

A black and white photograph of Michael Jackson's face and hand, set against a dark background filled with colorful, glowing circles and starburst patterns. The circles are in various colors (red, green, blue, yellow, pink) and sizes, creating a cosmic or confetti-like effect. The starbursts are white and radiate from several points. Michael Jackson's face is partially visible, looking directly at the camera, with his hand raised near his face. The overall aesthetic is futuristic and celebratory.

MICHAEL JACKSON

101

101 GREATEST SONGS



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Andy Healy

 Andy Healy 2013

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MICHAEL JACKSON



101 GREATEST SONGS

Dedicated first and foremost to Michael Jackson
and the Jackson family for a lifetime of music.

And to all the musicians, writers, arrangers, engineers and producers
who shared their talents and brought these musical masterpieces into being.

This book is also dedicated to the fans the world over - new, old, and yet to be -
who by exploring the richness in the art will ensure Michael's musical legacy
and influence continues on.

My wholehearted thanks to my own Liberian Girl, Trish, for her love, support
and encouragement to keep going.

This is a book by a fan for the fans.





Many great books have been written about Michael's music and artistry. This collection of 101 Greatest Songs is by no means absolute, nor is it intended to be. Rather it is meant to promote discussion, debate, and rekindle your love for the music that drew you to Michael Jackson in the first place.

If you wish to delve deeper into Michael's art I would encourage you to dive into the pages of some of the outstanding books on the topic, starting with Michael's autobiography 'Moonwalker' and his collection of poems and reflections 'Dancing the Dream'.

Also in my opinion no collection is complete without:

- For The Record
by Chris Cadman and Craig Halstead
- Man in the Music
by Joe Vogel
- A Visual Documentary
by Adrian Grant
- The Complete Story of the King Of Pop
by Lisa D. Campbell
- Maestro - The A- Z of Michael Jackson
by Chris Cadman.

PHOTO CREDITS

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I wish to acknowledge the great work Michael's photographers did over the years in capturing his artistic journey with special mention to Harrison Funk, Sam Emerson, Neal Preston, and those who created visually stunning works with Michael including Albert Watson, Arno Bani, and Jonathan Exley.

Cover image by Arno Bani

MICHAEL JACKSON

101 GREATEST SONGS



Lists that rank any form of art are always somewhat arbitrary. And when you are dealing with an artist who had such a wealth of material as Michael did over his 4 decade long career you are going to be met with some challenges. Some selections are undeniable and seem quite obvious and predestined. Others came down to a matter of degrees, and then there are those that are swayed by personal preference.

So how was the list created?

Well first off, I looked solely at the music. Not the visuals that went with it, nor necessarily the popularity of a track in terms of chart success. Rather I looked at how the song stacked up from a musical creation point of view. How the music impacted the industry, and also how it impacted Michael's career in terms of his creative journey and evolution as an artist. Drawing from all his recordings (including those of The Jackson 5, and The Jacksons - though I have tried to be sparing) I have tried to create a list that would please both hard core fans and those discovering Michael's music for the first time.

You may not agree with all the selections or the rankings, and that's OK. If the list alone causes you to (re)evaluate a track or give a long discarded song a fresh listen then I would consider it a success. Of course I hope it inspires you to pull out your collection, grab your iPod and create your own 101 list. You'll see the choices aren't always as easy as you think.

Share your thoughts and send comments on the selections to : mj101@outlook.com or visit mj101.squarespace.com





If ever there was a quintessential Michael Jackson song it would have to be the sonic masterpiece that is 'Billie Jean'.

Before the Motown 25 Anniversary Special, before the unveiling of the moon walk, before the captivating split screen video, there was an irresistible beat and bass line.

It's perhaps hard now to disassociate the song from the mental images it conjures, and whilst there is no denying this was Michael's iconic live performance piece, there is also no denying the mastery and craftsmanship that went into the writing and delivery of this song.

The crispness on that opening beat is something to marvel at. Just a simple one step beat, but the way it hits has such energy and propulsion it is almost irresistible.

And then the bass line kicks in. A mix of strut and stalk, the bass walks its way through the track and is so fat in its sonic value it literally hums through the speakers.

For most songs those two elements alone would be enough to make it an instant classic, but musically Michael brings so many little hooks to the track that would transcend it from being one the best songs he ever recorded to being one of the best songs ever recorded, period.

From the percussive lyrical delivery, to the rich harmonies, to the countering backing vocals, to the myriad of tantalising musical flourishes, 'Billie Jean' is as close to musical perfection as you are ever likely to come across.

From the verse with its bass line and ascending/descending chords, to the flurry of synth horns and trademark "heeeees" in the pre-chorus, to the chorus with its guitar hook and stabbing strings, to the bridge with its twanged guitar solo, there is something in every phrase, every note to catch the ear and keep it entertained.

Add to the mix Michael's flawless vocal delivery and surprisingly personal lyrics that are at once filled with intrigue, concern and then flat out denial and you would think its place in music history was predestined. It's as if all of Michael's musical ambitions are embedded in each bar. And successfully so.

It is still surprising to know that when it came time to select songs for Thriller, Quincy Jones wasn't that enamoured with 'Billie Jean' and thought it should be dropped. Thankfully Michael stuck to his belief in the song, and all his focus and dedication to the track rightfully rocket him into the stratosphere of superstardom.





DON'T STOP 'TIL YOU GET ENOUGH

Off The Wall

02

With its percussion and bass intro, 'Don't Stop 'til You Get Enough' beckons the listener in with Michael delivering a teasing spoken intro. Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of this 15 second introduction is that on first listen you don't know where the song will go. Then with what would become a trademark scream the track springs to life with a driving beat, lush strings, and teasing guitar.

And then there are the vocals. Michael's falsetto is perfection on this track. Dripping and smooth, the lead and background vocals draw out phrases and add accents in a way that is immediately intoxicating. Michael allows each word space to float in the air. He draws them out. Teasing the listener with every utterance.

From sweeping strings that dart and zig in between the vocals, to horns blaring with attacking and swooping patterns, each passing verse and chorus builds the intensity of the track carrying us to the climatic bridge where the song steps up to another level.

You can hear the love and dedication given to the delivery and arrangement of this song, with strings countering each other and that non-stop wall of percussion that shuffles the song along.

It's as though everything Michael has learnt in his career and his own musical ideas to that point are here. The way the song carries multiple hooks from the vocal melody to the jittering guitar lines to the blasting horns and swirling strings says as much about Michael's ability to write a hit on his own terms as it does his ability to masterfully weave musical arrangements.

Of course, Quincy Jones' masterful production is evident and helps elevate the track, though it shouldn't be overstated. Michael's early demos recorded in his Hayvenhurst studios present the song almost fully formed with the wall of percussion grooving along, bass and key melody lines present right down to the bubbling synth outro are all there just ready to hook the ear.

Whether or not he intended it be, 'Don't Stop 'til You Get Enough' became the introductory song to an adult Michael Jackson. It's no coincidence that it leads Off The Wall.

This is Michael presenting himself to the world, letting them know that he is older, has a more mature sound, and that he means business. Every second of this song is designed to be heard. And decades later it continues to entertain and hook you in from the very first bar.

While Michael had dabbled with elements of Gospel on and off throughout his career it wasn't until Bad that he stepped up to the mic and delivered his own take on a gospel track.

Written by Glen Ballard and Siedah Garret critics might argue that this isn't a true expression of Michael's, but the way he emotionally invests in the song he transforms it and truly makes it his own.

With a slow sparse arrangement in the first verse you notice that Michael delivers all the warmth and hope of the track simply with his voice and finger snaps. It isn't until the chorus that the song is fully fleshed out musically. The way Michael interprets the lyrics show true mastery. His vocals are honest and dripping in humanity. The way he twists and climbs the melody to the chorus and key change shifts the song to another level.

And it's from the key change at the 02:52 mark that Michael really makes the song his

own. With Michael in call and response mode, he just lays it all out there, taking on the role of both preacher and convert. His impassioned pleas are underscored by the choral backing that lay a firm Gospel foundation for him to leap from.

Each passing phrase, each ad-lib vibrates through the speakers and into your heart. And of course it wouldn't be a Michael track without some trademark "hoo" or "Cha'mon" moments.

For many, 'Man In The Mirror' has become Michael's "Imagine" and rightfully so. It is as much a song about the individual as it is the collective. A song about impacting the world around you by starting with the impact you make. The power of its message is in the simplicity of the arrangement, allowing Michael's vocals to carry and deliver it, full of heart and conviction.

'Man In The Mirror' offered the world a new Michael and was undoubtedly the unexpected stand out of the album.



Like the opening guitar strum of The Beatles "Hard Day's Night" before it, the sliding piano intro of 'I Want You Back' heralded in another important moment in music; the arrival of The Jackson 5 and a rise to stardom like no other.

In retrospect it is easy to think that 'I Want You Back' was destined to be a hit, but when you step back and look at all the elements that make it up, it is quite an unlikely hit and perhaps could be even be seen as a daring risk.

Think about it. Here you have a soul-pop song sung by an 11 year old; the star of a kiddies act. A front man who can't be expected to have had any semblance of an adult relationship to be able to relate to the remorse of ending love too soon and the jealousy it stirs inside. Oh, and did I mention this was sung by an 11 year old.

Musically 'I Want You Back' has a lush, almost joyous feel to it with scampering piano melody, grooving bass, sweeping strings and even congas, that undercuts the sorrow and desperation of the lyrics. And in the centre of the mix is Michael. You can almost hear him, sitting atop a high stool to reach the mic, literally singing his heart out. All the required emotional qualities are there; pain, remorse and a sense of begging. But Michael also adds an unexpected element that elevates the song, and that is a sense of innocence mixed with a tinge of joy.

Despite his age, the words ring true coming from his mouth. This isn't a kid singing an adult song in an 'ain't that cute' way. This is a fully fledged singer wringing all the heartfelt emotions each word carries and delivering them in a way that belies his age. And that's what made people sit up and notice.

'I Want You Back' is a beautifully crafted pop song, and some have argued that is the best pop song ever recorded. It is the perfect storm of great song, impeccable production and the vocal prowess of a singer who imbues each word with so much heart. Michael reaches for notes with a joy that grabs the listener. With beautiful harmonies delivered by the brothers, Michael takes certain notes and phrases and makes them soar. Listen to how he sings "Oh darling I was blind to let you go" and the way he hits "You in his arms" in the final moments of the song. This is someone being in the moment, carrying and delivering the emotions needed and doing it with such unashamed passion that pierces your heart.





In a career that featured hit after hit, signature tune after signature tune, it's natural that some great songs can be easily overlooked.

'Stranger In Moscow' is a case in point. Here we have a truly beautifully arranged song filled with rich imagery and personal lyrics. A song that demonstrates Michael's brilliance as a songwriter, producer and singer all in one (not to mention musician as the track even features Michael on guitar).

It is no surprise that 'Stranger In Moscow' is often lumped in with other haunting ballads of Jackson's career including 'Human Nature'. The link is even more tangible when you note that the same ensemble of musicians in Steve Lukather, David Paich and Steve Porcaro are present in the mix. But the key difference here is whilst 'Human Nature' is someone else's life experience interpreted by Michael, 'Stranger In Moscow' is all him. This isn't an instance of Michael giving meaning to someone else's words, this is him conveying his own thoughts, fears and feelings.

This is Michael with his heart squarely on his sleeve. But rather than play the by now default role of victim he brings us behind the curtain and allows us to experience his "swift and sudden fall from grace". He lets us feel the solitude ever present in the feeling of being "abandoned in my fame". He opens himself up with an honesty that lets us feel his pain without him asking for us to pity him.

The isolation the lyrics convey is echoed in the minimalist arrangement of the track. Beautiful melodies underscore the sadness of the situation but yet still offer a moment of hope that "sunny days will drown the pain". But rather than fully arrive at a happy ending, Michael stays with the reality of feeling alone and makes the song more powerful for it.

As people begin to dig deeper into his rich cannon of work and rediscover his music, 'Stranger In Moscow' will be a track that they will point to as evidence of his deft touch at production and his brilliance as a songwriter.

And rightfully so.

From the opening run of descending bass notes 'Remember The Time' grabs the listener and places them right in the centre of the groove. More seductive than some of the harder hitting rhythms that had accompanied it on Dangerous, 'Remember The Time' is joyful in its whimsical look back on a relationship long gone.

Michael's vocal delivery is on point and once again the backing harmonies layer so perfectly they almost wash over the listener.

From lush choruses to sparse verses that allow for just Michael's voice to carry the melody 'Remember The Time' became one of the instant stand out tracks of the Dangerous album.

It's a love song carried with such joy and celebration you can't help but want to sing along as it manages to recapture some of the joyful feelings of Off The Wall's finer moments.

Listen to the verses leading up the chorus, layered amongst Michael's backing vocals of "I betcha remember" you can also hear Michael mimicking the bass line notes "do da do do do" buried deep in the mix. This is just an example of how a song that initially feels quite sparse in its production, has layers upon layers of little musical nuances that seem to reveal themselves with repeat listenings.

It's all these little elements coupled with Michael's pure joy at singing this song (you can almost picture his smile in the delivery) that makes 'Remember The Time' still sound fresh and inviting 20 years later.

And whilst for many it might not be one of Michael's songs they instantly recall in their list of faves (those honours usually fall to tracks from Off The Wall Thriller, or Bad) 'Remember The Time' is the forgotten gem of hits that is sure to put a smile on any listener's face from those opening notes.

Go on, put it on now and I dare you not to be enjoying it by the first chorus.





The opening triple snare hits of 'Wanna Be Startin' Somethin'' is like a sonic knocking on the door of the world. With its driving beat and infectious groove 'Wanna Be Startin' Somethin'' bridges the gap between where we left off with Off The Wall and what Thriller promised. No surprise then that this track had its first incarnation during the Off The Wall sessions but was left to percolate until it fit more with where Michael wanted it to go musically.

Charged with energy the relentless bass line grounds the track throughout with the same hypnotic notes. But rather than wear out its welcome, the bass line pulses through the track with a growing sense of urgency. With each passing verse we are introduced to more instrumental embellishment as horns puncture lines, synths swirl, and percussive claps hit. They combine in a way that elevates the track to a higher plane as each new chorus approaches.

His most personal take on the world around him at the time, the lyrics convey his helplessness as those surrounding him feed off idle gossip and rumour. He tackles our ruthless desire to gossip, and the pain it inflicts. He takes aim at hypocritical behaviour and even spares a verse to square off with teen pregnancy.

We are also introduced to the antagonist of Billie Jean. For those of us who got to listen to Thriller prior to the release of 'Billie Jean' as a single it was quite a kick to have this lyrical cameo appear here and then discover a further reappearance in the title track.

Once again the backing vocals offer richness, especially with the taunting delivery of "you're a vegetable" where Michael lays down a mocking take buried in the mix.

