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**Transcript of Prince talking at Tavis Smiley Show**

Tavis Smiley: Good evening from Los Angeles. I'm Tavis Smiley. Tonight, Prince on PBS.

Tavis: I have struggled for days trying to figure out how to introduce this guy, and here's the best I've come up with. Ready? The artist formerly known and now known once again as Prince. That's the best I can come up with.

Prince: Lord have mercy. That's it, huh?

Tavis: Ha ha ha! That's all I could come up with.

Prince: All right.

Tavis: Otherwise it would have taken me 20 minutes--it would have taken me the whole show to introduce you because you are so phenomenal. So thanks for coming to see me. I appreciate it.

Prince: I appreciate it, too.

Tavis: Let me start with this Grammy thing. First of all, you rocked the Grammys. That was an amazing performance. Did you enjoy it?

Prince: Loved it. Loved it.

Tavis: I was scared when I heard that you were gonna do this thing with Beyonce, and I was scared, as I told you, because you were such all that by yourself, I was afraid that it wasn't gonna come off right. Even though I love Beyonce. She's very talented. I was just afraid that Prince can't do nothin' with nobody else. He's gotta do his thing because he's Prince, but it came off OK.

Prince: Oh, I, uh...I pride myself on working with great musicians, and I consider her to be as such. She's an amazing talent, the real deal, so she just fell right into it. It was no problem whatsoever.

Tavis: How did that performance come about? I mean, you decide to do whatever you want to do on your own terms, but how did that actually come to be?

Prince: Well, the producer, Ken Ehrlich, had been hounding me every year to do something, and this year we have a new record coming out, so...and a tour scheduled, so I thought if this was...if this was gonna be the year, then I wanted to do something special. Then the notion of working with Beyonce came about, and that made it extra special 'cause I'm such a fan, so I mean...

Tavis: That's nice for Prince to be a fan of your stuff. Speaking of being a fan, as you well know, and I can't even hide it, I'm a fan of your stuff, and just a couple of weeks ago, I went to Vegas to see you not in one show, but 2 shows, and you got to stop doing these things at 2:00 and 3:00 in the morning 'cause I can't stay up 2 days in a row.

Prince: See, that's how I tell who's real and who ain't.

Tavis: Ha ha ha! Am I authentic now? Am I real now?

Prince: That's why I'm here.

Tavis: I'm glad to hear that then. All right. So if I can stay up till 2:00 and 3:00 in the morning, not to see you go off-stage. I mean coming on at 2 A.M. Coming on at 3 A.M. And playing to 5, 6:00 in the morning. Um, but I stood and watched that audience in Vegas, Prince, and there are 2 or 3 things that stand out to me about your audience in particular. One, you have the absolute most diverse audience of any artist, no pun intended, that I've ever hung out with or experienced in a concert consistently. What is it about you or about your music...I mean, I've seen the black thing and the white thing and the Motown thing had the black folk and the white folk listening, but you have the most ethnically, culturally, racially diverse audience, I think, of any artist on the scene. Why you?

Prince: Well, I think from the beginning, as I was coming into my own persona and understanding of who I was, I never talked down to my audience. And when you don't talk down to your audience, they can grow with you, and I give them a lot of credit to be able to hang with me this long because I've gone through a lot of changes, but they've allowed me to grow, and thus we can tackle some serious subjects and try to just be better human beings, all of us, you know?

Tavis: The other thing that strikes me about your audience that's uniquely different is that your audience is very musically sophisticated. It's one thing to love music. It's another thing to have an audience of fans that is really very sophisticated about music.

Prince: Yeah, a lot of the people that come see us now, their parents listened to real music, real songwriting, real musicianship, and they respect somebody who takes their craft seriously, and I grew up that way. So I, you know, when we do our shows, I try to have the best musicians I can find with me at that particular time, and like I said, we don't play down to them. We don't, you know, it's just not about a party, you know. That's gonna be anyway if it's good music. But, you know, I think that's lacking in music today.

