

Prince Talks

And with the release of 'Graffiti Bridge,' the soundtrack to his forthcoming movie musical, the critics are listening. But don't even try to take notes.

Prince performing at Wembley, London, August 22nd, 1990.
Graham Wiltshire/Hulton Archive/Getty

By Neal Karlen
October 18, 1990

The phone rings at 4:48 in the morning.

"Hi, it's Prince," says the wide-awake voice calling from a room several yards down the hallway of this London hotel. "Did I wake you up?"

Though it's assumed that Prince does in fact sleep, no one on his summer European Nude Tour can pinpoint precisely when. Prince seems to relish the aura of night stalker; his vampire hours have been a part of his mad-genius myth ever since he was waging junior-high-school band battles on Minneapolis's mostly black North Side.

"Anyone who was around back then knew what was happening," Prince had said two days earlier, reminiscing. "I was working. When they were sleeping, I was jamming. When they woke up, I had another groove. I'm as insane that way now as I was back then." For proof, he'd produced a crinkled dime-store notebook that he carries with him

like Linus's blanket. Empty when his tour started in May, the book is nearly full, with twenty-one new songs scripted in perfect grammar-school penmanship. He has also been laboring on the road over his movie musical *Graffiti Bridge*, which was supposed to be out this past summer and is now set for release in November.



Overseeing the dubbing and editing of a film by way of dressing-room VCRs and hotel telephones, Prince said, has given him an idea. "One of these days," he said, "I'm going to work on just one project, and take my time."

Despite his all-hours intensity, the man still has his manners. He wouldn't have called this late, Prince says apologetically, if he didn't have some interesting news. He'd already provided some news earlier in the week, detailing, among other things, a late-night crisis of conscience a few years back that led him not only to shelve the infamous *Black Album* but also to try and change the way he wrote his songs — and led his life.

The crisis didn't involve a leap or a loss of faith, Prince had said, but simply the realization that it was time to stop acting like such an angry soul. "I was an expert at cutting off people in my life and disappearing without a glance back, never to return," he'd said. "Half the things people were writing about me were true."

But what's never been true, he felt, was what people have written about his music. Until, that is, just this minute. It seems that tonight a fresh batch of reviews of the soundtrack of *Graffiti Bridge* were faxed from Minneapolis to the hotel while Prince was performing one of his fifteen sold-out concerts in England.

What Prince has just read in the *New York Times* has astounded him. "They're starting to get it," he says from his phone in the Wellington Suite, which he has turned into a homey workplace with the addition of some bolts of sheer rainbow-colored cloth, film equipment, a stereo and tacked-up museum-shop posters of Billie Holiday and Judy Garland. "I don't believe it," he says again, "but they're getting it!"

They, in this case, are members of the rock intelligentsia who have alternately canonized and defrocked Prince. In the past, he has derided his professional

interpreters as "mamma jmmas" and "skinny sidewinders." Two days ago, it became obvious that his epithets, but not his feelings, had tempered concerning those who would judge him.

"There's nothing a critic can tell me that I can learn from," Prince had said earlier. "If they were musicians, maybe. But I hate reading about what some guy sitting at a desk thinks about me. You know, 'He's back, and he's black,' or 'He's back, and he's bad.' Whew! Now, on *Graffiti Bridge*, they're saying I'm back and more traditional. Well, 'Thieves in the Temple' and 'Tick, Tick, Bang' don't sound like nothing I've ever done before."

But hadn't he been cheered by the album's almost uniformly rave notices? "That's not what it's about," Prince had said. "No one's mentioning the lyrics. Maybe I should have put in a lyric sheet."

Now, in predawn London, he's called to say he was wrong. "They're starting to get it," he says one last time, unbothered by the fact that the *Times* article trashes his lyrics. That's okay, he says, because "they're paying attention." Sounding more amazed than pleased, Prince hangs up the phone and goes back to his dime-store notebook.

