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Natalie Merchant Mixes The Old With The New

By JIM RIGGS

You can take Natalie Merchant out of 10,000 Maniacs, but you can't take 10,000 Maniacs out of Natalie Merchant.

That was obvious at the Shea's Performing Arts Center Friday night in Buffalo when the former lead singer with 10,000 Maniacs made her first area solo appearance since leaving the Jamestown band in August of 1993.

Going it alone has been successful for Ms. Merchant, whose first solo album, *Tigerlilly*, has sold nearly 1.5 million copies. That is what, of course, prompted her *Tigerlilly* Tour, but 10,000 Maniacs weren't forgotten by the Jamestown native.

When a member of that band, Ms. Merchant was known as much for her sometimes erratic dancing as much as her singing. Now her dancing is more refined and is used to open the show.

With a see-through curtain in front of her and a spotlight directly behind, Ms. Merchant casts a huge dancing silhouette while a long musical intro gets the concert started with "San Andreas Fault" from *Tigerlilly*.

She followed with "Where I Go" from her solo album and the audience response was enthusiastic. But the noise level rose when Ms. Merchant and her band produced an interesting version of "Eat For Two" from the Maniacs' *Blind Man's Zoo* album.

The version was much slower with a heavy drumbeat and at times Ms. Merchant appeared to be belly-dancing. The beat had the audience mesmerized and then it exploded when Ms. Merchant sang the opening line to "Eat For Two."

It was back to *Tigerlilly* material with the album's most popular song, "Carnival." That is when Ms. Merchant really loosened up and literally let her hair down and began dancing in the style of her Maniacs' days.