



'Last Waltz' guests Neil Diamond, Joni Mitchell, and Neil Young join Band bassist Rick Danko onstage.

The Rock Movie Sound Explosion

One of the Kinks' best known songs is "Celluloid Heroes," in which Ray Davies tells us that "everybody's in show biz, everybody's a star." In 1978, it appears, almost every rock performer has got his or her name on a Hollywood marquee. From the ubiquitous *Saturday Night Fever* (Bee Gees) to a forthcoming, modestly-budgeted movie on the late Buddy Holly, rock & roll is being sprocketed for a movie-going audience eager to see what they've been listening to all these years.

Not that there's anything new about celluloid rock. Some sixties-era films—*Monterey Pop* and *Wood-*

stock—celebrated rock as festival, allowed us to peek at an audience as part of the concert. The Stones did the same thing in *Gimme Shelter*.

Scattered in and around these rock gems were lesser stars, like Dave Clark's *Havin' A Wild Weekend*, a boy-meets-girl saga which was patterned after innumerable films from the British pop idol Cliff Richards. The two decades after World War II saw a series of quickie exploitation films based either on a life style (the Annette Funicello-Frankie Avalon-beach-blanket-type) or a dance craze (the twist films of Chubby Checker).

From time to time an experiment

comes to light which stands by itself. *Tommy*, incandescent and enigmatic in its visual style, starred the Who as much as it did Ann-Margret. This year's crop—*The Last Waltz*, *FM*, *TGIF*, the forthcoming *Grease*—defy easy categories. *I Wanna Hold Your Hand* has no musical soundtrack album, yet captures the lyric madness behind Beatle hysteria. While all of these celebrate rock & roll, early reports indicate possible audience disenchantment. One or more of these films may be yanked by distributors because of poor box office receipts.

But still to come are more crowd pleasers, starring many of your favorites, among them a film about legendary French singer Edith Piaf, played by Bette Midler and a dramatization of their song "Desperado" starring the Eagles themselves. These coming attractions promise that this waltz isn't the last one. In fact, the dance has just begun.

—Shel Kagan

studios, working for what he considered the perfect sound."

The methodical Robertson was born in Toronto in 1944. His family was unremarkable musically, but the young Robbie was already playing a mean guitar and writing his own songs at age 13. By 15, he was a member of the Canadian Musicians Union, and had done gigs with local groups including The Robots, The Consuls, and Thumper and the Trambones. The young guitarist's compositions drew the notice of Ronnie Hawkins, an expatriate American working in Toronto who was best known for his rockabilly sound. Hawkins recorded two of Robbie's songs in 1959, then invited him to join his back-up band, The Hawks, a year later.

After three years of touring with Hawkins, the back-up group split off, becoming Levon and the Hawks. In early 1966, Robertson was hired as an accompanist, along with Levon Helm, by Bob Dylan. By the year's end, Dylan took in the entire group to accompany him on his world tour. In the summer of 1968, after a year living near the recuperating (following his motorcycle accident) Dylan, the group released its first album on Capitol Records, *Music from Big Pink*. They had renamed themselves The Band, which was the way industry people had been referring to them anyway, as in "Bob Dylan and The Band."

Their name finally was established by *Big Pink's* popularity. Through the 1970's, they released albums at a rate of almost one a year—*The Band* (1969), *Stage Fright* (1970) *Cahoots* (1971), *Rock of Ages* (1972), *Moondog Matinee* (1973). There followed a slowdown, interrupted by a tour with Dylan in 1974 and the release of *Northern Lights-Southern Cross* in late 1975. In 1976, they made the decision to stop touring, and the concert at Winterland—where The Band made its first headliner performance in 1969—was set. Then came the nearly two-year wait for the movie and soundtrack.

"We wanted to get inside the music," Robertson says of the film. "Every other pop music film I've seen was a let-down. We didn't want this to be the Johnny Carson show with music. We wanted to show what 16 years on the road meant to The Band so that anyone could understand it—not just the people wearing 'hip' buttons." Unintentionally, the film has elevated to star status the media-shy, self-conscious Robertson. While all members of The Band come across as genuine and unaffected, Robertson's star quality—based on his good looks and intuitive under-

standing of the camera—is striking. Will this mean the near-recluse will go Hollywood? Says one observer close to the group: "Robbie Robertson is a musician, a serious and dedicated one. *The Last Waltz* will just let the rest of the country in on his talents. But I don't think he's going to change his ways."

Interview material for this story provided by G. Archer Kitman.

'TGIF': Donna Summer at the Disco

by Steven Gaines

In the record business, she is disco. But in an all-white gay disco in New Orleans on an Easter weekend, which she approaches as a black and a woman, and where her records are played with almost non-stop reverence inside, the husky doorman won't let Donna Summer in. He asks for proof of age. Donna, tall, ironically boyish in jeans and a tailored jacket, with a peaked cap pulled over her big brown eyes and painted freckles on her cheeks, leans towards the burly doorman and says quietly and meaningfully: "My identification is in my limousine." A black woman with a limousine trying to get into a gay bar confuses the doorman long enough for Donna's publicity director to inform the management who it is he's hassling. Like Moses parting the Red Sea, Donna is admitted and word travels quicker than a fire alarm through the club that the Queen of the Scene is here.

Loved and adored, with a following as loyal and large as any legitimate cult figure, Donna Summer is known variously as the "Queen of Sex Rock" and the "First Lady of Love." A 29-year-old ex-Bostonian, who exploded onto the scene three years ago with an epic orgasmic song called "Love to Love You Baby," she has since managed to transcend her own sensual gimmick and become a first rate actress and song stylist. Last month, Summer jumped onto the screen in the Motown-Casablanca FilmWorks production of *Thank God it's Friday* and lands feet up, bigger than life.

