A full-page photograph of Michael Jackson performing on stage. He is wearing a white long-sleeved shirt and black pants, with his right arm raised and pointing forward. He has a microphone headset on and his mouth is open as if singing. The background is a blurred crowd of spectators under bright stage lights.

MICHAEL JACKSON

101

THE PERFORMANCES



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Andy Healy

 Andy Healy 2016

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MICHAEL JACKSON



THE PERFORMANCES

Michael gave the world a wealth of music.  
Songs that would become a part of our collective sound track.  
And for that the 101 series is dedicated to Michael  
and all the musicians and producers who brought the music to life.

This special Performances supplement is also dedicated to the choreographers,  
dancers, directors and musicians who helped realise Michael's vision.

By a fan for the fans.



101





**W**hat makes a great performance?  
Is it one that delivers a wow factor?  
One that stays with an audience long  
after the houselights have come on?  
One that stands the test of time?  
Is it one that signifies a time and place?  
A turning point in a career?  
Or simply one that never fails to give you  
goose bumps and leave you in awe?

Michael Jackson was, without doubt, the consummate performer. He moved on stage like no other. Every time he stepped into the spotlight he owned it. Whether standing alone or flanked by a troupe of dancers he owned it. When Michael performed he gave his all, leaving blood, sweat and tears on the stage. He never failed to deliver.

Like his music and short films, a Michael Jackson performance was an event. Something that would spark conversation, admiration, and, more often than not, imitation.

Here for the first time is a collection of 20 of his greatest performances from throughout his illustrious 4 decade spanning career. Performances that either changed the cultural landscape or just changed perception of what a Michael Jackson song and dance number was all about.

The 20 selections that made the cut have been evaluated based on their impact on Michael's career, the importance to his artistic development and the power that they contain.

Although he was the master of the short film, there was nothing quite like seeing a Michael Jackson performance. No one could command a stage like him. And no one ever will.

I hope reading through the list inspires you to rewatch some of the performances and rediscover the magic that Michael imbued in every one.

And maybe you'll find a new favourite.

There have been a handful of iconic TV performances that have truly launched careers; The Beatles singing 'All My Loving' on The Ed Sullivan Show, Elvis shaking his way through 'Hound Dog' (again) on The Ed Sullivan Show, or Madonna writhing through 'Like A Virgin' at the MTV Awards. But perhaps none had the kind of culture shifting impact that Michael's performance of 'Billie Jean' during the Motown 25 broadcast had to ignite the world and rocket a performer into the stratosphere.

By this stage Michael had already proven himself as a consummate performer through numerous appearances with The Jackson 5 and The Jacksons, but this was an adult Michael captivating an audience in a way no-one had or has since.

With the release of the 'Off The Wall' album Michael re-entered the collective consciousness as an adult performer and made people see him in a new light. Yet his appeal was, for the most part, still restricted to fans of R&B. This Motown 25 performance crossed Michael over to the mainstream in a way nothing had before and made his performance a water cooler moment the day after it aired.

Having already wowed the audience with an electrically charged medley of Jackson 5 hits Michael took centre stage to remind the world just how far he had come from the little kid many still had in their minds eye.

As he talks about "the good old days" Michael walks the stage with nervous energy. There's a hint of nostalgia in his voice as he reflects about how "those were good songs... I like those songs a lot", but then his focus shifts.

His eyes fill with fire. There's determination engulfing them. With an "You ain't seen nothing yet..." look, he proudly declares "but especially I like... the new songs".

And with a fire ablaze inside him he's ready to change the world. Striking what would

become an iconic pose inspired by the likes of Astaire and Kelly, Michael dons a fedora and holds the pose as the opening beat of 'Billie Jean' blasts through the auditorium bringing the crowd to their feet.

For many in the auditorium and those viewing at home, they had seen Michael dazzle in music videos but had not witnessed him "live". This was unlike anything they had to reference. This was "Performance Michael", entralling the world with a simple pelvic thrust in time to the back beat and flurries of leg kicks. By the time he so nonchalantly tosses the fedora to the side and mocks combing his hair he has already won them over.

These opening 28 seconds alone are enough to assure his place in iconic performances. With all the fluidity and grace of the greats that had come before him, Michael captivates the crowd and owns the stage. By the time he grabs the mic, he has already made this a performance to watch (and rewatch).

The crowd shouts with glee at every little leg flick, every self-assured step. His moves are hypnotic and magnetic, drawing you in and making sure you don't look away for fear of missing even a moment of brilliance. The audience all know they are witnessing greatness. Seeing a performance that is being etched in history as one of the greatest of all time.

And it's just getting started.

With a mix of improvisation and trademark moves, Michael works his way through the verses and choruses with ease. His energy is charged as he approaches the breakdown as only he knows what is to come.

Strutting the stage with confidence he builds the audience up - a finger point here, "Hee" and shuffle there, "Hoo" and then a spin and pause.

A brief pause. A moment of stillness as if to say "are you ready?" and then... it happens.



5 steps.

That's all it took.

5 mind bending, wondrous steps.

With anticipation at a high Michael shifts the game and slides backward in a mesmerising moonwalk. A move that would forever be linked with him and this song.

5 steps. That's all it took.

And before the audience can even register what they've witnessed, he spins and is up on his toes frozen for a moment - though not for as long as Michael had hope for.

But it doesn't matter. By the time he plants his feet back on that stage his career has already skyrocketed into the heavens.

For the rest of the performance the audience is in enthralled in pure awe.

How did he do that? What did I just see?

This, is Michael Jackson.

A captivating singer, dancer, performer, artist. Doing what he does best and what no one else can come close to.

As the song fades and the audience's cheers rise, the auditorium is brought to their feet. Michael raises his hand to the heavens ready to grab that golden ring he is destined to hold.

He closes his eyes as if wondering "Did I do it?".

Then, ever so slowly he opens his eyes.

He is greeted by an audience on its feet, a truly appreciative and authentic standing ovation. A sign that, yes, he had indeed done it.

And with a polite bow of appreciation it is over.

But it wasn't.

Performances this great, this sublime, don't fade. They live on. Forever.

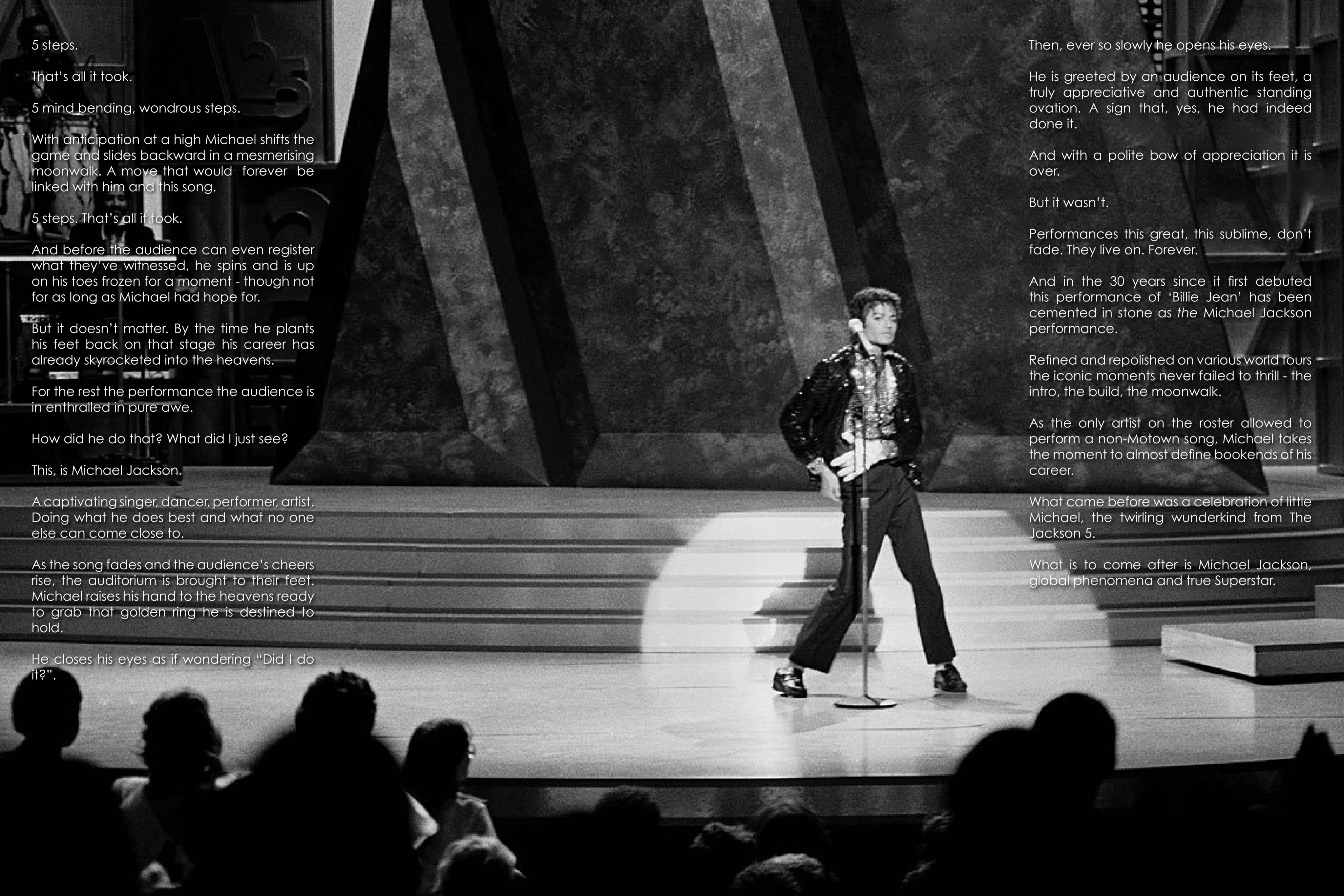
And in the 30 years since it first debuted this performance of 'Billie Jean' has been cemented in stone as *the* Michael Jackson performance.

