

PRINCE

1958-2016

HE WAS A GENIUS WHO INSPIRED MILLIONS—
AND A MAN OF MYSTERY OFFSTAGE.
INSIDE THE COMPLICATED, COLORFUL
LIFE OF A MUSIC ICON AND THE TRAGEDY
THAT ENDED HIS REIGN

By **ALYNDA WHEAT**





Prince's death on April 21 at age 57 forced the world once again to face the somber reality that while genius never dies, geniuses do—and often much too soon. This loss, though, hit especially hard for fans of the revolutionary artist who defied genre and gender, blending lyrical poetry with

rock-infused funk. Impromptu gatherings sprung up in New York City, in Los Angeles and at the gates of his recording studio and residence Paisley Park in Chanhassen, Minn. Tributes poured in from President Obama, Madonna, Stevie Wonder, Oprah Winfrey and more. Bruce Springsteen opened his concert two nights later with a rendition of Prince's signature ballad "Purple Rain." Prince himself had closed his show with the song the week before at an electrifying stop in Atlanta on his Piano and a Microphone tour—his last major concert, as it turns out. He'd postponed it from the prior week for what he said was the flu. "Once again, I would like to apologize for the cancellation," he told the audience. "I was a little under the weather."

The artist seems to have been far sicker than he had let on. Sources close to Prince said he may have fought an "ongoing illness" leading up to his death. "The people close to him were very concerned for his health and indicated he'd been undergoing treatments that made his immune system weak," one source said. There were also public hints that Prince was not a well man. Returning from Atlanta, his private plane made an emergency landing in Moline, Ill.—less than an hour short of his intended stop of Minneapolis—so that he could be rushed to the hospital to receive what several reports called a "save shot" after he was found unresponsive on the flight. Though his longtime lawyer L. Londell McMillan told the Associated Press the singer was "not on any drugs that would be any cause

HIS FINAL APPEARANCES
1. The star attended a Golden State Warriors game in Oakland, Calif., on March 3, arriving fashionably late with model Damaris Lewis, his muse.
2. "It was a crazy show. He sounded so good," says a source of Prince's final concert date, in Atlanta on April 14. "He seemed physically fine."
3. He was found dead in an elevator on April 21 at his Paisley Park compound, where he lived, recorded and performed. "You see his personal touches everywhere," says friend Jimmy Jam. "There was not an inch of that facility that he didn't touch."



(OPENING SPREAD) FROM LEFT: ROBERT WHITMAN/KEVIN MAZUI/WIREIMAGE; (THIS SPREAD) CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: SCOTT OLSON/GETTY IMAGES; NOAH GRAHAM/DAVE/GETTY IMAGES; AAM-GSI/COURTESY BOTO

for concern," sources confirm to *People* that the seemingly clean-living singer, who eschewed recreational drugs, once had a history of using the prescription painkiller Percocet. Still, the star batted away any rumors that he was seriously ill. "Wait a few days before you waste any prayers," he said at a party at Paisley Park on Saturday, April 16. Yet it was just a few days later, on April 21, that the news came from the singer's 55,000-sq.-ft. complex: Prince, the Oscar winner with seven Grammy Awards, a Golden Globe, millions of record sales and just as many fiercely loyal fans, had been found dead in an elevator within the complex.

As a performer, Prince is nearly impossible to define. The late jazz great Miles Davis likened him to a combination of Jimi Hendrix, Marvin Gaye, James Brown and Charlie Chaplin. He mixed musical genres like a mad scientist, dressed like a lascivious dandy and fused androgyny and masculinity into a celebration of raw carnality. To borrow his own lyrics, he was, in a word, sex. But the 5'2" dynamo who writhed around onstage in chaps and high-heeled boots could back up his raunchy image with musical virtuosity. A master of some two dozen instruments, he gave kinetic live shows with multiple encores, then jammed for hours more at after-parties. His solo on "While My Guitar Gently Weeps" at the 2004 Rock & Roll Hall of Fame ceremony is the stuff of legend. His halftime performance of "Purple Rain" at the 2007 Super Bowl—in actual rain he must have had delivered—stands as one of the best of all time. Performers who came after Prince took notice, with stars like Lenny Kravitz, Janelle Monae, Justin Timberlake and Adam Levine picking up style and musical cues from the master. "I was lucky to call him a friend," Levine told *People* of the star, with whom he spent nights jamming. "[I'll remember] just the great times that we had and just constantly being inspired by how he did things his way."

