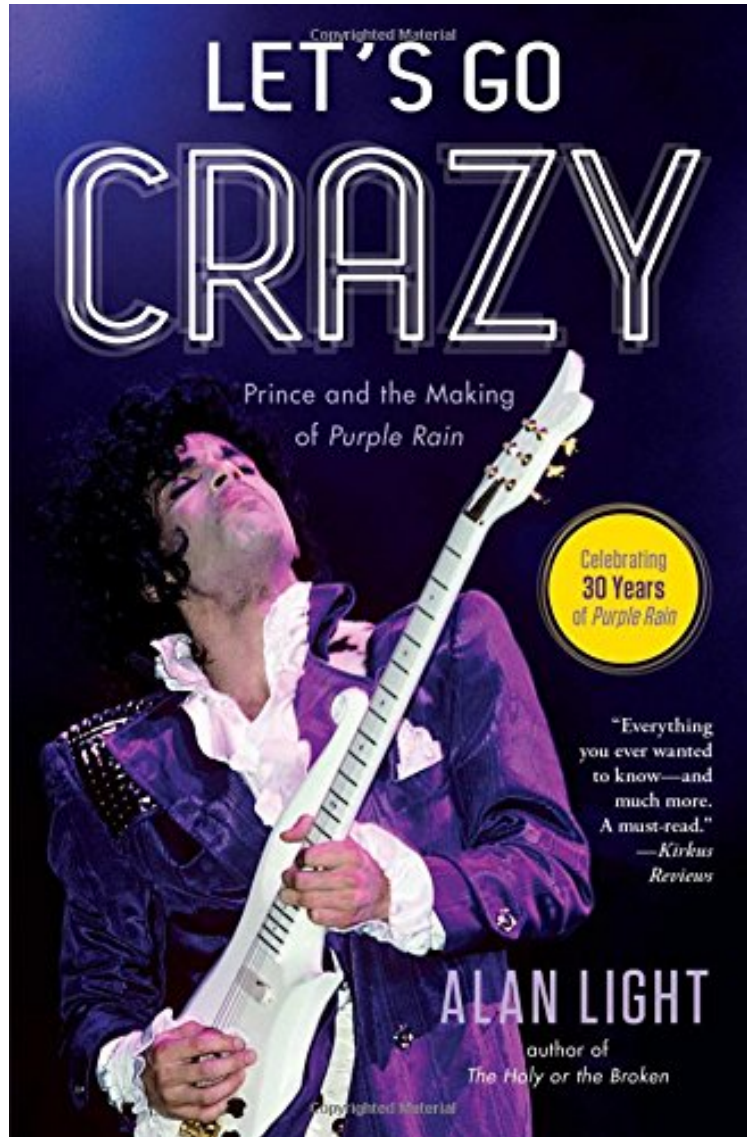


[Free] Let's Go Crazy: Prince and the Making of Purple Rain

## Let's Go Crazy: Prince and the Making of Purple Rain

*Alan Light*

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**Alan Light : Let's Go Crazy: Prince and the Making of Purple Rain** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Let's Go Crazy: Prince and the Making of Purple Rain:

19 of 20 people found the following review helpful. Finally a book for the die hard fans.By BAT71Excellent book. Any die hard will appreciate. A lot of behind the scenes information not before known. Most interesting the description of the tension that existed between the band and Prince as he encouraged them to be part of his grand vision only to simultaneously distance himself as he became a superstar. Former manager Bob Cavallo provides some

of the most interesting insights as does production coordinator Alan Leeds. These guys were able to assess the dynamics of what was going on with intelligence and detachment even while admitting that Prince ultimately, when it came to the vision of the movie, knew better than everyone. However, it's also interesting to see, as a lifelong Prince fan, that Prince clearly was never able (or willing) to again put that much focus into any other subsequent project. He was obviously frustrated with the amount of time and energy it took to bring the entire plan to fruition, including the subsequent touring, which he cut short after 6 months, never taking the obvious step of taking the tour to Europe, which would have extended the whole Purple Rain period for another 6-12 months. Light does a great job of illustrating the awe and frustration of everyone in the camp at that time and it makes for a fast, engaging read. Highly recommended. 3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. One of the best bio's I have ever read By A. Joseph Orlando If you want to know who Prince is then read this book. It really is no accident that he became a success. Luck had a lot to do with it, but he seized the opportunity of taking advantage and most importantly being AWARE of the time he was in. I felt by the end of it I knew how this person became the insane talent that he is known as today. And to tell you quite honestly it was inspiring because it showed you the building blocks on how to achieve greatness. It's a lot of work. It's repetition. It's practice. It's heartache. It's migraines. It's broken relationships. It's coming to terms of who you are as a person. It's treating your goals as a job. And at the end of the day that's what separates the achievers from the underachievers. I can't even begin to tell how inspiring this book was. Whatever your career or pursuits in life are you will find value in this book. I will be reading this periodically. You should too. 3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Some of the book was great By V. P. This book was just OK, that's all. I enjoyed the info about The Time and of course Prince and the Revolution. I remember seeing the movie when it first came out and my favorite part was Prince's performance of Darling Nikki, I mean the man was possessed. I really loved Prince, he was beautiful, talented, fiercely independent and just fearless. This book made me angry a few times when some of the members of the Revolution tried to paint Prince as some ragging crazy, arrogant creature. No, unfortunately I didn't know the man personally but, I do know that being a genius can be a double edged sword. With the responsibilities Prince had and all the music in his head, I feel he was entitled to act a fool without being judged so harshly. After all if it weren't for Prince many of the folks he put on payroll wouldn't be too much of anything. I'm glad I purchased the book but, wish there was more from Prince in it.

