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"The sun, the moon and stars don't seem as far as they did yesterday," now that Prince has left Planet Earth. From his 23rd studio album, *Rave Un2 the Joy Fantastic*, this enchanting hook, from the track "The Sun, the Moon and Stars" is steeped in pathos with the untimely loss of Prince Rogers Nelson, son of John and Mattie Nelson. Born in Minneapolis, Minnesota, on 7 June 1958, Prince was one of the most extraordinary pop musicians of all time. If one dares to use the term "genius," as a designation of exceptional originality, creativity, and a propensity for advancement in new knowledge, then Prince probably fits the bill. Grasping what it meant to be socially and politically active as a pop star, he skillfully crafted his songs with a transgressive intent that knew no bounds.

Prince left us on 21 April 2016. An iconic force in the world, a prodigious songwriter, arranger, bandleader, and performer, he sold more than 100 million albums and produced 39 studio albums during a 40-year career. Until the last, he was extraordinarily prolific, releasing four albums with his latest band, 3rdeyegirl, in just the final 18 months. His accolades included four number-one albums, five number-one hits in the USA, seven Grammy Awards, a Golden Globe, an Academy Award, and induction into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. In Barry Nicolson's words:

> [H]e looked like Little Richard, played guitar like Hendrix and was possessed of the same funk and revolutionary fire as James Brown and Sly Stone; even the great Miles Davis once described him as "pointing towards the future." If the arc of black American music was long, it seemed to bend towards Prince.

This was most evident as he rose to stardom with a rapid fire of albums in the early 1980s: *Dirty Mind*, *Controversy*, *1999*, *Purple Rain*, *Around the World in a Day*. The second half of the 1980s saw a continuous outpouring of albums: *Parade*, *Sign o' the Times*, *Lovesexy*, and *Batman*. It was the songs from these albums that informed Prince's signature acts for years to come, enthralling audiences across the globe. Accompanied by yelps, wails, and screams, Prince's multi-instrumental virtuosity, offset by spectacular performances, opened up a new set of aesthetics. It did not take long before he gained high visibility on MTV as one of the first African-American pop stars played on that network (alongside Michael Jackson), with his *Little Red Corvette* in heavy rotation. For many this was the first glimpse of Prince—impish, mysterious, and exhilarating—a veritable antidote to the straight, white male rock star. The brilliance of Prince's live and recorded performances was underpinned by an eroticized and humorous sensibility that maximized audience satisfaction. The pre-eminent feature of Prince's act was, of course, his singing. His elaborate vocal technique was grounded in a wealth of expressive devices, the goal being to entertain; a myriad of timbres, textures, and inflections comprised his rich vocabulary. Uncannily, Prince's vocal style emulated his guitar playing and vice versa, no better illustrated than in "Purple Rain." The climactic guitar solo turned this man and his instrument into one. The hook, "Purple rain, I only want to see you bathing in the purple rain," became a metaphor for the 20th century: a veritable metaphor for unleashing love as much as angst. Prince's improvisatory talent in this and other songs was "all about the transformation of musical material figuratively and rhetorically, where devices of call and response serve as

Figure 1. Prince at The Brit Awards—14 February 2006. Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LdVtRVTiC7I.

commentaries that are full of parody and fun," as Sarah Niblock and I observed in our studies of Prince (Hawkins and Niblock 82).

At the age of 18, Prince took root in the recording studio, fastidious in learning the craft of songwriting and art of record production. His creative approach to technology and recording practices pioneered the "Minneapolis Sound"—a mixture of new wave, synthpop, rock, funk, and pop. Not only did this sound boost popular music in the 1980s, it also changed the course of music history. Musically, Prince showed early in his career that he could turn his hand to anything. His way of experimenting with composition was state-of-the-art. He could make R&B music without being classified as an R&B artist. The same applied to funk, gospel, hip hop, soul, rock, jazz, blues, and metal. Often Prince used only one or two chords on an entire track, working chordal extensions, modulations, and rhythm with distinction. The knack for creating sophisticated phrases out of the simplest of tunes was in itself a compositional wonder. Similarly, Prince's pioneering approach to studio production and arranging never ceased to impress as he layered one part over the other, without ever stifling the mix. Prince's approach to sonic design was nothing short of astonishing. Consider "When Doves Cry," the top single from the *Purple Rain* album, released in 1984, in which Prince's ingenious control of recording engineering (not to mention playing all the instrumental parts himself) broke new ground. The decision to erase the bass line in the last moment resulted in an eerie yet earthbound aesthetic. Grounded in the key of A minor, "When Doves Cry" charted a shimmering melodic journey through a radical employment of drum machines, as well as the virtuosic, ingenious synth and guitar solo parts that managed to survive without a bass line. The song became one of Prince's most inspiring and loved tracks, and, as Matt Thorne has pointed out, it "attracted interest as being a particularly convincing portrayal of female desire, at odds with heavy rock's usually phallic trappings" (110).

