



GIGS

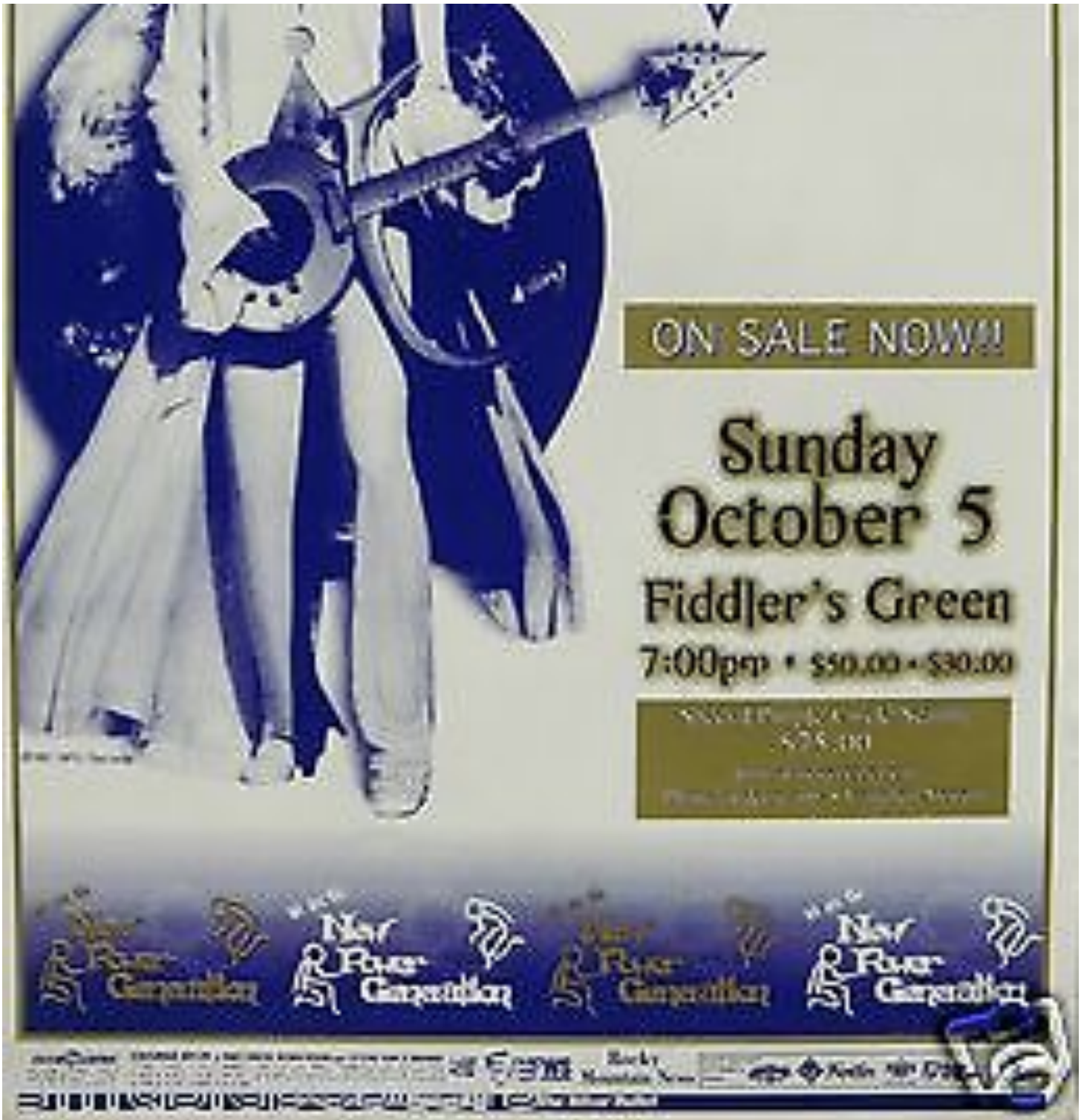
"Dude"



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By Robert Scovill / May 11, 2016





(This piece is one of several we are working on talking with engineers who worked with Prince for various time periods—everything for a three-part audio and text remembrance from Rob “Cubby” Colby who was part of the core for almost a decade at both MON and FOH to a story form a Vegas sound company owner about his one-night mixing The Artist almost 20 years ago. Especially with the Cubby stuff, we are taking our time because it is way more important to get it right than to get it fast. Stay tuned...)

BY ROBERT SCOVILL

So, there are a handful of words and phrases that are seared into my consciousness and in turn actually invoke emotion the second that I mentally recall and process them.

#1-My parents telling me "I'm proud of you son, well done",

#2-My wife or children telling me "I miss you and I love you"

#3-Anyone from the Prince entourage saying "Dude wants to see you".

#1 and #2 took years of shared experiences to develop and as a result, they carry deep meaning.

#3 took only three weeks to leave it's indelible mark on my personality as a professional. "Dude" was, of course, referring to "TAFKAP" – The Artist Formerly Known As Prince".

Given Prince's recent passing, there have been, of course, countless stories. "Legends" of working with Prince are going to continue to surface and become part of the social dialogue. And, of course, there is episode after episode of backstory to what I'm going to share with you here. But in the end, those tales are all just window-dressing for what I actually departed the tour with after working one-on-one with this most incredible musician, performer and person.

It is said that "powerful things come in small doses" and so it was for my stint with the Purple One. Brief, but very impactful.

