




Maciej Smółka  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8552-3676>

Institute of American Studies and Polish Diaspora
Faculty of International and Political Studies
Jagiellonian University

PURPLE CURRENT: STREAMING POPULAR MUSIC IN THE NAME OF A LOCAL HERITAGE

Abstract

The Current, a broadcasting service, which is a part of Minnesota Public Radio organization, has launched a special online radio stream called *Purple Current* in 2018. Based in Minneapolis, it focuses on the life and legacy of Prince, emphasizing his inspirations, influence, culture in which he grew up and recorded. While *Purple Current* can be seen as a reactive venture after musician's death in 2016, the stream is much more complex cultural project, especially given very specific cultural environment of Twin Cities. The research aims to analyze *Purple Current* radio stream as a cultural text, using the perspective of music geography and American studies, and through studying the discourse it presents – its mission, programming, music, image-building via Twitter, and statements by its founders – to understand its purpose and deeper social functions. The study shows that *Purple Current* is much more complex venture to be considered simply an homage to an important cultural figure as Prince. It integrates local community, exposes listeners to historically neglected minority culture of Black Minneapolitans, while being involved in the processes of popularization, education, and image-building. This results in a project, which is relevant and valid culturally, socially, politically, or even historically.

Keywords: popular music, public media, Minneapolis, Prince, HD radio

Introduction

It is no easy task to define or categorize Minnesota's culture, especially when focusing on its biggest metropolitan region of Twin Cities. Both Minneapolis and Saint Paul, throughout their history have experienced and accepted influences from various sources including Native Americans, European migrants, powerful working class, and, especially since the Great Migration, Black communities. The latter had a profound impact on how we perceive Twin Cities, starting as a tiny community of approximately 1% total population in 1960s, but growing to over 30% in 2020s (MN

Compass, 2020). Such an audience demand recognition, acknowledgment, appreciation, and a platform to manifest its culture.

Minnesota Public Radio (MPR), one of the most prominent and robust public radio organizations in the United States, can be treated as a perfect opportunity to comply to those needs by providing a platform to recognize, popularize and educate local communities about Black Minnesotans' role in shaping their local cultural reality. MPR, consisting of three main broadcast services: *YourClassicalMPR*, *MPR News*, and *The Current*, provides a mixture of classical music, news broadcast, and popular music content to its audiences. But, given the specificity of local cultural heritage, the third one – *The Current* – seems the most interesting from the perspective of its role in Twin Cities' cultural landscape.

It is so, because Minneapolis is Prince's city. Despite his unexpected passing in 2016, he is still considered to be one of the key figures of local contemporary culture, a unifying cultural factor, shared by the entirety of the city (Giant Steps, 2017). The legendary musician has put Minneapolis on the musical map of the United States, while his music and films, showed the urban landscape to a wide, even international audiences. The musical phenomenon marrying the city with the music called the Minneapolis Sound was shaped by Prince and his proteges throughout his career, exemplifying that the music is, in fact, a part of local identity, integrating the entirety of the city under the umbrella of an art (Ohmes, 2009).

Such special connection between local culture, artistic output, and local media creates an environment, which can be analyzed through the lenses of music as a referral point. As John Connell and Chris Gibson, prominent geographers tell us: "music is made in specific geographical, socio-economic and political contexts, and lyrics and styles are always likely to reflect the positions of writers and composers within these contexts" (2006, p. 90). Media can use these special contexts in order to selectively present culturally relevant music to their audience.

Since we can highlight the three major factors for local culture in terms of Twin Cities: (a) significance of Black communities, (b) prominence of local public radio, and (c) importance of Prince's music for the city, it is natural to wonder whether those three are being combined and how we can interpret such connection. The answer comes with the platform launched in 2018 called *Purple Current* – a project in a form of HD radio stream affiliated with MPR's *The Current*, which highlights the life and legacy of Prince, including music that inspired him and was influenced by him (Hallman, 2018).

Hence, the goal of this article is to analyze *Purple Current's* mission and its program, while focusing on the potential implications of such a project on both local community and foreign listeners. It analyzes the purposefulness of such stream, created as a part of public radio broadcast service, and its execution, especially in terms of Twin Cities' – particularly Minneapolis' – local cultural specificity, history, and its contemporary state.

The study, thus, seeks the answer to the research question whether one should consider *Purple Current* as a reactive homage to Prince and his music after his passing, having a particular commercial appeal in mind, due to a large and continuously growing Black community in Minneapolis, or is it a conscious attempt to foster knowledge and cultural awareness through Minnesota Public Radio's mission. Given the research, the latter should be considered the better argued approach, since *Purple Current* transgresses the simple notion of commercially targeting specific audiences with culturally aware content. It is so because, beyond that, it plays an important social role as it educates and integrates local community, preserves artistic heritage, and gives a platform to expose artistic achievements of a group, which historically has been marginalized.

