



MICHAEL JACKSON

101

HISTORY



MICHAEL JACKSON

101

HISTORY



Andy Healy

 Andy Healy 2015

Under the Creative Commons licence you are free to share, copy, distribute and transmit this work with the proviso that the work not be altered in any way, shape or form and that all written works are credited to Andy Healy as author. This Creative Commons licence does not extend to the copyrights held by the photographers and their respective works. This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License.

I do not claim any ownership of the photographs featured and all rights reside with the original copyright holders. Images are used under the Fair Use Act and do not intend to infringe on the copyright holders.



MICHAEL JACKSON



HISTORY

Dedicated to Michael for his bravery and honesty in writing and composing an album that stands as a powerful insight into his life and times.

This special HIStory Supplement is also dedicated to the producers, engineers, songwriters and musicians who helped bring Michael's vision and music to life.

By a fan for the fans.



HIS2ORY

As Michael's most personal album 'HIStory' followed a tumultuous period in his life that saw his image and reputation the subject of accusations, rumour and hearsay. Stoically silent through most of the preceding years Michael answered his critics in the best way he knew how - through his music.

Recorded over an eight month period from September 94 to March 95, 'HIStory' sees Michael stepping out of his isolation and back into the spotlight with a lot on his mind. There were songs squarely aimed at the tabloid media, absent friends and his response to the accusations levelled at him over the past years. But rather than narrow the scope Michael took the injustice he himself had been subjected to and broadened his focus to the mistreatment of others and a commentary on the shape of the world. Songs such as 'Earth Song' and 'They Don't Care About Us' are bigger than just one man's pain and the isolation and loneliness in songs such as 'Stranger In Moscow' give insight into the human condition not just Michael's own turmoil. And whilst there is no denying Michael's anger is present in songs such as 'Scream' and 'This Time Around' he balances that with a sense of hope and beauty in songs such as 'You Are Not Alone', 'History' and 'Smile'. Reflective and truly personal songs like 'Childhood' aim for understanding and empathy - this is Michael letting his guard down and inviting the listener in to who he is and what he stands for.

For those that saw Jackson as someone shielded from the real world and lost in a fantasy of his own making, the album is brutally honest and raw firmly cemented in the reality of what it was like to live through the preceding years. This was his side of the story, HIStory.

HIStory is a journey through the struggles of injustice and the ups and downs of life. As pointed out by many a listener this is an album that opens with a Scream and ends with a Smile.

As we celebrate HIStory's 20th Anniversary I hope this exploration finds you dusting off the album and rediscovering the brilliance contained within its grooves.



PHOTO CREDITS

I do not claim any ownership of the photographs featured and all rights reside with the original copyright holders. Images are used under the Fair Use Act and do not intend to infringe on the copyright holders.



HIS20RY

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 an industrial distorted introduction of 'Scream' blasting through the speakers it is almost as if 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" 'Scream' 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 indeed 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. Michael confronts the gossip and lies that enveloped him as he sings "Tired of you telling the story your way / It's causing confusion, you think it's OK" and shows that there is a cost to be paid for editorials that chase sensationalism over facts. Janet adds "Keep changing the rule while I keep playing the game / I can't take it much longer, I think I might go insane" highlighting the

mental toll paid for the price of fame. This is an artist's response to the idea that if you are in the public eye then everything is fair game. This is Michael mad as hell and not going to take it anymore. With each passing chant of "Stop pressurin' me" the tension builds to the breaking point with Michael and Janet finally lashing out "Stop f@&#ing with me". And despite the mistelling that Michael didn't swear, the isolated multitracks confirm Michael stepped up to the mic and delivered the line with the justified level of angst, and subsequent club mixes would leave no one question as this line would be repeated endlessly in extended outros.

But balancing his own frustration and ill-treatment Michael paints a bigger societal picture in the breakdown. As Janet sings "Oh my God, can't believe what I saw when I turned on the TV this evening / I was disgusted by all the injustice" one could easily related it only to the plight Michael was subjected to, but cleverly layered under the mix is a news report that outlines how "a man has been brutally beaten to death by Police after being wrongly identified as a robbery suspect. The man was an 18 year old black male..." which sadly makes this a bigger story of the ongoing injustice suffered by many in the community.

