Parade: A La Recherche De Nouveaux Sons

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ABSTRACT: By 1986, the Prince-pioneered Minneapolis sound had become increasingly coopted by copycat musicians and was a familiar presence on US radio. Yet Prince had already shifted focus, relocating the sonic home of his eighth release to Continental Europe; arguably creating his most diverse album in the process. This paper explores how *Parade* was the first Prince record to consciously embrace a more international fan base. I discuss how the use of French language and ambience throughout the album draw on the "prestige" associated with the Gallic lifestyle, adding a cosmopolitan flavor that helped *Parade* connect with European audiences. I argue that Prince capitalized on the cultural currency of France and its language to create a more elevated style of music and purposely distance himself from the Minneapolis sound. The paper contextualizes *Parade* against the musical backdrop of 1986 and considers the subsequent critical responses of the music press and biographers. I contend that the album was part of a strategic move to reach beyond traditional US notions of "rock and roll" stardom and establish himself as a truly global performer. In achieving this goal, Prince willingly sacrificed some of his American fan base, yet secured his credentials as a bona fide international artist in return. *Parade* marks a pivotal point in Prince's career, ultimately shaping his future output and forever altering how the world viewed him and his music.

HOW CAN I STAND TO STAY WHERE I AM? THE RELOCATION OF PRINCE'S SOUND

In March 1986 Warner Music unveiled a billboard in downtown Minneapolis to promote the forthcoming release of Prince's latest album (Ro, 2011, p. 148). Yet the sound of his eighth studio album was located a long way from the US Midwest.

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Parade's sonic home could be found over 4,500 miles away, in the cafes and jazz clubs of the Côte d'Azur. The album represents both a geographical and musical shift away from the city and the sound that had nurtured his rise to fame. As Mick Wall (2016) suggests, *Parade* demonstrates "just how far and wide his listening habits went—and how uninhibited he was about incorporating all spheres of artistic influence into his work" (p. 114).

By the time Prince had released *Controversy*, his fourth album, the "new wave-funk hybrid" of the Minneapolis sound was, according to Harrison (2016), "beginning to set the agenda of Black music rather than following it." Long-serving Prince keyboardist Matt Fink was asked for his definition of the genre:

> The Minneapolis sound is really a sort of an amalgam and influence of rock, funk, punk and R&B pop. It's like all of those things fusing and Prince was really redefining all of those genres and mixing and matching them together. His influence was James Brown and some of the pop music greats of the 60's and 70's era. He was mixing funk and rock and the pop music altogether. When you listen to the band The Time for instance, that he produced and wrote a lot of the material for, I would say that is really a definitive fusion of funk and rock right there. And of course, the work that he did with The Revolution is also in that same vein—but they both sounded different from one another. They had a completely kind of different vibe about it. So, it was very eclectic. (Interview by Casey Rain & Sam Coley, February 2011)

Despite the success of the Minneapolis sound, Prince had essentially abandoned its overly familiar constraints by the mid-80s. The motivation to distance himself from the sound he had designed and developed may have stemmed from the number of imitators it was beginning to generate (Matos, 2004, p. 55). Artists who duplicated the Minneapolis sound, such as Lovergirl, The Jets, Ready for the World, Jody Watley, Sly Fox, and Jermaine Stewart, among others, had been rewarded with regular airplay and chart placings. *Billboard* magazine's Brian Chin (1987) referred to "Prince-clone electronics," while Jon Pareles, writing in the *Pop and Jazz Guide* of the *New York Times*, described Janet Jackson's 1986 album *Control* as being "unmistakably influenced by Prince" and a "pure example of the Minneapolis sound" (Chin, 1987, p. 45; Pareles, 1986, p. 23). No surprise there as Jackson's album was produced in Minneapolis by Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis, two former members of the Prince-assembled band The Time. Regardless of its lineage, *Control* became a certified hit, selling over 10 million copies worldwide (Jones, 2002). The album was released just two months before *Parade*, so it was prescient that Prince had already headed in a new musical direction, thereby avoiding any awkward comparisons. Nevertheless, Jason Draper (2016) sees a degree of irony in *Parade* being kept off the number one placing in the US album charts by *Control*, as Prince had earlier sacked Jam and Lewis (p. 71).

By 1986 the Minneapolis sound had come to define the city's musical output. The increasingly ubiquitous use of the "sound" and its monetarization incensed detractors, such as The Time's original guitarist Jesse Johnson. An article by Simon Witter (1986), provocatively titled "Prince Is an Asshole," was published in the UK's *New Musical Express* (*NME*) in November 1986. Witter (1986) interviewed Johnson, who stated: "The Minneapolis 'sound' thing is bullshit. It's just a load of bands who've moved here and are trying to sound like *Dirty Mind* and the early Time albums. The record companies still fall for it, but the whole point of the Time or Prince was that we went against the grain" (p. 11).

Prince's timely break from the relative safety (and guaranteed sales) associated with the sound he had pioneered can be viewed as an expression of musical confidence, revealing his growing maturity as a composer and collaborator. Per Nilsen (2004) believes *Parade* represents "a quantum leap from the uniform Minneapolis sound of his previous albums" (p. 230). The electric guitar, which Matt Carcieri (2004) claims "had defined his success," was mostly discarded (p. 40). In its place, *Parade* showcased the orchestrations of Clare Fischer, alongside nuanced jazz arrangements and unembellished instrumentation. Michaelangelo Matos (2004) refers to the elaborate "cross-cutting" of musical styles featured on the album, which "sweetens and adds dissonance to the songs" (p. 54). This use of dissonance in a mid-80s pop album was, at the time, a bold move. Prince deliberately chose not to capitalize on past successes by replicating the sound of *Purple Rain*. Instead, he developed more challenging approaches to writing and recording, which resulted in some of his most innovative releases. *Around the World in a Day* and *Parade* are, in Matt Thorne's (2012) opinion, "two of his richest (and most adventurous) productions," exemplifying his willingness to step away from "the sound that had sustained him until this point" (p. 118).