Five years have passed since Prince opened the passenger door to his 1966 Thunderbird and took me on a three-day schlep around the hometown he has never left. When I finally got out, I felt like Melvin Dummar, the doofus milkman who claimed to have driven through the Nevada desert with a surprisingly human Howard Hughes. No one had believed Melvin, and no one, I thought, would believe Prince was a being orbiting so close to planet Earth.

Not that Prince hadn't shown some signs of unease with his still-new superstardom. Alone, he'd been animated, funny and self-aware. But out in public, even walking into places as hospitable as Minneapolis's First Avenue club, he would palpably stiffen at the first sign of a gawk, his face set in granite, his voice reduced to a mumble.

Now Prince seems more open and comfortable, less likely to slip into stridency. "You have a few choices when you're in that position," he says, remembering the first year after *Purple Rain*. "You can get all jacked up on yourself and curse everybody, or you can say this is the way life is and try to enjoy it. I'm still learning that lesson. I think I'll always be learning that lesson. I think I'm a much nicer person now."

This isn't to say that Prince has turned into Dale Carnegie — he still has the hauteur of a star. But something has changed; his philosophy no longer seems to hinge on things like the size of one's boot heels. "Cool means being able to hang with yourself," he says. "All you have to ask yourself is 'Is there anybody I'm afraid of? Is there anybody who if I walked into a room and saw, I'd get nervous?' If not, then you're cool."

Many things, however, have stayed the same. Prince is still very funny. ("You can always renegotiate a record contract. You just go in and say, 'You know, I think my next project will be a country & western album.' ")

He can still play the cocky rocker. "I don't go to awards shows anymore," he says. "I'm not saying I'm better than anybody else. But you'll be sitting there at the Grammys, and U2 will beat you. And you say to yourself, 'Wait a minute. I can play that kind of music, too. I played La Crosse [Wisconsin] growing up, I know how to do that, you dig? But you will not do 'Housequake.' "

His grasp of history and current events remains quirky. Prince can cite chapter and verse from biographies of Little Richard and Jerry Lee Lewis, but he seems genuinely unaware that his own life story was turned into a book a couple of years ago by an English rock critic. He knows, blow by blow, the events in the Mideast, relating the crisis to everything from the predictions of the sixteenth-century seer Nostradamus to the drug-interdiction policy of George Bush. But he

hasn't yet heard of 2 Live Crew.

There is still some residue of emotional pain. "What if everybody around me split?" he asks. "Then I'd be left with only me, and I'd have to fend for me. That's why I have to protect me."

Prince's detractors might diagnose these words as the classic pathology of a control freak. His high-minded supporters might say those are normal protective feelings for somebody who was kicked onto the streets by his beloved father at age fourteen. Prince himself, however, echoes Popeye more than Freud as he analyzes just who he is. "I am what I am," he says. "I feel if I can please myself musically, then I can please others, too."

Finally, there is one more philosophy unchanged with the years. "I play music," Prince has said. "I make records. I make movies. I *don't* do interviews."

So what are we doing? "We're just talking" he says. Hence, his decision not to be taped or allow notes to be taken or even a pad of questions to be brought out. That would inhibit him, he says; that would mean doing the thing that he just doesn't do.

No, Prince vows, he isn't trying to be a purposeful pain. What he says he simply wants to avoid is "that big Q followed by that big A, followed by line after line of me either defending myself or cleaning up stories that people have told about me."

No matter what he might say in a traditional interview, Prince continues, he'd only end up looking ridiculous. "Some magazine a little while ago promised me their cover if I answered five written questions," he says. "The first one was 'What are your exact beliefs about God?' Now how can I answer that without sounding like a fool?"

True. But isn't he afraid of being misquoted? No, he says softly, staring at the

holstered tape recorder on the table before him. When Prince says no, with pursed lips and a slight shake of the head, it carries a certain *finality*.

Still, in the coming days he addresses just about everything short of Kim Basinger ("I really don't know her that well") or anybody else he's dating ("I never publicize that. My friends around town are surprised when I introduce them to someone I'm seeing").

