

Two of the best motion-picture actors of their time, almost anyone might agree, Marlon Brando and Paul Newman, are approximate contemporaries (Brando is a few months older) and have been acting about the same length of time. (Newman began in community theater in Cleveland at 12.)

But by now the public evidence is that Brando regards acting with an indifference touched with loathing, contenting himself with the occasional highly paid turn in front of the camera, in roles that reveal a great deal of Brando's

effortless craft and not much of Brando.

Newman at 57 continues to do astonishing and dedicated work, and even in so heavily commercial and special-effected a film as "The Towering Inferno" in 1974, he performed with a no-nonsense, intensity appropriate to the collected works of Clifford Odets.

In last year's "Absence of Malice," which was very much a film of intricate plot by which issues of newspaper and governmental responsibility were exposed, Newman's low-key performance drew no special attention to itself, yet

THE VERDICT on NEWMAN

By CHARLES CHAMPLIN

the calm, guarded and credible presence of the character was crucial to the film's great success.

What seems confidently predictable about this year's rush of Christmas pictures is that "The Verdict" will be one of the very hot items and Newman's portrayal

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CALENDAR

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*I just can't believe all the things people say
Am I black or white, am I straight or gay?*

—From Prince's "Controversy"

Prince seemed to cringe as the door swung open at his West Hollywood hotel room. On stage, he's a boldly aggressive performer whose teasingly sensual stance challenges sexual and social norms in the classic pop-rock manner of Elvis Presley, Jimi Hendrix and David Bowie. His frequently X-rated themes include incest and masturbation. But away from the spotlight he can be painfully shy.

As an aide from Prince's management company ushered a reporter into the room, the young singer's doleful eyes suggested the sad resignation of a fugitive

cornered after a long chase. It was Prince's first interview in more than a year and—as it turned out—perhaps his only one for another year.

Prince, 23, had reluctantly agreed to do four interviews to promote his new Warner Bros. album. After this first interview, however, he canceled the others, rushing home to Minneapolis, where he feels most comfortable in the isolation of a recording studio. Using other musicians only on stage, Prince writes, produces, sings and plays all the instruments on his albums. He doesn't even permit an engineer in the studio with him.

Sitting on the floor in the semidark hotel room, Prince was

The Renegade Prince

By ROBERT HILBURN

"My goal is to excite and provoke on every level. . . . I like danger. . . . That's what is missing from pop music today," says the man who is challenging social and sexual norms in the tradition of Elvis Presley, Jimi Hendrix, Mick Jagger and David Bowie.



giving one- or two-word answers. He didn't exhibit a trace of his performance passion until the discussion wound around to his earliest memories of wanting to be on stage. Then he began to open up.

Lifting his gaze from the floor, he said, "My dad was in a jazz band, and I went to watch one of his gigs when I was about 5. We were supposed to stay in the car, but I snuck out and went into the bar. He was up on stage and it was amazing. I remembered thinking, 'These people think my dad is great.' I wanted to be part of that."

But Prince doesn't see much of his father anymore. "I think he's confused about a lot of what is happening," he explained. "When I first played the 'Dirty Mind' album for him, he said, 'You're swearing on the record. Why do you have to do that?' And I said, 'Because I swear.'"

"We got into this whole big thing about what you can and can't do on record. The point for me is that you can do anything you want. My goal is to excite and provoke on every level."

Prince's father isn't the only one confused by his son's steamy music and renegade image.

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The show for all seasons

A rare exhibition of works by Hans Holbein detailing the court of Henry VIII (including "Mary, Lady Heveningham") has arrived at the Getty Museum. See William Wilson's review, Page 86.

RENEGADE PRINCE OF ROCK 'N' ROLL

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The young singer/songwriter has been called too extreme by both mainstream black and rock audiences. Frequently dressed on stage in little more than bikini bottoms, Prince deals so explicitly with sexual taboos that Warner Bros. puts stickers on the album covers which warn about some of his language.

But there's more to Prince's music than its superficial naughtiness. He's a serious artist and a skilled craftsman who may become the biggest black star in rock since Sly Stone. Prince certainly has the charisma and vision. His sound confidently mixes the heat of post-disco funk, the drive of hard-line rock and the melodic flow of pop.

Prince also weaves a liberating message into a colorful pop-rock vocabulary which gives a modern, urban edge to the ribald blues tradition. His "Controversy" album last year sold nearly a million copies, and his new "1999" is a more accessible collection that should attract an even wider audience.

Like the most important figures in rock, from Presley and Dylan to Sly Stone and Bowie, Prince challenges listeners to examine their lives rather than accept what has been outlined for them. In "Sexuality" from last year's "Controversy" album, he urges:

*Stand up everybody, this is your life,
Let me take you to another world, let me
take you tonight*

*You don't need no money, you don't
need no clothes.*

*The second coming, anything goes
Sexuality is all you ever need, sexuality
let your body be free.*

While he sometimes worries that the eroticism overshadows other aspects of his music, Prince refuses to tone down his imagery, insisting that the emphasis on sex is an honest rather than calculated reflection of his own creative instincts.

