

10,000 Maniacs Finally Land That Major Record Deal

By MARK GENOVESE

In order to keep their spirits up during their three years of traveling from one low-paying concert date to the next, Jamestown's 10,000 Maniacs used to joke about getting the "MJD" — a "Major Label Deal."

Now they have it. Elektra-Asylum Records signed the group to a recording contract in November, and the six Western New Yorkers are to fly to Great Britain in the spring to record their first album, said group member Dennis Drew.

"It took a while to get the deal together," Drew said. "This is a slow-moving business."

Drew said the contract "is a good first deal," giving them "the dollars to get going."

It is "in the six figures," and the money will be the budget for the record, covering all pre-production, and production costs for the record, and attorney's fees, he said.

Elektra is to first work on promoting the record. Concert tour details are to be worked out after the record is released. Drew said the Maniacs will have to set up most of their own tour dates until then.

The first record and a video are guaranteed, and the company has an option for the group's next seven. The part about the subsequent records can be renegotiated by the group's attorney after the first record comes out, he said.

The Maniacs were to have signed with CBS Records early this fall, but Harold Thompson, a company representative who took a special interest in the band, said he was accepting a position with Elektra-Asylum. Thompson said the group could stay with CBS — but noted that he would not be there to watch out for them — or wait for his call from Elektra.

Natalie Merchant, vocalist and songwriter for the group, said the Maniacs recorded three songs for CBS in a studio in White Plains. The demos "turned out all right," but their producer — who had worked with Jimi Hendrix and Led Zeppelin — did not suit them. She said he liked the band and wanted to produce their record, but the group did not want to go with him. Miss Merchant said the Maniacs would like a producer who has worked



At Paddington Station

Posing for a publicity still in Paddington Station in London are Jamestown's 10,000 Maniacs. From left, Steve Gustafson, Robert Buck, Natalie Merchant, Jerome Augert, Dennis Drew and J.C. Lombardo.

who is influential in the industry in Britain. Peel liked the band and "championed our cause," Drew said.

Miss Merchant said that not many American bands are treated with the respect shown to the Maniacs by the British music press. Britons tend to think of American kids as self-indulgent. "They have this attitude that we have everything provided for us, our concerts don't go beyond what I own or desire," she said.

Also shaping the European impression of Americans are the movies and television shows that are exported. "They think everywhere in America is

in her music cannot exist in a New York background but that she can relax and be creative at home.

In London, she said, "The subways were immaculately clean, the streets didn't have trash all over them and they even cover up their graffiti. They will plaster over it."

Four singles are to be recorded and released in Great Britain first. "Britain is a singles market," Drew said. After this, the group is to tour England and other parts of Europe on the strength of the singles. Then "we'll see how it goes," before the album is released in Europe.

when I think there is no brightness in world, and Natalie's voice just makes me feel happy."

"We might have been the first Americans they had ever spoken to. I glad it was us instead of Van Halen," she said.

While the band appeals to mostly college-age audiences in the United States, it has a large following of teenagers in Europe. This is because the record is played on the radio there. Here, one of the main courses in a teenager's musical diet is heavy metal. "Heavy metal is getting so much attention. It's not teaching kids any-

thing. The performers don't even take themselves seriously. The attitude is "This makes us money and it's what kids want to hear." They created the market. We can change it," she said.

Meanwhile, the key to a good record is preparation. After getting the basics down, the Maniacs will be able to pay attention to smaller details during recording. They are working on the fundamentals, taking voice and instrument lessons.

"You get into bad habits when playing a lot of dates. You may forget to keep your elbow up, or your wrist down, and when to sing from your diaphragm," Drew said.

Drew said he had a fear of being over-produced. But with Boyd the group feels as though they can maintain their integrity and have the record still be accessible to listeners. "We want to make a record we'll like," he said.

Miss Merchant said she tries to not be obvious with the messages in her songs, trying to create an image rather than "be preachy."

"A lot of people say your songs aren't going to change anything. But it's not a lost effort," she said.

The 10,000 Maniacs feel their budding success is more the result of three years of hard work than of luck. The band played every other day somewhere around the east coast in 1983, he noted.

He said they ran into the usual assortment of record industry crooks and creeps who are eager to rip off a struggling group trying to market its own records.

They also spent most of their nights on tour bunking in friends' apartments, living in close quarters and sharing head colds. Although they feared that the crew was living in a pipe dream, families and friends have been supportive, lending them money.

However, Drew admitted the group was in the right place at the right time when Thompson walked into the band's first concert in a major New York rock club.

While speeding around on the tour bus, the Maniacs also used to joke about being "the NBT — the Next Big Thing."

You never know...