

**PRINCE FOR A DAY**  
**By**  
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In 1996, I'd just moved from London to Los Angeles and was eking out a living as a freelance music writer, pounding out articles on a laptop as thick as a phonebook for specialist music magazines and anyone else who'd pay me a few pennies per word who'd pay me a few pennies per word. I was barely earning rent, but I was living my version of the California dream – even if I was driving a \$500 car with a paint job that screamed 'penniless writer'.

And then the phone rang.

On the line was the editor of a small magazine I had written for a few times. He claimed to have an interview booked with none other than Prince, the multi-talented legend who had been in near-seclusion for the last few years at his famous Paisley Park

compound in Minneapolis. I accepted the assignment – of course – but I didn't believe it would ever actually happen because the elusive artist was almost as famous for avoiding the press as for his eclectic and never-ending output of memorable music. His Purpleness hadn't given a substantial interview in years.

Prince turned heads when he arrived at a media event, partly because of his star aura...but mostly because he so rarely arrived at all. A quick review of news clips told me a story of journalists being dicked around or just plain stonewalled. For a man whose manic musical output was legendary, his willingness to share other parts of himself had always been painfully lacking. In recent years he'd become a virtual recluse.

Prince was 37-years-old back then. At this point, he'd been at the epicenter of pop for exactly half his life. He'd signed with Warner Brothers in September 1977 for a six-figure deal, unheard of for a

then 18-year-old unknown artist. His debut album “For You” was released six months later, and sold close to 100 million records.

It was hard to imagine he was going to break the hermit habit, and even harder to imagine that he’d grant access to a small magazine and a writer that nobody had ever heard of.

Prince’s music was an ever-present soundtrack of my youth and I had always been in awe of his talent. But I didn’t idolize him in the way I probably should have. If I’m perfectly honest, by 1996 I had started to think of Prince as a hit-maker whose best work was behind him. I’d lost track of his output. He’d been fighting a destructive battle with his record label, Warner Brothers, the company that had bankrolled him as an 18-year-old unknown to global stardom. It had been five years since his last worldwide hit, “Diamond and Pearls”. Since then, Prince had released a string of albums, but none of them had produced the kind of iconic hits he

had previously pumped out with astounding regularity. He was making music – tons of it – but he didn't seem to care if anyone was listening or not. This, of course, was exactly the opposite of what any right-thinking record company wanted from an artist.

Plummeting record sales from this one-time superstar had Warner executives panicked that the artist was flooding the market by releasing one record after another before they had a chance to milk every cent of profit from every song. Prince blamed the weak sales on a lack of promotion...yet at the same time backed off from interviews, preferring to retreat to the seclusion of the mysterious Paisley Park.

The relationship with Warner reached a breaking point in 1993 when he suddenly announced to the world that he would stop using the name “Prince”. He flamboyantly adopted a self-invented symbol as his moniker, setting off something of a collective eye-roll

from many fans – myself included – not to mention a crisis among typographers. To some, he was now “The Artist Formerly Known as Prince ( “T.A.F.K.P.”). Others resorted to keyboard trickery to come up with O(+>.” At the time, this mystifying adoption of the now-famous, unpronounceable, self-invented squiggle, sparked more interest than his music.

Two years later, “The Artist Formerly Known as Prince” officially called it quits with Warner’s, slamming the stranglehold of the big record companies over humble, creatively-driven artists such as himself: “The company owns the name ‘Prince’ and all related music marketed under ‘Prince’. I became merely a pawn used to produce more money for Warner Bros.”

This bold – seemingly eccentric move at the time – seems brilliantly prescient all these years later. Prince seems to have instinctively foreseen the digitally-driven disintegration of the music business as

we knew it back then – a physical entity reliant upon CD factories and fleets of trucks. And – if you decode the Princely rhetoric in his “resignation letter” – you can tell that Prince got that music was “Social Media” long before the term gained currency.