Alan Light, former writer for Rolling Stone, editor-in-chief of Vibe and Spin magazines, and author of *The Holy or the Broken*, gets inside Prince's mind palace in *Lets Go Crazy* a history of the making of his historic, semi-autobiographical musical masterwork, *Purple Rain* (Vanity Fair). *Purple Rain* is a song, an album, and a film widely considered to be among the most important albums in music history and often named the best soundtrack of all time. It sold over a million copies in its first week of release in 1984 and blasted to #1 on the charts, where it would remain for a full six months and eventually sell over 20 million copies worldwide. It spun off three huge hit singles, won Grammys and an Oscar, and took Prince from pop star to legend the first artist ever simultaneously to have the #1 album, single, and movie in the country. In *Lets Go Crazy*, acclaimed music journalist Alan Light takes a timely look at the making and incredible popularizing of this once seemingly impossible project. With impeccable research and in-depth interviews with people who witnessed and participated in Prince's audacious vision becoming a reality, Light reveals how a rising but not yet established artist from the Midwest was able not only to get *Purple Rain* made, but deliver on his promise to conquer the world. A must-read for the Prince die-hards who have remained devoted through the musical meanderings of the last three decades (Kirkus Reviews), *Lets Go Crazy* examines how the masterpiece that blurred RB, pop, dance, and rock sounds altered the recording landscape and became an enduring touchstone for successive generations of fans.

"Everything you ever wanted to know about the making of the popular Prince movie and much more. Beyond the minutiae of moviemaking and who was sleeping with whom, the book is particularly incisive in providing context, showing how video technology and black crossover artists were changing the marketplace. A few of the revelations are real howlers... But mainly, Light commemorates an anniversary that might otherwise have passed without much notice. A must-read for the Prince die-hards who have remained devoted through the musical meanderings of the last three decades." (Kirkus Reviews) "Drawing on interviews with musicians and filmmakers involved in the making of the title song, the album, and the movie, Light provides not only a portrait of a musician compelled to share his musical vision, no matter the cost, but also a cultural history of the times in which the film and music debuted." (Publishers Weekly) "Alan Light gets inside Prince's mind palace in *Lets Go Crazy* a history of the making of his historic, semi-autobiographical musical masterwork, *Purple Rain*." (Vanity Fair) "In all, Light's 300-page reassessment of Prince's magnum opus is a revealing study in cinema and sound, not to mention a fascinating look at the dynamic young performer behind the songs (and image). (Cleveland Music Examiner) Light's behind-the-scenes look at a rock classic offers an enticing glimpse into its charming yet enigmatic creator. (Booklist) Praise for *The Holy or the Broken* "Thoughtful and illuminating... [Mr. Light] is a fine companion for this journey through one song's changing fortunes." (The New York Times) "A combination mystery tale, detective story, pop critique and sacred psalm of its own." (The

Daily News)"Brilliantly revelatory... A masterful work of critical journalism." (Kirkus s (starred review))"A deeply researched mixture of critical analysis and cultural archaeology." (Los Angeles Times)"Keeps the pages turning... A well-constructed, consistently enlightening book, which should have Cohen devotees and music fans alike seeking out their favorite version of the song." (The Boston Globe)"Fresh and compelling." (Entertainment Weekly)"Reverentially details every stage in the [song's] evolution and along the way, he reveals the compelling stories behind some of its most iconic interpretations." (The Atlantic)"Absorbing Eloquent... Light expertly unpacks the song's long, strange journey to ubiquity." (The Village Voice)"A must for music fans." (Booklist (starred review))"Captures the essence of a song and of the culture it was reflecting... Its just so well done. (Christian Science Monitor)"[A] charming ode to a pop culture phenomenon." (Publishers Weekly)About the Author Alan Light has been one of Americas leading music journalists for the past twenty years. He was a writer at Rolling Stone, founding music editor and editor-in-chief of Vibe, and editor-in-chief of Spin magazine. He has been a contributor to The New Yorker, GQ, Entertainment Weekly, Elle, and Mother Jones. He is the author of The Skills to Pay the Bills, an oral history of the Beastie Boys; The Holy or the Broken: Leonard Cohen, Jeff Buckley, and the Unlikely Ascent of Hallelujah; and cowriter of the New York Times bestselling memoir by Gregg Allman, My Cross to Bear. Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.