"And you really wouldn't feel better having your words taken down the second you say them?"

"No."

A couple of nights later, Prince is dealing with the painstaking minutiae of piecing together his almost-finished movie. "People are going, 'Oh, this is Prince's big gamble,' " he says, sitting on the floor of his London hotel room, fast-forwarding a video version of his most recent cut. "What gamble? I made a \$7 million movie with somebody else's money, and I'm sitting here finishing it."

Prince stops the tape at the point when gospel queen Mavis Staples is leaning out of a window in Minneapolis's Seven Corners, waxing wise on the night action down on the street. The movie appears to be set in the 1950s, when Seven Corners was a Midwestern hotbed of clubs and hipsters. The Seven Corners set, raised on the Paisley Park sound stage, resembles the kind of backdrop used in Gene Kelly musicals. "Yeah, cheap!" says Prince with a laugh. "Actually, that's okay. It's like how we did *Dirty Mind*. But man, what I could do with a \$25 million budget. I'll need a big success to get that, but I'll get it, I *will* get it."

Film-speak is now part of his vocabulary; the first director Prince mentions he admires is Woody Allen, "because I like anyone who gets final cut." Movies have also worked their way into his philosophical references. "If you're making your moves in life because of money or pride," he says, "then you'll end up like that dude who got beat up on the grass at the end of *Wall Street*. He'd been wheeling

and dealing, then *oomph!* That's what time it was!"

He's been studying, he says, and learning from his own film failures. "I don't regret anything about *Under the Cherry Moon*," he says. "I learned that I can't direct what I didn't write." Participating in *Batman*, meantime, allowed him to spy on the making of a megaton hit. Composing songs on locations, Prince mostly stayed on the sidelines and just watched. "There was so much pressure on [director] Tim [Burton]," he says, "that for the whole picture, I just said, 'Yes, Mr. Burton, what would you like?'"

Burton had hired him on the recommendation of Jack Nicholson, a longtime Prince fan. Prince, who'd never met Nicholson before, found the inspiration for "Partyman" when he first saw the actor on the set. "He just walked over, sat down and put his foot up on a table, real cool," Prince says. "He had this attitude that reminded me of Morris [Day] — and there was that song."

Prince says he'll survive if *Graffiti Bridge* is less than a blockbuster. "I can't please everybody," he says. "I didn't want to make *Die Hard 4*. But I'm also not looking to be Francis Ford Coppola. I see this more like those 1950s rock & roll movies."

Unfortunately, rumors have swirled for months that a better comparison might be the 1959 howler *Plan 9 From Outer Space*. "I don't mind," says Prince. "Some might not get it. But people also said *Purple Rain* was un-releasable. And now I drive to work each morning to my own big studio."

Originally, *Graffiti Bridge* was going to be a vehicle for the reborn Time, with Prince staying behind the camera. But Warner Bros. wouldn't go for it, so Prince wrote himself into a new movie. Later, visitors to Paisley Park saw a version of a script that was allegedly obtuse to the point of near gibberish. "That was just a real rough thirty-page treatment I wrote with Kim," Prince says. "*Graffiti Bridge* is an entirely different movie."

As in *Purple Rain*, the plot features Prince as a musician named the Kid. Willed half-ownership of a Seven Corners club named Glam Slam, the Kid must share control with Morris Day, once again playing a comic satyr combining Superfly smoothness and Buddy Love sincerity. It's a fight of good versus evil, and band versus band, for the soul of Glam Slam.

Then there's the unknown Ingrid Chavez, Prince's first female movie lead who doesn't look like she was ordered out of a catalog. Throw in the talents of Staples, the reborn Time, George Clinton and the thirteen-year-old Quincy Jones protégé Tevin Campbell, and you've got, Prince says, "a different kind of movie. It's not violent. Nobody gets laid."

It's impossible to judge *Graffiti Bridge* from just a few selected scenes. Still, they were very good scenes. Prince fast-forwards to a sequence in which Day tries to seduce Chavez on the fairy-tale-looking Graffiti Bridge.