That determination was evident in Prince from his youth. Born Prince Rogers Nelson in 1958 to singer and social worker Mattie Shaw and jazz performer John L. Nelson, the future star was forced to make his own way in the world. John Nelson "found it hard to show emotion," Prince confessed of his father in a 1984 interview with

♎
'He was a musician who spoke my language, so it's hard to take'
 —STEVEN TYLER

↑
THANK YOU FOR A FUNKY TIME
 In the days following Prince's death, fans flocked to Paisley Park, leaving balloons, flowers and messages outside the compound.



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3



GUITAR HERO
“He’s just a genius,” says former manager Bob Cavallo. “He’s one of the greatest guitarists. I don’t know anyone who could match him.”



1



2



3

People. When the boy was 7, his parents split, beginning a years-long odyssey in which Prince was passed around among family members and friends. The only constant in his life was music. Largely self-taught, he wrote his first song on his father’s piano at 7, played guitar at 13 and by 14 had picked up the drums. “He was a quiet musical genius,” says high school classmate Robert Vernon Plant. “He could pick up rhythms and chords and make up beautiful little riffs on the spot, but he was really shy.” With an instrument in his hand, though, “he was a different person altogether,” says his junior high music teacher Jimmy Hamilton. “His eyes would light up.”

In his late teens, Prince the star began to emerge. In 1977 he signed a then-unheard-of deal for three albums with Warner Bros. that guaranteed him creative control. His first two albums got him notice, but 1980’s *Dirty Mind* signaled the arrival of an emerging superstar. The following two years saw the release of *Controversy* and 1999,

THE MAKING OF AN ICON

1. “As a keyboard player he was unparalleled,” says Jimmy Jam of Prince (in 1977), who excelled musically starting in middle school. Later he “enjoyed sitting at the piano and writing.” **2.** “He was always very fashionable—and always looked like a rock star,” adds Jimmy Jam of his pal (ca. 1982). **3.** He helped launch the career of longtime friend Morris Day (ca. 1982) when Day and his band the Time appeared in *Purple Rain*.

both of which quickly went platinum, but it was the seminal *Purple Rain* that sent Prince into the stratosphere. He owned the summer of 1984 with the album, which included “Let’s Go Crazy,” “I Would Die 4 U,” “When Doves Cry” and the soaring title track, along with a semiautobiographical film that scored with legions of fans if not critics. Prince was also turning himself into an impresario, fronting his band the Revolution, introducing the world to acts like Morris Day and grooming up-and-comers like Sheila E. “I knew the person I don’t think everyone else knew, someone they didn’t get to see,” says the “Glamorous Life” singer and percussionist. “He loved people. He was funny. He loved throwing parties... and having people over and playing music and entertaining.” He also had a blossoming reputation as a ladies’ man. “He was an amazing gentleman—so funny and very considerate,” she adds, having dated Prince in the 1980s. In time he’d be linked to Kim Basinger, Madonna, Vanessa Marcil, Sheri-

lyn Fenn, Sheena Easton and many more. That changed when he married backup dancer Mayte Garcia on Valentine’s Day in 1996. After suffering the painful loss of their infant son later that year, and a subsequent miscarriage, the couple never recovered. Their marriage ended in 2000. (See sidebar on page 50.)

That same year, Prince turned his attention toward business matters. In a dispute with his record label, he changed his name into an unpronounceable symbol and wrote “slave” on his cheek. “He was a visionary, and he fought for artists’ rights,” says his former publicist Mitch Schneider. “He never let anybody deter him from what he wanted to accomplish creatively and musically,” adds Adam Levine. “As a musician, I can’t tell you how much that’s rubbed off on me.”

