

Richard Burton's Wales • Baby Fae • J.R.'s new mom

A mixed-up, messed-up Princess Stephanie

NOVEMBER 19, 1984 ■ \$1.25

# People

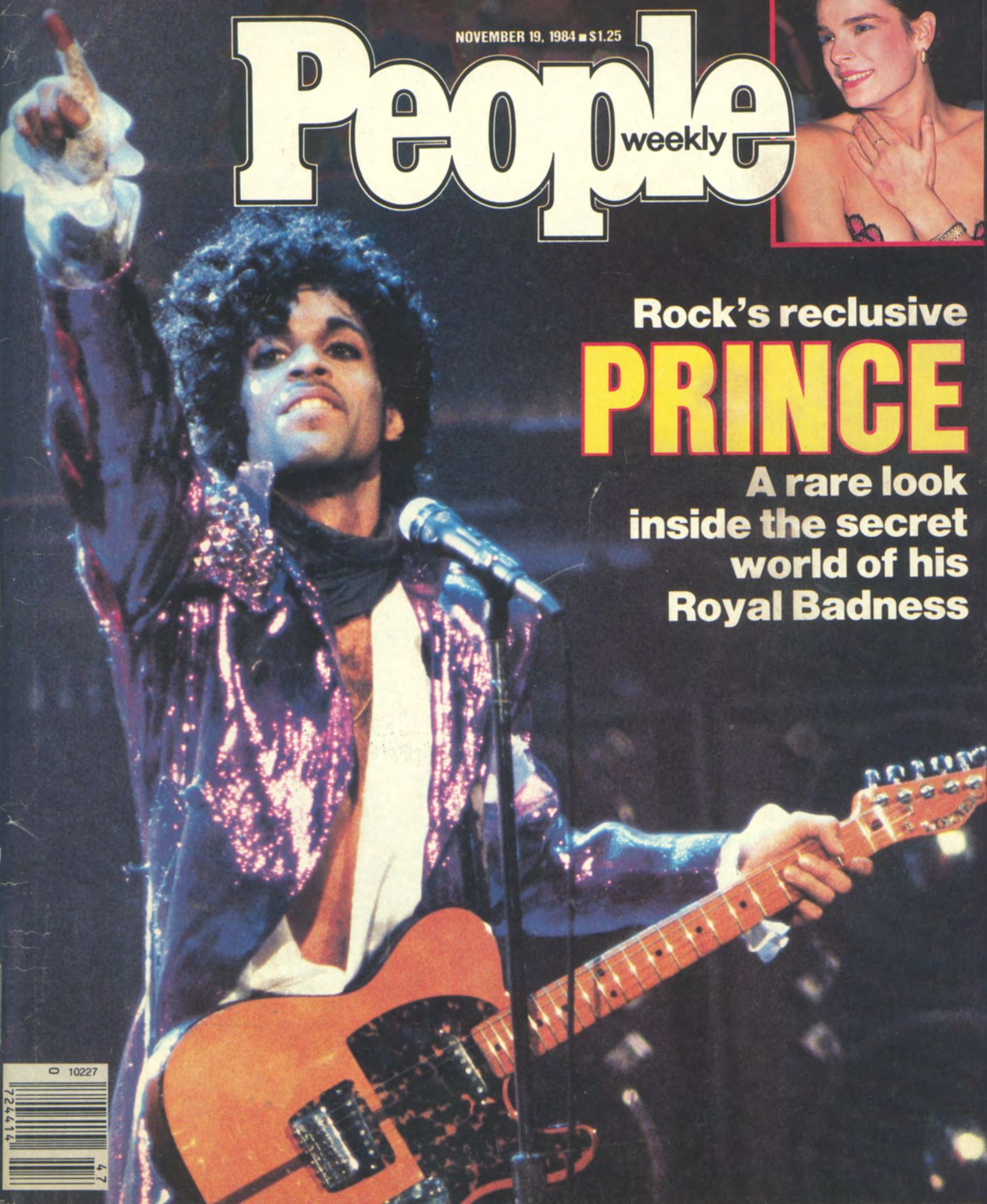
weekly



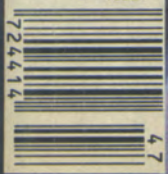
Rock's reclusive

# PRINCE

A rare look  
inside the secret  
world of his  
Royal Badness



10227





# PRINCE'S PURPLE REIGN

With a hit LP and movie, rock's most secretive and sexy cult hero grows into a cultural phenomenon

