



ALL THIS.
FROM YOUR
FRONT PORCH.



startribune.com

Variety

Published Friday, September 3, 1999

A portrait of the Artist: Healthy, happy, ready to play

Vickie Gilmer / Star Tribune

Related items

-  [Cruise the local music scene](#)
-  [Five acts to catch at Mill City](#)
-  [Mill City schedule and highlights](#)
-  [Mill City ticket information](#)
-  [The Artist's Web site](#)

At his Paisley Park studio, Prince is a gracious tour guide. He escorts a visitor through his wardrobe room, his rehearsal space, his studio, making introductions to his musicians and wife, Mayte, and pausing to pet bassist Larry Graham's Maltese dog, who nips at his heels.

But when it comes to talking about his music, he pauses. He talks about records he likes -- James Brown and the old-school sound of certain hip-hop recordings -- and his desire to sell software of samples of his music. But it seems he'd rather just shut up and play.

"It's been a great year for me," he says. He has a new record, "Rave Un2 the Joy Fantastic," to be released in November on Arista Records. And he's preparing to take the stage Monday at the Mill City Music Festival -- his first-ever outdoor performance in his hometown.

"There will be special guests -- very interesting people -- and a lot of surprises," he promised Wednesday. We'll play one song from the new album and we'll probably do a Sheryl Crow cover. 'Pretty Man' is the new song that I originally wrote for the Time [who also are playing Monday], but it was so good I kept it. In fact, I wish I had kept some other songs I gave them. I wish I had kept 'Cool' or at least still had one like it," he adds, laughing.

The new album features Crow -- with whom Prince jammed recently in Toronto -- Chuck D of Public Enemy, saxophonist Maceo Parker, Gwen Stefani of No Doubt, and indie singer/song writer Ani DiFranco. Prince long has been an admirer of DiFranco, a pioneer in setting up her own record

company.

"I wanted to meet Ani DiFranco and, lo and behold, she's everything I expected," he says. "We jammed for four hours and she danced the whole time. We had to quit because she wore us out. After being with her, it dawned on me why she's like that -- she's never had a ceiling over her. People want to put ceilings on you or people think they have ceilings over them. We don't come here [Paisley] to be put in a box."

Querying him about the motives behind his art seems to demean the funky, butt-shaking synergy inherent in it. It's all about sound and feeling, not definitions of why or how. And as the Artist -- a name he says he adopted out of necessity to distance himself from the media hype that depersonalized his given name -- he wants to talk of "the Truth."

It's a Truth with a capital "T" because it's tied to his spirituality; it's what he lives day in and day out. It's also a Truth that he doesn't think a lot of people understand, and he tried to explain why he wants to look forward rather than back.

"I know that people want to talk about the past," he says. "But we're not at 'Purple Rain' anymore. We don't look like that, we don't dress like that, we're different people now. If you talk about that, the next thing you know, people start writing things like the Revolution is going to reunite!"

"I can't really tell you why I decided to do things or play Mill City, because they're decisions in the past and to go back and try to remember why I agreed to things before is difficult. I am living in today and looking forward," he said.

A degree of separation

He's not ready to let outsiders listen to the new record, but the Artist talked about his decision to enlist an outside producer: someone by the name of Prince.

Making that distinction was a way to draw a line between the performer standing in front of the control booth and the person sitting inside it.

"You do have to mentally divorce yourself. And when you do allow yourself to have a 'different' producer on an album, I allowed him to have the final say. As strange as that may sound, it's really not strange. Look at it this way: Malcolm X thinks differently than Malcolm Little [Malcolm's birth name]. When you're trying to change, you have to divorce yourself from the past."

Because Arista will distribute "Rave Un2 the Joy Fantastic," it's been trumpeted as his return to a major label after his much-publicized departure from Warner Bros. Records and his recent effort to sell CDs via the Internet. But Prince makes it clear that this is not the kind of traditional relationship between musicians and labels with a lengthy contract that sets boundaries as to what each party will or won't do.

"People are looking for drama in it. It's for one album. There could be a second. The contract is [only] this thick," he said, holding his forefinger and thumb millimeters apart.

"When I was at Warner Bros., I always heard from a third party," he said. But Prince met directly with Arista's president, Clive Davis. "Record companies want to own their creations, but no one owns the creation but the creator. It's an actual ideology and Clive agrees you should own your masters. He also told me, 'I have free will, too.' Which was good that he said that to me."

Prince's belabored battles with Warner Bros. have made him a staunch advocate for artists' rights. And he holds the same ideal for all artists.

He's helped release albums by Chaka Khan and Graham -- best known as bassist for Sly and the Family Stone -- allowing them use of his studios and distribution through his NPG Records without all the restrictions involved in most recording contracts.

He says all artists should have the same right to own their master recordings that he now does. He laments the "mental and emotional" abuse that musicians such as Phoebe Snow have suffered at the hands of an industry that's made them captives by not releasing their work. He applauds the work of Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis and gripes about the low "points" (percentage of record sales) that

most musicians receive.

He and Mayte have founded a charitable organization that has donated money to various organizations, including the Rhythm & Blues Foundation, which provides help to musicians, and he's donated instruments through Mill City's Music Cares program to the Minneapolis school district.

He's also gotten inspiration from some of his new collaborators. "Chuck D. and I talked about hip-hop and how we have to knock down what they value, and the dollar bill is nothing to put a value on. . . . What I would like to see is the spiritual aspect come back in to the inner city. It's very important that people realize that we're in a situation that only God can fix at this point."

His beliefs -- spiritually, musically and professionally -- make him animated. He jumps up to make a point, cites biblical references that drive home his spiritual beliefs and exalts the positive influence of those around him.

Clearly, there's a lot of Truth to be told, and he wants to know that you "feel" what he's saying, because it's not just words, he says -- it's a way of life.

"I implore you to realize that I'm perfectly healthy and happy. My wife and I, you can see nobody's kicked her out. We decided to do this whole thing together. The main course is spiritual well-being. My protection comes from my faith in God. I know I'm going to be all right."

He stands and offers an invitation to sit in on his rehearsal. In the room, it's obvious he's happy, as are those around him. He smiles as the group runs through "Let's Go Crazy," breaks out laughing when one of his back-up singers comes in too early on the chorus for "Kiss" and drills home the groovy rhythm of "U Got the Look" and other songs he'll play in concert.

After a quick 20-minute drill, he walks his guest to the door. As Mayte showed him a magazine article on their new home in Spain that she's working on, you don't need to be persuaded that Prince is healthy, happy and, above all, all right.

Related items

-  [Cruise the local music scene](#)
-  [Five acts to catch at Mill City](#)
-  [Mill City schedule and highlights](#)
-  [Mill City ticket information](#)
-  [The Artist's Web site](#)



© Copyright 1999 Star Tribune. All rights reserved.