



Prince Rogers Nelson

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Introduction

Prince Rogers Nelson (7 June 1958 – 21 April 2016) was an American musician and actor, and one of the pioneers of the Minneapolis sound. A lifetime native of the Minneapolis area, Prince rose to international fame in the 1980s, after releasing a string of successful pop albums and starring in the 1984 semi-autobiographical film *Purple Rain* (the main and secondary soundtracks of which he also performed). Controversial because of his overt sexuality, camp on-stage persona, and androgynous appearance, Prince spent much of his career engaged in a debate with fans, critics, and his record label about the direction and intention of his music. While the enduring themes of sex, romance, and relationships that abound throughout his work have been the subject of extensive discussion, less has been written about Prince's religious preoccupations and their expression. Specific to the theology of his lyrical content was an extended exploration of the Apocalypse and the birth of a new world, an area of interest that was heavily influenced by his early exposure to the Seventh Day Adventist (SDA) church and, later, his conversion to the Jehovah's Witness faith. Although experiencing a metaphorical stint in the wilderness (captured in his early album releases), his albums, beginning with *Controversy* (1981) and ending with *Sign o' the Times* (1987), represent a shift in the artist's thinking, a return to God, and mark the opening stages of proselytising which continued throughout his subsequent albums, until his death in 2016. Rather than a passive observer or devout practitioner, Prince's ideology focused explicitly on his responsibility for both spreading the message of the gospel and, indeed, the Lord's imminent return as well as calling his congregation of fans to engage in their own spiritual exploration. This act of becoming, of forming a close relationship with the divine, is one that requires sacrifice and literal worship. For Prince, worship was often expressed most meaningfully in sexual union. It is the multi-layered fusion of sex, sensuality, and spirituality present within his lyrics, then, that make much of Prince's work so fascinating. In turn, the evolution of his religious ideas, specifically an emphasis on the role of God and the literal interpretation of apocalyptic theology, were the central, if often hidden, themes that underpin his oeuvre.

Life and Work

Prince was born in 1958, the eldest child of Mattie Della and John Lewis (known as John L.) Nelson, both musicians active on the jazz scene in Minneapolis. He learned to play piano from a young age, composing

his first song at seven, and was self-taught on at least eight additional instruments, including guitar. Throughout his career, Prince was renowned for playing every instrument on his albums and, in many instances, sang the range of vocal accompaniments as well. The track, 'Just as Long as We're Together' from his debut album *For You* (1978) is a prominent example of this whilst also showcasing his impressive register, which was another trademark of his performance style.

Prince spent his younger life within the SDA church where he was exposed to the doctrinal teachings of the church, developed a strong understanding of the Bible, and a belief in personal interaction with God and other beings of the spiritual realm. Suffering from epilepsy up until the age of eleven, Prince believed he was cured by an angelic intervention. Recounting a specific incident, he stated that an angel was sent by God to heal him and, while doing so, the angel told him that he would no longer be sick (with seizures) because God had other plans for him (Vogel 2018, 147). This belief in being anointed with a special purpose would become foundational to the construction of his adult persona (personally and professionally). Angelic visitation, contact from God, and divinely inspired dreams are persistent themes in his eighties output, while in much of his post-nineties work, he engages listeners with direct questions about their own relationship with the divine, often prompting them to get their spiritual lives in order as judgement is imminent.

After his parents' divorce, Prince's mother remarried and gave birth to another son. This began a turbulent period in the artist's life, which saw him frequently moving between homes, living sporadically with each of his parents, and, at other times, grandparents. After being kicked out of home by his father at the age of fifteen, he moved in with the neighbouring Anderson family. Their son, André, was of a comparable age and the pair soon established a firm friendship and would later become musical collaborators. André (who changed his surname to Cymone) went on to play guitar for Prince while he was on tour at the beginning of his career. Adhering to a gruelling performance schedule, the early days of Prince's career were, at times, characterised by sexually explicit performances, during which Prince questioned issues of gender and seemed at times to be intentionally antagonistic in his overt lyricism and dress. In other moments, he seemed almost chronically shy, presenting a persona at odds with the content of his songs.