"Sex is something we can all understand. It's limitless. But I try to make the songs so they can be viewed in different ways. I know some people will go right through those (message) elements in a song, but there are some who won't. If you make it too easy, you lose the point. Most music today is too easy. People just come out and do the same old same olds over and over. . . . All people care about nowadays is getting paid so they try to do just what the audience wants them to do. I'd rather give people what they need rather than just what they want."

Who is this guy who thinks he knows what pop fans need?

"Well," he said early in the interview, "let me clear up a few rumors while I have the chance. One, my real name is Prince. It's not something I made up. My dad's stage name was Prince Rogers and he gave that to me: Prince Rogers Nelson."

"Two, I'm not gay. And three, I'm not Jamie Starr."

Because Prince discovered the Time and Vanity 6, two other R&B-shaded Minneapolis acts, it has been widely assumed that name "Starr" after production credits on the two albums was simply a playful pseudonym for Prince.

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See full page image or
microfilm.

Prince, center, both provokes and teases with his concert performances.

But Starr is a producer-engineer in Minneapolis, Prince said. The gay rumors grew out of his stage manner, which often reflects the ambisexual tendencies associated with Jagger in the late '60s and Bowie in the early '70s.

"There's a certain type of people who may dig what we're doing, but they won't even listen to it because of the stereotypes or whatever," Prince continued. "I'm real proud of the new album, and I'd hate to have things get in the way of it."

Still, he's not about to back away from the sexual imagery. One of the jacket sleeve photos in the new album shows him lying nude, barely covered by a sheet, looking seductively at the camera.

"The most important thing is to be true to yourself, but I also like danger," he continued. "That's what is missing from pop music today. There's no excitement and mystery—people sneaking out and going to these forbidden concerts by Elvis Presley or Jimi Hendrix. I'm not saying I'm better than anybody else, but I don't feel like there are a lot of people out there telling the truth in their music."

Prince started playing piano when he was 7, tinkering at first with TV themes like "Batman" and "The Man From U.N.C.L.E." By the fourth grade, he was dancing and playing piano in talent shows. At 12, he put together a band, but he was too shy to sing, something he didn't overcome until high school. Part of his motivation by that time was to get out of the shadow of an older brother.

"My older brother was the basketball and football star," Prince said. "He

always had all the girls around him and stuff like that. I think I must have been on a jealous trip because I got out of sports. . . . I wasn't bad at basketball, but my brother was better and he wouldn't let me forget it. There were other guys like that, too.

"I just wanted to do something else and when I did get a band, the first thing you did was bring it to school and play the homecoming dance and say, 'Look at that.' It was something they couldn't do."

Because he didn't get along with his stepfather, Prince spent a lot of time away from home during his early teens, staying with his father, his aunt, a friend's parents and, eventually, his sister in New York. He was 17 when he cut the demo tapes that led to a much publicized six-figure contract with Warner Bros. Records. The word soon shot through the industry that another Stevie Wonder had arrived.

"Prince was totally absorbed with his music," said Owen Husney, who was Prince's manager at the time of the Warners signing. "He always has been. There's nothing else that goes on in his life. Though he was still in his teens when I met him, he was amazing. He knew exactly the sound he wanted. That's why we felt it was essential that he produce his own records. But I knew it would be hard convincing a record company to let someone that young go into the studio and do everything himself."

"So we developed this first-class campaign that left very little for the record company to do: press kits that cost \$100

each, a marketing campaign, everything. It was a very convincing package. We got offers from Columbia and A&M, but we went with Warners because they were willing to give Prince the most leeway."

Prince's 1978 debut album was a polished but rather conventional affair which sold 100,000 copies. But his second LP, "For You," thanks to the hit single "I Wanna Be Your Lover," almost hit the million mark. By this time, Prince's management had been taken over by the high-powered L.A. firm of Cavallo, Ruffalo and Fargnoli (among its other clients: Earth, Wind & Fire) and the Wonder comparisons became even more common.

Just when Prince's commercial direction seemed firmly set in a saccharine-flavored pop/R&B mode, however, the young man had second thoughts. His third album, "Dirty Mind," was a stunning departure which was filled with sassy vocals, an insistent rock tinge and

"The second album was pretty contrived," Prince said in an almost confessional tone as he sat in the West Hollywood hotel room. "I had put myself in the hole with the first record because I spent a lot of money to make it. I wanted to remedy that with the second album. I wanted a 'hit' album. It was for radio rather than for me, and it got a lot of people interested in my music. But it wasn't the kind of audience you really want. They only come around to check you out when you have another hit. They won't come to see you when you change directions and try something new. That's the kind of audience I wanted."

