



## Prince Talks: The Silence Is Broken

The Purple Pleasure Palace houses the genius behind 'Around the World in a Day'

Prince on the cover of Rolling Stone. "Raspberry Beret" video still

By Neal Karlen

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John Nelson turns sixty-nine today, and all the semiretired piano man wants for his birthday is to shoot some pool with his firstborn son. "He's real handy with a cue," says Prince, laughing, as he threads his old white T-Bird through his old black neighborhood toward his old man's house. "He's so cool. The man knows what time it is."

Hard time is how life has traditionally been clocked in North Minneapolis; this is the place 'Time' forgot twelve years ago when the magazine's cover trumpeted "The Good Life in Minnesota," alongside a picture of Governor Wendell Anderson holding up a walleye. Though tame and middle-class by Watts and Roxbury standards, the North Side offers some of the few mean streets in town.

The old sights bring out more Babbitt than Badass in Prince as he leads a leisurely tour down the main streets of his inner-city Gopher Prairie. He cruises slowly, respectfully: stopping completely at red lights, flicking on his turn signal even

when no one's at an intersection. Gone is the wary Kung Fu Grasshopper voice with which Prince whispers when meeting strangers or accepting Academy Awards. Cruising peacefully with the window down, he's proof in a paisley jump suit that you can always go home again, especially if you never really left town.

### 100 Greatest Artists of All Time: Prince

Tooling through the neighborhood, Prince speaks matter-of-factly of why he toyed with early interviewers about his father and mother, their divorce and his adolescent wanderings between the homes of his parents, friends and relatives. "I used to tease a lot of journalists early on," he says, "because I wanted them to concentrate on the music and not so much on me coming from a broken home. I really didn't think that was important. What was important was what came out of my system that particular day. I don't live in the past. I don't play my old records for that reason. I make a statement, then move on to the next."

The early facts, for the neo-Freudians: John Nelson, leader of the Prince Rogers jazz trio, knew Mattie Shaw from North Side community dances. A singer sixteen years John's junior, Mattie bore traces of **Billie Holiday** in her pipes and more than a trace of Indian and Caucasian in her blood. She joined the Prince Rogers trio, sang for a few years around town, married John Nelson and dropped out of the group. She nicknamed her husband after the band; the son who came in 1958 got the nickname on his birth certificate. At home and on the street, the kid was "Skipper." Mattie and John broke up ten years later, and Prince began his domestic shuttle.

"There's where my mom lives," he says nonchalantly, nodding toward a neatly trimmed house and lawn. "My parents live very close by each other, but they don't talk. My mom's the wild side of me; she's like that all the time. My dad's real serene; it takes the music to get him going. My father and me, we're one and the same." A wry laugh. "He's a little sick, just like I am."

Most of North Minneapolis has gone outside this Saturday afternoon to feel summer, that two-week season, locals joke, between winter and road construction. During this scenic tour through the neighborhood, the memories start popping faster. The T-Bird turns left at a wooden two-story church whose steps are lined with bridesmaids in bonnets and ushers in tuxedos hurling rice up at a beaming couple framed in the door. "That was the church I went to growing up," says Prince. "I wonder who's getting married." A fat little kid waves, and Prince waves back.

"Just all kinds of things here," he goes on, turning right. "There was a school right there, John Hay. That's where I went to elementary school," he says, pointing out a field of black tar sprouting a handful of bent metal basketball rims. "And that's where my cousin lives. I used to play there every day when I was twelve, on these streets, football up and down this block. That's his father out there on the lawn." These lawns are where Prince the adolescent would also amuse his friends with expert imitations of pro wrestlers Mad Dog Vachon and the Crusher. To amuse himself, he learned to play a couple dozen instruments. At thirteen, he formed Grand Central, his first band, with some high-school friends. Grand Central often traveled to local hotels and gyms to band-battle with their black competition: Cohesion, from the derided "bourgeois" South Side, and Flyte Tyme, which, with the addition of Morris Day, would later evolve into the Time.

Prince is fiddling with the tape deck inside the T-Bird. On low volume comes his unreleased "Old Friends 4 Sale," an arrow-to-the-heart rock ballad about trust and loss. Unlike "Positively 4th Street" – which Bob Dylan reputedly named after a nearby Minneapolis block – the lyrics are sad, not bitter. "I don't know too much about Dylan," says Prince, "but I respect him a lot. 'All along the Watchtower' is my favorite of his. I heard it first from Jimi Hendrix."

"Old Friends 4 Sale" ends, and on comes "Strange Relationships," an as-yet-unreleased dance tune. "Is it too much?" asks Prince about playing his own songs in his own car. "Not long ago I was riding around L.A. with [a well-known rock star], and all he did was play his own stuff over and over. If it gets too much, just tell me."