The peak of Prince's fame came with the release of the film *Purple Rain* (1984), and the accompanying soundtrack, which is perhaps the work for which he remains the most well-known. Despite the album's overwhelmingly religious sub-text, it became notorious at the time of its release for its sexually explicit content. Indeed, the track 'Darling Nikki' was the impetus behind a federal lawsuit, brought by Tipper Gore, the result of which was that explicit lyrical content was legally required to be advertised on the cover of albums via the 'Parental Advisory' sticker (Morton 2007, 199). In the aftermath of that event, Prince once again found himself under public scrutiny for his overly sexualised persona. *Graffiti Bridge* (1990), an unofficial sequel to *Purple Rain*, attempted to bring the theological concepts expressed into the first film more firmly to the fore, with unsuccessful results. The film, like the 1989 release *Under the Cherry Moon*, was a critical and box-office flop.

In the mid-eighties, Prince purchased a compound in Minneapolis, which he named Paisley Park, and which was converted into his home and recording studio. He would live here for the rest of his life, and often referred to it in his music as a place akin to heaven on earth. Indeed, as his experience of fame became more oppressive, he withdrew further into the privacy of the compound, making it the spiritual epicentre of his life. At varying times throughout his career, Prince opened access of the home to fans and critics, hosting launch release parties for his albums and performing mini concerts there. In his final years these

events were becoming more frequent, and, in the aftermath of his death, Paisley Park became a site of pilgrimage for fans, not unlike Graceland, the home of another musician and spiritual seeker, Elvis Presley.

Prince married his first wife, Mayte Garcia, in 1996, the pair having met after she joined as a dancer for the *Diamonds and Pearls* tour (1992) and then starred in the extended feature video of the *Love Symbol* album (1993). The pair had a son the same year, who they named Amiir. Sadly, the child died a week after his birth. Years later, Prince would suggest that the death of his son was a punishment from God, in response to his early performance style (Vogel 2018, 164). It is difficult to say if this comment was a genuine reflection of Prince's ideology or was inspired by his recent conversion to the Jehovah's Witness faith. The latter would prove to have a strong influence in the next phase of his musical output and, indeed, his legacy.

Prince and Mayte separated in 2000. Prince continued to release albums, albeit with a darker, more melancholic theme running throughout. After a long, drawn-out debate with friend and religious mentor Larry Graham, Prince committed to the Jehovah's Witness church and once again began to reshape his ideas of faith. Unlike previous explorations of his relationship with God and organised religion more broadly, this was a definitive turning point for the artist, who remained a committed and practicing Jehovah's Witness until his death. He married his second wife, Manuela Testolini, the same year as his conversion and the couple remained together until 2006. During this time, Prince took to practising his new faith with gusto, adopting a strict diet which mirrored the Jehovah's Witness belief system, and also actively proselytising for the church. This included door knocking in several Minneapolis neighbourhoods, a task which Graham often accompanied him on (Ro 2011, 321).

In the last decade of his life, it was rumoured that Prince repeatedly refused surgery for enduring hip problems (the result of years of performing in high heels) specifically because of his dedication to his new-found religious beliefs. The persistent pain led to a reliance upon medically prescribed painkillers, notably Percocet, which would ultimately lead to his death from overdose.

Prince died in April 2016. Recording late at night and alone in his private studio, it is believed he accidentally overdosed and was unable to call for assistance. He was discovered in an elevator in Paisley Park the following morning but could not be revived. Although the death was unexpected, there had been signs related to the artist's declining condition and increasing dependence on prescription painkillers. In the weeks prior to his death, Prince's private jet had made an emergency landing on a return trip to Minneapolis as the star had gone into cardiac arrest after again taking too strong a dose of painkillers. Although this event had been reported widely in the press, Prince was unconcerned with the episode, calling it a non-event (Greenman 2017, 251). An outspoken advocate for vegetarianism and alcohol-free living, Prince had also been a vocal opponent of drug taking, making his death from prescription dependency and overdose difficult for his fans to accept.