Tavis: You have changed, as you said a moment ago, and evolved in so many ways and have gone through so many stages in your own career development. You said a moment ago that because of that, you like to do different things. It's very difficult often times for a performer, for an artist to hang onto his or her audience when they're not doin' the stuff that you know they want to hear, and you have a certain, and I say this with all respect--there's a certain arrogance about you that will come out on stage, and you know these folks done paid their money, and you know they want to hear "Little Red Corvette." You know they want to hear "Delirious." You know they want to hear "Purple Rain," "1999," everything else. But you come out and play what you want to play at that particular stage in your life, and for your true core fans, they don't ever leave disappointed.

Prince: Yeah, well, first of all, I don't know who was the one that came up with the notion that you have to play the same songs every concert.

Tavis: Probably fans.

Prince: Yeah, well, most of the people that come see us now, they've been to see me umpteen times, and the only pity is when they bring their kids and they're trying to show their kids the experience they had. But I don't know how any of us grow if we just, you know, tread water. The idea is that we keep growing, and like we were saying before, the fan base I have now, they're so sophisticated, they almost expect me to do the unexpected, and that gives me a lot of room to challenge myself as well as them.

Tavis: One of the things I've been dying to ask you about is this notion of whether or not you think too many performers, too many artists have become too racy and become so willing to sell a record that they would do just about anything to make that record sell, and I want to ask you that question specifically because you are the King--OK, the Prince of raciness. 'Cause back in the day, you were, like--I mean, I can't even call it pushing the envelope. You were really pushing the envelope back in the day. So what's your sense now of artists who've gotten in trouble of late pushing the envelope and being extremely racy for much of the American audience?

Prince: Well, you know, everything's relative. First of all, racy, back when I was quote unquote "racy," as you say--I mean, it's pretty light now. I mean, if you take the words to "Darling Nikki," which I got into a little bit of hot water about back in '84, if you take those lyrics and read them now, it's a little different than say the president of the R.R.A.A.A. reading the lyrics to one of these current hip-hop songs at a congressional hearing.

Tavis: Yeah. Ha ha ha!

Prince: It's just--it's a lot different now. Any time you have to rely on just raciness alone, you know, you can only--put it this way. You're gonna get the audience you deserve. All right? So when we were wearing more risqué outfits, we had a bunch of...

Tavis: Risqué fans.

Prince: That's right. In the audience. And, you know, when you're 21 years old, you know, you're gonna try stuff. When you're 40, it's, you know, you don't wanna be pulling out body parts. Those are just...it's old skin.

Tavis: It's old skin, yeah.

Prince: So it's different then, you know. You don't wanna be showing all that to--

Tavis: But we live in a world now, we live in a culture where artists and media conglomerates sell us--I was just reading an article the other day in the L.A. Times about this very issue that we get sold all this hype. We get--all this hype gets pushed on us, and they're really selling events that really turn out to be nonevents, oftentimes.

Prince: Well, once again, they will get the audience and the consumer that they deserve. I mean, there's a glut in the industry because of this thinking. You know, it's all bottom line. It's all real quick. The artist turnover rate is really fast, and there's not a lot of substance. You know, a lot of these kids don't know how to play music 'cause they didn't learn it. They weren't taught the art and the craft of song writing, and it is an art, and if you don't respect that then, you know, we're gonna get a lot of these nonevents goin' on.

Tavis: I'm glad, but more importantly, the people who get a chance to play and work with you, I'm sure, are glad that over the years--speaking of playing instruments--that you got to be a little bit nicer and let somebody play on your record 'cause when you first broke, all songs written, produced, performed, lead vocals, background vocals, everything on the album was done by you.

Prince: Yeah. But there, again, it's a situation where, you know, people, if they want me to go back and do what I

used to do, they have to understand that it's my body of work, and I'm trying to put in that body of work things that I haven't done, so that when I finish, I look at all of it, it represents, you know, the whole complete pie as opposed to the same thing over and over.

Tavis: Who's running the business now? There's a big debate now with what just happened to L.A. Reid at Arista. Had more Grammy nominations on Grammy night than any other record label, and they kicked him out of the building in New York with the quickness.