Let's Go Crazy ONE We Are Gathered Here Today The stage is dark. A chord rings out. Its an unusual chord a B flat suspended 2 with a D in the bass. A year from this night, the sound of that chord will be enough to drive audiences into hysteria. But right now, in this club, the crowd of 1,500 or so people listen quietly, because its the first time they are hearing the song that the chord introduces. A spotlight comes up, revealing a young woman playing a purple guitar. She is dressed simply, in a white V-neck tank top, patterned miniskirt, and white, metal-studded, purple-trimmed high-top sneakers. Her asymmetrical haircut is very much on trend for 1983, the year this show is taking place. Wendy Melvoin, the girl holding the guitar, is just nineteen years old, and this is not only the first time she is performing this song in public, it is also her first appearance as the new guitarist in Princes band, the Revolution. So far tonight, they have played nine songs; this one is kicking off the encore. She plays through a chord progression once, and the rest of the five-piece band falls in behind her. They go through the cycle again, and then again. The fifth time around, you can hear a second guitar coming from somewhere offstage. On the ninth instrumental go-round, Prince strides out, wrapped tightly in a purple trench coat. He plays a few fills, moves his head to the microphone as if hes about to start singing, then pulls back again. Finally, three and a half minutes into the song, he begins his vocal, reciting more than singing the first line I never meant to cause you any sorrow... The performance would yield what would soon become his signature recording and one of popular musics greatest landmarks. When he reaches the chorus, repeating the phrase purple rain six times, the crowd does not sing along. They have no idea how familiar those two words will soon become, or what impact they will turn out to have for the twenty-five-year-old man onstage in front of them. But its almost surreal to listen to this performance now, because while this thirteen-minute version of Purple Rain will later be edited, with some subtle overdubs and effects added, this very recording the maiden voyage of the songs is clearly recognizable as the actual Purple Rain, in the final form that will be burned into a generations brain, from the vocal asides to the blistering, high-speed guitar solo to the final, shimmering piano coda. As the performance winds down, Prince says quietly to the audience, We love you very, very much. In the audience, up in the clubs balcony, Albert Magnoli listens to Prince and the Revolution play the song. Magnoli, a recent graduate of the University of Southern Californias film school, has just arrived in Minneapolis to begin work on Princes next project, a feature film based on the musicians life, which will start shooting in a few months. He thinks that this grand, epic ballad might provide the climactic, anthemic moment for the movie, an element that he hadnt yet found in the batch of new recordings and work tapes Prince had given him. After the set, Magnoli joins the singer backstage and asks about the song. You mean Purple Rain? Prince says. Its really not done yet. Magnoli tells him that he thinks this might be the key song they are missing for the film. Prince, the director recalls, considers that for a minute, and then says, If thats the song, can Purple Rain also be the title of the movie? This launch and christening of Purple Rain occurred on August 3, 1983, at the First Avenue club in downtown Minneapolis. The show with tickets priced at \$25 was a benefit for the Minnesota Dance Theatre, where Prince has already started his band taking lessons in movement and rehearsing in preparation for the film. The sold-out concert, which raised \$23,000 for the company, was his first appearance in his hometown since the tour that followed his breakthrough album, 1999, ended in April, during the course of which he reached the Top Ten on the album and singles charts for the first time, and made the hard-won leap to becoming an A-list pop star. The event was significant enough that Rolling Stone covered the show in its Random Notes section. Noting that the mini-skirted Wendy had replaced guitarist Dez Dickerson, the item said that Prince and the band swung into a ten-song [actually eleven] act, including new tracks entitled Computer Blue, Lets Get Crazy, [sic] I Will Die For U, [sic] Electric Intercourse, and a cover of Joni Mitchells A Case of You. Then he encoored with an anthemic and long new one called Purple Rain.... Prince looked toned up from workouts with Minneapolis choreographer John Command, whos plotting the dance numbers for the film Prince has dreamed up. The new songs, which may appear on Princes next LP, are to be part of the movies sound track.... Filming is slated to start November 1st. The location for this concert was no accident. First Avenue, a former bus station that reopened as a discotheque in 1970, was familiar, comfortable territory for Prince. It was his venue of choice to try material out, Revolution

