

Thursday December 28th 2023

The Last Waltz

USA 1978 117mins Cert U

The Last Waltz remains an unusually dignified portrait of country rock excess. Since its release in 1978, Martin Scorsese's documentary celebrating The Band's star-studded farewell concert, after 16 years on the road, has been widely imitated but never bettered. Yet its most striking quality is the sense of restraint - the manic editing of most rock movies since being largely absent. Simply put, Scorsese knew that when he had a camera on Muddy Waters belting out 'Mannish Boy', there was no point in cutting away to another shot or close-up.

As for The Band's music, history has been kind to that as well. The rustic terrain staked out by the four Canadians and one American in classic albums like 1968's *Music from Big Pink* and 1969's *The Band*, has been fertile ground both for the recent wave of all-country acts and the bluegrass veterans featured on *O Brother Where Art Thou?*'s soundtrack. It is to be somewhat regretted that there isn't more of The Band in *The Last Waltz* because the guest appearances tend to push the hosts out of the spotlight. Some (Muddy Waters, Dr John, Van Morrison and a surprisingly vigorous Bob Dylan) are terrific, while others (notably Neil Diamond) are less so. As for outfits, the jury's still out on whose was the most regrettable, was it Diamond's combo of red shirt, blue blazer and orange shades, Morrison's spangly purple jump suit or Ronnie Wood's white faux-tuxedo shirt?

Intercut with the concert footage are interview segments in which a nervous Scorsese tries to pal around with the infinitely cooler Band members - the director's awe for his friend Robbie Robertson, who later created the soundtracks for *The Colour of Money* and *Casino*, is still wryly amusing. Despite the subsequent release of a DVD which includes some previously unseen backstage and onstage action, *The Last Waltz* belongs in a movie theatre, where audiences can enjoy and fully appreciate the refurbished sound mix, which is so clean you can almost understand what Bob Dylan is singing!

Acknowledgments: Gary Tooze, DVDBeaver.com

"Arguably the most beautiful of rock movies, while the musical highlights - 'The Weight' with the Staples Singers, Van Morrison's fire-bolt 'Caravan', Neil Young's lovely 'Helpless' and every Levon Helm vocal - still astound"
Tom Huddleston, *Time Out*

Note:

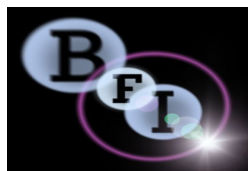
If you enjoyed tonight's film, you'll want to seek out *Once Were Brothers* (2019, dir. Daniel Roher), a cautionary, confessional memoir by Robbie Robertson of his young life and the creation of The Band. Another wonderful film, it effectively takes on the mantle of a prequel to *The Last Waltz* - almost forty years after the event! Sadly, Robertson died on August 9th, following a year-long illness.

Leading Players

Robbie Robertson	Himself
Rick Danko	Himself
Levon Helm	Himself
Richard Manuel	Himself
Garth Hudson	Himself

Production Credits

Director	Martin Scorsese
Producers	Robbie Robertson, Steven Prince + 4 others
Writing Treatment	Mardik Martin
Cinematography	Michael Chapman, Lazlo Kovacs, Vilmos Zsigmond
Original Music	The Band and featured guests



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