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## “The Right Amount of Odd”: Vocal Compulsion, Structure, and Groove in Two Love Songs from *Around the World in a Day*

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### ABSTRACT

In this music-analytic interpretation of two love songs from Prince’s *Around the World in a Day* album, we investigate the properties of groove, arrangement, and vocality, all of which contribute to the artist’s inimitable signature. With a disciplinary grounding in musicology, we demonstrate ways whereby musical features are associated with meaning in recorded songs. Underlying the approach is the notion that it is in the music where Prince’s ingenuity mainly lies. The analysis is informed by an understanding of the technological ramifications of the process on the part of Prince and his audio engineer Susan Rogers.

### KEYWORDS

*Around the World in a Day* album; groove; harmony; music analysis; Prince; vocality

### Introduction

Few would dispute that Prince’s musical vocabulary provides rich pickings for the avid music analyst. The recordings he left behind represent an extraordinary legacy. When all is said and done, we believe it is his music that will continue to motivate scholars, intent on discovering his creative approach to songwriting. Inevitably, record engineering forms an integral part of putting together any pop production, with technology at the core of the creative impetus. Indeed, the context of the recording studio is the site for delving into Prince’s musical style and his historic standing within popular music. Musical details, together with the virtuosic rendering of them, raise countless questions relating to Prince’s musicianship skills and of course to how he fashioned himself, spectacularly, from one project to the next.

For the purpose of this article we wish to focus on a variety of aspects relating to Prince’s musical signature. To this end, we address three aspects: vocality, arrangement, and groove. An important dimension, profoundly influencing this, is the way in which the songs are conceived and produced. The album *Around the World in a Day*, released in 1985, was carried out in collaboration with Prince’s longtime sound engineer Susan Rogers, a tight working relationship that defined many of his classic 1980s albums, from *Purple Rain* to *Sign o’ the Times*. When on one occasion Rogers suggested that they should change over from the old-fashioned manual way of mixing records to using automation like the rest of the recording world, Prince immediately dismissed the idea: “We don’t sound like everybody else, Susan. We’ve got our own thing” (Rogers, in this volume).

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Inspired by the originality and quality of Prince as a singer, musician, songwriter, and producer, our analyses highlight the influence of the choices made in the production process and the ways in which his sound was shaped. As prime focal points we have selected two songs from *Around the World in a Day*, which followed his hugely successful album *Purple Rain*. The two tracks represent classic extremes when it comes to love songs in the field of popular music: “Condition of the Heart” is a somewhat mystical heartbreak song about unattainable love, whereas “Raspberry Beret,” which is the next track on the album and was released as its first single, is an exultant “boy falls in love with the most fantastic girl in the world”-song. Rather than aiming for a comprehensive analysis of the two songs, we have chosen to concentrate on what we regard as some of their most salient aspects. In “Condition of the Heart,” we pay attention to the recorded voice, in particular highlighting the element of vocal compulsion that is inherent in singing. By vocal compulsion we refer specifically to the devices and techniques invested into the vocal utterance, which energize a physical presence and enable the artist to touch the listener. In contrast, “Raspberry Beret” involves an examination of Prince’s characteristic, minimalist approach in shaping musical form through adding and removing parts in the texture of the song. We also inspect how the groove, which runs through the whole song without much change, is used to underline the lyrical content. Our analyses are constantly engaged with the production of the two tracks, including a wealth of details and reflections on this very important aspect of Prince’s oeuvre. Here we have had invaluable input from Prince’s sound engineer Susan Rogers, who has commented on the production-related parts of the article.

Toward the end of the article we reflect on the role of music analysis in the field of popular music, suggesting that Prince’s impact on peers and fans—however fueled it was by Prince’s larger-than-life artist persona—was first and foremost grounded in his innovative musical output. His superstar status, spanning an entire decade in the 1980s, and then reemerging with the success of his live concerts in the last ten years of his life, is predicated upon his extraordinary skills as a singer, songwriter, guitarist, multi-instrumentalist, producer, and band leader. Delving into the musical aspects of his work, and applying an updated toolbox for musicological analysis as our primary approach, designates our aim to come to terms with Prince’s core qualities. Our overriding point is that it is *in the music* where these dimensions are most manifested.<sup>1</sup>

## **In Conditioning Our Hearts: Prince’s Vocal Compulsion**

At the time when *Around the World in a Day* was produced, the typical workflow started, according to Susan Rogers, with Prince programming one- or two-bar-long drum patterns on his LM-1 drum machine. After recording four or five minutes of it, Prince would then manually erase certain instruments from the bars in which he did not want them; for example, claps and clave were not needed on every other bar. On other occasions, she recalls, “we recorded a simple kick, snare, hat part and then he manually overdubbed claps or other percussion sounds where he wanted them.”<sup>2</sup> Rogers claims that, for pop songs, Prince launched into their recordings with fairly strong notions in mind of the arrangement. With “Raspberry Beret,” for example, and other pop songs like it (for instance, “Paisley Park,” “Let’s Go Crazy”), after getting the drum machine going he would play the melody on guitar or piano and the band would come up with keyboard,

bass, and guitar parts and fill them in. Working this way fleshed his material out, making it more well-rounded. This was in contrast to dance or funk songs, where he or the band played around with tempo, key, groove, progression, and so on.

During the recording process, Rogers would tweak the sounds and the mix as the overdubs were merging together. However, Prince would be very hands-on during the final mixing, knowing exactly what he wanted. As such, it was easier for him to do the blends himself rather than requesting them. Rogers's role was to control signal flow and to dial in the settings on reverbs, delays, compression, and everything that went into pulling the track together during the laying down of overdubs. Yet, at the time of the recording of *Around the World in a Day*, she usually had time on her own at the console after Prince had completed his vocals.

Rogers would surely agree that the recording of "Condition of the Heart" must be one of Prince's most poignant affairs. It is the third track from the album, slotting into a legacy of elegantly crafted love ballads from other albums, such as "Sometimes It Snows in April," "I Love U," "Somebody's Somebody," "Slow Love," "Diamonds and Pearls," and "The Most Beautiful Girl in the World." For the sake of this song's analysis, we excavate two principal features for musicological analysis: vocal compulsion and melodic arrangement. Enticingly, the song draws the listener into a magical mystery tour via a narrative that oozes with the passion of a lusty 24-year-old at the start of an unprecedented musical career. Prince's performance prompts a music analysis of the sheer physical exertion of his voice, which is rife with aesthetic implications. The title alone slots into a long line of classics waxing over conditions of the heart: the Bee Gees' "How Can You Mend a Broken Heart" (1971), Elton John and Kiki Dee's "Don't Go Breaking My Heart" (1976), Bonnie Tyler's "It's a Heartache" (1978), Whitney Houston's "Where Do Broken Hearts Go" (1988), Celine Dion's "Nothing But a Broken Heart" (1992), Mariah Carey's "Heartbreaker" (1999), and Evanescence's "My Heart Is Broken" (2011).<sup>3</sup> There can be no mistaking that "Condition of the Heart" is about a broken heart and sexual desire, as Prince probes the perplexities of human relationships; speculation abounds that his relationship with Susannah Melvoin was behind the intimate sentiments in this song. Recorded, composed, and engineered in a more experimental manner than earlier tracks and albums, *Around the World in a Day* heralded a new beginning, with Prince looking into the future, unwavering in his determination to wrestle with his feelings. At this stage, his voice was gradually evolving, displaying an innate propensity for continuous diversification. As such, it can be perceived as a barometer for measuring the development of his vocal skills in the context of a four-decade timeline.

