

Maniacs: Proceeds From Show Go To Reg Lenna Civic Center

DEC 30 1995

From Page A-1

Band members seemed to loosen up after the audience relaxed its collective inhibitions. Gustafson began spinning around, plucking at his bass guitar while keyboardist Dennis Drew pointed skyward during a keyboard solo and guitarist Rob Buck gyrated to his band's beat.

While former singer Natalie Merchant is pushing the 1.5 million mark for sales of her solo album *Tigerlily*, the new lineup of 10,000 Maniacs characteristically returned home Friday night, playing their first concert since their reformation to a sold-out house at Jamestown's Reg Lenna Civic Center. In addition to drummer Jerome Augustyniak, the lineup includes an original member, guitarist John Lombardo, and vocalist and viola player Mary Ramsey, with whom Lombardo performed in folk duo John & Mary before rejoining.

The homecoming concert that began at 8 p.m. demonstrated the band's commitment to its community: proceeds from the show, which one member estimated would cost the band nearly \$3,000, will benefit The Reg Lenna Civic Center, the very spot where Lombardo first quit the Maniacs.

Mary Ramsey, filling the spot once held by Ms. Merchant, obviously felt welcome by the band's hometown crowd.

What do you think of your native sons here? She asked before the audience erupted into jubilant applause. She told fans that she grew up nearby, in the village of Fredonia. The crowd accepted her as their own, with continuous applause and even some whistles from male members of the audience.

Ramsey's voice at times resembled Ms. Merchant's, but fans responded to her as a valuable new individual. The sound production, with its inexplicably loud lead guitar, sometimes obscured her vocals, rendering much of her lyrics indecipherable.

The return of the 10,000 Maniacs to Jamestown, dubbed the "Jamestown Party," lived up to its name. It was a true community event, with the Jamestown High School A Cappella choir and Band opening the show. The A Cappella choir sang "Traditional holiday music such as 'The Holly Tree.'" Music Director Brian Bogy early in the performance indicated the city's good spirits about the concert when he made an announcement about illegally parked cars at a nearby lot.

"Police will be towing away cars," he said. "However, they will wait until after the intermission. We didn't fit the exact motif, but it was cool," said Heather Ober, a member of the choir, while the Maniacs played. "All (the other kids) thought it was fun because we know every one out there."

Tonight it seemed really dead. Now it's cool.

The high school band followed the choir's performance when the house lights went up. At the sound of a whistle, members marched down the center's four aisles and gave a concert in true quadraphonic sound. Musicians stood next to audience members and played songs ranging from a Christmas medley to Billy Joel's "Uptown Girl."

Their 15-minute set concluded with the same precision, as band members retreated from the auditorium, making way for the Maniacs. The 10,000 Maniacs' perfor-

mance started off with anticipation as the lights went down. A howl arose from the crowd, but soon they became more low-key, sitting quietly as new, original songs filled the air. The stage was decorated in holiday style, with windows adorned with lighted candles hanging from the ceiling, potted poinsettias covering the stage's front and a lighted Christmas tree off in the corner.

The 10,000 Maniacs' music must have met the expectations of those nostalgic for their late '80s sound. Buck's shimmering lead guitar work seemed more full with Lombardo's accompaniment.

Drew's atmospheric keyboards created a palette upon which the other musicians added an alternating folk and rhythm and blues groove formed by the bass and drums. And, Mary Ramsey's viola completed a one-of-a-kind sound that transcended the group's identifiable beat.

The 10,000 Maniacs still are in negotiations with a major record label for a new recording contract. The influence of Lombardo and Ramsey adds a new dimension to the Maniacs' music, which could be a factor in the group's success once the deal is complete.

The evening's audience included a wide variety of ages. Bassist Gustafson, in a telephone interview prior to Friday's performance, said the makeup would be primarily relatives of all three musical groups.

He said returning to Jamestown to perform for an audience consisting largely of family and friends tends to give Maniacs members the jitters. Both Gustafson and Drew live in the Jamestown area.

"Playing at home is always the toughest," he said. "There seems to be a different set of expectations

— it's your family. It's most nerve-wracking. We've played at Carnegie Hall or at (an event) of 80,000 people where we're the opening act. For me, there's nothing more nerve-wracking than playing in front of the town.

Proceeds from the performance will go to the Reg Lenna Civic Center, which Gustafson dubbed, "the shining jewel of the city," during a press conference in early December announcing the concert. The band's passionate support of the center, he said, comes from perspective.

"It costs 30 grand just to heat it," he said. "They are a professional theater, and we've played in the best theaters in the world. We played the Royal Albert Hall in London in two sold-out shows. There, Carnegie Hall in New York, Radio City Music Hall for two sold-out shows. (The Civic Center) is absolutely on a par with all of those. It just happens to be in our back yard. The Reg Lenna is just a small version of all of those. It's just that we need someone to support it. ... You take that out of downtown, you just cut its heart out."

Dennis Drew explained the band's connection to the Civic Center during a pre-concert interview.

"We started rehearsing in here probably 1985," he explained. "One of my biggest memories — this is where John Lombardo quit the band, right on this stage. That was in 1986."

The center has served both as a rehearsal space and recording studio, a place to which the Maniacs invariably return when working on new material. Philip Morris, executive director of the Arts Council For

Chautauqua County, estimated the concert would raise upward of \$9,000 for the center.

"The depth of the relationship with the guys is significant," Morris said. "It's been going a long time and it's going to continue a long time."

Fans at the concert obviously wish the same for the group's longevity. Old hits from the band's heyday, such as "Candy Everybody Wants," and the next song, "These Are Days," sent audience members into a frenzy that continued through the encore. Jamestown's musical heroes ended the evening of varied music with the traditional "Auld Lang Syne."

The concert made it apparent that, in whatever direction the band's career goes, the 10,000 Maniacs are one old acquaintance that will not be forgotten in Jamestown.