

Maniacs Establish Fund To Sing Praises Of Moms

First Award To Be Given On Mother's Day

By MICHAEL PITTEN

The late Barbara Gustafson and Bridget Mary Drew spent the best years of their relatively short lives giving a mother's love and support to their children.

Their returning qualities impacted two young men whose rock band became one of the top musical acts of the late '80s and early '90s with two albums topping the million mark.

The two women's contributions to their families and to their families' lives have been memorialized by their sons, the 10,000 Maniacs' Dennis Drew and Steven Gustafson.

The two musicians established a special fund to benefit area mothers in their quest for education. The fund is being administered by the Chautauque Region Community Foundation.

The Barbara Mae Gustafson and Bridget Mary Drew Scholarship Fund — the B&B Scholarship Fund — is an outgrowth of the bandmates' desire to help others.

"It is a scholarship to be used for any mother from Chautauque, Cataraugus or Allegany counties attending JCC, who has financial need," said Florence Cass, director of communications at the Community Foundation.

Women with children who are attempting to juggle everyday living and academic need, social and financial endorsement, the two musicians agree.

The award, given for one year, can be used for schooling, child care or whatever is needed by the recipient, Gustafson, the band's bassist, said.

"This May, we'll award the first scholarship on Mother's Day," he said. "We'll probably do it like that every year." The fund has topped the \$10,000 level. This year's application deadline is April 20.

As the 10,000 Maniacs' final effort with singer Natalie Merchant, the *Unplugged* album climbed the charts, two events changed Drew and Gustafson's lives.

The first was fatherhood — both had children in the months following the tour.

The second was their discussions about their mothers' lives and deaths. Mrs. Drew died in 1991, and Mrs. Gustafson in 1989.

"After we had kids, I think we realized how much hard work it is to be a mother," said Drew, the Maniacs' keyboardist. "The incredible amount of work it is to raise children — being a parent is the highest calling."

"It makes you realize your own mortality," when a parent dies, Gustafson said. "It took me a long time to realize I wasn't going to live forever." His mother's lessons also made him aware of his stake in the community.

"You look after your neighbor," Gustafson said from a hotel in Northampton, Mass., where the band was playing a tour date. "That's ... my responsibility since I got married and had a son."

As album sales for *Our Time In Eden* passed the 1 million mark during the 10,000 Maniacs' 1993 tour, Drew's thoughts focused a problem he thinks stems from economic distress.

"You get to read a lot of newspapers," he said of the 1993 tour and the time they spent on the road. "The theme is the same. There's an assault on the American family."

This most recent effort is not the first time the rock and roll benefactors have extended a helping hand to the community.

They have held benefits for Jamestown's Reg Lenna Civic Center, coordinated a Chadaikon River cleaning effort and helped several area groups with fund-raising.

"You travel around the country, and the problems are the same everywhere," Drew said. "From Buffalo to Seattle — people are running out of money, running out of time."

He has received "a lot of letters from people who said our music was a ray of light for them in an otherwise dreary world. That's sad."

Both musicians say their mothers' greatest gifts included instilling values, values



Dennis Drew donates a platinum *Unplugged* CD to SS. Peter and Paul School.

P-J file photo by Joe R. Liuzzo

that were reinforced during extensive touring.

The idea for the fund began during a difficult chapter for the 10,000 Maniacs.

Natalie Merchant left the group in August 1993. The media speculated her departure spelled the end of the 10,000 Maniacs.

By the following February, however, the Maniacs gained two new members who had long been associated with the band.

Mary Ramsey, a classically trained musician, played violin, viola and sang with John Lombardo, one of the original 10,000 Maniacs, in a folk duo dubbed John and Mary. Ramsey played on the *Unplugged* and *Our Time In Eden* albums.

Lombardo had often played under the billing "former 10,000 Maniacs' guitarist" as their star rose in the late '80s while he was playing in such bands as the Bill-Ups, Hopheads and John and Mary in the Buffalo area.

The 10,000 Maniacs touch down in the local area at The Marquee at the Traf in Buffalo next Saturday, April 8, at 9 p.m.

Tickets for the 18 and over show are \$10 presale and \$12 at the door. Two other acts open the show. Doors open at 8 p.m.

Drew and Gustafson attended Jamestown Community College together before the Maniacs took off. Seeing the country while



Steven Gustafson performs during a St. Bonaventure show shortly after the new lineup formed.

P-J file photo by Michael D. Anderson

on tour made Drew share his mother's enthusiasm for higher education.

"Lyndon Johnson said all the problems in our society can be solved by one word — education," the keyboardist said. "We can solve the problems of poverty and the problems of violence if we can get everyone an education. It's a utopian idea, but you can't really make it out there if your education stops with high school."

"With today's economy, everyone has to work," Drew said. "I think that's a tragedy."

The band members encourage others who share their concern for area mothers to contribute to the fund through the Community Foundation.

Gustafson said his and Drew's parents "were very supportive of the band. They did everything they could to see us continue in music."

Gustafson's commitment also stems from his dedication to the Jamestown area. "Just because of my career choice and the success I've had, I'm able to share some of it, especially in my hometown," he said. "I plan on dying in Jamestown. I dug my roots in deep."

"We thought we'd do what our mothers would want us to do," Drew said of the fund.