By far the song's duration (6:48) surpasses that of the average of pop song; as the second-longest track from *Around the World in a Day*<sup>4</sup> its eclectic introductory material takes the form of an ornate instrumental overture (0:00–2:05). Its quasi-Beatles, *Sgt. Pepper*-type psychedelic mood, quirky and introspective, commences with a two-note tympani roll (evocative of a moderate heart-beat pulse) of ten strokes that dissolve into a floral piano figure.<sup>5</sup> In full control of the instrumentation and arrangement, Prince proceeds to paint a scene that is embossed with flute runs, electronic fills, and splashes of hi-hats and reverse cymbals. In addition to his Yamaha piano and Oberheim synthesizers OB-8 and OB-Xa, his main synthesizer was the DX7. Susan Rogers recalls putting the track down at Flying Cloud Drive warehouse in one long session with Prince. Unfolding in its own time, the opening material is playfully adventurous and exquisitely recorded; a Disney-like feel helps animate

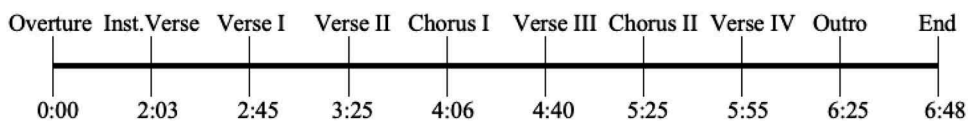
its design, operating in contrast to the more regular pace of the instrumental verse material that follows. Above all, the compositional ingenuity invested would showcase what Rogers has described as Prince's "bottomless well of ability to write hooks," hence revealing a mind-set that turns to "short, simple, memorable melodic phrases nearly every time he's on an instrument."

One might imagine that a sense of foreplay characterizes the instrumental overture (0:00–2:45), heightening the anticipation for Prince's entry. Following this, an instrumental verse (2:03)–the curtain raiser–lights up the stage. Sexy and beguiling, this gentle instrumental verse, with a smattering of vocal nonverbal sounds, blends sweet timbres and tones to pave the way forward for one of pop's most androgynous voices.<sup>6</sup>

If we consider the recording as the "pop score," the dialectical rapport between musical production, performance style, and aesthetics is of utmost relevance.<sup>7</sup> To consider this, let us start with the structural form of "Condition of the Heart," comprising verses and choruses in standard song form (see [Figure 1](#)). Overall, each verse and chorus contains its own set of features, shaping the song's compositional design and accommodating the voice. As with all of Prince's songs, it is subtle moments of change and surprise that sustain interest, signaling to the listener who and what the singer/star is about; ultimately, his own subjectivity is at the core of this song.

Prince's engagement with melodies occurs in a narrative about unrequited love and heartache. Involving subtle transformations throughout the song, his approach to singing reveals various techniques of vocal expression. In effect, his vocal trademark is the sum total of ideas and strategies that are realized by technological procedures. Captured by the recording, varying degrees of vocal expression occur due to the physiological aspects of producing sound, sustaining a high level of variation in pitch control, melodic articulation, regulation and ornamentation of intervallic structures, timbral control, and overdubbing.<sup>8</sup> Executed by the complexities of physiological exertion–muscle strain and laryngeal constriction–the intentions of vocal delivery have an aesthetic zeal.<sup>9</sup> Particularly revealing in "Condition of the Heart" is the degree of vocal agility, a prime indicator of showmanship, production esthetics, and compositional working.

At this point some reference to the handling of harmonic material seems relevant. Indisputably, harmony is central to understanding the role and function of melody, timbre, and numerous other parameters.<sup>10</sup> It is worth stressing that the chord progressions and chord types in "Condition of the Heart" have a direct bearing on the emotive charge of the song. Set in the key of B major, the general movement from tonic (B) to dominant (F#) in the verses is diatonically conventional in western musical practice, while in the chorus a less traditional progression from the mediant (D#) to dominant (F#) ensues. As is often the case in his ballads, Prince opts for "surprise" chords to enliven his subject matter.<sup>11</sup> For instance, instead of using the predictable subdominant chord, Emaj7, he opts for E7, with the lowered 7th degree. The unlikely transition from a D#



**Figure 1.** Structure of "Condition of the Heart".

major chord to E7 and then to the supertonic (C#) adds a degree of tension and arguably intrigue to the harmonic flavor, heightening the signification on the words and phrases: “sometimes lonely musician” (3:07) in verse I, “everything and nothing” (3:47) in verse II, “giggle that you do” (5:02) in verse III, and “foolhardy” (6:10) in verse IV. Emphasizing the flattened 7th throughout, Prince chooses to distort it at the end of the song by establishing a dissonance with the F natural in the vocal line superimposed over E7b9 (E-G#-B-D-F). The jarring effect of this brings into high relief the emotive state of being “foolhardy” (6:10, Example 1), which is woven into the counterpoint of his entry on “he’s” in falsetto (Example 7).<sup>12</sup>

Example 1. Employment of surprise chords in “Condition of the Heart”

<p>3:05</p> <p>Verse 1</p>	
<p>3:45</p> <p>Verse 2</p>	
<p>5:01</p> <p>Verse 3</p>	

In its entirety, the instrumental first verse (Figure 1, 2:03) establishes the mood of the track, introducing the melody played by guitar, piano, and synthesizers, which leads into the vocal entry: “There was a girl in Paris . . .” (2:45). Tenderly sung in falsetto, Prince regulates the dynamics and timbre to eroticize the melody as he narrates the story; the mix is translucent, aided by the choice of microphones that help extract the syllables (for instance the t’s in “sent a letter to” and s and sh sounds in “she would answer back” and in the hook, “condition” of the heart). In production terms, the recording technologies and technical choices have a major influence on the track’s aesthetics. For instance, attention to alliteration and to the articulation of consonants is contingent on the choice of

equipment and mixing procedures. Rogers has explained that the mics used on the track were not necessarily selected for their sonic qualities (as the Flying Cloud Drive warehouse did not have much to choose from). For his vocal part she took with her to the warehouse a Neumann tube U47 mic from Prince's home studio. Other mics used included Sennheiser 421 and Shure SM57, and for the piano and cymbals Rogers employed a pair of AKG c414s. Rogers has stressed that the nuances of vocal performance are best captured by the headroom on the mic preamp and also depend on the choice of compressor-limiter and how it would be set. Instinctively, she would dial this into what felt best to her ear, rather than using a preset for special effect. Rogers also accounts for their love of delays; there were always long and short stereo delays patched in. Again, worth stressing, were the restrictions, in terms of the set-up at the warehouse, although they had access to an EMT 245 reverb and the popular Lexicon 224. In all their work the Eventide H949 harmonizer was ubiquitous, but unlike most his other recordings, "Condition of the Heart" did not make use of the Roland Boss pedals. When the track was realized, Rogers sculpted only what she knew Prince liked or requested from her.