With an industrial funk hard edge 'Scream' was the answer that many a fan was hoping for. It was Michael squaring off with the way he had been dragged over the coals and showed he wasn't going to play nice anymore. But this isn't just anger for anger's sake, there is a deeper message and artistry here. A message that transcends a moment in time and becomes timeless. There is a power to the honesty and rawness in the lyrics and vocal delivery evident that most of Michael's vocals are taken from his very first take.

It was the perfect introduction the HIStory project and the only way the album could have opened.



THEY DON'T CARE ABOUT US

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 it is 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 attacks and the aggression knowing that ultimately the truth will be his savour as he sings "beat me / bash me / you can never trash me".

The constant marching beat underscores the tension and propels the song forward as Michael is unrelenting in his critique.

He takes the charges head on, confronts the innuendo and whispered rumours that surround him and shows how his fame made him an easy target but also how to some it robbed him of his basic human rights. "Tell me what has become of my rights / Am I invisible because you ignore me" he sings holding the mirror up to the spectacle of how he was treated, and how we watched like spectators at some sporting event discarding the human impact behind the scandalous and fabricated headlines.

Fully aware that his name and image are tarnished and a question will forever hang

over his head he 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" followed by a feeling of being letdown by his homeland as he decries "I can't believe this is the land from which I came".

When the song first appeared many were quick to judge and criticise him for using racial slurs and took this as he himself attacking. But in the context of the song he is clearly identifying with the injustice and bigotry that has been levelled at so many. This was him identifying with his fellow brothers and sisters not casting them aside.

Michael weaves his own personal narrative with one of a bigger social injustice felt by many day in and day out. He wonders how we got into this mess and why many with the power to change things appear helpless to do so. "You know I really do hate to say it / the government don't want to see / but if Roosevelt was living / He wouldn't let this be" he sings name checking both President Roosevelt and Martin Luther King in the song as leaders committed to social justice and the betterment of all.

Where 'They Don't Care About Us' could have easily drifted into a hostile rant, Michael manages to salvage it and make its 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.



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 songwriter, producer and singer all in one.

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 song is all about isolation and it begins with the sounds of rainfall and a quiet storm brewing. The sounds evoke a sense of looking for safe harbour, to find protection from the impending storm, something Michael knew all too well at the time of its writing.

Written initially in a hotel room in Moscow during the 'Dangerous World Tour' with uncredited co-writer (and long time collaborator) Brad Buxer at the keys the two created the musical basis for the song with its haunting chord structure and melancholy filled melody.

As was often the case with Michael this initial skeletal musical outline was put on the back burner until he was ready to focus his energy's on it. Sadly as the world around him began its descent into turmoil he turned to this instrumental piece to find solace and began writing about his experience and the sudden isolation it brought.

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" from his heartbreaking point of view.

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. Opening with a beat box pattern made from Michael's own percussive sounds the song slowly builds its musical foundation. Beautiful melodies underscore the sadness of the situation but yet still offer a moment of hope that "happy days will drown the pain".

When Michael sings "How does it feel / When you're alone and cold inside?" his outlook is bleak and hopeless. He is searching for a reprieve from the pain that is literally raining down on him calling out "Lord have mercy". There is a sense of dread in his ad-libs that this will now be his world of "living lonely", with a fear of abandonment from his closest friends to the fans that would rally for him.

This is Michael discarding the rose coloured glasses he was often criticised for wearing when composing songs of global love and unity. Instead a harsh reality is pulled into focus. This isn't a perfect world. This isn't the perfect situation. But rather than flee from it Michael does what any great artist does and channels those feelings into his art. And he does so with an honesty and truthfulness that moves you and effects the soul.

And rather than fully arrive at a happy ending, Michael stays with the reality of feeling alone. For indeed this ending is unknown. And the song is more powerful for it.

As people begin to dig deeper into Michael's 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.





Thumping out of your stereo with purpose and angst 'This Time Around' sees Michael at his most personal lyrically. Rather than sitting back and complaining about the wrongs done to him, he decides to turn the tables as he spits out lyrics of getting the upper hand.