But just when you think the song will get weighed down in its own struggle, Michael breaks the chains of the gossip that surrounds him and flips the track to one of positivity with an empowering delivery on the strength of self belief and knowing your truth. From here the track shifts gear and uplifts the listener with a sense of infectious optimism as it builds to its apex. With the now often sampled chant the song elevates to a new place as it encourages you to join in.

At just over 6 minutes in length 'Wanna Be Startin' Somethin'' remains fresh and vital throughout and never overstays its welcome. To this day it remains a track that is just as moving and catchy as it was the first time it blasted through the world's stereos back in 1982.



With a pure pop sensibility 'The Way You Make Me Feel' is one of Michael's catchiest compositions. His vocals are near flawless and there is a sense of joy in his delivery that is very reminiscent of the finest moments from Off The Wall. The joy is there in the opening ad-libs and the taunting "Go on girl" which he transforms into "gone girl" by the end of the track.

The first verse sets the scene perfectly with Michael loving everything about this girl from "the groove of your walk, your talk, your dress". He sings with passion, with pure adoration and longing. The lyrical content also gives us a glimpse into Michael's sense of relationships, perhaps telling that he feels the need to "work from 9 to 5 to buy you things just to keep you by my side" a notion that he utters in other songs about relationships. But he is also quick to promise more than just material things, swearing to keep his love "satisfied" in perhaps the first hint of a more sexual Michael - yet still more alluded to than his explicit contemporaries at the time of Prince and Madonna. Michael feels happy to hint at rather than be explicit, and the innocence of the song remains light.

With a deep mix of musical layers from swooning synth strings to hot 'n' sexy horn blasts and shuffling swing beat the song was destined to

be a hit. Once again Michael proves there's not a backing group that comes close to the beautiful harmonies he layers in the chorus. Soft and sweet, these harmonies float and allow for the lead vocal to be more grounded in this raw appeal for love.

Like a lot of Michael's classic dance numbers there isn't so much of a bridge present in the song but rather the creating of space to let the groove take over, stripping everything back to the bare essentials; that shuffling beat and the effervescence of that bouncing bass line punctuate.

'The Way You Make Me Feel' is also notable for two more things. Firstly, it showcases Michael's love of playing with the sounds of words to fit with his percussive expression in the way that he teases out "biz-i-ness" to heighten the playfulness, and secondly for the mystery bit of ear candy he placed at the end of the track at 4:52 teasing us with what sounds like the muted plucking of guitar strings. A little flourish to keep the ear fully engrossed and entertained to the end.

And entertain it does. Perhaps *the* pop hit off the Bad album, 'The Way You Make Me Feel' is a song that is as quintessential a Michael Jackson track as and you are ever going to find.





Haunting.
Seductive.
Intimate.

All words that perfectly describe the melodic beauty of 'Human Nature' yet only give a glimpse into the depth of its appeal. With a dreamlike introduction of trickling synths and seductive guitar, the heart of 'Human Nature' lays in the mystery of the lyrics and the sweet floating vocal delivery Michael brings.

As if waking from a dream, the vocals paint a narrative of isolation and longing amidst a bustling cityscape. With a desire to get out "into the night time" so strong that "four walls won't hold me tonight" Michael embraces the adventure that the twinkling city lights promise; a chance for excitement, discovery and perhaps one night of love. Maybe it is this desire to connect, this curiosity of what else must lay beyond the small confines of the individual worlds we live in, that is at the heart of our collective human nature and holds the answer to the questioning why. And it is this exploration, this curiosity, that is rewarded with a soothing love that is greeted in the morning light.

The airy quality of the melody cushions Michael's vocal as they float and swirl around the listener before taking flight with those oh-so-perfect extended exclamations of "why?"

It seems counter-intuitive that a song so heavily based in electronic instrumentation with sweeping and bubbling synth runs resonates with such a rich organic warmth. This feat is thanks mostly to Michael's vocal delivery (especially in the often missed backing vocals) that keeps the track still feeling fresh and current, and the intoxicating melody that feels as though it has been plucked from the future.

Penned by Toto alum Steve Porcaro and lyricist John Bettis, its development from sparse writers demo to a completed track is evidence of taking a beautiful hook and packing it with authentic heart and soul.

Add the impeccable production, and silky smooth vocal delivery, and it's easy to see why 'Human Nature' is one of Michael's most covered songs, and why live performances generated an intimate feeling in stadiums of 60,000 plus. With such broad appeal, it became the blueprint for what a soothing R&B ballad should sound like, and how it should make you feel.

Frenetic and pulsing with energy, 'Working Day And Night' bristles with pure funk. From the opening percussive groove complete with Michael's scatting and heavy breathing beat boxing, the song is grounded in the inescapable intensity of the rhythmic track. Michael's sweet falsetto conveys the plight of a man so busy trying to please his lover that there is no time left over for actual loving. His delivery expresses the frustration at not getting the good loving he craves with total ease.

With blasting horns and piano stabs the track is a dizzy hypnotic journey through the pains of unobtainable love that is too good to sit still to. Anchored in that driving beat, 'Working Day And Night' proved an effective dance floor filler as it did a stadium joint. It is perhaps the purist representation of Michael fully immersed in funk (followed closely by Get On The Floor).

Exploring the conflict of his desire to please and the equally strong desire to love, 'Working Day And Night' uncovers the sweetness inside the tension of anticipation and ultimate frustration. The promise of "what my life was meant to be" drives the lyrics on as Michael struggles to turn the desire of love into "reality", but with all his time taken up working so hard to please his love he is filled with concerns that someone else is enjoying the fruits of his hard labour. It is this mix of passion and confusion that comes through loud and clear in his vocal delivery.

The song also gives us a stronger shaping of Michael's vocal prowess with the emergence of his soon to be trademark ad-libs and percussive delivery. For a non-single, 'Working Day And Night' remains a must hear for any fan of Michael's music.

From its opening electro-chimes 'Beat It' sounded unlike anything else you had heard from Michael throughout his career. It was harder. Grittier. Rawer. It was rock.

Gone is the softness and sweetness of Michael's vocals, replaced by a more defiant and challenging delivery that is razor sharp.

Once again Michael pulled it out when it was needed writing the track when Quincy felt the album needed a rock flavour of The Knack's 'My Sharona' kind. Thankfully, rather than just deliver a generic rock-pop track like the former, 'Beat It' delivers something new and comes packed with killer hooks and a strong musical sensibility.

Drawing from the urban world around him Michael relays the pressures of a young man needing to prove himself in a street tough environment. He explores the push and conflict that exists between being a man, and manning up.

Fleshing out this bold expedition into the world of rock came the masterstroke of pairing Michael's harder vocals with the rock trickery of Eddie Van Halen. Eddie's instantly recognizable licks explode as he works the fretboard like a magician and his solo now feels like a natural inclusion. For its time however, this was a huge risk. The pairing of a "white" rock god with a "black" artist was unheard of and in some camps considered shocking. At the time music segregation was rampant on radio. White stations played white rock. And black stations played black artists. And never the twain should meet. That was until 'Beat It' blew up the speakers.

So powerful and popular it obliterated the colourlines of radio airplay and placed music, not race, at the centre of playlists. For that alone, 'Beat It' should always be celebrated. Couple that with the timelessness of the track and you have a song that truly packs a punch and will forever be one of Michael's most surprising and rewarding musical moments.





With an operatic prelude 'Who Is It' is built on the same musical credo of other classic tracks like 'Billie Jean'. With its own immediately distinctive bass line, 'Who Is It' delves into the darker side of relationships and presents a musical landscape that is quite forboding.

Lyricaly the desperation and paranoia that follows a breakup is almost palpable in the way Michael sings with a sense of pleading and yearning. Trying to make sense of where things went wrong he recounts everything he gave to the relationship in the form of money, time, passion and "everything inside one heart could find". There is a sense of hopelessness here at the betrayal suffered following promises of a love that would "last all time". Michael explores the failing relationship looking within as he wonders if "the reason why she left me did she find in someone else". There is real pain here as he ponders in whose arms she may have found comfort. And rather than brush it off, he allows us to glimpse his pain as he portrays it as the "agony inside the dying head". He also suggests that perhaps he is not without blame as he prays this pain, this "punishment will have mercy on me".

Musically it contains several hooks without straying too far from the firm groove of its foundation, allowing moments of punctuating strings and lush synth beds to draw the listener deeper and deeper into the track. Each musical refrain seems to tighten the tension a little more, as if dragging us spiralling down into the depression of heartbreak.

Undoubtedly one of Michael's finest moments as a songwriter but also as a producer as he crafts the perfect cloak of musical mystery and intrigue throughout the track. With a running time of 6.34 'Who Is It' remains keenly focused and never for a moment feels too long or even gives the hint of boring the listener.

Whilst Michael has often been criticised for lyrically living in a world of imagination and fantasy, 'Who Is It' shows us that he is at his most powerful when he is drawing from the personal, and like many of his other darker tinted views on relationship songs such as 'Billie Jean' and 'Ghosts', he presents an authentic take on the pain and suffering of failed love and the almost suffocating feeling of heartache.

'Who Is It' is a powerful example of how brilliant Michael could be as writer and producers. Just himself. His heart. And his talent.

Following on the heels of what music critics called the “bubblegum soul” of ‘I Want You Back’, ‘ABC’, and ‘’, ‘I’ll Be There’ gave The Jackson 5 their 4th consecutive number 1 single, and in doing so proved that this was a group with real depth in its ranks.

Sweet and innocent ‘I’ll Be There’ is the perfect example of how Michael could draw from emotions far beyond his years and deliver them with a sense of wisdom and knowing.

Just listen to how he delivers the lines “if you should ever find someone new / I know he better be good to you”. There is such heartfelt commitment packed into those lines that you wouldn’t know the voice delivering it was only 11 years old. Michael shows technique and vocal flourishes that made even the great soul singers sit up and take notice.

An “old soul” was how the great Smokey Robinson recalled Michael’s ability to deliver an emotional punch and here in 4 minutes of glory is a testament to this pure talent.

As with many of the Motown era tracks there are layers of instrumentation throughout that almost go unnoticed at first due to the power of the lead vocals. But let your ears delve into the depth of the arrangement and you’ll notice a Beatles-esque harpsichord, a jangling acoustic guitar, the soft chimes of a xylophone, and the forever travelling sweetness of a blues guitar.

Also of note are the wonderfully layered harmonies that underpin the verses and the sweet, almost angelic, refrains of “I’ll be there” during Jermaine’s lead vocals.

It’s these harmonies. These rich, soulful harmonies that should be presented to anyone who thinks all the talent in The Jackson 5 rested with Michael and Jermaine. ‘I’ll Be There’ is a prime example of why The Jackson 5 were more than just a throwaway kiddies band. Anyone paying attention (and by now the whole world was) would have been hard pressed to dismiss the soothing harmonies and complementary lead vocals as anything but the real deal.

An important song in the development of Michael’s confidence not only as a performer but also as songwriter and producer, ‘This Place Hotel’ is for all intents and purpose a solo work by Michael, working as lead and backing vocalist (to the exclusion of his brothers). It can also be viewed as the vital link in his artistic development between Off The Wall and Thriller.

Beginning with a sorrowful string prelude that paints a picture of heartbreak and loss it quickly switches to a shuffling jazz-funk fusion as Michael recounts the story of a relationship that has left him “yearning”. Drawing the metaphor of place for the heartbroken (as first established in Elvis Presley’s ‘Heartbreak Hotel’) Michael tells the tale of accusations of infidelity that have led him there, while desperately trying to “convince this girl there ain’t no other.” It seems his downfall has been conspired by those around him where “every smile’s a trial thought in beguile to hurt me”. But his plight is not his alone. It is shared by those whose own heartbreak

has brought them here including one who’s “been here in tears for fifteen years”. ‘This Place Hotel’ is vivid in its description of the broken hearted but rather than resolve with a happy ending, Michael chooses to leave the protagonist eternally trapped in this place of “doom”. Musically ‘This Place Hotel’ is just as cinematic as its lyrical narrative. From the opening prelude the song takes on a larger than life quality and is filled with the layering of stalking bass lines, stabbing horns and attacking strings accented by the use of sound effects to heighten the mood. Wanting to create a living nightmare feel, Michael layers the track with screams, whispers, and Psycho inspired stabs. Musically he creates little accents and missteps to add to the tension with whirling organs, cranking guitars, and taunting backing vocals.

As his most ambitious undertaking to date, ‘This Place Hotel’ is a key moment in his creative development and acts as the precursor to the darker side of love that he would explore later on in his career.





Michael was no stranger to writing songs with a global concern. With a back catalogue rich with tracks like 'Heal The World', 'We Are The World' and 'Can You Feel It' his concern for the planet was duly noted. But 'Earth Song' has a relatable truth to it that was somewhat lacking in a song like 'Heal The World'.

Starting with the sounds of nature and a sweet harp and string prelude, Michael opens 'Earth Song' with a musical fashioned dawn. All quite and serene.

The soft gentle melody of the piano introduces Michael's observations of the wonders of nature and man's impact on it. "What about sunrise?" he asks "What about rain? / What about all the things you said we were to gain?" he wonders aloud as he assess the trade off between progress and conservation. Next he lays out man's thoughtless destruction to the planet as a result of war, of "killing fields" and the scars we have carved in the land at the sacrifice of "this crying earth / this weeping shore." With a state of disbelief he looks around at the destruction and implores us to "look what we've done".

When he sings "I used to dream / I used to glance beyond the stars / but now I don't know where we are / although I know we've drifted far" it is a mature observation, a sobering reflection on where we have found ourselves.

Underpinned by an epic arrangement of the most grandest of rock-opera proportions, 'Earth Song' starts soft and simple and builds with every passing bar into a raucous, gospel tinged plea for action.

Rich and lush production means that almost every time you listen to 'Earth Song' you uncover something new. It might be the trickling strings. It might be

the weeping guitar. Or it might be the bed of vocal harmonies that surround you and, despite their doomsday predictions, still offer hope in their unity.

It's in the climatic call and response segment that sees the song bloom from full rock-opera track to gospel fused wonderment as Michael presents the litany of ills facing humankind and draws the connection between nature's plight and our own by countering each observation of "what about elephants?" and "what about the seas?" and tying it back to "what about us?".

Here the song lifts and lifts and lifts carried by a blistering bass, horns that herald impending doom and a blazing guitar that echoes the flames of destruction.

And rather than solve the world's issues or present us with an overly sweet happy ending, Michael confronts the listener and challenges them to take action finishing the song with the simple yet passionate question "Do we give a damn?"

Bombastic?
Maybe.

But there is a sense of urgency and power to 'Earth Song' that is compelling and cannot be denied.

It's all these elements that makes it one of Michael's most gifted musical arrangements. And one of his most passionate vocals. It is a song worthy of further study and repeated listening. A song that holds power in every note and every phrase.

