

**A Review of Prince's *Art Official Age* and *Plectrum Electrum*:
When Is Change Visionary, and When Is Change Selling Out?**

Originally Published by *B. K. Nation.org* on October 3, 2014

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It has been twenty-nine years since I've had a "what the hell is this" reaction to a new Prince album. When *Around the World in a Day* (1985) was released, I was a very unsophisticated fifteen year old who was, like most people, anticipating *Purple Rain II*. I received an album from an artist who was not interested in meeting anyone's expectations except his own. I must admit that my "what the hell is this" response to *Around the World in a Day* was a positive reaction whereas my "what the hell is this" response to *Art Official Age* and *Plectrum Electrum* was one of utter confusion. I like most of the songs; I just do not like that they sound like this era's music. Prince's first manager, Owen Husney, once stated that Prince's genius is taking what's in someone else's mind to the next level. If we review Prince's work from 1978 to 1989, Husney's statement is affirmed. Yet, from 1990 to 1998, Prince seemed to struggle with reconciling himself to hip hop's takeover of popular music. He begins by defying and attacking it and ends by attempting to assimilate it with varying success but not enough success to remain on the charts or in the hearts of the masses as a relevant studio artist, which was fine with me. While Prince was "out of sight and out of the minds" of the masses, I was enjoying his Nineties output. Additionally, because I was never a fan of hip hop, I was never bother by or even tried to determine if Prince was assimilating hip hop in a well-crafted manner. In fact, that most people disliked what Prince was doing when he embraced hip hop elements was a positive for me because it meant that he had not lost himself to hip hop in the manner that most of black music had. Then, the 2000s bring a revival in Prince's popularity, starting with 2004's *Musicology*, though anyone who knows anything about music will understand that 2001's *The Rainbow Children* ranks well, musically and lyrically, with anything Prince has done, including his 80s work. But, the response to these two new albums, especially *Art Official Age*, is quite jarring to me. It's not just reviewers that are praising these albums, but young people all over the net are doing so. As one college student stated:

"FunknRoll" is like a soulful-electro mash up from the future. The song is somewhere between the more soulful riffs of Andre 3000 and the more subtle moments of any R&B ballad of the past five years. Ironically, the lyrics are more of the latter, which I would not normally associate with Prince, 'Get it turned up, and get out of control.' Not being too familiar with Prince's sound outside of the *Purple Rain* era, this is very different sound than I'm used to hearing from him. Out of context I would say that it's indicative of the style of Janelle Monae and her use of real instrumentation alongside electronics. That's not to say I don't like the sound; I really enjoyed the song, but also knowing it comes from the Artist Formally Known as Prince is a bit of a shell shock."¹

He continues:

"U Know" is pretty amazing. Prince raps for about half the song. I didn't actually know whether to be excited, scared, or confused, but it was almost an out of body experience. The repeated piano chords playing initially left me floating until heavy 808s stomped my soul back to earth. On the first listen, I thought to myself 'Oh, so Prince let Kendrick Lamar do a verse; that's cool.' Only to realize as the notes got higher that it was Prince

delivering the greatest bars over the most angelic rhythm ever. I think I stopped breathing at one point.], and when I started back it was like I was born into a whole new body. I cannot begin to understand where Prince came up with this idea or how he created this masterpiece but thank God he did.”²