Refined and repolished on various world tours the iconic moments never failed to thrill - the intro, the build, the moonwalk.

As the only artist on the roster allowed to perform a non-Motown song, Michael takes the moment to almost define bookends of his career.

What came before was a celebration of little Michael, the twirling wunderkind from The Jackson 5.

What is to come after is Michael Jackson, global phenomena and true Superstar.







Just as he had done with Motown 25, Michael's performance at the 30th Annual Grammy Awards stole the show.

Using techniques pulled from his touring *Bad* production Michael first appears in a larger than life silhouette; a reflection on his talents as an entertainer as well as the scale that his career had reached. With an a cappella intro refashioned from the *Bad* album outtake 'Streetwalker' lush harmonies fill the auditorium as Michael's silhouette comes into view.

The strength of this introduction shouldn't be undersold. Very few performers can appear in pure silhouette and be instantly recognisable. By use of shadow alone, Michael strikes iconic poses to announce his arrival - no introduction are necessary.

As the screen rises to reveal Michael in an outfit lifted from 'The Way You Make Me Feel' short film, a laid back and jazz tinged arrangement takes shape. Almost crooning the lyrics, Michael's relaxed delivery adds to the excitement as his movements are all style and slow-burn attitude.

In this one verse and chorus reworking, Michael struts, he grooves, he brings it. A spin here, a cigarette puff mime there, he works the stage with precision slowly drawing the audience further and further in.

When Tatiana Thumbtzen strolls across the stage the performance ignites with the full playback of "The Way You Make Me Feel". And despite the inclusion of a lapel mic, there's really no illusion that Michael is performing to a backing track especially when the shirt collar hangs back over his shoulder. But it doesn't matter. For Michael is in the moment. Throwing out some trademark moves he is joined in the breakdown by several dancers signalling another change in gears. Recreating the intricate routine from the short film, there is an extra buzz of electricity in the performance culminating with Michael's circle moonwalk that acts as

a magnetic pull. Like the moonwalk during the Motown 25 performance this winding, shifting rotation leaves you wondering "how does he do that?". And as Michael shuffles off to the sunset the performance ends.

Or so we thought.

The audience applauds and Michael bows in appreciation as the cheers grow even louder for anyone witnessing this knows they just saw a performance to mark the ages.

But just wait.

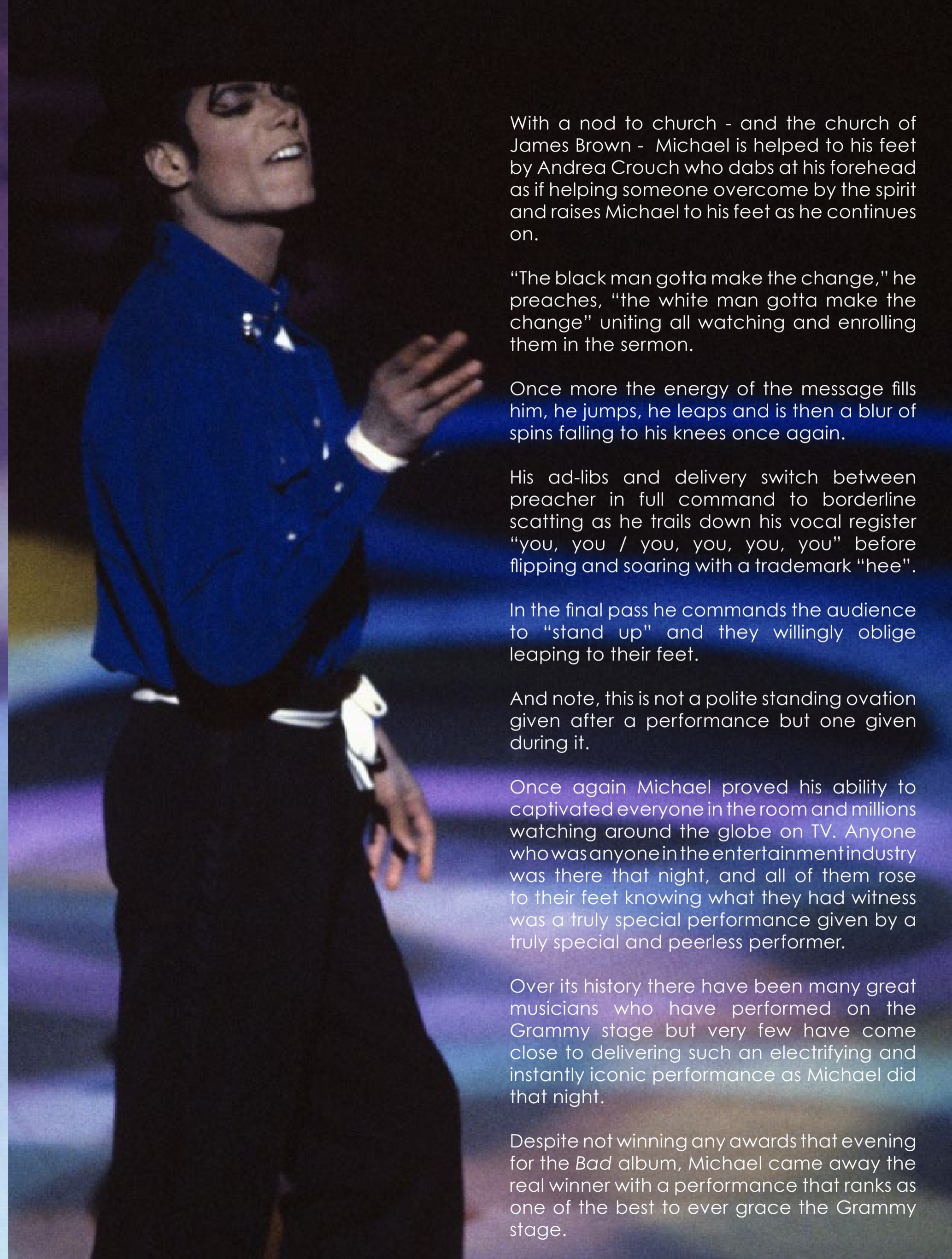
Grabbing a microphone as the opening strains of "Man In The Mirror" play we realise there's more to come, little did we know how much more. Captivating in its simplicity, Michael just lets his emotion and talent present itself as he stands centre stage. Drawing emotion out of every line, Michael commands the stage as the song builds and he is flanked by backing singers and a church choir that emerges out of the darkness. Echoing the word "Change" Michael cranks the performance up another notch. Bopping and swaying to the music he becomes one with it. He shuffles across the stage, spins and drops to his knees. He becomes both preacher and repentant taken over by the message of the song.

As Michael switches from playback to live vocals he takes us all to church.

