

Corrie Van Ausdal as Appollonia.

Minneapolis Babylon

Blair Schulman

The Show Formerly Known as Purple Rain
Late Night Theatre
February 18-March 26, 2005

There is reliability in the ridiculous, especially when our prime-time culture endures a reality that is scripted and edited into 45 minute increments. Escaping the channel-surfing malaise, Ron McGee's Late Night Theatre will sometimes portray the bubbling lunacy of Tokyo stockbrokers in a bull market. A pop culture playhouse of clutter and clatter that in the end renders itself cohesive and entertaining — suits still buttoned, self-respect seemingly unruffled, *coitus uninterrupted*. Silly and perverse can be a relief.

The Show Formally Known as Purple Rain falls somewhere in between the reeling Nikkei salaryman and a very familiar trip in the way-back machine. LNT mines the post-punk archives to remind its audience of what we thought the future held for us back in the innocent days of fluorescent makeup and lycra leg wear.

In 1984, *Purple Rain* was a *Godspell* for the MTV generation and David Wayne Reed adapts a script that hoped to seize every nuance of the diminutive divas shea-butter slick autobiography.

Even when the Artist best known as Himself first offered this visionary opus, it often fell under its own weight. Such is the burden of being first. There was so much that wanted to be said on so small a stage, the story plodded a bit where the gist would have been enough. Director Kara Armstrong made lemonade in overcoming the Titanic production needs for such an all-encompassing story. The discography was present and sung well enough to keep the audience toe-tapping with easy segues in and out of the story. Still, the Late Night team needs and deserves grander environs so that it can flex its synapses in an environment that allows their creativity to properly run amok.

Any encumbrances that heeded the flow of the story dissipated under the auspices of the heavily armed, all female cast. It was less women playing men in garish clothing than women interpreting the hormonal burdens that talent and freedom and opportunity present in a bitter, smoky 1980s Minneapolis. Brutal, forlorn, and unforgiving, Prince grabbed every sliver of talent to claw his way out of a dead-end night club scene that was rivaled between a sleazy pimp-cum-hoodlum Morris Day (A frighteningly transformed Kimberly Queen) and the relentless winds coming off Lake Min-

netonka. The script and direction gave the actors every opening to showcase their personal takes on the motley crew created, and the splendiferous effect bore great fruit for an audience expecting all the bells and whistles it paid for.

The actors were sincere and honest with their inhabitations. Jessalyn Kincaid broke down every barrier of doubt as the self-beleaguered impresario. Her incarnation transcended simple makeup. Less so her pencil-line moustache (Dear God, the entire cast had one it seemed!) than her ability to crawl inside the raw, slightly damaged psyche that was the incubus for this whole con-flamma. Her voice carried with it every scar in the battle to escape the drudgery of alcoholic parents cramping a style that required a much groovier living situation. Shannon Michalski and Loretta Pope were the aforementioned parents who also played dual roles. Michalski was Wendy, Prince's guitarist as well as the fist-happy father who maybe did/maybe didn't find Jesus. Pope portrayed the pathetic alcoholic mother. It was in her dual role as Lisa, however, a keyboard player using equipment straight from Toys R Us, that floored the audience with a breathtaking rendition of *Nothing Compares 2 U*. It is these gems that are the heart and soul of Late