In concentrating on the role of the voice, it is noteworthy that on each repetition of the hook, "condition of the heart," Prince turns to his more natural-sounding baritone mid-register. While the verses evoke a sense of gradual development, structurally and emotively, the chorus sections signal moments of arrival and release. Invariably, vocal variation emphasizes differences between tension and resolve, where the use of unexpected melodic elongation and ornamentation capture the listener's attention. As with any Prince song, verses intensify with each repeat, with the phrasing becoming increasingly ardent in respect to articulation. In "Condition of the Heart" a general rise in dynamics and alteration of lyrics on the last line, "terminal condition of the heart," ushers in the chorus, "Thinking about you . . ." (4:10). A sense of escalation in effects involves vocal dubbing as a pent-up response to the verses. As with the chord types and progressions, melodic rhythm works in stark contrast to the verses, with Prince emphatically declaring that the girls whom he is in love with are "driving him crazy"; all of this culminates in the somewhat baffling final phrase, "I'm blinded by the daisies in your yard" (Example 4, 4:30–4:37), which Rogers claims to be one his "most honest, poetic, and poignant lines; a confession that the object of his desire might be out of his league in the sense of a purity, and innocence, or for being the product of a sunny and nurturing environment that is so foreign yet attractive to Prince."<sup>13</sup> The word "yard," which we will concentrate on later, is teased out by a melismatic downward spiral gesture that announces the final arrival point in the chorus, while dissipating much of the energy, all in preparation for the third verse. A prime technique is to instigate sufficient contrast between the various sections, involving a toning down in the articulation of consonants in the chorus, all of which creates an air of nonchalance.

Upon repeating the material from the previous two verses in the third verse, two different registers are now used: Prince's falsetto is mixed in counterpoint with his "natural" register. The details of overdub in the recording engineering contribute to a sense of call-and-response interjections, a prime structuring device in increasing emotive charge. The effect of this (especially in terms of him replicating himself) is to increase the sense of urgency, where the accents on "heart" help convey feelings of pain and hurt. With the occurrence of the hooks at the end of each verse, modifications occur lyrically and melodically on the word "condition"—"for a condition," "terminal



condition,” “with a condition,” and “he’s got a condition.” This further intensifies the narrative as everything swells to the final spoken verdict: “He’s got a condition of the heart.” Highly introspective, Prince regulates the meter and rhyme of the lyrics meticulously. In moments such as these his skills as singer-songwriter are evident in the innovative ways he word-paints, employing the full spectrum of his vocal timbre to add passion, sensuality, and not least humor to the storyline. Much of this is down to the total effect of the *sonic choreography*, where the physical control of his voice(s) belies a dramaturgical strategy. During this process, his own corporeality is instated by a set of desired aesthetics, stylized through recording engineering. The overall impression is that the seductive gestures inherent in vocal compulsion are fetishized by the minutest attention to detail in the mix; this is how Prince sustains a high degree of intimacy throughout the song.

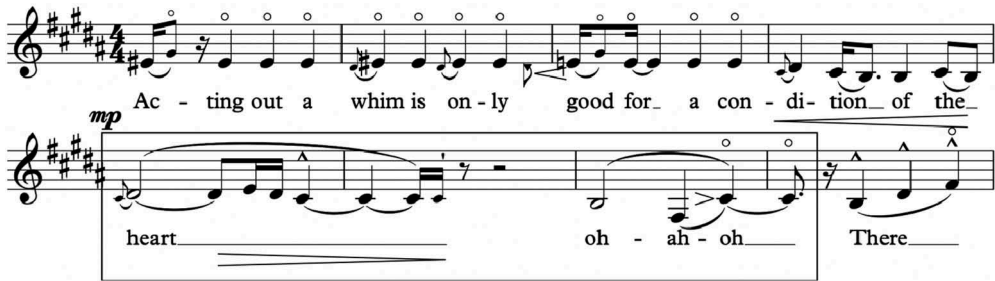
As we have suggested so far, melodic articulation is linked to vocal compulsion, which leads us to deciphering meaning from a musicological standpoint. Prince’s personal narrative is about exhibiting desire in an unapologetic, overt manner, and, importantly, he shows how erotic desire is expressed as much through the act of singing as through language; it is in the altered physical state of singing that we encounter the pleasures of listening and engaging with corporeality. As the song progresses, Prince’s vocal role is enlivened by an acute awareness of not only *his* identity but also the personas he pursues within the multiplicity of events going on in the storyline. “Condition of the Heart” is a story that blurs the divide between the protagonist and Prince himself, illustrated by him alternating between first- and third-person pronouns. This facilitates an incorporation of personas, making the narrative all the more intriguing. Rogers maintains this is one of Prince’s most personal songs ever, a possible reason for why he sings part of it in the third person, which has a corollary in “Moonbeam Levels.” “Condition of the Heart,” she suggests, is one of the rare times in his young life that Prince expressed disappointment in himself, however veiled. By comparison to his output at this stage in his career, Prince would go deeper into the personal realm of love, exposing his feelings while still distancing himself through his personas. It is on a note of nonchalance that the song ends, where following the delirious falsetto scat on “he’s” (Example 7, 6:11), his final diagnosis is proclaimed, punctuated by the return of the two-note tympani heart-beat oscillation, which bleeds into a long fade-out. The aftermath of such strenuous waxing is firmly grounded in the track’s finite resolution; recorded close-up, we hear a spoken voice that is sensual yet coolly detached, in a deep register: The line “He’s got a condition of the heart” is severely delivered—alas, with all the troubles of being in love, an air of resignation prevails.