“My songs are my children ...” he wrote in his statement. “I deliver them to my record company and, suddenly, they are no longer mine. The process is painful. I have been long ready for a new program as an artist. I want to share my music with others ... my fans are my children’s friends. I respect them and want to communicate with them.”

All of this is a long way of explaining that, by the time I got that assignment in 1996, Prince was – by pure luck – ready to talk in a way he hadn’t been for years. He was finally free of the constraints of his record label entirely. He was at liberty to sell music directly to his legions of fans. At least that was the plan that was in its

embryonic stages back in 1996. And that was the reason I caught a pre-dawn flight from LAX to Minneapolis, a damp contrast of a city.

I landed under a flat gray sky and took a long taxi ride along glossy, wet streets to the neatly trimmed suburbs where Prince had built his famous custom designed compound back in 1985. Even at that late stage in my assignment, I seriously doubted this interview was going to happen. I was fully prepared for a long wait and a brief conversation.

Despite its name, “Paisley Park” is neither paisley nor in any way park-like. A shiny, white, angular creation, the building looks more like a hi-tech factory than the home of the most famous nameless person in history. It is the kind of place that makes you double check the address because it’s impossible to gauge precisely who or what is inside.

Yet this is the space that the artist once called Prince calls home. That much is unavoidable as soon as you walk through the door. If the photos and obligatory platinum records on the wall aren't enough evidence, the 10-foot gold O (+> symbol etched in the marble floor is a dead giveaway. The vast, 55,000 square foot, multi-colored space is bathed in light streaming through triangular vaulted glass ceilings. It is littered with shiny potted plants and even shinier leather sofas so smooth it appears no one has ever sat on them. It reminds me of a doctor's waiting room.

Clearly, every part of this sprawling structure revolves around its musically gifted occupant. Within these walls, a name is unnecessary. "We just call him 'Him'," says one Park worker, adding with twisted but undeniable logic, "There's never any confusion because everyone else has a name." If there's any doubt the mercurial 'boss' clears it up instantly. The place hums with activity. People talk in quiet, earnest voices as they go about their

work. The muffled thump of a band rehearsing at the far end of the building shudders through halls. I obediently slide into one of those shiny sofas and settle in for a long wait.

But to my astonishment, I only have to hang out for minutes, not days. The suspense is brought to an end by the clip-clop of high heels, a nervy smile, and a firm handshake. He's tiny, of course, both in height and features – a compact, efficient body carried with almost military rigidity. The phrase “tightly wound” comes to mind. He's dressed as if he's about to go on stage, wearing velvet, silk, and plenty of make-up. He's not only on time but impeccably polite, immediately offering me a snack from his full-time, personal, vegetarian chef.

Before I can down my made-to-order, cruelty-free sandwich, we're off on a tour of what is very clearly Prince's domain. Gliding down endless hallways, he speaks quietly, punctuating our progress with a wave of the hand and an occasional wry smile. He glows with

quiet pride at a long wall lined with giant, looming portraits of Prince at various stages of his career. This leads to a large, bright performance space which functions as a weekly alcohol-free club for local kids. “I’m not the person I’m made out to be,” says the Prince, launching into a tirade against the evils of normal nightclubs. “I should know,” says Prince. “I was in that business for years.” Until recently he himself owned nightclubs in LA and Miami, but now he seems to be downplaying his reputation for youthful debauchery and the unabashed sexuality of his songs.

Prince recently moved from Los Angeles back to his hometown of Minneapolis full-time. “I had to get out, away from all that craziness.” It seems the capital of Kookdom took its toll on the eccentric superstar. Moving back to his kingdom at Paisley Park has made Prince – according to his spokesperson – “a happier and healthier person.” The boss is more succinct: “LA is perfect for *getting* famous,” he explains, declining to condemn it outright.

“That’s what it exists for. That’s what I went there for...But as you get older, you realize that fame isn’t something you need.”

