'Tonight Show' Spot Next For Maniacs

NOV 23 1987

By TIM O'BRIEN

Heeeeeeeeeeeere's... 10,000 Maniacs.

Fresh from two band members' appearance on *Late Night With David Letterman* Saturday, Jamestown's most well-known rock band will next perform on *The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson*.

"On Dec. 4, the whole band is going to be on *The Tonight Show*," Maniac Manager Peter Leak told *The Post-Journal*. "We sent a record and stuff to *The Tonight Show* and they loved it."

Guitarist Robert Buck and vocalist Natalie Merchant appeared shortly after 1 a.m. Saturday on *Late Night With David Letterman*.

Plans call for the group to perform two songs on *The Tonight Show*, Buck said. "We're going to be doing 'Peace Train' and then Natalie's going to be doing 'Verdi Cries' with the orchestra."

"Peace Train" is the Maniacs' version of a Cat Stevens' song, while "Verdi Cries" was written by Ms. Merchant. On the *In My Tribe* album, the latter song is performed with a quartet, three strings and a piano.

The two songs were selected by Carson's staff, Leak said.

The band's appearances on both shows — what bassist Steven Gustafson calls "the double NBC coup" — will bring their music before a wider audience, Buck said.

"As far as physical things like record sales, it's hard to say (what effects the appearances will have)," he said. "Now when our next album comes out, we'll be able to do the Carson and Letterman shows. It sort of sets a standard for us."

The Tonight Show appearance is likely to be a big boost to the Maniacs' career, Leak said.

"It has to be a step in the right direction, just the exposure to an audience that doesn't get to hear them," he said. "Johnny Carson is the ultimate acceptance."

The band's appearance on Carson's show may quell radio stations' concerns over their moniker, Leak said. The band was named, as a joke, after a slasher movie called *2,000 Maniacs*.

Buck said he believes the band was probably chosen for *The Tonight Show* for reasons similar to those for their *Late Night* appearance.

"I know they got 'hold of us. It's probably a similar scenario," he said. "I know last night, even on the *Letterman* show, people were coming to us — like writers — and saying they really liked the record. I think even David Letterman listens to it."

After their performance, Letterman shook Ms. Merchant's hand and congratulated her on the *In My Tribe* album, which he held up to the cameras when introducing them.

Ms. Merchant and Buck performed "Don't Talk," the Maniacs' newest single, on the *Late Night* show. Letterman's own band played the other instruments.

Buck said Saturday the *Letterman* show is filmed as if it were live.

"The whole thing was pretty strange, just from the fact that nobody ever came to say, 'This is the scenario,' " he said. No one told him exactly when to take the stage, Buck said, and he walked out — off camera — and stood while Letterman continued talking before a commercial break.

The show's filming went fast, Buck said.

"It was all over pretty quickly. It was pretty strange, actually," he said. "The whole thing is pretty ambient."

Before the show, he said, the two Maniacs rehearsed for about 40 minutes with Letterman's band, who had received the music in advance.

When they started the rehearsal, he said, the song sounded rough. But after playing it through about four times, he said, they were ready for the airwaves.

Buck also handed out his trademark ties to every member of the band and Letterman.

What's next for the group, an appearance on *Saturday Night Live*?

"Maybe," Leak said with a chuckle. "We're working on it now. It looks like we certainly have a shot. Just to get on Letterman and Johnny Carson within the space of two weeks is very exciting."

One concern with the band's TV appearances, Leak said, is that Ms. Merchant's voice be kept in shape. After four months of almost nightly concerts, he said, she had begun sounding slightly hoarse.

As a result, he said, she took the advice of her own song title the day of the Letterman show: "Don't Talk."

During a recent week's tour of England, Leak said, the band members sold out every performance. At one 2,000-seat arena, he said, 400 people had to be turned away.

Album sales are now nearing 90,000, he said. "Hopefully by Christmas it will have topped 100,000."

The manager's job now is to keep attention focused on the band, he said, and a new single will be released early in 1988. "This record is going to be worked well into the New Year."