When Prince is amused, which is almost every time Morris Day comes on the screen, he slaps his hands, shakes his head and throws himself back in his seat "I hope Morris steals this movie," he says, recalling the charge made after *Purple Rain*. "The man *still* thinks he can whup me!"

Prince pushes rewind, searching for a scene with the Time. Waiting, he reminisces about the old days, when he oversaw the band. For a tutorial on the proper onstage attitude, Prince remembers, he showed the Time videos of Muhammad Ali trouncing, and then taunting, the old champ Sonny Liston. "To this day," he says, "they're the only band I've ever been afraid of."

At first it seems strange to hear Prince talking in such fond and nostalgic terms about Day and the band. Day left the Minneapolis fold right after *Purple Rain*, with some nasty words about the boss's supposedly dictatorial ways. Now, Prince says, "I honestly don't remember how we got it together again."

Day's old charge of overbossing, however, brings a quicker and crosser memory.

"That whole thing came from my early days, when I was working with a lot of people who weren't exactly designed for their jobs," Prince says. "I had to do a lot, and I had to have control, because a lot of them didn't know exactly what was needed."

The most often-told tale involves Prince firing the then-unknown Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis from the Time in 1982. Jam and Lewis, all parties now agree, left a Time tour on a day off to produce their first record for the SOS Band. A freak snowstorm in Atlanta grounded them for an extra day, and the two missed a gig. When Jam and Lewis returned, they were summarily fired. Jobless, the two missed *Purple Rain*, so they set up as producers and went scrounging for clients. In the years since, they've produced everyone from Janet Jackson to Herb Alpert, becoming the other superpower on the Minneapolis music scene.

"I'm playing the bad guy," says Prince, "but I didn't fire Jimmy and Terry. Morris *asked* me what I would do in his situation. You got to remember, it was *his* band."

Despite the rap, Prince says, he harbors no ill will towards the now-famous producers working across town from Paisley Park at their Flyte Tyme studios.

"We're friends," he says. "We know each other like brothers. Jimmy always gave me a lot of credit for getting things going in Minneapolis, and I'm hip to that. Terry's more aloof, but I know that." And their music? "Terry and Jimmy really aren't into the Minneapolis sound," Prince says. "They're into making every single one of their records a hit. Not that there's nothing wrong with that, we're just different."

With this, Prince cues up the *Graffiti Bridge* movie sequence in which the Time performs "Shake!" The scene looks like something Busby Berkeley would have cooked up if he had choreographed funk.

The Time, Prince says, is proof of the good that can come from a group dissolving and eventually coming back together. "They broke up because they'd run out of ideas," he says. "They went off and did their own thing, and now they're terrifying."

Prince says this formula was just what he had in mind when, in short order, he broke up the Revolution. "I felt we all needed to grow," he says. "We all needed to play a wide range of music with different types of people. Then we could all come back eight times as strong."

"No band can do everything," he continues. "For instance, this band I'm with now is *funky*. With them, I can drag out 'Baby I'm a Star' all night! I just keep switching gears on them, and something else funky will happen. I couldn't do that with the Revolution. They were a different kind of funky, more electronic and cold. The Revolution could tear up 'Darling Nikki,' which was the coldest song ever written. But I wouldn't even think about playing that song with *this* band."

The breakup of the Revolution apparently didn't go down easy. Today, Prince's relationship with his onetime best friends Wendy Melvoin and Lisa Coleman is somewhere between uncomfortable and estranged. "I talk to Wendy and Lisa, but it's like this," Prince says, moving his hands in opposite directions. "I still hear a lot of hurt from them, and that bothers me. When I knew them, they were two spunky, wonderful human beings. I honestly don't know what they're hurt about."