From the first beat this is Michael taunting his accusers and those against him. Even his ad-libs in the intro have a sense of mocking and confrontation about them. He unfurls other's plans to "control him" and "get him" and "falsely accuse" him.

Michael isn't taking things lightly here, and squares up against the lies levelled against him as he sings "Somebody's out to use me / and falsely accuse me". And with a tone of lesson learned, he also seems to deliver the lyrics as if having the last laugh as he sings "You really can't control me".

With the treated backing vocals on the verses, Michael seems to echo the motivations and accusations with a sense of increasingly justified paranoia.

The rap by The Notorious B.I.G. reiterates that betrayal can come from every corner, and is underpinned by stark hard hitting beats that further demonstrate the harsh reality and darker side of fame that Michael had been exposed to in the years leading up to *HIStory*'s release.

The vocal delivery in the post rap choruses switch up from defensiveness to an almost daring celebration as Michael sings "no body's gonna break me".

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 justifiably so.



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 is 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 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.





It was always going to be a gutsy move by Michael to confront the issues that plagued his life in the lead up to HIStory. People expected him to address them in one way or another through his art but nobody was ready for Michael to be this gutsy.

With a non-too subtle play on words Michael dedicates a whole song to the leader of the pitchfork police who seems blinded by ambition to actually investigate facts. It's also interesting to note that D.S. is only a handful of songs whose lyrics were included in the album's liner notes perhaps as a plausible denial of the song's content. But any astute MJ fan knew exactly where the song was aimed and even Michael's use of codes through the song reinforces this.

With a grinding guitar edge supplied by Slash the song's funk rock beat lays the groundwork for Michael to get a few things off his chest. And he's not pulling any punches. Feeling like an outlaw Michael decries how the powers that be want to get him "dead or alive" and will join forces with anyone to further their cause. But here the bark is worse than the bite as the main antagonist "don't do half what he say" - all talk no action.

And whilst the lyric sheets will have you reading 'Dom S. Sheldon' your ears will pick up the unmistakable sound of Michael calling out the actions of 'Thom(as) Sneddon'. Michael further lays clues of the interchange in the 2nd verse where he changes letters in the title of Santa Barbara District Attorney to BSTA. Using the substitution code throughout the lyrics (later in the line "He want your vote just to remain TA") Michael has exchanged all D's for T's and vice versa thus Dom becomes Thom and TA becomes DA - the preceding BS of BSTA is a switch of the initials for Santa Barbara.

Michael paints a picture of a man hell bent on doing whatever it takes to steer the case his way. He is trying to work in cahoots with other offices such as the CIA and FBI and Michael even goes as far as drawing racial ties to the KKK. There's also an allusion to pressuring tactics of investigation as Michael sings "Does he say to either do it or die" a non-too thin a threat to fall in line.

Lyrically the chorus paints the picture of a man with a cold stone heart - unable to empathise or question the facts at play here. He's cold hearted, doesn't care who or what he damages in order to get what he wants, rather than get what is just. In fact justice it seems it not even part of the equation.

Michael also overlays this depiction with the inclusion of YES' sample of 'Owner Of A Lonely Heart', once more a dig at his real life nemesis.

Interestingly enough Michael specifically requested his sound designer and audio engineer Brad Sundberg to feature 'Owner of a Lonely Heart' as the key track for his bumper car ride at his Neverland ranch.

Hard hitting for sure, 'D.S.' goes for the jugular and doesn't let off, throwing out racist calls of "Go'on Boy" and ending with a gun shot - is this an allusion to a death wish, or perhaps a comment on fixated and trigger happy policing.

For the listener D.S. was once a welcome response but because it is so singular in its focus the song gets relegated to a distinct time and place and falls way behind in Michael's cannon of solid rock tracks.

For all the blustering and cathartic nature this song undoubtedly brought Michael one can't help but wonder if it should have been a track kept aside and maybe given its space to another song from the same sessions.



Underpinned by a rolling groove 'Money' 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, but in typical Michael style his harshest lyrics are wrapped up in a catchy chorus that is irresistible to the ear and will have you singing along in no time.

