

The Vinyl Phyle

To Kingdom Come
The Band
 Capitol

by Randal Smathers

This opus is subtitled "The Definitive Collection"; believe it. If you know The Band's music, I can't add anything else to that one-sentence review, except that there are three songs here that are new releases (Chuck Berry's "Back to Memphis", The Four Tops' "Loving You is Sweeter than Ever", and a live version of their own "Endless Highway"). Given a relatively complete library of The Band's music, this collection may be simply redundant, so I'll target the rest of this review towards people who may not know much about the group.

Unfortunately, the excellent liner notes which came with the cassette are only half there (one of the booklets was missing, so I checked with FM88 and they didn't get any liner notes, so this may be a problem). Not

being a Band historian, I don't have exact dates, but references are easy to find on this heavily-studied group, if you're so inclined.

The Band was formed in the early sixties by Robbie Robertson, Levon Helm, Rick Danko, Richard Manuel, and Garth Hudson. Their early career consisted of playing the chicken-wire bar circuit in Arkansas (home of the only non-Canuck member, Levon Helm) under the name of The Crackers, and playing backup to the greatest country rock guitar playin' singer never to hit the Big Time, Ronnie Hawkins.

Just prior to the release of their first album, *Music From Big Pink*, the band changed their name to The Band, and a legend was born. They wound up playing with such notables as Bob Dylan (whose *Basement Tapes* album was recorded in the downstairs studio at the house called Big Pink which the group owned in upstate New York), and Van Morrison, who dropped in one day to—as it turned out—co-write and record "4% Panto-

mime." The guest list for their famous farewell concert, "The Last Waltz," gives you an idea: Morrison, Hawkins, Dylan, Neil Young, Joni Mitchell, Eric Clapton, Muddy Waters, Paul Butterfield, Bobby Charles, Neil Diamond.

A short description of The Band's music is nigh-unto impossible. You've heard their imitators, disciples, and worshippers, even if you're addicted to AM and never heard the original. They called themselves a rock band, but they were also a country band, a gospel harmony group, and a folk band. The overall sound varies through everything that's ever been called "roots" music. If you think that Tom Wait made up all his own licks, then you haven't heard The Band. Ditto Bruce Springsteen and his ilk, Randy Newman, the Doors. . .well, the list is enormous.

The strongest things about this band are twofold: the writing and the cohesion. Robbie Robertson provided the first in as varied a selection of songs as any band has ever played, from "Acadian Driftwood", about

the Acadian people of the Eastern seaboard, to the jazzy "Rag Mama Rag".

The second is probably the thing that let the group hang together for sixteen years, and then do a reunion tour—before the 1978 suicide of Richard Manuel prevented the possibility of doing any more. Although there is room for a solo in many of the group's songs, these parts are spread around. Instead of a group where most of the impetus comes from one person, The Band relied on the input of the entire ensemble. Vocals came from Helm, Danko, and Manuel; songs primarily from Robertson; the "sound" from a mix of those vocals with Hudson's impeccable keyboards, Danko and Helm's solid rhythm section, and an ability to incorporate a diversity of influences into their music without losing their own identity.

If you don't know their stuff, *To Kingdom Come* will let you know why these guys deserve to be called The Band. If you know their stuff, this compilation is like welcoming an old friend back into your living room.



Victory
Culture Killed the Native
 Rampage Records

Dressed in leather, sporting long hair, and a good dose of makeup, this West German quintet appear to be your typical heavy metal rock band. Victory's latest album, *Culture Killed the Native*, could be written off as yet another recording of pounding drum beats, screaming vocals, and gripping guitar power chords — but it has a certain edge. There's something about this group that makes them special.

Lead singer Fernando Garcia's powerful vocals, backed by the screaming guitar of Herman Frank, drive the listener into a heavy metal heaven. Songs like "More and More," "Never Satisfied," and "Let It Rock On" contain such a high energy that only true metalloids could harness the power. After mixing in the ballads "Lost In The Night" and "On The Loose" you begin to realize that this

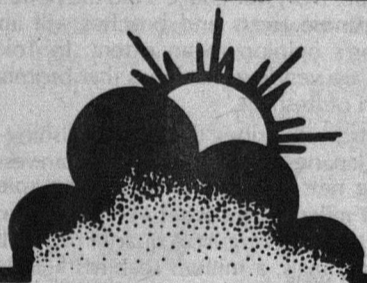
album is quite different. It stands out in a saturated market of new hard rock acts.

Although some of Victory's songs deal with the typical topics of sex and rebellion that seem to be the norm with heavy metal, a few tunes deal with issues like the environment and teenage problems. This band shows a hard, rebellious rock 'n' roll image while at the same time showing they care.

Obviously influenced by their fellow West German rockers, The Scorpions, Victory also seems to blend in touches of other metal bands like Dokken and White Lion. This combination of influences results in an excellent album.

Another plus for the band is that they write all their own songs and judging from the album, they are quite talented and experienced songwriters. Overall Victory's album is quite impressive, and I'm sure will be well received by the public.

—Pat McKiernan



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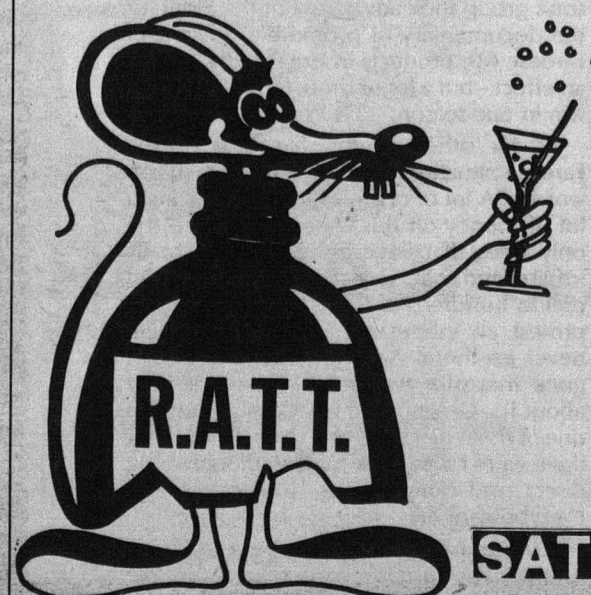
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