

Band turns blind eye to critics

By Larry O'Connor
Staff writer

The backlash cracked in England. But it still stung 10,000 Maniacs on their collective behinds across the Atlantic.

The British music press was not too kind in describing the socially conscious group's latest album, "Blind Man's Zoo" (Elektra). One dagger-penned journalist went as far as to warn people to keep the disc as far away from their turntables as possible.

Yet that same writer was just

praise about the Maniacs' last album, "In My Tribe." "I don't know why," said bass player Steven Gustafson, discussing the bad reviews in England (the LP has received mixed reviews stateside). "They were actually quite mean about it. Especially to Natalie (Merchant), who they said was making people feel bad if they weren't trying to save the world."

"I don't think she's being that preachy; I think she's being informative."

On the latest album, 10,000 Maniacs seem to go out of their way to educate. Even the cover of the LP features a montage of elephants, which is designed to bring awareness to the plight of the endangered species.

Songs have a common theme of betrayal, whether it's a person doing

the country wrong (i.e. people like Ollie North in "Please Forgive Us" or a nation doing the person wrong in "The Big Parade" that centers on Vietnam vets).

THEIR'S NO bouncy numbers such as "Like the Weather" and "My Sister Rose" that were on "In My Tribe." Instead, 10,000 Maniacs chose a darker sound this time around.

The group has always had a social bent, though, and can be seen as animal rights and the anti-nuclear movement. That especially came out on "In My Tribe" where lead singer and songwriter Natalie Merchant dealt with everything from child abuse to "What's the Matter Here?" to living with an alcoholic "Don't Talk" to illiteracy "Under the Cherry Tree."

Lyrical, 10,000 Maniacs are likely to be consumed along with selections in English literature. Merchant, along with band member Robert Buck, writes a good deal of her songs.

"Natalie is very intelligent," Gustafson said. "When I met her she was 16. She was really intelligent even then, far beyond her years."

"She keeps herself as an observer. She has a journal where every little conversation heard in the street gets written down. Then when she is writing lyrics, she uses those as reference points."

Merchant brings those carefully

chosen words to life with a winsome stage presence. Her voice is powerful. Her wild movements on stage tend to run against her schoolmarmish appearance.

THE CURRENT tour will take them to several ports in the country, including a stop last Monday at the Meadow Brook Music Festival.

The group came to the forefront last year. But it wasn't until 12 months after the initial release of "In My Tribe" that people really began to take notice. Part of that was the commercial ratings success of "What's the Matter Here?" and "Like the Weather."

The band was hailed by music critics, providing a voice of consciousness that was thought to have been drowned out by the Reagan Revolution. Now it's a voice some people in the press have already grown tired of.

"We're talking about (British music tabloids) Sounds, N.M.E. and Melody Maker, which have a circulation of 100,000 each," Gustafson said. "I get the impression they are rather frustrated journalists who would rather be writing for the Guardian but aren't good enough."

"Natalie was stunned. She had some personal attacks. She was upset for awhile. I was upset, too. But they could have been really mean and not written anything about the album. I guess bad press is better than no press."



Jazz flutist Horbie Mann will be featured in "Jazz to the Hill" concert series Wednesday, July 19 at the Troy Hilton.

upcoming things to do

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in person at the Novi Chamber of Commerce office or at the Novi Parks and Recreation Department. Tickets may also be redeemed through the mail by writing to the Michigan 50 Festival, P.O. Box 187, Novi 48375. In order to collect the showtimes of your choice, you must redeem your ticket by July 15. After July 15, redemption is subject to seat availability. For additional festival information, call 349-3988.

MEADOW BROOK

The Pat Metheny Group performs jazz and rock Friday, July 14. Tickets are \$20 and \$15. Panflutist Zamfir will perform Saturday, July 15. Tickets are \$18, \$15 and \$12. Three '60s singers — Frankie Avalon, Fa-

bian and Bobby Rydell — take the stage Sunday, July 16. Tickets are \$20, \$17 and \$12.50. All concerts are at 8 p.m. in the Baldwin Pavilion. For ticket information, call 377-2010.

MORE MEADOW BROOK

Perro Como opens a week that includes popular and symphonic music, comedy and a children's show at Meadow Brook Music Festival Tuesday, July 18. Comedian Jimmy Aleck opens for Como. Lawn seats only, \$15.

CONCERT ADDED

Carole King makes her Meadow Brook debut Sunday, July 23. Wayne Toups and Zydecajun will open. Tickets, \$22.50 and \$15. Evening concerts at 8 p.m. in the Baldwin Pavilion.

SCHEDULE CHANGE

The originally scheduled concert with Faithburger has been replaced by a concert with Tim Weisberg at 5 p.m. Wednesday, July 12, at Jazz to the Hill at the Troy Hilton. Tickets are available at any Ticketmaster outlet or by calling 585-9000.

Also, the Rick Astley concert, which was scheduled for Wednesday, July 26, has been changed to Friday, Sept. 8.

OUTDOOR MUSIC

"Music Under the Stars" presents the big band of Bob Durant 7:30-9 p.m. Thursday, July 13, at Civic Center Park in Livonia. The following Thursday, July 20, the Livonia Symphony will perform. For more information, call 421-2000, Ext. 221, or Arts Hotline, 425-2327.

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