He turns onto Plymouth, the North Side's main strip. When Martin Luther King got shot, it was Plymouth Avenue that burned. "We used to go to that McDonald's there," he says. "I didn't have any money, so I'd just stand outside there and smell stuff. Poverty makes people angry, brings out their worst side. I was very bitter when I was young. I was insecure and I'd attack anybody. I couldn't keep a girlfriend for two weeks. We'd argue about anything."

Across the street from McDonald's, Prince spies a smaller landmark. He points to a vacant corner phone booth and remembers a teenage fight with a strict and unforgiving father. "That's where I called my dad and begged him to take me back after he kicked me out," he begins softly. "He said no, so I called my sister and asked her to ask him. So she did, and afterward told me that all I had to do was call him back, tell him I was sorry, and he'd take me back. So I did, and he still said no. I sat crying at that phone booth for two hours. That's the last time I cried."

In the years between that phone booth breakdown and today's pool game came forgiveness. Says Prince, "Once I made it, got my first record contract, got my name on a piece of paper and a little money in my pocket, I was able to forgive. Once I was eating every day, I became a much nicer person." But it took many more years for the son to understand what a jazzman father needed to survive. Prince figured it out when he moved into his purple house.

"I can be upstairs at the piano, and Rande [his cook] can come in," he says. "Her footsteps will be in a different time, and it's real weird when you hear something that's a totally different rhythm than what you're playing. A lot of times that's mistaken for conceit or not having a heart. But it's not. And my dad's the same way, and that's why it was so hard for him to live with anybody. I didn't realize that until recently. When he was working or thinking, he had a private pulse going constantly inside him. I don't know, your bloodstream beats differently."

Prince pulls the T-Bird into an alley behind a street of neat frame houses, stops behind a wooden one-car garage and rolls down the window. Relaxing against a tree is a man who looks like Cab Calloway. Dressed in a crisp white suit, collar and tie, a trim and smiling John Nelson adjusts his best cuff links and waves.

"Happy birthday," says the son. "Thanks," says the father, laughing. Nelson says he's not even allowing himself a piece of cake on his birthday. "No, not this year," he says with a shake of his head. Pointing at his son, Nelson continues, "I'm trying to take off ten pounds I put on while visiting him in Los Angeles. He eats like I want to eat, but he exercises, which I certainly don't."

Father then asks son if maybe he should drive himself to the pool game so he won't have to be hauled all the way back afterward. Prince says okay, and Nelson, chuckling, says to the stranger, "Hey, let me show you what I got for my birthday two years ago." He goes over to the garage and gives a tug on the door handle.

Squeezed inside is a customized deep-purple BMW. On the rear seat is a copy of Prince's latest LP, *Around the World in a Day*. While the old man gingerly backs his car out, Prince smiles. "He never drives that thing. He's afraid it's going to get dented." Looking at his own white T-Bird, Prince goes on: "He's always been that way. My father gave me this a few years ago. He bought it new in 1966. There were only 22,000 miles on it when I got it."

An ignition turns. "Wait," calls Prince, remembering something. He grabs a tape off the T-Bird seat and yells to his father, "I got something for you to listen to. Lisa [Coleman] and Wendy [Melvoin] have been working on these in L.A." Prince throws the tape, which the two female members of his band had mixed, and his father catches it with one hand. Nelson nods okay and pulls his car behind his son's in the alley. Closely tailing Prince through North Minneapolis, he waves and smiles whenever we look back. It's impossible to believe that the gun-toting geezer in *Purple Rain* was modeled after John Nelson.

"That stuff about my dad was part of [director-cowriter] Al Magnoli's story," Prince explains. "We used parts of my past and present to make the story pop more, but it was a *story*. My dad wouldn't have nothing to do with guns. He never swore, still doesn't, and never drinks." Prince looks in his rearview mirror at the car tailing him. "He don't look sixty-nine, do he? He's so cool. He's got girlfriends, lots of 'em." Prince drives alongside two black kids walking their bikes. "Hey, Prince," says one casually. "Hey," says the driver with a nod, "how you doing?"

Passing by old neighbors watering their lawns and shooting hoops, the North Side's favorite son talks about his hometown. "I wouldn't move, just cuz I like it here so much. I can go out and not get jumped on. It feels good not to be hassled when I dance, which I do a lot. It's not a thing of everybody saying, 'Whoa, who's out with who here?' while photographers flash their bulbs in your face."