I questioned Fink about whether he saw *Parade* as an extension of the Minneapolis sound, or a move in a completely different direction:

> I think that *Parade* is a fusion of the influences that Prince had. He was creating an original style all of his own, still continuing forward to grow as an artist. Defining it as the Minneapolis sound, I don't know if that works or not, but you could say it's a continuation of his influences and his ability to fuse his influences into something that sounds original. (Interview by Casey Rain & Sam Coley, February 2011)

It was during the mid-80s that Prince finally veered away from the Minneapolis sound (Thorne, 2012, p. 118). He continuously developed his approach to recording in the studio, discarding tried and trusted techniques and collaborating with fellow musicians to explore new compositional possibilities. This determination to

challenge both himself and his audience ultimately paid off. Although *Around the World in a Day* failed to match the heights of *Purple Rain*'s enormous success, it still managed to reach the top of the US *Billboard* charts on June 1, 1985, where it stayed for three weeks. Although initial sales were strong in the UK, British music critics were unconvinced by *Around the World in a Day*'s unashamedly 60s' influences, claiming it unduly copied the Beatles *Sgt. Pepper* album (Nilsen, 2004, p. 205). At the time of *Parade*'s release, Barney Hoskyns (1986) believed *Around the World in a Day* was a better record, as it supposedly had three "good songs," which was "about three more than *Parade* has" (p. 27).

Despite these criticisms, *Around the World in a Day* was still considered a success. Its singles, including "Raspberry Beret" and "Pop Life," helped consolidate Prince's reputation; winning new audiences while satisfying the expectations of his existing fan base. By the end of 1985, Nilsen (2004) claims Prince had elevated himself to "superstar status of the first magnitude" (p. 216). As Wall (2016) suggests, had Prince decided to tour that summer, it would "most likely have been the highest-grossing tour of the year" (p. 110). Instead, he returned to the recording studio and continued to develop his second major motion picture project, *Under the Cherry Moon*.

In a radio interview from the period, Prince remarked that he saw no difference between making a movie and making an album: "People have tried to tell me contrary to that, but I strive for perfection and sometimes I'm a little bull-headed in my ways. Hopefully people understand that there's just a lot on my mind and I try to stay focused on one particular thing. I try not to hurt nobody in the process" ("The Electrifying Mojo," n.d.). Yet, the challenge of starring and directing the film, while also being responsible for the soundtrack, would ultimately place him under a great deal of pressure.

On paper, the concept for *Under the Cherry Moon* had all the ingredients to work. Michael Ballhaus, a regular Martin Scorsese collaborator, was the cinematographer, while Richard Sylbert, another experienced film professional with an impressive track record, was the film's production designer. Carcieri (2004) believes the film was intended to be a "study in haute couture" that would secure Prince's status as a serious filmmaker (p. 39). Instead, it failed miserably at the box office as a result of what Wall (2016) calls "amateurish acting" and "less than expert directing from Prince himself" (p. 111). The film opened to negative reviews in the UK in August 1986, with reports that audiences were "demanding their money back" (Hawkins & Niblock, 2012, p. 70). Nilsen (2004) diplomatically states the acting, dialogue, and plot "leave a lot to be desired" (p. 245). Carcieri (2004) is more forthright in his condemnation, calling *Under the Cherry Moon* "an embarrassing display of narcissism" (p. 41).

In its defense, the film is cinematically beautiful and makes the most of its Riviera setting. Prince had originally wanted Madonna to costar as the character Mary Sharon, a French heiress, but the role eventually went to newcomer Kristin Scott Thomas. Although Scott Thomas went on to become a highly respected actor, her debut performance in *Under the Cherry Moon* was nominated for two Golden Raspberry Awards, a mock annual ceremony for dismal films, in the Worst Supporting Actress and Worst New Star categories. The film was ultimately "honored" with a total of eight "Razzies." Nevertheless, Scott Thomas recalled the filming experience as being "absolutely extraordinary, because this is at the time when Prince was really at the height of his career" (BBC, 2003). In the BBC's long-running *Desert Island Disc* radio series, Scott Thomas named "Girls and Boys" among her eight all-time favorite songs. Keyboardist Matt Fink has similarly fond memories of the time he spent in southern France during the filming of *Under the Cherry Moon*.

> What originally was supposed to be maybe 10 days out there turned into a full month. It was really a blast to be in the South of France and just hanging out because there was quite a bit of downtime. Other than the working aspect, we all got our work done and did our video and photo shoots and all that stuff and watched the filming of the movie. But at the same time, it gave us all an opportunity to see the countryside, explore the area, and just have a nice time. It was like a paid vacation in a lot of ways. I thought [it] was really nice of him to do that. We had a great time. We hung out and partied a lot. (Interview by Casey Rain & Sam Coley, February 2011)

As Hawkins and Niblock (2012) observe, the film does not feature "conventional on-stage rock performances" (p. 70). This may have been a key reason why *Under the Cherry Moon* did not reach the same level of success as *Purple Rain*. Whereas Prince's first film often showed him in concert alongside The Revolution, he is only briefly seen playing the piano in *Under the Cherry Moon*. The word "flop" is regularly used to describe the film, which only managed to earn $10 million in box office revenue; *Purple Rain* made almost 20 times more (Wall, 2016, p. 112). Matos (2004) refers to the film as "the first unmitigated disaster of Princes career" (p. 53). Regardless of the film's perceived weaknesses, UK musician and Prince fan Casey Rain praises the boldness of *Under the Cherry Moon* and its accompanying album:

> I don't understand why it got slated as much as it did at the time. I think that people were expecting something in the vein as *Purple Rain*. I don't think that they should have had those kind of expectations, because Prince has never done the same thing twice. It was a change in style and a change in sound. It was

> very brave of him to walk away from the sounds of albums like *Purple Rain*. He was very insistent that he wasn't going to make any stylistic follow up. He could have easily done that and sold a ton of records again. But he chose to be more challenging. To challenge his audience. Many of them didn't get it, but in retrospect it was absolutely the right thing for him to do. (Interview by Sam Coley, March 2011)

Although *Parade* was intended to complement the film, it was not specifically marketed as a soundtrack album (Wall, 2016, p. 112). For most listeners, who never saw the film, the record stands alone without requiring any prior knowledge of *Under the Cherry Moon*'s characters or plot. In the following section I discuss the recording of *Parade* and the musicians involved in its production. I contextualize the album among contemporary releases of the time and consider the responses of the world's music press.

NEW POSITION: THE RECORDING OF *PARADE* AND CRITICAL RESPONSES

On the 17th of April 1985, shortly after the end of the *Purple Rain* tour and just days before the release of *Around the World in a Day*, Prince commandeered Studio 3 at Sunset Sound in Los Angeles to begin work on what would become *Parade* (Nilsen, 2004, p. 65). Much of the album was recorded during an intense three-week period, unlike his earlier albums, which had traditionally taken longer to develop. This suggests a clear sense of purpose for the album, which demanded lengthy recording sessions that extended late into the night and early morning (Robson, 2010, p. 28). As he had not yet established his Paisley Park studios in Chanhassen, Minnesota, Prince made himself more comfortable by having a bed installed in the studio with, predictably, purple sheets and a purple bedspread (Nilsen, 2004, p. 217).

Parade utilized musicians from The Revolution, including Mark Brown (also known as Brown Mark), Matt Fink, Wendy & Lisa, Bobby Z, and Sheila E. Although many of these musicians were associated with his earlier Minneapolis sound, each was capable and willing to follow Prince in a new musical direction. *Parade* represents a considerably different approach to writing and recording, which saw him adopting classical textures within his work (Carcieri, 2004, p. 40). This can be heard in the unique orchestral arrangements of Clare Fischer, which added a distinctive sophistication to the album. Thorne (2012) believes Fischer often played an important role in Prince's mid-1980s' music (p. 27). He had previously worked with Sergio Mendes, the Jacksons, and Paul McCartney, among others, and first began collaborating with Prince on The Family's debut album, a side project from

1985 (Matos, 2004, p. 54). Prince was sufficiently impressed with the results to invite Fischer to work on *Parade*. In an interview, his son Brent Fischer commented on certain similarities between his father and Prince, drawing parallels with their ability to play several instruments:

> One of the things that sets Prince apart from other musicians is the fact that he is an extreme multi-instrumentalist, which is similar to what Clare Fisher is. My father learnt how to play almost every single orchestral instrument as he was growing up. Prince did a similar thing as he was growing up, so I have been told. Anytime he wanted to put something down in the studio and he wasn't enjoying the way other musicians were doing it, he picked up the instrument himself and figured out the exact sound that he wanted out of that instrument. That's one of the things that sets Prince apart from other musicians. The other part is how he works as an artist, giving Clare Fisher complete artistic freedom for his orchestral arrangements. My father has said time and again over the years… that Prince is a very smart man for allowing him complete artistic freedom with his orchestral arrangements. (Interview by Casey Rain, March 2011)

Nilsen (2004) believes Fischer's "evocative, 'cinematic' orchestral backings" are one of *Parade*'s indispensable musical elements (p. 231). However, according to Thorne (2012), Prince collaborator Lisa Coleman felt a degree of jealously when Fischer was asked to compose the album's string arrangements, as this was a role she had previously been responsible for (p. 27). Fischer's talents are brought to the fore on "Venus De Milo," the romantic instrumental that closes side one of *Parade*. The track, written years earlier, was recorded in Monterey Sound Studios in California and is notable as being the first purely instrumental track included on a Prince album.

Although *Parade* moved Prince into new musical territory, the album's opening song, "Christopher Tracy's Parade," still bears the stylistic hallmarks of his previous record. The track, described by Ro (2011) as a "noisy, bustling, string-laden work," can be seen as a bridge between the two albums, leading the audience from the psychedelic mood of *Around the World in a Day* into the more jazz-influenced sounds of *Parade* (p. 142). "Christopher Tracy's Parade," which credits Prince's father as co-composer, then segues into the following two tracks, "New Position" and "I Wonder U," to form an extended opening to the record. Its rich melodies, pumping brass, and swirling production style give "Christopher Tracy's Parade" an unmistakably 1960s' flavor. The overall effect, according to Hoskyns (1986), is a "Disneyland soundscape" that provides "a follow-through from the ambience of *Paisley Park*." Nevertheless, *Parade* mostly avoided the rock influence of Prince's past releases and consciously replaced the Minneapolis sound with an increased fondness for jazz and new levels of musical complexity.