by Barbara Graustark

**H**e glittered in a white sequined cape, ornately futuristic atop a bank of speakers in the darkened hall. Eerie synthesizer chords echoed through the arena, laser lights dappled the crowd and a garbled heavenly voice rumbled, "I'm confused." And as confetti rained down, 19,000 fans at Detroit's Joe Louis Arena saw the song and spectacle of Prince Rogers Nelson. "Detroit," he thundered, "I've come to play with you!"

For Prince, a playground is a place where the id runs free. Prince's former manager once said that "his worst fear is being normal," and even the singer's friends admit that he's weird. On one other point fans and critics alike can agree: At 26, the musical polymath, film star and stage stud is currently the hottest act in show business. One newspaper has even coined a word for the hysteria he generates: *Princedomia*.

Prince's ascendance began two years ago with his rhapsodic dance LP, *1999*, which still rides the charts after 105 weeks. He followed that with a feature film, *Purple Rain*, that became a surprise summer hit. The film spawned a sound track, which he produced, arranged, composed—and made into the No. 1 album. Spinning off clones faster than a Cambridge lab, he transformed a jazz percussionist named Sheila Escovedo into the singing sexpot Sheila E. (see page 169) and turned a former consort, Denise Matthews, a Pearl Drops tooth polish model, into Vanity, the leader of a camisole-clad girl group whose songs—written by Prince, of course—became dance-floor hits.

Last week Prince and his band, the Revolution, hit the concert trail for the first time in two years. In Washington, D.C. Prince-lovers gobbled up 130,000

tickets in less than 10 hours, prompting one reporter to crack, "Maybe those Jackson fellows could open for him when they finish their Victory tour."

The comparisons with Michael are inevitable, since each is young, gifted, black—and a notorious recluse. Each has ignited, and united, black and white audiences with music that breaks down barriers among soul, funk and rock. But Prince's risqué lyrics extolling the joy of sex go where no mainstream rocker has dared to go before. And while Michael is a man of mystery, Prince is a person of paradox. Consider the evidence.

Onstage, at his most outrageous, he has writhed atop a stack of speakers in nothing more than bikini briefs, leg warmers and a layer of sweat. Yet he covered up with a '30s-style tank suit when he went swimming at his hometown Y. He controls every facet of his career and his music, yet he's too shy to face the press. He claims to speak "the truth" in his songs but early in his career lied to reporters about his name (he denied it was Nelson), his birth date (1958, which he pushed up to 1960) and even his racial heritage (he says he is "mixed" but his father says both parents are black).

He is a religious paradox as well. He gives thanks to God on his albums, yet his songs celebrate the pleasures of flesh, and the gospel he preaches is salvation by sex. In a song called *Sister* he even exploited the Big Daddy of all taboos: incest.

Who is this guy?

"The filthiest rock 'n' roller ever to prance across the stage," fumes Dan Peters, 33, a minister at the interdenominational Zion Christian Center in North St. Paul, Minn. For five years Dan and a brother have been kindling an antirock crusade by crisscrossing the country urging youngsters to destroy offending albums. At the moment the brothers are particularly incensed about a new song called *Darling Nikki*,

**Sounding echoes** of Jimi Hendrix, Sly Stone and Little Richard, Prince gave a Detroit audience his unique fusion of rock and funk.



**No longer** Prince's best pal, André Cymone (above) tired of doing everything the Kid's way and split in 1981 to turn out two solo LPs.

**"I get a dirty mind,"** Prince proclaimed in one early song. Now he's swapped his bikini briefs (below, at a 1981 gig) for Edwardian threads.