Even though with “U Know” Prince has simply “kept the groove [of the original Mila J track “Blinded”] but added the percussive beat (that wasn’t on the original track), backwards effects, and more keyboard”³ play, I am not use to this type of response to a new Prince song from a youth, especially an African American youth. Another college student states of “U Know”: “The content here is nothing other than what one might expect from a vintage Prince track. In ‘U Know’ the legendary steps beyond his sonic comfort zone (what ‘comfort zone?!?’ It’s Prince!) as he successfully tries his hand at a hip-hop-inspired cadence. Prince masterfully weaves his lyrical prowess showcasing complex internal rhyming techniques reminiscent of a prime Rakim circa ‘88. This song is definitely my personal favorite of the bunch.”⁴ Quickly, the question for me became how do I reconcile the fact that my favorite artist who has been my primary weapon to marginalize most music created after 1995 is now creating work that many feel may represent the best of that sound? In some ways it was 1985 all over again in that Prince was challenging my aesthetic sensibilities, forcing me, the hardcore fan, to adjust to his new direction or walk away, thanking him for the memories as I exited the Purple Kingdom. Yet, just as I was about take my fandom and go home, I gave the albums a second and third listen and was finally able to hear what my hip-hop prejudices would not allow me to hear initially: these new songs run the gamut from fair to good to great and they do so while forcing old and new fans to reconsider what they like and why they like it. At the core, that is what a Prince album has always done, force listeners to consider the merging of sounds that others would not have considered. And while many have asserted that Prince has been an absentee landlord to his own construction or mashup party (I just learned the word, “mashup,” so I hope I’m using it correctly.), let’s not forget that it was Prince, building on the legacy of Little Richard, Chuck Berry, Sly Stone, Larry Graham, and Parliament/Funkadelic, the paved the way for all of the rock/pop/r&b/hip hop mashups/collaborations/amalgamations that exist today. As such, *Art Official Age* and *Plectrum Electrum* continue Prince’s legacy of making listeners aesthetically uncomfortable while providing a few songs to which to groove while we come to terms with the bigger aesthetic questions.

Early reviews have some critics saying this is some of Prince’s best work in the past ten or fifteen years, depending on which reviews one reads. I seriously/strongly disagree. Neither of these albums have the musical sophistication and lyrical depth of *The Rainbow Children* (2000) and *Lotusflow3r/MPLS* (2009). But, as I have stated, I don’t know, yet, how I feel about Prince songs sounding like the music that I have tried my best to avoid since 1988. I have been a Prince fan since 1979, his second album (*Prince*), and I have loved most that a Prince song never sounded like anything else on the radio. And, so, as an old head, I’m a grumpy old man because I’m not sure how I feel about Prince sounding like what’s on the radio. So, yes, part of my concern has to do with my inability to “get into” the new music post-1995, having not listened to the radio since 1988, but, again, it’s also about my need for a Prince song not to sound like anything other than a Prince song, and too many of these songs sound like they could have been created by current artists. *Art Official Age* is the Prince album. The songs are not bad; some are rather funky with at least four of them earning a 10/10 rating form me, but it has a bit too much

of that Auto-Tune and R&B seasoned by hip hop vibe or flavoring for my tastes. *Plectrum Electrum* is the Prince and 3rdEyeGirl album, which is the three-piece all female rock band with which he travelled during the Live out Loud (LOL) Tour in 2013. These songs provide my rock fix, but drummer Hannah Ford sings lead on half the songs, which does nothing for me. Prince has always provided albums by protégée groups, and this is mostly what *Plectrum Electrum* is with Prince being more prominent in the actual performance of the record. But, if I wanted to listen to an album by a protégée, that's what'd I purchase. Still, four of *Plectrum Electrum*'s songs earn an 8/10 rating from me.