Theoretical Framework

The study uses an interdisciplinary approach, treating *Purple Current's* stream, a media platform, as a cultural text researched through the lenses of (a) music geography, (b) cultural studies, and (c) American studies, while (d) popular music studies principals are used as an inspiration since the researched medium is a musical phenomenon as well.

As (a) Lily Kong, specialist in the field of cultural geography states: "spatial distribution of musical forms, activities, performers and personalities" is the focus of the field. In this case, *Purple Current* can be treated as a form of said spatial distribution. Moreover, she adds, one must acknowledge "the regional tradition in which the character and identity of places are gleaned from lyrics, melody, instrumentation and the general 'feel' or sensory impact of the music" (Kong, 1995, pp. 185–186), an element also promoted by the stream. Therefore, *Purple Current* was analyzed as an element of regional culture, presenting a link between local culture and popular music with a particular mission in mind.

Meanwhile, (b) cultural studies' and (c) American studies' frameworks provided a specific perspective of highlighting the complexity and uniqueness of American culture and its local variation. Both emphasize that it is impossible to understand a certain cultural phenomenon or text, including ones of music-related character, should they not be placed in the context of a local characteristic. Therefore, American studies, which directly points to the better understanding of American culture within its specificities, is treated as a framework to study Minneapolis's own cultural heritage as both the starting and the reference point of this research – one cannot understand *Purple Current* without acknowledging the specificity of the Twin Cities region, especially in terms of musical history (see: Bennet, Peterson, 2004, pp. 7–8; Mechling, Merideth, Wilson, 1973, pp. 367–370).

Finally, (d) a popular music studies theoretical framework was also taken into consideration since *Purple Current* should be treated as a medium not only

in a particular geographical and cultural context, but also in a music-related one. Therefore, the context-based analysis of music-related phenomena was taken into consideration (Covach, 1999, pp. 454–455) as well as an approach of interdisciplinarity, interculturalism, and interprofessionalism as proposed by Philip Tagg, one of the key figures in popular music studies (Tagg, 1998, pp. 5–6).

Methodology

The research itself focuses, thus, on analyzing the discourse constructed by the *Purple Current* through its programming, music presented, and general narrative about the project, conveyed by means of promotional materials and its website. The study was conducted in 2022, 6 years after Prince's passing and 4 years after *Purple Current's* launch, giving a proper perspective on how the stream has been functioning and what are its potential functions in regards to local community.

To have a broader sense of the stream's mission and its goals, the article also includes voices of two key figures in the early *Purple Current's* history – Sean McPherson, who was the main founder of the stream, and Andrea Swensson's, *The Current's* employee during the inception of the broadcast and a specialist in the field of Minneapolis music's history. Both were approached via email and answered various questions about the origins, mission, and purpose of the stream. Moreover, the study includes *Purple Current's* Twitter feed, bringing one closer to a particular image of Minnesotan art, and the nature of the radio broadcast's mission. All those elements are also treated as a specific narrative regarding the relation between local media and local heritage, and are analyzed accordingly (Barker, Galasiński, 2001, pp. 3–5; Barker, 2008, pp. 163–168).

Therefore, a discourse analysis is set to be the main method of the study. It was used to study programming, selection of music, idea behind the stream, including comments by people participating in its formation, and set in a larger context of American culture. Consequently, the research uses interdisciplinary approach of music geography and cultural studies with a particular emphasis on American and popular music studies, highlighting the importance of the connections between culture, music, and location as a basis of this case study analysis.

The Context of Minnesota's Culture in Understanding Purple Current

In order to start the research on such a specific case study as the *Purple Current*, it is necessary to look at the general context of Minnesota and its Twin Cities region. This, in turn, will let one understand the environment, in which *Purple Current* was able to be conceptualized, launched, and led with success. So, the starting

point should be Minnesota's culture and its specific cultural structure with a strong emphasis on race demographics.

Historically, Minnesota is considered to be a state where majority of residents are white, a descendants of European immigrants, who shaped its cultural landscape – mostly from Germany, Norway and Sweden, becoming a center of Scandinavian and Nordic culture, especially in the city of Minneapolis. Meanwhile, Saint Paul's cultural roots were influenced by immigrants from Germany, Ireland, even Canada (Gilman, 2000, p. 3). This creates a general image of predominantly white residents with a tiny community of nearly 5000 Black Americans living in Twin Cities in 1900, making them 0.28% of the population. Demographics changed slightly due to the Great Migrations, which caused African American community in Twin Cities to grow to 2.7% of the total population in 1970. However, it was back then, in the 1970s, when the situation begun to change – the number of persons of color rose to 5.7% in 1980, 9.3% in 1990, 16.8% in 2000, 23.7% in 2010, and finally 31.2% in 2020 (10.4% identify solely as Black), bringing Twin Cities closer to the average of the United States as a whole (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020a, p. 483; U.S. Census Bureau, 2020b, p. 254; MN Compass, 2020).