Nearing the turnoff that leads from Minneapolis to suburban Eden Prairie, Prince flips in another tape and peeks in the rearview mirror. John Nelson is still right behind. "It's real hard for my father to show emotion," says Prince, heading onto the highway. "He never says 'I love you,' and whenever we try to hug or something, we bang our heads together like in some Charlie Chaplin movie. But a while ago, he was telling me how I always had to be careful. My father told me, 'If anything happens to you, I'm gone.' All I thought at first was that it was a real nice thing to say. But then I thought about it for a while and realized something. That was my father's way of saying 'I love you.' "

A few minutes later, Prince and his father pull in front of the Warehouse, a concrete barn in an Eden Prairie industrial park. Inside, the Family, a rock-funk band that Prince has begun working with, is pounding out new songs and dance routines. The group is as tight as ace drummer Jellybean Johnson's pants. At the end of one hot number, Family members fell on their backs, twitching like fried eggs.

Prince and his father enter to hellos from the still-gyrating band. Prince goes over to a pool table by the soundboard, racks the balls and shimmies to the beat of the Family's next song. Taking everything in, John Nelson gives a professional nod to the band, his son's rack job and his own just-chalked cue. He hitches his shoulders, takes aim and breaks like Minnesota Fats. A few minutes later, the band is still playing and the father is still shooting. Prince, son to this father and father to this band, is smiling.

**T**he night before, in the warehouse, Prince is about to break his three-year public silence. Wearing a jump suit, powder-blue boots and a little crucifix on a chain, he dances with the Family for a little while, plays guitar for a minute, sings lead for a second, then noodles four-hand keyboard with Susannah Melvoin, Wendy's identical-twin sister. Seeing me at the door, Prince comes over. "Hi," he whispers, offering a hand, "want something to eat or drink?" On a table in front of the band are piles of fruit and a couple bags of Doritos. Six different kinds of tea sit on a shelf by the wall. No drugs, no booze, no coffee. Prince plays another lick or two and watches for a few more minutes, then waves goodbye to the band and heads for his car outside the concrete barn.

"I'm not used to this," mumbles Prince, staring straight ahead through the windshield of his parked car. "I really thought I'd never do interviews again." We drive for twenty minutes, talking about Minnesota's skies, air and cops. Gradually, his voice comes up, bringing with it inflections, hand gestures and laughs.

Soon after driving past a field that will house a state-of-the-art recording studio named Paisley Park, we pull down a quiet suburban street and up to the famous purple house. Prince waves to a lone, unarmed guard in front of a chain-link fence. The unremarkable split-level house, just a few yards back from the minimum security, is quiet. No fountains out front, no swimming pools in back, no black-faced icons of Yahweh or Lucifer. "We're here," says Prince, grinning. "Come on in."

One look inside tells the undramatic story. Yes, it seems the *National Enquirer* – whose Minneapolis Babylon exposé of Prince was excerpted in numerous other newspapers this spring – was exaggerating. No, the man does not live in an armed fortress with only a food taster and wall-to-wall, life-size murals of Marilyn Monroe to talk to. Indeed, if a real-estate agent led a tour through Prince's house, one would guess that the current resident was, at most, a hip suburban surgeon who likes deep-pile carpeting.

"Hi," says Rande, from the kitchen, "you got a couple of messages." Prince thanks her and offers up some homemade chocolate-chip cookies. He takes a drink from a water cooler emblazoned with a Minnesota North Stars sticker and continues the tour. "This place," he says, "is not a prison. And the only things it's a shrine to are Jesus, love and peace."

Off the kitchen is a living room that holds nothing your aunt wouldn't have in her house. On the mantel are framed pictures of family and friends, including one of John Nelson playing a guitar. There's a color TV and VCR, a long coffee table supporting a dish of jellybeans, and a small silver unicorn by the mantel. Atop the large mahogany piano sits an oversize white Bible.

The only thing unusual in either of the two guest bedrooms is a two-foot statue of a smiling yellow gnome covered by a swarm of butterflies. One of the monarchs is flying out of a heart-shaped hole in the gnome's chest. "A friend gave that to me, and I put it in the living room," says Prince. "But some people said it scared them, so I took it out and put it in here."

Downstairs from the living room is a narrow little workroom with recording equipment and a table holding several notebooks. "Here's where I wrote and recorded all of *1999*," says Prince, "all right in this room." On a low table in the corner are three Grammys. "Wendy," says Prince, "has got the Academy Award."

