Prince Rogers Nelson stood only five foot two, but the eclectic musical genius—who died of an overdose of fentanyl, an opioid painkiller, on April 21, 2016, at age 57—was one of Minnesota’s artistic giants. Born and raised in Minneapolis, Prince took refuge in music after his parents divorced, and by his early teens he had mastered a multitude of instruments. At age 16 he joined Grand Central, a band started by childhood chum and bassist Andre Anderson (later Cymone). Although the band played mostly cover tunes, Grand Central offered Prince the opportunity to hone his musical chops, especially as a songwriter. After hearing a demo tape by the young prodigy, Warner Bros. signed the 18-year-old to a record deal, and in 1978 Prince released his first album, *For You*.

Fiercely independent, Prince insisted on self-producing his recordings to control the creative process. What transpired was a delicious musical stew of funk, rock, pop, synthpop, and new wave that became known as the Minneapolis Sound. Working largely out of Paisley Park, his sprawling nine-acre home studio in Chanhassen, Minnesota, Prince churned out a flock of classic eighties hits, including “1999,” “Delirious,” and “Little Red Corvette.” In 1984 he achieved megastardom with the release of the album and motion picture *Purple Rain*. Shot largely in Minneapolis, the semi-autobiographical film showcased local haunts like the nightclub First Avenue, where Prince performed in the signature costume (left), now in the collections of the Minnesota Historical Society. The film grossed $80 million and the album, which won an Oscar for Best Soundtrack, spawned the hit singles “When Doves Cry,” “Let’s Go Crazy,” and “Purple Rain,” securing Prince’s iconic status in the pantheon of American popular music.

The Minnesota Historical Society preserves more than 50 items associated with Prince, including T-shirts, posters, buttons, concert tickets, record albums, and branded merchandise from his now-closed Minneapolis retail store. Many of these items can be viewed online at www.mnhs.org.

—Adam Scher, senior curator

Within hours of Prince’s death on the morning of Thursday, April 21, 2016, MNHS staff sprang into action to honor Prince’s legacy in Minnesota and beyond. The first social media posts were made at midday. By afternoon, collections and exhibits staff readied the *Purple Rain* costume in MNHS collections for display at the History Center. Between April 22 and June 19, hundreds of visitors came to view the suit and memorabilia for free during normal museum hours. Many fans left tributes and remembrances to one of Minnesota’s most celebrated and beloved icons on multicolored sticky notes. Media attention was intense. In addition to Minnesota media outlets, Access Hollywood, Newsweek, People, CNN, and MTV were just some who called or visited. As of May 19, MNHS’s Facebook post with photos of Prince’s *Purple Rain* suit and the process of preparing and bringing it upstairs to display reached 331,670 people and had 20,331 likes and 4,558 shares.

Visit the digital edition to see exclusive video about the Prince tributes and hear the story of an MNHS staff member who was at a Paisley Park party just days before Prince’s death.
Copyright of Minnesota History is the property of the Minnesota Historical Society, and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or users or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder’s express written permission: contact us.

Individuals may print or download articles for personal use.

To request permission for educational or commercial use, contact us. Include the author’s name and article title in the body of your message. But first--

If you think you may need permission, here are some guidelines:

Students and researchers
- You do not need permission to quote or paraphrase portions of an article, as long as your work falls within the fair use provision of copyright law. Using information from an article to develop an argument is fair use. Quoting brief pieces of text in an unpublished paper or thesis is fair use. Even quoting in a work to be published can be fair use, depending on the amount quoted. Read about fair use here: http://www.copyright.gov/fls/fl102.html
- You should, however, always credit the article as a source for your work.

Teachers
- You do not need permission to incorporate parts of an article into a lesson.
- You do need permission to assign an article, either by downloading multiple copies or by sending students to the online pdf. There is a small per-copy use fee for assigned reading. Contact us for more information.

About Illustrations
- Minnesota History credits the sources for illustrations at the end of each article. Minnesota History itself does not hold copyright on images and therefore cannot grant permission to reproduce them.
- For information on using illustrations owned by the Minnesota Historical Society, see MHS Library FAQ.