According to Draper (2016), Prince's move toward jazz was influenced by saxophonist Eric Leeds, a former member of The Family who worked with Prince on a range of projects between 1985 and 2003 (p. 63). *Parade* is also significant as the album on which Prince returned to the sound of live drums, instead of relying on programmed, electronic beats. The recording of *Parade* began with Prince laying down his own live drum tracks and then gradually building on them with the addition of guitar, keyboards, and voices (Robson, 2010, p. 33). There is a sense of exploration within the album, which Nilsen (2004) sees as "further proof that Prince was more concerned with musical growth than repeating past successes" (p. 230). I asked Dr. Simon Barber, a musician who studies the craft of song writing, to comment on the amount of experimentation within *Parade*:

> There's a real attempt by Prince to grow as a composer on this record. That's basically what's happening I think with that album. He's got the time, he's got the budget, he's got the success to be able to really experiment in the studio. He's trying out new sounds, new instruments and moving away from the traditional things that's he relied on. So, with a track like *I Wonder U,* you might get the traditional James Brown style funk guitar but within that he's layering all kinds of other instrumentation. (Interview by Sam Coley, March 2011)

The first configuration of *Parade* was completed on May 1, 1985 and initially included the songs "All My Dreams" and "Old Friends for Sale," besides the actual tracks featured on the final album. At this stage, the song "Christopher Tracy's Parade" was still called "Little Girl Wendy's Parade" (Nilsen, 2004, p. 235). After further revisions and last-minute additions, the final version of *Parade* was eventually released in the US on March 31, 1986. However, as with the critical response to *Around the World in a Day*, it was met with some trepidation from the music press. A review in the *NME* by Barney Hoskyns (1986) stated that *Parade* "doesn't work at all" and was "appallingly kitsch," concluding: "I find this record labored and trite and self-satisfied and won't be listening to it again" (p. 27). Wall (2016) suggests that criticisms of *Parade* stemmed from the decision to ignore "what Prince was supposed to be good at," as it did not feature enough "blistering guitar" or "badass funk" (p. 112). In Nilsen's (2004) view, this backlash was somewhat inevitable, as the music press had lavishly feted Prince for many years (pp. 213–214). It was during the mid-80s that unfavorable articles, which focused on his perceived eccentricities, became more common. Wall asserts that many reviewers at the time enjoyed "getting their hooks into an upstart maverick who no longer granted interviews" (p. 113). Prince's reluctance to speak with journalists had started to cause him difficulties, with fabricated stories being concocted by the press to fill the void (Nilsen, 2004, pp. 213–214). Rockwell (1986) views *Parade* as a direct response to

these criticisms, claiming its release was an attempt to "recoup ground lost by the negative publicity surrounding Prince personally" (p. 22).

Hawkins and Niblock (2012) observe that many critical analogies made about Prince are associated with earlier Black musicians, stating: "His overt referencing of white or other musicians is rarely if ever noted unless he performs a cover version or collaborates" (p. 166). This reliance on Black musical references is evident in Flynn's (2007) comparison of Prince's recorded output to the "Black rock" of Hendrix, the "Black funk" of James Brown, the "Black psychedelia" of George Clinton and Funkadelic, the androgynous "Black sexuality" of Rick James, the "Black consciousness" of Marvin Gaye and Sly Stone, and the "Black pop" of Michael Jackson: "what we had never seen before was all these things wrapped up in one individual who shifted between them in the space of a key change" (p. 94). Yet, Matos (2004) states that by the mid-80s Prince had alienated some of his Black fan base. Aside from himself and Mark Brown, The Revolution was entirely White, "and so was his music" (p. 33). During a rare MTV interview in 1985, a reporter asked Prince if he felt he had abandoned his Black fans by selling out to a White rock audience. In response, Prince recalled his listening tastes as a child: "I listened to all kinds of music when I was young… I always said that one day I would play all kinds of music and not be judged for the color of my skin but the quality of my work, and hopefully I will continue" (Robson, 2010, p. 33). British broadcaster Bobby Friction takes issue with the accusation that Prince was chasing a White audience in mid-80s:

> Why would you release *Parade* if you wanted a white audience? Why would you, after climbing to the summit of the world, (becoming) one of the biggest pop stars in the world by releasing *Purple Rain*—and then you do *Around the World in a Day*. Why would you come out with *Parade* if you wanted to keep your white audience? (Interview by Sam Coley, March 2011)

When assessing the various strengths and weaknesses of *Parade*, it is necessary to consider its context within the year it was released. As the album is now more than thirty years old, casual listeners may have become accustomed to its wide-ranging musical scope. However, when evaluated against the musical landscape of 1986, the album is a unique and somewhat jarring offering from a musician previously more associated within the "rock" genre. Rain commented on *Parade*'s sonic approach and its position within the Prince canon:

> *Parade* is right in the midpoint of the 80's, moving away from urban funk and into a more pop sound, with classical edges and jazz influences. It focuses on different kinds of musicianship and has a more European-centric feel, which

> obviously goes along with the movie *Under the Cherry Moon*. Overall, it's just a very different vibe from the albums that preceded it such as *1999*, *Purple Rain*, *Around the World in a Day*—all of those big albums. This was very much a change in sound. (Interview by Sam Coley, March 2011)

Assessing the relative superiority of one album over another can be a subjective and perhaps futile activity, nevertheless, Matos (2004) believes *Parade* to be "on a higher level to virtually anything else released in 1986 in terms of originality and style" (p. 54). While this assertion is open to debate, there is little doubt that Madonna's *True Blue* took center stage that year, becoming the biggest studio album of her career with sales totaling over 24 million copies (O'Brien, 2007, p. 181). It outsold Janet Jackson's *Control* and towered over *Parade*'s international sales of two million. Although the Latin instrumentation of "La Isla Bonita" adds a touch of internationalism to the album's production, *True Blue* is a more conventional pop-offering than *Parade*, with its title track demonstrating a particularly retro, 1950s' approach to song writing.

