

## MUSIC REVIEW

# Problem With Sound Mars Band's Efforts

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*Times Pop Music Critic*

Since the Band may well be the best rock group in the world now that the Beatles have disbanded, it is a shame for both the group and its audience when it has to play under anything less than perfect conditions.

When the Band came to Southern California last July for four concerts, they appeared in small and medium-sized auditoriums (including the Pasadena Civic) that provided the sound systems and intimacy to give it the right showcase. The concerts were excellent.

But Friday night at the Hollywood Bowl, the conditions were far from perfect. Though the Band itself seemed restrained during the early numbers (perhaps tired from a heavy schedule recently), the chief problem was sound.

Not only was the volume too low to give the full impact of many of the group's liveliest numbers, but the sound balance was uneven, all but ruining many of the early selections. "It took us a while to adjust," the Band's Robbie Robertson said frankly after the concert. "We had trouble hearing ourselves on stage."

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# SOUND PROBLEMS

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For example, Richard Manuel's lead vocal on the opening "The Shape I'm In" (one of three songs previewed from the Band's next album) was smothered, the precise, haunting harmony on "The Weight" was all but destroyed and Robertson's sharply defined work was buried on several numbers.

## Wide Range

Even so, the Band drew a series of ovations at the end of the concert. There were numerous shouts of "more" and "play all night" as the group went through several encore numbers.

Toward the end of the concert, the Band did give evidence of its many strengths. The group passed the lead vocals around with ease (often during the same song) and supported the lead vocals with alternating two, three and four-part harmony. The musical accompaniment matched the mood and theme of the lyrics perfectly.

The Band's music, perhaps, is the only music in rock that can be compared favorably to literature. Like the best novels, it has a wide range of emotions, originality and a certain timelessness about it. It avoids the fads of the present.

While much of what is happening today in rock can be traced, at most to the fusion of country and

rhythm and blues in the mid-50s, the Band's Southern country-soul sound carries a sense of tradition, much like the novels of William Faulkner, in such songs as "The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down," "Unfaithful Servant" and "Up on Cripple Creek."

The group, which first gained attention as the band for Bob Dylan, consists of Robertson (lead guitar and chief writer), Manuel (piano, drums, organ and vocals), Rick Danko (bass and vocals), Levon Helm (drums, guitar, mandolin and vocals) and bearded Garth Hudson (organ, piano, soprano saxophone and accordion).

## Audience Disappointing

But the disappointing size of the audience Friday (the Bowl was little more than half full) shows the group, despite two \$1 million albums, has not reached the level of popularity here that one might have expected. Thus the Band, relatively new on the concert scene, will have to be content with merely being the best and will have to wait for the popularity to catch up with it.

Jazz trumpeter Miles Davis and his six-man group, who were reviewed here recently by Leonard Feather, opened the concert. The group played for 45 minutes without a break or apparent musical theme. The audience response was slight.