drummer Bobby Z (Bobby Rivkin; his stage moniker was derived from Butzie, a family nickname) has said. Grammy-winning megaproducer James Jimmy Jam Harris, whose career began as a member of Princes protg band, the Time, noted how the venue was an exception to the de facto segregation of live music: A lot of clubs wouldnt let us play because we were a black band, and they were one of the first to really give us a shot. Indeed, First Avenue would practically function as a full-fledged character in the Purple Rain movie, and on this night, its hospitable confines served as the perfect place to introduce not only new material but a new configuration of the band. Looking back, Wendy Melvoin claims that she didnt feel nervous about her first show with the Revolution. From eating and drinking to singing and playing and choreography, everything had a desperate importance, and nothing took priority over the other, she says. Every moment that you were in Prince and the Revolution had to be like your last day on earth. So when we were doing that show, it seemed just as important as making it to rehearsal on time the day before. The crucial decision to record the benefit was made in a bit of a scramble. Alan Leeds, who had worked as a longtime employee in the James Brown organization, had recently been brought on board as a tour manager for Prince. After the 1999 dates ended, Princes managers asked Leeds to stay on as plans for the film developed. By default, I ended up as the production manager, he recalls. Honestly, I was in over my head ... so I was nervous from a technical standpoint.... I had to find a [remote recording] truck, and I finally got a guy named David Hewitt, who had access to trucks, and he found the right truck and we had David Z [engineer David Rivkin, Bobbys brother] in it. So there was a lot of last-minute running around to pull that show off. It was also ridiculously hot and humid. The place was just absolutely packed to the rafters, Leeds continues. Steve McClellan, who ran First Avenue, was afraid that the fire marshals were going to come and close us down. Half the problem was the last-minute guest lists from Prince and Warner Brothers; we had, like, two hundred people we hadnt anticipated, and no one knew where to put them in a small venue. All of a sudden, my friends in the industry were like, Yo, can you hook me up? USA Today was there. Its like, Oh, shit! I guess were doing something. Still, for the members of the Revolution, the fact that the show was being recorded wasnt such a big deal. I wasnt really aware that Bobbys brother had been brought on board to engineer what was coming into the live truck, says keyboard player Matt Fink. When they told me that, I thought, Oh, hes recording this for posterity. He didnt say to us, Oh, by the way, were trying to capture this for the sound track. We were recording all along, as we always did, says the bands other keyboard player, Lisa Coleman. We felt really good about the songs, we really liked the set, and we knew the trucks were there recording, but it was just another show. But the show was evidently important enough to Prince that Melvoin remembers him talking to the band before the set, to calm their nerves. When we were getting ready to go onstage, he said, If you feel nervous, slow your body in half. So if youre playing at 100 bpm, slow your body down to 50 bpm. Cut everything in half while youre playing. Everythingevery move, every thought you make, just cut it in half. It was an incredible piece of advice, because you know how long those jams can go, and if you get too excited and someones rushing, thats one of the worst mistakes you can make in his band. Prince hadnt necessarily planned on using the First Avenue recordings on the actual album, but when he listened to the tapes, he found that some of the new songs sounded good, in both performance and audio quality. Incredibly, not only Purple Rain, but also two other songs that were debuted that nightI Would Die 4 U and Baby Im a Starwound up being used on the final Purple Rain sound track (though the others were reworked more extensively than the title song was). The show gave a major running head start to a film project that continued to seem like a pipe dream to most of the people involved. To the musicians, it still wasnt clear where the whole thing was headed. The reaction to the new material helped, says Fink, but we didnt know what was going to happen with the movie. That concert was a lot of fun and went well, but on some of the new songs, the audience was just listening. They didnt react in the strongest sense of the word, because thats what happens with new material at a lot of showsthey want to hear the hits. So even being onstage at the time, I just couldnt tell. Almost exactly one year later, on July 27, 1984, Purple Rain opened in nine hundred theaters across the United States. It made back its cost of \$7 million in its first weekend, and went on to clear nearly \$70 million at the box office. The sound track album has sold more than 20 million copies worldwide, and spent twenty-four consecutive weeks at number one on Billboards album chart. It won two Grammys and an Oscar, and included two number one singles (When Doves Cry and Lets Go Crazy) and another, the title track, that reached number two. It seems like anytime theres a best of list or a countdown, Purple Rain is there. In 1993, Time magazine ranked it the fifteenth greatest album of all time, and it placed eighteenth on VH1s 100 Greatest Albums of Rock Roll. Rolling Stone called it the second-best album of the 1980s and then placed it at number 76 on its list of the 500 Greatest Albums of All Time, saying that it is a record defined by its brilliant eccentricities; the magazine also included both Purple Rain and When Doves Cry high on its list of the 500 Greatest Songs of All Time. In 2007, Vanity Fair labeled Purple Rain the best sound track of all time (ahead of some serious competition: the sound track for A Hard Days Night was number two, followed by those for The Harder They Come, Pulp Fiction, The Graduate, and Super Fly). In 2008, Entertainment Weekly listed Purple Rain at number one on its list of the 100 best albums of the past twenty-five years, and in 2013 came back and pronounced it the second-greatest album of all time, behind only the Beatles Revolver, adding that Purple Rain might be the sexiest album ever. The Purple Rain tour, which ran from late 1984 into the spring of 1985, saw Prince and the Revolution perform just shy of a hundred shows in five months, and sold 1.7 million tickets. They played multiple nights in many arenas, and even filled afew football stadiums,