In further excavating compulsion as a device of embellishment, we now turn to a close inspection of the details of melodic treatment through a range of physical properties that result from Prince’s singing. As music analysts we are eager to stress that elaborate vocal gestures imply an amalgamation of accentuation, inflection, elongation, and ornamentation within the confines of narrative flow. The first instance occurs at the end of the first verse, on the word “heart,” where Prince embellishes the D# over two bars before resolving to C# (Example 2). The falsetto he turns to connotes fragility and tenderness, with the addition of “creaking” on the first syllable of “act-ing” and on “good.”<sup>14</sup> Creaking, a technique of vocal compulsion, is prevalent in countless pop songs, entailing vibration of the vocal cords in a controlled fashion that nevertheless gives a sense of cracking up. Throughout the first verse



Prince also resorts to delicate vocal “creaks” to extract the emotional state of being heart-broken. Close inspection also reveals a technique of “curbing,” which often succeeds moments of “creaking,” where the dynamics are regulated as medium loud in a moaning or wailing manner. Significantly, on all repetitions of the word “heart,” rather than creaking, the word “heart” is “curbed” in an ornamented oh-ah-oh exclamation.

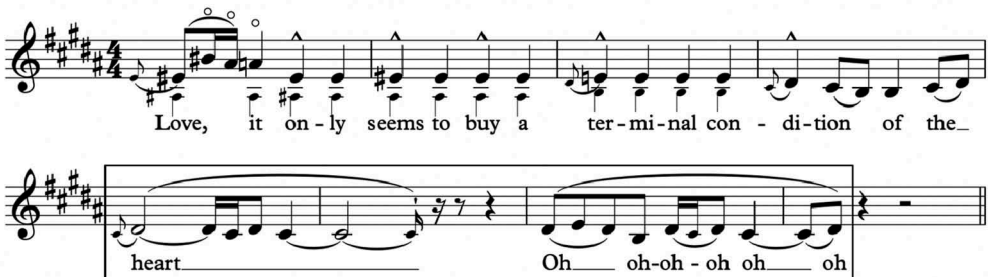
Example 2. Creaking on the word “heart” (verse I, 3:11–3:25) in “Condition of the Heart”



The musical score for Example 2 consists of two staves in treble clef with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and a 4/4 time signature. The first staff contains the vocal line for the first verse, starting with a mezzo-piano (*mp*) dynamic. The lyrics are: "Ac - ting out a whim is on - ly good for a con - di - tion of the". The second staff continues the vocal line, with lyrics: "heart oh - ah - oh There". The word "heart" is underlined and has a long horizontal line below it, indicating an extended note. The "oh - ah - oh" section also has a long horizontal line below it, indicating an extended vocal ornament.

Throughout the second verse, Prince’s singing is more decorative. Arriving at the hook, “condition of the heart,” he ornaments the word “heart” by extending it into three bars of “oh, oh, oh” before leading into the first chorus. The overall effect of such compulsion is laced with vocal overdubs, resulting in a full chorus sound that is impassioned with different colorations. Compared to the first verse, the second verse is more strident in its mission, with a strong emphasis falling on the strong beats (1 and 3) prior to arriving at the hook: “love, it on-ly seems to buy a ter-mi-nal con-dition of the heart” (Example 3). The word “condition” is weighted by a metallic vocal accent placed on the second syllable of “con-di-tion.” This phrase is reinforced in the arrangement by an increase in effects and tympani punctuations, prior to the start of the chorus.

Example 3. Ornamenting the word “heart” (verse II, 3:51–4:09) in “Condition of the Heart”



The musical score for Example 3 consists of two staves in treble clef with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and a 4/4 time signature. The first staff contains the vocal line for the second verse, starting with a mezzo-piano (*mp*) dynamic. The lyrics are: "Love, it on - ly seems to buy a ter - mi - nal con - di - tion of the". The second staff continues the vocal line, with lyrics: "heart Oh oh-oh - oh oh oh". The word "heart" is underlined and has a long horizontal line below it, indicating an extended note. The "Oh oh-oh - oh oh oh" section also has a long horizontal line below it, indicating an extended vocal ornament.

In the majority of pop songs, chorus sections function as arrival points. “Condition of the Heart” is no exception. As the first chorus transpires, Prince waxes lyrical about the subject of his desire. Vocal overdubbing at this point helps escalate the range of emotions up to the final enigmatic utterance, “I’m blinded by the daisies in your yard,” with the vocals descending on a modal-flavored scale (F# to A#) on the final destination word, “yard,” in a low sonorous register (Example 4). Landing on the sustained pitch A#, there is a moment of respite (in the form of a pregnant pause) before the next verse starts. On this phrase, Prince turns to a mellow timbre, produced by the lowering of the larynx and raising of the palette, which in effect produces a darker, warbling sound. Physiologically, this is conditioned by the size and form of the vocal tract, which is literally “instrumental” in shaping a rich and variable timbre; again, his mastery of coloration is a result of vocal compulsion.

Example 4. Coloration of the word “yard” (chorus I, 4:30–4:38) in “Condition of the Heart”

Musical notation for Example 4, showing the vocal line for the phrase “I’m blinded by the daisies in your yard.” The notation is in treble clef, key of F# major, and 4/4 time. The lyrics are “f I’m blin-ded by the dai - si-es in your ya - (a)rd”. A box highlights the final note of “yard”, which is a sustained A# note.

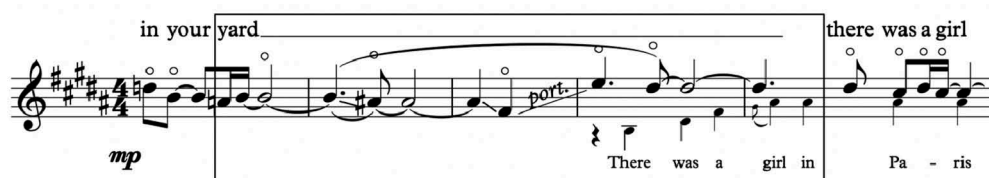
Contrasting with the first two verses, the third verse is all the more emphatic; a fresh spurt of energy leads to the final cadence on “heart” (Example 5). Not only is the word “heart” different in its melismatic treatment (with vocal overdubs), but a high dose of vibrato enriches the effect. The speed of the vibrato is slow-ish, with loud dynamics; as the vocal cords produce the pitch, it is the hypopharynx that regulates the speed. Prince’s laryngeal vibrato is distinctive, mostly due to the treatment of the word “heart,” followed by three measures of orgasmic oh-oh’s that ignite the passion behind heartache and loss. Proficiency in controlling vibrato, in all its different forms, is a major asset of his vocal address, requiring high technical expertise. In such moments, such strategies of compulsion disclose their own story in conjunction with the storyline, conveying to the listener a specific type of attitude and sensibility.