Rock albums released in 1986 included the Bon Jovi juggernaut *Slippery When Wet*, David Lee Roth's *Eat 'Em and Smile*, and Metallica's *Master of Puppets*, while electronic artists such as New Order, Depeche Mode, and Kraftwerk released albums that harnessed new synthesizer and sampling technologies. *Parade*, in contrast, was far subtler than many of its contemporaries, blending Fischer's orchestrations and acoustic arrangements with stripped down pop-funk (Wall, 2016, p. 113). The album's global perspective and use of language can be compared to Paul Simon's *Graceland*, released in late summer 1986. The record showcased Black South African musicians, such as the group Ladysmith Black Mambazo, who sang in Zulu. In the age of apartheid, Simon's critically lauded album was politically problematic for some audiences, as its collaborative approach contravened a United Nations Resolution that called for a cultural boycott of South Africa. This boycott was part of an international campaign to impose widespread sanctions against South Africa's racist regime, in an effort to bring an end its apartheid policies (Beaubien, 1982, p. 6). Prince's appropriation of French culture, complete with café-like ambience and stereotypical accordions, was clearly a less controversial proposition.

Carcieri (2004) contends that the single "Kiss" and its attendant success was responsible for rejuvenating Prince's public profile, stating the pulse of his career "would likely have flat-lined had he not given the world a 'Kiss'" (p. 42). Although this is questionable, the single's popularity certainly brought *Parade* to the attention of a wider audience. Wall (2016) refers to the song as one of the "most memorable and classically wonderful—not to mention most successful—hits in the Prince canon" (p. 112), while Matos (2004) memorably calls it "the greatest single Prince

or damn near anyone else has ever made, freeze-dried funk that defrosts in one mouth-watering drop at a time" (pp. 54–55).

"Kiss," the first single off the album, was released on February 5, 1986. Other singles from *Parade* included "Mountains," "Girls & Boys," and "Anotherloverholenyohead," but none came close to the success of "Kiss." The track's "tight, scratchy beat and sexy lyrics" helped it become Prince's third US number one, following the earlier success of "Doves Cry" and "Let's Go Crazy!" (Robson, 2010, p. 33). The UK's *New Musical Express* named it their single of the week, with writer Andy Gill (1986) calling "Kiss" "brilliant" and acknowledging its references to earlier artists: "The song calls all the way back to Sly Stone's deconstructions, a sparse, stinging and—yes!—sly funk workout in which the spaces say as much as the paces" (p. 17). Even Hoskyns (1986) was impressed by "Kiss," claiming it stood alone among an album of "overdone semi-ideas" (p. 27). However, the track was not always that well received. Ro (2011) claims "Kiss" was initially hated by an A&R executive at Warner Music, who complained "there's no bass and it sounds like a demo" (p. 143).

In its earliest guise, "Kiss" was indeed a short acoustic demo, gifted by Prince to his protégés, the funk combo Mazarati. The band was the project of Mark Brown from The Revolution, who were signed to Prince's Paisley Park label. It could be argued that Mazarati represents the purest distillation of the Minneapolis sound, and the band's work on "Kiss" is unmistakable. The demo was given a radical overhaul by producer David Z (the brother of The Revolution's Bobby Z), Mazarati, and Mark Brown, who stayed up one night in an attempt to make it into a fully fledged pop song for their debut album. They recorded most of the instrumentation heard in the final version, with Mazariti's singer Casey Terry on lead vocals and the rest of the band on backing vocals. When Prince heard their work the following day he decided to take the song back (Robson, 2010, p. 33). He then erased some of the bass parts and re-sang the lead vocal an octave higher in falsetto. However, most of the final track comes from Mazarati's reworking of the original demo, with the band's backing vocals left intact.

Hawkins and Niblock suggest that the track's "stripped down and simple" sound is a complete contrast to the "multi-layered excess and broodiness" of *Purple Rain* (Hawkins & Niblock, 2012, p. 28). Prince's guitar break in the chorus was a further innovation, and *Kiss* went on to win a Grammy award for Best R&B performance. Its popularity was enhanced by a striking video, which featured The Revolution's Wendy Melvoin playing guitar while Prince and a veiled Monique Manning danced erotically against a purple backdrop. Of all the tracks on *Parade*, "Kiss" perhaps comes closest to the Minneapolis sound. As a result, it is an incongruous inclusion that stands out, due to its different production style and overall tone. However, the minimalistic sound of "Kiss" helped to make it one of the most

acclaimed singles of all-time, earning it placings on numerous "Best of" lists, including those compiled by *NME* and *Rolling Stone*.

Yet, despite the success of its lead single, *Parade* was ultimately only considered to be a modest hit in the UK and US (Robson, 2010, p. 33). Although many American and British critics saw the album as being too reliant on the psychedelic sound of *Around the World in a Day*, the European music press was more responsive; praising *Parade* as "a work of art" (Ro, 2011, p. 144). Its chanson arrangements and worldly sense of style ensured that *Parade* "meant more to Continental Europe than to America" (Matos, 2004, p. 53). Having assessed the recording of the album, alongside critical responses to its release, I now investigate *Parade*'s second language. The prominent use of French throughout the album is one of its defining features, connoting a glamorous international sense of style. I explore how the French language is employed within *Parade* and consider the meanings its usage suggests to the listener.