**When Vanity** abruptly left his clique in 1983, Prince installed Apollonia (left) as his girlfriend—and leading lady in *Purple Rain*.

in which Prince sings, "I am fine, fine because the Lord is coming soon." "Kids come up to us and say, 'See, that shows he is a Christian,'" sputters Dan. "And I say, 'As far as we can tell from listening to the lyrics, his Lord is a penis.'"

Yet Prince's songs, which include themes of lost love, politics and gun control, seem to mirror the concerns and anxieties of a sexually precocious, socially aware generation. "I guess if there's a concept, it's freedom—personal freedom—and the fact that we all have to do what we want to do," Prince said of his music in my interview with him in 1981. A swaggering conqueror onstage, he seemed vulnerable in person, speaking in short, grudging bursts of words that nevertheless revealed more than he wanted me to know. Denying that he wanted to shock or outrage, he insisted, "I think I say exactly the way it is. I don't particularly think what I sing about is so controversial. My albums deal with being loved and accepted. They deal with war. They deal with sex. When a girl can get birth control pills at age 12, she knows just about as much as I do. My mom had stuff in her room that I could sneak in and get . . . books, vibrators. I did it. I'm sure everybody does . . . It could be that I have a need to be different."

The difference began in Minneapolis, where Prince was born to Mattie and John Nelson, who already had seven other children from previous marriages. He was christened Prince after his father, a jazz pianist whose stage name was Prince Rogers. He was a man whose musicianship—and possibly arrogance—Prince admired. His songs were different, "unique," Prince said. "He doesn't listen to any other music. I respect anybody who doesn't try to copy other people."

Prince had a large family but not much of a home. He and his father were never really close—"He found it hard to show emotion. I find that true of most men." Prince considered himself and his sister "mistakes," and after his parents' divorce and his mother's remarriage, he was passed from relative to relative. His last stop was the house of Bernadette Anderson, whose son André was a buddy and bandmate. Like his father, Prince "kept to himself," Anderson recalls, working with André in a CETA youth program and acting the dutiful son. (He still remem-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 165

bers her on Mother's Day, most recently with Lalique crystal.)

To André's mother, he may have appeared quiet and shy. Inside, says a Minneapolitan who has known him since he was 16, he was "an emotional hand grenade capable of enormous visceral emotional swings . . . a volcano of emotion boiling under the surface." His second cousin Charles Smith tells of the time he and the young Prince were riding on the freeway and a truck full of hooligans pelted their windshield with bottles. Smith, who was driving, wanted to flee but Prince refused to ignore that attack. "They made him so mad and scared," Smith recalls, "he stepped down on my foot to speed up and hit them."

During adolescence, Prince began finding his muse. In his basement bedroom he lingered over the vivid images he found in porn novels, using some of those images in songs. Embossed in 14-karat legend are tales he told early in his career about orgies at 13 with neighborhood girls. (In an interview that made everyone cringe, André boasted of wrapping girls up with duck tape.) But Charles Smith thinks such stories are sheer fantasy. "Everybody was basically scared of girls," he concedes. "We talked a lot of mess."

A musical omnivore, Prince learned to play a dozen instruments by ear. Chris Moon, an aspiring songwriter who discovered the prodigy, recalls that Prince spent long nights holed up in Moon's small recording studio, patiently teaching himself to make his own demo tapes. He and Moon agreed to collaborate on a tune, and when the time came to record, Prince laid down guitar vocals, then offered to play keyboards. "This little kid with a huge Afro, he was pretty good," Moon recalls. He was ready to call in a rhythm section when Prince asked, "Can I give it a shot?" Whereupon, says Moon, "He put down the bass guitar and I said, 'Go for it, Prince.' So he ran over to the drums." And Moon thought, "I've found the next Stevie Wonder."

But the question was how to break a 5'3", black, 18-year-old musical dynamo. Prince's first manager, Owen Husney, with his adman instincts, stoked the star-maker machinery by fudging Prince's age and then dropping his last name to add to the mystery. Moon fueled the fires by writing lyrics full of sexy innuendo. "I thought, 'What's the audience? Young girls.'" So the two



STEVE WOLT

**Fired up by** the Peters brothers' antirock crusade, some North St. Paul, Minn. youths put the torch to a pile of raunchy rockabilia.

wrote *Soft and Wet*. "The lines were pretty vague. But I thought the title would catch people's ears."