Example 5. Strategy of vocal compulsion on the word “heart” (verse III, 5:07–5:23) in “Condition of the Heart”

Musical notation for Example 5, showing the vocal line for the phrase “When ever I would act a fool, the fool with a condition of the heart oh oh.” The notation is in treble clef, key of F# major, and 4/4 time. The lyrics are “mf When - e - ver I would act a fool, the fool with a con - di - tion of the he(art) oh - oh”. A box highlights the melismatic treatment of “heart” and the following “oh oh” notes, which are marked with a “3” and a fermata.

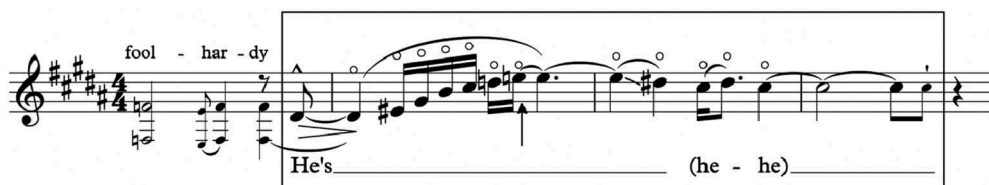
The last chorus of the song is melodramatic, due to numerous features, including an increase in dynamics, more vocal dubbing, descending piano concerto-like chords, and a wider range of effects used in the mix. As the section leads to the final phrase, “I’m blinded by the daisies in the yard,” the final words “in your yard” are superimposed in falsetto with a vocal line in normal registral range. Treatment of the word “yard” is in the form of a complex melisma that worms its way around the tonic pitch, B, falling down to F# and then escalating to the pitch E via a portamento slide (Example 6). The result is enthralling, in terms of sheer virtuosity, as Prince effectively shifts into a higher gear.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, what might have been a simple resolution turns into something disarming: a long ecstatic wail that conjures up notions of pain, remorse, and disbandment.

Example 6. Melismatic treatment of the word “yard” (chorus II, verse IV, 5:49–6:00) in “Condition of the Heart”



At ten seconds following the vocal pyrotechnics on “yard,” Prince sports an even more acrobatic spin on the word “he’s” in falsetto, assisted by a series of portamentos up and then down (Example 7) that conjure up impressions of melodic jazzing—a gesture of spectacular release. Ostensibly, the intention to draw out the personal pronoun “he” is to draw attention not only to the protagonist but also to the whiny vowel sound “eee” and the repetitions of “he-he” at the end of the phrase. Quite delicious, if not childlike, this vocal moment comes across as crazed due to the constriction of the vocal tract and the rising of the larynx to produce falsetto; the sound is eerie, its high frequency reminiscent of someone on helium. One might say that the choice to meander around on the third-person pronoun, in “heeeee’s,” is to express unfiltered elation; it is as if everything leads to Prince climaxing on the last spasm of vocal ejaculation, delivered with an angular upward shot that lingers like a cloud in time and space.

Example 7. Meandering on the personal pronoun “he’s” (verse IV, 6:11–6:18) in “Condition of the Heart”



“Condition of the Heart” was written, recorded, and produced only three years after songs such as “Jack U Off” and “Do Me, Baby” and three years before the raunchy album *Lovesexy*. Songs written by Prince in his twenties frequently contained controversial references to sex-play. Articulating himself erotically, if not ironically, Prince invariably opted for sex-talk in his songs, which he labored to astonishing extremes by a style that “accessed the sublime through a richly excessive musical vocabulary” (Hawkins “Sun” 126). This became the inimitable signature for his entertaining us. As this part of our analysis has sought to demonstrate, an extensive spectrum of vocal techniques underpins Prince’s beautiful song. Finally, his way of ornamenting, teasing melodies out in whirls and frills, is embedded in the practice of *scatting*, disclosing a prime vocal signature rooted within African-American culture. Scatting is a major device for embellishment and stems from Louis Armstrong’s performances in the 1920s, best epitomized in his recording of the song “Heebie Jeebies.” Scat having transferred from jazz into rock and pop styles, countless African-American singers have employed this vocal technique to mediate heart, soul, and politics. Significantly, such extemporization involves rhythmic innovation as much as melodic, where pitch patterns become impressive displays of structural elaboration. Throughout his career, Prince was inclined to invent embellishments that added zest to the sentiments of the lyrics. “Condition of the Heart” is a superb example of this, with the sense of heartache in the form of a “broken heart” truly becoming a metaphor for disillusionment yet also hope, as he pursued the physical condition of his life’s journey that terminated at 57 years. What stands out in this most beautiful song is the creative use of vocal sculpting, a remarkable feat that endorses the phenomenon of Prince and the recognition that his music can allegorize things we can never express otherwise.<sup>16</sup>

### Titillated by a Raspberry Beret

Whereas “Condition of the Heart” is a very dynamic production, characterized by several layers of expressive, sometimes even slightly “wild,” overdubs (for example the improvised vocal tracks and the grandiose grand piano in the chorus), “Raspberry Beret,” which follows it on the album, contrasts with such dynamism from the start. This time Prince simply counts in the band, who start playing their assigned patterns right away. The production might be described as more “orderly,” in the sense that each instrument tends to stick to its riff or role, which generally remains the same throughout the song. Apart from the vocal part, there is little of the excess one experiences in “Condition of the Heart.”

The version of “Raspberry Beret” released on *Around the World in a Day* was, according to Rogers, recorded live with the band during rehearsal: “I have relatively strong memories of recording this one (especially the string session) and ‘America’ at the warehouse rehearsal space.” A sketch of the song existed beforehand, as Prince had recorded “Raspberry Beret” as a solo performance already in 1982 (Brown 98). Rogers confirms that Prince basically knew what he wanted on “Raspberry Beret”—he would often begin rehearsal by standing at Bobby Z’s drum kit and programming the LM-1 to give him the groove he wanted: “He’d then leave it to Bobby to do fills and tempo changes while he and the rest of the band worked out the arrangement.” She is certain that the drum pattern of “Raspberry Beret” was programmed by Prince because “he was working from a concept that was typically in his head.” With this song and others like it (e.g. “Paisley Park,” “Let’s Go Crazy”), after getting the drum machine going he would play the

melody on guitar or piano and the band would come up with keyboard, bass, and guitar parts and fill it in.

Formally, the song consists of verses and choruses, supplemented by an intro (an instrumental version of the chorus) and a bridge. The sections follow each other in a conventional pop-song fashion (see [Figure 2](#) for an overview). The groove runs through the whole song, with little variation, as does the chord progression | A G | F#m7 | G | G A |, except during the bridge and the final chords of the chorus. By comparison to “Condition of the Heart,” this cyclical harmonic basis foregrounds the groove (see discussion below); as a result, harmony, shaped by chord progressions, is not the parameter that distinguishes the different sections. Instead, the song’s musical form is constructed via changes in arrangements, texture, and production—the deliberate addition and subtraction of a few elements are what establishes the chorus as different from the verse.

