Prince Rogers Nelson

By Elizabeth Ting, Hosam Alkhatib, Cody Komorouski, and Hannah Gibson
Our Interests In Prince

We decided to create a presentation on Prince because he has left an absolutely incredible legacy behind in music. With the tragedy of his recent death, Prince has again been in the headlines and the impacts he made in music are being appreciated. Prince was a highly innovative pop, contemporary R&B, and rock artist, so we wanted to uncover the aspects of his music and style that made him such an influential artist.
The musical icon known as Prince was born on June 7, 1958 as Prince Rogers Nelson, in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Prince became interested in music at a young age, perhaps due to the fact that both of his parents were musicians. He taught himself to play the piano, guitar and the drums. After his parents split up when he was ten, he and his sister divided their time among their parents. Eventually Prince ran away, moving in with “The Anderson Family,” his next door neighbors. In high school Prince formed his band, known as Grand Central. Not until late in his musical career did Prince reveal that as a child he suffered from epilepsy, which he went on to claim was cured by an angel.
In 1978 Prince signed with Warner Bros and released his first album, in which he played almost every instrument on. He would go on to make numerous albums, and in 1984 Prince would win an Academy Award for best original song score for his hit *Purple Rain*. Prince had a number of high and low profile relationships. When he was 37 he married his backup dancer, Mayte Garcia, on Valentine's Day 1996. The two had a son together, he was born with Pfeiffer syndrome, and he died a week after birth. Prince and Garcia divorced in 1999, and in 2001 he married Manuela Testolini. They divorced in 2006. Prince was a vegan, and he was a longtime animal rights activist.
In 2001 Prince joined the Jehovah’s Witnesses. He attended religious meetings at a local hall, and it is said that he would sometimes knock on doors to discuss the faith.
On April 21 at 9:43 a.m., a call was made to 911 from Prince’s Paisley Park residence. A man was found unconscious in an elevator, that man was later revealed to be Prince. Prince died of an accidental Fentanyl overdose at the age of 57. Since Prince’s death Paisley Park has hosted thousands upon thousands of mourners, coming to pay their respect to one of the greatest artists who ever lived.
Mourners gather to remember Prince shortly after his announced death.
Prince’s Musical Style

Prince took pride in mastering multiple instruments:
- Guitar
- Piano
- Drums
- Bass
- Saxophone
- Many more...

Prince is known to have crossed many types of musical genres, sometimes within a single song:
- Funk
- Acid Rock
- Mainstream Rock
- R&B
- Pop
- Disco

- Prince was also known for his vocal range, transitioning from falsetto to baritone with ease.
Prince’s Unique Style

- Refused to comply with society’s idea of masculinity
- Wore tight pants, high-heels, crop tops, and other cross gender items
- Charismatic performer who used flirtation to create his character
- Embraced sexuality in all forms, becoming the sex icon of his generation
Prince was the embodiment of versatility and experimentation. He is also a perfect illustration for the struggle between record labels and musicians. He has shown future musicians that learning, experimentation, and fighting for your work is what makes an artist great.
Musical Influences

- Carlos Santana
- Joni Mitchell
- Jimi Hendrix
- Larry Graham
- Sly and The Family Stone
- Stevie Wonder
Musical Influences

James Brown

- Known as the “Godfather of Soul”
- Funk/ Soul/ R&B artist
- Strong social activist
  - Racial equality
  - Education for the underprivileged

“James Brown played a big influence in my style. When I was about 10 years old, my stepdad put me on stage with him, and I danced a little bit until the bodyguard took me off” -- Prince
Artists Influenced by Prince

Questlove
- Co-founder and drummer of the Roots
- Hip-hop, soul music
- Plays in the house band for Late Night with Jimmy Fallon

“Much of my motivation for waking up at 5 a.m. to work-and sometimes going to bed at 5 a.m. after work- came from him...Whenever it seemed like too steep a climb, I reminded myself that Prince did it, so I had to also.”

--Questlove
Artists Influenced by Prince

Janelle Monae

-R&B artist
  -Appeared in musical productions of *The Wiz* and *Cinderella*
  -Prince appeared on her album *The Electric Lady* (2013)

“He’s been in the industry for a really long time, he’s smart, and he’s constantly reinventing himself. I just hope when I reach that many years in the game I can still be as passionate as he and giving to new artists as he is”

--Janelle Monae
Artists Influenced by Prince

Beyoncé
- Began career in R&B group Destiny’s Child
- By 2013, she had won 16 Grammy Awards
- Performed at two Super Bowls
- Tied for the most No.1 hits on the Pop chart (2010)

On performing with Prince at the 46th Annual Grammy Awards…

“That night with Prince, I was just in a trance. I don’t remember anything after I walked through the smoke onstage. I was definitely Sasha Fierce that night, completely free.”

--Beyoncé
Artists Influenced by Prince

Justin Timberlake

“Prince, to me, is the ultimate artist. The thing that I love about Prince is he really makes his own rules, and I think that in creating something like music, you really shouldn’t have any rules.”
--Justin Timberlake

The Weeknd

“Prince was always just pushing the envelope. Michael was doing that too, but he wasn’t as experimental. Prince turned experimental music into pop music.”
--The Weeknd
Prince’s Thoughts on Critics

- Prince did not think highly of music critics throughout his career and had little regard for them.

- In 1982 Prince recorded the cynical “All the Critics Love U in New York”.

- He described writers as ‘mamma-jamma(s) wearing glasses and an alligator shirt behind a typewriter’.