With a slow-burn funk groove the song creeps along with relentless momentum as Michael lines up the green eyed monsters and serves up what is coming to them.

Lyrical Michael gives insight into the behind scenes machinations of the 1993 allegations and settlement, especially telling is the line "Insurance, where do your 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 civil case was somewhat forced upon Michael by his insurance firm who weighed up costs instead of the issues of right and wrong.

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 as he sings "They don't care they do me for the money / They don't care they use me for the money."

As history shows there are those who are quick to turn on friendship and loyalty if there is a big enough payoff at the other end for

those who know it's a lie and "swear it" and those who "say you wouldn't do it for all the money in the world... I don't think so."

Michael also takes aim at those two faced friends and supporters who are "the one's with the biggest smiles / the idle jabbers" revealing that in truth "they're the back stabbers". Whilst they claim "I'll never betray or deceive you my friend" he also sadly knows that if they are made to choose between loyalty and a payday well, "show me the cash and I will take it".

Michael 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.

Once again this is Michael the genius songwriter who can wrap up a story of greed and betrayal inside an irresistible groove and sing-song chorus. Just try to resist singing along to "money makes the world go round / money makes the world go round".

One of HIStory's standout tracks, 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.

Removed from the scandal that created it, 'Money' holds up as a song against the ills of greed and a blood lust for the almighty dollar.

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.







Putting his recently acquired, and much-sought-after, Beatles catalogue to work, Michael recorded 'Come Together' in the late 80s and gave it its first airing as the finale to his film, 'Moonwalker'.

For years the song lingered away from a commercial release until it was subsequently made available on the 'Jam' CD-Single (and in some countries as b-side to 'Remember The Time').

But it wouldn't receive an official album release until *HISTory* almost a decade after it was recorded (in a trimmed down and re-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 vocal almost spitting out each line and in doing so 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.

Michael would go on to include 'Come Together' as a rare add on to his *HISTory* World Tour much to the delight of the audience.

Just as anyone now days doing a cover of a Michael song, taking on a Beatles classic was always going to be a daunting task with critics at the ready to rip it to shreds.

But rather than record a carbon copy of the track Michael opts to put his own spin on it drawing out its blues origins and overlaying some funk edge.

In doing so he creates his own take and pays the inventiveness of the original recording its greatest honour.



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 expected it's not until the second verse where Michael starts taking liberties with the melody that the song really begins to shine. In fact up until that moment 'You Are Not Alone' is a well-crafted modern soul song but fails to take flight.

It's in these moments where Michael throws away a strict adherence to the guide vocal outlined by R Kelly in the demo that he makes it his own and as a result 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 in these final 2 minutes that Michael pulls the song back from the brink of sappiness and injects some much-needed heart into the track.

The lyrical narrative is open to interpretation. Some of the lines hint at an unexpected break up of a relationship and a longing to reunite with a belief that love will be the salvation of the relationship as alluded to in the lines "whisper three words and I'll come running".

However, on a deeper level the song could be about the loss of a loved one through death. This casts lines such as "something whispers in my ear and says / You are not alone / for I am here with you / though you're far away / I am here to stay" meaning that the spirit and protection of the loved one remains in the heart of the living and that solace can be found in that.

The ambiguity in the lyrics is one of its strengths as it allows the listener to bring in their own narrative to the track and thus imbue it with greater meaning.

What could have easily been a good but not great ballad is exalted because of what Michael brings to the track.

'You Are Not Alone' stands as proof once again that when Michael allowed himself space to just feel the music and the freedom to put himself into the song that's when the true magic happened.



Have you seen my childhood? This is the question Michael poses in this lush (and borderline sappy) song that aims to answer the questions about why Michael was the way he was.

With glorious swirling orchestral arrangements 'Childhood' is Michael's very personal plea for understanding. This is 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.

Subjected to overly harsh judgement for the way he lived his life, Michael recasts the vision in its purest form that to have childlike qualities and to hold onto the innocence of youth is something to be admired and envied rather than ridiculed and written off.

Having grown up as a performer since age 5 and been in the public light since 10 Michael lived in a fishbowl saddled with the burden of not only pleasing the thousands of fans that clamoured for a piece of him, but also that of the proverbial goose that laid the golden eggs acting in no small way as breadwinner for his family. A lot to carry on such slender young shoulders.