Turns out everything the ‘Artist Formerly Known As’ ever needed was right here in Minneapolis all along, in the town where he was born, Prince Rogers Nelson, in 1958, the eldest child of a jazz singer and a pianist. Today, he resides in his Paisley Park compound which contains his living quarters, recording studio, rehearsal suites, and the world headquarters of “1-800 NEW FUNK”, Prince’s brand new mail-order sales operation, the latest linchpin in his plan to circumvent the music biz.

Paisley Park is also home to his personal wardrobe department, with two seamstresses on staff, presumably working around the clock to keep him furnished with the kind of clothes he’s wearing today for our interview: a billowy shirt slashed to the waist and no less than a frock coat with tails – a fantastic look that few people in

the world can pull off on stage, let alone a Tuesday lunchtime.

Finally, Prince leads me up to his inner sanctum, the second floor of a spacious, yet surprisingly messy office. Pyramid shaped skylights illuminate the room. A workout machine sits in one corner, a microphone clipped in front for those moments Prince might be lyrically inspired mid-way through pumping iron. Cluttered bookshelves contain box sets of Prince's CD's, a smattering of gaudy statuettes, and biographies of fellow superstars Bob Marley and Marvin Gaye nestled up against a copy of Ayn Rand's idealistic ode to individualism "The Fountainhead" (a book choice he shares, strangely enough, with Rand Paul, Clarence Thomas, and Paul Ryan.)

Whether the subject is business, marriage or music, words start to spill out at his mouth a surprisingly chipper clip and an increasing volume. I'd expected stoic one-liners and a lack of eye contact.

Instead of that, I got ‘chatty Cathy’.

“I didn’t have anything to say before,” he says, explaining the change from the elusive monosyllabic enigma of old. “Now I’m free. My words aren’t owned anymore.”

The reason this pocket-sized superstar is so energized is that he’s about to release a brand new album, “Emancipation”, which the artist has independently produced, distributed, and marketed as his “coming out” as his own man. Like a proud parent, he’s gushing about its creation. He ambles over to a wall of stereo equipment and slides in a CD, cueing up Track 1. Emancipation is, he explains – bubbling over with decidedly un-Princely excitement – “not just a new record, but a new business venture, the record I was born to make. This is me. If it’s not on this record, I can’t do it.”

For reasons even Prince can’t quite explain to me as I sit there jet lagged in his office, each of the three CD’s that make up

“Emancipation” is one-hour long, a precision which, I realize by now, fits the man. “I can’t wait to hand this one over to my contemporaries,” he says, puffing himself up in a mock boastful pose. “Just to lay it on people like George Michael or Elton John or Lenny Kravitz, and just be like, there you go...There’s 36 on there... Take your pick.”

As he fast-forwards through the many, many tracks that bop from pop to hard-edged rock to syrupy love songs to raunchy funk, it’s awesome and awkward at the same time. What is the correct response when the most talented musician in the world is playing his work for you? I tap my feet, sway to the music, and express my admiration, and realize this music is just as powerful and perfect as you would dream it should be.

Every now and then he hits pause and looks up to explain the hidden meanings in his music. It almost seems like he’s looking for

approval. I'm not sure how to respond. I'm still just a little amazed that I'm actually at Paisley Park and Prince in standing in front of me explaining his music. "She Gave Her Angels", he says, is about an otherworldly experience he had when his loved one was away from him for the first time. "Let's Have A Baby", a song that uses "piano, bass...and silence" is about "how a sperm feels on his way into the egg. But," he elaborates, "I got part of the way into it, writing about everything a sperm has to go through, and I was like whoa! That's way too heavy for me."

By Princely decree, journalists are banned from using tape recorders at Paisley Park. In yet another act of artistic defiance, he has decided that – despite the very dangerous risk of being misquoted – he prefers to hear the journalist's impression of their time with him rather than read his own words quoted back at him. He believes that reporters – like all artists – should create their own, original vision of their impressions of Paisley Park.

