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# The Band's last waltz

They saved it for Dr. John, **Joni Mitchell**, Neil Young, Van Morrison, Bob Dylan, Ronnie Hawkins, Ringo Starr, Paul Butterfield . . . and 5,000 '60s kids who've grown up

By PETER GODDARD  
Star rock critic

SAN FRANCISCO  
"Any day now/Any day now/I shall be released."

They were looking at one another as they sang these words early yesterday morning. There was Eric Clapton on one side of the stage, grinning lazily at Ron Wood, Paul Butterfield, and Muddy Waters. There were Neil Young, Joni Mitchell, Neil Diamond and Van Morrison on the other side of the stage.

Bob Dylan, a broad-brimmed hat hiding his eyes, stood with his legs apart. Behind him, swaying like a friendly bear, stood Ronnie Hawkins. At the very back Ringo Starr pumped away methodically with his drum sticks.

And at the very centre of it all was the Band — guitarist Robbie Robertson soaked with sweat; bassist Rick Danko; drummer Levon Helm and pianist Richard Manuel all laughing; organist Garth Hudson with his eyes closed.

It was the end of five hours of almost non-stop playing for the Band. It was also the group's last stop after 16 years on the road. The Last Waltz, as they called their farewell concert at the old Winterland ballroom, was just that.

"You can go home now folks," said an usher as the crowd filed past him into the damp foggy streets of the Fillmore district. "It's all over."

This was more than just a farewell concert for the Band. It was in many ways a swan song for an entire generation of rock. The Last Waltz was the last of the true '60s events — one that will eventually seem as important as the Beatles' first appearance on the Ed Sullivan Show, or Woodstock, or Altamont.

The Last Waltz was a compacted musical experience of varied threads woven tightly together into a consistent pattern. It was a concert by and for a single generation — those

who grew up in the 1960s. It was, in short, a rock concert for adults. Most of its performers were people who are in their 30s, who have gone through the publicity mills and now guard their privacy, who are cautious about their careers. What they do is done with careful consideration.

"That's why we want to make sure everything is done correctly," said Robbie Robertson before the show. "That's why it was important to have it on (the American) Thanksgiving Day. We wanted to show our thanks in the best way possible."

For the Band, this meant spending \$200,000 to decorate the hall and feed a crowd of more than 5,000, and another \$100,000 as an advance on a movie of the concert, directed by Martin Scorsese (Mean Streets, Taxi Driver, etc.). For the crowd this meant paying \$25 a ticket for a complete turkey or smoked salmon dinner and, as one girl explained, "more stars than you can find on the entire hit parade."

## Faded grandeur

Using props from the San Francisco Opera Company, Bill Graham's crew of 500 workers turned the worn Winterland interior into something out of La Boheme. The setting was of faded grandeur. The stage was surrounded by an elegant backdrop. Six enormous chandeliers were suspended from the ceiling.

Shortly after the doors opened at 4 p.m. Thursday, a full-sized orchestra played zesty waltzes in an artificial garden setting complete with two hedges and fake statuary. Banquet tables, later removed for the concert, were covered in white linen. Funky elegance was the tone. Some bikers turned up in crumpled tuxedos while other fans in jeans and T-shirts swept around the dance floor to the strains of Strauss.

Despite all the paraphernalia and despite the complexity of the opera-

tion, nothing seemed rushed. An enormous amount of food was consumed — 220 turkeys weighing a total of 5,600 pounds, 400 gallons of apple juice, 300 pounds of Nova Scotia smoked salmon brought from New York by Bob Dylan, 6,000 bread rolls, 2,000 pounds of peeled yams. Using walkie-talkies to keep the food supply coming regularly, the caterers fed everyone in the five hours before the Band went on.