### 100 Greatest Singers of All Time: Prince

The work space leads into the master bedroom. It's nice. And . . . normal. No torture devices or questionable appliances, not even a cigarette butt, beer tab or tea bag in sight. A four-poster bed above plush white carpeting, some framed pictures, one of Marilyn Monroe. A small lounging area off the bedroom provides a stereo, a lake-shore view and a comfortable place to stretch out on the floor and talk. And talk he did – his first interview in three years.

A few hours later, Prince is kneeling in front of the VCR, showing his "Raspberry Beret" video. He explains why he started the clip with a prolonged clearing of the throat. "I just did it to be sick, to do something no one else would do." He pauses and contemplates. "I turned on MTV to see the premiere of 'Raspberry Beret,' and Mark Goodman was talking to the guy who discovered the backward message on 'Darling Nikki.' They were trying to figure out what the cough meant too, and it was sort of funny." He pauses again. "But I'm not getting down on him for trying. I like that. I've always had little hidden messages, and I always will."

He then plugs in the videocassette of "4 the Tears in Your Eyes," which he's just sent to the Live Aid folks for the big show. "I hope they like it," he says, shrugging his shoulders.

The phone rings, and Prince picks it up in the kitchen. "We'll be there in twenty minutes," he says, hanging up. Heading downstairs, Prince swivels his head and smiles. "Just gonna change clothes." He comes back a couple minutes later wearing another paisley jump suit, "the only kind of clothes I own." And the boots? "People say I'm always wearing heels cuz I'm short," he says, laughing. "I wear heels because the women like 'em."

A few minutes later, driving toward the First Avenue club, Prince is talking about the fate of the most famous landmark in Minneapolis. "Before *Purple Rain*," he says, "all the kids who came to First Avenue knew us, and it was just like a big, fun fashion show. The kids would dress for themselves and just try and look really cool. Once you got your thing right, you'd stop looking at someone else. You'd be yourself, and you'd feel comfortable."

Then Hollywood arrived. "When the film first came out," Prince remembers, "a lot of tourists started coming. That was kind of weird, to be in the club and get a lot of 'Oh! There *he* is!' It felt a little strange. I'd be in there thinking, 'Wow, this sure is different than it used to be.' "

Now, however, the Gray Line Hip Tour swarm has slackened. According to Prince – who goes there twice a week to dance when he's not working on a big project – the old First Avenue feeling is coming back. "There were a lot of us hanging around the club back in the old days," he says, "and the new army, so to speak, is getting ready to come back to Minneapolis. The Family's already here, Mazarati's back now too, and Sheila E. and her band will be coming soon. The club'll be the same thing that it was."

As we pull up in front of First Avenue, a Saturdaynight crowd is milling around outside, combing their hair, smoking cigarettes, holding hands. They stare with more interest than awe as Prince gets out of the car. "You want to go to the [VIP] booth?" asks the bouncer. "Naah," says Prince, "I feel like dancing."

A few feet off the packed dance floor stands the Family, taking a night off from rehearsing. Prince joins the band amid laughs, kisses, soul shakes. Prince and three other Family members wade through a floor full of Teddy-and-Eleanor-Mondale-brand funkettes and start moving. Many of the kids Prince passes either don't see him or pretend they don't care. Most of the rest turn their heads slightly to see the man go by, then simply continue their own motions.

An hour later, he's on the road again, roaring out of downtown. Just as he's asked if there's anything in the world he wants but doesn't have, two blondes driving daddy's Porsche speed past. "I don't," Prince says with a giggle, "have them."

He catches up to the girls, rolls down his window and throws a ping-pong ball that was on the floor of his car at them. They turn their heads to see what kind of geek is heaving ping-pong balls at them on the highway at two in the morning. When they see who it is, mouths drop, hands wave, the horn blares. Prince rolls up his window, smiles silently and speeds by.

Off the main highway, Prince veers around the late-night stillness of Cedar Lake, right past the spot where Mary Tyler Moore gamboled during her TV show's credits. This town, he says, is his freedom. "The only time I feel like a prisoner," he continues, "is when I think too much and can't sleep from just having so many things on my mind. You know, stuff like 'I could do this, I could do that. I could work with this band. When am I gonna do this show or that show?' There's so many things. There's women. Do I have to eat? I wish I didn't have to eat."

A few minutes later, he drops me off at my house. Half a block ahead, he stops at a Lake Street red light. A left up Lake leads back to late-night Minneapolis; a right is the way home to the suburban purple house and solitude. Prince turns left, back toward the few still burning night lights of the city he's never left.

## **The Interview**

### **Why have you decided that now is the time to talk?**

There have been a lot of things said about me, and a lot of them are wrong. There have been a lot of contradictions. I don't mind criticism, I just don't like lies. I feel I've been very honest in my work and my life, and it's hard to tolerate people telling so many barefaced lies.