Over the course of his career, Prince released forty-two studio albums. In addition to these came a litany of online albums, B-side cuts, bootlegs, and live performance recordings, which is to say nothing of the volumes of material stored in his notorious vault, located in his home.

Musical Output

Prince signed with Warner the late 1970s, releasing his debut album, *For You*, in 1978. Comprised of nine songs, the album is a meditation on dating and relationships, a theme which would carry over into his following two albums, *Prince* (1979) and *Uptown* (1980), with the content becoming more sexually charged and explicit with each progression. These first three albums were foundational in the construction of Prince's performance persona, specifically Prince as the romantic lover. Narratives of sex, sexuality, and eroticism would remain central aspects to Prince's performance style and lyrical approach throughout his career, though as he turned more towards the open exploration of faith and religion, themes of sex and sexuality became entwined with discussions of God. Thus, in Prince's work sex becomes a form of spiritual celebration, while love is the ultimate act of worship in which man and woman can partake. As they do so, they express divine worship. It is *1999* (1982) that first introduces overtly religious dialogue alongside Prince's standard sexual and romantic musings, specifically an apocalyptic narrative which is the prominent element of the title track. The latter begins with a voiceover (presumably God) telling listeners not to be afraid, that he has not come to hurt them, but that he wants them to have fun. The track then breaks into a synth melody in which Prince recounts a dream of his interpretation of the end of the world. Unsurprisingly, and likely inspired by his exposure to the SDA church and its millennial ideas about the final judgement, the song recounts an apocalypse of fire and brimstone. Still, the track is not sombre but is instead a celebration in which Prince talks of life as a party and the party not being meant to last. Reminding listeners that they "cannot run from the Revelation," he suggests that they must accept their fate, and their mortality, and celebrate the time they have been given. While the end of the world is a literal and symbolic death of society, it is a celebratory event, because humankind is returned to the divine love of their creator. This theme would become a recurring theme throughout his work, usually linked explicitly to eternity and the afterlife. This specific branch of theological musing is unpacked with greater significance in the 1984 album *Purple Rain*.

It is also worth noting that '1999' is explicit in its discussion of surrendering to the temptations of mortal life, particularly sexual desire, before the moment of death. Judgement is an inevitable feature of Prince's apocalyptic vision and, thus, if he is to be judged, then he is going to give over to his final urge to fulfil himself sexually. Again, this theme underpins his later works, with sexual union and the gratification of desire being primary themes on all of his albums. Throughout *1999* the theme repeats in most tracks, notably 'Little Red Corvette' and 'Delirious,' before being interwoven in 'Free,' alongside a message of social consciousness and celebration. The latter would also present in future releases, notably 'Cinnamon Girl' from *Musicology* (2004) and more broadly on *3121* (2006) and *Here on Earth* (2007). 'Let's Pretend We're Married' is also a notable inclusion on the *1999* album, as it casts sex and love making specifically within the context of matrimony. Although the marriage in the song is pretend and not supposed to last beyond the sexual encounter, the connotation is that love in its true expression and form can only be experienced when undertaken within the context of sanctified union. In this ideology, sex between two partners is a form of physical expression but, more importantly, worship. It is designed specifically to bring the lovers closer to God and provides a momentary glimpse into the eternal realm.

Controversy (1981) sees the inclusion of strong religious iconography in album artwork, as well as continuing the theological dialogue begun in *1999*. The poster which accompanied the album depicts Prince in a bathroom, wearing a belly chain and black bikini briefs. Water flows from a showerhead behind him, as well as from a faucet that runs into the bathtub in which he is standing. There is a black crucifix

hanging on the tile wall behind him. The image strongly represents the idea that he is baring himself before God, the water surrounding him akin to a baptismal font in which he will offer his sins and from which he will be reborn. While some of his old persona is present in the sexualised stance and the feminine eye make-up, the tone of the album and the additional artwork and symbol is very clearly indicative of transition. The bathtub motif would be used again in the open scenes for the music video 'When Doves Cry,' this time with Prince emerging suggestively from the water, gesturing towards the viewer as if to connect with them directly. The use of doves in that video also carries a strong religious message—one of hope and a renewed covenant with God, as outlined in Genesis 8:6–12.