So far, Prince says, the two women haven't listened to the few tidbits of advice he has offered. For their first video, Prince recommended that they try to announce themselves by making a splash, by "doing something like jumping off a speaker with smoke pouring out everywhere. Something." When he saw the video, however, Wendy was sitting in a chair, playing her guitar. "You can't do that when

you're just getting established — kids watching MTV see that and they go click," Prince says, miming a channel being changed. "They'd rather watch a commercial."

Still, Prince's pronouncements seem proffered more in mourning than in malice. "Wendy and Lisa are going to have to do some more serious soul-searching and decide what they want to write about," he says sadly and shakes his head. "I don't know what Wendy and Lisa are so hurt about. I wish I did, but I don't."

It's a broiling summer afternoon in Nice, France, and Prince is performing before an almost completely empty soccer stadium. It's a sound check, and Prince and his band have been going for over an hour, segueing from John Lee Hooker's "I'm in the Mood" to the free-form jamming in "Respect."

After the check, Prince retreats to the bowels of the stadium to wait for night. Camped out in his dressing room under a gaucho hat, Prince plugs in a tape bearing some early versions of songs he's written on tour. Prince says the first song, called "Schoolyard," is about "the first time I got any." Funny and funky, the song is an inner-city *Summer of '42* that tells the story of a fumbling sixteen-year-old-boy trying to seduce a girl to the strains of a Tower of Power album. "I think that's something *everybody* can relate to," he says.

Still, that probably wouldn't prevent the song from getting a parental-warning sticker. "I don't mind that," Prince says. "I think parents have a right to know what their children are listening to."

At first it seems an unlikely sentiment coming from the man who once wrote about the onanistic doings of a woman sitting with a magazine in a hotel lobby. But Prince hasn't turned into a bluenose, he insists — he's just changed his outlook on how to present his still eros-heavy creations.

The change, he says, came soon after he finished the *Black Album*, in 1987. The reason the album was pulled from release had nothing to do with record-company pressure, he insists, or with the quality of the songs. Rather, Prince says, he aborted the project because of one particular dark night of the soul "when a lot of things happened all in a few hours." He won't get specific, saying only that he saw the word *God*. "And when I talk about God," he says, "I don't mean some dude in a cape and a beard coming down to Earth. To me, he's in everything if you look at it that way.

"I was very angry a lot of the time back then," he continues, "and that was reflected in that album. I suddenly realized that we can die at any moment, and we'd be judged by the last thing we left behind. I didn't want that angry, bitter thing to be the last thing. I learned from that album, but I don't want to go back."

By the time of the album *Lovesexy*, Prince says, he was a certifiably nicer human being — and a happier creator. "I feel good most of the time, and I like to express that by writing from joy," he says. "I still do write from anger sometimes, like in 'Thieves in the Temple.' But I don't like to. It's not a place to live."

He's been angling for a different effect on each album he has made in the last few years. "What people were saying about *Sign o' the Times* was 'There are some great songs on it, and there are some experiments on it.' I hate the word *experiment* — it sounds like something you didn't finish. Well, they have to understand that's the way to have a double record and make it interesting."

Lovesexy, Prince says, was "a mind trip, like a psychedelic movie. Either you went with it and had a mind-blowing experience or you didn't. All that album cover was, was a picture. If you looked at that picture and some ill come out of your mouth, then that's what you are — it's looking right back at you in the mirror."

The *Graffiti Bridge* soundtrack, a couple cuts of which have been floating around

for a few years, "is just a whole bunch of songs," he says. "Nobody does any experiments or anything like that. But I still want to know how it stands up to the other albums. I'm always going forward, always trying to surprise myself. It's not about hits. I knew how to make hits by my second album."

Not that Prince is above appreciating a good old Number One with a bullet — especially when he wrote it. "I love it, it's great!" he exclaims when asked about Sinéad O'Connor's version of "Nothing Compares 2 U," which Prince wrote in 1985 for the Paisley Park act the Family. Is he sorry that he didn't get to sing the song before O'Connor? "Nah," Prince says. "I look for cosmic meaning in everything. I think we just took that song as far as we could, then someone else was supposed to come along and pick it up."

