

Music

The Band

By Carl Bernstein

What do you say about The Band? Simply that they're great?

That's too simple, because the five men who played Constitution Hall last night represent more than great musicianship.

Their art is the quintessence of American rock, everything rock has been trying to do done right. When The Band plays, the roots of rock—country, folk, jazz, the blues, even gospel—become a beautiful whole, a wondrously stunning, mature sound.

The Band's music is uniquely North American (four members of the group are Canada, one from Arkansas), colored by an exquisite country feel that evokes the smell of hickory, the texture of mountains and woods, the experience of the frontier.

Make no mistake, this country feel that helps shape The Band's music is something very different from the occasional use of Nashville technique that has led dozens of rock groups to experiment with dobro and effect a nasal twang.

Like the work of rural craftsmen, The Band's music is hewn from the rough, then honed and smoothed and polished until it glistens.

The result is a wonderful sound that retains the essential freedom and spirit of rock but whose every note and phrase is purposefully perfectly and *lovingly* laid down.

The craftsmanship comes from the excellence of the five musicians who are The Band—Garth Hudson (organ, clavichord, piano, slide trumpet, accordion, soprano, tenor and baritone sax); Richard Manuel (vocals, piano, drums, baritone sax and mouth harp); Rick Danko (vocals, bass, violin and trombone); Levon Helm

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(vocals, drums, mandolin, and guitar), and Jamie Robbie Robertson (vocals and guitar).

The aforementioned list is no gimmick, because each of these men is a superb musician whose abilities extends far beyond the level of mere competence on each of the instruments he plays.

Critic Ralph Gleason, perhaps the most eloquent of us all when it comes to writing about People's Music (and that is exactly what The Band's music is) has likened Robbie Robertson's guitar playing to the cracking of a whip and no image could better describe it.

But to make a guitar crack like a whip you have to love the music you play and that is what makes The Band.

Helm is almost gentle on his drums, seeming to coax them with an antithesis of attack which has never been heard before in rock. It makes him the only drummer in the same league as jazzman Max Roach.

The Band has been together for almost a decade now, moving from the days when they played sock hops in Jersey as Leven and the

Hawks, to their hibernations. Their final song before stock, to backing Dylan when he returned to the road, to becoming The Band.

Along the way, they haven't forgotten where they came from and they proved it last night with three songs from the Fif—it was their song, with the encores was Little Richard's 'Slippin' and Slidin,' which takes a lot of guts because . . . well, if you've heard Little Richard sing it, you know why.

But when The Band played 'Slippin' and Slidin,' it was their song, with Robbie literally snapping the notes off his guitar, Manuel pumping the piano and bobbing his head, all five of them singing and grinning and then the audience was on its feet. It was the kind of experience you don't forget, something that goes beyond just men making music.

Reading about The Band, however, is no way to approach this music, as 2500 persons learned at Constitution Hall last night.

You have to hear this music, feel it, let it envelop you. That is what The Band—and Rock—are all about.



The Band, which used to back up Bob Dylan, offered us a night of musical glory at Constitution Hall last night at Constitution Hall.