As Joseph Vogel argues (2018, 145), *Purple Rain* is a definitive turning point in the career of Prince, in which he begins to engage more openly with his faith and embraces theological concepts and a discourse which had been either absent or hidden in his albums until this point. Rather than waiting for listeners to uncover his hidden message, he is bringing it to them, acting as both prophet of God's word and herald of his impending return. The album is rife with discussion of God and the devil and revolves around Prince's struggle (albeit a struggle which everyone faces in their own way) in choosing between these two forces, which battle inside him as well as within the physical world. Throughout the album, Prince casts himself as both worshipper and divine, contemplating sin and temptation in one moment, before aligning himself directly with his prophetic purpose in the next.

The opening track, 'Let's Go Crazy,' begins as a sermon, drawing on traditional wedding vows which essentially call the listener into a holy union with God. In the song, Prince sings about the inevitability of death and the idea that we must live a good life which also has a view towards Heaven and the eternal. If the devil (referred to in the song as "da elevator") tries to "take us down" (to hell) through temptation and sin, we should fight against this and "punch a higher floor" (heaven). From the point of this album on, Prince has accepted that he cannot turn his back on God nor ignore the prominence of the Bible and biblical teaching in his life. So, too, he would more openly engage with the idea of accepting Jesus as saviour and developing a personal relationship with God (in which sex is seen as a sacrament). Considering the importance placed on prophecy within the SDA faith, it also becomes apparent that Prince has begun to use his music as a tool of change, through which he will begin to inspire or call listeners towards a life in which they live more consciously with God. In addition to this is the very clear assertion that humanity is living in the shadow of Christ's imminent return and, thus, we must be mindful of our actions because we will be judged. This approach feeds back into the encounter from his early childhood, and the promise that God had bigger plans for him.

'When Doves Cry' is another of the enduring hits from *Purple Rain* and while it is filled with religious symbolism, it also marks a turn in the way that Prince begins to speak about himself within the context of his own end-times theology. In this case the main symbol is the dove, a sign that God's covenant was restored to his people. Throughout the song, Prince refers to himself as a dove (notably in the second verse), suggesting that he has taken on the role of God's messenger. In this instance, Prince is speaking more directly, and he is doing so from the stance that it is part of his mission to spread the word of God to his audience. For their part, it becomes the role of the listening to heed these words, both as messages and warnings, for God will be returning and those who are unfaithful will be held to account.

'I Would Die 4 U' picks up this theme again and is the most clearly religious track on the album. Within the lyrics, Prince both retells the story of Jesus's redemptive mission and establishes himself as a figure of similar redemptive power. He begins the song by directly aligning himself with the figure of the crucified

Christ, telling listeners that he is neither woman nor man, but something that they will never understand. Later, he refers to himself explicitly as the Messiah, who will love them (all listeners) by and by. In conclusion, his message is clear: that he is a redemptive force, that he is their consciousness, that he is love, and that all he needs (to succeed in his mission) is to know that they believe in him.