Yet, as much as I try to deny it, the songs as individuals and as a collection are still vintage Prince as they defy "true" or "pure" definition. *Art Official Age* actually presents a thumbnail of Prince's history. For instance "Clouds" is the closest thing he's delivered to his *For You* (1978) sound, since *For You*. It's not retro but provides the free-spirit of late seventies bouncy funk. This can be a roller-skate jam with bouncy beats, groovy harmony, great falsetto, and driving keyboards with a wonderful guitar solo to end the song. And, unlike half the songs, the lyrics are well done: "You should never underestimate the power of a kiss on the neck when she doesn't expect a kiss on the neck." True to his classic form, Prince builds a musical playground filled with sexual tension only to transfer that sexual tension to an understanding that love is more powerful and satisfying than sex: "In this brand new age we do everything quick, fast, in a hurry./ All of our life's a stage. Everybody stars, reality so blurry./ If you scream out loud, top of your voice be higher than the crowd (no)./ Tattoo-less and proud, yeah. We'll get to something higher that doesn't require clouds./ No, we don't need no clouds, no/... I'm gonna give you something baby, but I wonder does it really even matter if it ain't on a stage. I don't really think it matters in this brand new age/ when life's a stage, in this brand new age, how do we engage?/ Bullying just for fun, no wonder there's so many guns./ Maybe we're better off in space." This is the metaphysical poet showing how reality television is just the new quick/artificial fix for people embracing the physical over the metaphysical and, as always, ending dissatisfied. The "space," as indicated by the end of the song, is about finding the metaphysical—inner peace. Again, in true Prince fashion, the listeners are given the mega-hype party jams of "FunknRoll" and "U Know" to entice them to the album, and when they arrive they receive more than they expect. As Prince stated in "What's My Name" from *Crystal Ball* (1998), "You never would have drank my coffee if I had never served you cream." "Clouds" reveals that Prince has not lost his core values but is simply developing new ways to provide them to new listeners. Returning to our local college student: "'Clouds' is more of what I expect from a Prince song, very much part of the funk era and smooth. The song accomplishes what the artist always is able to accomplish; give us a song of substance with the quality we expect but still keeping things fresh and pushing bars."

Of course, not every song is a winner. I disliked "Breakdown" when I first heard it several months ago, and I still dislike it. Yet, this song is loved by most hardcore Prince fans who continue to lament that Prince has not done anything worthwhile since Wendy and Lisa have been gone. This type of song is right up their ally. And while I respect and love Wendy and Lisa, the lyrics of "Breakdown" are cheesy, and the laser sound effects are even cheesier. Ironically, as a ballad, what I dislike about "Breakdown" is what I dislike about most hip hop songs; I do not an artist telling something is "good" or "bad," but showing that something is "good" or "bad." So, when Prince begins, "This is could be the saddest song that's ever been

told,” it is about as cheesy as the average hip hop artist saying how “dope” his rhymes are. Still, even with those opening lyrics and lasers, many listeners like that Prince provides a narrative about self-reflection, change, and growth: “I used to want the house with the biggest pool./ I’ve been missing out; I just feel like a fool./...I used to throw a party every New Year’s Eve/ First one intoxicated, last one to leave/ Waking up in places that you would never believe/ Give me back the time; you can keep the memories.” Ultimately, “Breakdown” continues the narrative of wanting more than the physical tangible/thrill and of realizing over so many missteps that the metaphysical or spiritual is so much more fulfilling than the physical. It’s a great message with a very passionate vocal delivery/ending. If only I could ignore those damn lasers. Yet, songs like “The Gold Standard,” “This Could Be Us,” “Way Back Home,” and “Affirmation I, II, III” make it easy for me to forget quickly those lasers. “The Gold Standard” reminds us that bands like Midnight Star with songs like “No Parking on the Dance Floor” kept the funk alive during the 80s and that Prince was the funkier of them all during that time. If “The Gold Standard” doesn’t get you moving, you just dead. “This Could Be Us” is playful soul. It’s got the feel of songs like “Adore,” “Scandalous,” and “Insatiable,” but it lacks the lyrical depth and musical layering. Yet, like the classic line from “Adore,” “maybe not the ride,” when Prince declares that he loves his woman so much that she can destroy anything he owns, except “the ride,” “This Could Be Us” is sensual as it finds its emotional appeal by not taking itself too seriously, especially when Prince states, “Like a new pair of shoes, you gon’ wanna show me off to your friends.” “This Could Be Us” is not a retread or a tired remake of other songs. Because it is beat driven, it is not as musically full as the others, but the vocal delivery is flawless, proving that Prince still understands that soul singing is about longing to find that point where the physical intersects with the metaphysical or that effective R&B is a marriage of soul grit and swagger with gospel subtle harmony. And, the guitar tease at the end is the perfect payoff. “Way Back Home” is an example that Prince is a musical and lyrical poet. It’s not close to the level of “The Ballad of Dorothy Parker” from *Sign “O” the Times* (1987), but it contains that quirkiness that can mesmerize in its uniqueness. Maybe it is closer to “Valentina” from *Lotusflow3r/MPLS*, in that there is a synergy between the lyrics and music that causes one’s body and mind to sway. Lyrically, it couples with “Clouds” to continue the metaphysical them of seeing more than the surface physical: “I never wanted a typical life/ scripted role, huh...trophy wife/ All I ever wanted, to b left alone/ See my beds made up at night/ Cuz in my dreams I roam/ Just trying to find, trying to find/ My way back, back home/... There's so many reasons why/ I don't belong here/ But now that I am I/ Without fear I am/ Gonna conquer with no fear/... Most people in this world are born dead/ But I was born alive/With a dream outside my head/ That I could find my way back home.” “Way Back Home” is a declaration for those who refuse to accept that the physical, prescribe existence is all there is. And “Affirmation I, II, III,” which is really the prelude and epilogue to “Way Back Home,” creates a moving journey of self-discovery. The calming female narration serves as guide to inner bliss while the musical build or progression with the drums serving as a heartbeat and the strings and backing vocals evoking angles and wind chimes paint a lush, emotive nirvana.