He also went on to embrace his spiritual side, being baptized a Jehovah’s Witness in 2003. “He was ‘Brother Nelson’ to us,” says Anna Barry, a member of the St. Louis Park Kingdom Hall

A STAR ON- AND OFFSTAGE

1. Prince (in 1986) was known for his electric performances. **2.** “Prince and I had a magical journey, and I loved him immensely,” says his second wife, Manuela Testolini (with him at the 2005 Oscars). “I knew him as a husband, friend and fierce philanthropist.” She plans to build a school in his memory. **3.** At his home in Marbella, Spain, in 1999.

congregation, to which Prince belonged. “This was a safe place for him; it was a haven.” By all accounts Prince embraced his new faith wholeheartedly, arriving to service in a conservative suit and tie and going out to knock on doors, trying to recruit new members. “He was a believer,” adds James Lundstrom, another congregant, who adds that Prince became so devout, he installed a “cuss bucket” in the studio. “If you swore at Paisley Park, he would charge you between \$3 and \$10 per swear word. And he wasn’t joking. You had to pay in cash in the bucket.” Along with not celebrating birthdays and avoiding self-aggrandizement, Jehovah’s Witnesses also abstain from drugs and limit alcohol use. Prince would “drink a little red wine—no beers,” says Lundstrom.

The faith’s refusal to accept blood transfusions, a necessary part of many surgeries, may also have played a role in Prince’s health concerns. Years of onstage performances—always in heels—had begun to take a toll on the 57-year-old’s body.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: TIM LESTER/GETTY IMAGES; KEVORK DJANSEZIAN/AP; NILES O’REGEN/REX SHUTTERSTOCK; MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES; ROBERT WHITMAN; ALLEN BEAULIEU/CO

“His hip bothered him from jumping off risers for 20 years,” says Sheila E. Without surgery to alleviate the condition, pain seemed inevitable. Still, rumors of prescription-drug abuse surprise many who knew him. To Tina Kahn, one of the children of Prince’s longtime bodyguard Charles Huntsberry, he was a doting surrogate uncle with a sweet tooth. “Every year he would send a dozen red roses and candy on our birthday. He would come to Fourth of July cookouts and be playing volleyball with us in his high heels. He’d play hide-and-go-seek with us around the yard—like, ‘Peek-



‘Everyone fell in love with his music. That’s his legacy’
—SHEILA E.

a-boo! I’m Prince!’ It was hilarious,” Kahn recalls. The last person to have seen Prince alive reportedly dropped him off at Paisley Park at 8 p.m. the night before he died. A 911 call was placed from the complex at 9:43 the next morning. By 10:07 he was pronounced dead. The medical examiner conducted an autopsy the following day, finding “no obvious signs of trauma.” Toxicology reports may take weeks to complete. But the star’s loved ones spent little time pondering the questions behind his death, cremating his body the day after the autopsy and holding a celebration.

Girl Power: His Most Memorable Muses and Protégées

THE ICON SURROUNDED HIMSELF WITH BEAUTIFUL, TALENTED WOMEN ONSTAGE—AND OFF



WENDY MELVOIN

The guitarist backed Prince in his mid-’80s band the Revolution, while her twin sister, Susannah (not pictured), was once engaged to the pop star.



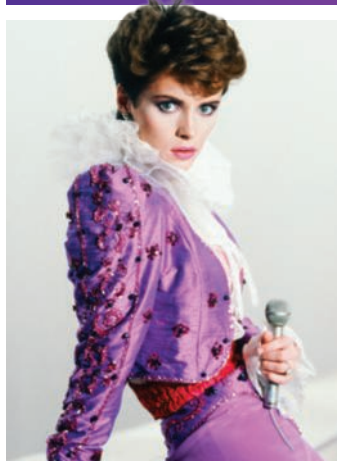
VANITY

Prince wrote and produced the now-deceased Vanity 6 frontwoman’s hit “Nasty Girl,” and she was originally to appear in *Purple Rain* before they split.



THE BANGLES

In addition to writing the psychedelic pop group’s hit “Manic Monday,” Prince was once romantically linked to guitarist Susanna Hoffs (top right). (She denied the reports to *People* in 1986.)



SHEENA EASTON

The Scottish pop singer was featured on “U Got the Look,” which appeared in *Sign ‘O’ the Times*, before their 1989 hit *Batman* duet “The Arms of Orion.”



