

Richard Manuel, 40, Rock Singer and Pianist

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Richard Manuel, the singer, pianist, songwriter and occasional drummer with the rock group the Band, was found dead Tuesday in his motel room in Winter Park, Fla. The police said the death was apparently a suicide. Mr. Manuel was 40 years old and lived in Woodstock, N.Y.

Mr. Manuel and the Band had performed Monday night at the Cheek to Cheek Lounge, next to the Quality Inn where the group was staying, as part of a tour of Florida.

According to Rick Nuss, a police spokesman, Mr. Manuel hanged himself from a bathroom curtain rod between 2:30 A.M. and 3:30 A.M. Tuesday and was found at noon by his wife, Arlie. Interviews with Mrs. Manuel and with other members of the Band offered no reason for Mr. Manuel's suicide, Mr. Nuss said. A toxicologist's report will not be completed for a week, he said.

The Band was highly influential in 1960's and 1970's rock, first as Bob Dylan's electrified backup band and later for its own resonant fusion of rock, rhythm-and-blues and country music.

Mr. Manuel was born in Stratford, Ontario. He and the four other members of the Band backed the rockabilly singer Ronnie Hawkins as the Hawks between 1960 and 1963. The group started performing on its own, then joined the blues singer John Hammond Jr. in Greenwich Village, Bob Dylan heard them and began working with

them. They toured the world as Mr. Dylan's backup band in 1965-66.

When Mr. Dylan had a serious motorcycle accident in 1966, members of the Band settled near him in Woodstock. As Mr. Dylan convalesced, they worked with him on songs that would later appear on "The Basement Tapes" and, in 1968, on "Music From Big Pink," the Band's debut album, which included Mr. Manuel's songs "In a Station," "We Can Talk," "Lonesome Suzie" and a collaboration with Mr. Dylan, "Tears of Rage."

On the 1969 album "The Band," Mr. Manuel co-wrote "Whispering Pines," "Jawbone" and "When You Awake" with J. R. (Robbie) Robertson, the main songwriter for the the group.

With the Band, Mr. Manuel also sang lead vocals — in a distinctive high, weary voice — on such songs as "I Shall Be Released" and "The Shape I'm in."

The Band toured and made albums on its own; in July 1973, the group played for an audience of 500,000 at Watkins Glen, N.Y. The Band backed Mr. Dylan in concerts and albums in 1973-74. In 1976, the original Band played its final concert, which was filmed by the director Martin Scorsese as "The Last Waltz." The group reunited without Mr. Robertson in the early 1980's, and returned to touring as the Band.

Mr. Manuel is survived by his wife, Arlie.