

POPULAR RECORDS

# Band Album Mines Dylan Vein

BY PETE JOHNSON

● My favorite pop album at the moment is a masterpiece by a group known, simply as the Band, "Music From Big Pink" (Capitol SKAO 2955).

Big Pink is a salmon-colored boxy house set on Overlook Mountain in W. Saugerties, N.Y. I have no map detailed enough to show W. Saugerties, but I presume it is close to Woodstock, N.Y., the current home of Bob Dylan.

The Band is Dylan's band, a quintet which evolved from a Canadian group once known as Ronnie Hawkins and the Hawks. Ronnie Hawkins left to become the owner of a nightclub in Canada and the Hawks found as good a replacement as it could for lead singer.

For a while the group was called Crackers, but settled on the Band by the time the LP was ready for release.

The group consists of Jaime Robbie Robertson, Rick Danko, Richard Manuel, Garth Hudson and Levon Helm. Robertson is the only member who has received instrumental credit on a Dylan album ("Blonde on Blonde"), but all reportedly have worked closely with him since his retreat to Woodstock (the group also backed Dylan in his only performance in the last two years, the tribute to Woody Guthrie held in New York City).

"Music From Big Pink" can be summed up in one word: funky. The quintet seems to have arrived where Procol Harum and Traffic were aiming, a new kind of soul amalgamating the most emotional elements of country music, rhythm and blues and straight rock.

They accomplish their funkiness with wailing lead vocals, soulful harmonies and a down home guitar - piano - organ - drums combination en-

hanced by superb production from John Simon.

Included are three new Dylan songs, "Tears of Rage," "I Shall Be Released," and "This Wheel's on Fire." The first two have not been recorded by anyone else to my knowledge.

They are great, as is their updated version of "Long Black Veil," a country standard originally done by Lefty Friz-

zel. But my favorite cut is a song by Robertson, "The Weight," with lyrics very much a la Dylan:

*I pulled into Nazareth,  
Was feeling 'bout half  
past dead,*

*I just need some place  
where I can lay my  
head.*

*Hey Mister can you tell  
me*

*Where a man might find  
a bed?*

*He just grinned and  
shook my hand.  
"No," was all he said.*

It is impossible to describe how real and inevitable this song sounds, but with it and with the album the group has set a new standard for every group experimenting with permutations of white soul. Procol Harum sounds hopelessly pretentious, Traffic sounds misguided and all the blues and folk resurrectionists sound dated and artificial.

This is a great album, more to my liking than Dylan's last two original efforts but in a Dylan vein though they pay as much attention to their music as to their lyrics.