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Prince Unveils Plan to Release Three LPs Via Lotusflow3r Website at Private Gig

2/2/09, 1:12 pm EST



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The e-mail invitation was vague but intriguing: spend Saturday night at Prince's mansion in Beverly Hills for "a journey through the galaxy" and a live performance by the man himself.

As the first to arrive, I'm greeted by Scott Addison Clay, the bearded young developer behind Prince's new Website, lotusflow3r.com. He wears a tweed jacket and sits behind a widescreen computer monitor to show off a bit of the new site, launched just minutes earlier. Leaning against a nearby couch is a sparkling metal cane, with Prince's "love symbol" etched into the handle.

Clay notes that 10 years before, Prince helped revolutionize the relationship between music and the Internet by being the first major artist to debut music exclusively on the Web. And lotusflow3r.com is where Prince will release three new albums in 2009, including *MPLSound*, *Lotus Flow3r* and the unveiling of his newest female protégé Bria Valente.

Then there is a voice behind us: "Can I use my computer?" It's Prince, smiling in a blue shirt decorated with a stylized drawing of his own image, and shoes with heels that blink colored lights. "It's OK, I just want to check my e-mail."

This is his home office, just one corner on a large estate in the exclusive gated community of Beverly Park, in the hills above Los Angeles. In another room is a space-age grand piano with liquid curves and framed snapshots of Chris Rock, Spike Lee, Quincy Jones and other friends. Outside on a pedestal amid the reflecting pools, recording studio and a beach volleyball court is a metal sculpture of his symbol. This is could only be one man's house.

Downstairs in the home theater, Clay gives a deeper glimpse of what's coming on the site, set to slowly unfold in coming months. For now, it is limited to a home page with a barren cliff beneath a night sky and three new songs: "Another Boy," "Colonized Mind" and "Discojellyfish," which flow from a boombox that glows purple. Fans will eventually be asked to pay a subscription fee to open up other areas of the site, with music, lyrics, animation, photographs and video (including [Prince's cover of Radiohead's "Creep" at Coachella last year](#)).

Guests are led down the hall, past the pool table and a pair of motorcycles that look like they just rolled off the cover of *Purple Rain*, toward the sound of a band tuning up in a small room. It's a crowd of barely 30 people: three invited fans, a few journalists, soul singer Anita Baker, DJ Kat Corbett from KROQ-FM and Miss Valente, tall and elegant in a low-cut dress.

Prince is in the corner with a guitar and the first song is a shimmering cover of the Cars' "Let's Go," followed by "Crimson & Clover" (by Tommy James and the Shondells), before erupting into the Troggs' "Wild Thing" as Prince raises his guitar, singing like Hendrix himself: "Baby, I think I love you . . . sock it to me!"

He calls harmonica player Frédéric Yonnet up to blow through the Rolling Stones' "Miss You," following a tough, sexy groove as Prince announces: "Come on out on the dance floor, come on!" It's just the first of two sets he'll lead tonight, and it's a purely musical performance,

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without the big production of a tour date, playing vivid originals going all the way back to 1979's "I Feel for You" and surprising cover tunes, including several Sly Stone hits ("Everyday People," "Stand," etc.).

You could see when Prince was especially moved by an emotional vocal from Baker or one of his three backup singers (Marva King, Shelby Johnson and Olivia Warfield), whose solos are epic performances unto themselves. Baker joins him for several duets, including "Guitar."

"Real music by real musicians," Prince announces, slipping into another funky psychedelic groove, leaving room for big solos from the band and his own guitar.

Near the end of the second set, it's nearly 3 a.m. as Prince and bassist Josh Dunham jump into a sticky groove that's instantly recognizable as a 1976 riff from Wild Cherry. Prince points directly at Clay, his Internet guru, by now peeled out of his tweed at the edge of the dance floor. He calls him over to the microphone, and Clay immediately begins singing, reading from an oversized lyric sheet: "Play that funky music, white boy! Play that funky music right!"

Prince leans back against drummer Cora Dunham, still slashing at his guitar, eyebrows rising, as if he can't believe what he is witnessing. But it's a kind of unbelievable, brilliant moment, one of many during more than three hours of live music. Clay is still dancing behind the microphone, his dress shirt soaked, and for one moment the baddest white dude on the West Coast. "That's pretty funky, right?" he asks. With Prince and the band behind him, it could hardly be anything else.

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Steve Appleford

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