These specific demographics are mirrored in the music composed and performed in Twin Cities, especially in Minneapolis, which, since the beginning of the 20th century, has become an artistic hub for local music with some notable exceptions. The first significant event occurred in 1903, when the Minneapolis Orchestra was established, creating the first formal hub of formal musical activity in the region. However, the first prominent local music scene in Twin Cities was established a few decades later within Saint Paul's Rondo neighborhood and its African-American community, which reached its prominence in the 1940s and 1950s, and ended rapidly with the destruction of the area due to the construction of the highway system within city limits. However, it's R&B character will be the first instance of this genre becoming significant in the region (Shabazz, 2017; Swensson, 2017, pp. 20–36).

Meanwhile, the next prominent local music scene was established in Minneapolis in the late 1970s with the rise of punk music with the opening of Jay's Longhorn Bar and establishing Twin/Tone Records in 1977, The Suicide Commandos and Husker Du, becoming crucial groups in the following years, while The Replacements releasing their first record in 1981. All of the following events, happening mainly in downtown Minneapolis, contributed to the national fame of the Minneapolis punk scene. Still, another phenomenon was brewing at the same time in the northern part of the city (Stegall, 2021).

After the demolition of Rondo in Saint Paul, Minneapolis' Near North became a hub for African American community in the region, including their artistic output. This resulted in numerous initiatives, including the creation of The Way community center, where children and young adults could spend their time creatively. The late 1960s and early 1970s could be seen as the beginning of growing music

activity, but the true milestone was the release of Prince's second album titled *Prince* in 1979. It became popular not only locally, but nationally, bringing closer attention beyond local punk music, but R&B scene as well. The following years brought Prince's breakout successes with *Dirty Mind*, *Controversy*, 1999, and *Purple Rain*, which confirmed his status as an international star. But the success of R&B's scene in Near North was not only his own success: his proteges, including friends from school years, built a significant scene, which later became associated with a particular musical phenomenon – the Minneapolis Sound. Such acts as The Time, Vanity 6, Apollonia 6, Jimmy Jam & Terry Lewis, Sheila E., and numerous others represented the most recognizable sounding of the city. What's most important, Prince did not move to a bigger cultural center in the US like New York or Los Angeles, but stayed in Minneapolis until his passing in 2016, solidifying his connection to the city and its culture (Swensson, 2017, pp. x–xv).

Contemporary, post-Prince Minneapolis still recognizes his music as one of the most important in the history of this area, not only in artistic, but also cultural terms. Events commemorating his life and legacy are still being held, including concerts, lectures, conferences, and other performances like annual gatherings of fans called *Celebration* since 2017 (Gabler, 2016), *Prince from Minneapolis* conference in 2018 (Gabler, 2018), or the 2022's unveiling of Ramp A mural depicting Prince's career (Eler, 2022).¹

Nevertheless, the success of local music phenomena – from classical music, through punk, ending with R&B and contemporary hip hop – was also influenced by the local media, and especially radio, highlighting the Minnesotan music. For example, KUXL was a significant radio station in the early stages of local Black music scene. Officially opened in 1961, it provided program of R&B music for a few hours daily. The second one, concentrated on a similar type of music, was KMOJ, which started broadcasting in 1976, heavily inspiring artists, who later became associated with Prince and his music. Such environment favored experimental approach to music by Black artists, who were mostly exposed to white music, often rock, and Black music sporadically, creating a specific stylistic merging punk, folk and classic rock influences with funk and R&B aesthetics (Swensson, 2017, pp. 84–89; World Radio History, 2022, p. 84).

However, even before the success of punk or R&B music scenes in Minneapolis, another influential figure in the media landscape officially launched in 1967 – Minnesota Public Radio, which would eventually become one of the strongest public radio organizations in the whole U.S. As of 2022, MPR consists of three main broadcasting services: *YourClassicalMPR*, which focuses mainly on classical music; *MPR News* providing news broadcasts, radio shows, and podcasts; and *The Current*,

¹ Still, even though Prince's legacy is still alive and well in Minneapolis, one has to acknowledge the importance of contemporary hip hop music, and the local Minneapolis' hip hop scene, which is resonating with younger audience, who did not have a chance to have a personal relationship with Prince's music during his career.

which is popular music-oriented, strongly emphasizing local music scenes and alternative music. The latter one, *The Current*, seems the most interesting in terms of treating local artistic heritage, since Minnesota is currently widely known because of such genre. Furthermore, popular music in Twin Cities region plays a significant role not only in terms of leisure, but also cultural identity. This topic is often discussed by *The Current* and embodied in the form of *Purple Current*.