Rediscovered by many after his passing, 'Earth Song' is a crowning moment showcasing not only his ability to weave a global concern into a beautifully crafted and executed song, but also his ability to connect to the heart in us all.



Ladies & Gentleman, please welcome to the microphone, Michael the seducer. Here he is in 'Rock With You' teasing out the lyrics as he urges the listener to "close your eyes and let that rhythm get into you". Being carried away by his vocals he lifts you up towards the highs of the too catchy for its own good chorus. There is a sensuality here in Michael's voice. A mix of pleasing and promise. Of desire and deliverance. Of passion and playfulness.

Rooted in a more traditional disco groove, 'Rock With You' allows Michael's voice to float through the verses in anticipation of a driving chorus. Again the production and arrangement sees Quincy Jones bring his ability to sew together hints of jazz with a funk groove, all topped with Michael singing with a pure sense of joy and excitement.

With each passing verse Michael pulls you

into the groove. He soothes the world away, and makes the moment all that matters. And when that bridge hits Michael's vocals carry you effortlessly. When he claims that "when the groove is dead and gone / you know that love survives / so we can rock forever on" you believe him. And since his unexpected passing in 2009, these words have become a self-fulfilling prophecy of sorts. Once again the harmonies he layers here are rich and full and guide us through to the uber catchy "pop-corn" inspired synth solo.

Whereas other songs from the disco era now seem throwaway and soulless, 'Rock With You' offers a richness that drips from the slow delivery of the lead vocals, to the oh-so-sweet backing harmonies. Supported by a healthy sprinkling of soothing strings and popping synth notes 'Rock With You' manages to perfectly capture a moment in time and yet remain timeless and captivating.



Black or White was the ideal choice as lead single for Dangerous. The way it fused a great rock riff with pop sensibilities and a helping of rap was a perfect introduction to where Michael's music was heading.

While the whole "it's too late" intro overstayed its welcome by about the 5th listen (and for that reason the single edit remains superior) there is no denying that 'Black or White' is one of Michael's most iconic tracks.

Perhaps driven in part by all the speculation around his appearance (at this stage Michael had not publicly acknowledged his vitiligo), 'Black Or White' continues to put forward Michael's "one world" ideology. Whereas at other points on the Dangerous album where Michael's voice comes across as raspy and rough, here the verses are sung with such smoothness that the melody sweeps you up and carries you through the track.

'Black Or White' has a skip along groove that grabs you from the first beat. The guitar hook is as classic a rock riff as anything from The Rolling Stones, and Michael's vocals (believed to be taken from the first take) are totally on point. There is a sweetness and almost romantic tone in the opening verse where Michael professes "I believe in miracles / and a miracle has happened tonight".

His tone becomes a little sharper in the second verse as he lays out his take on equality stating that it doesn't come down to one's skin colour but rather "who's wrong and who's right".

Here in these two verses he takes us from an intimate focus on a (interracial) relationship and then broadens his view to the world stage.

As the song progresses into the breakdown / rap segment Michael focuses squarely on social injustice and alludes to racism caused by either "brothers" or "sheets" as being equally reprehensible. The raucous guitar track blistering underneath echoes his frustrations as it grinds and fires like a machine gun. Then just as his anger reaches breaking point the track shifts gears and slides into a funk groove for the rap message that limiting one's value based solely on race leads to the "bright getting duller" and that we must strive to see each other as more than just "a colour".

The final verse displays a sense of confidence and defiance as Michael challenges a two faced populace who will say one thing while "kicking dirt in my eye".

The heaviness of the lyrics is played off against the joyous backing vocals that coax you to sing along with each "yeah yeah yeah". Again there are little ad-libs and flourishes present that bring a smile to the listener's face, in particular Michael's little muted trumpet vocal trill at 3.26 and even a trademark "Cha'mon" uttered under his breath in the final moment of the track.

Perhaps surprising to note is that in a era of music lauded for, and perhaps defined by the birth of grunge, Black or White was the biggest selling rock single of the 90's.



Epic in nature and global in its outlook 'Can You Feel It' is an anthem pleading for humanity to come together as one. Co-written with brother Jackie, Michael shares lead vocal duties on the track with the youngest of the Jackson brothers, Randy. With its thumping funk groove and momentum building string and horn arrangement 'Can You Feel It' ends up equal parts party tune and song of social consciousness.

Produced with purpose and scale the song takes on the feel of a pulsing movie score complete with orchestral arrangement, triumphant horns, ringing bells and booming tympanies; not your run of the mill instruments for an R&B and soul band.

Both Randy and Michael sing with heart, but Michael seems to elevate his delivery with passion that rallies the hairs on

your neck to stand to attention each time he breaks in with his solo spot. You hear his conviction as he sings about our interconnection and dependance "cause we're all the same / the blood inside of me is inside of you". His singing uplifts the listener and offers hope, uniting them with the cause.

Adding urgency to the song is the driving drums that pound on like a relentless march, while the percussion ticks like a time bomb with an it's now or never manner. Add in those blissful darting strings and the track leaves the listener with the promise of what could be if we just set aside our differences and focused more on what we collectively share and feel.

A highlight of the Triumph album, 'Can You Feel It' is as important a song today as it was the day it was released.



Opening with panicked breathing and quickening heart beat, 'Smooth Criminal' is one of Michael's most cinematic songs. And here it is all classic film noir; dark, menacing and threatening.

Using sound effects to place the listener in the midst of the action was something Michael had used to great effect in previous songs like 'This Place Hotel' and 'Thriller'. And here, in 'Smooth Criminal' they help heighten the anxiety as Michael narrates the downfall of the song's lead character.

The urgency in the bass line forms the foundation for the vocal delivery and allows the progression of the narrative to feel vibrant and fresh. As both narrator and witness, Michael takes us through the blow by blow predicament of Annie's struggle with a perpetrator who has invaded her home.

In an almost Hitchcockian Rear Window viewpoint, Michael reports on the struggle and attempted rescue of Annie though "mouth to mouth resuscitation" and "sounding heartbeats" which allude to the fact that for

the moment Annie has survived.

The use of police sirens and an officer clearing the crowd, help paint the visual picture of a cordoned off crime scene and the investigation of the assault (being replayed in each passing chorus).

Of course, Michael's concern is for the victim, and his worry for her safety grows as he goes from inquiring "Annie are you OK?" to feeling hopelessness in the situation played out in his desperate "I don't know why?" pleas.

Showcasing his desire to create sounds never heard before, Michael samples his trademark "doah" scream from the opening of the song, and twist and contorts it as it is played back as a melody line at the 2:50 mark and again in the outro.

On subject matter alone, 'Smooth Criminal' is an unlikely hit. But the way Michael uses the music to create an irresistible hook has the listener enjoying the track before stepping back to consider the darker consequences of the lyrics.



Picking up where 'Man In The Mirror' left off, 'Will You Be There' sees Michael pen his own gospel and choral inspired song with what were (to this point in his career) his most personal of lyrics and ones that would carry extra weight in the years that came after it.

Opening with an orchestral prelude taken from Beethoven's 'Symphony No. 9' it not only highlights a wealth of appreciation for music in all forms, but also sets the expectations of the song as being inspired and grandiose.

With an angelic refrain just before the song begins we are transported from the purity of the heavens to the reality and struggle in what it means to be human. And this idea is the cornerstone of 'Will You Be There' making it a truly human experience rich in emotion and feeling.

Steeped in deep harmonies that swell around him, Michael sings with a sense of honesty that both inspires and attracts as he asks "Carry me like you are my brother / love me like a mother / will you be there?"

The stripped back arrangement, with its shuffling beat, lets the vocals truly shine and you can hear the pressures of life cracking in Michael's delivery as he proclaims "I'm only human" (a fact lost on many a journalist and fan alike).

As if addressing the price of his fame Michael sings "Seems that the world's got a role for me" before asking for understanding "will you care enough to bear me?".

The midpoint of the song is like a gentle climb up a summit, each step carried by the choir and Michael's call and response. Each bar pushing higher and higher, gathering the listener up in the process before the soft landing of the final two minutes allows Michael to reflect on his life in a moving spoken word piece. With words that would become strangely prophetic for the years that would unfold before him he asks, "In my darkest hour / in my deepest despair / Will you still care? / Will you be there?".

For all the tabloid fodder that littered his career, this is the real Michael Jackson. Raw. Honest. Human.



Built around a jangling jazz inspired groove, 'Leave Me Alone' was initially left off the Bad album release and only included as a bonus track on the CD edition. A surprising move when you consider it has held up better than some of Bad's less notable fillers.

With a shuffling rhythm behind him, Michael delivers his lover's marching orders and won't accept any attempts to make amends as he warns "don't you come walking, begging back". He laments all that he has given to the relationship, but instead of drowning in sorrow he sees the casting off of deadweight as an opportunity to move on... "ain't no mountain that I can't climb baby" he sings defiantly, and with the tables turned notes "all is going my way."

It's perhaps a case of incessant manipulation and deception that he is riling against, so with the exit clearly marked in "the choice that we make / and this choice you will take" Michael exclaims to just go and "leave me alone". Freed from a bad relationship, he is there to have the last laugh.

With 'Leave Me Alone' Michael seems more relaxed in with vocals, bringing back some of the unbounded joy of earlier career recordings.

Take for instance the blissful layering of harmonies in the chorus as each voice reaches higher and higher until the final refrain touches the heavens. Or the carefree nature with which he scats in the instrumental breakdown, his every playful utterance fed back through a vocoder as he becomes at once both instrument and vocalist. Even in his ad-libs there seems to be a bit more pep in their delivery.

Once considered a Bad cast off, 'Leave Me Alone' does what all great Michael Jackson tracks do. It presents him in a new light, surprises the listener, and has a timeless quality to it.

It's no wonder that 'Leave Me Alone' continues to be a fan favourite long after it was pulled from the reserve bench.



How does one so young sing with so much heart and soul, and with so much conviction? This was often the question posed regarding Michael's early Jackson 5 works. And that question had no greater resonance than when applied to the stirring performance he delivers in 'Who's Lovin' You'.

In this cover version of the original sung by The Miracles featuring writer Smokey Robinson, 'Who's Lovin' You' goes from a sweet soul lament to a more desperate bluesy cry. The opening Hammond organ lays the foundation for Michael, age 9, to build upon. And not only does he build upon it but he creates the blueprint that future cover versions would be based on.

With the conviction on someone many years his senior, Michael out Smokey's Smokey delivering a vocal that drips in anguish and heartache. Producer Bobby Taylor creates space in the track for Michael to infuse emotion into each phrasing as he draws out notes, and slips and slides through the melody with ease.

When Michael sings "All I can do / All I can do / since you've been gone is cry" you believe in his heartache. You not only believe his pain. You feel it.

Anyone who thought this group of youngsters were going to be a flash in the pan had to reconsider their assumptions when they heard this. This wasn't a kids song. This was a song that would challenge even the most talented soul singer, and here was this young child, this Michael Jackson kid, singing and tearing his heart out.

Just listen to the coda following Michael's solo moment and hear how he attacks those ad-libs. The way he hits that incredibly high note right at the end. In these simple moments, pure talent takes over and the future as the world's greatest entertainer seems predestined.

'Who's Lovin' You' showcases what a true boy wonder the young Michael was. And why popular singers at the time, had to feel nervous.



With its smooth jazz vibe 'I Can't Help It' sees Michael taking a Stevie Wonder penned track and making you forget who wrote it from the very first note.

The rich and silky fretless bass opening coupled with dreamy chords create a feeling of sensual delights just beyond our reach that Michael's voice invites us to explore. "Looking in my mirror" he coos "took me by surprise / I can't help but see you / running often through my mind". He draws out the final word with such sweetness that if he hasn't hooked you by now you should get your heart checked.

The production on the track is second to none. Drawing on his wealth of experience in the jazz arena, Quincy Jones applies just the right mix of accompaniment, and holds back from overlaying Michael's voice with dense harmonies letting Michael just double track his lead in

the chorus. A great example of restraint where less is more.

Similarly, rather than bring in extra instrumentation for the solo, Quincy lets the best instrument - Michael's voice - take centre stage as Michael scats with precision and passion.

With such ease Michael's voice trails up and down his register, scats here and gathers pace and urgency in the chorus.

And just when you think there is nowhere else to go he soars in the closing minute before floating back down to earth.

If anyone ever questions Michael's vocal ability – this is the track to leave them awestruck. It shows his light and shade, his effortless grace and his ability to blend genres.

A must hear.



There was a lot of speculation surrounding the release of HIStory. How would Michael respond to the whirlwind of media that had invaded his personal life in the preceding years? Would he confront the rumours and speculation, or would he retreat into a world of fantasy as if nothing ever happened? The answer to these questions came in the form of 'Scream' (first single and lead track off HIStory).

With the industrial distorted introduction of 'Scream' blasting through the speakers it was almost like Michael was rebooting for a new chapter in his life. And for those who thought Michael might tread lightly the first verse showed he was instead going to tackle things head on.

With a hard hitting beat grounding the track Michael and sister Janet trade verses in a unified attack at the injustice, frustration, and pressure that being in the public light delivers. As if saying "you want the truth you

got it" it contains some of Michael's most direct and confronting lyrics as he spits out lines like the opening one-two punch of "Tired of injustice / Tired of the schemes". He clearly and succinctly lets you know exactly how he feels about everything that has transpired. He goes on to deride the actions of the media who "bash abuse and victimise", and reminds us that there is a person behind the personality as he begs for mercy "for I just can't take it".

In both an attack and plea for relief, the song throws down hard and doesn't let up. This is Michael mad as hell and he's not going to take it anymore. It even has the distinction of containing Michael's first ever true curse word on record.

With an industrial funk hard edge 'Scream' was the answer that many a fan was hoping for. It was Michael squaring up with the way he had been dragged over the coals and showed he wasn't going to play nice anymore.



Money is underpinned by a rolling groove that sees Michael settling the score with all those who are willing to trade off someone else's success or misfortune for the sake of the all mighty green.

No one escapes the wrath of Michael here, from those who use him for their own financial gain, to religious zealots who preach one thing then do the other, to insurance companies that force settlements, to those who will betray you for a dime or sell you out and swear on a lie.

It's hard hitting stuff, especially in light of the years that preceded it, but in typical Michael style his harshest lyrics are wrapped up in a catchy chorus.

Lyrically Michael actually gives insight into the behind scenes machinations of the 1993 allegations and settlement, especially telling in the line "Insurance, where do you loyalties lie? / Is that your alibi?" a point lost on most listeners at the time. In fact its true strength wouldn't be revealed until many years later

when it came to light that the settlement of the case was somewhat forced on Michael by his insurance firm.

It's gritty in its narrative, and Michael's delivery is raw and bristles with quiet anger. The verses are part spoken word as Michael lists the litany of sins all rooted in a lust for money. He even offers advice to those willing to do "anything for money" by making a quick buck on his dime to actually go out and earn an honest living with "dignity" before listing people like "Vanderbilt, Trump, Morgan, Rockefeller, Carnegie, Getty" as examples of entrepreneurial men who whilst making their money also had a strong philanthropic side.

