



Prince's Sign O' the Times (33 1/3)

Michaelangelo Matos

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One of the greatest double albums of the vinyl era, Sign 'O' the Times shows Prince at his peak. Here, Michaelangelo Matos tells the story of how it emerged from an extraordinary period of creativity to become one of the landmark recordings of the 1980s. He also illustrates beautifully how - if a record is great enough and lucky enough to hit you at the right time - it can change your way of looking at the world. EXCERPT The most immediately striking thing about Sign 'O' the Times is the jazzy sensibility running through it. Prince's father was a jazz musician, his mother a vocalist; he'd been a fan of chops-heavy jazz-fusion as well as rock and R&B growing up. But when Prince began recording for Warner Bros., he abjured the brass sections that dominated groups like Earth, Wind & Fire and Parliament-Funkadelic, opting instead for stacked synthesizer patterns and a spare, cold feel that markedly contrasted with lush, overarranged disco and the wild, thick underbrush of the era's giant funk ensembles; Rickey Vincent, author of Funk: The Music, the People, and the Rhythm of the One, dubbed it "naked funk." Getting away from traditional R&B instrumentation is an underappreciated aspect of Prince's crossover success; Prince is also said to have actively disliked the sound of horns early in his career.

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