The Idea of Purple Current

Popular music-focused *The Current* provides not only one singular radio broadcast, but expands its activity through several other services, including HD radio streams available online and through special radio receivers. When *Purple Current*, one of such streams, was launched on April 6, 2018, *The Current* already provided a few other such as *Local Current* with all-Minnesota music, *Radio Heartland* with Americana and folk music, and *Rock the Cradle* with music for children and their parents. Since 2018 two additional streams were launched: *The Siren* (*The Current launches...*, 2022), which focuses on women's voices and their music, and *Carbon Sound*, dedicated to "Black musical expression," both in 2022 (MPR Staff, 2022). As seen above, every stream has a particular theme and provides selected programming for a specific audience. In this terms, *Purple Current* is no different, but stands out in one characteristic – it is a stream based on one particular cultural figure, Prince (*The Current to Launch...*, 2018).

So, the main idea behind the stream was to focus its offer on the legendary musician as a referral point, to which all the other material presented is connected, directly or indirectly. The former would consist of music by Prince and his associates, or music, which inspired their own art. However, the latter presents music, which was inspired by Prince, showcasing his influence on popular music, mostly the contemporary one. As Jim McGuinn, a former director of *The Current* states: "This stream will showcase what we're calling the roots and fruits of the Purple Family Tree," and adds that "A half hour into listening to *Purple Current* you're likely to have heard artists as varied as James Brown, Santana, Nooky Jones and Public Enemy" (*The Current to Launch...*, 2018). Additionally, Andrea Swensson recalls the early, conceptual days of the project:

We wondered, what would it sound like if a radio station played Prince a few times an hour, woven together with songs by the artists we know he loved from the past and present? It also gave us a home to air our interviews and audio documentaries about Prince's music and life (Personal communication, July 8, 2022).

Moreover, Sean McPherson shares another perspective, this time highlighting fans as a starting point of the stream: "We were aware that we connected with a lot of new Prince fans who weren't aware of our offerings shortly after Prince's death.

We became an audio and online hub for people to grieve Prince's passing" (Personal communication, July 8, 2022).

Therefore, one might assume that the main idea and mission of *Purple Current* would be to pay homage to Prince's music through the presentation of art, but also show his musical inspirations. Moreover, in a city such as Minneapolis, where Prince had and still has a status of an artistic legend, such program would continue to promote and legitimize his person as a culturally significant member of the community among all listeners. McGuinn explained that by stating: "We're hoping to make this a warm and inviting purple universe in which to connect, listen and celebrate for music fans the world over" (*The Current to Launch...*, 2018). Therefore, it is not only directed towards local audiences, but listeners all around the globe.²

So, when it comes to the execution of the stream's program itself, *Purple Current's* offer consists of songs related to Prince's music heritage by himself, his associates, his inspirations, or artists whose music are inspired by Prince's art. Therefore, in result, audience receive a selection of songs, chosen by *The Current's* staff, based on Prince and his musical roots, which eventually creates a mixture of Black music's canon, contemporary Black artists, which is mainly R&B music genre. However, one can also hear artists that inspired Prince and does not represent Black music like The Rolling Stones, Joni Mitchell, or Santana – artists, who are widely considered (and confirmed) to be an inspiration to Prince himself (Matos, 2018).³

Such approach is confirmed by stream's programming, which consists of a constant stream of music with a few radio shows⁴: (a) *Purple Current*, which is the main stream of music, occasionally curated by a radio host; (b) *The Purple Hour*, consisting of almost solely Prince's music; (c) *Funk at 5*, showcasing funk music in relation to Prince's music, (d) a limited series titled *Prince Year by Year*, focusing on a particular year in Prince's career; and a weekend show (e) *Wayback Weekends*, emphasizing the older songs of Black music, dating back to the 1950s, but still including Prince's music. McPherson states that the team responsible for establishing the stream

created 1 minute to 2 minute pieces called Music Heads Essentials that offered context on Prince albums and then [the stream]'d play a song from that album. We would also push our programming towards other artists on birthdays or other anniversaries. We wanted

² However, it has to be acknowledged that the stream's mission, in this case, would be also popularization of local culture in a form of Prince's music, which is not a representative image of Black culture in general, or Black culture in Minneapolis, given the fact that Prince's music was created and performed in a particular place and time. Therefore, one could argue that *Purple Current* is a presentation of one figure's cultural roots, which can be extended to a demonstration of Minneapolis' Black culture's roots of the late 20th-century. Nevertheless, such an idea as *Purple Current* may seem as a continuation of the tradition of Black radio stations in Minneapolis, presenting R&B music in predominantly white cultural environment.

³ The playlists are available at *Purple Current's* website: <https://www.thecurrent.org/playlist/purple-current> (accessed: 1.07.2022), where the radio shows and particular songs played are listed.

⁴ As of July 2022.

the arm chair fan of Prince to discover his connections to a Santana, to a Janelle Monae, to a Miles Davis (Personal communication, July 8, 2022).

What is extremely important, the stream itself, even during the *Purple Current* segment without any particular radio host, includes short educational segments, giving context to particular songs or Prince's career. Therefore, as one can see, Prince is a central figure of the stream – a starting point for all musical exploration of the *Purple Current*.