One of the standout tracks of HIStory, and initially slated for a single release, 'Money' is not only an example of Michael speaking his mind through his music but also of his ability to craft powerful songs that continue to have resonance long after an album's release. It is a must listen to track for anyone only familiar with "the hits" and proves that musical gems often lay beyond the Top 40 charts.

Opening with the crackling of an old school record 'Butterflies' is Michael embracing the sounds and feel of neo-soul and giving it his own spin.

Written by Marsha Ambrosius (one part of the group Floetry) and Andre Harris, 'Butterflies' is a soothing shot of soul wrapped up in an ever so easy groove.

With a strolling, relaxed back beat, the musical arrangement feels organic and unfolds like a new day, with horns and percussion punctuating the breezy feel of the chorus.

Michael's vocals are among some of his best work, especially in the second verse when he goes into the heavens with a falsetto that has been missing from a lot of his more recent work. When Michael sings "just make my dreams come true" his voice touches the sky whilst the follow up line of "Ohh baby you..." drifts back to earth.

Rich and luscious backing vocals keep the

repeated choruses warm and surround the listener in the soft glow of infatuation.

There's a lot more vocal gymnastics present here, and not just for the sake of trying to show off, but to imbue the song with real emotion and depth.

Pay close attention to the backing vocals and ad-libs in the final choruses after the bridge. You'll hear Michael using every shade of colour in his voice with soft sweet delivered coos through to earthy, grounded pleading. He also shows his vocal flexibility as his voice mimics that of a scating horn line to the point of being almost indecipherable.

When you compare Michael's final version to that of the Floetry demo that first caught his ear, you see how Michael matches note for note the little runs and ad-libs to perfection yet still puts his own stamp on it. He even manages to bring some added classic soul to out do the neo-soul genre of the track.





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LIBERIAN GIRL

Bad

The opening to 'Liberian Girl' is another example of how Michael would use sound effects to whisk the listener out of their life into another place and time. Here the sounds of exotic birds transports us to a new world. One filled with wonder. And like a new day dawning the intro awakens us to a tale of perfect love and desire.

Like a painter, Michael uses sound to sketch out a landscape for us to explore, and his choice of percussive and musical accompaniment places us deep in a steamy, exotic locale. Even the spoken word intro in Swahili (translated to "I love you too, I want you too, my love!") is there to set the scene.

For all the talk of Michael being calculated in his composition and only pursuing hits, 'Liberian Girl' flies in the face of that argument. Here he is exploring sounds to provide a more filmic backdrop for his lyrics, and his choices are anything but conventional. His deliberate selection of sounds and instruments from pan pipes, to spiralling sitars, to enchanting chimes help create a distinct sound for the

track with instruments not usually enlisted for mainstream pop fare.

Once again, the way Michael uses phrasing and a range of mid and high notes is a master class on eliciting emotion. And the way he layers the vocal harmonies provides even greater richness to the track. Just listen to the range contained in the harmonies that support the ad-libs in the final minute of the track.

Whereas many of the tracks from Bad feel dated due to the choice of hot at the time sounds, 'Liberian Girl' doesn't feel tied down to a time and place. The softer, more organic production gives it a timeless quality that makes every listen a chance to discover something new.

If a song on an album that has sold over 30 million copies can be considered a hidden gem, then 'Liberian Girl' is that track. Its beautiful composition, arrangement and production places it in the same sphere as 'Human Nature' and 'Break of Dawn'.



28

GET ON THE FLOOR

Off The Wall

The bass work on 'Get On The Floor' is second to none as Louis Johnson (co-writer on the track) runs his hands all over the fret board in a flurry of funk.

Kicking off with a sparse arrangement of just bass, strings and vocals (later embellished with guitars overdubs, horns, claps, and extra vocals in subsequent pressings) 'Get On The Floor' is anchored on a percussively infused groove that fills the song with pure energy.

Mixing his upper and mid voice, Michael delivers the vocals with a sense of abandon and freedom as he teases out each line. At the breakdown section he uses his voice as percussion, whispering and grunting as the section builds and builds to its climax.

The oft cited joy of Off The Wall as an album is completely evident in this track especially at the 3:38 mark where we hear Michael laughing caught up in the moment. A spontaneous moment that in later years would have been removed and sacrificed for a more polished take.

THE LADY IN MY LIFE

Thriller

29

Dripping with old school soul 'The Lady in My Life' is another slice of perfect production.

Seductive and smooth, the song slowly builds with Michael's sublimely pure vocals and enticing melodies and delivers dual peaks in the shape of the amazing bridge and the extended break down just past the mid point of the song.

Originally recorded with extra verses, timing constraints on vinyl forced the song to be trimmed back. Thankfully, the verses were sacrificed to save the more than 2 minutes of Michael's ad-libs in the extended outro.

It's worth listening to the song twice over to really appreciate the vocals here. Listen once to Michael's main vocal as he dips, swirls and soars. Then listen to the backing vocal harmonies. Listen to their rich, deep texture as they sing "lay back in my tenderness". They are flawless and the icing on a track that showcases the brilliance of Michael as vocalist.



30

MORPHINE

Blood On The Dance Floor

Perhaps Michael's most unexpected and shockingly personal of songs 'Morphine' assaults the listener with a mechanical groove of industrial funk that places them in the middle of the seductive power of drugs and the nightmares of addiction.

With a narrative that switches between cause and effect the lyrics wind their way through the pressures of life that drives someone to seek escape and the promise of relief. Each line is delivered with pent up anger. It's in your face. Attacking. The pre-chorus gives a glimpse of the seductive nature of drugs, and those prescribing them, as Michael sings "put all your trust in me" before being countered with the shocking revelation "you're doing Morphine".

All this chaos gives way when the mechanical soundtrack is replaced by dreamlike classical melodies echoing the harshness of the world drifting away as the seductive drug takes effect. But this bliss, this escape, comes at a price as Michael confesses "today he's taking twice as much" alluding to a growing dependency. Ultimately this escape comes crashing down and the addiction takes hold, rendering the user captive to the effects.

One of Michael's bravest and edgiest works, 'Morphine' is also one that is the hardest to hear in light of his untimely death.

THRILLER

Thriller

It's difficult not to conjure up the visuals of the landmark short film as soon as you hear the opening of 'Thriller' but before the iconic imagery was burned into our collective consciousness there was just this catchy-but-kooky track in the middle of an otherwise mature album.

Removed from the short film, the song is at once a novelty and a serious contender for your dancing shoes. Its shuffling groove grabs you like one of the song's ghouls and doesn't let go while Michael's vocals contain a sense of dread before exploding with excitement in the killer chorus.

Originally written as an optimistic tune called 'Starlight' the lyrical content was changed at the behest of Jackson and Jones who felt the song should have a darker edge to it. Charged with the task songwriter Rod Temperton came back with this ode to schlock horror and Michael knocked it out of the park. Employing a production trick he had used earlier on 'This Place Hotel' sound effects are used to give the track an cinematic feel.

Perhaps now relegated to Halloween parties and video countdowns 'Thriller' still holds some of its original allure more than 30 years later.

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THEY DON'T CARE ABOUT US

HIStory

Opening with a bare bones pulsing rhythmic shunt 'They Don't Care About Us' is Michael dismissing the idea of being universally loved, and hits hard with a reality check of the hatred now aimed at him.

A mix of social consciousness tinged with the experiences of the preceding years Michael challenges his detractors to truly see what it is they are hating and what they base their hatred on – stories fed to them by someone "in a suit, on the news" where people are chewed up and spat out like "dog food" and everyone has an "allegation".

It's almost like Michael is welcoming the aggression knowing that ultimately the truth will be his savour as he sings "beat me / bash me / you can never trash me" and addresses the labels people were now slinging in his direction as he counters "I'm tired of being the victim of shame / you're throwing me in a class with a bad name". Where it could have easily drifted into a hostile rant, Michael manages to salvage it and make the message heartfelt with vocals that galvanize through broadening the subject matter to the world around him. This isn't just them vs him. This is them vs us.

ABC

ABC

33

As the second single by The Jackson 5 'ABC' took advantage of their kiddies band image. Built around school and lesson metaphors the song playfully focuses on the issues of love and relationships, albeit puppy love.

Drawing more than just a passing influence from their previous number one single 'I Want You Back', the track has a similar level of exuberance to it and has Michael and the brothers trading vocal lines and ad-libs. The strolling bass line and fuzz box guitars provide the basic groove with minor breakdowns leading out of each chorus. Michael was given a few challenging melody runs to play with and with a performance that exceeded his experience delivers a blissful vocal performance building to the call and response breakdown with young Michael encouraging a fan to "show me what you can do".

'ABC' manages to capture perfectly the feelings of young love and listening to it is like rediscovering that feeling all over again.

WHY YOU WANNA TRIP ON ME

Dangerous

Opening with the lyrics “they say I’m different / they don’t understand / but there’s a bigger problem / that’s much more in demand” ‘Why You Wanna Trip On Me’ has Michael challenging our preoccupation with celebrity at the sacrifice of the real issues going on around us.

Grounded in a hard edged new jack swing beat with stabbing guitar strums, Michael switches the focus away from himself to more pressing global issues like “world hunger”, “school teachers who don’t wanna teach” and “strange diseases but there’s no cure” and then simply asks, when faced with all this “why you wanna trip on me?”

The chorus’ repeated questioning of harmonic “why, why, why?” brings the point home in a way that is seductive rather than confronting, allowing that burst of anger to hit in Michael’s lead vocal.

Funky and fierce, ‘Why You Wanna Trip On Me’ is Michael back on a social consciousness tip and is almost the unofficial song in his career long battle with a tabloid press.

IN THE CLOSET

Dangerous

A romantic prelude of piano and strings introduces ‘In The Closet’ as a mystery girl (played by Princess Stephanie of Monaco) coos “touch me / don’t hide our love” before the song flips to raw, sensuality. Driven by a pulsating beat this is Michael at his most sexually suggestive both lyrically and rhythmically as he fills out the groove with moans, grunts and gasps.

Once again Michael layers the track with so many different hooks the song literally seduces the listener with each passing phrase whether it’s the hypnotic calling of “she wants to give it / ahhh she wants to give it” or the longing in “there’s something about you baby / that makes me want to give it to you”.

This is Michael caught between desire and chaste. But one gets the feeling he is giving into his carnal desires. Suggestive rather than explicit, ‘In The Closet’ bristles with passion and climaxes with the slamming of a door alluding to the passion that is about to unfold away from prying eyes.

SHAKE YOUR BODY (DOWN TO THE GROUND)

Destiny

Packed full of funk ‘Shake Your Body’ is The Jacksons at their finest; an infectious groove, punching horns and Michael twirling through his falsetto.

Written by Michael and brother Randy, ‘Shake Your Body’ soon became a mainstay at clubs and as part of The Jacksons live show. It’s rhythmic shuffle of hi hat and toms provide the constant groove and lay the foundation for jangling guitars and pianos to provide a counter point. As the song progresses more instruments and melody lines are added to this bubbling stew of funk with blasting horn lines that rival James Brown and emerging synth runs that would make Bernie Worrell of Parliament / Funkadelic jealous.

Michael wrenches every ounce of infatuation out of the lyrics with a delivery that is sharp and fast, as if almost impatient to get to the hook in the chorus. At 8 minutes in length it is Michael’s longest recording, but those 8 minutes are guaranteed to get you and keep you moving.



TABLOID JUNKIE

HIStory

Once again ‘Tabloid Junkie’ sees Michael in the role of media victim, but this time he is standing up against the machine. Starting with a role call of all the weird stories that became synonymous with his celebrity, the song explodes into a hard hitting vocal spitting groove that mixes anger in the lead vocals with an alluring softness in the backing harmonies.

Showing his prowess at being able to meld a catchy melody with an attacking vocal the chorus lands its message of fact versus fiction clearly as he sings, “just because you read in a magazine or see it on a TV screen don’t make it factual”.

Michael cleverly layers various pieces of gossip throughout the song ranging from speculation over his sexuality to a report about Bubbles getting married highlighting the ridiculousness of such “news”. ‘Tabloid Junkie’ remains a convincing, and warranted, response to the media madness that revolved around him.





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LOVELY ONE

Triumph

A solid dance floor filler, 'Lovely One' is The Jacksons serving up the funk. Written by Michael and brother Randy it rivals Shake Your Body (Down To The Ground) for the title of funkiest Jackson track.

With hints of the sonic tapestry of Off The Wall, 'Lovely One' comes galloping out of the gate with horns blazing and doesn't let up. Scratching guitar work, accenting strings and Michael's vocals all help to scoop the listener up and carry them away on this funk odyssey.

Michael's deliberate play with the amount of air around the vocals adds to the momentum of the groove, whilst the pre-chorus delivery is so frenetic it feels like the beat is playing catch up.

The chorus with its simple, catchy refrain, sets up the final few minutes perfectly allowing Michael and the brothers to ad-lib with some back and forth during the outro.

'Lovely One' like the song's object of desire, leaves you wanting more. The mark of a great song.

BREAK OF DAWN

Invincible

Invincible as a total offering was a mixed bag, and whilst the album would be criticised for having too many ballads (especially in the way it was sequenced) it's often these songs that provide the album's high points. 'Break of Dawn' is a prime example of this.

With Michael in laid back mode the song floats out of the speakers and easily seduces the listener. A perfect balance of lead and backing vocals, there's a depth here to Michael's delivery that gives the track its warmth.

The arrangement feels organic and natural, mimicking the soft glow of a new day aided by the sounds of a waking world. Lyrically Michael doesn't shy away from the sensuality and sexual nature of the song with promises of "making love all the way through another night". Here is a Michael comfortable, even confident, in his sexuality welcoming both a physical and mental intimacy.

And when Michael wants to get his groove on and drift into a soul territory there are few that come close.

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2 BAD

History

Bringing a battle, '2BAD' kicks off with a sample of Run-DMC's "*King of Rock*" before launching into a blistering, attacking groove complete with bass and horn blasts. Here Michael takes aim at those who scrambled to get their "cut from me" and whose fruitless attempts "tried to bring me to my knees".

A standout feature here is the way Michael works his backing vocals mixing both high notes with brooding low ones to convey his defiance and disdain. They are expressive and border on taunting.

The track's only downside is the ill conceived rap from Shaq that lacks the bite of Michael's own lyrics. The one saving grace in the rap section is the way in which the flurry of horn stabs are treated and manipulated underneath to have a sharper edge.

Musically this song is so multifaceted that you need to listen to it over and over to truly appreciate the intricate layers in it. Do so with headphones on and you will hear things you never noticed before.

LOOKIN' THROUGH THE WINDOWS

Lookin' Through The Windows

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A touch psychedelic, a happy sprinkling of pop and some classic soul elements; 'Lookin' Through The Windows' has it all.

