

By MARK GENOVESE

To say the the crowd in Muenster, West Germany, appreciated that May evening's performance by Jamestown's 10,000 Maniacs would be an understatement.

"We turned on the lights and started the taped music. We were getting dressed downstairs and they wouldn't leave. They were clapping in rhythm, pounding on the floor," said keyboardist Dennis Drew.

Steven Gustafson, bassist, said the club manager told them: "You couldn't hear the music through the cheering because the people were screaming so loud." So we had to do another song." The German fans even knew the words to the band's songs.

They have accomplished a lot the past few months: polished their skills to major-label standards; excited fans in England, the Netherlands and Germany; and won even more acclaim from the European music press.

But most important, they finally earned what most local bands can only wish for: a recording contract. The album, *The Wishing Chair*, was released by Elektra Records Friday in North America and Europe.

People locally have a lot to be proud of, as all members are Western New York residents. Drew, Gustafson, vocalist Natalie Merchant, and guitarists Robert Buck and J.C. Lombardo, are from Jamestown and drummer Jerome Augustyniak is from Sloan.

In fact, Miss Merchant refers to her home frequently on the album through songs titled: *Lilly Dale*, *Cotten Alley*, and *Maddox Table*.

#### The Basic Tracks

One of the band's first activities after arriving in London on March 26, their stop on their European tour, was to appear live on a television music show, *The Tube*.

The band rented a house in the Muswell Hill section of London. A lawn mower was not available, so they let the weeds their spacious backyard grow and used the jungle backdrop for photo sessions. They also rented a grill and had frequent evening cookouts on the back porch.

The group began its studio sessions for the album on April 3. First the group had to record the basic instrumental tracks of each song. From these any changes could be made for the other instruments. But it was most important for the band to produce good drum and bass tracks to create a tempo for each song.

Often it takes more than two hours of testing for the producer and engineer to get an acceptable drum sound, Gustafson said.

Drew said they worked for about two weeks from about 2 p.m. to 2 a.m., with a break for dinner. Producer Joe Boyd helped keep the atmosphere relaxed, Gustafson said.

Drew called Boyd "a real mentor," noting he gave the young band a chance to experiment and fail. "He let us do what we wanted to and only would tell us what didn't work or what he didn't like," he said. "He would keep us from banging our heads against the wall on one song."

The Maniacs planned to first release a single in Europe, entitled *Can't Ignore the Train*, on June 10. Four songs had to be finished by the middle of May because a B-side song was needed as were an extended version of the single and a third track for an extended-play record, which would also be released.

The band was to pick three or four suggestions for the single, from which the record company would pick one.

The company wanted an extended remix of *Train* to be placed on the EP, but the band felt the song worked well at its length of 2 minutes and 45 seconds. After some discussion, the band tried to throw in a longer instrumental in the middle. As a result, the new product was now a whole three minutes.

Elektra officials and the band decided then to add on an older Maniacs song to the EP, *Grey Victory*. The single and EP were finished by about May 15.

#### Touring in Holland and Germany

Then the first leg of the tour began, as the band traveled overnight on a ferry to Amsterdam, only to be told upon their arrival at the hotel at 9 a.m. they could not check in until 2 p.m.

At most of the dates the band drew about 400 to 500 fans in clubs that could hold about 600 people. Gustafson said they often were called to do three encores per night. "We had to stop playing with people in there, we ran out of songs," he said.

Besides Muenster, other dates were in Venlo, Bochum, Hamburg, and at a U.S. Army base in Frankfurt. During the tour, Jerome Augustyniak, the band's drummer, had a cold but managed to play each night, even the multiple encores. "He was a real trooper," Gustafson said.

The band expected the crossing of the East German border to be tense, having heard stories of other bands being detained all day as the border guards ripped apart their vans. Luckily, they did not have any problems, with the advice of Scumbeck Sabotka, their German road manager who was provided by the promoter.

"The border is barbed wire and guns. Machine gun turrets. Automatics. Guys with guns checking you over," Drew said.

"They got on the bus and they would have everyone's passport. You would all have to sit up straight, take your sunglasses off and look at them, Gustafson said.

Gustafson said one guard wanted a photograph of the band to give to his children, "because we were an American pop band."

"You've got to bribe them half the time," Drew said. "We were fortunate. I guess we looked like a wholesome crew," Gustafson added.

The mood of East Berlin was cold, the two said, noting the Berlin Wall was about 200 yards from their hotel. Drew band members were told by a man at a club in Berlin there are kids on the other side of the wall in East Germany that hear their music on the radio, but were not able to come to the concert that night.

Drew noted that one fan, Roberto from Italy, said he traveled 22 hours by train to see the band.

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