including the Superdome in New Orleans and Miami's Orange Bowl. In retrospect, maybe the Purple Rain phenomenon seemed inevitable. Prince was the greatest pop genius of his time on a very short list of music's most gifted and visionary figures and it was just a matter of his finding the vehicle that would translate his incomparable abilities to a wide audience. Yet in truth, when you look closer, the fact that the Purple Rain movie got made at all is hard to imagine, difficult to explain, and the result of many extraordinary leaps of faith on the part of virtually everyone involved in the production. Prior to this release, Prince was nowhere near a household name: while he had established himself in the R&B community, he had just one album that could be considered a mainstream hit, and no singles that had peaked above number six on the pop charts. He was also shrouded in mystery, surrounded by rumors about his ethnic background and sexual preference, and had completely stopped talking to the press as of the release almost two years earlier of his previous album, 1999. The film had a rookie director, first-time producers, and a cast that, with only a few exceptions, had never acted before. The star and most of the featured players were black, and most of the footage was shot on location in Minneapolis, about as far away from the coastal entertainment industry as you can get. On top of all of these strikes against popular acceptance for the movie, the road was already littered with failed vanity projects by singers attempting to make it as movie stars—artists who were a lot better established, including folks like Bob Dylan, Paul Simon, and Mick Jagger. But Prince's unwavering focus on the project was vindicated, to the shock of many in Hollywood. And he maintained his seemingly illogical faith because he knew or sensed, or divined that there were people like me out there. At a suburban Cincinnati high school, my friends and I were already nothing short of obsessed with Prince, whose music felt like the culmination of all the sounds and styles we loved—dance beats, rock guitars, provocative lyrics, passionate vocals, style, glamour, intrigue. There was an extra locker in our senior class hallway, and we dedicated it to Prince, hanging the poster that came with the 1981 *Controversy* album (of Prince in a shower, posed in front of a crucifix, wearing nothing but bikini briefs, which I'm sure delighted our teachers and administrators) inside the door. We sent him a letter welcoming him to the class of 1984 and got back a postcard with the handwritten words "love god" stamped across his photo. *Purple Rain* was released just a few weeks after our graduation. Earlier that spring, we had all stayed up until midnight, cassette recorders at the ready, for the radio premiere of *When Doves Cry*. On this mesmerizing, churning single, and then on eight more album tracks, we heard that he had modified his sound—focused and sharpened it, became a guitar god fronting a true rock n roll band. Oddly, the aura of apocalypse and religious salvation that had already begun to turn up in his work was, if anything, pulled even further forward; yet during the heart of the Reagan era, with the nuclear arms race at the top of everyone's mind, this didn't make his lyrics any less accessible for new listeners. The album seldom left our turntables in the weeks after it came out. We lined up to see the movie on opening weekend in late July. And we saw it over and over again for the rest of the summer, mesmerized by the stunning performance sequences, repeating the campy but irresistible dialogue to one another. If any of our other friends weren't previously on board with our Prince fixation, now the word-of-mouth street team was in full effect, and they simply couldn't avoid hearing about him everywhere. And once their curiosity got the best of them and they took a chance on the movie, any lingering resistance was futile as soon as an offscreen voice intoned the first words—*Ladies and gentlemen, the Revolution*, and a backlit Prince recited the opening words to *Lets Go Crazy*. When I got to college in the fall, I discovered that many of my new classmates were equally obsessed with *Purple Rain*—which meant that now we all had to go see it together, repeatedly, as part of the new bonds we were creating. (A few months later, my closest new friend and I took turns sleeping on the sidewalk in the snow to purchase tickets for the nearest stop on the *Purple Rain* tour.) Perhaps affluent, mostly white and mostly male kids weren't initially the target audience for a Prince film, but what the world soon realized was that a \$7 million investment gets paid back pretty quickly when groups of teenagers go to see a movie six or seven or eight times. The 1980s were all about big-bigger-biggest blockbusters and sequels and expensive music videos, and Prince was going head-to-head with some of music's most towering icons at their peaks of popularity—Michael Jackson, Bruce Springsteen, Madonna. But in that moment, no one understood the potential of the new scale for media and harnessed it for his own purposes as effectively as Prince did. He shook the culture, musically and racially, sexually and spiritually, transforming possibilities and ignoring rules. And if he never reached those heights again, and in many ways never recovered personally or creatively from the *Purple Rain* juggernaut, he still took us all to a place we had never been. *Rocketown* is an unassuming, warehouse-sized club just a few blocks from the Bridgestone Arena in downtown Nashville. Geared to Christian teenagers, its adjacent to a skate park; there are pool tables upstairs, and the marquee lists a bunch of bands you've never heard of. It is now May 2004, twenty years after the release of *Purple Rain*, and Prince has already finished a sold-out performance at the arena (which was still called the Gaylord Center at the time), followed by an additional ninety-minute set on *Rocketown's* stage, after which he has an almost three-week break in his touring schedule. I gotta go home and water the plants, he tells the crowd of five hundred or so with a laugh. Prince is in the midst of one of his periodic resurgences in popularity, spurred by both music and strategy. After a series of experimental and even surly records, released in the midst of his ongoing battles with the music industry, his new album, *Musicology*, is accessible and funky; not a breakthrough or a true classic, it's still a fully realized collection of satisfyingly Prince-style songs. He made some high-profile media appearances (opening the Grammy Awards broadcast performing a medley with Beyoncé, singing for Ellen DeGeneres), delivered a knockout mini-set at his