Right now there is no doubt the impression he is trying to make. Perched stiffly on the edge of a sofa, he expounds earnestly on one subject about which he wants to be crystal clear: by jettisoning Warner Brothers in favor of independently making, marketing, and releasing his own music, he explains, he has finally assumed complete control of his career. “I was told ‘We want an album every 18 months,’ he says, complaining that there was no way he could limit his musical output to that measly amount. “You just can’t do that to me. That’s my essence. They’re trying to tie me down. If you do that, sooner or later I’m going to shrivel and die.” “It just can’t be done,” explains Prince. “In that time, I might record enough material for three or four albums. And what happens to that? Sometimes the process of getting the final result is more interesting than the finished piece. Half our life we’re going to make mistakes...I don’t care how my music is criticized or if it sells. I can give it away if I want to. The message has to get across.”

Prince was once quoted as saying “If you don’t own your masters, then your masters own you.” All he wants is to spread as much of his music as he can, as widely as possible. Warner Brothers – a multimedia conglomerate with tentacles in almost every nation on earth – just couldn’t keep up with his prodigious output.

Prince loves the idea that it’s the artistic process with all its flaws – and not the product – that matters most. He wants to put his music on the Internet, give it to charity, or sell CDs at his concerts. He wants to work with anyone he wants to, whenever he wants to, without having to “go to a lawyer and talk points and rights. It only takes a day to make the music. Then it takes forever for the system to catch up with the creative people.”

He giggles like a kid when he talks about his yet-to-be-confirmed deal to distribute his records, but shies away from outright condemnation of – or confrontation with – his ex-record label. On

the one hand, he'll acknowledge that Warner Brothers made him a star. On the other hand, he calls it "one big, long, twenty-year mess." In one breath he'll condemn the relationship as akin to slavery: "True emancipation happens in the mind," he's said. Then he'll insist that the termination of his Warner ties is something that saddens him deeply. "Sometimes I'll just call them up and say 'I love you.' I bear them no ill will. Their system works very well...for them." He insists the split is not about money. "Money is not the issue. Getting the message across is. The message is misunderstood." But his eyes light up mischievously when he talks about the prospects of his new independent enterprise. "I will never sell less than a million records. Now if we charge, say, \$40 for 36 new songs...you do the calculations. That's \$40 million, and now it's up to me to split that up. Now I'm the one who decides how much royalties they get," he grins. "It's a very strange feeling...but I like it. I can do anything – orchestral, jazz, duets – anything. Everybody's tripping. They just can't wait to see what's going to

happen.”

On the subject of business, Prince could go on for hours. He seems genuinely exhilarated by the idea of working with whomever he wants; thrilled by the concept of creating a self-contained, self-sustaining industry within these four walls. “I’m not a control freak,” he claims. “I’m just curious to see what happens when I get the chance to create my vision exactly as I see it, to see what happens when you have this pure sharing of energy and spirit. As time goes on, that has to become the priority.” In fact, Prince sees it as fulfilling his destiny.

“I don’t believe in coincidences. That word does not exist for me. Once you find your path...you really do have no choice but to stay on it. For a long time I didn’t really follow that, but now I accept it wholeheartedly.”

This road to independence began, he insists, with his unilateral

rejection of the name he was born with, the name under which his music was marketed ever since he signed with Warner's. At the time, few stopped to consider that the name change could be anything more than an outlandish publicity stunt. But the way Prince sees it, turning his back on one of the most marketable brand names in pop was an act of justifiable rebellion. In a press release at the time, he called it "a cry for solidarity amongst the artists" and a "reprieve from the greed of entertainment executives", adding "I became merely a pawn used to produce more money for Warner Brothers." In person, he hammers home his point. Refusing to be fazed by criticism, he piously compares his decision to Mohammed Ali's rejection of Cassius Clay. "What is the name 'Nelson' anyway?" he asks, indignantly. "It's a slave name."