Prince: Can I at least go to the Grammys and just...can I just--

Tavis: It was nice that Outkast brought him up on stage. That was nice. They gave him some love, but the question is who's running the business now? Are the creatives running it? Are the suits running it? What's the state of the business these days?

Prince: Well, that changed a long time ago when it became merely bottom line. You'll see, if you go back and you look at music, you'll see a big change when MTV came into the business. Now, that's not to say that they're running it, but that sort of mentality is what is king now. It's not about content and substance. You know, hip-hop is very diverse, but if you only focus on one aspect of it, then what you get is this image of black America that is completely contrary to what actually goes on. You know, I've never seen you in a jogging suit. You know, fit and trim, but look at how you're dressed. The gatekeepers, they know who they are. We don't need to name names, but rest assured, they aren't musicians. They don't have anything to do with music. If you sat one of 'em in a room and you asked him, "What is it that you do? How did you get this job?" A lot of 'em came from law, a lot of 'em came from accounting and things like that. They're merchants, basically. And it's not to disrespect 'em or demean their role in any way, but at the same time, you can't expect them to know who they're signing and sort of gatekeep the music.

Tavis: Let me change gears on you dramatically 'cause I've been dying to show this to you. I don't know if you've seen this or not. Maybe you have, but if you haven't, I want to show this to you. I went to see a movie the other day, and there was a clip in the movie that was absolutely hilarious, and I want you to see this, and I want to ask you something about it. Uh, roll this clip for me.

Barber: With all the problems we got, black folks used to just say, "At least we ain't crazy." Our crimes made sense. Ain't got no money, rob somebody with some money. Simple as that.

Man: Hey, y'all don't want to admit it, but black folks just as crazy as white folks.

All: Ooh...now, whoa, whoa.

Man: Mike Tyson, he's like 3 crazy people, man. Prince?

Second man: Hold on. Hold on, now. He half Cherokee or something. Don't put him in there with us.

Tavis: Ha ha ha! "Prince is half Cherokee. Don't put him in there with us." Did you see this?

Prince: Yeah.

Tavis: Did you laugh at this?

Prince: Oh, yeah. Absolutely. Yeah. There's a dispute over who my grandfather was on my mother's side.

Tavis: Right. Ha ha ha. How do you--I don't know if this even matters to you, but let me ask you anyway. What's your sense of how the public has viewed you as a personality over the years, and how that has changed? I mean, do you concern yourself with that? Are you conscious of how you have been viewed over the course of your career? Does it matter to you? What do you think about--what do you think about what people think of you, if you think about that at all?

Prince: Mm...that's kind of a deep question. I...

Tavis: I get one every now and then.

Prince: Yeah. I'm sort of like a, um...because of some of the stances I take, people are gonna have different viewpoints of me depending upon which side of the fence they're sitting on. You know...like, we were talking about the music industry. A merchant would have trouble being called a bean counter when, in fact, they know that's true. They'd be hard pressed, though, to try to sing a song with me. So, I don't really care so much what people say about me because it usually is a reflection of who they are. For example, if people wish I would sound like I used to sound, then it says more about them than it does me. If I change the lyrics to a song, then it begs the question "Why do you want me to curse? Why do you want me to talk like other people?" See, cursing was cool when nobody was doing it. Or just a couple people. Like, if everybody wears the same clothes, then it's, you know--it ain't cool no more. You're trying to be different. One can't be different by being racy today. It's not interesting anymore. See, sexiness was in the mind. It was in your imagination. When you lose that, then, you know, like I said, it's just old skin.

Tavis: We've had any number of conversations over the years, off-camera, obviously, and you are a very, very politically astute--very much politically aware--a news junkie. And I've often wondered why it is that as interested as you are in the world that we live...and with all this happening in the world, um, what your thoughts are specifically in this election year--economically, politically, socially. I'm asking a broad question to give you room to play with here, but tell me something about your political views...in this particular and all-important election year.