Overall, *Art Official Age* is a B+ album 9/10. As one online poster stated: “These songs are not legendary nor do they break any new ground, but, damit I’ve got a party this Saturday and at least three of them will be in heavy rotation.” This sentiment is affirmed by a local Jackson, Mississippi, writer, Astin Rocks:

With all the synthetic drum beats and overproduced guitar sound hitting the airwaves, I can see how Prince's newest songs wouldn't move the soul of a hardcore Prince fan as he once did during the 80s..."FunknRoll" doesn't break ground because, today, everyone is using the same equipment! Almost nothing divides the song from the rest of the genre in terms of quality. Even at the end of "FunknRoll," there's still that world, techno sound every producer thinks is cool. But, the soul is still there. There's still something authentically funky about the song in terms of composition. I don't feel as if Prince was trying to make something mind-blowing or legendary, nor does it fit the category of other songs composed and released simply for the purpose of instant popularity and its obligatory fifteen minutes of fame. I don't see "FunknRoll" becoming legendary. However, aside from the last sixty seconds, I'm still bouncing. I'm still swinging my hair every which way. I think I'd like to hear it in a DJ set, even if only at one party in my life.

And that final college student adds:

For perhaps the first time, I heard a conscious attempt from Prince to conform to certain modern musical conventions. This is not to say, however, that "conforming" is necessarily a bad thing in "FunknRoll." Prince has been able to maintain his unparalleled status of longevity because of his unique ability to change with the times. As Prince continues to reinvent himself with each passing era, "Funk-n-Roll" provides a clever display of bridging the gap between genres: electro-rock and funk/soul, as well as old school and new school.⁵