After *Purple Rain* came *Around the World in a Day* (1985), which continued his visual and lyrical narrative of the end times by depicting his vision of paradise. Whereas *Purple Rain* had been dark and moody in both tone and style, *Around the World in a Day* draws on paisley themes, soft colours, and cloud symbology to denote moving closer to heaven. The track 'The Ladder' is one of the most overt references to the new spiritual journey which Prince finds himself on. In a parable-style narrative, it finds him discussing the idea of earthly possessions, wealth, and gratification being ultimately unable to fulfil the human spirit, which seeks to find the ladder that will lead them up from temptation and closer to God. There are parallels here between the symbol of the ladder and the elevator which was the focal point of 'Let's Go Crazy.' In both cases, Prince is ultimately telling his listeners, his congregation, that they must always be trying to raise themselves above the material and that it is only by doing so that they will gain insight into the eternal. *Sign o' the Times* (1987) reintroduces the concept of the androgynous and angelic Prince, through the introduction of his feminine alter-ego, Camille, who performs 'If I was Your Girlfriend,' a song that seeks to unpick the discord that arises between men and women in intimate relationships. The title track 'Sign o' the Times' is another critique of a society turned away from the teaching of the Gospels, whilst 'The Cross' once again calls listeners to accept Christ as their saviour. The ongoing refrain "don't cry, he is coming/don't die without knowing" is both a call to conversion and a warning of Christ's imminent return. As one of Prince's most successful releases, *Sign o' the Times* remains an excellent and all-encompassing example of his fusion of theological concepts and his application of the same to contemporary western civilisation.

The late 1980s also marked the release of the now infamous *The Black Album*, which was pulled on the eve of its release because Prince reportedly did not feel comfortable with what he perceived as negative emotions entrenched within the content (Thorne 2012, 203). Specifically, he did not want to be responsible for releasing that kind of evil or negative energy into the world or into the lives of his fans (Thompson 2020, 115–16). Halting the album at this stage would prove to be traumatic for his continuing relationship with the Warner label, but within the scope of his religious ideology it also represents an important moment of awakening, in which Prince commits to the idea of being responsible for how he discusses God. Whereas the previous albums of the decade had discussed the end of the world and apocalyptic judgement in dark terms, the albums of the early nineties began to embrace an image of judgement that was optimistic and a God who embraced love and forgiveness over damnation. These concepts were immediately evident in the album which replaced *The Black Album*, *Lovesexy* (1988), which is well-remembered for the cover art (which features Prince, naked and sitting on an open lotus flower and largely recalls the idea of Adam in the garden of Eden) more so than its lyrical content. The album's title track itself is a discussion of religious awakening, which calls listeners to hear the word of God, to embrace love, and in doing so to begin a path towards redemption at the time of the final judgement. In traditional style, the song also features explicitly sexual overtones, which seem to meld the idea of religious awakening to a sexual experience.

Diamonds and Pearls (1991) would be Prince's most commercially successful album since 1987's *Sign o' the Times* and marked the debut of his new ensemble, the New Power Generation (NPG). The album begins

with the track 'Thunder,' which offers a vivid description of Prince battling once again with the inner forces of good and evil. It is only in the confrontation of these negative aspects of himself that he has the promise of seeing Jesus in the morning light and the song ends with the assertion that Prince has overcome his inner struggle to find himself in the light of a new dawn. Track ten, 'Money Don't Matter 2 Night,' is another example of Prince warning listeners that it is not enough to think of their spirituality or relationship to God in abstract terms, calling on them to put aside their perpetual attainment of wealth in favour of considering the wealth of their soul. Similar themes reappear in subsequent songs, notably 'Dear Mr. Man' (from 2004's *Musicology*) and 'Act of God' (from 2010 release *20Ten*). *Diamonds and Pearls*, which also featured enduring and provocative hits 'Cream' and 'Get Off,' was followed by *Love Symbol*, a concept album in which Prince once again interrogates heterosexual relationships, attraction, and love. '7' was the most commercially successful single, discusses the seven deadly sins as a focal point, and joyously celebrates the notion that love can overcome these. 'And God Created Woman' is another of the overtly religious tracks, which unpacks the Genesis narrative, with a strong view towards the sacred connection between man and woman, drawn from the creation of Eve from Adam's rib (Genesis 2:23). Rather than being a narrative which suggests the superiority of male over female, its focus is on the reciprocity of love and the notion that men and women are complimentary forces which cannot exist without each other.