The most obvious element in this regard is the lead vocal, which changes from a free, speech-like style in the verse to a melodically poignant delivery of the repeated lines of the chorus. In the verse, that is, the lead vocal speaks-sings the lyrics, conveying the content through the exploration of a plethora of expressive effects. In this way, Prince’s performance is a clear example of how words can be used not only to present information but also to convey action that influences the information in important ways. Using a term from the speech act theory of [Austin](#) (1975), further developed by [Searle](#), we might posit that Prince’s delivery is an example of “expressive illocutionary” action ([Searle](#) 1975). Especially in the second verse, Prince’s lead vocal foregrounds the articulation and sounds of the lyrics, taking a speech-approach to singing to an extreme: The mannerisms and expressive outbursts are clearly helpful in telling the listener that the protagonist is about to become slightly out of control.<sup>17</sup>

During the chorus, on the other hand, the vocal arrangement by and large obeys an exclusively musical logic, with both repetition and backing vocals emphasizing the song’s melody. Wendy and Lisa’s octave-doubling of Prince’s lead vocal (see [Example 8](#)) typifies the vocal arrangements from the Revolution era. Rather than stacks of thirds, which produce a dense, powerful sound, they often used octaves, perhaps following Prince’s inclination toward a more minimalistic, open sound during these years. Doubling Prince’s baritone

Drum intro (4 bars)	Intro (2 x 4 bars)
	A G   F#m7   G   G A   ... etc.
Verse I (4 x 4 bars)	Chorus I (3 x 4 bars)
A G   F#m7   G   G A   ... etc.	A G   F#m7   G   G A   ... etc.
Verse II (4 x 4 bars)	Chorus II (3 x 4 bars)
A G   F#m7   G   G A   ... etc.	A G   F#m7   G   G A   ... etc.
Bridge (4 x 4 bars)	Chorus III (3 x 4 bars, repeat to fade)
D A/C#   D A/C#   ... etc.	A G   F#m7   G   G A   ... etc.

**Figure 2.** Schematic outline of musical form and chord progressions in “Raspberry Beret”.

with Wendy and Lisa's voices also adds a feminine, nonchalant flair to the lead vocal, a kind of feminine alter ego, that Prince might have welcomed here. According to Rogers, he loved balancing masculine and feminine perspectives in his music; she has suggested that Wendy and Lisa were the perfect partners for him to satisfy this appetite: "He arguably never again achieved this balance."

A second textural change from verse to chorus is discernible within the string arrangement. Rogers draws attention to the ways in which Prince's strident rhythm tracks needed to be balanced in the overall structure by a strong vocal/lyric and a strong countermelody—"the string arrangement, in this case." Lisa Coleman arranged the strings for this track, which were recorded on 13 September 1984, with Wendy and Lisa as producers and Rogers as the engineer. Prince was not present during the session, which, according to Rogers, was good for the performance: "I remember how stilted our behaviors could be in his presence because he was so controlling and because of how constrained your options are. You've got Prince watching you, and you must meet his standards. And what that forces you to do is throw your standard out. I don't want to say you become a puppet, but part of your psyche does" (Rogers quoted in *Tudahl* 410). The strings' long, circular melodic motif has a harmonium-like feel to it, which smooths out the stompy feel of the groove, easing into the more legato feel of the chorus. The motif starts out together with the melody line in the first bar but soon takes on a more contrapuntal function. As the melody descends and ends on the four-and in bar 1, the strings move upward in an off-beat-oriented motif then to descend and end on beat 4 in bar 2 (see Example 8). In the second half (bars 3 and 4) the strings return to following the melody closely. Together with the change in the lead vocal delivery and the addition of Wendy and Lisa's backing vocals, the strings give the chorus a clearly different feel compared to the open and staccato sound of the groove-oriented verse.

Example 8: Melody and string arrangement in first four bars of chorus in "Raspberry Beret"



Example 8 shows the musical score for the first four bars of the chorus in "Raspberry Beret". The score is in 4/4 time with a tempo of 121. It features a Violin (Vln.) part and a Vocal (Vox) part. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The vocal line is marked *mf* and includes the lyrics: "Rasp - ber-ry be-ret... the kind you find... in a se-cond hand store." The violin part provides a counter-melody to the vocal line.

The bridge is different from both the verse and the chorus and also incorporates a tonal shift to the subdominant, with the harmony undulating between the subdominant D and the tonic A with a C# in the bass. The bridge is structured as a call and response; the lead vocal calls over the first two bars, and, somewhat atypically, the strings respond, with a melodic riff that ends on E instead of A and is doubled by the bass. In the third four-bar phrase, the melody call is sung on top of a slightly cadential chord progression | G D/F# | E | but is still followed by the response from the strings. In the fourth four-bar phrase, however, we find the same chords serving as a clear-cut cadence into the verse: | G | D/F# | E | E |. Overall, then, and contrary to the verse and chorus, the chords play a much larger part in building the structure of this section.

The last chorus follows on from the bridge, with Prince's lead vocal building up to a climactic conclusion. Toward the end of the bridge, Prince turns to a very speech-like vocal style that leads into the chorus without disruption. In this transition from bridge to chorus, the roles have reversed—the chord progressions are used to make the musical form, whereas the lead vocal provides the continuity. On reaching the chorus, it becomes obvious that Wendy and Lisa will sustain the melody on their own—Prince, as the protagonist, has lost his vocal way (that is, the melody) and is now freestyling all over the place. Overwhelmed by lust and love, he raves, moaning and crying in a mannered, even creaky voice: “I think I love her!”

Across the different sections, the unchanging groove and repeated vamp-like riff played by a clavinet-sounding synthesizer bind everything together. Both hold a clue to the hip-swaying, “sexy” feel that runs through the song—a feel that is made explicit in the dancing that accompanies the song in the video<sup>18</sup> and perfectly matches the contents of the lyrics. As *Touré* points out, the song is almost like a short story about the sexual desire of a male youth and follows the structure of a much-used cliché in popular culture: Boy is bored to death at work (“It seems that I was busy doin’ something close to nothing, but different than the day before”) when the most titillating girl in the universe arrives, “walking in through the out door.” The rest of the song unfolds accordingly. In Rogers’s opinion, the lyrics of “Raspberry Beret” were among Prince’s strongest for their imagery, relatability, and simplicity. It’s a classic “boy meets girl” story, but, as Rogers points out, “given that Prince was such an eccentric character, it feels just *the right amount of odd*.” Rightfully, she stresses that the combination of an ordinary scene starring an extraordinary protagonist arouses interest in us: “We can’t really picture Prince working for Mr. Magee at a five-and-dime store.”<sup>19</sup>