Reviews of *Plectrum Electrum* have been more mixed, but, if nothing else, it is praised for its sonic energy and for being a perfect bookend to *Art Official Age*, as it is filled with rock tracks. A review on the German-based *N24*⁶ website states that *Plectrum Electrum* is "a legs wide rock-soul album, recorded with his band 3rdeyegirl Girl and tons of guitar solos and rock riffs - and hardly a breather from all the opulence. This album is meant for the stage, for a very large, excessive, colorful retro party," and I agree with this assessment mostly. The guitars are the best thing about this record. Prince is clearly proud of the guitars as he states: "If I were a kid learning to play guitar, this would be the album that I would learn, note for note". The opening two songs "WOW" and "Pretzelbodylogic" display the virtuoso of Prince and his bandmates, but it also reminds the listener that rock-n-roll is based in blues. "WOW" contains a gut-bucket grind, swing harmony, and swaying rhythm that informs that a master is playing the guitar, and "Pretzelbodylogic" has a backbeat and bass groove that affirms Funkadelic's notion "Who says a Funk Band Can't Play Rock Music?" Additionally, "WOW" may be the most urgent and possibly powerful thing Prince has done since "Colonized Mind" and "Dreamer" from *Lotusflow3r/MPLS*. These two songs become neon examples for what Prince declared on the 2013 Live out Loud (LOL) Tour during an extended jam of "She's Always in my Hair," when he stated: "I like rock-n-roll, but I like my rock-n-roll funky." The instrumental "Plectrum Electrum" proves that Prince still works with the best musicians in the business as these girls kick us in the gut with this groove. It is a music lesson of Prince imitating Led Zeppelin as they imitate Muddy Waters. And, unlike "Breakdown" to which many are comparing to the Wendy and Lisa sound, "Whitecaps" truly echoes Wendy and Lisa with more moving music and more interesting lyrics. Being called dull or unmemorable by some, "Whitecaps" is perfect for long-

distance cruising or spending Saturday afternoon in a hammock as the images of the song and the dreamy groove allows the mind to float endlessly. “Fixurlifeup” is solid but comes across better live than on record, and, ironically, but in true Prince fashion, “BoyTrouble” is a funky surprise on this “rock” record, proving that Prince is just too eclectic/complex to create a pure-anything record. Then, following “BoyTrouble,” “StopThisTrain” changes the direction and tone of the album completely, reminding us of Prince’s ability to write catchy R&B/Pop tunes. And in a display of his ability to deconstruct songs to show us something that we did not know was there, Prince takes the disco flavored bouncy/groovy “Another Love” by Alice Smith and turns it into a nasty, biker-bar/café soulful, if not bluesy, rant in which we can feel and hear, explicitly, the speaker tell the lover to “go to hell”. I usually do not like cover songs by anybody, including Prince, but “AnotherLove” is wicked. Still, while Hannah is an excellent drummer, I would much rather hear Prince provide lead vocals for all the songs.

Returning to that fifteen year old epiphany when listening to *Around the World in a Day*, I remember thinking simultaneously, “Damn, this is great!,” “Damn, this is different!,” “Damn, there may become a time when my favorite artist will release something that I don’t like!” That was/is the thrill/roller-coaster ride that was/is Prince. What made Prince great is that he was not afraid of being quirky, weird, different. In fact, for Prince, different always seemed to be more important than good. This is the man who completely destroyed the momentum of *Sign “O” the Times* by releasing “If I Was your Girlfriend” as its second single, while the album was still climbing the charts. There are at least three other songs that would have been more radio friendly, but he didn’t want radio friendly; he wanted different. And while I have been reading the limited reviews of how Prince is creatively weaving these modern elements, I can only assume that my ears are so anti-hip hop and what hip hop has transformed R&B into being that I’m struggling to recognize the dude who in 2009 still had the talent, balls, and defiance to strap on a guitar and create a song, “Colonized Mind,” which instantly became one of my top-ten favorite Prince songs, even though it was created twenty-years after his so-called “golden age.” Maybe I just never believed the same guy who could create “Party Up” and “Colonized Mind” could be reduced to singing over a borrowed track (the Mila J track for “Blinded) like some average singer or rapper on a mix tape. It just seemed so beneath him. This single act of borrowing someone else’s track seemed to taint his entire legacy of being one of the most creative artists on the planet. After all, isn’t using someone else’s track the act of people who are not talented enough to write their own songs? So, at first, while listening to these new songs, I just never heard the seminal gut-wrenching, “eff the world” guitar note or the bass line that made it clear that Prince was still one of the baddest cats to play an instrument because I was too “Blinded” by the hip hop production until I had a very philosophical discussion with my wife, Monica, who stated:

“Dude, you tripping on the whole album ‘cause you hate one song? And, it ain’t the song you hate. What you hate is that Prince, gawd forbid, used a ‘hip hop’ technique of singing over someone else’s track like a mix tape. That’s your real issue. You’re prejudice against hip hop. Well, you can let your issues with hip hop ‘Blind’ you to this new funk, but these two albums are banging! Look, man, if I’ve got a four or five course meal in front of me, one piece of food on my plate that I don’t like ain’t gon’ stop me from eating the rest of it. That don’t make no sense. Thus, it don’t make no sense to trash an entire album because of one song, especially since the Funk and Rock Master is

back, playa. And for somebody who claims to like it most when Prince rocks, I hear at least two rock anthems on the *Plectrum* whatever he calls it album. Oh, and dem slow jams from *AOA*...you know don't nobody do a slow jam like Prince. So, you can trip on 'U Know' if you want. I'm 'bout to pop this into the ride and cruise around the city with this new funk."

And, she left me standing there, alone, with my righteous indignation, forcing me to wonder if I was missing something good because I just could take my favorite artist doing anything associated with hip hop, especially singing over somebody else's track. With all the new sounds, I didn't know if I could consider most of them "Prince" songs. But, I actually love "U Know"; it's a damn funky song and perfect follow/bookend to "The Gold Standard" in which "The Gold Standard" is classic Prince funk and "U Know" is new-age Prince funk.

The irony is that Prince created the blueprint for how to use the drum machine. I mean this literally. The company actually gave Prince a prototype, and with it he created *1999*. However, by 1986, Prince was feeling the pressure of hip hop taking what he started and outpacing him. During a live performance of "Head," which includes one of the greatest synthesizer solos ever recorded on wax, which was written by Prince but played by Dr. Fink, Prince proclaims "If y'all ain't gon' do that with a synthesizer, then don't touch one." Clearly, by 1986 Prince understood that hip hop was taking over, changing the game, and by 1988 it had all but whipped his ass, causing him to create "Dead on It" from the infamous *Black Album*, which is a straight diss to hip hop: "Negroes from Brooklyn play the bass pretty good, but the ones from Minneapolis play it like it oughta should...See, the rappers problem usually stem from being tone deaf. Pack the house, try to sing, there won't be no one left." And, after almost thirty years of being at war with hip hop, often trying and failing miserably—check "Mr. Goodnight"—to assimilate something that he never quite understood, we arrive in 2014 with Prince being praised for embracing the new sound. Yet, just before I can call Prince a hypocrite, I remember that also included on *The Black Album* is "Bob George," which is a musical and metaphorical/lyrical response to noted critic Nelson George for stating that Prince had lost his funk. To this day, while it is pseudo-gangsta rap, it is one of the funkier things I have ever heard. So, in 1988 on the same album, Prince provides one song that disses rap and another song that deconstructs rap. This is the dichotomy that is Prince: Black or white, straight or gay, male or female, rock or R&B, indie artist or mainstream sellout? This is the roller-coaster that a Prince fan rides. In 1991 I raved about the fact that only Prince could release two singles from one album, *Diamonds and Pearls*, and one single's video, "Diamonds and Pearls," be released to MTV and another single's video, "Insatiable," be released to BET with "Diamonds and Pearls" crossing over from MTV to BET to become the number one video on the *Video Soul Countdown*. This is that dichotomy, that roller-coaster ride that is Prince. Even in 1992 when Prince released "My Name Is Prince" as the second single from the ♀ album, my wife, Monica, looked me straight in the eyes and said: "That fool has finally lost his damn mind." Then, she proceeded to chant "My name is Monica, and I am funky" for the next three weeks. Because even while his rapping was terrible, the insanity of the record worked. The same is true for the lead single of the ♀ album, "Sexy MF," which became a cult classic with even Salt of Salt-n-Pepa quoting "Sexy MF" in their smash hit "Shoop". Additionally, if one can ignore the profanity, the horns of "Sexy MF" are a classic nod to James Brown. Only "The Work" from *The Rainbow Children* comes close to Prince paying supreme homage to the James Brown horn