Prince's first two LPs, with their sexy soul, established him with black audiences as a poetic prince of the libido. His third, *Dirty Mind*, at first seemed doomed to failure, with its X-rated lyrics and a cover of Prince stripped down to his bikini, and even Owen Husney complained that Prince had "taken a good marketing gimmick too far."

But Prince's bold sexuality touched a nerve in the hip pop culture, and white critics praised him for music that fused Jimi Hendrix-style guitar, disco thump and robot synthesizers. *Rolling Stone* proclaimed him artist of the year in 1982, and on the strength of 1999's three Top 10 hits, he was launched toward stardom.

In *Purple Rain*, Prince played the Kid—a name he is often called by his Minneapolis circle—a selfish, tormented, unreachable soul who fights to survive an unhappy home life and turns inward, refusing to share his emotional or creative life. Prince has described the film as an "emotional autobiography." Says his keyboardist Matt Fink: "For the first two years that I worked with him, Prince never talked to any of us. Once he started talking about his life

with his parents. He mentioned something about having a tough time. Then he suddenly realized what he was doing and clammed up. That was two and a half years ago. We never heard about his personal life again."

Revolution guitarist Lisa Coleman calls Prince a "genius," but others haven't been so generous. Some people who have worked with Prince call him Ayatollah or Napoleon. Others says he is simply a perfectionist who demands only what he asks of himself. He drives his musicians hard, even fining them for showing up late to rehearsals. He dictates what they wear during his show and refuses to let them give interviews without his permission.

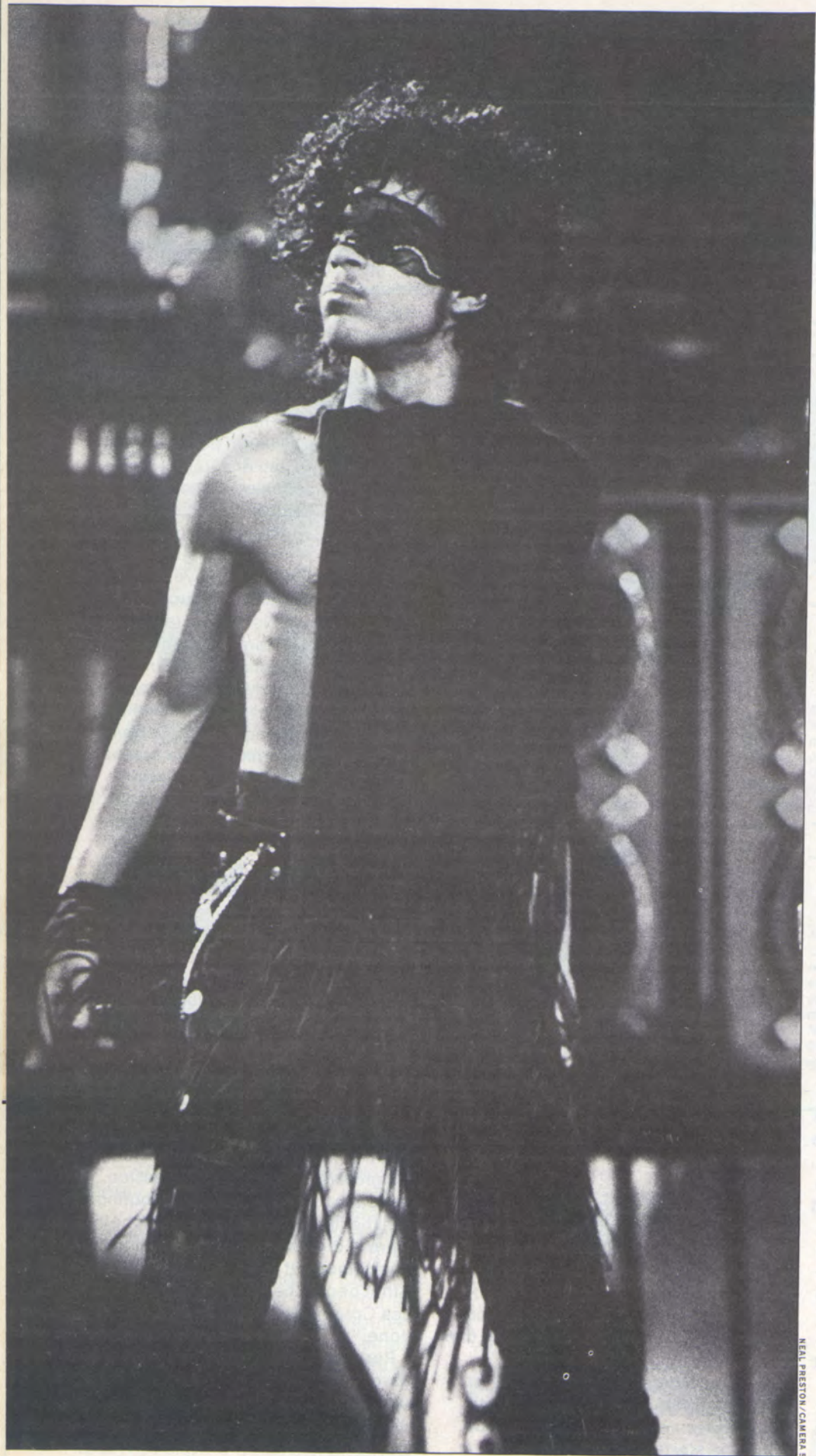
As an outlet for his other musical interests, he has created pop protégé bands like the Time and Vanity 6 (rechristened Apollonia 6). Like the title character in *The Idolmaker*, one of his favorite films, he taught his charges how to dress and move onstage and also provided them with royal treatment in the studio. He produces albums other than his own under the pseudonym the Starr Company.