Commenting on the groove of the song, Rogers recalls that the recording features direct (strictly electronic) inputs on the kick drum, snares, hi-hats, claves, shakers, and claps, whereas cymbals are live. She claims that Prince would often begin rehearsals by standing at Bobby Z’s drum kit and programming the LM-1 to give him the groove he wanted: “He’d then leave it to Bobby to do fills and tempo changes while he and the rest of the band worked out the arrangement.” Regarding “Raspberry Beret,” the band was used for several basic tracks—that is, in addition to cymbals, bass, guitar, and keyboards. The song’s groove marks the four quarter notes in a straightforward rock fashion, with kick and snare drums alternating on the downbeats. The drum pattern is complemented by a slightly more elaborate bass line that doubles the kick drum strokes with certain discreet, but nonetheless very important, additions of dampened eighth notes after the downbeats. (Some of these after-beat notes might have been produced by an eighth-note delay.) The articulation varies slightly: Some are very discreet, whereas others are more pronounced. The pattern is always played in a light, staccato manner in the verse (see Example 9) and with more legato in the chorus. In the chorus the downbeats have also gained a little more weight. This was, according to Rogers, achieved by complementing the weight on beats 1 and 3 with a heavy AMS RMX16 reverb on the NonLin (nonlinear) setting, which “gives the groove a trochaic, rather than iambic, rhythmic feel.” In the last bar of the chorus, the bass plays a short riff almost in unison with the lead vocal (“sec-ond hand store”) on eighth notes. These after-beat eighth notes keep the groove from settling on the quarter notes and roll out the energy of the strong beats *after* the beat itself, propelling a groove pattern that, if it were treated too squarely, could come across as bottom heavy and lacking forward momentum.



Example 9: Basic groove (drum kit and bass) in verse of “Raspberry Beret”



♩=121

Bass

Drums

Avoiding stiff or overdetermined strong beats is a central theme in funk-related groove styles<sup>20</sup>; the groove should be anchored and at the same time never stick on the strong beats but rather spread its energy out, both before and after them.<sup>21</sup> The feel of the groove is, of course, different in “Raspberry Beret” than in a classic funk tune, but the way in which the bass line grounds the groove without overarticulating the strong beats is similar; the energy is always led away by after-beats, often performed in a light, staccato fashion.

The number of eighth notes in the “Raspberry Beret” bass drum/bass figure following the downbeat varies over the course of the pattern (see Example 9) and increases toward its end. This conceit generates a pleasurable surprise with each “repetition”; moreover, it means that instead of slowing down to prepare for a possible landing on the first beat of the next four-bar pattern, the groove instead increases its forward momentum in the final bars preceding the repetition. This has a very dynamic, even headlong effect upon the song, especially given the heavy weight on beats 1 and 3 throughout, which balances the more forward-leaning eighth-note pattern.

Keeping the groove and the chords/riff unchanged while changing the arrangement/texture is quite typical of the R&B-derived popular music tradition to which Prince originally belonged. The way in which bass and kick are treated in the “Raspberry Beret” groove also reflects Prince’s overall funky approach to traditional rock grooves, which always includes a hint of funk’s snappy phrasing (*Danielsen Presence and Pleasure*). As mentioned above, the funky “lightness” and hip-swaying feel here also resonate with the playful, sexy mood in the lyrics. “Raspberry Beret” also perfectly captures the sound of the Revolution band, in which Wendy and Lisa had a lot of influence, which is probably why the string arrangement plays such a prominent role in the composition. According to Rogers, Prince’s music was never the same after Wendy and Lisa left. In Wendy’s words: “The three of us were part of something very intense. We received trust from Prince and were given responsibility for finishing things, he trusted our ears” (*Vinger*).<sup>22</sup>

## Eclecticism and Innovation

In the same interview, Wendy also comments on the very different musical upbringing of herself and Lisa in relation to Prince: “We came from families of good musicians in Los Angeles and brought with us a lot of ‘highbrow’ impulses. Prince had to write better songs, and we suggested listening to composers like Ives, Hindemith, Stravinsky; we brought him into deeper and darker jazz. I gave him Bowie’s ‘Berlin Trilogy’” (*Vinger*).<sup>23</sup> The fact that Prince’s bandmates thought he had to write better songs after the massive success of *Purple Rain* might be a surprise to many, but it probably simply indicates the difference in

aesthetics between the world of R&B and the musical tradition valued by Wendy and Lisa. In any case, the meeting of these two worlds resulted in the very special sound of “Raspberry Beret,” the first single from the new album and a huge contrast to the musical style of *Purple Rain*.

The mix of R&B and arrangements inspired by avant-garde and classical music was probably what led reviewers to compare *Around the World in a Day* to the Beatles’ *Sgt. Pepper*. Similar to that classic album, *Around the World in a Day* included psychedelic soundscapes such as the intro of “Condition of the Heart” and parts played by classical instruments—for example, the strings on “Raspberry Beret.” But as Prince stated in an interview with *Rolling Stone* at the time: “The influence wasn’t the Beatles. They were great for what they did, but I don’t know how that would hang today . . . I think the smartest thing I did was record *Around the World in a Day* right after I finished *Purple Rain*. I didn’t wait to see what would happen with *Purple Rain*. That’s why the two albums sound completely different” (Karlen).

As we have already suggested above, the contributions from Prince’s band members were probably key to pulling the album in a new direction: The varied background of the musicians of the Revolution band brought new ideas to the table. According to Rogers, Mark Brown (stage name Brown Mark) was from “the same musical street as Prince.” Drummer Bobby Z also came from the Minneapolis jazz-funk scene, where Prince received his musical upbringing. However, Wendy had a whole different set of influences from Latin-American music and jazz, and Matt Fink and Lisa were, in Rogers’s words, “different musical thinkers” and instrumental in adding clever arrangements to Prince’s basic chord progressions.

Warner Bros., the record company, which probably had hoped for a follow-up to *Purple Rain*, was not too fond of the drastic change in musical style that *Around the World in a Day* represented. According to Eric Leeds, who played saxophone in the extended Revolution band in 1985–86,<sup>24</sup> Prince could see on the faces of the Warner Bros. people at the listening party, where he played the album, that it wasn’t really working. Prince told Leeds: “Well sometimes you know right away that you’re not going to reach some people, but that’s OK. It still was where I was at the time” (Nilsen 216). Comparing the sales of *Around the World in a Day* (approximately 2.2 million) to *Purple Rain* (approximately 24 million) confirms Prince’s gut feeling here: He did not reach the mainstream audience to the same extent as with his two previous records. In fact, he never did again.