VOUS ÊTES TRÈS BELLE: THE FRENCH LANGUAGE AS CULTURAL CURRENCY

Prince's move toward a more global perspective is exemplified by *Parade*'s representation of French culture and language. It is arguable whether his first exposure to the French language came via his ancestry, given that all four of his grandparents were born in Louisiana (Smolenyak, 2017). Cajun French and Louisiana Creole were once widely spoken throughout the state, after variations of the language spread across the French colonies during the 17th and 18th centuries (Valdman, 1997, p. 3). Although Sexton (2000) states there has been a "rampant decline" in the everyday use of French in Louisiana, which started in the early 20th century, it is possible to surmise that Prince had encounters with the language through his grandparents (p. 24). Irrespective of how he came to be inspired by French culture, Prince's first recorded reference to the language can be heard on "It's Gonna Be Lonely," the last track on his eponymous 1979 album. The song's lyrics reveal the protagonist's fondness for the Parisian accent, which "gets me every time." By the mid-80s, Prince had taken up a secondary residence in Paris and was undoubtedly a Francophile. The instrumental B-side to "Mountains," *Parade*'s second single, was titled "Alexa de Paris"; indicating his affection for the French capital. The feeling was mutual. Durand (2002) believes France has a long history of "admiration for African American musicians," listing Prince among iconic Black artists such as Tina Turner, James Brown, Ray Charles, and Aretha Franklin (p. xiii). Prince's apartment was fittingly located in the 7th arrondissement of Paris, an area associated with the French aristocracy and upper classes. Prince used this residence

as a base for his latest cinematic project and to compose new music, which was often published under the name "Parisongs" (Carcieri, 2004, p. 39).

As *Parade* was developed as the soundtrack to *Under the Cherry Moon*, a film set in the south of France, it is no surprise that the record reflects the joie de vivre of the Riviera. The film and its characters are referenced in the album's opening track "Christopher Tracy's Parade," as well as the song "Under the Cherry Moon" and during "Sometimes It Snows in April." Yet Prince first displays his French linguistic skills on track five: "Girls and Boys." The song describes two lovers who "kiss on the steps of Versailles," and the phrase "Vous êtes très belle" (you are very beautiful) is a key lyric repeated throughout the track. Hoskyns (1986) describes "Girls and Boys" as an "adolescent 'Lady Marmalade'" and draws attention to the song's "saucy French bits" (p. 27). This "sauciness" was provided by Marie France, Prince's wardrobe manager, who was summoned to perform her distinctive French monologue in the middle of the night. At the time she was already a trusted collaborator, having designed costumes for *Purple Rain* and various Prince music videos, as well as *Under the Cherry Moon* ("Marie France," n.d.). Her spoken word section, which proposes a sexual encounter, appears during the song's instrumental breakdown and is described by Rockwell as "moaning French female love-talk" (1986, p. 22). According to Fumaroli (2011), English prevails as a "vernacular technological language," whereas French has an unmistakable sense of style that "gives it a universal prestige" (p. xxvii). "Girls and Boys" deploys this sociolinguistic "prestige" to maximum effect. The inclusion of Marie France plays to the erotic typecast of the French woman as a "svelte Euro goddess in high heels" and is perhaps the album's most conspicuous use of the French language (Ollivier, 2004, p. xi). Although her appearance could easily have become an awkward cliché, it is in fact an exuberant addition to the album, which works effectively within the wider context of both *Parade* and the film *Under the Cherry Moon.*

The use of the French language underscores *Parade*'s stylish pretentions, suggesting a high sophistication previously unheard in Prince's recorded output. The album reinforces the stereotype that the French are, as Sciolino (2011) notes, "devoted to the pursuit of pleasure and the need to be artfully exquisite, witty, and sensuous" (p. 7). Although the French language is associated with the humanitarianism of the enlightenment (Fumaroli, 2011, pp. xxvi), it is more commonly recognized as the unofficial language of culture, refinement, and beauty (Battye, Hintze, & Rowlett, 2011, p. 34). However, this was not always the case. In the 16th century, France was not considered to be a particularly sophisticated or elegant country. Nevertheless, by the early 18th century, DeJean (2003) claims it acquired a "sort of monopoly on culture, style, and luxury living, a position that it has occupied ever since" (p. 3).

Battye et al. (2011) believe the French language maintains global diversity as a symbol of "cultural and linguistic independence" from the English-speaking world (p. 49). Yet this individualism has arguably played a part in French pop music's inability to reach a global audience. Rosen (2001) describes the relationship between French and American pop music as being a mostly a one-way transaction, with French efforts viewed as "comically inept," hampered by "stereotypes and incomprehension." By using French as a recurring theme throughout *Parade*, Prince single-handedly helped to redress this imbalance. The album is a rare example of the French language being heard within the context of US popular music. French artists had previously not been well-received in the United States, where the hegemonic status of the English language had limited the appeal of their music. Even established, relatively well-known French musicians such as Charles Aznavour and Maurice Chevalier failed to effectively cross over. The most popular tracks by these artists were sung in English, yet they remained novelty caricatures in the US, while Serge Gainsbourg was only recognized as a cult artist.

The connection between French and American music is usually seen through the lens of cultural imperialism, demonstrated by the pronounced influence of US artists on popular French music. However, Tinker (2005) suggests a more dialogical musical relationship between the two countries, referencing the 1920s as a period when Paris was the "center of a thriving jazz scene" (p. 850). During this time the city became an emblem of the "Jazz Age," characterized by its openness toward Black culture and jazz music (Archer-Straw, 2000, p. 18). In the early 20th century, many Black American entertainers toured and eventually remained in Europe, where they found race relations to be less strained than in the US. This flow of expatriates increased during the 1920's when the explosion of jazz music in Paris, coupled with its relaxed social climate, made the city a natural home for African American musicians (Shack, 2001, p. 9). In later years, France remained loyal to African American music and was quick to embrace blues, soul, funk, and, more recently, hip-hop (Durand, 2002, p. xiii).