induction to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in March, and concocted a plan in which everyone who bought a ticket for the tour received a copy of *Musicology* on his or her seat each of which counts toward SoundScans bestseller lists. Since the ninety-six-date run would prove to be the top-grossing tour of the year, earning \$87.4 million, this meant that the record would go gold and stay in the Top Ten for the whole summer, even if not one person bought a copy in stores. So Prince is happy. He has also recently become a Jehovah's Witness, and his conversation is now laced with frequent biblical references and allusions. The after-show performance at Rocketown offers the musical manifestation of this new Prince. Where these intimate, late-night gigs used to be cathartic, virtuoso displays, this time he leads his band through a set of loose funk jams. He bops through the crowd to listen from the soundboard and roams the stage cueing the players through a mash-up of Led Zeppelin's *Whole Lotta Love* and Santana's *Soul Sacrifice*. There's no tension, all release. I'm there to interview him for a cover story for *Tracks*, a magazine I founded and edited in the early 2000s, and after the show, I observe something even more unlikely: At 2:30 a.m., Prince can be found standing outside the stage door, hanging with his band members and talking to fans. The thirty or so clustered civilians are breathlessly excited to be in his presence, yet seem understanding when he tells them that he doesn't believe in signing autographs. He is, as always, shy and quiet, listening more than talking, but he actually seems to be enjoying the chance to mingle. One young woman tells him that *Purple Rain* was the first album she bought when she was in the first grade, but that her mother wouldn't let her see the movie because it was too risqué. Just think about what too risqué means today! Prince responds. Material from *Purple Rain* had provided the focus for the arena concert earlier in the evening. He performed seven of the album's nine tracks during the thirty-song, two-hour greatest-hits set, closing with the title song. In the grimy Rocketown dressing room, though, he claims that the twentieth anniversary of the project is of little consequence to him. I was there, he tells me. I did it, it was my baby. I knew about it before it happened. I knew what it was going to be. Then it was just like labor, like giving birth in '84, it was so much work. In fact, he says, just a few nights earlier in Atlanta, the Time the Minneapolis friends/rivals/contemporaries who played his nemeses in the film, and sometimes in real life came out and performed during his show. We never got a chance to do the real *Purple Rain* tour, because the Time broke up, he says. But then, there they were, onstage last week, and people started tripping, and I was watching my favorite band. So there's no anniversary, no dates; we just have to have faith in Jehovah and lay back and ride it. (The fact that Prince became a Jehovah's Witness may also explain some of his attitude toward the anniversary of the album, since members of the religion do not celebrate birthdays.) Ten years later, his feelings about such milestones seem even more detached. In February 2014, Prince played a super-intimate performance in London for ten people, held in the living room of his friend, singer Lianne La Havas, as part of a press conference to announce a series of upcoming hit-and-run UK shows. Matt Everitt of BBC 6 Music News was one of those in attendance, and he noted that Prince seemed surprised when he was asked about *Purple Rain*'s impending thirtieth anniversary. I hadn't even realized, he said. Everything looks different to me, because I was there. I wrote those songs; I don't need to know what happened. A few weeks after that, he appeared as the only guest for an hour of the Arsenio Hall Show yet another in a series of odd media visits without a tour or new release to support. An audience member asked him when he last saw *Purple Rain*, and what he thought of it. I was in the living room three days ago, said Prince, and it came on television, and I watched *Take Me with U*. He did not address the second part of the question. (On July 27, 2014, the actual anniversary of the movie's release, Prince did play a surprise show at his home base of Paisley Park: he opened the show with *Lets Go Crazy*, and at one point slyly noted, *Thirty years ago today... but he didn't close the loop by playing *Purple Rain*.*) Every pop star presumably has some feelings of ambivalence about his or her biggest moment or defining hit. It immediately becomes both an obligation whenever you perform and the marker of a career pinnacle that, by definition, you can never match. Prince had a long run as one of the most successful musicians in the world, and can still sell out an arena pretty much whenever he wants to. He's had an impressive half dozen records certified two- to four-times platinum, with 1999 (which predated *Purple Rain*) highest on that list, but he has never had an album with sales close to *Purple Rain*'s 13 million in the U.S. Indeed, he once described *Purple Rain* as my albatross it'll be hanging around my neck as long as I'm making music. His work in film has suffered a more troubled fate. Each of his subsequent efforts—the features *Under the Cherry Moon* (in 1986) and *Graffiti Bridge* (in 1990), and the concert documentary *Sign o' the Times*—has flopped. *Sign*, which chronicled performances from the magnificent 1987 album of the same title, earned some critical praise, but it was a production disaster and did minimal business. The other two movies were ravaged in the press, and the common belief is that Prince's insistence on directing played a big part in his fall from the peak of the pop world. Whatever his feelings about the legacy of *Purple Rain*, though, Prince has always kept its songs front and center in his shows—especially the title song. It has served as the climax of most of his concerts, including his 2007 Super Bowl halftime show in Miami, which was seen by 93 million people in the U.S. alone and is generally considered the gold standard of all performances at sporting events. (Over the years, *Purple Rain* has also been covered by a wide range of artists, from LeAnn Rimes to Foo Fighters, Etta James to Tori Amos, Phish to Elvis Costello, while other songs from the album have been recorded by everyone from Mariah Carey to Patti Smith.) A December 2013 concert at Connecticut's Mohegan Sun Arena saw Prince at his latter-day loosest; he introduced the night by saying, *We're gonna just jam tonight it's just an old-school party, and largely stayed away from the hits, digging deep into his catalogue (including quick runs through *Jungle Love* and *The Bird*, the two songs by the Time*