- On The Gold Experience Prince wrote “Billy Jack Bitch” which was a direct stab to one local journalist who gave him negative feedback.
A major part of Prince’s appeal and success was due to his drastic self-reinvention during the last half of 1983 and first half of 1984. He had a sound that was familiar to those of experimental R&B musicians of the time, yet was remarkably unique at the same time. His music sounded like it was from an alternate reality or from the near future, and people were eager to embrace it.
1980s Music - Pop and Contemporary R&B

Pop

As the disco-style genre of pop began to decline in popularity during the 1980s, the pop genre began to favor lighter synthpop production, leading to dance-pop music.

R&B

Contemporary R&B began taking shape in the 1980s as musicians began adding disco-like beats, new electronic production technologies, and aspects of hip hop, soul and funk to rhythm and blues.
Popular Musicians of the 1980s

Prince

Madonna

Michael Jackson
Popular Musicians of the 1980s

- David Bowie
- U2
- Queen
Prince and Michael Jackson - A Comparison

Often regarded as the two greatest musicians of the 1980s, Prince and Michael Jackson and their music are frequently subject of comparison. However, the music each musician produced and the intentions behind each album are actually very different, especially regarding Michael Jackson’s *Thriller* and Prince’s *Purple Rain*.

Michael Jackson’s *Thriller* was created with the goal of making an album that sounded like it solely contained hit singles. Although the sounds in *Thriller* was indeed inventive, the album is not very thematic and lacks emotional significance.

Prince’s *Purple Rain* could be viewed as an antithesis of *Thriller*. It has raw emotional significance, contains a combination of studio and live recordings, and has a thematic emphasis on personal passion, loss, desire, and Prince’s disconnection from the events and cultural contexts occurring in the world around him.
The Assassination of John Lennon on December 8th, 1980

The assassination was the first incident of America’s dark and chilling obsession with the concept of a celebrity. Additionally, musicians became even more inspired to stand out so as to be remembered forever, whether it was dressing in an avant-garde and controversial way (very common among pop artists) or creating innovative sounds in music.

The launch of MTV in 1981

This was the first television channel that was solely dedicated towards music. This pivotal event caused the pop video to have importance equal to that of the pop single. Musicians increasingly created music videos that would circulate on this channel and hopefully generate media discussion.

The Live Aid concert on July 13th, 1985

The televised concert was watched by millions of people across the country and raised over $125 million towards fighting the famine crisis in Africa. Although it was one of the greatest philanthropic events to ever be organized, many regard it as the moment that pop music became pure “showbiz entertainment.”
The Reagan Years

The recession in the United States ended during President Reagan’s first years. Taxes were reduced and inflation was controlled. Americans now felt confident again in spending and making money.

Americans in general became very concerned with themselves. Americans of the 1980s were regarded as “the ‘me’ generation” with their focuses on spending money and living lavishly.

This caused Americans to become increasingly enamored by lavish musicians. Musicians began to dress more controversially and expensively and live extremely expensive lifestyles. This helped musicians stay in the limelight, as “the ‘me’ generation” loved it.
Politics and Prince

Prince was not very voracious when it came to overt political or social stances. As especially depicted in *Purple Rain*, Prince proposed himself as being disconnected from the political and social contexts of the contemporary world, instead focusing more on music sounds that seem to be from the future. Unlike U2 or The Police, Prince did not present himself as a politically aware artist composing socially relevant music.
Musical Analysis

“When Doves Cry”
(Originally written for *Purple Rain*)

**Dynamics:**
- Pitch, intensity, and volume all vary throughout the song
- Adds some quick high pitched “ooh” and “hee” sounds, similar to Michael Jackson

**Melody:**
- Disjunct melody, notes and vocal pitch are very jumpy throughout the song
- Harmonized vocals create a chordal effect

**Meter:**
- 4/4 meter
- Basic subdivision
- Backbeat
**Musical Analysis**

“When Doves Cry”  
(Originally written for *Purple Rain*)

**Instrumentation:**
- Mainly keyboard and drums
- Synthesizer
- Varies with sound effects on keyboard
- No bass line which was very uncommon for 80’s era music

**Texture:**
- Homophonic: main vocals and instrumental accompaniment
- Polyphonic Imitative in some brief vocal sections

**Tempo:**
- Consistently moderate throughout the song

**Form:**
- Chorus has an ABAB form
- Individual verses have the form ABCB
Principle was the epitome of music in the 1980s. His innovative sounds, avant garde performances, and unparalleled versatility led him to be regarded as one of the greatest pop, contemporary R&B, and rock musicians of all time. Not only did he impact countless musicians, he impacted the paths of genres altogether, and his legacy will continue to shape music for decades to come.
References


Photo Sources

http://streetsonpoint.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/stevie-wonder-prince-2191539w948.jpg

https://pbs.twimg.com/media/Cglq7j3WwAAK8XI.jpg


http://www.abc.net.au/news/image/7348552-3x2-940x627.jpg

https://i.guim.co.uk/img/media/0a803a90e288422241d928688e75ec6b37dfb2c1d/0_0_594_356/master/594.jpg?w=620&q=55&auto=format&usm=12&fit=max&s=bdb9b734877e17f4fd4435c127bd0cb2

https://deenasdays.files.wordpress.com/2013/04/big007.jpg


http://www.traofficial.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/00_srtw_-_we_were_young_maya_janecoles_remix_spdeep166-web-2015-228-320x320.jpg


http://assets.nydailynews.com/polopoly_fs/1.2610176.1461264534!/img/httpImage/image.jpg_gen/derivatives/article_750/jason22n-6-web.jpg