The "Dirty Mind" album began as experimental demo tapes, he said. "They were just like songs inside that I wanted to hear. When I took them to Steve (Fargnoli), he said, 'This should be your album.'"

Warner Bros. executives, however, weren't so sure about Prince's controversial new direction. Explained Fargnoli in a separate interview, "I thought 'Dirty Mind' was an album that deserved to be made. But Warner Bros., understandably, didn't know how to react. The last record had sold almost a million, and they expected something with the same sound. They were very negative at first—about the music and the (seminude) cover—but they eventually got behind it."

"Dirty Mind" sold only about half as many records as "For You," but it established Prince as a far more arresting figure. The LP was voted one of the year's 10 best in the Village Voice's annual poll of the nation's leading rock and pop critics. Last year's "Controversy" was an even bolder, more eclectic collection that reached out to a rock audience, nearly doubling the sales of "Dirty Mind."

The new "1999" lacks some of the experimental edge of "Controversy," but the two-record set is a dance-floor marvel that offers an even more assured blend of Prince's rock and R&B instincts. The tunes range from the lustful celebration of "Little Red Corvette" and the jaunty infatuation of "Delirious" to the chilling emotional exorcism of "Lady Cab Driver" and the sly sarcasm of "All the Critics Love U in New York."

"I didn't want to do a double album, but I just kept writing and I'm not one for editing," Prince said. "I like a natural flow. I always compare songwriting to a girl walking in the door. You don't know what she's going to look like, but all of a sudden she's there."

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For the nearly 100,000 people who were on hand and the thousands of others who heard about it, Prince may be best known in Los Angeles as the guy who was booed off the stage when he opened last year for the Rolling Stones at the Memorial Coliseum.

Rock-oriented radio stations avoid playing records by black artists, even if the records have a rock slant, because they feel rock fans associate any black artist these days with the dreaded disco. This *black-out* has only reinforced the rock audience's intolerance for contemporary black music.

Though the almost exclusively white audience at the Stones show listened to the nostalgic strains of Jimi Hendrix records during intermission, many near the front of the stage hurled paper cups and shouted obscenities when Prince began playing, eventually driving him from the stage briefly.

"When we first went on the stage, a lot of people were throwing things and making noises," Prince recalled. "At first, I thought it was funny. I figured, 'We'd better just play.' When I looked up a bit later, it had simmered down and a lot of people seemed relaxed. But there was this one dude right in front, and you could see hatred all over his face.

What was really strange was there was two of them. We kept playing and the one of them noticed that everyone else (in the crowd) had cooled out. So he tried to stop this other dude, but the guy wouldn't stop. The reason I left was because I didn't want to play anymore. I just wanted to fight—to fight *him*. I was really angry."

Smiling for one of the few times in the interview, Prince added that if he had been able to reach the heckler, "They wouldn't have found him. He just didn't want to see me. I was thinking, 'Look, I've only got 20 minutes up here. If you can't deal with that, we've got to go outside and work it out.' But I couldn't get at him and I was frustrated."

But what about reaching that rock audience?

Prince's new album has entered the pop charts nicely, and the single is a hit on pop, dance and black music charts. But neither is on the list of Top 50 records on Billboard magazine's check of rock radio playlists.

Steve Fagnoli, Prince's manager, is disappointed by rock radio's resistance to black artists. "To me, tracks like 'Little Red Corvette' and 'Delirious' are classic rock 'n' roll records. I just think stations are more concerned with what they think the image of an artist is than with what the music is. Those few rock stations who have played Prince have gotten good response. I don't know what the alternative is other than to keep doing what we're doing. Slowly and surely, the demographics are shifting every tour. White kids are beginning to pick up on what's happening."

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Though some of Prince's uneasiness melted away during the interview, he slipped back into his shell after the final questions. Rather than engage in the usual small-talk, he simply faded across the room with the quiet of a man entering a church confessional as the aide reappeared to usher the reporter out of the room.

Of the contrast between the public flamboyance and the offstage shyness, Fagnoli suggested a few days after the interview, "That's just how he is. I've never seen an artist totally consumed to the level of Prince. It pretty much excludes everything else. He has very little to say about what he's doing other than what's in his music, but he has a clear perception of what he's done and what he wants to be. He's not afraid to follow his own instincts."

About those instincts, Prince explained in the hotel room. "When I first got started in music, I was attracted by the same things that attract most people to this business. I wanted to impress my friends and I wanted to make money. For a while, I just did it as a hobby. Then it turned into a job and a way to eat. Now I look on it as art. I realized after 'Dirty Mind' that I can get away with anything I want to get away with. All I have to do is be true to myself. I can make the records I want to make and still be OK. I feel free." □