I was on a short break from a recording project when I visited the Jam of The Year Tour as a fan when it stopped in Phoenix in October of 1997. I went at the invitation of my Tom Petty tourmate Charlie Lawson who was on the tour as the PA systems tech. I departed from the show a bit early, but by the time I arrived home after my 25-minute drive, there was a message on my phone saying that Prince had heard that I was at the show and wanted to meet me and very much wanted to know if I would be willing to come out and help "right the ship" in that they were having "sound challenges".

Now, at this point in Prince's already long and storied career, the reputation of the gig simply preceded itself. Since the departure of long time mixer Rob "Cubby" Colby from the camp, the organization appeared

to have drifted into a bit of a "human saw mill" where a long list of reputable mixers had come and gone. But after being there for a short time it was very evident to me that the situation was much more an endorsement of Cubby and his skills and abilities than it was an indictment of Prince.

The reputation at that point for the gig was that it was uncommonly challenging. Metaphorically speaking it was on par with volunteering for SEAL training. By that I mean, your time there was sure to be intensely and personally challenging, emotionally charged and volatile.

But if you did survive it, if you made it through the gauntlet, you were certain to be a better, stronger person and professional for having done so. But also just like in SEAL training, the attrition rate of those who *didn't* make it was extremely high. According to those on the Jam of the Year Tour, the attrition rate during my time was that I would be the 13th mixer selected at the 12-week mark of the tour. Yeah. Okay. Sign me up.

Now, to the casual observer, it would be easy to just attribute all of this volatility to "artist grandstanding" or "ego run amuck" or more commonly, "the guy's just an asshole" etc. Honestly, when your name is TAFKAP you're an easy target for this type of characterization – frankly, too easy. But, none of those assessments square in any way with my experiences during my three-week stint with Dude. Now, that's not to say there wasn't tension on the tour; there was, and it was intense. I don't think I've ever experienced more anxiety on display from people of every rank on the tour simply because you lived minute-to-minute not knowing if you were going to have a job in two hours time.

So why was it like this? Why was *he* like this? Honestly, in the end, who truly knows? But, I have my own hypothesis based solely on my experiences on the tour after dealing with Dude one-on-one and it goes something like this.

He simply demanded that you EARN his respect.

If you were incapable of or unwilling to do what it took to do so, you weren't long for the tour. Now make sure you hear me correctly on this; Prince very much wanted you to succeed in this quest for his respect. He VERY much wanted to respect you and to view you as GREAT at your given duties. And he was going to challenge you to see if you were up to the task. In contrast, you have to juxtaposition that against this additional insight; the last thing Dude wanted was a "yes man" in his hire.

Because of this he would test you seemingly at every turn. A couple of times, I can remember him asking for kind of crazy and outrageous things to be done with regard to audio, and honestly, I was brave enough, or maybe savvy enough, to see that it was a test—just to see how I was going to respond. In the space of a few seconds, you had to process an intense internal dialogue.

"Okay, how are you going to respond?"

"Are you scared of losing your job?"

"Are you going to just cave and commit to the impossible in order to secure your paycheck for another week?"

"Are you going to give in to his charisma and simply bow down and kiss the ring?"

"Or, are you going to serve with integrity and have the backbone to stand your ground as a professional?"

"You know what needs to happen here. You need to make your case for what you believe to be right and push your chips into the center of the table."

The grand prize, of course, being that you'll immediately earn his respect and be viewed as a champion of not only the show, but Prince himself. It forces you to immediately ponder and answer the question: "Am I the champion of HE or ME?"

In the end, the entire exercise was about Dude saying "who's interests are you looking out for, yours or mine? In case you it's lost on you, I'm paying you to look out for mine." Now, just to reiterate, what he was NOT saying was "I'm paying you, so you have to do whatever I say." From my vantage point, the last thing he wanted was a robot working for him. No, he wanted driven people with soul and emotion and competence who absolutely owned what they do and in turn attacked their instrument of choice—whether it was a bass guitar, a mixing console or a frying pan—with as much passion and energy as he put on display every minute of every day. Anything less was simply unacceptable.

So it's with great fondness that I remember the day on the tour when Takumi, Prince's guitar tech came up to me and said "Dude wants to see you". A phrase that was normally met with anxiety, fear, loathing and a pondering of "Well, I wonder how am I going to get home?" But that anxiety was all washed away when it was followed by "Hey, be careful man, he's really starting to like you. You could be here a while"

So what professional life lessons did my time with Dude teach me?

#1 – If you're in this line of work, get comfortable with being uncomfortable. You're going to regularly get

put on the spot and you better be secure enough in who you are and what you bring to the table to deal with it and not come unhinged.

#2 – You gotta be all-in. Get fired up with enthusiasm or get fired with enthusiasm. Yep, apply it to every aspect of your life and your career.

#3 – If you're going to be the one charged with telling the Emperor he has no clothes, be careful when and where you do it, and always make sure and have a beach towel handy. i.e., protect the artist at all times even when he is; metaphorically speaking, naked.

I'm filled with great memories of that epic three weeks of touring with Prince. I've shared a few of the stories with my peers from time to time. But many of the events I'll keep close to me and take with me when I leave this planet purely out of respect for Prince and his legacy. I assure you they're similar to many other Prince stories you'll hear surfacing now. Stories where, at the end, you'll catch yourself saying something like "wow, that's unbelievable". And ya know what? That's the magic of the Purple One ... he was always willing to challenge your notion of what is doable, believable or even possible especially with how it pertained to YOU.



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