As for his choice of a symbol as a new name, he can't quite grasp the idea that this produces practical problems for the people around him. He seems to think that it was somehow predestined,

and rather than explain his logic, he points to the detailed deconstruction of his symbol, indulged in the many fanzines around the world dedicated to his name.

“Sometimes these people understand me better than I do myself,” he says of the fans he prefers to refer to as his ‘friends.’

Despite his uncharacteristic openness the artist seems to still prefer flights of fancy to the kind of specific details a music journalist with no tape recorder is looking for. He pontificates, and meanders, making grand comparisons and littering sentences with spiritual metaphors. In short, just about every answer is like a concept album.

Without naming names or attributing blame, he complains that he has been misunderstood for years. The same man who once performed on a stage designed to look like female genitalia can't quite grasp why people came away with the idea that he was obsessed with sex.

“‘Sexy MF’ was about monogamy, but no one ever got past the

title,” he complains. “‘The Revolution’ was all about enlightenment. ‘Lovesexy’ was about harmonic convergence. It has always been about...this message. But it’s never been communicated in the right way.”

For someone who insists that Message is everything, he’s not very good at explaining precisely what that “message” is. His conversation is littered with New Age vagaries, talk of spirituality, fate, and destiny. In person – as in song – he avoids getting bogged down in the details. He seems pretty much devoid of a political or social agenda. “America is decaying from the inside out,” he says when pushed. “This is a great place, a great country. But the country is dying, the people are stagnating, and it’s going to take something like this to fix it.”

At times he makes it sound like asserting his independence can somehow serve as a role model for those not fortunate enough to be superstars. “If people could understand that, no matter how

bad your situation is, if you can just imagine who you really are, who you can be, there is a way out.”

When asked to go into details, he either can't or won't.

On matters of race, he is – for the most part – silent, although he makes it plain he stands on the side of love and unity, rather than militant activism. “Look at Farrakhan's son,” he suddenly blurts, referring to the controversial Louis Farrakhan of the separatist Nation of Islam. “He's younger, stronger, and madder than the father. This is what's happening in America; the country is dying for a spirituality.”

At one point Prince suddenly excuses himself and slips out of the room, returning moments later with his very beautiful wife. Like her husband, Mayte Garcia – a Puerto Rican former belly dancer from Alabama – is a perfect miniature human, wearing only slightly more makeup than her husband. Mayte is also painfully shy and happens to be very, very pregnant. I am too shocked to fully digest

at the moment the image of Prince changing diapers or pushing a stroller. I had no idea of this life-altering fact of his wife's pregnancy. It is an awkward but touching moment, Prince – the quintessential playboy – glowing with the idea of parenthood, and utterly smitten with his perfect, miniature Princess bride.

But the “Artist Formerly Known as” – soon to be known as “Daddy” – sees it all as perfect manifest destiny. Despite Prince having been linked over the years with many glamorous partners – Sheila E., Misty Copeland, Carmen Electra, and Kim Besieger to name but four – Mayte is Prince's first marriage, and this baby is his first child...as far as anyone knows. The wedding took place on Valentine's Day earlier that year in a Methodist church in Minneapolis. The New Power Generation performed a song written for the day called ‘Kama sutra’, and the ceremony concluded with the release of dozens of white doves.

“It was just incredible,” the artist gushes. “It was beautiful. It was

like I was above it. I wasn't really there. That's what I mean by following your path...you just have to let the spirit take you. There are several different paths I could have gone down. A million women I could have been with."

Prince hands over a glossy pamphlet entitled "Coincidence or Fate?" with a picture of him and his bride entwined on the cover. Inside, it traces the creation of their relationship, and what Prince apparently sees as proof that they were predestined to be together. Starting with the not-very-startling fact that both have fathers named John, it goes on to list even more obscure semantic similarities: "Her middle name will be his father's first and middle initial combined – 'Janell' as in 'John L'" adding the further evidence that "Mayte's mother is named Nell. Prince's last name was Nelson."