Strutting across the stage he calls on all of us to "Stand up for your brother / Stand up for your sister". He dazzles with the strength and power of his voice during this call and response, his impassioned pleas filling the auditorium. He clashes piercing high notes with sublime bass ones.

And just when you thought this performance couldn't get any more passionate he jumps, shuffles and spins. Not once. Not twice. But five perfectly executed spins dropping to his knees with his back to the audience.





With a nod to church - and the church of James Brown - Michael is helped to his feet by Andrea Crouch who dabs at his forehead as if helping someone overcome by the spirit and raises Michael to his feet as he continues on.

"The black man gotta make the change," he preaches, "the white man gotta make the change" uniting all watching and enrolling them in the sermon.

Once more the energy of the message fills him, he jumps, he leaps and is then a blur of spins falling to his knees once again.

His ad-libs and delivery switch between preacher in full command to borderline scattling as he trails down his vocal register "you, you / you, you, you, you" before flipping and soaring with a trademark "hee".

In the final pass he commands the audience to "stand up" and they willingly oblige leaping to their feet.

And note, this is not a polite standing ovation given after a performance but one given during it.

Once again Michael proved his ability to captivated everyone in the room and millions watching around the globe on TV. Anyone who was anyone in the entertainment industry was there that night, and all of them rose to their feet knowing what they had witness was a truly special performance given by a truly special and peerless performer.

Over its history there have been many great musicians who have performed on the Grammy stage but very few have come close to delivering such an electrifying and instantly iconic performance as Michael did that night.

Despite not winning any awards that evening for the *Bad* album, Michael came away the real winner with a performance that ranks as one of the best to ever grace the Grammy stage.



Nowdays when people think of the *Super Bowl* they think of 3 things - football, commercials, and half-time shows. But for a long period the half-time shows were mired in cheesy Americana productions that simply filled time rather than being just as crucial viewing as the game itself.

For years the half time shows were an excuse for an extended restroom break. A chance to gloat about your team's performance while a marching band or dance troupe saluted the sounds of Motown or a history of Snoopy. Things began to slowly shift in the 1990s when half time shows would feature token pop cameos amongst a Disney take on Super Bowls or a salute to the Winter Olympics.

That all changed one sunny afternoon on January 31 1993 when the half-time show became must-see viewing, all thanks to Michael Jackson's takeover of proceedings. In a 13 minute production he would change the face of Super Bowl half time shows and raise the bar for decades to come.

Anticipation was at an all time high for this performance. After all this was *Michael Jackson* who in 1993 had closed out a decade as the world's greatest entertainer. People tuned in by the millions to see what he would do. And what he did was nothing short of amazing.

With an introduction by the voice of Darth Vader himself, James Earl Jones, viewers were introduced to "an unprecedented Super Bowl spectacular". As thousands in the stadium, and millions around the world, focused their eyes on the main stage at centre field their focus was pulled to one of the towering video screens in the corner of the stadium. To thunderous applause Michael appeared on the jumbotron screens before appearing atop of it in a blaze of smoke and fireworks sending the crowd into a frenzy. But no sooner could you register him, but your attention was drawn to the opposing corner where he appeared atop another towering jumbotron. What was going on here?

Then with a rumble from the main stage Michael literally popped up from beneath the stage sprung into place by his "toaster" elevator and the cheers from the crowd was deafening. And at a time when Super Bowl commercials cost \$850,000 for thirty seconds of airtime, Michael spend over 90 seconds (that's over \$2.5 million) standing there statue like simultaneously teasing and building the anticipation.

With the removal of his sunglasses to the opening strains of "Why You Wanna Trip On Me" Michael begins what will go down in history as one of, if not the, greatest half-time shows. In a flurry of pyros erupting from the stage Michael spins and cuts straight to the chorus of 'Jam' the popular crowd opener from the *Dangerous* tour and album. Strutting the stage with confidence Michael executes trademark moves being joined on stage by 4 back up dancers as they rip through a pulsating routine with military precision.

Dispensing his jacket with one move and donning a fedora in another Michael strikes his now signature pose as the beat of "Billie Jean" kicks in. For the only time in the performance history of the song Michael is joined by back up dancers who do their best to not get in the way as Michael delivers the moves that first catapulted him to the stars. And of course no performance would be complete without the crowd pleasing moonwalk which he executes with ease. And with a spin Michael cuts the song short, and we realise he's packing in the hits here.

And the hits don't stop as the band kicks into "Black or White" with Michael working every inch of the diamond stage making sure his energy sparks out to all parts of the stadium. And with each passing bar the energy and performance is built up, there's pyro explosions, card flipping audience members spiralling through black and white, smoke and wind machines, and massive banners unfurled out over the length of the field depicting black and white hands joined together in unison. With fireworks (in the daytime) erupting overhead Michael brings the

hits part of the show to a close and soaks up the applause that swamps the stadium.

Then with a wave of a sparking wand Michael transforms the stadium itself (with the help of each audience member holding individual cards) into a mural of kids' drawings from around the world. A technique first used en masse during the 1980 Moscow Olympics, this tidal wave of imagery underscores Michael's message of unity and hope as a children's choir sings 'We Are The World'.

Then Michael did something he rarely did in live performance or in any public event - he spoke.

With the eyes of the world on him he took the opportunity to express his mission and that of *Heal The World*; "Today we stand together all around the world, joined in a common purpose - to remake the planet into a heaven of joy, and understanding, and goodness. No one should have to suffer, especially our children. This time we must succeed."

Dedicating "Heal The World" to the children of the world, Michael is joined on stage by children and adults in their hundreds dressed in traditional national costumes further emphasizing his global outlook.

But this is a Michael Jackson performance so everything has to be on a grand scale. So supplementing the 'people of the world' is a gospel choir and then out of nowhere a huge inflatable globe appears that dwarfs the stage and its participants. But the message is clear and intent earnest. Using his time in the global spotlight to spread his message, Michael ensured that it was received.

And after 13 minutes Michael left the stage and Super Bowl Half-Times would never be the same. For the first time in history viewership and ratings actually went up during the half-time performance and the bar was now set for all that were to come.

Many would follow in Michael's footsteps to entertain and delight a Super Bowl crowd and worldwide audience but none used it to spread a message of love and unity, and none have done it with the same kind of anticipation or has elicited the same kind of excitement as he did.







## DANGEROUS

American Music Awards

Opening the American Music Awards was a first for Michael. And in typical MJ fashion there was no introduction, no announcement, just the excitement of the audience realising who was opening to build hype.

An evolution of his "Smooth Criminal" routine, the performance begins with a slew of dapper gangsters dressed in black suits striking classic Broadway moves against a blood red backdrop against a James Bond sound track. Unaware of who the opening act is the audience wait in anticipation.

In a flurry of sparking bullets a body falls to reveal Michael dressed in matching black suit, white shirt and black tie. He struts to the front of the stage accenting moves that ripple through the bodies of fallen dancers that lay on the floor and resurrecting them with the beat.

As "Dangerous" had not been released as a single it was another first for Michael to be performing a routine that, for the most part, had not been seen by the viewing audience and had not been featured in an accompanying short film.

From the opening beat this is, as the song's lyrics attest, "divinity in motion". A fully fledged dance number of intricate moves from the first to last beat. Perhaps Michael's most fully fledged routine the moves don't stop.

As the core group of dancers interchange their numbers, Michael struts the stage accenting moves and having a moment of freestyle before rejoining the precision choreography going on around him.

With pin point precision every move is executed, a mix of street, interpretative dance, Broadway and even hints of ballet creep into the routine.

Whilst the routine was always somewhat a work in progress or on constant evolution this very first incarnation is its strongest and purest representation.

Here there was subtlety that later would be dialed down. For instance in this iteration 50% of the dancers wear black gloves while the others wear no gloves at all - perhaps a commentary on the dichotomy of innocent and guilt, good and bad. In latter performances the gloves would be blood red (caught red handed) creating a more ominous interpretation. Similarly the graphic white shirt black tie combo would evolve into a blood red shirt dialing up the underworld gangster symbolism.

Likewise the silhouette of the *Dangerous* girl evokes desire and allure, here whereas in later executions she is revealed, and not only revealed but adorned with spikes - we get it, she's dangerous.

Michael would also go on to expand its performance with nods to the theme from *The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly*, an incorporation of key moves from "Smooth Criminal" and some interesting spoken word samples from sister Janet.

