

Third time the charm for 10,000 Maniacs

Following the lead of their previous two albums, 10,000 Maniacs has unleashed yet another college radio gem apparently destined for mainstream success. The first album, *The Wishing Chair*, established the band as perhaps the most important new band of 1985, selling quite well for a debut album. In *My Tribe*, a sleeper on the charts in 1987, went gold on the strength of the charming single "Like the Weather." This year's release, *Blind Man's Zoo*, should at least equal *Tribe's* sales, possibly even reaching platinum. The first single, "Trouble Me," is already moving strongly up the charts.

The success of R.E.M. (a band to whom 10,000 Maniacs is often compared) helped blaze the trail for many of the new college radio bands. This has allowed 10,000 Maniacs to develop (and to achieve success) rapidly. If *The Wishing Chair* was analogous to R.E.M.'s *Murmur*, then *Blind Man's Zoo* is 10,000 Maniacs' *Document*, a transition which only took three albums. Both *In My Tribe* and

Brian Springer Album

Blind Man's Zoo have not changed the Maniacs' sound dramatically — folkish yet driving, socially conscious, American rock 'n roll. Instead, the two albums demonstrate refinement on that basic sound. The only fear is that 10,000 Maniacs will stagnate as R.E.M. did with *Life's Rich Pageant*.

After using producer Joe Boyd on the debut, 10,000 Maniacs chose Peter Asher (of the 60s band Peter and Gordon) for the two subsequent releases. Asher has given the band a clean, polished sound (especially on *Zoo*) that avoids being "slick." The drums are tight and powerful, the current in-vogue approach which owes a sizable debt to Don Dixon. Guitars drift in and out, with Natalie Merchant's strong vocals dominant throughout.

Musically, it appears that the in-

dividual band members are coming into their own. Merchant lacks a truly beautiful voice, but she sings with a remarkable strength and presence. At times her voice calls to mind Tracy Chapman, Robin Lane, Suzanne Vega, Melissa Etheridge and early Deborah Harry, but Merchant's versatility allows her to transcend such similarities. Guitarist Robert Buck's playing is brilliant throughout, utilizing many different approaches. His fluid solos resemble those of Tom Petty sideman Mike Campbell. From the sparse, atmospheric rhythm guitar of "Trouble Me" to the folkish acoustic guitar of "Please Forgive Me" to the distorted leads of "Headstrong," Buck has a stylistic smorgasbord at his disposal. Drummer Jerome Augustyniak powers the songs along, but within the limits of the individual songs. Dennis Drew, keyboards, and Steve Gustafson, bass, ably fill in the empty spaces, without interfering with Merchant's voice.

Merchant wrote or co-wrote all of the songs on the album. As with the

previous albums, she displays a strong social consciousness. She takes aim at issues as diverse as poverty, the continuing influence of the Vietnam war, water pollution and unwanted pregnancy. At times, such commentaries can put off the listener, but less-directed songs are strategically placed around the album to prevent listener desensitization. Merchant is also adept at making songs that can appeal as both entertainment and social critique. Meaningful songs need not be unappealing.

The opening track, "Eat for Two," is perhaps the best on the album. The song is the story of an unwanted pregnancy. "Dream child in my head/Is a nightmare born in a borrowed bed," grieves Merchant, as she ponders her new condition, in which she "eats for two, walks for two, breathes for two now." This is a sure-fire hit single, with a poppy feel that manages to mesh well with the unpleasant subject matter.

"Poison in the Well" criticizes water pollution, seeming especially timely in the wake of the Alaskan oil spill. Merchant asks, "I wonder how long they knew our well was poisoned but they let us just drink on?" Chiming guitars and fast drumming make this a cut that college radio will surely embrace. The next song, "Dust Bowl," bears a strong resemblance to the work of Tracy Chapman. A mother who struggles to take care of her children mourns that "the hole in (her) pocketbook is growing," despite her attempts to escape the "dust bowl days." The subject matter, restrained music and vocal performance are all Chapman-like.