After the success of *Diamonds and Pearls* and, to a lesser degree, the *Love Symbol* album, the nineties were largely consumed by Prince's very public rift with Warner and his fight to free himself from the restraints of his recording contract. One of his main complaints during this time was that he did not own the rights to his own music, nor the masters of his original recordings. In addition, he was required to release specific quotas of music, which he felt hindered the creative process. It was during this era that he changed his name to a glyph and appeared in public with the word 'slave' written on his face. Due to his desire not to engage with the press, these actions were largely misinterpreted and as a result, Prince became an object of ridicule and scorn. This would continue to follow him throughout the rest of his career.

Emancipation (1996) is a triple album and marked a turning point for Prince and the freedom he felt in discussing religious beliefs openly. Whilst seen as a direct comment on his battle with Warner and final emancipation from his contract, it is overlaid with religious themes and musings on the power of faith and worship. *Crystal Ball* (1998), another triple album, is a compilation of previously unreleased tracks from throughout Prince's career. Including songs from the early eighties through until the time of its release, it provides an insight into both the evolution of his religious ideology and the ways that themes are fused together in his interpretation of scriptural ideals. These were followed by a string of albums which largely alienated listeners because of their length, content, and in the case of *The Rainbow Children* (2001), heavily theological content. The latter album is often referred to as the conversion album, released around the time of Prince's conversion to the Jehovah's Witness faith.

Prince did not find himself in the US Top 100 chart again until 2004 with the release of *Musicology*, which was a return to the funk roots that many fans had been longing for. The album hits on the same themes of love and romance, although in a more mature way. Rather than discussing relationships purely in relation to sex and gratification, there is a strong emphasis on negotiation and equitable treatment between partners. The 2006 release *3121* sees religion once again return as a thematic centrepiece, though again, it has been softened to be more palatable to the secular audience. 'The Word' is the most overtly religiously motivated song, in which Prince calls listeners to get saved and asks them "don't you want to know the word?" There are elements of the lyrical content which recall 'Money Don't Matter 2 Night,'

specifically the allusion to spiders and the metaphor of being caught in the web of materialism and temptation. 'Love' also recalls the sound and emotional drive of 'Lovesexy,' in the sense that it is about the joyousness of immersing oneself in the gospel and finding spiritual ecstasy through a relationship with the divine. Once again, Prince discusses love (defined within the context of divine love, in the same way as *Lovesexy* describes it) as being free from all sin. For those who engage with this form of love, life becomes separate from the drama and antagonism that come from jealousy, materialism, and vice.

The final phase of Prince's career indicated a more contemplative approach to spirituality, with there being less emphasis on calling listeners into union with God in favour of a solitary exploration of faith and what it meant for Prince as an individual. While this could have been the result of years of contemplating the death of his son, two failed marriages, and a range of fallouts among his contemporaries and peers, it is also possible that the ongoing criticism and negativity levelled against him from fans and the press played a role. After discussing his conversion to the Jehovah's Witness faith publicly, Prince was often put on the spot about his views around social issues such as drug use, homosexuality, and racism (Vogel 2018, 165). An increasing reliance on scripture to answer for him led to his views being misconstrued or misinterpreted by fans and the media and, often, he found himself having to correct or further articulate his ideas. In time, this led to his almost complete withdrawal from the public. Misinformation was also spread online, leading to his complete disengagement with all forms of social media and online platforms. In a 2010 interview given to the *Daily Mirror*, he went so far as to say that the internet was "over," concluding that it was a force of evil and that so many numbers (meaning binary codes) could only be bad for you (Willis 2010). This attitude began to shift after the formation of what would become Prince's final backing band, 3RDEYEGIRL, in 2014. Accepting that social media was a necessary function of fame and marketing, Prince registered an Instagram and Twitter account and was active on both, sporadically, until his death (Greenman 2017, 208).

'WAY BACK HOME,' from 2014's *Art Official Age*, presents Prince musing about a life in which he can be left alone to explore his destiny. His statement that 'most of the people in this world are born dead, but I was born alive' can be construed as his understanding that he has opened himself up to a deep interpretation of the scriptures whereas most people remain closed off to a life of deep religious contemplation. Such an insight links closely to the public scorn and derision he had faced in the years leading up to the release of the album for his refusal to step away from controversial religious ideas.