arrangement. Thus, even with insane songs like these, there is enough of the history of black music to anchor me. I could always hear Brown, Jimi Hendrix, Little Richard, Parliament/Funkadelic, and many others inside or underneath Prince's insanity. Yet, for these new albums that safety net or anchor seems to be missing. And, maybe, that's what Prince wants—to fly without a net because he is clearly a man not concerned with crashing and burning. In fact, the risk of crashing and burning makes the reward of removing the bass line from “When Doves Cry” at the last moment all the more gratifying when it becomes a number one smash.

Ultimately, my initial issue or trepidation with these new albums was not a question of Prince reinventing himself. That's who he is. That's what he does. For me, it is a question of how much of himself is he losing with this new phase? For twenty years Prince has been saying, declaring, almost admonishing the current generation with the phrase: “Real music by real musicians.” And now we get a song with Prince composing over the top of somebody else's track while using Auto-Tune. And no, it's not just his use of Auto-Tune that's bothering me. Hell, Prince, after Roger Troutman, made the voice/talk box fashionable, even crafting an alter ego, Camille, through his use of the voice box. Yet, the question remains: “Is Prince doing something new with Auto-Tune, or is he just using it because it's familiar to the ears of people purchasing records today?” Again, is Prince being that weird, different, unusual cat, or has he finally become content with chasing a hit record? And, my current answer is: “I don't know.” I'd also be remiss if I didn't add that I'm more than disappointed that a few songs, such as “RocknRoll Love Affair” and “Screwdriver,” which were slated for the albums in 2013 and feel more like the “weird” Prince songs that I like, did not make either official release, leaving me with the bad taste that classic Prince soul and rock were bumped for Auto-Tune and hip hop grooves. So, I'm still processing. I am enjoying a lot of these new albums, but I'm not sure how much I actually like them. And, maybe, I just don't want to be a hypocrite. For the past twenty years, I've been saying that hip hop was good for hip hop but bad for black music because it marginalized black musicianship/instrumentation. The best funk and R&B musicians now play exclusively in the church because hip hop has rendered it almost impossible for them to earn a living elsewhere. Now, it seems that even my favorite artist is influenced by hip hop in a major way, and that causes the world to be “upside down” to me. I'm still processing. Yet, even while processing, I recognize the quality of most of these songs, even if they may flow against the grain of my personal aesthetic. Eleven of thirteen songs on *Art Official Age* receive an eight of ten rating or higher, and nine of twelve songs on *Plectrum Electrum* receive an eight of ten rating or higher. Roughly, I have rated seventy percent of the songs on both albums an eight or higher. An eight of ten rating for a double album set is not bad, especially for a man who is still determined to have an aesthetic discourse on his own terms. If nothing else, these two albums prove that Prince has one of the most eclectic styles and ranges of anyone in popular music, proving Nelson George's assertion that Prince “is an encyclopedia of rock-n-roll.”

Spotify allows for a listen to both albums. *Art Official Age* can be previewed at <https://play.spotify.com/album/1xRg9g9QCGjFp9poxLnU5M>, and *Plectrum Electrum* can be previewed at <https://play.spotify.com/album/675uV1x91y53JcI7elQN2b>.

¹ Khari Johnson is a sophomore at Tougaloo College

² Ibid

³ Keith Murphy is a writer and regular contributor to *Vibe* and *Rolling Stone*. This comment was made on Prince.org.

⁴ Marc Chamberlain is an emcee and senior at Tougaloo College.

⁵ Ibid

⁶ <http://www.n24.de/n24/Nachrichten/Panorama/d/5466386/eine-fuer-die-buehne--eine-fuers-bett.html>