The film *Under the Cherry Moon* draws heavily on the Jazz Age for its inspiration, reflecting its look, sound, and general sense of decadence. It has an almost nostalgic tone, with stylized "flapper" costumes and hairstyles harking back to Paris in the 1920s, when the city was infatuated with Black US culture. Even the poster for the film, and its subsequent VHS/DVD release, uses an Art Deco style, first popularized in the 1920s. The decision to release *Under the Cherry Moon* in black and white is another acknowledgement of a bygone era and, according to Carcieri (2004), was an attempt to create a "sweeping classic, a vintage 1940s style romance" (p. 39). The video to "Girls and Boys," the album's fourth UK single (although not released in North America) was filmed at the same time as the film and similarly

captures the stylish extravagance of the 1920s Jazz Age in old-fashioned black and white.

For centuries Paris has been a destination known for its elegance, luxury, and sophistication (DeJean, 2003, p. 3). However, Prince chose not to shoot his second film amid the city's familiar landmarks. Perhaps he found the cinematic cliché of a Parisian love story too conventional. Instead, *Under the Cherry Moon* was set against the sunny backdrop of Nice, on the French Riviera. This location is best represented on track nine, "Do You Lie?," which begins with a child's voice saying, "Les enfants qui mentent ne vont pas au paradis" (Children who lie don't go to heaven), followed by a male voice who briefly replies, "OK, merci." The song itself has a distinctly French flavor as well, featuring an instrument commonly associated with the country: the accordion. "Do You Lie?" is a convincing jazz pastiche, which instantly evokes images of southern France in the listener's imagination. Understated and idiosyncratic, "Do U Lie?" has a decidedly Mediterranean feel, accentuated by the use of the aforementioned accordion. Hoskyns (1986) refers to the song as a "jazzy smooch," which seems to be a fitting description of the track's retro-styled, romantic sound (p. 27). Clever vocal arrangements make "Do U Lie?" an instantly accessible track: few Prince songs are as catchy. The instrumentation suggests a sunny afternoon in a French café, with drums lightly brushed by Jonathan Melvoin, the brother of Wendy. Although Thorne (2012) calls the track "musically charming," he ultimately dismisses it as an "inconsequential nursery rhythm" (p. 138). Matos (2004) is less damning, suggesting that ballads, such as "Do U Lie?," have an ethereal quality, which is entirely in keeping with "the French locale of *Under the Cherry Moon*" (p. 55). Barber also refers to the track's relaxed, European ambience:

> "Do U Lie?" has that really lazy, jazzy feel. You can almost imagine that you're in the South of France somewhere, sitting outside a café. You've got the accordion, you've got that very loose vocal style and the drums just washing around in the background. I think that really speaks to the vibe of the whole project. You can tell he was really consumed with that whole European approach to his music. And of course, *Parade* was the first album where the European sales eclipsed his sales in the US. (Interview by Sam Coley, March 2011)

The use of the French language within *Parade* provides an exotic, stylish backdrop to the album, reinforcing the idea that the French lifestyle is a luxurious and sophisticated existence (Williams, 2004, p. 13). This salute to French culture may have helped *Parade* find a warmer reception in Europe than it did in the rest of the world (Thorne, 2012, p. 137). The album is currently certified as platinum in France, with sales over 300,000 ("Parade," n.d.). In the following section I draw

my final conclusions, consider *Parade*'s impact on The Revolution, and assess the album's status within Prince's back catalogue.

ALL GOOD THINGS, THEY SAY, NEVER LAST: THE LEGACY OF *PARADE*

Even by Prince's prodigious standards, 1986 was a busy period. Nilsen (2004) describes Prince's pace of recording throughout the year as being "ferocious" (p. 254). Along with a film, a new album, accompanying singles, and an international tour, it was also the year that "Manic Monday," The Bangles first international hit, reached number two in both the UK and US charts. Prince originally wrote the song in 1984 for Apollonia 6, before offering it to The Bangles two years later. "Manic Monday" was written under the pseudonym "Christopher," a reference to the lead character from *Under the Cherry Moon*. In April 1986, Prince was listed in the *Billboard* Hot 100 chart as the writer of both the number one single, "Kiss," and the number two single, "Manic Monday." *Billboard* referred to this feat as a rare occurrence that placed him among the likes of Elvis Presley and Lennon and McCartney (Anderson, 2016).

Following the release of *Parade*, Prince began a series of live shows known as the *Hit and Run* tour, with a series of US dates, before moving on to Europe and finally Japan. In early August Prince played two sold-out shows at Madison Square Garden. *Billboard* magazine writer Nelson George (1986) saw the opening night as a response to recent press criticisms, claiming Prince "shut up his attackers with a brilliant performance," which lasted two and a half hours (p. 74). Just over a week later, the tour arrived in the UK. Martin's (1986) review of the Wembley Arena concert describes the show as a "lavish celebration and tribute to Black culture, to those who dared break and cross barriers, to explicit beauty and sensuality and to his own career, which has used all those traits" (p. 46). Despite the tour's critical acclaim, difficulties between Prince and The Revolution were beginning to come to a head. Lighting designer LeRoy Bennett (2013), who first worked with Prince on the *Dirty Mind* tour in 1981, noted that members of The Revolution were becoming unhappy: "It was kind of us and them basically.… He'd started to separate himself out. I think that became very frustrating for everybody" (p. 28). Vocalist Susannah Melvoin (2013) recalled that during the tour "something was shifting in Prince" and, as a result, his increased isolation had become "uncomfortable" (p. 27). In September 1986, this unease manifested itself during the tour's last show in Yokohama, when Prince, in Hendrix fashion, uncharacteristically smashed his guitar on stage. Shortly afterward he effectively ended The Revolution by firing Wendy & Lisa and replacing Bobby Z with Sheila E.