But there are signs that his empire may be crumbling. Morris Day, the Time's dapper front man, whose braggadocio performance in *Purple Rain* won kudos from critics, left to pursue a solo career. So did Prince's former girlfriend, Vanity, a loss that friends say "left him brokenhearted." Bernadette Anderson, whose son André is another defector from Prince's band, says, "You either go along with Prince or not at all."

"Friendship, real friendship, that's all that counts," Prince once said wistfully, admitting, "I would like to be a more loving person." Keyboard player Wendy Melvoin of the Revolution believes that Prince is changing: "There's a willingness to accept new things." The title of his film, *Purple Rain*, may have symbolized what she calls "a new beginning. Purple, the sky at dawn; rain, the cleansing factor." The song itself grew in a late-night jam session, with each band member contributing a lick, the first time Prince had let them share in creating his music. "I think the most important lesson he has learned is that people care about him," says Lisa Coleman. "He did start out alone."

Perhaps the quest was not just for stardom but also to belong. That would explain why the Kid continues to live in Minneapolis, where he has devised a social world with other like-minded re-

CONTINUED



bels. Explains Lisa: "I grew up in my own room, making music and having philosophies I thought no one would ever share. That's exactly the way Prince grew up, so we find solace in each other."

With no special woman in his life ("He's married to his music," says Vanity), Prince roams his hometown haunts with friends like Sheila E. A typical evening consists of supper at Rudolf's, a barbecue house where you find the kind of fan who still remembers the autograph Prince signed for her six years ago. "Love, God, Prince," it said. He still turns to religion for guidance, and current protégée Apollonia remembers finding a Bible in her motel room "opened to a scripture that he wanted me to read." (How he got into her room remains a mystery. "Maybe he picked the lock," she jokes.)

At heart, he's a homebody, and he returns from evenings at the now famous First Avenue Club—usually alone—to his purple house with its pots of flowers and Marilyn Monroe posters. Late into the night he writes music and short stories with a purple pen on a purple pad that he carries about "like Walt Whitman," says Wendy. Sometimes the Kid needs more. At least once he has slipped out of bed, jumped onto his bicycle and pedaled off—naked—into the Minneapolis dawn.