While being so productive on his own, Prince has also found time to produce such disparate talents as Mavis Staples, George Clinton and Bonnie Raitt. "The best thing about producing is that there are so many really talented people out there who just never got that push over the top," he says. "Without that push, they just get lost."

Raitt was perhaps his most talked-about reclamation project. "Oh, those sessions were kicking!" Prince says. But nothing was ever released — a fact which Prince takes the blame for. "There was no particular reason it didn't come out," he says. "I was just working on a lot of things at the same time, and I didn't give myself enough time to work with her. I used to do that a lot — start five different projects and only get a couple done. That's the biggest thing I'm working on: patience and planning."

What Prince listens to on his own time is a grab bag. He likes rap; he's recently signed rappers T.C. Ellis and Robin Power to record on his Paisley Park label but denies that he'll be producing songs for M.C. Hammer. "I like his stuff a lot," Prince says. "We've talked but not about working together." He also gives highly favorable mentions to the likes of Madonna, Michael Jackson, Patti LaBelle and

Bette Midler. "I'm not real into Bruce Springsteen's music," he says, "but I have a lot of respect for his talent."

Prince and Springsteen occasionally exchange notes; in recalling a Springsteen concert he saw from backstage a few years back, Prince displays the respect of a general reviewing another man's army. "I admire the way he holds his audience — there's one man whose fans I could never take away," he says with a laugh. And how does he compare their stage tactics? "I'm not sure," says Prince. "But at one point, his band start going off somewhere. Springsteen turned around and shot the band one terrifying look. You *know* they got right back on it!"

For his own enjoyment, however, Prince usually relies on himself. "I like a lot of people's music, and I'm interested in what's going on," he says, "but I don't listen to them. When I'm getting ready to go out or driving in the car, I listen to my own stuff. Never the old stuff. That's the way it's always been."

Prince walks back over to the stereo and plays with the cassette of his latest creations until he finds a number featuring Rosie Gaines, his band's unknown keyboardist and vocalist, who may be the next big star to come out of Prince's camp.

"Terrifying," says Prince, shaking his head, "simply *terrifying*."

It's another sweltering afternoon in another soccer stadium, this time in Lucerne, Switzerland. It's as tame as a church picnic in the dressing rooms; drugs have long been a firing offense, and even cigarettes have been forbidden from the entire area.

Killing time in the hallway, the members of Prince's band seem more like the kind of winning, good-natured characters in a script for the television show *Fame* than jaded road warriors. Gaines is doing her imitation of Daisy Duck as a soul sister. "Be quiet, boyfriend!" she quacks. "What's happening, baby?" goes a squawk directed at fellow keyboardist Matt "Doctor" Fink.

Fink, the only member of the Revolution still playing with Prince, has just read in *USA Today* of a 2 Live Crew parody made by a group called 2 Live Jews. Shticking in his own estimable Jewish-man voice, Fink begins rapping: "Oy, it's so humid!" Over in the corner, Michael Bland is poring over a purple copy of *The Portable Nietzsche*. A corpulent twenty-year-old drummer, Bland is probably the most fearsome-looking band member. Actually, he's a scholarly innocent who still lives with his parents in Minneapolis and plays drums in his Pentecostal church. "Nietzsche's cool," Bland says, putting down his book. "But Schopenhauer — now there's a brother with no hope!"

Also lolling in the hall are Miko Weaver, a hunkish guitarist, and Levi Seacer Jr., a thoughtful bass player, who has been entrusted with speaking to the European press about this roadshow. The Nude Tour is a greatest-hits production with lean arrangements and none of the Liberace-on-acid costumes and special effects of the *Lovesexy* tour.

Prince, hanging out behind a closed door a few feet away from his band, makes no apology for the show's programming. "Kids save a lot of money for a long time to buy tickets, and I like to give them what they want," he says. "When I was a kid, I didn't want to go hear James Brown play something I never heard before. I wanted to hear him play something I knew, so I could *dance*."

