

# The Keyboardist

"I like it when we have all those songs with rather complicated (lyrics) ... and everyone still sings," says keyboardist Dennis Drew.

Drew seems to be the band's keeper of the flame, a man both humble — "I'm no genius musician," he says — and proud.

"We played cheap when we had to. We worked hard ... but we had talent. I think we proved you can succeed with brains, without selling yourself as a sex symbol, without selling yourself as a hedonistic symbol. That's what I'm proud of; we've succeeded and we've succeeded on our terms," he says.

Drew's terms are businesslike and, in his own way, efficient.

If Ms. Merchant is the band's musical center, he is its practical presence. This is the man who makes the contacts, hustles the press, remembers the names, the faces.

He is the politician, the gambler.

"We went out on a limb and we gambled all the way; borrowed money from our parents and everyone," he says.

"We were a little slow about it, but we were well organized," he says without a trace of irony.

In performance he is low-key to the point of obscurity.

At Darien Lake he wears a tie and sport coat, takes his place behind his piano silently and stays there through the evening, playing his songs, doing his job.

But in the greeting party after, he is Mr. Congeniality, roving through the crowd, shaking hands, making introduc-

tions, leaving kisses.

Asked if he and the other band members are jealous of Ms. Merchant's prominence, he replies, simply and quietly, "You have to be a fool to think (that.)" She is, he says, the natural and articulate speaker.

"I think our personalities speak through our instruments," he says of himself and the other band members. "You can see our personalities through our actions in the group."

But underneath it all, Drew is a showman.

On a quiet mid-week night in the Rusty Nail in Jamestown, The Billups, a band that will open for the Maniacs tonight is on stage.

They have a small, intimate audience.

Drew and Gustafson are there.

There's joking between them and John Lombardo, a former guitarist with the Maniacs.

"Come on up," says Lombardo.

Drew and Gustafson do.

There follows a 20-minute jamming session. First are versions of old Maniac songs.

Drew is at the keyboards, Gustafson on the bass.

But about 10 minutes into the act, the music dissolves into spontaneous song. Lombardo starts crooning in different languages.

Drew abandons his piano and dances across the stage, adding sound effects through his microphone as he struts.

It's a nice sight.

# The Bassist

Behind him is Gustafson, smiling, strumming.

In a sense, Gustafson will forever be tied to the Rusty Nail for a quote — that he claims was a misquote — in *People Magazine* in which he derided the people of Jamestown for not paying to see the band because they believed they could still see them for \$2 at the Rusty Nail.

Gustafson says he didn't say it.

He says he is forever grateful to the Rusty Nail and other local bars that gave the band a forum in which to play.

And he says he misses the friends, the smallness, the ease that he found there. "It was fun."

Those days, though, are over, he says now.

But Gustafson is at home here, in this small atmosphere.

He is the real hometown boy.

And he is the one with the nerves.

Before large shows, he says, "I always get very nervous and (an) upset stomach. ... you may find me in the bathroom, throwing up.

"I always believe they're not going to like what we do. ... I'm usually presently surprised."

On stage, that nervousness transforms itself to a restless energy. Gustafson hops, waves.

During the encore at Darien Lake, he even throws a towel to the crowd, and comes to the microphone to shout his thanks.

It is a curious site for a normally calm, and quietly funny, house painter.

At a practice session for the band, Gustafson arrives in old paint-smattered khakis and a painter's hat.

"I suppose if I didn't want to paint ... I wouldn't have to," he says from the vantage of his new-found financial success.

But he does. "I paint houses for therapy," says Gustafson. "I get to sort of lose myself in the paint. You can see definite accomplishment when you're through. You have a nice looking house."

He and his wife, the former Pam Hallberg, are both from here. He takes pride in mentioning that he is one in a long line of Gustafsons who are graduates of Jamestown High School.

"I have a definite feeling of roots here in Jamestown," he says.

Although the couple have recently bought a house in Frewsburg. ("in the country," he explains), "We're still Jamestownians."

# The Guitarist

That is not true of Robert Buck.

He grew up in Chandler's Valley, Pa., a tiny village between North Warren and Sugar Grove.

"This was a big city when I lived in Chandler's Valley,"

he says from the dark depths of the Reg Lenna Civic Center.

He lived with his grandmother. "She started me with piano lessons when I was 5 or 6," he says.