The last two songs on the album

are sharply different from the rest. "Hateful Hate" features pipe organ courtesy of Merchant. The song seems to be a broad-based critique of interference with personal autonomy. Calling up images of imperialism, slavery and safaris (poaching), Merchant urges these foreign invaders to stay where they belong, not to fall victim to their own curiosity. The final cut, "Jubilee," features the Saint Luke's Chamber Orchestra, at first playing soft accompaniment, later building a wall of sound. The song tells the story of an overly pious religious fanatic who sets fire to a field in order to stop sinful activity during the jubilee. The last two songs add a Beatle-ish flavor to the album, which is both emotionally and musically effective.

The album is not as gloomy as it might seem, however. "Trouble Me" is a gem that should be all over the radio this summer. The song is one of the more personal, less global tracks on the album, helping to save the album from hopelessness. Instead of addressing the world, Merchant simply wants to ease her friend's pain, asking "Why do you let your shoulders bend underneath this burden/When my back is sturdy and strong?" The vocal interplay between Merchant and guest vocalist Jevetta Steele is exquisite. The atmospheric vocals and sparse guitarwork give a textbook example of gifted pop songcraft.

"Headstrong" is another song removed from social consciousness. Displaying almost Elvis Costello-ish self-will and independence, a woman berates her lover for trying to control

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'Renegades' good but cliched

By JEFF KIEL
and RANDY BASINGER
Staff Writers

Due to a lack of free popcorn, we were forced to just watch this movie and give our true opinion of it. "Renegades," starring Kiefer Sutherland and Lou Diamond Phillips (both of "Young Guns" fame), plays along the same tired lines as "48 Hours" and "Running Scared," yet the story seems fresh, which is a real accomplishment. Bravo!

The film opens in typical Hollywood fashion, with a bar brawl. "Buster" McHenry (Sutherland), an undercover, off-duty Philadelphia cop, looks out of a barroom window and sees what should be a routine speeding ticket go sour — accompanied by a shower of bullets sprayed through the bar. McHenry uses his street smarts to help out these flat-headed flat-foots and prevent a total disaster.

As if that wasn't enough, McHenry is a part-time diamond thief in with the mob. Well, not exactly. In order to uncover a bad cop, McHenry agrees to help the local mob leader (Rob Knepper) scam some \$6 million in diamonds. But while the crooks (and McHenry) are running from the police, they duck into a museum, which is having a display of ancient Indian artifacts. The crimi-

nals break into the display, steal a sacred Lakota Indian lance, and kill Hank "Chief" Storm's (Phillips) brother.

McHenry, however, is shot by the mob leader after his cover is blown. Storm, knowing that McHenry has an idea where the lance and the crooks are, nurses him back to health and the two go out on the hunt.

We've already seen an odd "buddy-buddy" cop combination this summer (Jim Belushi and a German shepherd in "K-9"), and this is merely an addition to an ever-increasing list of similar films, some of which work ("48 Hrs," "Midnight Run"), some of which don't ("K-9"). Although the story line has been overused in recent years, the more successful versions have the uncanny ability to entertain rather than annoy. They also have interesting characters. This is the case with "Renegades."

Congratulations go out to David Rich, the screenwriter, and Jack Sholder, the director, for not making this just another cop movie with car chases, gunshots and all the rest of the things we spend \$4.50 to go see. They've given us an entertaining flick.

You never get the feeling that you've seen this one before, although you know the basic outline. What

especially impressed us was the action, which wasn't dry at all. How can you say a movie is boring if the bad guys have a cop driving their getaway car (a stretch Cadillac limo) through rush hour traffic in Philadelphia? Or if there's enough ammunition set off to supply the Contras?

JEFF: I really liked this movie. I thought that the story, in its own little way, was fresh and I'm glad they didn't try to make a movie that came out of the same Play-Doh Fun Factory as "Die Hard."

RANDY: I agree that there were some fresh ideas added to an ancient plot, and I liked the flick, but I'm afraid that with all the blockbusters coming out this summer, this movie will be overlooked for say "Ghostbusters II" or "Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade."

It was a little too predictable for me, like when McHenry lance-kebobbed the head dude. I saw that one coming for a mile, but I still wanted to see him do it. Maybe I'm psychotic, but I liked it.

JEFF: I agree. You are psychotic. Anyway folks, this is not a must-see, but if you're in the mood for a shoot-'em-up, steal-the-diamonds, kill-everyone-in-sight good time, go and check it out.

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