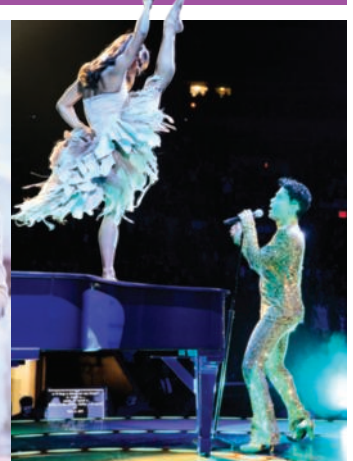
APOLLONIA KOTERO

The actress-singer who played his *Purple Rain* love interest denied rumors of a romance, telling *People* in 1984, “Right now music is his wife.”



SHEILA E.

Prince met the drummer-singer in 1978, and they worked on and off afterward. “We would just jam at my house,” she says. “We had a blast.”



MISTY COPELAND

The icon plucked the now-renowned ballerina from obscurity in 2009, recruiting her to dance in his “Crimson and Clover” music video.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: BET ROBERTS/GETTY IMAGES; SO. WABING ABBOTT/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES; KEVIN MAZUR/WIREIMAGE; MARK J. TERRILL/LAP; HARRY LANGDON/GETTY IMAGES; FRANK CARROLL/INCF/GETTY IMAGES



EXCLUSIVE
People
EXCLUSIVE

Love and Tragedy

To Prince she was “the Most Beautiful Girl in the World.” He first met Mayte Garcia, his muse, his love and the subject of his 1994 hit song in 1990, when the dancer and singer was 16. At a concert in Spain, Garcia’s mother reportedly passed a videotape of her dancing to one of his backup dancers. Prince hired Garcia to go on tour with him, and she inspired his 1992 *Love Symbol Album*. On Valentine’s Day 1996 they wed in Minneapolis, releasing white doves at the ceremony. She was pregnant two months later, and the couple welcomed a son, Boy Gregory. “This man was my everything. We had a family,” says Garcia, now 42. A week later their son died from Pfeiffer syndrome, a rare genetic disorder affecting the skull and facial bones. Garcia lost another pregnancy to miscarriage, and the pair divorced in 2000. “I loved him then, I love him now and will love him eternally,” she tells *People*. “He’s with our son now.”



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“There were no limits. He just continued to grow, move forward,” says Sheila E. of her friend and former flame (in 2013). “There are not a lot of people who knew him personally, but they got to know him because of his music.”

Questions continue to swirl about what will happen to Prince’s vast estate, rumored to be worth some \$250 million, including his master recordings, ancillary properties in Minnesota, Paisley Park and its vault of unreleased music. “I think that the minimum income flow over the next five years—minimum—is \$100 million,” says entertainment attorney Donald David, who represented the estates of Tupac Shakur and Lisa “Left Eye” Lopes of R&B group TLC. Indeed, Prince’s album sales increased some 42,000 percent in the days after his death. With no surviving children or intact marriages (Prince and his second wife, Manuela Testolini, divorced in 2006), that leaves his sister Tyka Nelson, along with five living half-siblings, to deal with what is left behind. The state of Minnesota currently has no will for Prince filed in probate court, but the complete absence of such a document would be an unusual oversight for a man so fastidious with business affairs.

What he left to fans, though, is clear: albums full of spectacular, challenging, breathtaking music. The heartbreak is that a man beloved by so many, a man who once said that “friendship, real friendship, [is] all that counts,” apparently died alone. But no matter what unfolds in the coming weeks about his health, habits or cause of death, fans will always celebrate the way he lived. As he said at the beginning of his 1984 hit “Let’s Go Crazy”: “Dearly beloved, we are gathered here today to get through this thing called life.” Prince more than got through life: He changed it, forever. ●

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: JEFF KATZ/PHOTOGRAPHY/CP; ANDREAS TERLAAR/HOLLANDESE HOOGTE; HERB RITTS/TRUNK



♏
‘It’s sad that we lost somebody so epic. His talent was so genuine and authentic’
—CHRISTINA AGUILERA