Time and time again Michael would return to "Dangerous" and refine its execution. Whilst noted above some changes were subtle, but the biggest shift came in a performance never to be seen.

Rehearsing for his 1996 HBO special *One Night Only* Michael and his team looked to present "Dangerous" with some extra edge drawing inspiration from Stanley Kubrick's 'A Clockwork Orange'. Gone would be the gangster suits, and in their place a more dystopian garb that would borrow heavily from the film's stylised band of delinquents including iconic bowler hats and braces.



Whilst the world would never see this new vision realised elements of the routine at least began to find its way into future performances, most notably the 1999 Michael & Friends concerts.

Here the performance was given a more stripped back and drawn out introduction, focusing on the motifs of tease and seduction. The routine itself offered several new flourishes including the tweaking of (non-existent *A Clockwork Orange*) braces, an introduction of the troupe and sonically had extra effects and accents to heighten the tension. The moves are sharper and in some cases more threatening.

This newly evolved routine became the blueprint for further performances in 2002 where it was once again adapted to fit a more intimate televised stage.

Rumour has it that in preparation for the 'This Is It' residency, "Dangerous" was once again being reworked with new sonic elements being included such as snippets of 'Morphine' and the signature stabbing strings of 'Psycho' together with new graphics of brain scans and even straightjacket costumes.

Whether all these alterations added to the performance or muddied it is up for debate but there is no denying the power and brilliance contained in this original execution. The choreography managed to fuse the best elements of Michael's iconic moves as well as push his style forward.

Still able to wow to this day, this original broadcast performance of "Dangerous" reaffirms Michael's brilliance as a dancer and is perhaps his most dance intensive routine of his career. At a time when the music industry was in flux, Michael showed once again what true artistry, inventiveness and mastery of performance was all about.











**A**s an artist and pioneer of the music video Michael's name had become synonymous with MTV so it was fitting that when MTV wanted to celebrate its 10th Anniversary Michael was one of the main stars invited to perform.

Hot off the heels of the *Dangerous* release, and perhaps using the controversy of the 'panther sequence' from the "Black or White" premier Michael kicks off his performance in a run down cityscape setting atop a vandalized and abandoned car. Surrounded by dancers and assisted by Slash augmenting the playback with live guitar, Michael grooves to the beat sitting on the roof of the car before leaping into action.

Busting out some trademark moves, Michael gives the song a shot of energy whilst Slash's extended solo in the breakdown amps up the performance. The new arrangement of the song allows Michael to improvise some of his moves whilst deliberately recreating some of the more salacious moves on the roof of the car.

The new musical arrangement does away with the rap section focusing on the funky breakdown instead while the whole reading of the song has a harder, rocker feel to it (perhaps a reminder that Michael could still rock out and a reflection of the shifting musical landscape towards grunge).

With extended solo outro by Slash and ever effective use of wind machines by Michael, Slash discards his guitar through the windscreen of the prop car and under a barrage of sparks the song is over.

One might expect Michael to have followed up with another rocker or even a performance of one of his hits, but instead he took the unusual step to play (what was at the time) an album cut with "Will You Be There". Filling the expansive and

multilayered stage with a mix of gospel and children's choirs Michael fashions the song into one of racial unity as evidenced by the deliberate cutaways of black and white hands held together.

Michael lets the power of the song carry him, working the stage without overly forcing the performance and interacting with the various choirs. Then in the final coda he returns to centre stage to dance. Flanked by his dancers the routine is fluid and sensual, a mix of interpretive signing and softer hip hop moves. During the performance children present both a globe and (bible) book that perhaps suggesting that the answers for the care of the planet and each other can be found inside its pages.

Whilst the performance so far has been lipsynced, Michael chooses to recite the spoken word outro live connecting its message with the audience. In addition the message is conveyed through sign language and Michael is comforted by a heavenly golden angel. Wrapping her protective wings around Michael at the crescendo is an emotional moment in a passionate performance. Replicated on stage during the *Dangerous World Tour* with a more archetype angel, the representation here is more a mix of nature and heaven.

The MTV10 performance is one of Michael's finest and one where he seems more willing to do away with the expected conventions and deliver a more personal and resonant performance.

It might not have been all flash and dance routines, nor paid the expected tribute to the glory days of MTV with yet another performance of Billie Jean, Beat It and Thriller, but it presents a more personal Michael, one that is more relevant to the times rather than trying to milk nostalgia. It showed that Michael was still important in the present for MTV just as he had been in to truly defining their past.







## THE JACKSONS

Michael Jackson 30th Anniversary Concert

It had been over 16 years since The Jacksons took their final bow on the *Victory Tour*. In that time Michael's career as a solo artist continued to grow from strength to strength while the brothers had mixed success as solo artists and occasional hits as a band without him.

So when the idea of a concert celebrating Michael's 30 years in show business was first touted, thoughts turned to reuniting The Jackson 5 / Jacksons line up for one more performance. After all, how can you celebrate the legacy of a 30 year career without acknowledging where it all began.

So to the opening strains of the theme from *2001 A Space Odyssey* the brothers took to the stage as Michael rose from beneath it as if they had all made their way from another world. With each brother removing variations on space suits and Michael tossing his helmet into the audience the performance began. Taking us back to the *Triumph Tour* the brothers open their set with a fully charged version of "Can You Feel It" with all the trademark moves. And unlike tours prior (including the *Victory Tour*) here were all 6 members of the Jacksons sharing the stage.

As much as Randy commands the stage as he kicks off the song all eyes are on Michael in anticipation of his pre-chorus. And when he sings the crowd erupts in joyful cheers. He sings with strength, with conviction and determination. Michael has often stated that he always feels at home on a stage and as he struts and preens there's no doubting this is where he belongs.

With a nod to the posturing of the *HISTORY Tour* mid song, the brothers take us back to their Motown roots with a playful take on "ABC" including its rebirthing as Naughty By Nature's "O.P.P." - including a highlight of Michael's mock anger and protest at Randy's inclusion of this reworking.





Continuing with the glory days the brother's launch into "The Love You Save" delivering those trademark old fashioned moves.

With "I'll Be There" the brothers continue the trip down memory lane with Michael wrenching every bit of emotion from the lyrics and truly warming into the performance by the final verse and chorus. Milking it for all it's worth Michael's orchestrated breakdown has the desired effect whipping the crowd into a frenzy. A master of knowing when to give and when to wait, Michael teases out the final words as the brothers offer sweet harmonies.

With hugs all round and following the blueprint of the Motown 25 reunion one might expect the performance to be over, but as Randy rightly points out they can't leave the stage without doing the song that started it all for them, and with a not back how it was "done on the Ed Sullivan Show", the brothers recreate that iconic performance of "I Want You Back" to a tee.

Riding the spectrum of hits Michael introduces the crowd to "one of my favourites" as they kick into "Dancing Machine". Michael's gritty vocals give the song extra edge and the surprise inclusion of N\*Sync is a masterstroke of showing the lineage of power hit boy bands The Jackson 5 created.

Digging into The Jacksons cannon the brothers deliver a funkified version of "Shake Your Body Down (To The Ground)" and Michael proves his voice still has the gymnastic prowess to hit those blissful high notes. And despite all eyes being on him, Michael knows when to be the lead and when to step back and be just another member of the band.

The power of The Jacksons has always been the dynamics between the brothers and the rich history of hits they shared between the J5 days and the days coming into their own as The Jacksons. Seeing them all together on stage for what unknowingly was the last time makes this performance extra special both from a nostalgic viewpoint but also to celebrate the longevity of their music.





## YOU WERE THERE

Sammy Davis Jnr 60th Anniversary Celebration

Ask anyone what they think of when they hear the words "Michael Jackson performance", and most likely they will respond with words like "high energy", "electrifying" and of course "dancing". For this is how Michael had cut his entertainment chops as the all singing all dancing 8th wonder of the entertainment world.

All of this makes the Sammy Davis Jnr 60th Anniversary Celebration performance such a stand out as it forces people to remember Michael as a singer first and foremost.

In the period between *Bad* and *Dangerous* Michael had rarely stepped foot upon the stage, and had shyed away from the spotlight. So when it was announced that he would be one of the performers to pay tribute to Sammy Davis Jnr - a man who helped pave the way for performers like Michael - expectations and anticipations were at an all time high. What would he sing? How would he move? Would he perform a song made famous by Sammy or would he pull out one of his own hits? The questions were endless.