featured in *Purple Rain*) as he alternated between a twenty-one-piece, horn-heavy funk ensemble and his stripped-down, all-female rock trio, 3rdEyeGirl. Still, the inevitable closer, as a second encore, was a heartfelt rendition of *Purple Rain*, with a tender vocal and a winding guitar solo that saw him exploring the indelible melody as if it were a brand-new composition. As he had that night at First Avenue thirty years earlier, he stood in the spotlight, and an audience stood thrilled and riveted by what it heard despite, or because of, the fact that this roomful of middle-aged, mostly white concertgoers was able to sing every note and anticipate every turn of the song, and had been able to do so for the majority of their years on earth. Prince's reluctance to look back at his career in more comprehensive ways is a mixed blessing at best. An artist can't be faulted for wanting to keep moving forward, for making all best efforts not to be weighed down by a legacy that, if he's lucky, eventually and inevitably turns him into a reliably bankable oldies act. The fact that Prince keeps making new music after all this time, that he refuses to coast on his back catalogue, is admirable, and whatever it takes for him to do that is understandably a priority. At the same time, though, we are at serious risk of watching one of music's all-time greats erase his own legacy. For years, Prince has talked about his vault full of hundreds of unreleased songs many of which have made the bootleg rounds among his superfans, while others circulate only as rumors or whispers. He constantly scrubs the Internet of unauthorized video footage and even his own official music videos, recently going so far as to file a lawsuit against twenty-two individuals, for \$1 million each, who engage in massive infringement and bootlegging of Prince's material. (The suit was dropped a few days later.) Where Bob Dylan's authorized Bootleg Series or the Beatles Anthology discs represented attempts by these artists to control and codify their unreleased material, improving the sound quality for fans and editing to help present their own versions of their histories, Prince has run in the opposite direction; in fact, the two primary documents capturing him live in his mid-80s prime (the 1985 Syracuse concert that was released as a home video and the *Sign o' the Times* film) are both out of print and were never transferred for official DVD release in the U.S., leaving the immaculately choreographed and lip-synched performance sequences in *Purple Rain* as the only real evidence of what he was capable of onstage. And, as cultural critic Greg Tate wrote in *The Village Voice* when the movie came out, Those of y'all going gaga behind *Purple Rain* and never seen the boy live aint seen shit. Following the bewildering announcement that Prince would make a guest appearance on the Zooey Deschanel sitcom *New Girl*, Ahmir Questlove Thompson, drummer for the Roots (and such a superfan that he taught a course on Prince at New York University in the spring of 2014) posted on Facebook, begging that Prince just make it count, since it was a rare opportunity for people beyond the dedicated fan base to see him, and saying that he was tired of needing to explain Prince's greatness to a new generation without having any material to show them to prove it. It was a thoughtful plea from a true believer, and concisely presented the very real challenge Prince has created for himself by moving only forward. (The amiable, slight *New Girl* guest shot, in which he offered romantic advice to Deschanel and then had her sing with his band at a party, didn't wind up helping matters much in the end.) Yet a surprise announcement in April 2014 suggested a long-awaited change in Prince's thinking about his own musical legacy. Just a few weeks after he revealed that he now controlled the publishing rights to all of his music, a new deal with Warner Bros. Records, his initial champions and longtime adversaries, was unveiled, which would lead to