Michael's relaxed vocals float cloudlike through the verses before shifting gear in the runaway chorus that gathers in momentum and intensity. It's in the galloping chorus that Michael's expanding vocal range truly comes into play as he plucks high notes out of thin air and delivers little flourishes and trills. Special attention should be paid to the way the backing vocals of the brothers provide a counter tempo to the verses and chorus. In the verses the brothers' backing vocals are delivered with urgency with hurried "Lookin' Through The Windows" stabs, only to switch gears in the chorus with blissful ascending harmonies that really help the song take full flight.

In a time of musical maturity, 'Lookin' Through The Windows' provides a glimpse into the true potential of The Jackson 5 and foreshadows what the brothers would later achieve on their own.



On first listen 'Jam' sounds like your quintessential dance track with hard hitting beats, funk fuelled guitars and horn jabs. But dig deeper into the lyrics and you'll find an atypical narrative focused on world affairs.

As a funky "state of the global nation" Michael addresses the plight of unrest and natural catastrophe the whole world faces and sets this against the unwillingness for the individual to be involved.

Not immune from selfish values Michael at first laments having his plea for help denied in the first verse but succumbs to the selfish norms in the second as he "tells my brothers don't you ask me for no favours / I'm conditioned by the system / don't you talk to me".

But there is a glimmer of hope present.

As part of the Baby Boomer generation, history's biggest period of population growth, Michael sees his place in a collective responsibility and hints at a time when young ideals need to come to fruition with decisive action in a world of constant flux.

Also addressed is a sense of spiritual confusion, with people willing to pray and do anything to find peace as if chasing a religious trend rather than finding truth. And in this search for inner peace, Michael finds his salvation in the music. It offers him a refuge, a sanctuary from the confusions and pressure of the world. When it all gets too much, he escapes to the music. To his 'Jam'.

Once again Michael wrapped his message inside an irresistible beat and it's the message with its ongoing relevancy that makes 'Jam' a constant fan favourite.

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BAD
Bad

As a response to the speculation about whether or not Michael could equal, or even top, the success of Thriller 'Bad' throws down the lyrical gauntlet. It's a song about taking on challenges, feeling the pressure and rising to the occasion and challenging those that doubt to listen as "the whole world has to answer right now just to tell you once again... Who's bad?",

Underpinned by a crawling, taunting bass line and supported by a series of thin yet multilayered percussive blips, 'Bad' has Michael teasing out the lyrics as he spits out each line like venom. The musical progression of the track acts as a sonic groundswell with bubbling organ, accenting wah wah guitar and a synth bed that swarms and carries the song to the chorus.

Jimmy Smith's blissful organ solo takes the song to another level and who doesn't smile hearing "because I'm smoooooth" with those horns hitting. For added funk, listen to the original album version that featured more horn stabs throughout the chorus.

WHATEVER HAPPENS
Invincible

Infused with a Latin feel, 'Whatever Happens' sees Michael once again broadening his musical landscape. In a period of his career when he could have easily rested on his musical laurels he continues to push into new styles and genres teaming up with guitar virtuoso Carlos Santana to deliver one of Invincible's undisputed highlights. A further evolution of the guest guitar solo, 'Whatever Happens' is more of a duet between Michael's passionate vocals and Santana's weeping guitar.

Lyricaly we are placed in the middle of an unfolding story (suggested as an unplanned pregnancy) but without a definitive position on the narrative it gives the listener a chance to flesh out their own back story and in doing so draws them further into the track.

A hidden gem, 'Whatever Happens' earns its spot along side other haunting tracks such as 'Human Nature' and 'Stranger in Moscow' as one of Michael's finest.

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NEVER CAN SAY GOODBYE
Maybe Tomorrow

It was a constant risk to place songs with deep emotions into the hands of a child, but that's exactly what Motown did time and time again with Michael. And each time, he channelled the emotions of the song and delivered them with an authenticity that belied his young years. 'Never Can Say Goodbye' is a perfect example of this.

A beautifully crafted soul pop song, we see Michael expressing the tangled emotions of a "too good to leave, too bad to stay" relationship. His sweet, soothing vocals drip like honey tinged with a dash of vinegar as he recalls "that same old giddy hang up / can't do with you or without". His vocals carry the emotion of the track and imbue it with true heart and soul. Yet there is still a degree of playfulness present as Michael splits up words and adds extra syllables so that the lyrics become even more rhythmic singing "I ne-vah-can-ah-say-ah-goodbye girl"

With tracks like this, it's no wonder that people often questioned whether Michael really was only 11 years old.



Following on from the runaway success of 'Beat It', Michael continued to explore his affinity with rock with this tale of life on the road and the persistent advances of groupies.

This time around though, the music is darker, brooding. It's enticing, intriguing Michael to explore the seduction. Here he finds himself the relentless focus of a fan's obsession and try as he might to resist the unfolding lyrics show that he too gives in to the temptation.

Whereas 'Billie Jean' had him painted as a victim, 'Dirty Diana' evolves the narrative to a place where Michael is a willing, if not remorseful, participant.

With Steve Stevens dynamic guitar solo echoing the spiralling out of control situation Michael finds himself in, it provides the perfect musical moment to convey a sense of heightened passion and the warning of temptation.

'Dirty Diana' is classic MJ in rock mode and proved once again there wasn't a genre he couldn't take on and excel in.

Putting his recently acquired Beatles catalogue to work, Michael recorded 'Come Together' in the late 80s and gave it its first airing as the finale in his film, Moonwalker. Subsequently released on the 'Jam' CD-Single, it didn't receive an album release until HIStory almost a decade after it was recorded (in a trimmed and edited version).

Unlike the more relaxed delivery of The Beatles' original, Michael's take dials up the funk and packs the track with bristling energy. Michael attacks the vocals almost spitting out each line and gives them a more menacing, threatening interpretation. But even within his darker delivery, there's still a sense of excitement and joy present in Michael recording a track he had long loved as noted by the playful laugh uttered prior to the guitar solo.

It's always going to be a daunting task to take on a Beatles song, let alone such an iconic one, but Michael opts to put his own spin on it rather than record a carbon copy and in doing so pays the inventiveness of the original its greatest honour.



Destiny as an album marks a turning point in the careers of The Jacksons and an increase in confidence for Michael. For the first time in their career they had total creative control over the project fully writing and producing the album themselves. Perhaps a “what do we have to lose” gamble from the record company who had seen sluggish sales from Jacksons releases to date, but for the brothers, and particularly Michael, it was a chance to prove themselves.

And that they did. ‘Things I Do For You’ is a classic example of taking everything they had learnt and fashioning it into something unique to them. Whereas in the past, producers would try to give the brothers a current sound, here they aren’t writing to keep up with the times but writing to help reflect and push the sound of the era they are a part of.

Lyrically the song gives us Michael’s first inklings into his distrust of those around him. And while many might consider it a first glimpse of paranoia, you have to see the world through Michael’s eyes to understand where he is coming from. Having literally grown up in the public eye, his whole human experience has been one of those around him taking advantage and clamouring to have a piece of him. As he sees it people are always “wanting something for nothing” and taking things they themselves haven’t earned. His cries for help seem to go unanswered until he discovers that the power to stop this lies within as he chastises himself “reaching in my pocket / I just got to stop it”. And twisting the biblical verse of “do unto others” Michael refashions it into a more contemporary take “the things I do for you / in return do the same for me”.

Musically the song pulsates with many elements that would become a mainstay in The Jacksons writing – blistering horns, driving beat, and more adventurous bass work, plus the emergence of Michael’s trademark “hee hee hee”.



At the time when many were worrying about the longevity of The Jackson 5 the band hit back with this funk-soul groove and disco tinged track. Under the tutelage of Hal Davis he helped push the brothers towards a more current and adult sound.

Following the lead set by others in the soul world as they drifted into a more dance orientated style, ‘Dancing Machine’ doesn’t try to hide what it sets out to be.

Instead it embraces the sonic signature and production of the emerging disco sound with a steady, driving beat coupled with funky wah wah guitars and futuristic sounding synth passes. But the song keeps the band’s Motown roots close with horn blasts and old time showstopper accents.

With a maturing voice Michael tackles the playful vocals with an emerging sense of sensuality as he admires the moves of this “captivating, stimulating” sexy lady.

And bringing back a winning formula of sharing lead vocal duties between Michael and Jermaine backed with vocal harmonies from the brothers, they reaffirmed their sense of being a true band and showed that they were capable of evolving their sound with the changing sonic landscape.

With ‘Dancing Machine’ the brothers, and perhaps more importantly the record company, proved that The Jackson 5 were still a viable entity and scored their first Top 10 hit in over 2 years as well as a coveted Grammy nomination.



GIVE IN TO ME

Dangerous

Some critics of Michael's work often pointed to a style over substance belief as justification to dismiss his artistry. Confusing his tabloid persona with the artist on record, they were quick to label his work as detached and removed from a shared experience. But as one digs deeper into his cannon of work they discover that throughout his career for every fantasy driven song critics would point to as basis for their rationale (such as 'Thriller', 'Smooth Criminal') they were ignoring the humanity in songs such as 'Stranger in Moscow', 'Will You Be There?' and in this case, 'Give Into Me'. Perhaps they, along with some segments of his fan base, didn't want to see a mature, sexual Michael but even as far back as 'Heartbreak Hotel' and 'Don't Stop 'til You Get Enough' his songs had a sensual, if not immediately sexual, component to them. He was a multifaceted man, and 'Give In To Me' is a example of this.

With its haunting guitar melody, 'Give Into Me' gives us a glimpse inside Michael's tortured loneliness. Here he is yearning, vulnerable, longing as he recounts "I've spent a lifetime searching for someone". It's not just a throwaway line but a confession of his journey to be understood. As the song progresses the narrative shifts from searching for love, to finding (or succumbing) to it only to be betrayed and left wounded, stung by desire. The verses are brooding retellings, while the chorus explode with passion and aggression as Michael demands "don't try to understand me / simply do the things I say" in the lead up and unleashes his desire as he sings "give it when I want it". Here too is a sense of conflict between his desire and his beliefs as he collides "satisfy my feeling" with "tell it to the preacher".

Following the break through success of 'Beat It' Michael's follow up rockers were unfairly compared to it, often seen as lesser copies. But with 'Give In To Me' not only does Michael show he is equally at home in front of a set of Marshall Amps as he is a dance floor, but also that there was breadth and depth to his rock songs beyond just being token.

I WANNA BE
WHERE YOU ARE

Got To Be There

Perhaps the best solo song of the early Motown era to truly showcase Michael's amazing vocal range 'I Wanna Be Where You Are' is a prime example of why many were sceptical about Michael's young age. The vocal prowess and maturity he shows as he dips and turns, flips and spins both grounds the love song in reality and gives it wings as it glides in the choruses. Michael's high notes in the chorus give the yearning a sense of passion and desire, while his deft touch on the verses brings the hope of reconciliation into being.

Like a pledge of true love, Michael sings with a purity unrivalled by his contemporaries. Listen to how Michael slides and glides over notes and trickles runs like a slippery dip. And does so with ease. He makes you believe in the plight of the narrative, and long for that reconciliation.

YOU ROCK MY WORLD

Invincible

As the bit of first new music heard from Michael in 5 years 'You Rock My World' wasn't the big revelation most music fans were hoping for. Whilst there is no denying it is catchy, it was a bit of a safe sounding Michael taking a touch of Off The Wall soul and giving it a freshening up. The swooping strings harken back to 'Don't Stop 'til You Get Enough' and 'Rock With You', and the sense of joy that many felt was lacking in more recent releases appeared to be back. Here Michael sings with a smile in his voice drawing out the words of each line with a subtle shake in his vibrato. The chorus is as catchy as anything Michael had put on record and the warmth in his ad-libs captivate.

Disregard the forced intro banter, and the ubiquitous "Darkchild" shout out, and you're left with a solid dance track.



Of the many duets with Paul McCartney 'Say, Say, Say' is the one that sees both he and Michael bringing their best to the track. Produced by George Martin (of The Beatles fame) it offered Jackson a chance to push his pop sensibilities outside of the guidance of Quincy Jones.

With the majority of the lyrics written by Michael the up-tempo nature supports the tale of a pleading love with both Michael and Paul playing to their vocal strengths with McCartney's melodic languid delivery offset by Jackson's more anxious pre chorus. And unlike 'The Girl is Mine' and 'The Man', the song steers clear of any corny or saccharine sentiments that permeate their other collaborations.

'Say, Say, Say' remains a vibrant song that captures the talents of two forces in music coming together as one.

With a soft introduction that really lets the purity of Michael's voice ring through 'Time Waits For No One' shows how Michael can bring a warmth and humanity to a song. Written by brothers Jackie and Randy, this MOR inspired track simmers initially as Michael laments a failed relationship and is trapped in the pain of second guesses. It's this questioning and pain that is on display here.

The sparse arrangement allows for Michael to ease the song along and build his delivery through sorrow to hope to despair as he breaks out with an explosive "I can't hide / all the pain / deep inside / is this love?" This shift in the final minute kicks the song into gear as the brothers join in for richly drawn out harmonies singing the "time waits for no one" refrain as Michael sprinkles the final phrases with his soon to be trademark pleading ad-libs.

What was a track initially written and recorded for Invincible '(I Can't Make It) Another Day' didn't see the light of day until Michael's untimely passing. Initially leaked on the internet in a rough unfinished form, it finally saw an official release on the posthumous 'Michael' album.

What many fans and critics failed to realise though was that 'Another Day' had previously been released in a more stripped back and reworked version by Lenny Kravitz on his Baptism album under the title 'Storm'. It is interesting to hear these two tracks side by side as they offer two sides to the same coin. Whilst Lenny's take is subtle and laid back, Michael injects a degree of spikey anger and regret as each chorus catches fire.

Michael's delivery gives the song more gravitas and intrigue. His soft vocals in the verses give the lyrics an otherworldliness as he sings "My life / has taken me beyond the planets and the stars". The mood here is ethereal and Michael drips each word like placing stars in a new universe. But no sooner has the verse drawn you in that it erupts into an explosive chorus with Michael in full voice delivering a picture of loss and isolation over the top of Lenny's searing guitar work.

Co-produced with Lenny, 'Another Day' exhibits a tough mechanical groove, not unlike 'Morphine', that anchors the song and gives it the urgency and guts that was lacking from Lenny's own take on the track. Once again Michael keeps the vibe fairly minimal and builds the song with each passing verse and chorus until it takes off in the extended guitar solo. Like past rock efforts by Michael, the solo wails and spirals as Michael ad-libs over the top before returning to the final chorus.

One of the shining moments in the otherwise patchy (not to mention controversial) posthumous album, 'Another Day' is a track than should have been given a greater airing, and remains one of hidden treasures in Michael's extensive catalogue.