And all night as the broadcast went on, the anticipation built. Without so much of an introduction the panels of the stage backdrop began to part revealing a silhouetted Michael walking confidently into a pool of spotlights. With each step the recognition grows as do the audience cheers. A testament to Michael's prowess as an iconic performer is the power of his silhouette. Etched by the spotlights his figure, just standing mind you, almost becomes a cue for a standing ovation and the excitement levels boil over to fever pitch.

Michael stands there soaking it in and milking it for all its worth before a beautiful piano and string melody begins to play. But it's a melody new to our ears. Unheard of before tonight, a beautiful filmic melody that floats with ease. And then Michael sings and the energy in the room changes.

Rather than trot out "Billie Jean" or "Man In The Mirror" Michael performs a song specifically written for this homage to Sammy Davis Jnr.

Acknowledging the vital importance of the

pioneering achievements of Sammy, Michael sings with heartfelt appreciation and love for the man that as he would sing opened doors "we all walk through".

Michael draws a direct pedigree between the innovative and ground breaking work of Sammy Davis Jnr as a black entertainer to the path he himself now treads.

"You were there" he sings, "before we came / You took the hurt / you took the shame" Michael sings sweetly in this perfect encapsulation of the obstacles and triumphs of Sammy's career. And the power of this performance is evident in the so *quiet you could hear a pin drop* captivation of the audience. Everyone is hanging on every note, every word that passes Michael's lips. Here is Michael, alone on stage, just his talent as a singer and an open mic.

Of course Michael being Michael he cannot hear music and not feel it, so there are little flurries of movement, sweeping and rolling hand gestures to emphasise the narrative - moves that boarder and blur the line between Broadway flair and the dramatically cool.

But it's his voice that is the star here. As he builds in power and sings "And we are here / for all to see" against a swirling arrangement you can't help but get caught up in the emotion. This is a statement of honour, a statement of fact, a statement of appreciation from new guard to old. "I am here / because.... you.... were there" Michael sings locking eyes with Sammy ensuring the connection between the two artists is not missed.

Caught up in the moment, Michael can't help himself and in a whirl of movement strikes a pose putting a powerful accent on a wonderful performance.

What makes this performance even more special is the fact that it was purpose built for this night.

Never to be performed again, and the song never to gain release, it has become a rare gem that proves that when Michael steps up to the mic he doesn't need anything except his vocal talents to create long lasting magic.





## I WANT YOU BACK

The Ed Sullivan Show

For many an entertainment act a spot on *The Ed Sullivan Show* was a step towards superstardom.

Like The Beatles and Elvis before them, The Jackson 5's performance that night raised their profile and made them a nationwide sensations. And although The Jackson 5 had already debuted "I Want You Back" on *The Hollywood Palace Special* with Diana Ross this was their chance to really perform inside the living rooms of mainstream America.

Performing "Stand", "Who's Loving You?" and "I Want You Back" The Jackson 5 showcased their versatility with three solid showstopper performances. And unlike *The Hollywood Palace Special* this performance of "I Want You Back" featured all live vocals showing the astonishing true talent of this young kid, Michael Jackson.

Every detail here is designed for TV. From the colourful background to the vibrant bold colours of the brothers wardrobe (including purple hat for Michael) to their pinpoint choreography. It's all there to woo and captivate, to entertain and keep you glued to the set.

Even the special arrangement of "I Want You Back" has been augmented for broadcast with extra horns giving the song perhaps a more accessible (and acceptable) big band feel to the classic Motown sound.

But they needn't have worried for as soon as a young Michael opens his mouth to sing the first line the audience both in the studio and at home were transfixed.

With the brothers fanning out across the stage behind him Michael sings with a unabashed sense of joy. There's a twinkle in his eyes that reflect a dream being accomplished and the way his

eyes dart around the studio to take in the lights and cameras it's as though he is both performer and observer, savouring a moment of being, not only on TV, but being on *the TV show of the day*.

This mix of joy and enthusiasm is shared by the brothers as they all dig into the dance steps that would soon become trademarks and become hallmarks of future performances.

All the appeal of the band is perfectly packaged here from the family unison, to the nonthreatening likability, to the amazing dance steps and of course the talent, sweetness and wonder of little Michael Jackson.

The impact of this performance cannot be understated. This was the fuel in The Jackson Five rocket ship that would see them reach for and grab the stars. It was the launchpad for 4 consecutive number one hits, the starting point for countless albums and tours, and the ignition point for a career that would be unrivalled.

It's hard not to watch this performance and not overlay everything that would follow as a natural fait accompli. Of course it's a great performance, it's Michael Jackson, it's The Jackson 5. But when watching you have to remember that to most of the viewing audience this was their introduction to The Jackson 5 and all their talent. This was the "wow, look at that kid" moment that would set aside any thoughts of novelty and replace them with bona fide performer credentials. This was no kiddie act, and this act weren't kidding.

This was an introduction to a new band, a new performer, who would go on to change and shape the entertainment industry and redefine the word superstar.

And what an introduction.





**W**ith the release of *HIStory* Michael was once again upon the world stage. And just as the album served as a reminder of his brilliance with a greatest hits package supplemented by new material Michael set about doing the same with his MTV Awards opener in 1996.

Michael in silhouette was by now a trademark of his performances and here he uses it to his advantage as the opening bars to "Don't Stop Til You Get Enough" begin and Michael walks from the back of the stage to the mid point with all the swag of a returning Heavy-Weight Champ.

And this set is all about delivering those knock out punches. With a spin and a stop Michael is bathed in the spotlight. He holds the pose, teasing the audience before removing his jacket and signalling the start of "The Way You Make Me Feel". But as one had come to expect Michael decided against using a troupe of backing dancers for this truly solo spot. Instead he lets his energy, his moves and the pulsing beat command the show. Slipping effortlessly into "Scream" (the only televised performance of the song) he winds his body with ease. Incorporating snippets of "Beat It" and "Thriller", Michael is joined on stage by Slash for a powerhouse performance of "Black and White" with extended guitar outro and mock defiance by Slash who continues his solo over the finale. Of course this was just pure Michael theatrics and allowed him time for a quick costume and set change.

Repurposing the larger than life silhouette device of *Smooth Criminal*, this time Michael uses it to amplify the drama of his by now trademark "Billie Jean" routine. Enhanced and refined since its television debut on the *Motown 25* stage Michael uses this set piece to really drive home his prowess as a dancer, entralling the audience with every glide of his foot, every shutter and pop of his body, every locking step in the SkyWalk and blissful and flawless slide in the moonwalk elicits cheers from the audience.

Having dazzled with a megamix of hits, Michael wasn't done. With a nod to those who "Like to live on the wild side" Michael launches into an elaborate version of "Dangerous" evolving the performance from its debut several years earlier. Here the moves a little sharper, a "Smooth Criminal" segment added in, so too is a dramatic pause set against the whistling theme of "The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly" and, somewhat confusingly, so too are samples from Janet's spoken interludes that Michael lip syncs to. That confusing oddity aside this was a sharp and sophisticated performance of a routine not wildly seen.

Still Michael had more to give and shifts gears sliding into the ballad "You Are Not Alone", reminding all of his still relevant chart topping prowess.

But sadly whereas his lip syncing could be forgiven somewhat in the more dance centric numbers, his reliance on backing tracks here saps the song of any real joy and energy until the final moments when he briefly sings live. And perhaps in an act of defiance or "who cares what people think" or maybe just poor judgement, Michael is joined on stage by a choir complete with gaggle of children who rush to his side at the song's conclusion. Overly staged and thus seeming forced, it felt like Michael was trying too hard to make his point and left many viewers conflicted.

But overall the MTV opener, clocking in at a mammoth 15 minutes, served its purpose in reminding the world of the true talent Michael had and that he could still whip an audience into a frenzy and garner excitement. A mix of mostly stellar moments with a somewhat anti-climatic finale this performance is remembered more for the highs of the opening two numbers rather than the tepid closer.

But still, even a momentarily tepid Michael Jackson performance was miles ahead of anyone else who followed for the rest of the night.