"Something like this is only made possible when you can afford to not make a profit," explained Graham, who started his career as a concert promoter in 1965 with a benefit for the San Francisco Mime Troupe. It's likely, though, that the Band will make a profit aside from the \$125,000 taken in from ticket sales. The concert was recorded and a spokesman for the Band explained that "everyone played for the minimum union scale and they all want to see an album come out of this."

There's the movie, too. Martin Scorsese became involved with the Band when he was shooting Mean Streets in New York and went to Woodstock, where the Band was living, for a break from work. They became friends. "So he knows exactly what they want," explained the spokesman. "If this doesn't become the best rock movie ever made, it will become the most expensive home movie ever made."

The choice of the Winterland ballroom was important. The Band made its concert debut here in 1969 — a year after its first album, Music From Big Pink, and the year before the group appeared on the cover of Time. Even in 1969 the group represented the culmination of a lot that had happened in rock — from '50s rock, which they had churned out for eight years with Ronnie Hawkins, to country, blues and Bob Dylan, with whom they had worked in the mid-'60s.

The Last Waltz was the crystalliza-

tion of all these influences. The crowd, jammed on the floor, reacted to each song as if greeting a long-lost friend. Backstage things were no less enthusiastic. Ronnee Blakley, who had appeared with Rolling Thunder, couldn't even get close to the stage. "This is unbelievable," she mumbled.

David Bromberg, Dylan's former accompanist, almost backed into Ringo Starr, who had flown in from Los Angeles in the private jet rented by Neil Diamond.

"I'm taking it very easy," said Ringo. Bromberg was otherwise inclined. "On a scale from 1 to 10," he said to no one in particular, "this concert rates a 15."

Walking by almost unnoticed was Albert Grossman, Dylan's first manager. He ended up managing the Band when Dylan left him in 1967 and wasn't about to admit the group had quit performing together for good. "It is just not going to happen," he said shaking his head.

## The big time

Certainly the Band acted on stage as if they would never quit. First Ronnie Hawkins joined them. "This is the big time, the big time," he kept saying as he and his former sidemen snapped briskly to one of their old hits, Who Do You Love?

Dr. John cooled things down a bit with some rolling gospel piano, but Paul Butterfield and Muddy Waters teamed up with the Band for an intense, almost overpowering version of Mannish Boy. Then Eric Clapton took things even further by swapping guitar solos with Robbie Robertson in Farther On Up The Road.

The peak seemed to have passed when Neil Young appeared. With Joni Mitchell singing behind him backstage, he and the Band tried a tentative version of Helpless. This was followed by Four Strong Winds, a song "written by a friend of ours, Ian Tyson," said Robertson. But Young was barely halfway through it when he forgot the words of one of the verses.

The Canadian connection wasn't left there, however. After Joni Mitchell offered three songs and after Neil Diamond and Van Morrison had appeared, Mitchell and Young teamed up with the Band for Acadian Driftwood. "They call my home the land of snow," they sang. The hall seemed strangely quiet.

## Final chords

Outside limousines were lining up. Inside, the Band had just finished the final chords of The Weight. "Now," said Robbie Robertson quietly, "Bob Dylan."

Dylan's appearance was no surprise. Much of the line-up had been made public in the month since the Band announced its retirement. Dylan's performance was a surprise though. This was not the mellow folkie of Rolling Thunder. This was the Dylan of 1966, raw and uninhibited.

"Baby let me follow you down," he sang as the Band freewheeled behind him. Slowly people started walking out on stage — Eric Clapton, Joni Mitchell, Neil Young, Ringo Starr, Ron Wood, Robbie Robertson, looking around, nodded and gave the downbeat for I Shall Be Released.

The show was over. But "just because we're not going to tour anymore doesn't mean the music stops," Robertson had said before the show. "We've been going so long we'll never stop completely."

# Actress writes plum part too painful to play

By FRANK RASKY  
Star staff writer

"I know it sounds nuts," said Anne Baxter. "I've written the juiciest role an actress could dream of. But I'm not up to playing the part in the movie version of my book. It would be too painful."