That prankish spirit reigns onstage, where His Royal Badness is at his hot, erotic best. "Do you want to take a bath with me?" he taunted the crowd last week during his concert's showstopper, stripping to his waist and climbing into an oversized elevated purple bathtub. Prince has tamed his sexual shtik; there's no more necking with his female musicians. Gone too are the bikini briefs and his trademark, the pervert's trench coat. What remains is enough to satisfy the most demanding fan: stiletto-heeled splits and leaps, wicked sonic screams and suggestive pelvic thrusts. After nearly two hours he gave his thanks with a melting grin that seemed to say that if the Kid had his way, he'd keep dancing until 1999. We'd ask him, but we know he wouldn't talk.

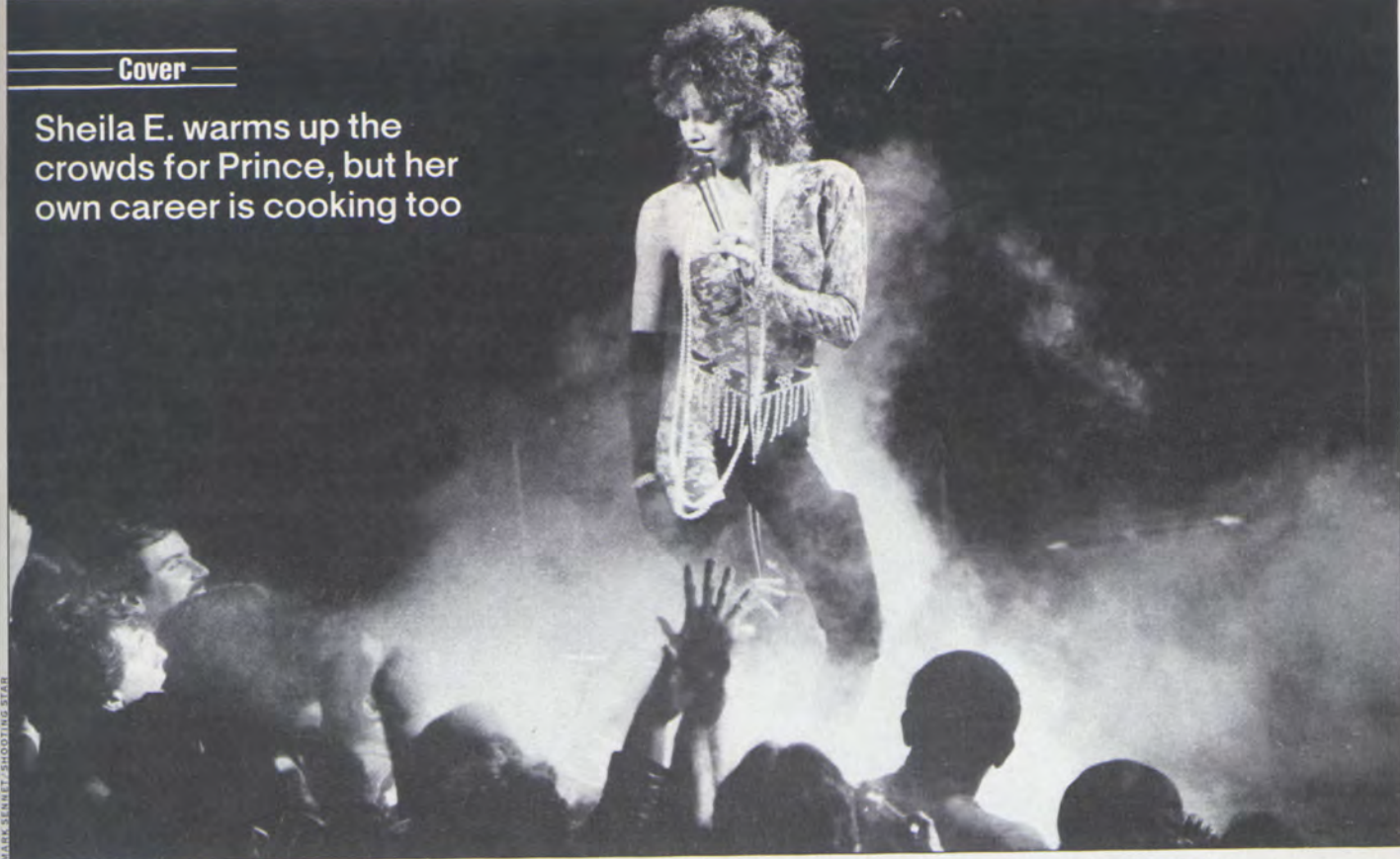
*Additional reporting by Julie Greenwalt, Debbie Loeser and Leah Rozen*