Prince's recordings chronicle the collective traditions and practices of music history. Always his love for popular music was obvious. The influences of white artists, such as David Bowie, Joni Mitchell, Mick Jagger, Elvis Presley, Carlos Santana, Todd Rundgren, and the Rolling Stones, were on a par with those of African-American artists (James Brown, George Clinton, Jimi Hendrix, Chuck Berry, Sly Stone, Miles Davis, Stevie Wonder, Duke Ellington). Notably, the Beatles' effect on Prince was profound and discernible in songs such as "Raspberry Beret." Prince's deep admiration for this Liverpool band was further borne out by his legendary two-minute guitar solo in "While My Guitar Gently Weeps," the performance by Tom Petty, Steve Winwood, Jeff Lynne, and others in tribute to George Harrison upon Harrison's induction into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2004. This has gone down as one of rock music's greatest moments.

The literacy of Prince's musicianship, reinforced by a prevailing aura of *positivity*, laid bare his cool attitude. "Cream," from the *Diamonds and Pearls* album, epitomizes this with a torrent of positive emotions aroused in the jerky bass line, grinding beats, sleazy guitar wails, and passionate vocals. Raunchiness could not be more overt than in the video for this track, where Prince performs alongside Rosie Gaines and a troupe of female dancers. Clasping his bright canary-yellow guitar at the climactic point, Prince yells out: "look up in the air it's your guitar!" Parodying phallic power in such a way bridged his affinity with heavy metal and rock to funkadelic, soul, and pop. Perhaps most beguiling of all was Prince's stylistic reflexivity, distinguishable in the gestures that spelt out an erotic desire, coolness, and defiance. Effortlessly, the energy captured in Prince's inimitable sound would ignite his stage appearances, where the juxtaposition of music and visual lavishness framed a performer who understood the complexities and variables of crossover. Instinctively, Prince recognized that pleasures in music function on multiple levels as he accessed the sublime through a richly excessive musical vocabulary. In this sense, the life and times of this artist are an ideal forum for contemplating enactments of gender, race, and religion in pop. In the song "Controversy," from 1981, Prince would wax for the first time: "Am I black or white? Am I straight or gay? Do I believe in God? Do I believe in me?" With playfulness high on the agenda, Prince entered commercial pop as a pansexual effete dandy. His short height, slight build, skin color, androgyny, use of makeup, and class background remained ambivalent and peculiar. A turbulent upbringing meant that Prince would spend his life processing things through his music. The track "Purple Rain" was all about this. It dealt with the complex relationship Prince had with his father. Subversively, Prince fashioned a look and sound in this song and others as a form of protest against the wider political, cultural, and social forces that restrain minority groups. Compared to his two iconic contemporaries born in the same year, 1958, Madonna and Michael Jackson, Prince was more shocking. His mission was to break down barriers and to tackle racism and hetero-patriarchy. Effeminacy, gender bending, and queerness were the mechanisms for the particularity of Prince. Most of his life he wore eyeliner, nail polish, high heels, and unisex clothing. It was as if an inner tenacity propelled him forward; a belief in difference enabled him to continue from where Bowie left off. Unlike Bowie, though, Prince was an African-American male who had it harder. Satirizing conventions through an alternative masculinity, Prince called for systemic change through a catalog of songs littered with biting political retort: "Partyup" (1980), "Ronnie, Talk to Russia" (1981), "1999" (1982), "Sign o' the Times" (1987), "Dance On" (1988), "Walk Don't Walk" (1992), "We March" (1995), "Dear, Mr. Man" (2004), "Colonized Mind" (2009), "MARZ" (2014), and "Baltimore" (2015), just to name a few.