"That's what comes from being an author. You can't detach yourself emotionally from your leading character — even if that character happens to be yourself."

The 53-year-old actress, in Toronto to appear on CFTO-TV's Joyce Davidson Show, was referring to her newly published autobiography, Intermittion.

It's a sensitively written account of how she gave up her Hollywood career — 50 movies, an Academy Award for her sordid alcoholic in The Razor's Edge, an Oscar nomination for her portrayal of the ruthless title character in All About Eve — to play the true-life role of a pioneer in love. For four years she and her second husband, Randolph Galt, a sheep rancher six years her junior, lived in a rat-infested house isolated in the Australian bush country, until she finally realized she was hopelessly miscast.

## Boiling volcano

"It wasn't the drudgery of boiling diapers on an old stove that killed our marriage," she now says. "It was the sheer loneliness I couldn't hack. I love civilized conversation and I was left parched and starving for it. I wound up like a boiling volcano sealed with scotch tape and I had to erupt."

An exuberant, witty and highly literate woman, who inherited her strong individuality from her grandfather, architect Frank Lloyd Wright, she sat down one day with a pencil and began scribbling scenes she remembered most vividly from her failed romance.

"It was a kind of personal catharsis," she says. "And it was like opening night on Broadway when I played Margo Channing in Applause (a musical version of All About Eve). Every time I locked myself in my room to write, I'd have the same butterflies in the stomach and sweating palms."

## Emotional drain

"And as I relived those bitter-sweet experiences in Australia, I'd get so excited I would be moved to tears and laughter. I didn't know that writing could be so emotionally draining. Nor that finding the exact word could be such a tremendous thrill."

What pleased her considerably was the praise she got from Joseph L. Mankiewicz, the author of All About Eve. He's now working on



ANNE BAXTER AT 53  
"Never say never is my motto"

the screenplay for a movie version of the book which she hopes to co-produce.

"Mank adored my prose style, but hated the title of my book," she says. "He feels it ought to be called Margo Channing, Chapter 2."

She was likewise flattered by the response from Bette Davis, who created the role of the aging actress, Margo Channing, to her Eve in the original 1950 film of All About Eve.

"Bette phoned me up to say she'd wept after reading my book. You know, she's really the original soft underbelly hidden behind a crusty shell. She said she'd undergone several of the same kinds of experiences I'd recounted in my book. And she was especially moved by my recollection of how she felt she was a failure at 41 when she tackled Margo in All About Eve."

"It's that spunky spirit I most respect about her. She's aware that ours is a risky profession — what I call a dog-eat-Dogpatch of quicksand — and yet she's not afraid to rush in again and risk failure."

The same thing might well be said of Anne Baxter. Twice divorced and the mother of three daughters (the oldest, 25-year-old Katrina,

is from her marriage to the late actor John Hodiak), she has by no means abandoned the prospect of risking a third marriage. "Never say never is my motto."

Having recently completed the co-starring role of a bank manager opposite Kirk Douglas in The Moneychangers, a four-part TV series based on the Arthur Hailey novel which will be shown next month, she has been busily reading scripts for good film roles.

"If an interesting part doesn't turn up soon, she's contemplating the possibility of creating one by trying her hand at writing a novel."

"Why not?" she asks rhetorically. "I remember reading the Bible when I was 2 years old and being hit by one phrase in Psalms: 'Number thy days.' That's been the theme of my life."

"I've never had enough time to do all I want to do. I'm a psychically greedy person. I want to do it all."

"So why shouldn't I try to conquer the new challenge of becoming a novelist? If I fail, I can always come back with the retort that my grandad often made when asked, after a defeat, 'How are you?' And he'd answer: 'Battered, but still in the ring.' That's me, too."



BY 1969 the Band represented the culmination of many styles. Richard Manuel (left), Garth Hudson, Levon Helm, Robbie Robertson and Rick Danko played '50s blues, country and Dylanesque rock.