CONTINUED ON PAGE 169

**"We were just** free kids trying to be original," Prince says of his early days. In Detroit he tried again, this time with a peekaboo mask.

## Sheila E. warms up the crowds for Prince, but her own career is cooking too

MARK SHERNETT/SHOOTING STAR



**Though critics** fault her Prince-inspired costumes and suggestive stage moves, Sheila's audiences rarely complain.

If you pencil in a mustache and pour her vital assets into pegged trousers, Sheila E. could pass for her musical mentor, Prince. She has his chilly eyes, sculpted cheekbones and pouty mouth. And if her own black curls weren't frosted, she would be his hair apparent. Sheila has more in common with Prince than smoldering good looks. She shares his record label, his management team, his costume designers and even the bill on his current world tour (she's the opener). But Sheila E. (for Escovedo) is more than just another sultry siren in a long line of pop protégée acts that Prince has molded in his own image. She's a multitalented musician who left a percussionist post with Lionel Richie for a stab at solo stardom. As her manager told a colleague, "This isn't just Prince. This one writes her own songs."

Of all the sexy women that Prince has beckoned to his artistic court, Sheila E. is the most promising. Her new album, *The Glamorous Life*, seems destined for gold. Its title cut, a percolating brew of synth-funk and Latin rhythms, is a dance-club smash that cracked the Top 10, and this fall Sheila and her seven-piece band sold out club dates across

the country—possibly because Prince is known to join her onstage often.

No stranger to show business, the 26-year-old musician from Oakland, Calif. is the oldest child of Juanita Escovedo and her husband, Pete, a percussionist best known for his work with Santana. Sheila got her first hands-on experience pounding her father's drum kit when she was 5, and by 15, she was drumming with local Latin bands. One night she stepped in when a member of her father's group became ill. "I got a standing ovation," she recalls. "That was it for me—all I wanted."

Sheila dropped out of high school after her sophomore year, went on to record two LPs with her father and toured with such heavies as George Duke, Billy Cobham, Herbie Hancock and Diana Ross. Playing—often simultaneously—congas, timbales, cowbells and cymbals "is very tough physically," she admits. "Sometimes my hands go numb. I look down at the drums and see blood over everything."

Friends for six years, Sheila and Prince regularly swapped musical licks but never played together professionally until last March, when he got her to record with him on a hot-breathing single, *Erotic City*. Afterward he told her,

"You've been playing behind people for too long. You should just do your own thing."

Escovedo's "thing" has come to look and sound suspiciously like Prince's. Although Sheila dismisses any musical similarities ("We've been friends for such a long time; we've picked up on a lot of the same influences"), there's no denying she's picked up on his stylish funk and raw onstage sexuality. More femme but no less fatale than he, she recently teased a Los Angeles crowd with the brazen come-on, "Would you like to play with my timbales?" Her saucy act prompted a high-minded rebuke from one critic who sniffed, "Sheila E. wasn't any more inspiring than the dancers at adult theaters."

Offstage Sheila's more sedate than seductive. Her Hollywood apartment is adorned with stuffed animals, and she clutched an orange Tootsie Roll Pop for an entire interview. Though rumors of romance between the Prince and the protégée may inspire rock tabloids to purple prose, Sheila is girlishly coy about their relationship. "It's the same as it always has been," she says, barely suppressing a smile. Pause. "We're still good friends." **CARL ARRINGTON**