



The Band

MUSIC FROM BIG PINK 50TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

CAPITOL/UMG

Music critics are often guilty of bandying around hyperbolic epithets about albums – “classic”, “landmark”, “epochal” – you get the picture. But let’s not understate the case for *Music From Big Pink* – this was a game-changer for rock ‘n’ roll. It’s not strictly true that this astonishing collection came out of nowhere – The Band had already backed Dylan and rockabilly veteran Ronnie Hawkins – but the way they hit the ground running as finished-product songwriters in their own right was totally unexpected. This is an album that sounds simultaneously familiar and otherworldly – woody, organic and shot through with an acute understanding of *The Great American Songbook*. Robbie Robertson’s guitar playing serves the songs rather than dominates them, and in Richard Manuel, The Band had one of the most soulful vocalists around. The quintet transform their *Basement Tapes* Dylan collaborations *I Shall Be Released* and *This Wheel’s On Fire* and create their own standard with *The Weight*; while drummer Levon Helm shines vocally on the funky *We Can Talk*, and *Chest Fever* showcases mad-scientist organist Garth Hudson. The Super Deluxe boxset has a CD version with five outtakes, a Blu-ray 5.1 surround mix, plus a 2LP incarnation on black vinyl and a 7” of *The Weight*. A 180g 2LP pink-vinyl version is also available. *Steve Harnell*

VERDICT

9/10



The Pretty Things

S.F. SORROW 50TH ANNIVERSARY

MADFISH

The Pretty Things were victims of release-date circumstances with their concept LP *S.F. Sorrow*. Sandwiched between the ‘White Album’ and *Beggars Banquet*, it hardly stood a chance. The quality of the songs on *S.F. Sorrow* certainly wasn’t to blame – this is a Brit psych-rock masterpiece. Out of step with the back-to-basics approach of both The Beatles and the Stones, *S.F. Sorrow* still resonates with tripped-out hippy ideology. But there’s a darker edge here, too. A storyline taking in birth, love, war and death sees the titular protagonist ultimately deciding to turn against the world and resign himself to a life of depressed solitude. Raga-rock opener *S.F. Sorrow* morphs into the swirling atmospheric of *Bracelets Of Fingers* and the punchy psychedelic romance of *She Says Good Morning*, while the mournful folk of *Private Sorrow* sees the album deftly change direction as our hero heads off to battle. The striking *Balloon Burning* is proto prog, and the band move into uncharted territory with the wonderfully eccentric *Baron Saturday*, a progressively more wiggled-out *The Journey* and downright terrifying *I See You*. Despite the refutations, the punchy *Old Man Going* surely influenced Pete Townshend to toughen up The Who’s sound. This 50th Anniversary boxset edition serves up the album in both mono and stereo incarnations, an intriguing David Gilmour-assisted Abbey Road live recreation from 1998, plus assorted singles. *Steve Harnell*

VERDICT

9/10

