10,000 Maniacs Encyclopedia Article

10,000 Maniacs

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10,000 Maniacs

Formed under the name Still Life in rural Jamestown, New York in February 1981, 10,000 Maniacs became noted for its melodic folk music and the wistful lyricism and distinct vocal patterns of its lead singer, Natalie Merchant. After releasing one EP and three albums, the group blossomed into prominence in the late 1980s on the strength of its single "What's the Matter Here." The hit put them in the Top 40 along with friends R.E.M. Following the success of its fifth album, *Blind Man's Zoo* (1989), the band's participation in the MTV (Music Television) Inaugural Ball for President Clinton in 1992, and its swan song performance on MTV Unplugged (1994), Merchant left to pursue a successful solo career. The remaining members of the band, guitarist Robert Buck, keyboardist Dennis Drew, and bassist Steve Gustafson, recruited an old collaborator, singer-violinist Mary Ramsey, releasing *Love Among the Ruins* (1997) to critical praise, marking a new chapter in the band's eventful career.