the release of previously unheard material... a veritable gold mine, while also giving Prince his hard-fought, long-desired ownership of the master recordings of his classic, global hits. A statement from Prince said that both Warner Bros. and Eye [sic] are quite pleased with the results of the negotiations and look forward to a fruitful working relationship. The deal is potentially a landmark in the recording community. An often overlooked change in copyright law allows musicians, writers, and other artists to exercise so-called termination rights. The provision, which took effect in 2013, enables the creators of music to win back their U.S. rights after thirty-five years, so long as they can show that they weren't employees of the record label, even if they signed a contract that transferred all the rights to their work. These rights, though, are not automatically awarded, and to obtain them usually requires extensive litigation. That thirty-five-year window reaches back as far as 1978, when Prince signed with Warner Bros. No further details of the deal or of future plans were announced except that the first fruit of this agreement would be a newly remastered, deluxe thirtieth-anniversary version of *Purple Rain*. (His actual enthusiasm about this, however, still remains to be seen: the dates marking the anniversaries of first the sound track and then the movie release both came and went, and still no date had been announced for the reissue.) Regardless of any anniversary, of all of Prince's groundbreaking work, it is *Purple Rain* that endures first and foremost. It will always be the defining moment of a magnificent and fascinating if often erratic career. It carries the weight of history. Its success, on-screen and as a recording, was a result of the supreme confidence, laser-focused ambition, and visionary nature of the most gifted artist of his generation. Dancing on the line between fact and fiction, Prince utilized his mysterious persona to hypercharge the film's story with tension and revelation. He let us in only partway, certainly not enough to rupture his myth, but more than he ever did before or since. Defying all odds, a group of inexperienced filmmakers and actors, working against the clock and the brutal Minneapolis weather, clicked for just long enough to make a movie that the public was starving for, even if they didn't quite know it at first. We just wanted to do something good and something true, says director Albert Magnoli. The producer was on the same page, and we had an artist who wanted the same things, a group of musicians who felt the same way. It was one of the very few times when everybody actually wanted to make the same movie which sounds obvious, but is actually very, very rare in the movie

business. I think part of the success of Purple Rain was that [Prince] did open up and examine himself, and that it was real, says Lisa Coleman. It was an authentic thing; you could feel it, and there was all this excitement around it. And I don't think he's ever done that again. Purple Rain came along at precisely the right moment not just for Prince, but for the culture. The summer of 1984 was an unprecedented season, a collision of blockbuster records and the ascension of the music video that created perhaps the biggest boom that pop will ever experience. It was also a time of great transformation for black culture, when a series of new stars, new projects, and new styles would forever alter the racial composition of music, movies, and television. While the magnificence of the Purple Rain songs remains clear thirty years later, the album and the film were also perfectly in tune with the time and place in which they were created, and their triumph was partly the result of impeccable timing and circumstances that could never be repeated or replicated. The first time we heard the songs on the radio, the first time we put on the album, the first time the lights in the movie theater went down, we all did just what the man told us to do: we went crazy.