## **Do you read most of what's written about you?**

A little, not much. Sometimes someone will pass along a funny one. I just wrote a song called "Hello," which is going to be on the flip side of "Pop Life." It says at the end, "Life is cruel enough without cruel words." I get a lot of cruel words. A lot of people do.

I saw critics be so critical of **Stevie Wonder** when he made *Journey through the Secret Life of Plants*. Stevie has done so many great songs, and for people to say "You missed, don't do that, go back" – well, I would never say, "Stevie Wonder, you missed." [*Prince puts the Wonder album on the turntable, plays a cut, then puts on Miles Davis' new album.*] Or Miles. Critics are going to say, "Ah, Miles done went off." Why say that? Why even tell Miles he went off? You know, if you don't like it, don't talk about it. Go buy another record!

Not long ago I talked to George Clinton, a man who knows and has done so much for funk. George told me how much he liked *Around the World in a Day*. You know how much more his words mean than those from some mamma-jamma wearing glasses and an alligator shirt behind a typewriter?

## **Do you hate rock critics? Do you think they're afraid of you?**

[*Laughs*] No, it's no big deal. Hey, I'm afraid of *them!* One time early in my career I got into a fight with a New York writer, this little skinny cat, a real sidewinder. He said, "I'll tell you a secret, Prince. Writers write for other writers, and a lot of time it's more fun to be nasty." I just looked at him. But when I really thought about it and put myself in his shoes, I realized that's what he had to do. I could see his point. They can do whatever they want. And me, too. I can paint whatever picture I want with my albums. And I try to instill that in every act I've ever worked with.

## **What picture were you painting with *Around the World in a Day*?**

[Laughs] I've heard some people say I'm not talking about anything on this record. And what a lot of other people get wrong about the record is that I'm *not* trying to be this great visionary wizard. Paisley Park is in everybody's heart. It's not just something that I have the keys to. I was trying to say something about looking inside oneself to find perfection. Perfection is in everyone. Nobody's perfect, but they can be. We may never reach that, but it's better to strive than not.

## **Sounds religious.**

As far as that goes, let me tell you a story about Wendy. We had to fly somewhere at the beginning of the tour, and Wendy is deathly afraid of flying. She got on the plane and really freaked. I was scared for *her*. I tried to calm her down with jokes, but it didn't work. I thought about it and said, "Do you believe in God?" She said yes. I said, "Do you trust him?" and she said she did. Then I asked, "So why are you afraid to fly?" She started laughing and said, "Okay, okay, okay." Flying still bothers her a bit, but she knows where it is and doesn't get freaked.

It's just so nice to know there is someone and someplace else. And if we're wrong, and I'm wrong, and there is nothing, then big deal! But the whole life I just spent, I at least had some reason to spend it.

## **When you talk about God, which God are you talking about? The Christian God? Jewish? Buddhist? Is there any God in particular you have in mind?**

Yes, very much so. A while back, I had an experience that changed me and made

me think differently about how and what I wrote and how I acted toward people. I'm going to make a film about it – not the next one, but the one after that. I've wanted to make it for three years now. Don't get me wrong – I'm still as wild as I was. I'm just funneling it in a different direction. And now I analyze things so much that sometimes I can't shut my brain off and it hurts. That's what that movie will be about.

### **What was the experience that changed you?**

I don't really want to get into it specifically. During the *Dirty Mind* period, I would go into fits of depression and get physically ill. I would have to call people to help me get out of it. I don't do that anymore.

### **What were you depressed about?**

A lot had to do with the band's situation, the fact that I couldn't make people in the band understand how great we could all be together if we all played our part. A lot also had to do with being in love with someone and not getting any love back. And there was the fact that I didn't talk much with my father and sister. Anyway, a lot of things happened in this two-day period, but I don't want to get into it right now.

### **How'd you get over it?**

That's what the movie's going to be about. Paisley Park is the only way I can say I got over it now. Paisley Park is the place one should find in oneself, where one can go when one is alone.

### **You say you've now found the place where you can go to be alone. Is it your house? Within the family you've built around you? With God?**

It's a combination of things. I think when one discovers himself, he discovers God. Or maybe it's the other way around. I'm not sure. . . . It's hard to put into words. It's a feeling – someone knows when they get it. That's all I can really say.

### **Do you believe in heaven?**

I think there is an afterworld. For some reason, I think it's going to look just like here, but that's part . . . I don't really like talking about this stuff. It's so personal.

