

Weekend

The Arts, Leisure, Music, Columns

Prince

'I've come to play with you.'

photos by Joe Daniels



A Review

Prince and Sheila E.: The night I spent in purple heaven

By YVONNE ANDERSON
Special to the Chronicle

Purple passion -- the sonorous philosophy of an enigmatic recording artist was played out in dramatic style last week in the Greensboro Coliseum.

For three nights Prince Nelson Rogers, 22, filled the 16,000-seat arena to capacity with fans ranging in age from five to 55. To them, he presents an allegory of life, love, lust and even death: all through Prince's only means of expression -- music.

Fans filed into the coliseum with ease on Thursday night, many of them dressed in purple -- a must -- laced or sequined garb like the show's main attraction. A harp solo replaced the usual pumping of the latest pop tunes. No less than 16 amplified speakers hung from the ceiling, while eight lighting ducts were dispersed in between these. Although Thursday's performance was not sold out prior to the gate's opening, by 7:58 p.m. the arena was packed. The lights went out abruptly. With no fanfare and no introduction, Sheila E. and her band took the stage.

This is Sheila's first tour as a solo act, but not her first tour. Her performing savvy was evident throughout her one-hour set. Born to a family of legendary percussionists (her father, Pete Escovedo, was the original per-

ussionist with the Santana band), Sheila staked a name for herself as a session musician before joining George

Duke. Heretofore her strength lay in her Latin roots that found a home in the fusion phenomenon of the 70s. But Sheila's hook-up with Prince gives the talented lady an avenue to show her stuff; and show it she does.

Stiletto heels and a diamond ankle bracelet capped the seductively long-legged lady who appeared first in a full-length black velvet and rhinestone-studded evening coat. You couldn't see what was underneath, but you knew it wasn't very much. Behind her was an assembly of chrome pipe, serving as a drop to reflect a slickly arranged lighting network. Her band included two drummers and four guitarists, some of whom doubled on synthesizers and horns.

Beginning with an instrumental piece, the band warmed up. The audience didn't need warming up; they were hyped from the beginning. Working into "The Bells of St. Mark," and a funky version of "Playing with the White Boys," Sheila's sound was impeccable. The band weaved tightly around her vocals, which are the weakest aspect of her talents. But they are stronger than many current female vocalists.

The band was letter perfect, her percussions astoundingly strong. With the visual effect of her erotic and campy movements, Sheila whizzed through each song

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Prince Concert Facts At A Glance

- The Purple Ra'in Concert ran up a \$9,000 flower tab. The bill included 45,000 carnations and chrysanthemums, 15,000 of which were ejected into the crowd at each of the three shows by an air compression cannon; five dozen lavender mums accompanied Prince on stage each night, and \$1,000 worth of exotic flowers from Holland and Southern Africa for Prince's dressing room.
- Over 48,000 people attended the three-day concert, making this the largest concert ever for the Greensboro Coliseum. Previously, Alabama and Kenny Rogers have held two-day concerts.
- Prince and his entourage rented 80 hotel rooms at the Holiday Inn Four Seasons.
- Ten 18-wheelers carried all his stage equipment.