The *Piano and a Microphone* tour (2016) would mark Prince's final live performances and also continued to reveal a more contemplative nature. In one of his final shows, he revealed to his audience that he found himself living more and more in a dream state and that he found his waking life to be increasingly boring. It was in his dreams that he was able to see his departed friends and he wondered if the desire to sleep more was indicative of the fact that his time on earth was coming to a close (Prince 2019, 42).

Death and Afterlife

When Prince died in April of 2016 it was not long before fans began to draw on the song 'Christopher Tracy's Parade' (*Parade*, 1986) which gives an almost prescient glimpse of Prince's actual death. In the song, Prince is lamenting the death of Christopher Tracy (the lead character, played by him, in *Under the Cherry Moon*), specifically the notion that he died after a "long fought civil war," and details his ascension

into heaven. Prince sings not just about the character but about himself as Tracey and also of himself as being Tracy's best friend, reflecting on the death and what he has learned from it. While the song can be read within the context of the film narrative, it is also indicative of Prince's ongoing religious and theological journey at this time, as well as his continuing views of the afterlife. What has been highlighted by his fans is a belief in heaven in which one is reconciled to God (described in the song as "another friend") and in which concerns for the living world fall away. Within the scope of Prince's millenarian beliefs, what is evident is the idea that death leads on to a new life in which one is reunited with the almighty and where the worries of daily life are no longer a priority..

Despite a seemingly long-term belief that death was another form of existence, removed from the concerns of the living world, prior to his passing Prince had been a vocal opponent of digital forms of memorialisation and resurrection. His attitudes were expressed specifically in relation to technologies used on Tupac Shakur (2Pac), Elvis Presley, and Roy Orbison, allowing them to perform from beyond the grave. Speaking to *Guitar World* in 1998, he described these representations as being demonic and expressed an extreme aversion to similar methods being used to maintain his posthumous legacy (Simonart 1998). What has become evident is that since his death, the legacy of Prince as a musician and a man of faith continues to be a complex one, particularly in relation to the way that fans mourn his loss and celebrate his musical output. This is further complicated by the dilemma of how to respect his religious beliefs whilst also celebrating him as an artist and significant celebrity, particularly in his hometown. Justin Timberlake's Super Bowl performance (2018), which took place in Minneapolis, drew the ire of Prince fans because of these beliefs. There had been initial reports that Timberlake intended to use a hologram of Prince, but due to the backlash this idea was scrapped in favour of a video projection of his performance in *Purple Rain*. Many fans saw the show as going against the grain of Prince's very specific and devout beliefs about death, the soul, and the afterlife (Harris 2020).

Dying without a will, Prince's estate has been the subject of several legal disputes. It eventually passed into the hands of family members, who have slowly released unheard music from the vault, along with a range of re-releases from Prince's early career. While these have generally been well-received, they present an ongoing problem in the context of Prince's theological interests. It was not uncommon for Prince to release albums that featured a compilation of new and old material. The old material would often have been shelved until he found a better fit for the (usually religious) message it was attempting to convey. Without the context of his specific and idiosyncratic religious ideas as a framework for his existing unreleased music, listeners will never be able to gain a complete insight into how Prince came to understand his role as musician but also as prophet for the message of God.

Academic interest in Prince's unique and particular religious beliefs has also been piqued since his death, with excellent volumes published by Ben Greenman (2017) and Joseph Vogel (2018). These offer an extensive and detailed discussion of both the religious influences that shaped Prince's life and where these present in specific albums and performance eras. What is important to note, and what differentiates Prince and his millenarian ideas from other musicians with an interest in the discussion of religious themes, is the role which he understood himself to be playing within the cosmology he had created. More than offering an insight into the importance of reading the Bible and understanding its teaching, Prince understood himself to be an active player in prophecy. Defined through the apocalyptic and millenarian aspects of the faith communities of which he was a part, Prince used imagery of the same throughout his music, all the while calling to listeners to turn towards a relationship with God. Failure to do so, in his estimation, could only

result in suffering in this life and judgement in the next.

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