### **Does it bother you when people say you're going back in time with *Around the World in a Day*?**

No. What they say is that **the Beatles** are the influence. The influence wasn't the Beatles. They were great for what they did, but I don't know how that would hang today. The cover art came about because I thought people were tired of looking at *me*. Who wants another picture of him? I would only want so many pictures of my woman, then I would want the real thing. What would be a little more happening than just another picture [*laughs*] would be if there was some way I could materialize in people's cribs when they play the record.

### **How do you feel about people calling the record "psychedelic"?**

I don't mind that, because that was the only period in recent history that delivered songs and colors. **Led Zeppelin**, for example, would make you feel differently on each song.

### **Does your fame affect your work?**

A lot of people think it does, but it doesn't at all. I think the smartest thing I did was record *Around the World in a Day* right after I finished *Purple Rain*. I didn't wait to see what would happen with *Purple Rain*. That's why the two albums sound completely different. People think, "Oh, the new album isn't half as powerful as *Purple Rain* or *1999*." You know how easy it would have been to open *Around the World in a Day* with the guitar solo that's on the end of "Let's Go Crazy"? You know how easy it would have been to just put it in a different key? That would have shut everybody up who said the album wasn't half as powerful. I don't *want* to make an album like the earlier ones. Wouldn't it be cool to be able to put your albums back to back and not get bored, you dig? I don't know how many people can play all their albums back to back with each one going to different cities.

## **What do you think about the comparisons between you and Jimi Hendrix?**

It's only because he's black. That's really the only thing we have in common. He plays different guitar than I do. If they really listened to my stuff, they'd hear more of a **Santana** influence than Jimi Hendrix. Hendrix played more blues; Santana played prettier. You can't compare people, you really can't, unless someone is blatantly trying to rip somebody off. And you can't really tell that unless you play the songs.

You've got to understand that there's only so much you can do on an electric guitar. I don't know what these people are thinking – they're usually non-guitar-playing mamma-jammies saying this kind of stuff. There are only so many sounds a guitar can make. Lord knows I've tried to make a guitar sound like something new to myself.

## **Are there any current groups you listen to a lot or learn from?**

Naah. The last album I loved all the way through was [Joni Mitchell's] *The Hissing of Summer Lawns*. I respect people's success, but I don't like a lot of popular music. I never did. I like more of the things I heard when I was little. Today, people don't write songs; they're a lot of sounds, a lot of repetition. That happened when producers took over, and that's why there's no more [live] acts. There's no box office anymore. The producers took over, and now nobody wants to see these bands.

## **People seem to think you live in an armed monastery that you've built in honor of yourself.**

First off, I don't live in a prison with armed guards around me. The reason I have a guy outside is that after the movie, all kinds of people started coming over and hanging out. That wasn't so bad, but the neighbors got upset that people were driving by blasting their boxes or standing outside and singing. I happen to dig that. That's one reason I'm going to move to more land. There, if people want to come by, it will be fine. Sometimes it gets lonely here. To be perfectly honest, I

wish more of my friends would come by.

### **Friends?**

Musicians, people I know. A lot of the time they think I don't want to be bothered. When I told Susannah [Melvoin] that you were coming over, she said, "Is there something I can do? Do you want me to come by to make it seem like you have friends coming by?" I said no, that would be lying. And she just put her head down, because she knew she doesn't come by to see me as much as she wants to, or as much as she thinks I want her to. It was interesting. See, you did something good, and you didn't even know it!

### **Are you afraid to ask your friends to come by?**

I'm kind of afraid. That's because sometimes everybody in the band comes over, and we have very long talks. They're very few and far between, and I do a lot of the talking. Whenever we're done, one of them will come up to me and say, "Take care of yourself. You know I really love you." I think they love me so much, and I love them so much, that if they came over all the time I wouldn't be able to be to them what I am, and they wouldn't be able to do for me what they do. I think we all need our individual spaces, and when we come together with what we've concocted in our heads, it's cool.

### **Does it bother you that strangers make pilgrimages to your house?**

No, not at all. But there's a time and a place for everything. A lot of people have the idea that I'm a wild sexual person. It can be two o'clock in the afternoon, and someone will make a really strange request from the call box outside. One girl just kept pressing the buzzer. She kept pressing it, and then she started crying. I had no idea why. I thought she might have fallen down. I started talking to her, and she just kept saying, "I can't believe it's you." I said, "Big deal. I'm no special person. I'm no different than anyone." She said, "Will you come out?" I said, "Nope, I don't have much on." And she said, "That's okay."

I've lectured quite a few people out there. I'll say, "Think about what you're saying. How would you react if you were me?" I ask that question a lot: "How would you react if you were me?" They say, "Okay, okay."