When the world is on your shoulder / gotta straighten up your act and boogie down' Michael sings in the opening to 'Off The Wall' and not only pays homage to the escape and release he found in dancing, but gives a nod to the 'party people' of the era who lived for the moment with a carefree abandon.

And it's this carefree abandon that is infused in the song. The groove is uplifting as it shimmies with a classic disco beat and is carried by bright and sparkly harmonies delivered with a true sense of joy.

An anthem for the party ethos of the disco era, it captured the vibrancy and blissed out love that was key to the lifestyle. Here the dance floor is your sanctuary. Here you can "leave that 9 to 5 up on the shelf". Here you can "let the madness in the music get to you" and let the up tempo grooves wash away any stresses or worries.

A little dated now, 'Off The Wall' still manages to uplift the spirits more that 30 years later.

As he did with 'Thriller' Michael's choice of lead single to the release of Bad was not what the public was expecting. Rather than hitting with a hard dance track, he chose 'I Just Can't Stop Loving You' to lead the charge, a soft and sweet ode to love.

With a somewhat unconvincing spoken intro (removed from later issues) 'I Just Can't Stop Loving You' builds into a joyous declaration of unstoppable love; a love that gives one comfort and purpose. Although initially offered to Barbra Streisand and Whitney Houston, the choice of Siedah Garret as duet partner was a masterstroke of production as both her and Michael's voices meld and intertwine so effortlessly it is hard at times to distinguish who is singing which line.

A masterful pop ballad that gathers in confidence from the bridge onwards as Michael lets loose with joyful ad-libs, 'I Just Can't Stop Loving You' remains a lasting reminder of Michael's ability to craft beautiful arrangements.





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GOT TO BE THERE

Got To Be There

If sunshine could be captured on record, this is pretty much what it would sound like. 'Got To Be There' is a moment of pure soul-pop perfection that harkens to the innocent musical stylings of The Carpenters.

Although it has the privilege of being Michael's first solo single the production is very much a Jackson 5 affair with all brothers featured on backing vocals and long time Jackson 5 producer Hal Davis at the helm. As such its not difficult to hear the Motown/Jackson 5 hallmarks throughout the song with silky smooth harmonies, orchestral string embellishments, and floating melodies.

Once again a 12 year old Michael shows a mix of innocence and experience far beyond his years as he wraps the vocals with sweet gliding lifts that take the song into the stratosphere as he sings "I need her sharing the world beside me". And once again he shows why he was a force to be reckoned with. This is the track that started his solo career and perhaps sparked a light in a little 12 year old to become the greatest star in the world.

THAT'S WHAT YOU GET (FOR BEING POLITE)

Destiny

A major criticism often levelled at Michael was that he dealt with more fantastical themes than personal. Perhaps a by-product of his early fame and all encompassing celebrity that kept him sheltered from a "normal" life drifting into a more observational narrative but there are moments in albums where fame wasn't so all consuming that he would express himself in a more personal manner and 'That's What You Get (For Being Polite)' is testament to this.

With a classic soul foundation that skips beneath, Michael paints a picture of a solitary figure searching for love and a sense of purpose. Unlucky in love he finds himself trying to keep hold of it through "buying things for the girls". It's this theme of love's cost or Michael's impression that gifts equal love that would be echoed in other works such as "Working Day And Night" and "The Way You Make Me Feel". Even the protagonist's name, Jack, is a thinly veiled allusion to his own experiences in longing to finding a place to be loved and a place where he is safe to express who he really is. A search that continued well after the writing of this song.

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GHOSTS

Blood On The Dance Floor

Like exploring the depths of a haunted mansion 'Ghosts' take the listener on a hunt to find the cause of an unseen threat. With a jangling backbeat and Gothic chants the song explores the trails left by those out to damage Jackson and make sense of their motivations.

By using the metaphor of home, a place of personal solitude, Michael is able to paint a picture of the attacks in his own personal life. Threats and betrayal that seems to be coming from all angles. These unseen assailants with their hidden agendas are the ghosts of which he sings. In the chorus he questions their motivation and the perceived right to "scare my family" and "shake my family tree" concluding that the pure motivation must be that of jealousy (perhaps from both within and outside his own camp).

Cloaking a personal story into the grooves of a hypnotic beat its a tale from within the gates, and one that should have been given a better chance to come out and play.

PUSH ME AWAY

Destiny

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Soothing and lush production ripples along the surface of 'Push Me Away' like a calming breeze that carries Michael's vocals as he sings this tale of unrequited love. Like many of Michael's love songs it's one of longing, where his desires for love seems to be beyond his grasp. It's this struggle between what he longs for and the reality of love that manifest themselves in the lyrics as he sings "Don't you know / these dreams I wish could be / the real you and me".

Perhaps even more telling is the main refrain in the chorus "I come running back to you / you push me away" sung over and over in the final moments of the song as if echoing the failed attempts to find love.

Musically subtle with only a minor build, Tito's beautifully executed and not over played solo wrings more emotion from the track. 'Push Me Away' is another example of the breadth of talent the brothers had as songwriter and producers.





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SPEED DEMON

Bad

At first ‘Speed Demon’ can come across as a bit of filler track on Bad. But to view it as such doesn’t do it justice for what it represents in Michael’s evolution as a composer.

Kicking off with a drive by racing car sound effect, ‘Speed Demon’ is a sparse track musically with the initial verse comprising just synth bass, industrial inspired percussion and Michael’s low mix beat boxing. When the chorus hits, we are met with wondrous lush harmonies and fluttering bass slide. The build in the second verse adds a classic funk riff on guitar, and a more impassioned vocal delivery by Michael.

Unquestionably the highlight of the song is the bridge that features Michael double tracking the vocals in falsetto and even gives a wordplay nod to The Jackson 5.

Whilst some may deride the song for its lyrical simplicity, musically it has ambitious moments that makes it worthy of further exploration.

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AIN’T NO SUNSHINE

Got To Be There

Taking on a Bill Withers’ classic is not for the faint hearted. Considered one of the supreme soul singers Withers had an effortless way of injecting his songs with rich soul and feeling. So for a 12 year old Michael to kick off his solo career with this song not only showed a belief in the powers that be at Motown in his abilities but also laid down the gauntlet for critics to reassess what they thought the kid-wonder was capable of.

Although it gets off to a shaky start with a spoken word intro that feels a little forced all is forgiven as soon as Michael sings his first note, a blissful extended “oooooh”. By the time the B verse hits any concerns have long left the building. Michael is more than up for the challenge and pours his heart into the song, lifting notes effortlessly and imbuing the song with real heart. Just listen to how Michael takes flight at the 3 minute mark. By the end of the track there is no denying Michael is the real deal and truly worthy of the title soul singer.

DESTINY

Destiny

One of the songs that showed the true power of The Jacksons when left to their own devices ‘Destiny’ is a song that melds the soft croonings of soul with a dash of country and a healthy helping of 70s funk rock. It’s a song that hints to the genre busting work Michael would do in his solo work.

A song about trying to find one’s purpose and place in an ever changing world it has Michael singing about “dreaming of distance places” and longing for “the simple life” that offers him a chance to “be me”. It has him rejecting the allure of the big city and dismissing a life of riches. There’s also an impatience to meet the life he is here to lead as he beckons his “destiny” into being with each passing utterance of the word. It’s here the song takes off with a climatic orchestral arrangement that etches out an ascension and leaves the future open.

But as Michael was soon to discover, sometimes there is no changing what destiny has planned for you.

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HEAVEN CAN WAIT

Invincible

Rich and seductive ‘Heaven Can Wait’ sees Teddy Riley back in the fold as co-writer and co-producer. Like a sensual lullaby the song details the fear of losing a love that has taken a lifetime to find. Here Michael sings of staving off death to remain with the one he loves, even if it means being excluded from heaven.

It’s this unbearable separation that drives Michael’s vocals. They ache. They long. They plead. This isn’t Michael searching for love, this is Michael finding it, cherishing it and putting it above all else. There’s a real humanity evident in the way he sings. This isn’t fantasy, this is real, this is now. And this is a love so powerful and strong, he is willing to give up heaven for it.

Musically the song’s lush organic arrangement offsets some of the more mechanical sounds found elsewhere on the ‘Invincible’ album. It is warm, full and inviting, enveloping the listener in rich harmonies and melody. Michael’s vocal performance is one of his strongest on record and showed he was still a vital voice in music.

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Spluttering with an incessant groove of jagged edged beats and malfunctioning sounds 'Heartbreaker' was one of the surprise finds on 'Invincible'. Taking the frenetic, computer manipulated beats of the era and cranking it up a notch Michael and Rodney Jerkins not only raised the bar for techno-infused beats they broke it.

Easily dismissed as yet another "done wrong" song at the hands of a yet another femme-fatale 'Heartbreaker' warrants a further listen due to the rich sonic layering embedded in the groove, not to mention the near irresistible hook in the chorus and the vocal performance in the bridge.

Giving the song a sonic tension the swirling stop start melody cranks and ratchets to literally the breaking point as the song begins to malfunction in a series of random blips and bops. Best experienced with headphones if only for the joy in hearing Michael's own beat-boxing prowess, 'Heartbreaker' will reveal itself as a complex shuttering gem of a dance track.

Bittersweet is perhaps the best way to sum up the available recording of 'Behind The Mask'. Built around the pre-existing track by Yellow Magic Orchestra, Michael added new lyrics and melodies to record his own version for inclusion on 'Thriller'. Shelved and archived only to see the light of day on 2010's 'Michael' album the final released track was an updated version embellished with sax solos and crowd atmos, rather than the original 81 recording.

All that aside this remixed version does offer some glimpses into what could have been with Michael's vibrant and energetic singing propelling the song along its futuristic groove. The Yellow Magic Orchestra melody and robot infused backing vocals are present, but Michael's lyrics tell a story of deception and concealed intentions as he confronts a two-timing lover asking "who do you love?".

Listening closely and you get to hear moments lifted from the demo of Michael scatting out guitar runs and beatboxing the groove. Hopefully one day the 81 original will surface and we'll get to see the full face of the track.

As the closing song to the Disney 3D extravaganza Captain EO, 'Another Part of Me' debuted to the public several months in advance to its official release on Bad. A hybrid of dance-funk it shuffles along accentuated by synth horn blasts, lush layered harmonies and ad-libs. Lyrically the focus is on a common Jackson theme, that of belonging, a sense of global unity and oneness.

As the 6th single off Bad, it broke the winning streak being the first single off the album failing to reach the Number 1 spot on the Billboard Chart (though it did hit Number 1 on the R&B chart). And like many of the electronic synth based tracks off Bad it does have a slightly dated feel to it. Still 'Another Part of Me' still has the ability to transport thousands of people back to their first viewing of Captain EO, and for sentimental reasons alone, deserves its place in the 101 list. Thankfully though this electro-funk song is so much more than just a nostalgic trip.

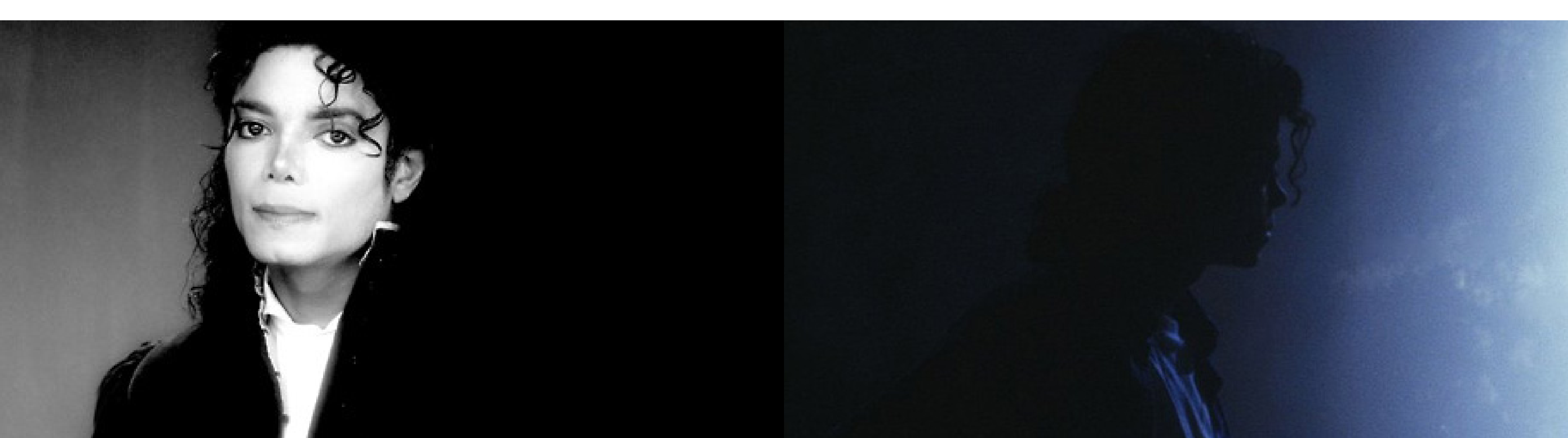
Recorded during the Invincible sessions 'The Way You Love Me' had its official airing during Jackson's career spanning 2004 boxset, and was subsequently remixed for the 2010 'Michael' album.

A beautifully sweet song about the salvation of love, the 2004 recording offers a warmer feel with minimalist production that really shows off Michael's vocals and full harmonies and also has nice little touches like Michael's beat boxing and ad-libs during the fade out that were removed in the more polished 2010 reinvention.

Not a song that strikes you as having hit written all over it, it does hold its own charm and harkens back to a time when song melody mattered.

It is easy to see why this simple melody would draw Michael back time and time again as he reworked and revisited it in the lead up to his death. And whilst the 2010 version seems to counter his own instructions given via voicemail, it does give it a bit of a touch up and clearing of the cobwebs and presents a more refined and pristine version. Both equally charming.





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BE NOT ALWAYS

Victory

It's hard to imagine a Michael Jackson song that you can call little known, after all when an artist sells millions upon millions of records chances are the songs have been well and truly heard. But a track like 'Be Not Always' appears to be just that.

As Michael's only solo lead vocal (and for that matter) solo contribution to the unbalanced Victory album it surprised many a listener who was hoping for another classic Jackson dance floor filler. Instead they were presented with this soft, sparse ballad that deals with the ongoing plights of the world. With a global perspective long before 'Man In The Mirror' or 'Heal The World' it sees Michael addresses everything from third world famine, to cold war tensions, to the popular 80s greed is good philosophies in a simple, stark arrangement that implores us to change and fulfil the promises of tomorrow.

A hauntingly beautiful track, it might have been an odd choice in a post-Thriller era, but it is perhaps one of Michael's purest, most unadulterated moments on record.

And well worth another listen.