The centrality of women in Prince's life had the strongest bearing on his work, delineating his political aspirations. In an interview with the magazine *Mojo* in 2014 he declared: "The feminine energy on the planet is very strong now, after being suppressed for so long" (Hodgkinson 80). During Prince's entire career he hired mainly female musicians and engineers to work with him. And, as well as producing and mentoring many girl groups, Prince wrote songs that became hits for female pop stars such as Sinéad O'Connor, Chaka Khan, Sheila E., the Bangles, Vanity 6, and others. Daringly, Prince transcended gender norms in ways that turned him into the first poststructural queer pop artist, a point that the musicologist Robert Walser made in his exploration of Prince's strategy to deterritorialize patriarchy in an article published in this journal. Conflating racial, sexual, and gender signifiers, Prince rejected clichés of the black male performer by repudiating patriarchal stereotypes. Prince's quirky idiolect exhibited the brash signifiers of an androgynous body. Indeed, this is how his ludic approach to music-making gained its ironic function. A rhetoric, often lewd and provocative, would showcase his musicianship skills. Tactically, Prince's plight was that of the dandy, rooted in what Charles Baudelaire described as the "the joy of astonishing others, and the proud satisfaction of never oneself being astonished" (27–28). By reworking production techniques and instrumental practices, Prince

revitalized the look and sound of rap and hip-hop performers, the impact of which is detectable in the following generations of African-American queer artists: Missy Elliott, Mykki Blanco, Janelle Monáe, Nicki Minaj, Zebra Katz, Lelf, and Azealia Banks. The "feel good" factor in Prince's music emanated from the intricate mechanisms of groove regulation and design, where a spate of musical mannerisms cushioned his novel approach to energizing himself on stage, as much as in the studio environment. Emasculating himself, Prince reveled in the ambiguities and silliness of heterosexual display. As such, the eroticization of his sonic and visual agency fashioned an aesthetic that highlighted race- and gender-related struggles. Significantly, Prince's androgyny obfuscated his sexual orientation, not least through his love symbol, a glyph amalgamating both male and female signs. Alas, homophobic sneers and condemnation were the price he paid for going against the grain and transgressing a securely grounded rock aesthetic. Yet, unperturbed, Prince turned to slick choreography, makeup, and clothing when shifting his mode of address. Always he reached out to his audiences in whatever size the venue might be, winning them over and getting them to partake in his very joy of music-making (See Figure 1). Live performances ensured Prince's longevity in the music industry. Somehow he mastered the skill of turning fashion into a structuring tool for transforming the male body in pop. And, by valorizing masculinity, Prince exuded laissez-faire inventiveness. Crucially, this gave him cultural authority.

Eulogizing always demands a degree of critical circumspection. As with all prolific artists, Prince had his ups and downs; the media frequently referred to him as his Royal Badness (a nickname I happened to relish). Behind the bravado of self-send-ups and emotional outpourings rested a superego with a high dose of vanity. Fiercely private, Prince prohibited journalists from recording his voice or even taking notes. His music, he felt, was not guaranteed nearly enough airplay, and this embittered him all through his adult life. Throughout his career, many of Prince's staunchest supporters felt bewildered and let down by his vociferous religious views. Although a humanitarian, donating money to help people out of poverty and combating racial injustice, Prince spoke out against gay marriage in 2008, criticizing the liberal values of the US Democrats and Republicans. And, while a campaigner for Black Lives Matter, Prince's Jehovah's Witnesses faith paradoxically prevented him from voting for the first black US president, Barack Obama. Yet in his early career Prince upset clean Christian values through his sexually lewd lyrics. The song "Darling Nikki" initiated the campaign to establish the Parents Music Resource Center (PMRC). This was formed in 1985 and spearheaded by Tipper Gore, resulting in "parental advisory" labels on records dealing with drugs, violence, and sex. "Darling Nikki," as well as Cyndi Lauper's "She Bop," was rated among the PMRC's most objectionable Filthy Fifteen songs due to the themes of sex and masturbation in the lyrics.