**It's not just people outside your door who think you're a wild sexual person.**

To some degree I am, but not twenty-four hours a day. Nobody can be what they are twenty-four hours a day, no matter what that is. You have to eat, you have to sleep, you have to think, and you have to work. I work a lot, and there's not too much time for anything else when I'm doing that.

**Does it make you angry when people dig into your background, when they want to know about your sexuality and things like that?**

Everyone thinks I have a really mean temper and that I don't like people to do this or do that. I have a sense of humor. I thought that the *Saturday Night Live* skit with Billy Crystal as me was the funniest thing I ever saw. His imitation of me was hysterical! He was singing, "I am the world, I am the children!" Then **Bruce Springsteen** came to the mike, and the boys would push him away. It was hilarious. We put it on when we want to laugh. It was great. Of course, that's not what it is.

And I thought the Prince Spaghetti commercial was the cutest thing in the world. My lawyers and management are the ones who felt it should be stopped. I didn't even see the commercial until after someone had tried to have it stopped. A lot of things get done without my knowledge because I'm in Minneapolis and they're where they are.

It's a good and a bad thing that I live here. It's bad in the sense that I can't be a primo "rock star" and do everything absolutely right. I can't go to the parties and benefits, be at all the awards shows, get this and get that. But I like it here. It's really mellow.

### **How do you feel when you go to New York or L.A. and see the life you could be leading?**

L.A. is a good place to work. And I liked New York more when I wasn't known, when I wasn't bothered when I went out. You'd be surprised. There are guys who will literally chase you through a discotheque! I don't mind my picture being taken if it's done in a proper fashion. It's very easy to say, "Prince, may I take your picture?" I don't know why people can't be more humane about a lot of things they do. Now when I'm visiting, I like to sneak around and try stuff. I like to sneak to people's gigs and see if I can get away without getting my picture taken. That's fun. That's like cops and robbers.

### **You've taken a lot of heat for your bodyguards, especially the incident in Los Angeles in which your bodyguard Chick Huntsberry reportedly beat up a photographer.**

A lot of times I've been accused of sicking bodyguards on people. You know what happened in L.A.? My man the photographer tried to get in the car! I don't have any problems with someone I *know* trying to get in my car with me and my woman in it. But someone like that? Just to get a picture?

### **Why isn't Chick working for you anymore?**

Chick has more pride than anyone I know. I think that after the L.A. incident, he feared for his job. So if I said something, he'd say, "What are you jumping on *me* for? What's wrong? Why all of a sudden are you changing?" And I'd say, "I'm *not* changing." Finally, he just said, "I'm tired. I've had enough." I said fine, and he

went home. I waited a few weeks and called him. I told him that his job was still here and that I was alone. So he said he'd see me when I was in New York. He didn't show up. I miss him.

**Is it true that Chick is still on the payroll?**

Yes.

**What about the exposé he wrote about you in the *National Enquirer*?**

I never believe anything in the *Enquirer*. I remember reading stories when I was ten years old, saying, "I was fucked by a flying saucer, and here's my baby to prove it." I think they just took everything he said and blew it up. It makes for a better story. They're just doing their thing. Right on for them. The only thing that bothers me is when my fans think I live in a prison. This is not a prison.

**You came in for double heat over the L.A. incident because it happened the night of the "We Are the World" recording. In retrospect, do you wish you had shown up?**

No. I think I did my part in giving my song [to the album]. I *hope* I did my part. I think I did the best thing I could do.

**You've done food-drive concerts for poor people in various cities, given free concerts for handicapped kids and donated lots of money to the Marva Collins inner-city school in Chicago. Didn't you want to stand up after you were attacked for "We Are the World" and say, "Hey, I do my part."**

Nah. I was never rich, so I have very little regard for money now. I only respect it inasmuch as it can feed somebody. I give a lot of things away, a lot of presents and money. Money is best spent on someone who needs it. That's all I'm going to say. I don't like to make a big deal about the things I do that way.

**People think that you're a dictator in the studio, that you want to control everything. In L.A., however, I saw Wendy and Lisa mixing singles while**

## **you were in Paris. How do you feel about your reputation?**

My first album I did entirely alone. On the second I used André [Cymone], my bass player, on "Why You Wanna Treat Me So Bad?" He sang a small harmony part that you really couldn't hear. There was a typo on the record, and André didn't get any credit. That's how that whole thing started. I tried to explain that to him, but when you're on the way up, there's no explaining too much of anything. People will think what they want to.