Purple Current's Social Functions

Given the character of the idea behind the *Purple Current* stream and its execution, one might acknowledge a number of social roles the project can adapt in relation to the local culture of Minnesota. The one that stands out as possibly most obvious one is the popularization of local music. As *Purple Current* focuses on Prince's and music related to him in various ways, such stream provides audiences not only with a knowledge of an artist's music, but with a valuable context of local reality in which such artist could have developed his career. Therefore, through the radio stream, a listener is more aware of Prince's background, cultural influences, which shaped the artistic output of the musician, and the cultural environment in which he grew up in. Additionally, it can also be stated that through popularization of popular music, the stream also has an educational function, because it teaches listeners about the social reality of Minneapolis and Near North. Thus, *Purple Current* highlights the cultural specificity of a particular place, which is especially important given the scale of the Black community in Minneapolis. Swensson claims that

the idea was that you could plug in and learn about not just Prince but all of his peers who created the Minneapolis Sound and the earlier generation of musicians who inspired them. (...) Because of the segregation and racism that permeated the Minnesota music scene in its formative years, many of these [Black] artists were rarely heard on the airwaves during their heydays. Our goal was to create a platform that could showcase all of this incredibly rich, dynamic work from the predominantly Black artists that can be traced back to the Minneapolis Sound – with a little Joni Mitchell and Grand Funk Railroad sprinkled in to stay true to Prince's inclusive palette (Personal communication, July 8, 2022).

Thus, the educational role of the stream is much more complex than solely sharing knowledge about Minneapolis's music scene. *Purple Current* also educates about the history of popular music in general, focusing on the Black music in particular, which is, for example, exemplified in the *Wayback Weekends* radio show. Additionally, the stream also promotes and educates listeners – again, in the predominantly white cultural environment – about the variety of contemporary Black music and their influence on popular music in general. The concept of creating

a radio stream, consisting of music inspired by or inspiring other artists, showcases the complexity of cultural process of influences of one particular case study – Prince. Therefore, just like Swensson explains, *Purple Current* is, in fact, a case study, analyzing and showcasing Prince's career, using songs as an exemplification of cultural processes of inspiration and influence in a larger context of Black art.

But, presenting an artist so closely connected to one particular place – Prince and Minneapolis – creates another possible outcome, impacting the listeners' approach to the other side of an equation: the city itself. *Purple Current* as a stream of music devoted to Prince and his legacy in Minneapolis, has a potential to create a specific vision of the place as a haven for Black music. By highlighting an artist, his influences and others impacted by his art, the project creates an illusion of the music showcased being representative or descriptive of the place of its origin. Of course, an attempt on such a representative image can be seen in the *Local Current* stream, but for those interested in Prince and his music alone, wanting to know more about Minneapolis itself, *Purple Current* – just like Prince did himself (Delegard, Lansing, 2018, pp. 12–17) – creates a particular vision of the place, mythologizing it as a place of creativity, inspiration, and thriving Black culture without any restraints, which, knowing the history of Minneapolis, is far from the truth.

Consequently, it can be argued that *Purple Current* may have two active social functions: the (a) integration and (b) exposure, both of which involves the processes of popularization, education, and image-building. Firstly, the stream serves as (a) an integrational platform, which uses music as a measure to present Prince as a common cultural ground for the residents of Minneapolis. It may seem especially important for local Black communities, because it shows the musical roots of a member of their local community, strengthening the acknowledgment of their impact on the cultural landscape of Twin Cities. Through such a process, another potential of the stream can be seen – a tool for strengthening the local identity through cementing the links between local identity, local media, and local art. As McPherson puts it:

My goal was to make being a Prince admirer or being Prince curious a more communal experience. With no more Prince shows to go to, I wanted to make sure that being connected to Prince still included being connected to other like-minded listeners (Personal communication, July 8, 2022).

Music and other content, as presented by *Purple Current*, creates a platform, where Minneapolitans can reinforce their connection to the city, by tracing cultural roots of music, created within the city. This, in turn, broadens the awareness of one's cultural heritage and, consequently, identity.

Such role can also be seen in *Purple Current*'s twitter feed, where, besides Prince-related information about anniversaries or historical trivia, news about local cultural events are shared, potentially connected to both Prince's legacy and Minneapolis' Black community's heritage. Examples include invitation to unveiling of Prince's Ramp A mural (@PurpleCurrent, 2022.06) or to the Black Fashion

Week Minnesota organized at Prince's home and recording studio Paisley Park (@PurpleCurrent, 2022.05).

On the other hand, *Purple Current* is showcasing a person, who is a figure tightly connected to Minnesota on a cultural level, not only in terms of particular community, since Prince can be treated as a common cultural ground for Minneapolitans. Showcasing him within public radio's online stream, confirms his status as a significant cultural figure, and integrates the community in a similar sense like a local flag or anthem does – he becomes a referral point for residents of a given area. This assumption can be confirmed by McPherson's comment, claiming that *Purple Current* has an active role integrating local community and educating it in regards to local culture “through offering in-depth interviews with musicians and pillars of our community and through putting a location on the streaming and HD2 dial where this music is celebrated as a living document” (Personal communication, July 8, 2022).