Prince had more than a fair dose of personal struggles and setbacks. Both his marriages were unhappy and ended in divorce, and in 1996 his only child, Boy Gregory, was born with the rare genetic disorder Pfeiffer syndrome and died one week after birth. There is no doubt that Prince's own death has left us with many unanswered questions concerning the causes of his death through painkiller medication, his private life, his faith, and an extraordinary drive that never left him. Much of Prince's life was spent battling with the music industry. He was bothered by the politics and machinations of people earning money from his and others' music. Announcing that he was retiring in 1993, his ploy was to change his name to the unpronounceable, eponymous love symbol, a protest against his label, Warner Bros. Now insisting on being called the Artist Formerly Known as Prince, he fought to own his master tapes so as to release his own material more often. In defiance, he wrote "Slave" on his face as relations deteriorated, and he released five albums as his contract required. Only in the early 2000s did he return to his name. When finally severing his ties with Warner Bros and dabbling with other labels, Prince turned to forming his own label, promoting his music through live shows and the Internet. Alas, this proved less lucrative than anticipated. Yet it gave Prince the impetus to reach heights unattainable by the majority of pop artists. Today Prince holds a record at the 20,000-capacity

O2 arena in London for his residency of 21 nights as part of his Earth Tour in 2007. All in all, Prince played a total of 504 songs to an audience of more than half a million. At a low price of £31.21, Prince made the concerts affordable to everybody, with tickets including a free copy of the new CD *Planet Earth*, an idea he repeated from his 2004 Musicology Tour, when he gave away the album of the same name. With the 21-nights-in-London event Prince went as far as allowing the CD to be distributed free with *The Mail on Sunday*. This was in the same year as Prince's historic performance at halftime at Super Bowl XLI, marked by a performance of "Purple Rain" that was electrifying. Matt Taibbi enthused:

> [W]hen he played "Purple Rain," nature upstaged the most scripted event on Earth to unleash torrents of water on the stadium. The joy on Prince's face was unmistakable as he screamed his guitar higher and higher while buckets of rain came down on him. It was something you never see anywhere, let alone on TV: pure happiness. And tens of millions of people swayed along to his by then familiar ballad about the hope of finding something better in this world.

In 2014 some of the biggest disputes in Prince's career were resolved by him regaining control of his musical catalog in a licensing deal with Warner Bros. The 1976 Copyright Revision Act permitted the termination of master recording copyrights after 35 years (see Collins). In 2015 Prince joined Jay-Z and a consortium of 22 other artists in the ownership of the music streaming company Tidal, in a move to owning his shares in music-streaming royalties. In doing this Prince banned his music from other streaming services, such as Spotify and Apple's iTunes. His parting message to musicians was to "never sign record contracts."

Demonstrating that the particularities of stating one's difference can be inscribed by the politics of musical style, Prince staked out a terrain of dissident masculinity. He personified pop dandyism. His antics became potent markers of resistance, prime referents for an aesthetic that redrew the lines between race, gender, sexuality, nationality, and age. A messiah of earthly pleasures, Prince synthesized spirituality and sexual desire into his songs by means of exquisite grooves, tunes, chords, and lyrics. Always he will be remembered for his sheer elegance as a musician, encapsulated by the idiosyncrasies of jamming, scatting, and rapping. The inflections of ornate phrasing, connoting seduction, invitation, and ecstasy, spelt out Prince's musical sensibility. They ushered in a unique agency in popular music that established new forms of listening and identification. Indisputably, Prince's adeptness as a performer—his versatility, originality, and peculiarity—has already been noted in music history. There is little doubt that the Princian sonic universe is an established generic marker to stay. A poignant reminder of this is that within one month of Prince's death he achieved a *Billboard* record with 19 albums in the Top 200 in just one week—the Beatles had held the previous record with 13 albums. The most important thing is that Prince's music will live on with us and the generations to come who are not yet born. Personally, I feel fortunate enough to have experienced this iconoclast live numerous times in my own lifetime as I now take solace in the hook with which I started this obituary. Take a listen. "It's late and I'm running out of clever things to say…the sun, the moon and stars, in love we are forever, always."

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