To a mere mortal, it looks more like a collection of irrelevancies than fate, but I'm not going to be the journalist who bursts Prince's bubble. To Prince, it's all the proof he needs that he and Mayte

were destined to be together. “I’ve had a lot of women tell me they’re my soul mates,” he says...declining to name names. “I don’t know if they knew what it meant. I never felt it...until now.”

The baby is due in just a few weeks. Turns out it was impending fatherhood that inspired the artist’s attempt to tell the story of a sperm in song on “Everlasting”. Later in the day on another tangent in the Paisley Park tour, Prince opens the door to what is clearly his favorite place in the compound, a child’s fantasyland playroom crammed with brightly colored toys. Hidden elsewhere in the Park are two baby bedrooms: one for a boy and one for a girl. This child will want for nothing...except for a father with a name. It’s suddenly quite easy to imagine this childlike man being an incredible father.

“I expect my child to advise me,” says Prince with that far away gaze common to all first-time parents-to-be. “The way I see it, there’s nothing wrong with them when they come out. It’s already

smarter than me...It's going to be teaching me.”

After the detour to the playroom, we are back to business. The heavy thump of bass echoes nearby, and I follow Prince through a thick, heavy door into a recording studio. The music stops with the stutter of a flow interrupted. The atmosphere in the room thickens. It's clear that this is work, not play, and I get the clear impression that this is NOT a group of guys who hang out after gigs. Grabbing his gold, squiggly guitar, the artist issues instructions, barely making eye contact and rarely speaking, relying on a nod here and a glare there. At times he underlines his instructions with a riff. He's courteous yet aloof with his band, firm and clear, and every inch the petulant and inventive genius that's kept the pop world guessing for almost two decades. The band members – who have been practicing this new material for over a month now – obediently nod in unison as Prince makes his point clear. There's an almost audible sigh of relief when the royal one lays down the guitar, mumbles instructions, and glides out of the room.

I've just witnessed Prince actually making music, about as up close as you can get. The uniqueness of the experience doesn't quite hit me until after the heavy door studio closes behind us, and Prince throws his eyelashes to the sky in a gesture of desperation and disgust. "They still need a lot of work," he sighs, excusing what he decrees as a distinctly lackluster performance. "That," he adds, with a quick, ironic smile, "is why I get the big bucks."

I don't remember exactly how the meeting came to an end. I don't remember saying goodbye to Prince. But I do recall being blown away by his single-minded, shrewdly smart determination to control every aspect of his career, whether in the rehearsal room or the boardroom. And that his new venture into self-distribution and self-determination would, more likely than not, help upend the business of selling records. I also realized why he'd chosen to do this interview in the first place, at this crucial juncture when he was experimenting with new ways to reach his audience. The magazine

that hired me was small and not well known, which was why I'd been so skeptical that the interview was going to happen in the first place. The publication's gimmick was its shape – small and square like a CD – and the fact that every issue hit newsstands with a shiny disc of new music on the front cover. That meant the magazine had something Prince wanted, namely distribution to towns and cities all over the country. It was a shrewd way around the fact that he no longer had Warner Brothers to physically transport his music to record stores, and that, back then, the Internet was so slow and unreliable that selling music online was still a major novelty.

Even so, Prince was an early internet adopter in a world where most people still connected via the high-pitched squeal of dial-up. That same year, 1996, he launched “Thedawn.com”, placing a stake in an emerging technology that he believed was where “the record industry is headed...to communicate directly with people all over the world...an ever-changing venue... audio and video clips, a chat

room, and exclusive new music and video releases.”