While integration is a crucial social function of *Purple Current*, the second one, (b) cultural exposure, extends the influence of the project, making it appealing to both internal and external listeners. It is so, because the stream teaches audiences about history of Black music, its evolution, the music it influences, and impact on contemporary music industry through showcasing modern Black performers. It is especially important given the context of Minnesota as a predominantly white region, in which *Purple Current* becomes a platform for Black art. Moreover, the stream also presents the roots of a prominent Black figure such as Prince and his cultural and musical roots to those, who do not realize the value of various connections between his music and those who inspired him like Santana or Joni Mitchell, painting a yet bigger picture of Black community in Twin Cities.

Then again, popularization, education, and image-building affects not only those within Twin Cities cultural area, but also foreigners interested with local culture or, simply, Prince's and Minneapolis music's fans. Given McGuinn's statement that *Purple Current* is also directed towards listeners around the globe, one could wonder about potential effects of such music's exposure to this audience. Stream's programming could result in bringing awareness of Minneapolis' music and build a certain image of the city as an urban region, where music is a focal element of cultural landscape. And even if particular element of radio program does not focus solely on Prince, an effect of exposure of Black culture to foreign listeners has an educational value, bringing awareness about the specificity of both Twin Cities' and American culture in general.

What's more, besides programming or music presented within *Purple Current*, both instances – active internal and external exposure to local and Black culture in general – can be seen in the Twitter feed of *Purple Current*. Such initiatives as educating its followers about prominent figures of Black music every weekday in February 2022 (@PurpleCurrent, 2022.02a), sharing posts by Minnesota Historical Society about local music's history (@MNHS, 2022.06), or highlighting Prince's

songs that “that touches on Black identity, history or culture” (@PurpleCurrent, 2022.02b), creates a platform for not only local, but global reach, being a source of information not only for Prince fans, but also those who are interested in Black culture.

Local Context and Purple Current’s Approach

The Current and the entirety of MPR must be put in the context of the importance of public radio for a local culture as well. This applies not only to *Purple Current*, but also to the other specialized streams like *Local Current* or even *Rock the Cradle*, because, by embodying the purpose and mission of public media in the U.S., they acknowledge local specificity, promote certain values through music and programming, educate, bring attention to minority cultures, and emphasize the importance of seeing what is closest to audiences – their own cultural surroundings.

At the same time, it is important to recognize the complexity of the said educational functions in such a music stream as *Purple Current*. Since it is public radio’s side project, financed by a public institution in a form of *Minnesota Legacy Amendment’s Arts & Cultural Heritage Fund*, which highlights “programming on Minnesota culture and heritage,” it conveys a certain messages to fit into the format of such medium (Mullen, 2019, p. 8).

Still, one could wonder whether *Purple Current*, with its educational mission and other social functions, is sustainable due to its unambiguous focus on one central figure – Prince. Such endeavor might be seen as based on nostalgia, especially after the sudden death of the musician in 2016, used to gather local audience and serve them music as an answer to their sentimentality. Answering to these doubts, McPherson states that

there is a very short list of musicians whose musical universe is so robust that a figure-oriented radio stream works. We had many things working in our favor, our deep knowledge of Prince’s local connections, our unparalleled collection of Prince’s music for a radio (...). I believe there are other artists where a stream like this is possible, but I believe you can count them on two hands (Personal communication, July 8, 2022).

Additionally, Swensson highlights another extremely important element, which fueled the stream, emphasizing the complexity of the issue:

Now that it’s been six years since Prince passed, I do think that we are in a moment of transition regarding his musical legacy; we’re moving away from the acute grief of losing him into the larger question of how he will be remembered. He will forever be hugely important to Minnesota – as evidenced by the recent mural and street naming in downtown Minneapolis – but I do wonder what the next 10, 20, 50 years will look like in terms of his music and his impact, as he becomes a historical figure. Education about him is important but the younger generations also have to be given a reason to care about him in the first

place, beyond their parents' or grandparents' nostalgia. I hope his music can experience a resurgence like the one Kate Bush is experiencing now, but I don't know that you can necessarily orchestrate something like that; it may have to happen organically, and with a generation of kids who haven't even been born yet! (Personal communication, July 8, 2022).

Therefore, such figure-oriented format can be approached from a different side than just a one-dimensional promotional gimmick – it must be treated as a complex cultural medium with a potential for education, popularization and image building through integration and exposure. In this sense, such a stream has a capability to be expanded into broader themes, just like in the case of *The Current's The Siren* or *Carbon Sound*, focusing on a particular element of local social reality, making this format a case worth of following and repeating (Carlos, 2021).