Prince: First of all, I think just the word "political" and "politics" and all that is just semantics. You know, an equal share of economic wherewithal is desirable by all. We all just want to take care of our families, and do it to the

best of our abilities, and see the world. People want to travel and things like that. A lot of people that I know haven't even been out of the United States. So I consider myself more of a spiritual person than I do political. I'm more concerned with the truth. More concerned with why people won't adhere to it, and why they see themselves as us against them. I used to think that we were the ones that came up with that, but see, we didn't start a lot of these wars, and we certainly don't want to go to them, but...

Tavis: A lot has been written, uh, and I shouldn't even say written, but there's been a lot of conjecture, a lot of conversation in the country about your spiritual evolution of late. Care to say anything about that?

Prince: Uh, well...

Tavis: Your spiritual journey.

Prince: Yeah. I'd say a big change happened for me in the year 2000, because I, uh, I went back to using my name again. Uh, I--

Tavis: And thank you for that. It was hard trying to say what that symbol was.

Prince: Yeah. Well, there was a purpose for that, and, uh, recently, Anita Baker called me, and we spoke about, uh, her view of me writing "slave" on my face at the time. She said she didn't understand it at the time, but right after that, she had a lot of wars with her particular record company, and she's free now, and she owns her masters now. So, uh...she says to me, "You know, I didn't understand it then, but I do now. I get it." Like I said, in the year 2000, once I changed my name back, and the war was finished with my...so-called enemies, I, uh, I started reading the Bible intensely, and I come to find out that this is--this is the truth.

Tavis: Well, by any name, you a bad man.

Prince: All right.

Tavis: Thank you for coming to see me, and you got to come back and do this again.

Prince: Yes, sir.

Tavis: You got a lot to say, and you got to come and say it more regularly.

Prince: Definitely.

Tavis: I'll hold you to that.

Prince: All right.

Tavis: Nice to see you. Up next, a very special acoustic performance. We talked in this conversation about how he can play just about every instrument. He plays all kinds of music, and his audience and fans appreciate the variety of music, but I've asked him to come on tonight and to do something a little different from what he normally does. I loved that Grammy thing, but what you are about to hear now will blow you away. So stay tuned for a very special acoustic performance by Prince.

Tavis: To close out the show tonight, here's Prince and the very talented Wendy Melvoin performing "Reflection."

Prince: 2 sevens together,  
like time, indefinite,  
try to catch the glass  
before it falls,  
without a frown,  
can you turn up the stereo?  
I wanna play you this old song,  
it's about love,  
can I do that?  
Did we remember  
to water the plants today?  
I forgot to look up at the moon  
because I was too busy,  
yes, I was too busy,  
too busy  
looking at you,  
oh, baby,  
still, it's nice to know  
that, uh, when bodies wear out,  
we can get another,  
what does that one thing  
have to do  
with the other one?  
I don't know,  
i was just thinking about  
my mother,  
you know what?  
Turn the stereo back down,  
ain't nothing worse than  
an old, worn-out love song,  
do you like my hair this way?

Remember all the way back  
in the day  
when we would compare  
whose afro was the roundest?  
Mirrored tiles  
above the bed,  
fishnets and posters  
all over the walls,  
oh, yeah,  
sometimes I just wanna go out,  
you know what I mean,  
playing my guitar,  
just watch all the cars go by...  
[song ends]

Prince: thank you.

Tavis: As with any Prince appearance, there's always a little something unexpected at the end, so here's a sneak preview at a world premiere of Prince's latest music video. The song is "Musicology." Enjoy. Good night and keep the faith.

Ooh...uh Ooh...uh  
Heard about the party now just  
east of Harlem, Dougie gonna  
be there but you got to call him  
even the soldiers need a friend  
some time, listen to the  
groove, y'all, let it unwind  
your mind, no intoxication  
lets you see what I see  
dancin' hot and sweaty right in  
front of me, ohh, call it what  
you like, I'm a cold and hot  
beat, this is just another one  
of God's gifts: musicology  
you got to keep the party movin'  
like I told you, keep the old  
school going for the true funk  
soldiers, musicology, uh  
Wait a minute, band,  
wish I had a dollar for every  
time you say don't you miss  
the feelin' music gave ya back  
in the day? Let's groove,  
September, Earth, Wind & Fire,  
Hot pants by James  
slides will make you higher...

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