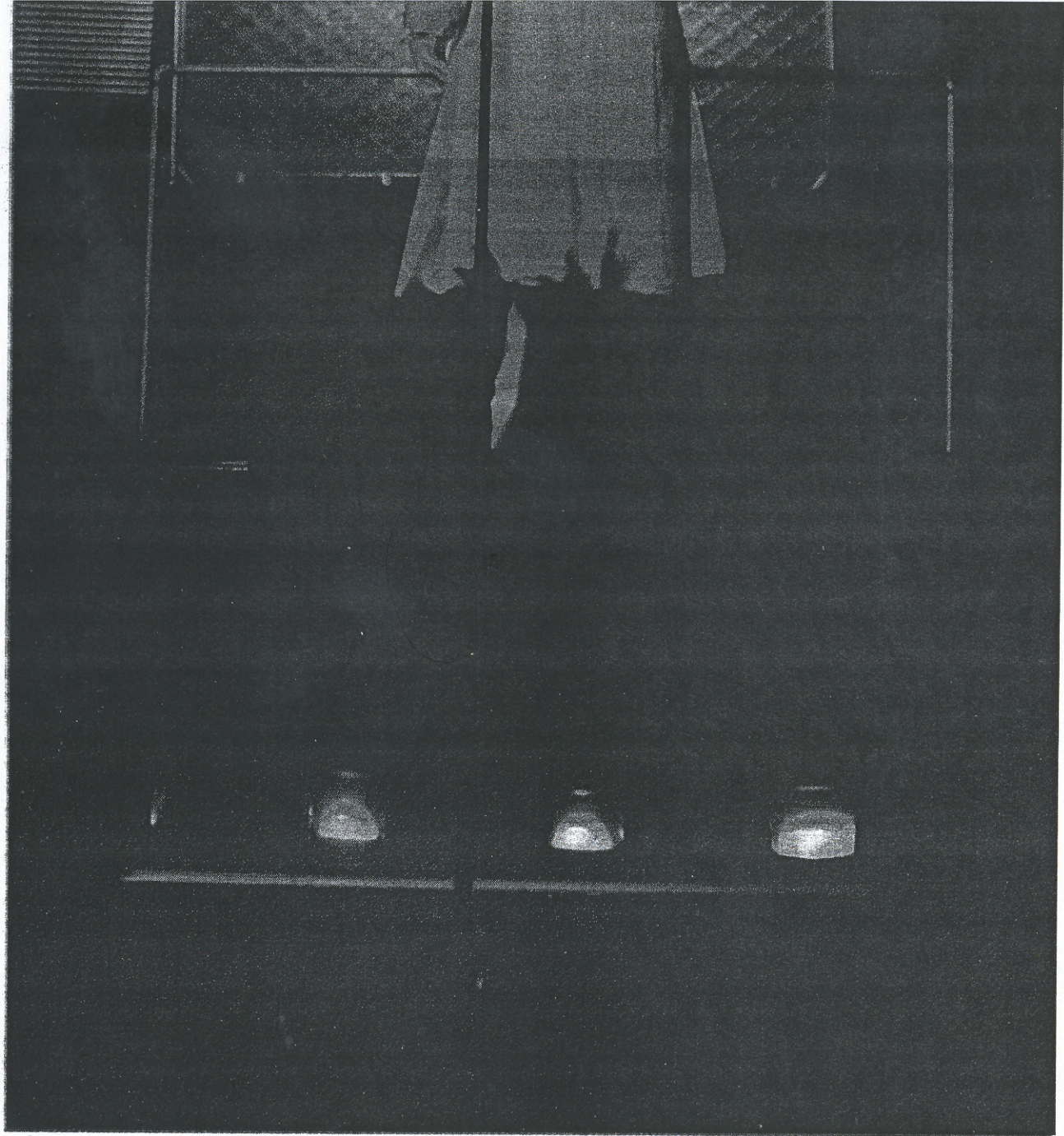
Night Theatre.

Rather than picking daisies for her small dual roles of Jenny/Jerome, Laura Frank made a bouquet of the lovelorn barmaid and coke-addled sideman by creating lasting idiosyncrasies for each character that rose to the professionalism of the entire cast.

Corrie Van Ausdal portrayed the Amazonian career whore extraordinaire, Appollonia, a character who blew into town on an ill wind, coasting on a mane of dark hair, sunburnt breasts and dubious sex appeal. It takes a lot of talent to display none at all and Van Ausdal breathed selfishness into a shiny-spangled nin-compoop that took her trifecta and ran it straight into obscurity.

There was something innocent about the perverted ambition each character portrayed. A moment in time when the determined weren't always connected to a modem or cable wire and simply consented to portray themselves, eager to escape whatever drudgery was their albatross and not to succumb to homogeneity. And like Prince, Late Night Theatre and its lexicon of the odd, obscure, and downright regular release us from the deluge of ringtones to offer an evening that sets out to prove nothing, except a collective ideal to entertain.

Blair Schulman is the author of *Love Letters To Myself*, (Writers Press, 2000) and makes a vain attempt at dividing his time between Kansas City, New York and Los Angeles. In Kansas City, he operates Second Honeymoon Vintage Clothing in the Crossroads Arts District.



Jessalyn Kincaid as Prince.