## THE JACKSON 5 MEDLEY

Motown 25: Yesterday, Today, Forever

When Motown 25 was first touted as a concept there were certain acts that were a must - Diana Ross reuniting with the Supremes, Marvin Gaye getting back on stage, and getting Jackie, Jermaine, Marlon, Tito and Michael back together to perform as The Jackson 5. And with some gentle (and not so gentle) convincing The Jackson 5 took the stage together for first time in over a decade.

A pre-roll of footage highlighting their success as the powerhouse teen hit makers of Motown introduces them as the brothers take the stage. To say the crowd is appreciative is an understatement. They know here is the hottest performer on the planet reuniting with his brothers to honour where it all began.

And with the signature piano slide of "I Want You Back" the brothers fall into their classic line up.

Confidently strolling to the front of the stage they command attention from the get go. And with a slide of the back foot they dance in unison building anticipation for the performance.

Joyful and jubilant, Michael launches into the opening lines of "I Want You Back" much to the pleasure of the audience. As Michael would often say these were "the old songs the old fashion way". The excitement felt by the audience is also shared by the brothers, evident in the extra bit of energy they give every shuffle, slide and step. And with every passing moment the energy level builds.

Seamlessly transitioning from "I Want You Back" to "The Love You Save" Michael takes further command of the stage. And as much as the other brothers dance and move all eyes are on Michael who prowls the stage back and forth stopping only every now and then to fall in line to the shared choreography with Marlon and Jackie.

For all he protests prior to the evening it appears that Michael is actually enjoying himself. Enjoying being back on stage. Enjoying playing those old songs. And yes, even enjoying reliving those formative moments on stage and sharing this experience with his brothers.

Forever the showman, Michael builds his performance - the steps become more energised, a sense of spontaneity and delight in every move. And then during the chorus he wows with an effortless tornado whip spin.

The crowds cheers spur him (and his brothers) on as they take an extended dance break and introduce the quasi-official 6th member of the group (and latter fully fledged Jacksons member) Randy.

With all 6 brothers on stage they merge steps from The Jackson 5 glory days with those finessed by The Jacksons on tour. And as the song builds to its crescendo the brothers freeze in individual poses that seem to capture the energy of each entity. They hold their poses letting the applause of the audience wash over them and waiting for Michael's signal. They wait. And wait. And then with a simple point of his hand Michael cues up the opening strains of "Never Can Say Goodbye".

It's during this segment that Michael seems to take the most liberty with the song enjoying running the lyrics together and even dropping in a trademark "Hee Hee Hee" much to the delight of the brothers who seem to be sharing an inside joke.

For all the polish and finely tuned dazzle given the performance its a totally unscripted moment that steals the show. With the backing vocals all pre-recorded only Michael's lead mic was live. Thus when Jermaine steps up to take his moment he sings into a dead mic. With quick thinking and a flair for showmanship, Michael lends his mic to Jermaine, reaching out and holding his arm aloft as he sings before wrapping his arm around him in a sign of brotherly love as they share the mic.

And just as they had started the segment together, the brothers all unite for the final verse with smooth moves. With their hands held victorious they swoop the audience up for the final chorus and outro.

Exchanging heartfelt embraces the brothers celebrate this moment of unity. A moment that would be a highlight of the *Motown 25* show and also be the genesis for *The Victory Tour*.











**B**y the time the *HIStory World Tour* had rolled around Michael made the decision (whether for health or perfectionist issues) to rely more and more heavily on backing vocal tracks for his live performances.

Whilst this allowed him to deliver high quality and physically demanding shows night after night whilst saving his voice for key moments, it also meant there was a defined lack of emotional connection between audience and performer. Sure the audience was seeing the world's greatest performer dazzle them with moves and wow them with production, but they weren't hearing him in all of his brilliance.

That's why moments when he broke from the carefully crafted and precision built script yielded such brilliant rewards for both artist and audience.

Not only did they deliver the added excitement of the unexpected but also reminded audiences what drew them to Michael in the first place; his voice.

In July 1996, 2 months prior to the official kick off of the *HIStory World Tour*, Michael performed a one off free concert celebrating the 50th Birthday of the Sultan of Brunei drawing from the bulk of his *Dangerous World Tour* set list and production.

One of the benefits of such a decision was most of the concert was performed with live vocals. And with the *HIStory Tour* just around the corner Michael also decided to incorporate two songs from the new album - the sweet R&B ballad "You Are Not Alone" and the epic "Earth Song".

"Earth Song" in particular is a standout with a stripped back production void of any cherry-picker, tank prop or cast of thousands.

Instead there is just Michael, standing alone, commanding the stage.

And whilst the majority of the song is aided by backing track it's the final coda that truly awes.

With just a piano backing playing the haunting melody line, Michael steps up to the mic and delivers a series of unexpected ad-libs. Repeating a single line, "Tell me what about it", over and over Michael shows that he still has the vocal chops and power to deliver the goods live. As if in a trance he repeats the line, clapping and stopping his foot as he loses himself in the moment and the effect is mesmerising.

Several feet back from the live mic, Michael sings with passion and powerful projection inducing hairs to rise and goose bumps to appear. And although he sings the 5 same words over and over he places emphasis on different phrasing with every pass and wrenches every last drop of impassioned emotion from them each time.

It may be just two minutes long but that's all it takes for Michael to deliver a performance that stays with you. It showcases the humanity and ability to connect in his voice, but sadly does so in a way that leaves you wishing he did more *live* in his live performances on tour and allowed himself more moments of spontaneity like this as the results were always breath taking.



Cobbled together over two nights and two separate performances, the 30th Anniversary special was Michael's return to the stage after a four year absence.

Having just wowed the audience with his reunion with his brothers, this was what the audience had waited hours to see - Michael back on the stage as a solo artist.

Structured like a greatest hits of his previous tours the show begins with "The Way You Make Me Feel" using the now iconic drop sheet silhouette effect to herald his arrival. Whilst it's great to see Michael back in command of an audience the usual perfectionist polish isn't 100% there, but that in part is some of the appeal. With (mostly) live vocals (sourced from the two nights) there's a sense of urgency and energy to the performance. And whilst Michael's habit of obscuring his mouth - to cover lip syncing - detracts from the performance it's still a thrill to see him strut the stage. Even though the broadcast version trims the dance sequence (for the full version see the Britney Spears duet) there's still enough signature moves to garner excitement.

Broadcast out of sequence, "Black or White" follows with a high energy performance featuring Slash complete with finale pyrotechnics, followed by "Beat It". Continuity errors aside (how did he change jackets so quickly) the power punch of 2 of Michael's biggest rockers keeps the momentum going. Accompanied by a company of dancers from the outset the ensemble adds a new dimension to the performance. And of course when all of them fall into formation for the iconic routine there's no denying Michael's prowess as performer.

Any performance of "Billie Jean" is going to induce goose bumps and once again

Michael doesn't disappoint. Drawing out the theatrics with the vaudevillesque dressing introduction (a carry over from the *HIStory World Tour*) Michael tweaks the performance drawing every ounce of anticipation as he puts on the iconic glittery jacket, places the fedora on his head and then ever so teasingly reveals the glove. Never before has a single white glove caused such a frenzy. And as Michael steps into the spotlight... it begins.

Curiously the tempo has slowed a little over the years, but here Michael's steps fuelled by adrenalin are at pace with his original Motown 25 performance. The curse of backing tracks though means the tempo is locked in place and Michael's internal click track is ahead of the beat, almost willing it to keep up. However Michael was feeling or however his performance was impeded he still manages to execute a flawless moonwalk into spin and sticks that on the toes position with precision. And the final coda is truly sublime as Michael lets the beat take over and relishes the moment to simply dance much to the delight of the thousands crammed into *Madison Square Gardens* and the millions watching around the world.

The final (and only) performance of "You Rock My World" feels rushed and unfocused and suffers as a result. But once it's all said and done the whole solo set still manages to wow and whether for better or worse would go on to become Michael's last (widely screened) broadcast in front of a live audience. One can't help but feel that if Michael knew this, some extra effort and finesse would have been afforded it.

But as it stands, it's a testament to Michael's longevity as a performer and proves that into his 3rd decade he could still put on quite a show.













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## DANCING MACHINE

Various TV performances

For a band best known for its first string of number one hits, The Jackson 5 had a challenging growth period once they had established themselves as bona fide entertainers. In the three years since their last Top Ten hit "Sugar Daddy" many questioned their viability. Originally the album closer to *G.I.T. Get It Together*, "Dancing Machine" became the song to see The Jackson 5 ascend the charts once more with its initial release in February of 1974. With its popularity on the rise the song became the cornerstone of a hastily put together titular album.