Michael's childhood was unlike anyone else's in existence prior to or since. His days were not spent in playgrounds but in recording studios. His day trips were not to the mall but to another city to perform another concert. So was an attempt to reclaim and perhaps never let go of a childhood he never got to truly experience such a bad thing?

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.

Michael looks at the world's perception of him and explains that "it's been my fate to compensate / for the childhood I've never known".

The sheer questioning of "Have you seen my childhood?" points to something that has been lost or has gone missing. Michael is asking each of us to reflect on the gift that childhood is with its carefree ways and playful nature and asks us how would we have dealt with that missing from our own lives. As he so eloquently puts it "before you judge me / try hard to love me". This is Michael asking not to be judged until you have walked in his shoes.

Constructed more like a Broadway musical than a simple pop ballad, 'Childhood' shows Michael's flair for melody and ability to write convincingly in any genre. It sweeps in with lush production and has Michael performing the lyrics like a stage show production filled with expression and heart.

Footage of the recording session shows Michael overjoyed with the arrangement and the peaks and valleys of the orchestra's accompaniment. He steps up to the mic, hands outstretched as if about to fly and with all the drama he can muster delivers the opening lines. As he sings of "pirates in adventurous dreams" he clenches his fists as if to try and capture the moment of glee that imagination sparks.

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.

And like the song suggests, Michael's childlike wonder was not lost as he asked with excitement if he could meet the orchestra once the session had taken place. It's this pure wonder that is at the heart of the track - a wonder of what might have been but also a celebration of the wonder of what childhood should be all about.





A common theme in Michael's work was that of media victim. And once again 'Tabloid Junkie' sees Michael in that familiar role, but this time he is standing up against the machine that seems to delight in twisting and distorting truths for its own gain.

Fully aware how much his life had become tabloid fodder and how much his current perception had been shaped not by fact but by scurrilous rumour and innuendo Michael delivers a track that is both a meta statement of his celebrity and a scathing indictment on the shady practices of a press more interested in creating stories rather than reporting them.

Starting with a role call of all the weird and outlandish 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. All the stories linked to Michael over the years are here - sleeping in an oxygen chamber, building a shrine to Elizabeth Taylor. The more absurd it seems the more willing people are to believe.

As the verse begins Michael attacks each word as if chewing them up and spitting them out (a sensation one with such fame can sometimes feel) as he equally bemoans and chastises "Speculate to break the one you hate / Circulate the lie you confiscate". His intent is clear; he is a target and the bigger the lie the quicker it is to be retold. Having been truly plagued by a "hounding media in hysteria" Michael knows the price that must be paid by a blood hungry media intent on snaring its pound of flesh.