A year after my visit to Paisley Park, Prince sold another 3-CD set – the now infamous “Crystal Ball” set – direct to fans over the internet, winning a Webby for its innovative design. He followed that with a series of fleeting websites, one for “1-800 New Funk” and another called “Love 4 One Another”. Then in 2001, the same year iTunes started, he launched the NPG Music Club, a subscription service to distribute exclusive new music and VIP access to his concerts, podcasts, and radio shows. That website won Prince yet another Webby while other artists his age were still figuring out how to launch legal battles over download sales. NPG folded in 2006, maxing out at around 400,000 subscribers at its peak, while Apple’s service was selling to 30 million users.

That was pretty much the end of Prince’s love affair with the Internet, which at first might look like another mercurial twist in his

ever-changing plans. In fact, his growing rejection of online music made perfect sense in his quest for control. As iTunes and streaming services quickly took over the virtual music business, the web was no longer a liberating tool for artists.

By 2010 Prince was quoted as saying, “the Internet’s completely over,” aiming his ire at online purveyors of music. “They won’t pay me an advance for it and then they get angry when they can’t get it. The Internet’s like MTV. At one time MTV was hip, and suddenly it became outdated.” He once told the Guardian that “the Internet was over for anyone who wants to get paid, and I was right about that. Tell me a musician who’s got rich off digital sales. Apple’s doing pretty good, though, right?”

During his lifetime, Prince’s discography was only partly and sporadically available online, and a year before he died he withdrew his music from all except Tidal. In an even more surprising move, he eventually reunited with Warner Brothers in 2014 – on vastly better financial terms with much more control for

the artist. In business and in his creative process, that quest for complete authority over his own destiny seems to have been one of Prince's driving, primal forces.

By the time I landed in LA late that night, at the end of a long and slightly surreal day, I was left with two distinct impressions: one of a businessman with a ruthless and fearless edge hiding behind a shy, soft-spoken demeanor; and another of an expectant parent, endearingly full of all the normal excitement and anxieties of a soon-to-be dad. But just a few weeks after my visit to Paisley Park – in a tragedy that mars my memory of that interview to this day – news reports broke saying that the birth had not gone smoothly. The baby boy was born with a severe medical condition. At the time, details filtered out as unsubstantiated rumors, which eventually led to a report in Prince's local paper, the Minneapolis Star Tribune. The paper tracked down a death certificate, which it was confident referred to Prince's child. After less than a week, the

baby had died of an impossibly rare genetic condition – the ultimate loss of control. As if to reclaim some power over the loss, Prince refused to acknowledge the death publically, then and for the rest of his life. His marriage to Mayte fell apart a few years later and, although he married again in 2001, he never produced an heir.

When Prince passed away, I turned my house upside down in search of my old clippings. I found a few, but not all, of the articles based on my meeting. The interview was published in various forms in magazines all over the world: in Japan, Germany, France, the UK, Hong Kong, and Australia. But I never did find the original article for that small LA publication that originally hired me – the one shaped like a CD. That magazine went out of business a year or two after the Prince story, made irrelevant by the digital revolution in general, and the emergence of Napster in 1999 in particular.

Now obsessed with the idea of finding my original piece, I dug out a

disheveled box of floppy discs from the hot, dusty garage, surviving relics from my original phonebook-sized laptop. They had all my old freelance work saved on them, but I had no idea whether they still worked, after all this time and neglect. A quick Amazon search and a click got me a USB floppy disc reader by fed ex, and a day later I slid the fragile plastic disc into the tray, feeling only slightly hopeful. After an interminable sequence of worrying mechanical sounds it finally, and miraculously, mounted. I recovered everything, my original notes, various versions and rewrites, and the new material that makes up this essay. Now that Prince is no longer with us, it seemed only right to share this experience and his words, for posterity if nothing else. Back in 1996, the proceeds from this article helped me shed the 'penniless writer' tag, at least temporarily, and upgrade to a car with paint *and* air-conditioning. But the more I reread Prince's words and the more I listen to the songs – which I do now more than ever – I've come to the conclusion that Prince never made much sense in anything other

than *musical* terms. And I wouldn't wish it any other way.