Due to its ongoing success "Dancing Machine" saw The Jackson 5 give several notable performances on a variety of TV shows from its debut on *The Bob Hope Show* through to *Soul Train* and *The Carol Burnett Show*.

Initially performed on *The Bob Hope Show* in 1973 in support of *G.I.T.*, this appearance is a great starting point on tracking the evolution of performance of "Dancing Machine". For the most part, the slick choreographed routine is a by the numbers delivery lacking any real extra oomph or punch. And perhaps the greatest travesty is that Michael's television debut of 'The Robot' is all but missed as the camera

cuts away to a newly joined Randy Jackson on congas.

The next noteworthy iteration was on *Soul Train* (still in 1973 and still as an album track) where, perhaps spurred on by the *Soul Train Dancers* they admired, the energy levels are dialed way up. The brothers bop and spring to the beat, cutting sharper lines with their moves and hitting harder with little accents here and there. There's a natural groove in their steps, as if the moves are now less conscious steps and more muscle memory. Michael especially digs into the moves giving them more of a flourish and thankfully when he begins his robot moves the camera sticks on him, at least initially. In another scratch the head moment in directing the camera cuts to the surrounding *Soul Train* dancers before returning to Michael in extreme close up missing the final nuances of his dance. In the final minute of the performance Michael steps to the front of the riser stage as was part of the routine, but the immediate feedback from the audience spurs his performance on. As he sings "Shake it baby" he beams that 1000 watt smile as the audience roar their approval. There is an energy loop going on in that moment with the dancers feeding off

Michael's performance and him feeding off their energy. As Michael would go on to recollect, this was another reminder of the power of TV and how executing a perfect routine could have it resonate across the country. As he recalls in *Moonwalk* it was as if "every kid in the United States was doing the robot".

With the song now officially released as a single in its own right in 1974, the brothers continued their way round the variety show landscape arriving at *The Carol Burnett Show* whilst the song was charting. Perhaps because it was now no longer just an album track, the energy is once more dialed up with Michael stepping to front of stage more often, especially when showcasing the robot. Whereas previous executions took place behind the bank of mic stands, Michael takes over the floor and thankfully the camera stays with him. His moves are sharp, laser focused and executed to perfection. Once more with the final moments Michael mixes the by now refined routine with some freestyle moves to keep the energy going.

Rounding out the evolution of "Dancing Machine" is their appearance on the legendary *Tonight Show with Johnny Carson*. Whereas previous performances were lip synced (as per

the norm on most TV shows) this performance sets things apart due its fully live performance.

With the joy of live TV the brothers stand awkwardly for what feels like an eternity as Jermaine struggles with his bass strap. Finally counting in the intro (which begins on the 2), the song begins stripped back to the pure instrumentation of the band later augmented by a horn backing track. Michael's live vocals, whilst not perfect, display a carefree nature to them. Michael's moves are also less regimented and sadly once again the camera cuts away mid robot. The rest of Michael's moves are free even incorporating classic popping and locking moves for a moment. The highlight here though is the breakdown with Michael leading a call and reply section displaying his maturing voice and more soulful stylings.

The legacy of "Dancing Machine" continued long after it faded from the charts becoming a fan favourite and high energy number whenever performed live. It was, in a sense, Michael's awakening to the influence a performance could have on a wider TV audience and the immediate impact it can have on the culture. Something he would revisit and refine with *Motown 25*.



Michael had a love-hate relationship with TV specials. After being somewhat coerced into doing *The Jacksons* TV show for one season Michael was reluctant to do any more specials. Besides, the newly emerging music video format was an easier way to reach your audience with a vision that was all of your own making. So it was somewhat surprising that when Diana Ross was doing a TV special Michael agreed to appear and perform. Then again, it was Diana asking so maybe it wasn't all *that* surprising he said yes.

Performing 3 songs during the show his live performance of "Rock With You" is without doubt the true standout. As with his performances in a pre-*Thriller* era there is less at stake here so Michael allows himself to just enjoy the performance and be in the moment rather than worry about every aspect of it and push for perfection. So it's with live vocals (instead of pre-recorded) that he sings and with moves that are equally at home on a dance floor as they are the stage (of course these are Michael Jackson moves not that of a mere mortal). He sings with ease, plays with the melody and simply enjoys the moment, watched from a proud Diana on a balcony above.

Dressed in white tux, silver sequined shirt and black sparkly socks Michael digs into the lyrics and busts out some trademark moves in the musical bridge. There's unabashed joy in his performance, a carefree nature that just allows for the power of his voice and free flowing moves to emerge.

Dialling up the playful factor is his duet with Diana on "Ease On Down The Road" with a jiving Quincy Jones on piano. Diana and Michael trade off each other's energy and enjoy this rare chance of performing the song in public. Even their playful flirtation during a sit down chat seems easy and natural.

The reprise of "Rock With You" features Diana joining in on the song and here both stars enjoy little moments of one upmanship without either pushing to overshadow the other. Diana's playful teasing of Michael's moves highlight her admiration, and Michael's glances highlight his. But as was often the case, it's the solo performance - just Michael, a mic and a stage - that steals the show.

Michael wasn't known for being a politically active artist. Sure he had lent his support to various government programs and appeared at the White House during both Reagan's and Bush's presidency, but he hadn't thrown himself behind a political candidate like he did when President Clinton was elected into office.

Invited to perform at *President Clinton's Inauguration Gala* in 1993 many expected Michael would perform a high energy song and dance number. Little thought he would take the opportunity to make a quasi-political statement. But as he walked from the crowd to the stage in the round Michael prepared to shift expectations.


Influenced by both his friendship with Ryan White who died from the AIDS virus and the campaigning of close friend Elizabeth Taylor, Michael decided to use the opportunity to make a plea for greater research and funding with the aim of eradicating the AIDS Virus. Dedicating his performance to Ryan, Michael began "Gone Too Soon".

Like he did with the Sammy Davis Jr performance, Michael did away with flashy dance moves and instead focused on using his voice to enthrall the audience. Singing live, Michael delivers a heartfelt rendition, his voice wavering in moments as he sings the lyrics that have deep meaning for him. He sculpts the performance in real time, bending the melody here and there, taking a dramatic pause to impart the importance of the message. He even manages to salvage a mistiming of the lyric singing "Like a perfect (sun) flower / that is just beyond your reach" with ease showing how a true master of live performance handles things.

And in a "you could hear a pin drop" moment Michael elongates a note to silent awe before concluding the song. As the only time Michael performed "Gone Too Soon" live, this performance ranks as a must see for its pure simplicity and power.







**A**s part of a trio of songs performed to introduce The Jackson 5 to the American TV viewing audience, the performance of "Who's Loving You?" on *The Ed Sullivan Show* was the icing on a delightfully sweet cake.

Whilst "Stand" and "I Want You Back" proved the young men could sing and dance, the soulful rendition of Smokey Robinson's "Who's Loving You?" cemented the fact that this little kid out front, this pint sized showman, really could sing.

Michael's nerves show at little during the "sandbox" introduction with him flubbing and almost forgetting his lines. But those nerves soon go as soon as he starts singing and from that point on Michael presents himself as a true showman, full of confidence and ability way beyond his years.

It's hard to watch this performance without knowing everything that would come to follow and not see it as predestined. Of course the kid is great, he's Michael Jackson.

But pause for a moment and imagine you are seeing this for the first time. Imagine how perhaps you viewed the kid out front as a novelty and not a "real" (adult) performer. You're expectations might be lessened due to his age and that of his 4 siblings. Sure, this will be cute but it won't be great. Just imagine that's the assumption you've made. Now watch this cute little kid blow all those notions away.

Watch how from the very first note he captivates you. See how he commands the stage with very little movement. See how he hits each note perfectly, how he breaks notes, and draws the emotion from them. Witness his power as he belts out certain notes and his restraint as he lets others float. See the flurry of energy he unleashes in the final moments working a spin in between ad-libs and try not to be wowed.

Michael's charisma and pure talent in this performance is undeniable and he (along with his brothers) dismissed any doubts that these 5 kids weren't the real deal.

