of the flood, I could sense the difference. I felt the stinging urgency to get home, much like when we came back in the midst of the COVID pandemic. I needed to hug the people that I cared about and see, feel, and touch my home state. It was such an instant physical and emotional reaction that I don't even remember calling my management about planning the livestream, but I reached out to Vermont's Senators and everyone else who I could talk to in order to



help plan it. Within four hours, I had decided and declared that I was going to do it, but there was still the reality check of having to put together a concert in one day. I had already done many livestreams during COVID, when I established the "Monday Night Twilight Hour." I can promise you that no matter how many times you do it,

it's equally insane and impossible, and it never goes off without a hitch. It was all worth it, though. We got a lovely note from the Vermont Community Foundation saying that the donation spike from my livestream was a beautiful thing for them to wake up to. It had a palpable effect on me.

Q: As a result of your creative success, you've built an incredibly large platform and toured around the world, but your music is still very grounded and resonant. It talks about where you are in your life and career, and it distills large ideas and concepts down to their digestible essence. Moving forward, what would you say is the



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biggest takeaway from this album, and how does that factor into your understanding of what it means to be a Vermonter in this fluid, transitional stage of your life?

A: I think that much like the flood proves that there are forces that we have no control over, there are also forces within ourselves and in our lives that we can't control, which are more powerful than anything that we can ever really understand. But after the rain clears, there are still beautiful rivers that we can paddle down that are waiting for us to explore. Vermont, like anywhere else, faces real challenges, but it still has incredible beauty, amazing people, and bucolic, rolling, green grassy fields. I think there is a balance there, and that measured, nuanced understanding of the brand of Vermont is something I've never held myself responsible for. But I also feel that it does hold an unspoken power—almost like a superpower. There's a look of glazed-over awe that people get in their eyes when they hear the word, "Vermont." They have a vision of it that is actually quite real, honest, and true. It's not a façade. Vermont needs to be protected, as well as appreciated, and I think that the flood reminded people of that fact. Whether I'm at home here in Vermont or on the road, I want to place myself as close to the true nature of reality as possible, while also sharing the beauty and the magic that's always there.



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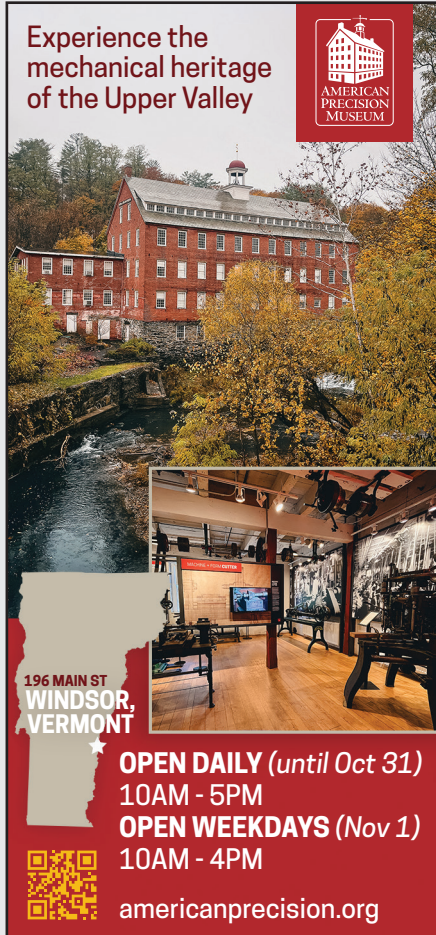


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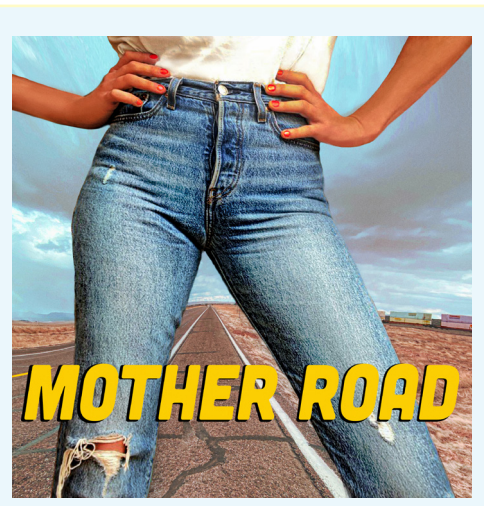
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Mother Road: Artistry Unleashed

Take a soul-stirring road trip with Grace Potter, celebrated as one of the greatest voices in Rock, as she unleashes her fifth studio LP, Mother Road

Released on August 18, 2023, *Mother Road* is an audacious and daring album that deconstructs Potter's deepest thoughts, fears, personal triumphs, and regrets with brutal honesty. Drawing inspiration from John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, where Route 66 is dubbed the "Mother of all roads...the road of flight," Potter embarked on a cross-country journey, hoping to gain perspective on her life. While doing so, she discovered buried memories that fueled her creativity, shaping an album that explores the roads she could have taken.

