

This work has been submitted to **NECTAR**, the **Northampton Electronic Collection of Theses and Research**.

**Article**

**Title:** Prince: Don't play me

**Creator:** Wiseman-Trowse, N. J. B.

**Example citation:** Wiseman-Trowse, N. J. B. (2016) Prince: Don't play me. *Tarred and Feathered Blog*. **22/04/16**

It is advisable to refer to the publisher's version if you intend to cite from this work.

**Version:** Published version

**Official URL:** <https://tarredandfeatheredblog.wordpress.com/2016/04/22/prince-dont-play-me/>

<http://nectar.northampton.ac.uk/8415/>





University of Northampton [Follow](#)

Welcome to the University of Northampton blog! Featuring student & staff opinion, real experiences an...  
Apr 22, 2016 · 5 min read

## Prince will never be gone.



Image source: [www.tumblr.com](http://www.tumblr.com)

### **As another legendary singer leaves this mortal coil, Dr Nathan Wiseman-Trowse shares his love for this talented artist:**

The world of popular music is full of great singers, musicians, composers and performers. It has more than its fair share of innovators and plenty of artists oozing charm, mystery and pizzazz. But there aren't that many that you can say all of these things of. You could say it about Prince though. Prince was not just the perfect pop star, he seemed to be a conduit for some kind of unceasing stream of the most exciting, thrilling, soulful music. Tales abound of endless recording and jamming sessions with his many bands and collaborators, he maintained a pretty seamless output of recordings

spanning almost forty years, and his marathon shows, often with unique set lists every night, evidence a man who couldn't help but make music, who had to pump this amazing, mercurial sound out into the world.

*Prince was not just the perfect pop star, he seemed to be a conduit for some kind of unceasing stream of the most exciting, thrilling, soulful music.*



Image source: <https://togz.net/tag/when-doves-cry/>

Over the last twelve hours or so I've heard countless tributes to him as we mourn his passing. Everyone talks of his talent, everyone talks about how ground-breaking he was, how hardworking he was. I don't imagine that you need me to tell you any of that. But Prince has been a significant figure throughout my musical life and looking back it's certain moments that resonate with me. I remember hearing 'When Doves Cry' for the first time around 1984, the first thing I'd ever heard of from him, I was 13. We were just on the tail end of the synth pop thing in the UK, I'd heard plenty of white post-punk funk, I'd heard Summer and Moroder, but 'When Doves Cry' was so totally alien, really hard, minimal. The staccato bursts of guitar sounded like something larger had been smashed apart and Prince was just leaving us with the shards. The skeletal rhythm track, something Prince was always good at, was barely there at all (in retrospect I wonder if Prince had been listening to New York No Wave pioneers Suicide) and

then over this barren alienating landscape was his vocal, soulful but disturbing at the same time, disjunctive and cramped. I loved it.

*'When Doves Cry' was so totally alien, really hard, minimal. The staccato bursts of guitar sounded like something larger had been smashed apart and Prince was just leaving us with the shards.*

Then it's 1992 and Prince releases 'Sexy MF', to date my favourite track of his. Whilst everyone was going mad about Ronson and Mars' 'Uptown Funk' last year, it always rang hollow to me. As a James Brown pastiche it had all the ingredients but seemed to be missing an understanding of the taught minimalism of funk, less is always more. 'Sexy MF' is so streamlined, only made up of what's purely necessary, the relentless guitar, the horn stabs just in the right places, the repetition, all of these things an expression of the desire Prince is channelling through the mixing desk. It's not pastiche, it's a language Prince could use to walk that line between the sacred and the profane. It still astonishes me.



PeterTea via Visual hunt / CC BY-ND

And then there's the power pop of 'Purple Rain'. And then there's the social commentary of 'Sign O' The Times'. And then there's his blistering guitar playing (see his attack on George Harrison's 'While My Guitar Gently Weeps' at a tribute concert in 2004). Then there's his championing of female musicians, producers and engineers. Then there's his single-minded spat with Warners. Then there's his refusal

to allow his music on most streaming sites. Then, well, there's a lot to admire isn't there.

And then last night I go out for a drive and Nick Luscombe's on Late Junction. His first track is 'Don't Play Me', a track from a bonus disc released with Prince's 1998 *Crystal Ball* box set. I haven't heard it before, and it starts off with a swinging acoustic guitar riff, close-miked, and Prince right by your ear. It's a statement of independence, artistic, erotic, commercial, personal and spiritual. It's a nod to the way in which the music industry sought to control him and how he can simply sidestep all of that. It's a nod to his own assurance in his craft:

**"I'm the wrong colour and I play guitar, my only competition is, well, in the past."**

And he's right. It's a song that says I worked damn hard, I made art that I'm proud of and I'll control it, not the record companies, not the fans, not the machine of the entertainment industry. It's mine, and you can share it too if you like. When Bowie passed away at the start of the year I said to my students that we had lost someone as significant as Bach. I think we just lost Beethoven. Actually, no we didn't, we lost Prince, he was never anybody else, despite the name changes. As he says in 'Don't Play Me' ...

**"U couldn't play enough of me now  
2 make me feel like a star  
Don't play me, I already do in my car  
Don't play me"**

Another light goes out but by God, it burned very bright while it was here. And perversely of course, he isn't really gone. We can still play him.

**How did Prince influence you? Share your stories with us #UNandYou**

