

The Band Breathes Fresh Country Air Over Fillmore East

By MIKE JAHN

The Band, which was first known as Bob Dylan's back-up group, spent Friday and Saturday coolly circulating mountain air through the Fillmore East, 105 Second Avenue.

The Band rose on Dylan's coattails and made a respectable dent in the pop music world last summer with the release of "Music From Big Pink," its first album.

"Big Pink" refers to The Band's house in West Saugerties, N.Y., and the album composed there was a huge success. It was a lean, crisp bearer of what one member of the group calls "mountain music, half country, half rock 'n' roll."

The Band comprises Jaime Robbie Robertson, guitar; Rick Danko, bass; Richard Manuel, piano; Garth Hudson, organ, and Levon Helm, drums. All of them contribute vocals, and it is this vocal style that makes them unusual. Their voices blend in the nasal harmony that marks the hillbilly musician; tight, rusty and mournful, like an old banjo string.

The Band takes cryptic, hip thoughts and filters them through their mountain air. In this way Dylan's thoughts on "I Shall Be Released," the song he contributed to their album, comes off as a backwoods plea: "I see my life come shining/ from the west down to the east/ any day now, any day now I shall be released."

In their first set Friday it took them two or three songs to really warm up, but when they did they played with great freshness and ease. The members of The Band are coolly professional. They appeared on stage wearing suits (of all things) and worked into a rocking fever of an intensity seen only occasionally.