

# Prince showcases talent on three-disc release

## SOUND ADVICE

**Marcus Amaker** Staff Writer  
**"EMANCIPATION"** The Artist Formerly Known as Prince  
 ★★★½ (out of four stars)

These are trying times for the man we used to call Prince.

Year after year he has asserted his genius on great albums only to have critics and fans reminisce on his reign in the mid-1980s.

While it may be true that he may never reach the level of commercial success he had over 10 years ago, the artist formerly known as Prince has been making some of the best music of his career.

1995's "The Love Symbol Album" was one of his best albums ever, and last year's Chaos and Disorder showcased his unprecedented skills on the guitar.

Continuing in that trend of exceptional CDs, the artist's most recent release Emancipation may be the most ambitious move of his career. This new collection contains 36 songs on three CDs, and each CD is divided equally into 12 songs totalling exactly one hour.

An album this ambitious is nothing new to the artist.

1987's classic double record "Sign

of the Times" (which was originally a triple album called "Crystal Ball") explored some of the same territory.

What makes Emancipation different is that the artist formerly known as Prince is no longer the introverted and reclusive person who seemed obsessed with sex.

Now when he sings about that topic, the lyrics are directed towards one person: his wife Mayte.

Their marriage, coupled with the birth of their baby, and the shakeup with his former record company Warner Brothers, has given the artist a new appreciation for life.

For the first time we can hear the man behind the image he so carefully created with albums like "Dirty Mind" (1980), "Around the World in a Day" (1985) and "Lovesexy" (1987).

Now that he no longer answers to a major record label, the artist formerly known as Prince has total control over the amount of music he wants to release.

The concept behind Emancipation deals with this new freedom and the new direction his life has taken.

Musically, Emancipation is as eclectic as the artist himself.

He effortlessly swings from rock (a remake of Joan Osborne's "One of Us") to techno ("The Human Body") to ragtime ("Courtin' Time") to ambient

("The Plan") to R&B ("Right Back Here in My Arms").

In anyone else's hands, this would make an uneven album, but the artist formerly known as Prince meets the challenge with some of the best songs of his career.

As always, the artist produced, wrote and performed all of the songs on the album. The only songs he didn't write are the five remakes.

This time around he opts for the studio-perfection of albums like "1999" and "Come" instead of the live band he used for his recent material.

The end product is one of the most satisfying albums he has created since his debut in the late seventies.

The first CD contains some of the best songs that "Emancipation" has to offer.

The hat trick of "Jam of the Year," "Right Back Here in My Arms" and "Somebody's Somebody" open up the album in a way that recalls his pre-1999 days when he was known as an R&B artist.

"White Mansion," with its catchy chorus and bass heavy melody, is the perfect in-your-face statement to his former label.

"Damned if I Do" is a pounding rock song that switches mid-tempo into a Latin groove before song's end.

He dedicates "In This Bed I Scream" to former band mates Wendy, Lisa and Susanah from The Revolution.

In that song he sounds like a man who has realized the error of his ways when he sings lines like "a thousand times I feel whatever I put you through."

The best material, however, is on the nearly flawless second disc. This CD acts as a perfect transition between the more aggressive songs on the rest of the album.

"One Kiss At a Time" recalls everything that made "Do Me Baby" such a huge hit in 1981.

"Curious Child" floats along an instantly catchy hook and "Joint 2 Joint" is a ranchy funk excursion complete with tap dancing (courtesy of tap wonder Savion Glover) and a segment where the artist eats cereal (!).

"The Holy River" recalls some of his best work on "Sign of the Times."

The lyrics, such as "surrounded yourself with all the wrong faces / spending your time in all the wrong places / putting your faith in things that only make you cry" speak of the evolution he endured in becoming the person he is today.

The third CD finds the artist experimenting more with sounds and

moods. "New World" and "The Human Body" are both electronic-inspired numbers, while "Style" and "Sleep Around" are driven by horns.

Still, songs like "Face Down" and "Da Da Da" would sound better as B-sides because they only inhibit the overall flow of the album.

"My Computer," featuring Kate Bush on background vocals, is a plea for a time when life wasn't complicated.

He transforms Joan Osborne's "One of Us" into a larger than life rock anthem and changes the line "Just a slab like one of us" to "Just a slave like one of us."

"Emancipation" ends on a high note with the Purple Rain-esque "The Love We Make."

This song is the title track in which he states the new artistic freedom he now has.

One of the only real problems with "Emancipation" lies in sappy remakes of "Betcha By Golly Wow" and "La La La Means I Love You."

These two songs sound like a poor man's version of the artist's original 1994 hit "The Most Beautiful Girl in the World."

One has to wonder why "Betcha By Golly Wow" was released as the first single when there are plenty of

better songs to choose from.

Also, the artist formerly known as Prince still insists on incorporating rap into some of his songs.

A no name rapper, Scrap D., appears on "Mr. Happy" and "Da Da Da." As a result, these are two of the weakest songs on the album.

But these are only minor complaints for a collection as brilliant as "Emancipation."

The artist has always been years ahead of everybody else, and this new album proves that he is one of the few visionaries left in music.

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