However, rather than marking the end of his time in the limelight, *Around the World in a Day* was the start of a series of remarkable albums that were mostly very well received by “expert” critics such as the music press and that made his musical recognition even stronger.<sup>25</sup> After *Around the World in a Day* came the innovative, stripped-down *Parade* album (which was the last he recorded with the Revolution band), then the double epos *Sign o’ the Times*. Both were characterized by an extreme degree of musical eclecticism: At the Wikipedia page of the *Parade* album, for example, the stylistic categories used to describe the album vary from neo-psychedelia to R&B and jazz, soul, and funk, to baroque pop! (“*Parade (Prince Album)*”).

Instead of repeating a success, then, Prince changed his style with every new record in an almost Bowiesque manner. However, the meeting of the different musical worlds that these albums from the Revolution–Rogers era involved, also entailed somewhat clashing values and traditions. For the avant-garde pop and rock audience—that is, the white, Euro-American middle class—the albums following *Purple Rain* were probably the definitive peak of Prince’s artistic output. For the more mainstream but still white audience, who loved *Purple Rain*, this

experimental turn was probably a turnoff, as reflected in the decrease in record sales. For those who saw Prince primarily as an R&B artist, which clearly was his profile prior to his mainstream breakthrough, his flirt with influences from European avant-garde and classical art music as well as the collaboration with musicians representing the Euro-American-dominated mainstream music industry can be seen as a betrayal of his musical upbringing in the African-American musical tradition (see McInnis in this volume).

In such a perspective, the music-analytical approach that we have chosen for this article may be seen as an attempt to move Prince's music further away from his musical roots. However, while Western art-music tradition has spawned much music analysis (for some too much), other traditions have in our view produced far too little. Our concern for music analysis is a way of attempting to emphasize the extremities of Prince's musicality and his exceptional capacities as a singer, songwriter, guitarist, and multi-instrumentalist. Put differently, it is a way of spotlighting, not only the musical value of Prince's music and the expertise of Prince himself, but also the African-American R&B tradition to which he first and foremost belonged. Through a focus on the sophisticated musicianship and the extreme musical qualities of this tradition one also highlights the artistic effort that went into Prince's music. Prince's "bottomless well of an ability to write hooks" (Rogers) as well as the craftsmanship of him, Rogers, and the band were needed in order to transform original ideas into a well-formed tune. Shaping a groove that calls for a total presence in the musical motion, that simply makes you long for the dance floor, is a musical process that requires highly specialized technical skills on the part of the performers. Producing a soundscape that grabs the attention of the listener within a couple of seconds testifies to a highly developed ability to shape sound. Delivering a melody and lyrics the way Prince does is no less than unique.

Documenting this through detailed analytical work makes it harder to overlook such facts, for the skill to pinpoint musical excellence, which we know has empowered the works of the Western canon, can be implemented in the same way for the works of other groups and genres. No better is this exemplified than by Prince and his team members, past and present, in the R&B family.

## Notes

1. Our analytical approaches build on our earlier studies on Prince. See the bibliography entries under Danielsen and Hawkins.
2. Throughout this article we quote, by reference and with her permission, dialogs we have had with Susan Rogers.
3. It should not go unnoticed that *Condition of the Heart* is the album title released in 1985 by Kashif (born Michael Jones).
4. The final track, "Temptation," is slightly more than eight minutes in duration.
5. The influence of the Beatles on Prince's music, not least in *Around the World in a Day* and tracks such as "Raspberry Beret," is indisputable. See Hawkins, "Sun" 125.
6. For a discussion of androgynous voices in pop history, see, Hawkins, *Settling*.
7. For a definition and discourse on this subject see, Hawkins, *Settling*.
8. For another in-depth discussion of vocal compulsion, see Hawkins and Ålvik.
9. See Gonsalves, Amin, and Behlau.
10. Notably, little research has been undertaken to date on Prince's remarkable techniques of harmonic control in arrangements and chord progressions. Cf.; Hawkins, "Prince"; Hawkins, "Chelsea"; Hawkins, *Settling*; and Hawkins and Niblock.

11. For instance, similar “surprise chords” are discernible in slow love ballads such as “Sometimes It Snows in April,” “Slow Love,” “Scandalous,” “Pink Cashmere,” “Damn U,” “Empty Room,” “If I Was Your Girlfriend,” and “The Beautiful Ones.”
12. Rogers has suggested that to his peers Prince’s word choice might have felt uncommon to the point of obfuscation, questioning how many young inner-city kids in 1984 used the term “foolhardy” to describe their own feelings.
13. Rogers suggests that Wendy and Susannah Melvoin, who were from Los Angeles and born and raised within the entertainment industry, arguably comprised some of the daisies in Prince’s yard.
14. See the Complete Vocal Institute site for technical descriptions of vocality: <https://cvtresearch.com/description-and-sound-of-creak-creaking/> (accessed 6 June 2019).
15. This aspect of performance is explored in more detail in an earlier study of the song “Chelsea Rodgers,” where the findings suggest that “Prince’s voice elicits desire through the gymnastics of musical virtuosity. Virtuosity, in his case, is a configuration of ideas that establishes selfhood” (Hawkins, “Chelsea” 345).
16. Cf. Hawkins and Niblock for an interdisciplinary study of the making of this pop-music phenomenon and the iconic status Prince held. Specifically, attention is drawn to what made his music so meaningful in his fans’ lives.
17. For a discussion of Prince’s attraction to vocal “role-playing,” see Danielsen’s analysis of the album *Diamonds and Pearls* (“His Name”).
18. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l7vRSu\\_wsNc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l7vRSu_wsNc). Accessed 22 August 2019.
19. In Rogers’s view, the line “Thunder drowns out what the lightning sees” is one of his best ever. The line inspired the name of the band the Lightning Seeds, who misunderstood the words.
20. See, for example, Danielsen, *Presence and Pleasure*.
21. Bootsy Collins was an expert in this exercise when he played with the James Brown band. All of his strong beats were either “muted” by preceding small notes or rolled out after the beat in sequences of sixteenths. For analysis, see, Danielsen, *Presence and Pleasure* 79–80.
22. Translated from Norwegian by the authors: “Vi var en del av noe veldig intenst sammen alle tre, fikk tillit og ansvar til å gjøre ferdig ting for ham, han stolte på ørene våre.”
23. Translated from Norwegian by the authors: “Vi kom fra gode musikerfamilier i Los Angeles og tok med oss alle “high brow” impulsene derfra. Prince måtte skrive bedre låter, og vi anmodet ham om å lytte til komponister som Ives, Hindemith, Stravinskij, vi fikk ham inn i dypere og mørkere jazz, jeg ga ham Bowies “Berlin-trilogi.””
24. According to Rogers, Eric Leeds was a major contributor during the *Parade* and *Sign o’ the Times* albums.
25. For a typical example of a positive assessment of the change in Prince’s musical style from *Purple Rain* to *Around the World in a Day*, see; Light.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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