Produced by Eric Valentine—who also happens to be Potter's husband—*Mother Road* encompasses soulful rock, roots, funk, country, and R&B. Grace's powerhouse vocals, complemented by her top-flight band, make for an expansive soundscape. The album's ten original tracks are a musical adventure. From the searing slide guitar and attitude in "Ready Set Go" to the heartfelt tribute to anti-heroines in "Lady Vagabond," each song captivates listeners with emotional depth. At the heart of the project lies "Little Hitchhiker," co-written with Natalie Hemby. The song reimagines Grace's own profound experience of running away from home at the tender age of nine years old.

Grace Potter's electrifying tour is currently continuing to unfold across the U.S., with unforgettable performances throughout the country. Her two sold-out shows in Vermont will be held at The Shelburne Museum as part of the Ben & Jerry's Concerts on The Green series on September 15 and September 16.



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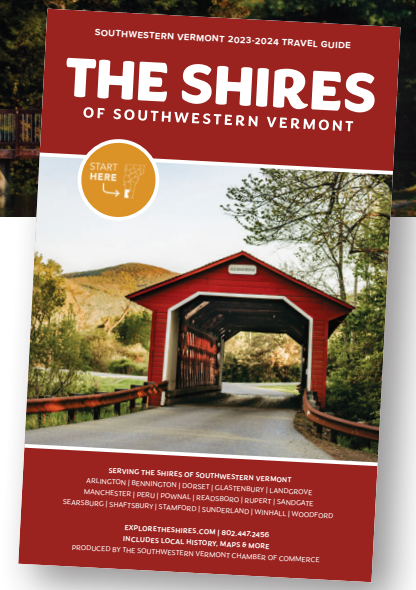
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A behind-the-scenes look at Potter's influential Vermont music festival, Grand Point North

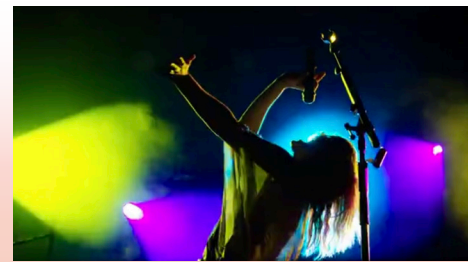
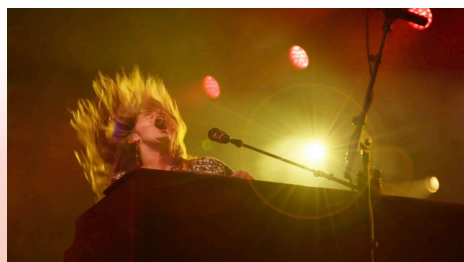
Grace Potter has delighted audiences worldwide throughout her career. She has also made an indelible impression on Vermont's creative scene through legendary performances in the Green Mountain State, including the Grand Point North Festival.

Grand Point North is an enchanting two-day music festival that is held at Waterfront Park in Burlington. Founded by Grace Potter and the Nocturnals, this annual extravaganza of sights and sounds took place every year from 2011 to 2019—and promises to return in the future. The festivals have usually unfolded during mid-September weekends over two days on two adjacent stages, ensuring a seamless flow of performances without any overlap. Potter headlined both nights, captivating the audience with her magnetic stage presence and mesmerizing vocals.

Grand Point North has also attracted a star-studded lineup of additional artists. From the soulful tunes of The Avett Brothers to the dynamic rhythms of Trombone Shorty & Orleans Avenue, the festival boasted a diverse array of musical talent. Other renowned acts like Lake Street Dive, The Flaming Lips, Old Crow Medicine Show, Guster, Trey Anastasio Band, Jackson Browne, and Nathaniel Rateliff & The Night Sweats also performed, leaving audiences in spellbound awe.

Beyond showcasing nationally-touring acts, Grand Point North also proudly celebrates Vermont's vibrant local music scene, creating an inclusive space for local talent to shine. The festival also showcases the artistic wonders of Grand Point Weird, an eclectic art installation curated by Grace's sister, Charlotte. In addition, Grand Point Local offers a delightful celebration of Vermont's culinary treasures, which is organized by the beloved Burlington eatery, The Skinny Pancake.

When the COVID-19 pandemic led to the cancellation of the festival for two consecutive years in 2020 and 2021, Potter shifted her focus towards working on her brilliant new album, *Mother Road*. However, fear not! Potter continues to go above and beyond for her Vermont fans, and she will light up the stage in the Green Mountain State once again with two dynamic performances in 2023 at Shelburne Museum. Potter adds that she is currently laying plans for Grand Point North to return better than ever, and looks forward to bringing the beloved Vermont festival back to the Burlington Waterfront.



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