For now, Prince has no plans to bring his tour to the States. The main reason, he says, is that he wants to get back to Minneapolis and the studio. Prince also says that Warner Bros. is pouring increasingly large amounts of cash into Paisley Park Records, which means he must "put in some serious time behind the desk." It was only a couple of years ago that Prince was rumored to be in financial straits. But *Forbes* magazine estimated that in 1989, Prince earned \$20 million in pretax profit, and the *New York Times* recently reported that his Paisley Park empire was quite solvent. "We're doing okay" is all that Prince will say.

He has other reasons for wanting to get back home. Prince wants to get rolling on a screenplay he has been working on with Gilbert Davison, his best friend, his chief adjutant and the owner and proprietor of the soon-to-open Minneapolis nightclub Glam Slam.

Prince has lent the club his full endorsement as well as its name, the motorcycle from *Purple Rain* and some of his more-historic guitars. "Glam Slam's going to kick ass," Prince says. "It'll be one of those joints that's remembered! I've just always wanted to have a place where I knew I could just show up and my stuff would be there, so I wouldn't have to jump onstage with equipment meant for Dwight Yoakam."

The point of helping Davison, Prince says, goes far beyond nepotism. "Glam Slam will be another thing to center Minneapolis in the national eye," he says. "People talk about Minneapolis sound or the Minneapolis scene, but they don't really know what the place looks like or means. I want it to mean something."

For Prince, the place still mostly just means home. "It feels like music to me there," he says. "You don't feel prejudice there. I know it exists, but you don't feel it as much. I can just drive around the lakes or go into stores without bodyguards or just hang out."

Nursing a cold and chewing on Sudafed, Prince excuses himself to rest up for the show. The next time he appears in the doorway, his intimidating game face is on. The band comes in for a last-minute huddle; Paisley Park costume designer Helen Hiatt fixes a crucifix necklace big enough to scare off Nosferatu.

"It's raining," Davison says to Prince. "It's raining" is Prince's mumbled reply, accompanied by a thousand-yard stare. Moments later, an army of damp and screaming Swiss teenagers hear the first beats of "1999."

The oldies come, as do some nifty hommages beyond the requisite James Brown footwork. Prince sings "Nothing Compares 2 U" with a Wilson Pickett wail, the

song ending with him crucified on a heart. "Blues," sung with Rosie Gaines, hearkens to Otis Redding and Carla Thomas doing "Tramp." "Baby I'm a Star" lasts twenty-four minutes, and after two encores, Prince is whisked to a backstage BMW that is gone well before his fans stop screaming for more.

Soon after, the band bus is being rocked in the parking lot by highly non-neutral Swiss. "We're the Beatles!" says Michael Bland, giggling and waving to the fans.

"Oy, it's so humid," raps Dr. Fink.

At four in the morning, flying into their third country in the past twenty-four hours, the band and the entire entourage of about thirty are sacked out in what looks like the sleep of the dead. Everybody's unconscious on this charter, including one of the flight attendants.

There's movement, however, up in row 1. Prince's headphoned head is bobbing against the back of his seat, his arms pounding the armrests. From the back, it looks like a prisoner is being executed in an upholstered electric chair.

Earlier in the day, Prince had refused to make any predictions about his future. "I don't want to say anything that can be held against me later," he'd said with a laugh. "Mick Jagger said he hoped he wouldn't be singing 'Satisfaction' at thirty, and he's still singing it. Pete Townshend wrote, 'Hope I die before I get old.' Well, now he is old, and I do hope he's happy to be around."

And himself? "When I pray to God, I say, 'It's your call — when it's time to go, it's time to go,'" Prince had said. "But as long as you're going to leave me here" — he slapped his hands — "then I'm going to cause much ruckus!"

Now, while his band mates and support staff snooze around him, Prince keeps air-jamming beneath the glare of his seat's tiny spotlight. Listening to a tape of his own performance that day, Prince stays up all night, all the way to London.

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