The reason I didn't use musicians a lot of the time had to do with the hours that I worked. I swear to God it's not out of boldness when I say this, but there's not a person around who can stay awake as long as I can. Music is what keeps me awake. There will be times when I've been working in the studio for twenty hours and I'll be falling asleep in the chair, but I'll still be able to tell the engineer what cut I want to make. I use engineers in shifts a lot of the time because when I start something, I like to go all the way through. There are very few musicians who will stay awake that long.

## **Do you feel others recognize how hard you work?**

Well, no. A lot of my peers make remarks about us doing silly things onstage and on records. Morris [Day, former lead singer of the Time] was criticized a lot for that.

## **What kind of silliness, exactly?**

Everything – the music, the dances, the lyrics. What they fail to realize is that is exactly what we want to do. It's not silliness, it's *sickness*. Sickness is just slang for doing things somebody else wouldn't do. If we are down on the floor doing a step, that's something somebody else wouldn't do. That's what I'm looking for all the time. We don't look for whether something's cool or not, that's not what time it is. It's not just wanting to be *out*. It's just if I do something that I think belongs to someone else or *sounds* like someone else, I *do* something else.

## **Why did Morris say such negative things about you after he left the**

## **band?**

People who leave usually do so out of a need to express something they can't do here. It's really that simple. Morris, for example, always wanted to be a solo act, period. But when you're broke and selling shoes someplace, you don't think about asking such a thing. Now, I think Morris is trying to create his own identity. One of the ways of doing that is trying to pretend that you don't have a past.

Jesse [Johnson, former guitarist for the Time] is the only one who went away who told what happened, what really went down with the band. He said there was friction, because he was in a situation that didn't quite suit him. Jesse wanted to be in front all the time. And I just don't think God puts everybody in that particular bag. And sometimes I was blunt enough to say that to people: "I don't think *you* should be the front man. I think *Morris* should."

Wendy, for example, says, "I don't want that. I want to be right where I am. I can be strongest to this band right where I am." I personally love this band more than any other group I've ever played with for that reason. Everybody knows what they have to do. I know there's something *I* have to do.

## **What sound do you get from different members of the Revolution?**

Bobby Z was the first one to join. He's my best friend. Though he's not such a spectacular drummer, he watches me like no other drummer would. Sometimes, a real great drummer, like Morris, will be more concerned with the lick he is doing as opposed to how I am going to break it down.

Mark Brown's just the best bass player I know, period. I wouldn't have anybody else. If he didn't play with me, I'd eliminate bass from my music. Same goes for Matt [Fink, the keyboard player]. He's more or less a technician. He can read and write like a whiz, and is one of the fastest in the world. And Wendy makes me seem all right in the eyes of people watching.

## **How so?**

She keeps a smile on her face. When I sneer, she smiles. It's not premeditated, she just does it. It's a good contrast. Lisa is like my sister. She'll play what the average person won't. She'll press two notes with one finger so the chord is a lot larger, things like that. She's more abstract. She's into Joni Mitchell, too.

**What about the other bands? Apollonia, Vanity, Mazarati, the Family?**

**What are you trying to express through them?**

A lot has to do with them. They come to me with an idea, and I try to bring that forth. I don't give them anything. I don't say, "Okay, you're going to do this, and you're going to do that." I mean, it was Morris' idea to be as sick as he was. That was his personality. We both like Don King and got a lot of stuff off him.

**Why?**

Because he's outrageous and thinks everything's so exciting – even when it isn't.

**People think you control those bands, that it's similar to Rick James' relationship with the Mary Jane Girls. A lot of people think he's turning all the knobs.**

I don't know their situation. But you look at Sheila E. performing, and you can just tell she's holding her own. The same goes for the Family. You and I were playing Ping-Pong, and they were doing just fine.

**After all these years, does the music give you as much of a rush as it used to?**

It increases more and more. One of my friends worries that I'll short-circuit. We always say I'll make the final fade on a song one time and . . . [*Laughs, dropping his head in a dead slump*]. It just gets more and more interesting every day. More than anything else, I try not to repeat myself. It's the hardest thing in the world to do – there's only so many notes one human being can muster. I write a lot more than people think I do, and I try not to copy that.

I think that's the problem with the music industry today. When a person does get

a hit, they try to do it again the same way. I don't think I've ever done that. I write all the time and cut all the time. I want to show you the archives, where all my old stuff is. There's tons of music I've recorded there. I have the follow-up album to *1999*. I could put it all together and play it for you, and you would go "Yeah!" And I could put it out, and it would probably sell what *1999* did. But I always try to do something different and conquer new ground.

In people's minds, it all boils down to "Is Prince getting too big for his breeches?" I wish people would understand that I always thought I was bad. I wouldn't have got into the business if I didn't think I was bad.