Conclusions: Why Purple Current Matters?

The case of *Purple Current* exemplifies how local medium can present a potential in raising awareness and promoting local cultural heritage, while extending its mission vastly beyond that. Through one particular figure at the forefront, the radio stream uses popularity of Prince to build the audience, and refocuses its purpose to a more general one – to a local specificity and cultural education about Black community of Twin Cities and U.S. in general. Therefore, *Purple Current* has to be acknowledged as a platform transgressing simple notion of fan-focused stream, becoming a place of cultural preservation, popularization, integration, and identity-building.

It shares information about Prince as a key figure in Minneapolis, but also teaches listeners about Minneapolis's culture in general, targeting both fans and general audience interested in local culture. Of course, given the specific character of the stream, the former would be the primal target for the project, but even those listeners, who simply enjoy listening to Prince and Prince-related music, because it provides cultural context in form of specific selection of wider arrangement of music or commentary between the songs. Thus, *Purple Current* can be treated as both a radio stream, and a cultural and geomusicological instrument, which can be used to trace, exemplify, and popularize the connection between a location and art, or to signify a place with its music and vice versa.

Moreover, *Purple Current* is an important example not only because of its educational potential, but also due to the capacity to promote a variety of cultural elements. The stream exemplifies that local media can popularize music or a particular artist just as well as a general knowledge about a local culture, an image of the city, music of minorities, and even such cultural process as cultural diffusion in a form of presenting an interconnected web of influences. These elements illustrate that *Purple Current* should be seen as an example of a platform, which can be used to

help us understand local culture or even ourselves living in a particular social context through the knowledgeable usage of music and programming.

Bibliography

- @MNHS (2022.06). *Today is Prince's birthday! For our Item of the Day we are sharing Prince's personal travel bible. This is a...* [Tweet]. Twitter. Retrieved from: <https://twitter.com/mnhs/status/1534173390218711040> (accessed: 1.07.2022).
- @PurpleCurrent (2022.02a). *Every weekday in February we are celebrating a different Black artist. Today we are celebrating James Brown! We'll air a tune...* [Tweet]. Twitter. Retrieved from: <https://twitter.com/PurpleCurrent/status/1498366138085953536> (accessed: 1.07.2022).
- @PurpleCurrent (2022.02b). *Every weekday in February we are celebrating a Prince track that touches on Black identity, history or culture. Today we're...* [Tweet]. Twitter. Retrieved from: <https://twitter.com/PurpleCurrent/status/1491789484236501011> (accessed: 1.07.2022).
- @PurpleCurrent (2022.05). *Happening Wednesday, May 11: a Black Fashion Week Minnesota event hosted in the legendary Soundstage at @PaisleyPark! Find more info...* [Tweet]. Twitter. Retrieved from: <https://twitter.com/PurpleCurrent/status/1524358670494089216> (accessed: 1.07.2022).
- @PurpleCurrent (2022.06). *The Purple Block Party in Minneapolis marked the official unveiling of the 100-foot mural dedicated to hometown musician and icon #Prince.* ❤️ [Tweet]. Twitter. Retrieved from: <https://twitter.com/PurpleCurrent/status/1532756291008995329> (accessed: 1.07.2022).
- Barker M. (2008). *Analysing Discourse*. In: M. Pickering (ed.). *Research Methods for Cultural Studies* (pp. 150–172). Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Barker Ch., Galasiński D. (2001). *Cultural Studies and Discourse Analysis*. London: SAGE.
- Bennet A., Peterson R.A. (2004). *Introducing Music Scenes*. In: A. Bennet, R.A. Peterson (eds.). *Music Scenes: Local, Translocal, and Virtual* (pp. 1–15). Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press.
- Carlos I (2021). *MPR's The Current, KMOJ-FM Partnering on New Music Service for Young, Diverse Audience*. Minneapolis/St. Paul Business Journal. Retrieved from: <https://www.biz-journals.com/twincities/news/2021/09/17/mprs-the-current-kmoj-launching-new-music-stream.html> (accessed: 1.07.2022).
- Connell J., Gibson Ch. (2006). *Sound Tracks: Popular Music, Identity and Place*. London: Routledge.
- Covach J. (1999). *Popular Music, Unpopular Musicology*. In: N. Cook, M. Everist (eds.). *Rethinking Music* (pp. 452–470). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Delegard K., Lansing M.J. (2018). "Prince and the Making of the Minneapolis Mystique". *Middle West Review*, 5(1), pp. 1–24.
- Eler A. (2022). *Larger Than Life: Prince Mural Nears Completion in Downtown Minneapolis*. Star Tribune. Retrieved from: <https://www.startribune.com/larger-than-life-prince-mural-underway-in-downtown-minneapolis/600176983/> (accessed: 3.07.2022).
- Gabler J. (2016). *Paisley Park Announces Celebration 2017: Four-day Gathering to Mark Anniversary of Prince's Death*. The Current. Retrieved from: <https://www.thecurrent.org/feature/2016/11/28/paisley-park-announces-celebration-2017-four-day-gathering-to-mark-anniversary-of-princes> (accessed: 10.07.2022).