## 2003 BET AWARDS

Tribute to James Brown

Michael had shared the stage before with James Brown, most notably in 1983 when he dazzled an audience at a James Brown concert with an impromptu performance (followed by an embarrassingly subpar performance by Prince). And whilst that performance showcases an unfettered Michael in a spontaneous moment, it's Michael's cameo at the 2003 BET Awards that truly takes the cake.

James Brown was slated to be honoured that night and took to the stage to perform his classic hit "It's A Man's World". As James and his band burn through the soul hit before shifting gears and bringing the funk with a high-energy rendition of "Get Up (I Feel Like Being A) Sex Machine" James pulls out all

the stops and reminds everyone what made him such a legend. With an extended jam underway James commands his band like back in the good old days building them to the crescendo of his trademark hits and stop routine.

With the band paused and posed on an accent, the traditional showman cape routine begins. This time though the bearer of the cape is none other than Michael Jackson, much to the joy and surprise of the audience, the band and James himself.

Feeling the cape wrap around his shoulders James looks up and clocks Michael. It's a moment of pure surprise. The smile on James' face is priceless as he stands and lovingly

embraces Michael. In homage to the talent passed down and influence over his career Michael busts a quick James Brown shoe shuffle and the audience loses it. Not one to let the moment pass, James implores Michael to do it again as he cues his band. And as the one beat hits Michael breaks into his moves. Spurred on by the music and the audience's reaction Michael grabs the mic and utters James Brown's trademark call out "Make It Funky" before tossing in one of his own trademark "Woos". James Brown loves every minute and shuffles and slides behind Michael before ushering his stage hand to drape the cape on Michael. It's this moment, this shared respect and ordaining by James, Michael's childhood idol, that really gets to Michael. He beams in pure happiness

perhaps realising a childhood dream of being draped in that cape ever since he first witnessed James Brown's brilliance. As the horn section rips through the riff of "Shake Your Body (Down To The Ground)" Michael exits the stage and heads towards the podium to deliver a heartfelt speech about the influence and impact Brown had on his own career.

It's a touching speech made ever more special by the few moments that preceded it. In this small little homage and performance there is a lineage of showmanship that hasn't been matched. Two powerhouses of entertainment, two legendary performers, two timeless artists, together for one magical moment.



**O**n the occasion of dear friend Elizabeth Taylor's 65th Birthday, a tribute show entitled *Happy Birthday Elizabeth: A Celebration of Life* was hastily organised in her honour. As part of the shows lineup of stars, Michael agreed to compose and perform a song especially for this event.

As a way of repaying Elizabeth for her unwavering friendship and support, Michael began composing a song that would reflect the struggles and triumph of Elizabeth Taylor's life. As he had done with "You Were There", Michael called on the talents of Buz Kohan to help co-write the song and give it more of a classic showtime, musical feel.

Stepping up to the mic, Michael begins his salute to his dear friend "Welcome to Hollywood / That's what they told you. / A child star in Hollywood / That's what they sold you". With orchestral backing the song unfolds like a great story detailing the sacrifices and challenges of many a child star. Something Michael knew a thing or two about.

Celebrating Elizabeth's fire, determination, beauty and grace, Michael outlays a journey of success and struggles. But this isn't just a career or life retrospective gleamed from observation, this is a heartfelt dedication to one dear friend to another. A celebration of the meaningful relationship they have shared together.


Using a bevy of dramatic poses and theatrical flourishes, there is a quiet confidence in Michael's moves as he builds the narrative to the bridge where he links the joys and pain of stardom and Elizabeth's ultimate triumph at "beating life's battles / again and again".

With a deeply personal final verse Michael leans into the performance with a moving vocal as he recounts "You did all the things / that only a true friend can do".

As a master of stagecraft Michael knows when to build and when to taper off, and in a explosive flurry Michael spins and stops on a dime for dramatic effect before executing an epic elongated final note.

Performed only this one time, "Elizabeth, I Love You" is evidence of Michael being able to execute a thrilling performance no matter the genre.





**A**s Michael's first foray into the world as a solo artist the unlikely hit song 'Ben' became his launching pad. At just 14 years old Michael approached this sweet song of friendship with vulnerability and honesty that saw it shift from being a song from a forgettable movie to an Academy Best Original Song contender.

Whilst Michael was no stranger to a televised performance this was his first time where he was stepping out alone, without the security of sharing the stage with his brothers. And here he was doing it on one of the most watched televised programs of the year.

Introduced by Charlton Heston as "a young man who's talent is mature but age suggests maybe he shouldn't even be up this late" Michael appeared amongst a soundstage of a million bulbs and lattices.

As part of the telecast, Michael performed to the album version without live vocals, but still made sure that the performance was one to be remembered. Unable to just stand and sing, Michael offers subtle slides and dips of his body to dramatise the passion of the words. And in doing so wins over the audience both in the venue and at home.

Despite the understated approach taken the significance of the performance itself can't be understated. This was, for the most part, a chance for a young budding solo singer to reach all corners of the globe with one performance. Sure, Michael had done it with The Jackson 5, but not as a serious solo performer.

Here he was, at just 14, staking his claim as a contemporary artist not a novelty act, and with an Oscar Nom to boot. And whilst the award wasn't his to claim (even if the song did win it would have gone to the song writers) Michael came out the true winner. After all having a number one song and an Academy Awards performance under his belt helped launch him as a viable solo artist.



Scheduled to appear at the 1993 *Soul Train Music Awards*, Michael was all set to unveil a live performance of "Remember The Time" bringing to life the syncopated dance routine from his short film.

But as bad luck would have it, Michael either sprained or twisted his ankle (depending on reports) and was unable to perform. This was a blow not only for the producers of the Award Show who feared Jackson would cancel, but also for Michael himself who would have danced once more on the famed Shrine Auditorium stage where ten years earlier he had unveiled the moonwalk during his Motown 25 performance.

So rather than cancel Jackson decided to find another way to get to the stage. As Patti LaBelle introduces him, Michael is quickly (and not so quietly) wheeled onto the stage and quickly hobbles to a hastily arranged throne. With a nod to the Short Film, the performance begins with the crashing of a gong, augmented by the intro of "Can't Let Her Get Away". And there, revealed on stage sits Michael in full Egyptian inspired costume.

Backed by a specially created edit of the song, Michael begins the performance a cappella as he is joined on stage by back up dancers. The pre-recorded vocals (as evidenced by several slip ups) pump Michael up as he thrusts his shoulders in time to his internal metronome. It's an uncomfortable performance not merely because of his injury but also because despite wanting to move his is limited to quite literally dancing while seated. So an arm flail here, a pose there is all he could really muster to accent or sync up to the dance ensemble around him.

It's a shame, and he knows it. As the elaborate performance takes shape, including the Queen being carried in on her own bed throne, Michael clearly wants to be part of it. Unable to contain himself

in the confines of his seat, he stands for a moment whipping the crowd into a frenzy before quickly sitting back down. It's a brief moment but one that (pardon the pun) stands out as evidence of Michael both being moved by the music as well as knowing how to fire up an audience.

During the main dance break which had Michael been able to perform would have been truly memorable, you sense Michael's frustration and perhaps realisation at how absurd this must look; to have one of the world's greatest dancers and performers literally hobbled.

Restricted to his upper torso, Michael busts out a few moves and falls in line with the backing troupe much to the enjoyment of the audience who begin to chant, "Go Michael, Go Michael". This spurs him on and he become even more animated, almost violently thrashing in his seat at one point.

The final moments of the performance see Michael stand, unsteadily, perhaps in appreciation for the support the audience have given him. It's a brief, hobbling moment but it brings the audience to their feet as they bestow Michael with a standing ovation.

Whilst it may not be a shining moment in Michael's long history of perfectly executed stage performances, it is one that shows the impact seeing Michael Jackson on stage has on an audience. Sitting, standing, dancing or not, matters little it would seem. For even an injured and confined Michael can still wow and deliver a performance with energy that captivates and steals the show.

As it turned out this ill-fated performance was the only one Michael did of "Remember The Time". Sad when you consider how exciting and vibrant it could have been. Regardless, it remains one for the history books, and fittingly so.





I hope this exploration into the The Performances of Michael Jackson has made you want to revisit and dig deeper into his art. If one of your must haves isn't on the list let me know and tell me what it means to you.  
Send your comments, feedback and your own selects to [mj101@outlook.com](mailto:mj101@outlook.com)



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