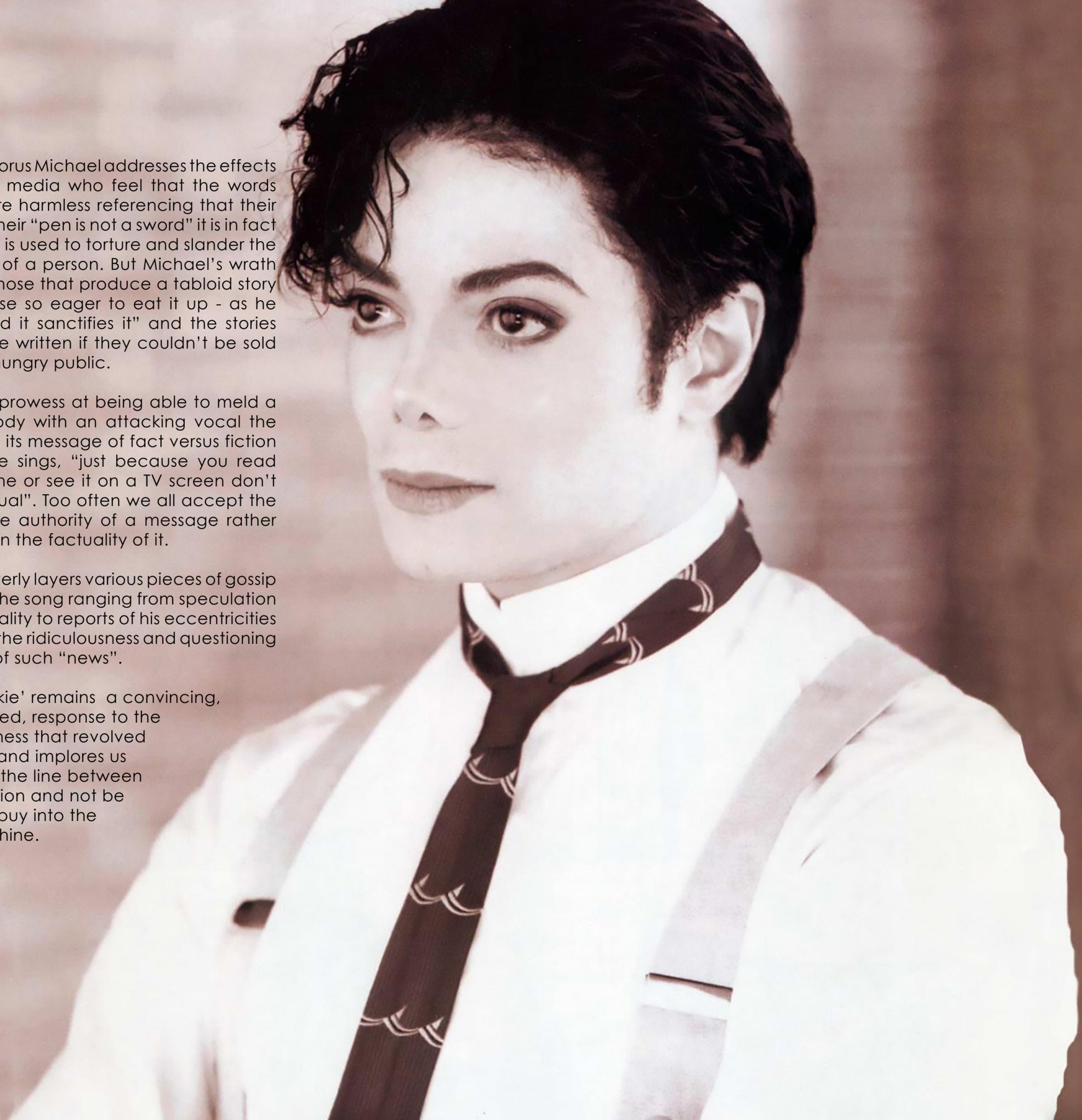
Alluding to hidden truths, mystery and conspiracy Michael name checks the JFK assassination, the death of Marilyn Monroe, and sudden about turn media targets receive in death.

In the pre-chorus Michael addresses the effects of a tabloid media who feel that the words they write are harmless referencing that their claims that their "pen is not a sword" it is in fact mightier as it is used to torture and slander the good name of a person. But Michael's wrath isn't just as those that produce a tabloid story but also those so eager to eat it up - as he says "to read it sanctifies it" and the stories would not be written if they couldn't be sold to a gossip hungry public.

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". Too often we all accept the media as the authority of a message rather than question the factuality of it.

Michael cleverly layers various pieces of gossip throughout the song ranging from speculation over his sexuality to reports of his eccentricities highlighting the ridiculousness and questioning the validity of such "news".

'Tabloid Junkie' remains a convincing, and warranted, response to the media madness that revolved around him and implores us all to realise the line between fact and fiction and not be so willing to buy into the tabloid machine.



Sequenced as the double punch that follows 'Tabloid Junkie', '2 Bad' brings a battle kicking 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 "try to bring me to my knees". As if entitled to benefit from his suffering and capitalize on his pain, Michael takes aim at those "crying wolf" with baseless lies who claim "you ain't done enough for me" and those busy avoiding suspicion by "throwing rocks to hide your hands".

Here Michael is aware of the line between friend and foe, between those there to support him and those who "just want your cut from me". But turning the tables, and getting wise to their motivation Michael isn't going to play their game, as if saying "You expecting something for nothing from me? Well, too bad".

