

The Band' Rocks With Hillbilly Ease

By MIKE JAHN

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The Band, firmly on its own as a leading rock-country music group, played Friday and Saturday at the Felt Forum of Madison Square Garden.

The group was first widely known as Bob Dylan's back-up band, but for the last year and a half it has been making an increasingly important mark on popular music.

It is not strictly a rock band, as it blends country and western with hillbilly music into a rock format. The nasal vocal style and lyrical musings about rocking chairs, creeks and "The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down" (the title of one song) make The Band at once rocking, refreshing and sentimental.

The Band had not been performing actively from the time of Dylan's motorcycle accident in 1966 until last spring. After seven or eight months of public appearances, the group seems to have acquired much more confidence than it showed in its first appearance here in May.

The bandsmen pursued their songs aggressively Saturday at the Felt Forum, playing a long set. What is most amazing about The Band is that, despite the packed house, the amplification and the praise that has been thrown at them, the musicians still play like five friendly old coots picking away in the back of some Kentucky barroom. Their songs, even when cryptic and wordy, after the style of Bob Dylan, sound like old family favorites.

The members of The Band

are Robbie Robertson, guitar; Garth Hudson, organ; Levon Helm, drums; Rick Danko, bass, and Richard Manuel, piano. Mr. Manuel is from Arkansas. The others are Canadian.

New York Rock Ensemble

Last night, the New York Rock and Roll Ensemble gave a very good performance of serious and pop music at Carnegie Hall.

The Ensemble boasts three Juilliard-trained musicians and has made valid attempts to blend classical and contemporary. The players would show up in tails, and between their dress and their title would allow the feeling that they were playing rock only to be cute. Last night the tails were gone; they dressed in casual hip clothes, and played the wits out of several good rock songs. They seemed greatly improved in the past year — like The Band —

more forceful, but also more involved in the excitement of what can be exciting music.

The group is composed of Dorian Rudnytsky, bass guitar and cello; Brian Corrigan, rhythm guitar; Clifton Nivison, lead guitar; Martin Fulterman drums and oboe, and Michael Kamen, piano. For this performance they were joined by Romuald Tecco, violin; Marcus Thompson, viola; Fred Sherry, cello, and Hank DeVito, steel guitar.

The Ensemble's best moment during the half of the concert that deadlines allowed one to hear, was a series of four original compositions: Mr. Fulterman's "Thibadoux" for oboe, violin, viola and cello, which led into one country and two rock songs. The Ensemble finished this long series in a blazing display of tight, practiced hard rock that saw an usher chase two people who were dancing in an aisle.