SHE'S OUT OF MY LIFE

Off The Wall / This Is It (Deluxe)

Hearbreak has never been captured on record quite like it is on 'She's Out Of My Life'. The album version with its melodramatic string intro and crying guitar licks, goes for the heartstrings from the very first note. Showing maturity in his vocals Michael delivers an impassioned performance complete with real tears and a break in the voice in the final line. Rumoured to be unable to complete the song without finishing in tears, the decision was made to keep the breakdown in the track. And whilst the 'Off The Wall' album cut is the most well known, it is the demo version released in 2009 that is the superior version.

This stripped back, acoustic version does away with any extra instrumentation to draw out emotion and instead relies on Michael to deliver it. And deliver he does. Without the strings and piano plucking on the heartstrings, the song stays this side of saccharine and presents itself as an earnest and authentic ballad. The purity in Michael's voice here show that no studio trickery is needed when talent is this much in abundance.

71

72

THIS TIME AROUND

HIStory

Thumping out of your stereo with purpose and angst 'This Time Around' sees Michael at his most personal lyrically and rather than sitting back complaining about the wrongs done to him, he spits out lyrics of getting the upper hand. He unfurls other's plans to "control him" and "get him" and "falsely accuse" him. And with a tone of lesson learned, he also seems to deliver the lyrics as if having the last laugh.

The rap by The Notorious B.I.G. evidences that betrayal comes from every corner, and stark hard hitting beats further demonstrate the harsh reality of fame that Michael had been exposed to in the years leading up to HIStory's release.

Featuring treated backing vocals on the verses, Michael seems to echo the accusations with a sense of increasingly justified paranoia. Once again Michael's ability to draw you in with a vocal melody is at the fore and it's often not until you actually sit back and listen to the lyrics that you realise just how harsh and attacking the song really is. And deservedly so.

**P.Y.T.
(PRETTY YOUNG THING)**

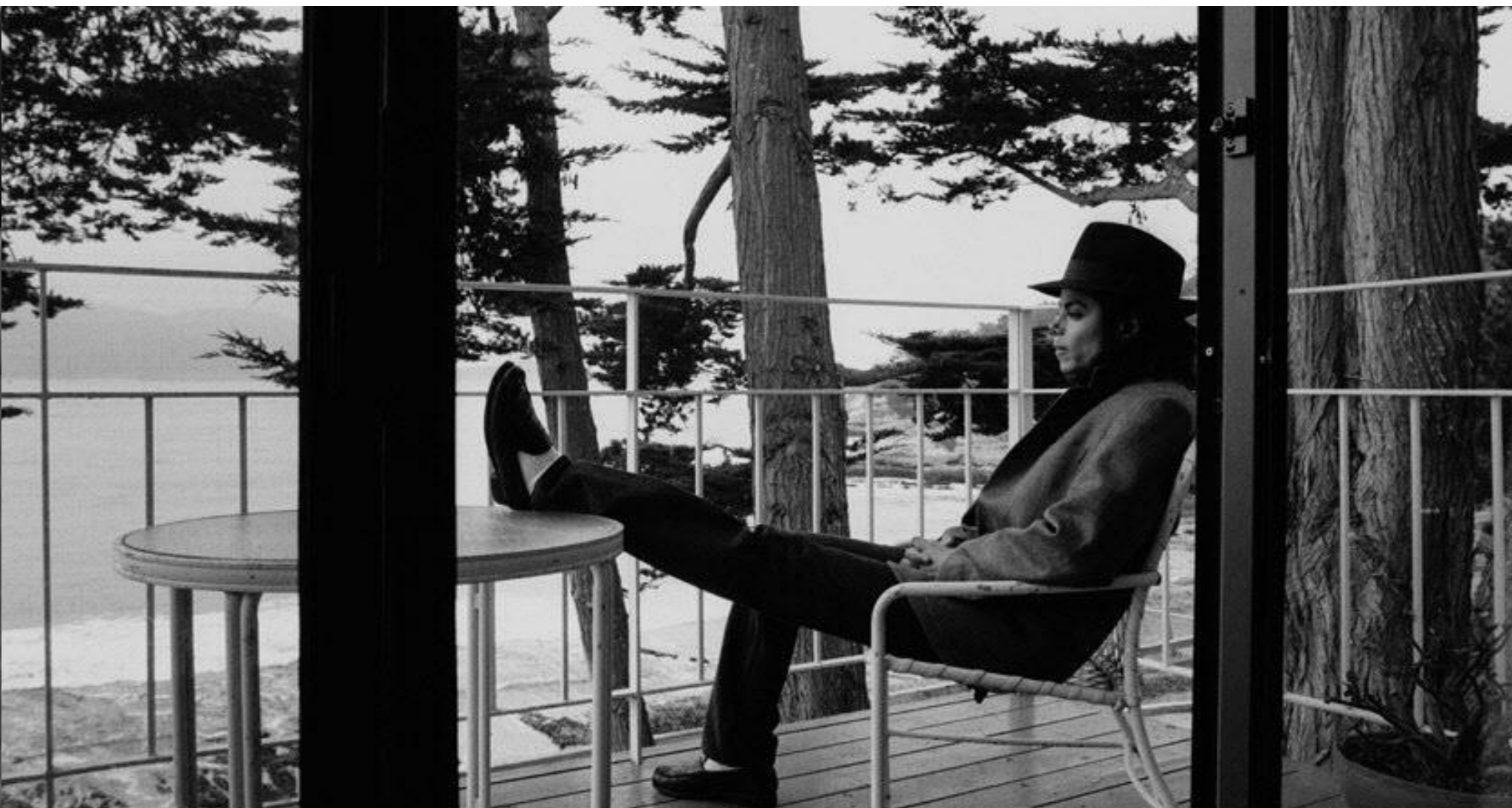
Thriller

73

Originally written as a smoother slo-jam by Michael and keyboardist Greg Phillinganes 'P.Y.T' underwent a substantial overhaul and rewrite by Quincy Jones and James Ingram transforming the song from simmering groove to all out dance party favourite, and discarding everything aside from the title from Michael's demo version.

With a new spring in its step, 'P.Y.T' was reborn as an infectious party jam. There is a sweetness embedded into the track that has kept it from aging, and while not overly complex musically, nor vocally challenging, it has the ability to improve moods and place a smile on the face of any listener especially during the playful "na na na na" breakdown.

And who can resist the helium pitched chants of "I want a / P.Y.T. / I want a / T.L.C." in the final minute or Michaels spoken come on in the fade. It's playful, sweet and charming. A moment of fun dance-pop that isn't meant to change the world, but will undoubtedly shuffle your feet.



74

IN THE BACK

The Ultimate Collection

Brooding is perhaps the best way to describe 'In The Back'. A work in progress track from the HIStory sessions, it is one of Michael's most intriguing 'unreleased' tracks.

Once again Michael expresses his feeling of betrayal by those around him, and does so set against an industrial Nine Inch Nails inspired groove, complete with little technical mishaps and blips and blops. The percussive track alone is quite dense and layered, whilst the remaining instrumentation is sparse. Perhaps a prime example of how Michael would work a song, the track is very much in a skeletal form lyrically, with a line here or there amongst more melodic lead utterances until we reach the chorus. For Michael, the chorus was always the most important to have finished in these early demos. If it stayed with him days later then he would return to flesh out the track and lyrics.

Here, perhaps, is a track many fans wished he had returned to as it shows a darker side of Michael and lays his anguish bare. All in a way that still has beautiful melody throughout.

IS IT SCARY

Blood On The Dance Floor

Originally written for inclusion in 1993's Adams Family Values movie but subsequently pulled, "Is It Scary" would lay dormant for a few more years until it was finally released in 1997.

By now Jackson was fully aware of how the world looked at him through lenses crafted by a tabloid media. His role as sideshow freak is spelt out here in the pre-chorus as he sings "I'm gonna be exactly what you want to see / It's you who's taunting me because you're wanting me / to be the stranger in the night". In the next pass though he turns the table stating that if you want to look beyond the preconceived notion you'll see "truth and purity" inside a lonely heart. It's as if he is saying, if this is how you are going to cast me OK then I'll play that role but it says more about you than it does me.

Musically the song combines horror themed arrangements with rock opera stylings in a way that elevates the song from being just another 'Thriller' wannabe. Whereas 'Thriller' is all fantasy, 'Is It Scary' offers a deeper glimpse into the psyche of a man often misportrayed by the media.

75

76

MAYBE TOMORROW

Maybe Tomorrow

Following the success of "I'll Be There", The Jackson 5 were shuffled back into the studio to record a series of ballads that would comprise their 4th regular studio album. From that offering came the beautiful 'Maybe Tomorrow'

A soulful song about lost love and the hope for reconciliation, the lyrics place a heavy burden on the 12 year old shoulders of young Michael but he delivers one of his most touching and heartfelt deliveries from his time at Motown.

With a mix of passion and pleading he lays it on the line during the chorus as he croons "but maybe tomorrow you'll come back to my arms girl." His voice, so pure and innocent, seems custom made to pull on the heartstrings of the listener. Once again Michael displays the uncanny ability to fool you into thinking you were listening the vocal stylings of a more seasoned professional in the ilk of the great Smokey Robinson or Sam Cooke.

It may go down in history as the first Jackson 5 track not to chart in the top 5 (it peaked at number 20 on the Top 100 Charts, and number 3 on the R&B Charts) but it remains one of their finest moments on record.

ONE DAY IN YOUR LIFE

Forever Michael

77

Recorded in 1974, "One Day In Your Life" sees 16 year old Michael tackling more lyrically mature material.

Built around a lyrical theme of reflection and missing out on love, Michael allows the emotion of the song to swell in his vocal delivery. The way he climbs the notes "you'll remember me some how / though you don't need me now / I will stay in your heart" strikes a chord with the listener, hooks you in and doesn't let go.

Musically the song is more easy listening pop than soul or R&B, and demonstrates how Michael's voice could tackle various genres with ease.

The timelessness of the track was evident when Motown re-released the song as a single 7 years later in 1981 to capitalise on the success Michael was enjoying with Off The Wall. It was a move that worked, earning Michael a UK #1 hit, his first of many.

To this day the song remains potent with its warm arrangement, beautiful melody and a vocal delivery that reminds you what it means to connect to a song.



78

MUSIC AND ME

Music and Me

If ever a song was written for an artist that would encapsulate their life then for Michael 'Music and Me' was the perfect choice. Although this song was penned for an 13 year old Michael, it would serve as a prophetic indicator of his relationship to music and the impact he would have on the musical landscape.

Structured around a simple guitar melody, the track floats guided by Michael's maturing voice that weaves its way through the melody and gives both a nod to the youthful range he was known for but also a hint to the voice he was growing into.

Documenting the forever bonded journey Michael and music would travel it might be hard to buy the authenticity of lines like "we've been together for such a long time" considering he was only 4 years into his professional career at its release, but its in listening to the song in retrospect that it reveals its gravitas as perfectly highlighted in Michael's career retrospective in Moonwalker. A simple, uncomplicated song that serves as a both a heralding of a life just beginning as well as tribute to a life lived in the spotlight.

EVERYBODY

Triumph

With a blast of funky horns to kick it off 'Everybody' encapsulates all that was good with the left overs of disco and combines them with funk and R&B sensibilities. Written with brother Tito and Mike McKinney, 'Everybody' musically provides a strong groove for Michael to just roll out the vocal melody with a tease here, and extended phrase there, and a relaxed delivery that worries less about syncopation but relies more on feel.

A party song for a new decade, it doesn't have the same level of strength or hook appeal of its sister track 'Lovely One', but it still showcases Michael's longing to be at peace with (and a more optimistic view of) the world where freedom is gained from just being yourself and losing yourself in dance. It's as if for a brief moment the dance floor can provide peace and salvation, and if so, then this is the groove to gain access to it.

79

80

THE LOVE YOU SAVE

ABC

As the third consecutive number one for The Jackson 5 'The Love You Save' explodes out of the gate with powerful vocals and a galloping groove.

Musically it is their most adventurous single to date incorporating classic Motown soul with doo-wop harmonies, blues piano, super sublime strings and rollicking guitar. All set against an urgent vocal interchange between Michael and Jermaine as they plead for a promiscuous girl to "take it slow" and "save it". Filled with lyrical allusions to first time discoveries and pioneers it was a risky subject matter for a squeaky clean group of boys to be singing about, but in true Motown fashion the grit is polished to shine brightly and the track ends up as a super funky morality tale.

Building on its Motown lineage the song also nods to the Supreme's 'Stop In The Name of Love' right down to stomping footsteps in the power-packed bridge and outro.

An instant classic 'The Love You Save' became a hallmark of performances throughout Michael's career.

BEN

Ben

81

As far as number one hits goes, a song about a rat might seem like an impossible contender. But that's exactly what 'Ben' did. As Michael's first solo number 1 this song heralded a new possibility in career trajectory for Michael. Even at the young age of 14, 'Ben' proved the point to Motown, and perhaps more worrying to his family, that there was an appetite to see what the cute little kid out the front of The Jackson 5 could do on his own.

Written as the theme song for the sequel to quasi-horror film Willard, 'Ben' is a innocent tale of loneliness, acceptance and belonging that would sadly turn out to be hallmarks of Jackson's own life as well as a theme he would return to in his own works.

But here, with a sense of happiness and contentment, young Michael delivers the song with the professionalism of someone far beyond his years. And does so in a way that draws you into the story and touches your heart.



82

BLUES AWAY

The Jacksons

The first ever recorded song fully written and composed by Michael, 'Blues Away' is a funky track built around a jangling piano arrangement.

Maybe as part of proving their point, the brothers got 2 self composed songs on their debut album for CBS records. And whilst they would have to wait a few more releases to get the full control they had left Motown for, 'Blues Away' gives us the first real hint of what Michael was like as a songwriter.

With his own words to play with, Michael displays the first real showing of what would become his signature vocal style. Present are syncopated delivery, little vocal hiccups, and the ability to bend and extend one phrase through several notes. The song was never destined to set the world on fire, and wasn't even considered as a single by the label, but it still remains one of Michael's purest moments on record. There is a sense of satisfaction and determination present in his delivery as if to say, you ain't seen nothing yet. And history would show he had more to offer. A lot more.

THE GIRL IS MINE (DEMO)

Thriller 25th Anniversary

As lead single for Thriller, 'The Girl Is Mine' wasn't quite what people were expecting. In its finished form the song was a borderline schmaltzy popfest between Paul McCartney and Michael. And whilst the song charted to Number 2 on Billboard, it still felt a bit lightweight.

Curiously when the demo version came to surface during a 1994 deposition it had a more laid back jazzy feel to it, something worked out of it on the final album version (surprising considering producer Quincy Jones' jazz pedigree).

The demo version finally appeared on the 25th Anniversary of Thriller and features sweeping strings, twinkling Rhodes piano, and full vocal delivery by Jackson.

Without the cringe worthy spoken back and forth between Michael and Paul, and with more of a soulful feel to it, the demo comes out miles ahead. And for fans who haven't heard it, it's likely to takeover their appreciation for the final album cut.