A standout feature here is the way Michael works his backing vocals mixing both high refrains of "yeah yeah" with extended brooding low ones to convey his defiance and disdain. They are expressive and border on taunting and he thrills.

This defiance is evident in the confrontational nature of the lyrics as Michael questions the validity of rumours and innuendo in the shape of people "telling what somebody told". The fixation on his downfall, the "blood lust" of the media and others looking to cash in on his demise, is rebuked as Michael retakes his place "right back where I wanna be" and how despite their best efforts to tear him down he is "standing thought you're kicking me". All the plans, all the secret deals, all the deception was for nought as Michael stands victorious and defiantly above them all.

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, cutting edge depicting the frantic back stabbing nature and assault Michael had been subjected to. It's during the rap and final choruses that the funk infused horns are really dialled up almost jolting the listener with their alternating short stabs and long runs.

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 buried deep within what feels like a deceptively sparse mix that you had never noticed before.





With the whole 'HIStory' project Michael was presenting his side of the story. So the expectation was that the title track would be a deeply personal song once more dealing with the whirlwind that had engulfed his life. Instead Michael chose to present a broader, more universal telling of ambition and wanting to leave one's mark on the pages of HIStory as well as the lessons that could be learnt from knowing the stories of the past.

Ambitious in its undertaking 'HIStory' aims for epicness incorporating audio snapshots of some of history's greatest moments into the musical arrangement of the track.

Set against snippets of Mussorgsky's 'The Great Gate of Kiev' taken from 'Pictures at an Exhibition' and 'Beethoven Lives Upstairs' are famous samples from the Eulogy of Robert Kennedy, Lou Gehrig's "Farewell to Baseball", Muhammad Ali's famous "I am the Greatest of All Time", Edison's reciting of 'Mary Had A Little Lamb' (believed to be the first audio recording in history) coupled with an 1888 advertisement recording for the Edison Phonograph, as well as samples of 'Greetings to the Children of England' by (then) Princess Elizabeth and Princess Margaret, and Martin Luther King's famous 'I Have A Dream' speech. Also included is an early interview recording of Michael himself from 1970. Interestingly the track begins with two historic dates - Monday March 26 1827 (the death of Beethoven) and November 28, 1929 (the birth of Berry Gordy) - as Michael draws a direct link between the master of classical music and the pioneer of modern music. These audio snippets are used to give the impression of travelling through time and sets the scene for the song.

With a whomping stomp the track kicks in as Michael sings about the driving nature of ambition, and how what might be a setback to one person can be a motivating force to another who will take "his place in world history".

Countering the personal drive narrative in the verse, the pre-chorus looks at the lessons that history can provide us and how the failures of war should not be the blueprint for our future, but sadly we are destined to repeat history if we don't change our ways.

The chorus, taking on a third musical movement, highlights the importance of today and the gift that the present offers each of us. In today we have a chance to leave a mark, and opportunity which should make the most of every day.

Switching between musically driving and inspiring verses, the song teeters on the edge of being too saccharine during the uplifting choruses. It's classic Michael painting with lush broad strokes as he creates an anthemic piece that contains all the bluster and bloom of a national anthem.

Hours spent on producing and arranging the song are self evident as the listener is taken on a historical journey through a kaleidoscope of audio grabs and historic dates that check off Rosa Park's refusal to give up her seat to a white passenger, to the fall of the Berlin wall, to the birth of John Lennon, to the first shuttle flight.

As it began, the song ends with more snippets of audio ending with Neil Armstrong's famous words uttered as he descended down a ladder and stepped onto the surface of the moon "It's one small step for man... one giant leap for mankind". Rather than an allusion to his own historic moonwalk, choosing to end on this quote pays tribute to the power of dreams and echoes the theme of drive and determination.

It's a clear statement that what can seem impossible can be made possible with true unquitting ambition and a desire to leave one's mark - whether on the surface of the moon, or in the history of music.





Hauntingly beautiful 'Little Susie' was a daring inclusion to the HIStory album for several reasons. With the majority of the album featuring hard hitting beats and even harder hitting lyrics the inclusion of a song that borders on classical was surely disruptive, yet alone a song focused squarely on the issue of child abuse and neglect.

