

# 10,000 Maniacs

## New Single To Be Out Next Week

By TIM O'BRIEN

A week from today, Jamestown's 10,000 Maniacs will release "Peace Train," the first single from their new album. And the band is planning to film the video to the record locally.

The band's second major-label album, *In My Tribe*, is due in record stores nationwide July 22.

Lead vocalist and lyricist Natalie Merchant said the new record is more personal than the band's first national release, 1985's *The Wishing Chair*.

"I seem on this album to avoid really broad issues," she said.

That's not to say the Maniacs will not tackle important issues on the album: The topics include child abuse, alcoholism, homelessness and illiteracy.

Michael Stipe, vocalist for the band R.E.M., accompanies Ms. Merchant on "The Campfire Song," a song about exploiting natural resources.

One of her favorite songs on the record, she said, is "Verdi Cries."

"I wrote it last summer when we were rehearsing at the Palace Theater," she said. Producer Peter Asher then enlisted a quartet, three strings and a piano, to perform on the record.

"It was just really exciting to work with the players he hired," she said. The song was recorded in one take, an unusual occurrence in rock music.

"What's the Matter Here?" written by guitarist Robert Buck, is another favorite, Ms. Merchant said.

"I like them all, which is good because we'll be doing them another three years — or 10 years, depending on how long we go on doing this."

If the album was not by her band, Ms. Merchant said, she would still buy *In My Tribe*.

"I think I would really like it.

And that's the way I listen to music. I don't look for a particular sound or style. On this album, there are so many different styles represented. I think I would really be enticed by that."

The record encompasses bits of gospel, folk pop, rock, disco and string music, she noted.

Unlike *The Wishing Chair*, the new album does not refer to local places. "I did write a song about my brother. It's a home reference, about him joining the Army against my wishes."

All but one song is original. "Peace Train" is a cover of a Cat Stevens' song. But Ms. Merchant said she is not sorry the single was not written by the band. "I think it's the best way to introduce people to our band."

Once people become familiar with the single, she said, "maybe they'll be more open to our original material."

The video to accompany "Peace Train" will be filmed locally next week, Ms. Merchant said. It may film in Allegany State Park or by Kinzua Dam.

But she added she wants the video's content to remain a surprise for now.

The band's records — which include two independent releases — have received greater recognition overseas than in this country. Half the copies of *The Wishing Chair* were sold in Europe. And the band has received letters from fans in Japan and even Poland.

While the first album only sold 70,000 copies, Ms. Merchant said Elektra, the band's record label, has not put undue pressure on them to come up with a hit this time. The band's contract calls for them to produce eight records.

With *In My Tribe*, she said, she would like to see the band at least double sales of its first

album.

The band's agreeing to work with Asher, who produced hits for Linda Ronstadt and James Taylor, helped Elektra keep faith in them, she said.

"A lot of people hear horror stories about the way people in the record industry manipulate bands," she said. But the Maniacs have never experienced any problems with their label, perhaps because its president is a fan.

Asher also was receptive to their ideas, she said. "Every step of the way, he was very diplomatic. He kept reiterating, 'I want the band to sound like the band.' He just improved on the actual sounds of the recording."

While the first album was designed as a whole, the Maniacs focused on writing some singles for *In My Tribe*, Ms. Merchant said. "We had written songs that could get us on the radio."

To write a song, Ms. Merchant said, "we usually come into rehearsal with a chord progression and decide on a rhythm pattern."

She then picks out a melody, and the lyrics flow from it. "I get certain images in my head when I hear music," she said.

The new album will be released on compact disc, and *The Wishing Chair* will also be available on compact disc for the first time — with two more songs.

Ms. Merchant said she grew up listening to bands like Roxy Music and David Bowie and knows what a "powerful addiction" music can be. That's why musicians must be careful about choosing what they say.

"I think music can unify people in a way," she said. "What can be more personal than a person singing about something they feel strongly about?"