

PRINCE LOVED MUSIC ON PHYSICAL MEDIA

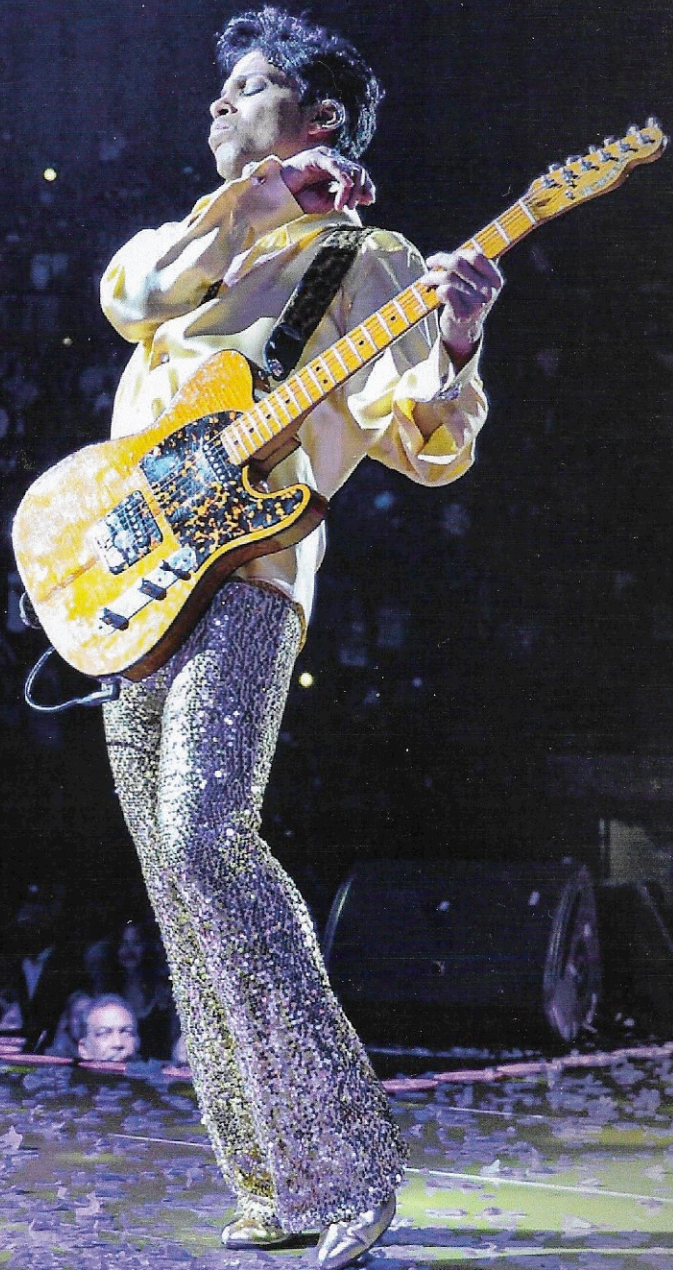
By Larry Jaffee

It's no accident we're holding Making Vinyl on what would have been Prince's 65th birthday here at the Loews Hotel in Minneapolis. We're a stone's throw from the landmark night club First Avenue featured in the 1984 *Purple Rain* film that made him a superstar.

Although Prince could have lived anywhere, he was most comfortable in Minneapolis, exemplified by his Paisley Park recording complex completed in 1998 in nearby Chanhassen, Minn.

I have no doubt that Prince would especially appreciate Making Vinyl for several reasons, and the rebirth of record manufacturing as a real industry, so important in his career. Firstly, when Prince finally won his independence as a recording artist in the late 1990s through his own NPG label, he wasted no time tapping the services of local vendors, including Copycats Media (www.copycatsmedia.com), our Making Vinyl Hometown Sponsor. (Copycats is arranging tours to the new pressing plant and its CD factory at the conference conclusion on Day Two at 1:00pm)

Concert photo courtesy of The Prince Estate, taken by Kevin Masur



"We manufactured millions of CDs for Prince over the years," explains Connie Comeau, COO of Copycats parent company The ADS Group. Copycats pressed Prince's *HITNRUN Phase 2* CD for NPG Records, a few months prior to his untimely passing on April 21, 2016. "We started manufacturing the end of January, turning packaged CDs in 72 hours."

In 2003, Copycats facilitated the manufacturing and packaging of Prince's first live album, the CD boxed set, *One Night Alone*. After receiving the masters from his production company, Copycats pre-flighted the design and orchestrated all the printing for the inserts, tray cards and booklet.

With different components produced at a variety of manufacturers, it all came back to Copycats for assembly, packaging and fulfillment of direct-to-consumer mail orders of the boxed set, which is how I acquired my copy, among the 62,000 units initially made. Demand within two months of release forced a second run of another 25,000 units.

Copycats also manufactured CDs for Paisley Park special events, typically handed out at the door or were mailed to fan club members. "Prince was always good to us," Comeau explains. "His team was amazing — he was amazing! We were excited that he started to open up Paisley Park for the public, a smaller venue, a bit more intimate. Unfortunately, I kept putting off going, next time, next time. It never happened. The man was amazing.... We mourn, Minnesota mourns and the world mourns. It was sad, very sad."

In 1998, the musician was then known as , an unpronounceable love symbol, or as the media called him "The Artist Formerly Known As Prince." He tapped Minneapolis-based Noiseland Industries, which has provided vinyl record and compact disc manufacturing since 1994, to put together the five-CD set *Crystal Ball*. Packaged in a custom-molded petrie dish, *Crystal Ball* was preceded two years earlier by The Artist's first post-Warner release, the aptly named three-CD *Emancipation*, which was distributed by Capitol Records. But for the next album, it was a total indie move.

Noiseland arranged for enough *Crystal Ball* CDs for 250,000 dishes.

Around this time, the musician and his entourage visited the Cinram factory in Huntsville, Ala., to see first-hand how CDs were made. The Artist reportedly asked technical questions such as yields. As workers learned he was in the building, pandemonium broke out, reminiscent of Beatlemania, with screaming women running in the halls.

Prince made sure a limited amount of *Crystal Ball* packages were sold at retail by Minneapolis-based Musicland/Sam Goody stores; and Eden Park, Minn.-based Best Buy stores.

More recently, one of *Crystal Ball's* five CDs, dubbed "The Truth," was issued by itself on vinyl for Record Store Day (RSD) in 2021.

Prince tweeted on the morning of April 16, 2016, to remind everyone it was RSD, and hinted he'd be at his favorite Minneapolis record store, Electric Fetus. About a half hour before the store closed, Prince showed up, buying six CDs, probably opting for the smaller format instead of vinyl because he was traveling on his bicycle. Prince's eclectic purchases on RSD 2016:

- 🌀 Stevie Wonder, *Talking Book*
- 🌀 Chambers Brothers, *The Time Has Come*
- 🌀 Joni Mitchell, *Hejira*
- 🌀 Swan Silvertones, *Inspirational Gospel Classics*
- 🌀 Missing Persons, *The Best Of Missing Persons*
- 🌀 Santana, *Santana IV*

After making his purchases, Prince tweeted again: "FETUS, THANX 4 THE TUNES! ROCKED STEVIE'S TALKING BOOK ALL THE WAY HOME! #RecordStore Day."

Prince died passed away five days later.

Prince shopping
at Electric Fetus

Courtesy Steve Smith