The move to movies is important for Donna, not only because she was cast in the disco mold, but because she was specifically famous for groaning, moaning and otherwise sighing on songs like "Love to Love You Baby" and "I Feel Love." Although the cuts brought Donna riches and fame, they brought a lot of resentment, too. "They were really no great sign of talent," she admits in her spacious suite at Le Pavillion

Hotel in New Orleans on the eve of her spring tour. "It was just something that caught on at the moment."

She had recorded "Love to Love You Baby" while living in Germany, where she had spent eight years performing on stage and with the Vienna Light Opera. Casablanca Records president Neil Bogart, who also discovered Kiss, had bought the rights to "Love to Love You Baby" from Oasis, a German based production company. Bogart, also known as the "Sultan of Sell," didn't even realize the song's potential at first. He took the single home—originally only four minutes in length—and put it on the stereo during a party. Bogart recalls: "Every time it was over I felt like there was something missing. The people at the party kept on saying 'Play it again, Neil.' Well, after about twenty plays I realized what the song needed was to be longer. So I called Germany and asked the producers, Giorgio Moroder and Pete Bellotte, to record it in a longer version."

The extended version was an instant disco smash. Orders as large as for Kiss records started to pour into Casablanca without any radio airplay. Donna, in the meanwhile, was on a cruise in the Mediterranean, recovering from a minor illness. "The next thing I knew," she remembers with a shudder, "was that I got a telegram that said I had a tremendous hit in the United States. I flew back here and suddenly I was a big star. I guess I just wasn't ready for it. It

Donna Summer on-camera during the filming of 'Thank God It's Friday.' It's the disco queen's acting debut.





Leigh Charlton

Robbie Robertson and the Band's 'Last Waltz'

by Ira Wolfman

Robbie Robertson, lead guitarist and semi-official spokesman for The Band, spent six months running in and out of The Shangri-La sound studio in Malibu this winter, carefully, slowly, methodically working to perfect the mix of the soundtrack for The Band's feature film, *The Last Waltz*. Those six months were five months over the normal amount of time required, even for a 24-track live recording that was being overdubbed and remixed. The lanky, 34-year-old Robertson admits as much, but counters, "That's the way it is in mixing movie soundtracks—it's very behind on that end." The soundtrack aimed at stereo sound more than complete crispness, he explains: "It wasn't mixed so that it has a shimmering, slick hi-fi sound. It's just that the complicated effects are difficult to balance—

just as they were in the film."

The Last Waltz is a concert film, a record of the final live performance by the five members of The Band. The concert took place at San Francisco's Winterland on Thanksgiving Day, 1976, and was attended by 5,000 lucky fans and more than a dozen of the most esteemed names in rock history—including Eric Clapton, Bob Dylan, Emmylou Harris, Joni Mitchell, Neil Young, Ringo Starr, Van Morrison, Muddy Waters, Dr. John and Ronnie Wood. A going-away present of sorts from The Band to their fans, the concert was intended as a celebration. The soundtrack which came out of it (Warners) is a deluxe 3-record set featuring The Band by itself on 13 cuts, and accompanying their famous friends on another 15.

The Canadian-born Robertson was

cameras, and you have the result."

The result is a stylish movie, which director Scorsese filmed with the aid of eight of Hollywood's best cameramen. The musical results can best be judged on the *Last Waltz* soundtrack, which is an impressive combination of The Band's greatest hits (13 numbers, all written by Robertson, save "Life Is a Carnival," which was co-written with Danko and Helm) and a sampling of their superstar friends' famous numbers. Included on the soundtrack—but not in the movie—are a rousing version of "Tura Lura Lural (That's an Irish Lullaby)" by Van Morrison; "Down South in New Orleans," a bluesy number featuring Dr. John and Bobby Charles; "I Don't Believe You," a little-known Bob Dylan tune; and "The Last Waltz Refrain," sung by Bandman



Robbie Robertson (c) and the man who gave The Band its name, Bob Dylan. While Dylan was happy to perform for his old back-up band's farewell, promoter Bill Graham says he almost succeeded in being the only friend who wasn't filmed.

the mastermind behind the entire project. Together with his four fellow Band members—drummer Levon Helm, bassist Rick Danko, keyboardists Richard Manuel and Garth Hudson—Robertson decided the concert was to be filmed and recorded for posterity, and Robbie engaged Hollywood director Martin (*Taxi Driver*) Scorsese to manage the filming.

Bill Graham, the well-known promoter who backed the concert, recalls a crisis that came close to wrecking Robertson's plans for the film. "Robbie came to me a minute before Dylan was supposed to go on, shouting 'He won't let us film him. What'll I do?' Dylan had posted a guy by each camera onstage, and would not go on if it was rolling. I told Robbie, 'Go ahead. Don't worry.' He was still in doubt, I know, but when Dylan came on, you know me, I had my stage crew pull those guys off the

Richard Manuel and written expressly for the film by Robertson.

Among the soundtrack's high points are Band reworkings of their most popular tunes, "The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down," "Up On Cripple Creek," and a holiness-tinged collaboration with the black gospel/rock group The Staples on "The Weight." With Robertson and crew backing, we hear Van Morrison in a wailing version of "Caravan," Muddy Waters powering a driving "Mannish Boy," and Bob Dylan contributing four numbers: "Baby Let Me Follow You Down," "Forever Young," "I Don't Believe You," and a finale with the entire superstar cast, "I Shall Be Released."

"Robbie Robertson is a careful, painstaking man," says Paul Wasserman, Robertson's press agent. "He spent literally hundreds of hours in the