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September 20,
1999

Edited by Carrie Borzillo



The Artist Surprises Press Conference With Special Performance

Sep 17, 1999, 11:25 am PT

**The Artist**

There was a hype storm Thursday (Sept. 16) afternoon in New York City that nearly matched tropical storm Floyd, which was busy dumping torrential rains on the city. A mere tropical storm wasn't about to stop Arista president Clive Davis from boasting about his label's worldwide distribution agreement for the upcoming album from The Artist Formerly Known As Prince, who now asks us all to be on a first-name basis with him as simply The Artist.

But the listening party for a capacity crowd filling the downstairs auditorium of the Equitable Building was overshadowed by a surprise concert immediately afterwards, during which The Artist proved once again that he can justify any hyperbole.

Backed by the latest lineup of the New Power Generation, which includes former Sly & the Family Stone bassist Larry Graham, The Artist announced to the invitation-only audience -- consisting mostly of press and Arista employees -- "This is the best way I can

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thank you, is to play a tune. I hope I play something you know." Dressed almost entirely in bright red, with a shawl on his head and a partly transparent red robe draped over his thin frame (plus yellow slippers), he launched into his old favorite "I Could Never Take the Place of Your Man," finishing with a lengthy, raucous guitar solo.

A horn section (two trumpets, trombone, baritone sax) was then added and The Artist sang a dark, droning version of the spiritual "Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child." After an unannounced groove apparently called "Funky Love" came a cover of Sly & the Family Stone's "Everyday People," with Arista artist Deborah Cox joining on vocals and a woman coming up from the audience to dance. She looked like a pro, but there was also a guy from the audience who clambered up onto the stage looking totally geeky in suit and tie, gyrating awkwardly on the far left side of the stage.

After another Arista artist, Angie Stone, sang on another unnamed song that could be called "Tell Me What You Want," The Artist went over to the guy in the suit, who went back into the audience as the band launched into a James Brown medley of "Talkin' Loud and Sayin' Nothin'"/"Sex Machine." "I didn't want you to go away, I wanted to do something with you," The Artist said, and the young suit came back up and, after a slight hesitation, replaced the keyboardist for a surprisingly good solo in the middle of "Sex Machine." "Everybody funky here today," The Artist declared in amazement.

An instrumental with a go-go beat segued into a slow solo blues groove played by The Artist on a large hollow-body guitar; when a spotlight hit him, he pleaded, "No, leave me in the dark, I like it that way." Continuing, he said, "We are the New Power Generation. That means we remain free, regardless." He then invited Buddy Miles to come up from the back of the auditorium to finish out the blues titled, "The Ride." It got considerably more electric and Hendrixian, and if there was one thing this private gig made clear, it's that whatever his records sound like, The Artist will always love funk and his guitar.

Until the surprise performance, Clive Davis had been the star of the show. He was there to

rave about *Rave Un2 the Joy Fantastic*, which will be released on Nov. 2, with the first single, "The Greatest Romance Ever Sold," to precede it on Sept. 28. It's The Artist's first major-label distribution since 1996, and the notoriously artist-friendly Davis made sure to devote a good chunk of his opening address to discussing his relationship with The Artist, whom he praised in the most lavish language. "An artist who really has no peer" and "pioneering yet accessible" were two of his more moderate characterizations. He also made a point of noting, "To this day, we've never talked business."

Davis then previewed tracks from the album, emphasizing that some were just rough mixes. "The Greatest Romance Ever Sold" was played three times, twice in its single mix and once in the album version. Other tracks previewed -- the final album will have 16 tracks -- were the title cut, "Undisputed" (featuring Chuck D), "Hot Wit U (with guest rapper Eve), "So Far, So Pleased" (with Gwen Stefani of No Doubt), "The Sun, the Moon & the Stars," "Man o' War," "Baby Knows" (with Sheryl Crow), "I Love U But I Don't Trust U" (with Ani DiFranco), "Wherever U Go, Whatever U Do," and the hilarious "Pretty Man" (with Maceo Parker). Davis named, but did not play, "Tangerine," "Silly Dream," and "Strange But True"; the other two tracks are short segues, one featuring the voice of the late jazz great Miles Davis.

Two hidden tracks will be included but were left unheard and unidentified. The title track, Clive Davis explained, dates from 1988 and is by Prince. "The producer of the album has been his favorite producer, and the producer is Prince," he elaborated.

Following the listening session, throughout which Davis bopped and gyrated at the podium, The Artist came out. He took a bow but didn't say a word as he bashfully received a standing ovation. Then came the good part.

-- Steve Holtje

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