83

84

YOUR WAYS

Triumph

Pumping with vitality, 'Your Ways' hooks you from the first bar. With a catchy groove and melody the song epitomised what The Jacksons were all about; great hooks, flawless vocals, and strong R&B/funk foundations.

Buoyed by the independence, and success of Destiny, the tracks off Triumph show a continuation of craft and attention to detail in production. Composed by Jackie Jackson, 'Your Ways' sees Michael tackling the higher register of the lead vocals in his stride and making them his own. In fact, you'd be hard pressed to find another artist who can sustain such lofty notes. In moments it feels like Michael's voice is touching the roof of the sky, and it's only in the b-section of the chorus that he drops the register for a more natural delivery.

With an extended instrumental fade out lasting over a minute, Michael just feels the groove and sprinkles the track with deftly placed ad-libs that were starting to become trademark by this time. Once again Michael managed to make heartache so inviting.

ON THE LINE

The Ultimate Collection

85

Written for Spike Lee's movie Get On The Bus, 'On The Line' was one of the songs that came out of a song writing partnership between Babyface and Michael (others to see the light of day include 'You Are My Life').

A modern soul song very much in the style Babyface was known for, it is a beautiful expression on regaining faith after hard times, and perhaps gives us an insight into Michael's state of mind during the recording of HIStory. Lyrically the song calls for having faith in your abilities, dusting yourself off from being knocked down, and laying it all on the line; issues not foreign to Michael at that time. Whilst the song is written very much from a first person perspective the song takes on a more anthemic feel as it winds its way through each verse and climbs each additional chorus culminating with Michael joined by a choir.

A beautifully crafted and executed song it gives us a sense of what else might be lurking in the depths of the Jackson vaults from this period.



86

YOU ARE NOT ALONE

HIStory

As the song that took Michael back to the top of the charts in an era when many had written him off 'You Are Not Alone' is a sweet R&B ballad that features more of a stripped back production than many of the other tracks off HIStory.

With a vocal delivery that is intimate and at times more reserved than usual it's not until the second verse where Michael starts taking liberties with the melody that the song really begins to shine. It's in these moments where Michael throws away a strict adherence to the guide track outlined by R Kelly in the demo that the song really flourishes.

In the bridge Michael ascends the notes as he implores "I'll be there" and wills the song into the key change where he finally lets go filling the track with beautiful ad-libs. In fact it's only these final 2 minutes that Michael pulls the song back from the brink of sappiness and injects some much needed heart into the track. It stands as proof once again that when Michael allowed himself space to just feel the music true magic happened.

BEST OF JOY

Michael

Noted as the last song Michael recorded 'Best of Joy' is a beautiful soft track that seems to depict his relationship with his 3 children.

Michael's vocals see a return to melody in an era where many of his songs had been overtaken by a more syncopated delivery and straight edge approach.

Not only does it stand on record as proof of Michael continuing to work on new music in the period post 2005, but it is also testament to his ability to still be able to produce the goods and write and deliver catchy melodies wrapped up in beautiful vocals of an undying, loyal and unconditional love.

Closing with the line "I am forever" 'Best of Joy' presents some of the best elements of a Michael Jackson song while also serving as prophetic statement on his enduring appeal and legacy.

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88

BLOOD ON THE DANCE FLOOR

Blood On The Dance Floor

As a cast off from the Dangerous recording sessions 'Blood On The Dance Floor' came at a time when Michael had triumphantly returned to the top of the charts with HIStory and interest was high as to where he would go next musically.

So at the time it was somewhat disappointing to hear what appeared to be a step back in his musical journey. With a familiar new-jack groove (borrowing heavily from 'Remember The Time') the song offered nothing new in terms of stylings or content. But with expectations long since jettisoned the track has grown in appreciation amongst fans and critics alike.

The song's antagonist "Susie" joins a long line up of Jackson femme-fatales as we hear her tale of revenge and retribution. Here, in Michael's world, promiscuity comes at a price. But rather than being an observer, Michael is in the middle of it all, drawn into her allure and seductive powers as he tries to "enjoy that simple dance". But like all others that have crossed her path, he is now at risk. A morality tale-cum-dance track 'Blood On The Dance Floor' stands proud as a solid Jackson club song, and whilst not his best effort, can still jam a dance floor like few others.

CAN'T LET HER GET AWAY

Dangerous

89

Can't Let Her Get Away is a pure new jack dance tune. Whilst not overly a stand out on Dangerous, the song still has elements that make it fun to listen to and satisfied those fans that wanted Michael to deliver more dance oriented songs.

Built around a classic new jack beat, the track sees Michael give an equally gutsy and sweet performance attacking each line in the verses before floating in the build up to the chorus.

Even in the breakdown section Michael holds his ground as he spits out syncopated vocals before full and warm harmonies glide in singing "can't let go".

And although it is beginning to show some wear, 'Can't Let Her Get Away' was designed first and foremost for dance floors the world over.

And it more than answers the brief.



90

CHILDHOOD

HIStory

Have you seen my childhood? This is the question Michael poses in this lush (and borderline soppy) song. With swirling orchestral arrangement 'Childhood' is Michael's plea for understanding. It's him stating his case, and longing for, the Childhood he never got to fully enjoy. "People say I'm not OK / 'cause I love such elementary things. It's been my fate to compensate for the childhood I've never known" Michael sings with a keen sense of both his public persona and the simple truths of his life. For those that wanted to understand him, Michael would always point them to this track... it's all here. There is an innocence, a yearning to be understood, a sense of fantasy, a tinge of sadness, and expressions of wanting to be loved.

Constructed more like a Broadway musical than a simple pop ballad, 'Childhood' shows Michael's flair for melody and ability to write convincingly in many genres. Perhaps most impressive is the fact that the vocal we hear (minus a one line pick up) was recorded in one take with Michael singing live with the accompanying orchestra.

WITH A CHILD'S HEART

Music & Me

With A Child's Heart was a song originally recorded by Stevie Wonder on his Up Tight (Everything's Alright) album of 1966. As was the fashion at the time, Motown would often look to its own stable of songs to cover, and thus in 1972 Michael recorded his take on the track for Music & Me. The interesting difference between the two versions is that Stevie's original is more of a mid-tempo uplifting song, while Michael's take is a little more sombre, and more reflective (well, as reflective as one can be at 13 when Michael recorded his version).

There are still soul undertones in Michael's vocals but you can start to hear the pop sensibility that would start to creep into later recordings.

When Michael hits each soaring "Oh", you can't help but be carried by the notes he hits, and you can almost feel his understanding of being on the verge of adulthood whilst still being very much a child.

91

92

WE'VE HAD ENOUGH

The Ultimate Collection

Contrary to popular belief spurred on by its inclusion in the 2004 release The Ultimate Collection 'We've Had Enough' is not a pointed commentary on the Iraq war (it was written and recorded in 2000 for inclusion on Invincible) but rather a condemnation of all wars.

Placing the listener amongst the debris of a war torn city Michael elicits a sense of despair as he tells the tale of children witnessing the horrors of war and asking us all to move into action to stop such senseless loss. Asking when is enough enough, he urges us to lend our voice to a call for peace. "They've got it hear from you / they got to hear from me" he sings desperately in the raucous climax of the song. With driving beats and blazing guitars there's an intensity in the music and an epic scale that harkens back to 'Earth Song'.

The strength of the song makes it a surprising cast off from Invincible, especially considering the unevenness of that release.



93

SHE DRIVES ME WILD

Dangerous

She Drives Me Wild was one of the new jack swing inspired songs on Dangerous and while the other songs in this vein move the styles progression forward, 'She Drives Me Wild' doesn't mess with it and presents the key elements of new jack.

The only real moment of inventiveness is the way that various car sounds are incorporated into the musical landscape from car horns, to tyre skids, to slamming doors, to revving motors creating an infectious groove.

One of Dangerous' clear-cut dance songs, 'She Drives Me Wild' doesn't offer lyrics you will find deep and meaningful but instead provides a fun infectious love song that was destined to be pumped out of speakers all through club land.

To this day 'She Drives Me Wild' remains fresh and playful and despite being one of Michael's lesser known songs from the Dangerous record is one that always delights new listeners.



Originally built around the bass line of one of Michael's Bad era castoffs *Streetwalker*, 'Dangerous' evolved into its own musical beast when Bill Bottrell and Michael worked on the track in the early 90s. An early demo version of the song can be heard on *The Ultimate Collection*, whilst the album version shows how the track transformed from dark, broody track into a taunt, sonic attack thanks to Riley's new jack swing influence.

Of note is the way Michael delivers each intro verse in a deep spoken rap, before singing the b-track in the lead up to the suitably seductive vocal hook of the chorus. With a smattering of trademark ad-libs, the song crawls along with a sense of menace and impending dread. Once again Michael assumes the role of persecuted lover, but this time is drawn into the seduction more than in previous explorations. It's a touch 'Billie Jean', a touch 'Dirty Diana' blended into solid industrial funk dance floor filler.

When Michael died unexpectedly on June 25, 2009 'Gone Too Soon' became the unofficial soundtrack of the day. This album track from *Dangerous* seemed to echo how everyone was feeling, and was gallantly performed by Usher at the memorial service. Whilst the song will now forever be tied to Michael's death, at the time of its release in 1991 the song was dedicated to Ryan White, a friend of Jackson's who died from contracting the AIDS virus through a blood transfusion.

The song itself has a beautiful melodic structure that mixes loss with hope, sadness with joy and sees Michael delivering a heartfelt vocal. And whilst the somewhat syrupy and cliché lyrics gives the song a Broadway-esque feel to it, Michael manages to rescue each line with humanity.

Since his death, this track has taken on new meaning for many fans, and it will now be a track that causes reflection on the artist delivering the vocals.

94

YOU CAN'T WIN

The Wiz

Dripping in funk, 'You Can't Win' bursts through your speakers with energy and socially aware lyrics that contrasts the joyous musical delivery. Written specifically for Jackson's inclusion in the film version of *The Wiz* by Charles Small 'You Can't Win' tells the plight of the black man held back by a system of inequity. Michael himself referred to the song as "the feeling that there are people out there who don't actively hold you back as much as they work quietly on your insecurities so that you hold yourself back".

Produced by Quincy Jones, the song is of historical note as it shows the promise of things to come when Jones and Jackson would join forces to produce Michael's *Off The Wall* album. The latter part of the track "Can't Get Outta The Game" would be recorded as an off the wall B-Side entitled "Can't Get Outta The Rain" and showcases Michael's ability to ad-lib and create vocal hooks out of a few simple words or grunts. While the social landscape may have changed, 'You Can't Win' remains just as funky to this day.

MONKEY BUSINESS

The Ultimate Collection

Never one to miss out an opportunity to play with his media persona, 'Monkey Business' opening gives a cheeky nod to Michael's long term association with Bubbles the chimp as we hear apes of all kinds hoot and chitter. But before you are allowed to dismiss the track as gimmicky, a deep slow burn funk groove presents itself and forms the basis of a tale of adultery and cheating with everyone from the mother in law to his brother "doing the do" and it's all too much 'Monkey Business' for Michael to bare.

With funky horns and organ grinding throughout the verses, 'Monkey Business' is proof that Michael could still throw down funky tracks that have hooks 'til the cows come home, or in this case the monkeys. Although it is presented in demo form, the track has all the embellishments of a final track, with punching harmonies, ad-libs and lush instrumentation. And teases with the promise of what might have come had Michael finished it.

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96

DANGEROUS

Dangerous



GONE TOO SOON

Dangerous

97



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BEAUTIFUL GIRL

The Ultimate Collection

Beautiful Girl is a demo track that was originally recorded during the Invincible sessions, and subsequently released on 2004's Ultimate box set. One of his more polished demos the track has an airy quality to it that sweeps the listener up in the gradual build to each chorus and then takes flight in the final key change. Michael's vocals soar and swirl as he gets caught up in the sweetness of being in love.

While repetitive in its lyrical structure due to Michael's scat lyrics, the demo recording gives us an insight into the way Michael would feel out a song and sing melodic la-de-da's where lyrics would later fall.

A simple yet beautiful composition that no doubt would have soared to even greater heights if it had been fully completed, 'Beautiful Girl' remains one of Michael's most promising "what could have been" demo tracks currently available.

MUCH TOO SOON

Michael

99

Originally recorded during the Thriller sessions, 'Much Too Soon' finally saw the light of day in 2010.

Stripped back to a basic arrangement of acoustic guitar, added piano accordion, harmonica and strings Michael fills the track with a sweet lament of lost love and the realisation that some times you can't go back.

Michael vocals harken back to a delivery more akin to 'She's Out Of My Life' than the tracks off Thriller. With a simple verse chorus structure, 'Much Too Soon' is a reminder of Michael's ability to sing almost any style of music from raucous rock to soulful funk to heart on the sleeve ballads.

Once again his voice draws you into the song, but sadly with it's placement on a posthumous album, you can't help but relate the lyrics to Michael's passing, and as such for many it will always be a bittersweet song.



100

FOR ALL TIME

Thriller 25th Anniversary

Another off cut from the Thriller recording sessions, and later released as part of the special 25th Anniversary edition, 'For All Time' is an exquisite mid tempo ballad. With hints of Human Nature (also written by Steve Porcaro) in the musical composition, melody, and lyrics, 'For All Time' has all the hallmarks of Michael's most haunting tracks; a sense of yearning in the lyrics, lush harmonies in the backing vocals, and a captivating melody.

Whilst originally intended for Thriller, many have speculated that the production of the final release is more akin to the style of production of Michael's later work on Dangerous. This is a strong possibility as Michael would often revisit songs that didn't make the cut in one album, and rework and rearrange them for future releases.

'For All Time' is a song the majority of people haven't heard and still are unaware of. A soulful blend of 'Human Nature' and 'Lady In My Life' it's one of the few off cuts that to this day still challenges strongly for its inclusion.

THIS IS IT

This Is It

101

Released posthumously to coincide with the movie of the same name, 'This Is It' is actually a track originally recorded back in 1983 with Paul Anka. Originally built of the piano and vocal demo, the album version was fleshed out to give it a fuller sound and features Jackson's brothers on backing vocals - the first time they had appeared on record together since 1989's *2300 Jackson St.*

The pop-ballad sees Jackson effortlessly deliver the lyrics with some of the sweetest vocals captured on record. One moment contemplative, the next soaring, Michael's performance belies the rough demo feel the content of the lyrics has. Perhaps because he isn't striving for the perfect phrasing, there is a sense of ease in the way he is singing. There is nothing calculated in the way he picks his notes, he is just going where the song takes him.

While the final production gives the song extra warmth and a slightly modern feel, the soul of the song remains that of an artist free in the a moment of pure joy.



I hope this exploration into the music of Michael Jackson has made you reconsider a few tracks or re-appreciate old favourites. If one of your must haves isn't on the list let me know and tell me what that track means to you.

Send your comments, feedback and your own selects to

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