- Gabler J. (2018). *'Prince Shaped Minneapolis': Symposium Panel Explores Prince's Pivotal Impact*. The Current. Retrieved from: <https://www.thecurrent.org/feature/2018/04/17/prince-shaped-minneapolis-symposium-panel-explores-princes-pivotal-impact> (accessed: 10.07.2022).
- Giant Steps (2017, April 24). *Ripple Effects of Prince in Minneapolis and Beyond* [Video]. YouTube. <https://youtu.be/X5KEE06tRRk> (accessed: 28.06.2022).
- Gilman R.R. (2000). "The History and Peopling of Minnesota: Its Culture". *Daedalus*, 129(3), pp. 1–29.
- Hallman Ch. (2018). *The Purple Current Honors Prince's Diverse and Enduring Legacy*. Minnesota Spokesman Recorder. Retrieved from: <https://spokesman-recorder.com/2018/04/18/the-purple-current-honors-princes-diverse-and-enduring-legacy/> (accessed: 9.07.2022).
- Kong L. (1995). "Popular Music in Geographical Analyses". *Progress in Human Geography*, 19(2), pp. 183–198.
- Matos M. (2018). *What Was in Prince's Record Collection?* The Current. Retrieved from: <https://www.thecurrent.org/feature/2018/04/24/what-was-in-princes-record-collection> (accessed: 2.07.2022).
- Mechling J., Merideth R., Wilson D. (1973). "American Culture Studies: The Discipline and the Curriculum". *American Quarterly*, 25(4), pp. 363–389.
- MN Compass (2020). *Persons of Color as a Percent of Total Population: Twin Cities 7-county Region, MN, and U.S., 1960–2019* [Online data and graphs]. Retrieved from: <https://www.mncompass.org/demographics/race#7-5081-g> (accessed: 1.07.2022).
- MPR News Staff (2022). *The Current Launches New Carbon Sound Music Stream*. MPR News. Retrieved from: <https://www.mprnews.org/story/2022/06/16/the-current-launches-new-carbon-sound-music-stream> (accessed: 2.07.2022).
- Mullen M. (2019). *The Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund*. MN House Research. Retrieved from: <https://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/hrd/pubs/artculthf.pdf> (accessed: 2.07.2022).
- Ohmes J. (2009). "*The Minneapolis Sound*". Pop Matters. Retrieved from: <https://www.popmatters.com/94060-the-minneapolis-sound-2496026723.html> (accessed: 7.06.2022).
- Shabazz R. (2017). *How Prince Introduced Us to the "Minneapolis Sound"*. Zocalo Public Square. Retrieved from: zocalopublicsquare.org/2017/09/07/prince-introduced-us-minneapolis-sound/ideas/nexus/ (accessed: 6.07.2022).
- Stegall T. (2021). *How Minneapolis' Punk Scene Foreshadowed Alt-Rock, Grunge and Pop Punk*. Alternative Press. Retrieved from: <https://www.altpress.com/best-minneapolis-punk-bands-husker-du-the-replacements/> (accessed: 12.07.2022).
- Swensson A. (2017). *Got to Be Something Here: The Rise of the Minneapolis Sound*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Tagg P. (1998). *Popular Music Studies – Bridge or Barrier?* Tagg.org. Retrieved from: <https://www.tagg.org/articles/xpdfs/Bolz9811.pdf> (accessed: 14.11.2022).
- The Current Launches The Siren Stream for Women's History Month* (2022). The Current. Retrieved from: <https://www.thecurrent.org/feature/2022/03/01/the-current-launches-the-siren-stream-for-womens-history-month> (accessed: 2.07.2022).
- The Current to Launch New Stream – Purple Current – on April 6* (2018). Minnesota Public Radio. Retrieved from: <https://www.mpr.org/stories/2018/04/03/the-current-to-launch-new-stream-purple-current-on-april-6> (accessed: 4.07.2022).
- U.S. Census Bureau (2020a). *Sex, General Nativity, and Color: Population by Sex, General Nativity, and Color, by States and Territories: 1900–Cont'd* [Online data]. Retrieved from <https://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/33405927v1ch09.pdf> (accessed: 25.06.2022).

- U.S. Census Bureau (2020b). *State of Minnesota: Population by Color and Condition* [Online data]. Retrieved from: <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1860/population/1860a-21.pdf> (accessed: 25.06.2022).
- World Radio History (2022). *Broadcasting Yearbook 1964: Directory of AM and FM Radio Stations in the U.S.* [Online document]. Retrieved from: <https://worldradiohistory.com/Archive-BC-YB/1964/Section%20B1%20A%20M%20Broadcasting%20Yearbook%201964.pdf> (accessed: 21.06.2022).