

Prince's 'Purple Rain' might launch '80s' Elvis

Look out America. An Elvis for the '80s has arrived.

Not since Elvis' revolutionary black-white sound enthralled a generation and his raunchy hip-swinging delivery scandalized their parents has a young singer put such urgency, sexiness and even defiance into his music as Prince. And in his movie debut, *Purple Rain*, he proves his talent in film with a style as unique and outrageous as he is.

It's not quite a musical and it's not quite MTV. Perhaps the best way to explain *Purple Rain* is simply to say it is exciting.

Prince Rogers Nelson, whether wearing purple Edwardian punk or black leather and lace, is definitely a personality strong enough to carry a movie on sheer cult appeal alone, but the good news is that he does not try to carry off the film in his concert style. Rather, he gives a credible performance with a little help from his friends and a drop-dead soundtrack that should satisfy his old fans and not prove too radical to attract new fans.

Set and shot in Minneapolis, his real hometown, at the club First Avenue, where he actually got his start, *Purple Rain* appears to be semi-autobiographical, but part of the Prince mystique is the nebulous line between fact and fiction that his film sustains.

At heart a father-son rock drama in the tradition of Elvis' *King Creole*, *Purple Rain* is the story of a musician, part black and part Italian like Prince himself, identified only as The Kid, whose preoccupation with his personalized music is compli-

Review

Ivy Hilliard

cated by his troubled home life. His father (*Mod Squad's* Clarence Williams III) drinks to forget his own washed up musical career and regularly beats on his mother (Olga Karlatos) and The Kid, if he gets in the way.

The Kid's musical rival, Morris Day of The Time, is putting on the pressure to remove The Kid from the club and decides to put together a sexy girl group to replace him. When Morris happens to choose The Kid's new girlfriend, Appollonia Kotero, to star in this group, The Kid begins to slap her around and realizes he can become just like his father.

Meanwhile, his band, The Revolution, is rebelling against his refusal to play songs they have

written. The club manager finally tells The Kid that his music "makes sense to no one but yourself," but it takes a tragedy to really turn The Kid around.

Prince is credible in portraying the two halves of The Kid, one a self-centered star and the other a youth still scarred by domestic violence, but what is truly fascinating about *Purple Rain* is that all the characters play themselves, with the exception of The Kid's parents, who are professional actors.

Kotero, who is, appropriately, a sexy enough match for Prince in their steamy love scene, is the real-life leader of the group Apollonia 6, consisting of herself and two other singers formerly of the old Prince group Vanity 6.

All the police in the film are real police, and so on down to the waitresses, the band members and the club owner Billy Sparks.

The real scene stealers are Morris Day, who preens and struts like the Richard Pryor of rock, and his sidekick Jerome

Benton, who does a hilarious play on the old Who's On First routine.

Although obviously low budget, director Albert Magnoli's visual style is striking, whether following Prince on his purple motorcycle to a lovely golden pond or a scummy big-city alley.

The true core of the movie, though, is its music which lifts it above the moments of awkward dialogue or heavy handed close-ups of its stars.

Prince foregoes black/white musical stereotypes and the club owner is wrong to say his music doesn't mean anything to others. From the opening number "Let's Go Crazy's" frenetic energy to the already number one hit "When Dove's Cry" to the daringly explicit "Darling Nikki," each song builds meaning into the film.

By the time the screaming love song "I Would Die 4 U" and the soulful title cut send the audience reeling at the climatic scene of the film, Prince cuts loose with the triumphant finale "Baby I'm A

Star."

Truer words were never spoken and by this time next year Prince may leave America saying "Michael who?"

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