Prince's growing estrangement from The Revolution had begun to emerge during the recording of *Parade*. Draper (2016) considers "Mountains," the opening track of side two, to be the only truly collaborative track on the album, which put The Revolution in the "odd position of being asked to contribute to a project that they were generally being kept at arm's length from" (p. 70). The gradual demise of the band is somewhat captured in the restrained, mournful ballad that brings *Parade* to its conclusion. "Sometimes It Snows in April" features only Prince on lead vocals, Wendy Melvoin on guitar, and Lisa Coleman on piano. There is a wistful sadness to the song, intensified by its status as the last album track that Prince ever recorded with The Revolution. Thorne (2012) declares it to be "one of Prince's finest achievements" (p. 138), while Matos (2004) bluntly describes it as "melodramatic bullshit" (p. 55). Recorded in just one take, "Sometimes It Snows in April" is impressively raw. The sounds of fingers on strings and the unembellished nature of its production give the song an added sense of authenticity. The track, cowritten by Wendy & Lisa, has a straightforward structure that is complimented by the unadorned sound of voice, acoustic guitar, and piano. This unfussy arrangement could not have been further from Prince's earlier Minneapolis sound, yet the song's simplicity provides a fitting coda to his association with The Revolution.

Prince's response to the difficulties he was facing at the time was to "strike back with more music than ever" (Nilsen, 2004, p. 254). He recorded three albums, which he then discarded, reshaping the material into the *Crystal Ball* album, which was eventually released in 1998. It was at this point that problems with his record label began to appear for the first time in Prince's career, when Warner Music refused to release what they saw as an overabundance of material. Eventually, a compromise was reached when a two-disc follow up to *Parade* was released in March 1987 (Robson, 2010, pp. 35–36). The album, *Sign o' the Times*, went on to receive the best reviews of Prince's career. To this day, many consider it to be his greatest work (Carcieri, 2004, p. 46). Draper (2016) believes *Parade* was an attempt to "harness new sounds that he wasn't familiar with," while its follow-up successfully managed to master them (p. 77). Yet *Sign o' the Times* would not have been possible without the innovation and experimentation demonstrated by his eighth album. *Sign o' the Times* peaked at number 6 in the US charts, which was two placings lower than *Parade*.

In conclusion, I maintain that *Parade* holds a unique and crucial position in the Prince canon. Although it was the final album released with The Revolution, it signified the start of a bold new direction on which *Sign o' the Times* continued to build. By moving further and further away from the comfortable confines of the Minneapolis sound, Prince freed himself to become one of the most skilled musicians of his era (Flynn, 2007, p. 94). *Parade* represents a renewed sense of

ambition, musical dexterity, and a desire to fuse the best of funk, jazz, pop, soul, and R&B into a new sound. According to the *Rolling Stone Album Guide* "no artist has swung as fluently from style to style" (Brackett & Hoard, 2004, p. 655). *Parade*'s blend of jazz and soul, with French influences, makes it a one-off, unlike any other record in Prince's back catalogue. Carcieri (2004) claims the album represents "a continental shift of change" (p. 40), while Draper (2016) acknowledges *Parade*'s unique position as "one of his densest records" (p. 64). The album is diverse in its subject matter, as well its musicality. Although tracks like "New Position," which promises to "do it to you like a big man should," present Prince's sexuality in a typically forthright manner, there are subtler songs of loss and meditations on religious themes. The lyrics to "Mountains," for example, employ Christian motifs that, according to Hawkins and Niblock (2012), connote "transcendence" and "Prince's immortality and ever-youthful body" (p. 71). Barber points to the track's ability to blend socially conscious lyrics with an infectious riff; thereby showcasing "Prince's real love of social issues and politics as well as funk" (Interview by Sam Coley, March 2011).

In an interview Brent Fisher spoke about the album's lasting legacy, suggesting his father's orchestral arrangements "added a timeless quality to the music that now can be enjoyed by future generations for decades to come" (Interview by Casey Rain, March 2011). Conversely, while Thorne agrees that the album is popular among Prince fans, he is more cautious of its lasting appeal. Although he claims the "inconsequential nature" of the album's lyrics are "part of *Parade*'s charm," he ultimately sees the album's legacy hampered by the "high content of essentially pretty filler" (Thorne, 2012, p. 137). Rain disagrees, claiming the album laid valuable groundwork for what was to follow.

> One of the most interesting things about *Parade* is the contrast between how the album was viewed at the time to the way that it's viewed now. It's almost universally regarded as a classic. If you go on any Prince forum you won't find many people who don't own the album, or who don't think that it's a masterpiece. It was absolutely the right move for him at the time in terms of the change of sound. He was on a creative tour de force at this point, which ultimately not only brought us *Parade,* but also a lot of the songs that ended up the following year on *Sign o' the Times*, also considered to be a masterpiece. (Interview by Sam Coley, March 2011)

Parade is the work of a supremely confident musician, looking beyond the confines of his native country and musical conventions to connect with a global audience. According to Matos (2004), *Parade* was the album that "announced Prince as a man of the world" (p. 54). I leave the final words to keyboardist Matt Fink:

> I feel that *Parade* still holds up really well as one of Prince's best albums. I'd say it's right up there with *Purple Rain* and maybe *Sign o' the Times*. All his records have great merits to them but *Parade* was just … a really great milestone for him. His music will hold up forever, much like the Beatles … because it's timeless, and just a really wonderful piece of work. Very creative. (Interview by Casey Rain & Sam Coley, February 2011)

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