Originally sketched out lyrically back in 1979 Michael revisited this tale of sorrow and reworked its composition for inclusion on HIStory. Beginning with a replaying of 'Pie Jesu' from Durufle's 'Requiem' the song brings a sense of forboding to the listener as we are introduced to Susie through the melody of her jewellery box.

Augmented with 'Sunrise Sunset' from 'Fiddler on the Roof' Michael is making a musical commentary on the passing of time and a transitioning from childhood to adulthood, a journey that is robbed from Little Susie in her death.

Dramatically poetic Michael recounts the death of Little Susie, a victim of abuse and neglect whose passing resulted from a (push) fall down a set of stairs. Michael removes any doubts that this was an accidental death as he paints the scene, opening with the confronting "Somebody killed Little Susie the girl with the tune".

His description of her neglect and ongoing abuse is evidence by her screaming and "beating her voice in her doom" but her pleas for assistance fall on deaf ears.

As a commentary on our society that turns a blind eye to confronting issues Michael pinpoints how concern for her only came after her death when finally she became visible to the gathering crowd.

Having suffered through the death of her mother and wayward father Susie was left all alone in the world and her plight and desperation was soul destroying for her. With no safety, no protection she was "damned to know hoping was dead", her fate tragically sealed. The only sign of concern and act of kindness afforded her - "lift her with care" - came too late.

A song about child abuse and neglect would be a tough subject to get across to an audience at any time let alone in the spectre of what Michael had gone through. Its inclusion underscores both Michael's ability to cross genres with ease and write convincingly in any he chose to dabble in, but also shows his bravery as an artist.

Without doubt 'Little Susie' is confronting and haunting, and it is also daring. This isn't a safe dance floor filler or even saccharine pop ballad, this is a risk both musically and lyrically. For someone often labelled as playing safe 'Little Susie' provides the counter argument. And does so beautifully and convincingly.



Michael had often been asked through his career what his favourite song was. And whilst most expected him to answer with R&B or soul standards he would often surprise them with classical songs, or ballads. Amongst his favourites was the Charlie Chaplin penned 'Smile', a song that took on a greater personal meaning as Michael began healing from the emotional scars of the years that preceeded him.

With orchestral accompaniment, Michael delivers a heartfelt rendition of the song. "Smile, though your heart is aching / Smile, even though it's breaking / When there are clouds in the sky / You'll get by" he sings with a sense of innocence and hope. His voice is soulful, honest and pure.

Relating to the lyrics about putting on a brave face in the face of pain and adversity wouldn't have been a difficult ask of Michael. The way his voice soars through the melody gives it a sense of joyfulness, perhaps healing the pain with every line.

Listen to the breakdown when it's just Michael's voice set against the strings. He conveys a myriad of emotions in just a few lines from a sense of despair in his quivering voice as he sings "That's the time you must keep on trying / Smile what's the use of crying".

He then quickly turns to hopeful, singing "You'll find that life is still worth while..." before finding the joy in the moment delivering "if you just smile" with a chuckle.

It's in these moments of just Michael's voice and the orchestra that the beauty and pathos of the song comes through. The dated and forced inclusion of a drum machine and synth has the song teetering on kitsch, but it's here with Michael's voice, orchestra backing and outro piano that the purity of the song really comes across.

There is joy evident in the outro as Michael just hums and sings along, laughing and whistling with a carefree nature, a hope that his worries are behind him.

From a 'Scream' to a 'Smile'.

That's the journey of HIStory.

From justified anger and bluster to sweet happiness. A journey of injustice. A journey of strength. A journey of resilience.

Perhaps there is no better illustration in Michael's long career of his inner strength, in his ability to survive, in his ability to transcend rough times and come out the other side just as hopeful and optimistic as the sequencing of this album. The ability to still see and relish hope is a rare gift, and one most of us would fail to possess. We'd still be angry. We'd still be hurt. But instead Michael seems to place it all behind him and rather than let the hurt and anger consume him he will simply smile.

As a listener the very last thing we hear on the album is Michael's laugh. Quite a journey and quite a resolve indeed.



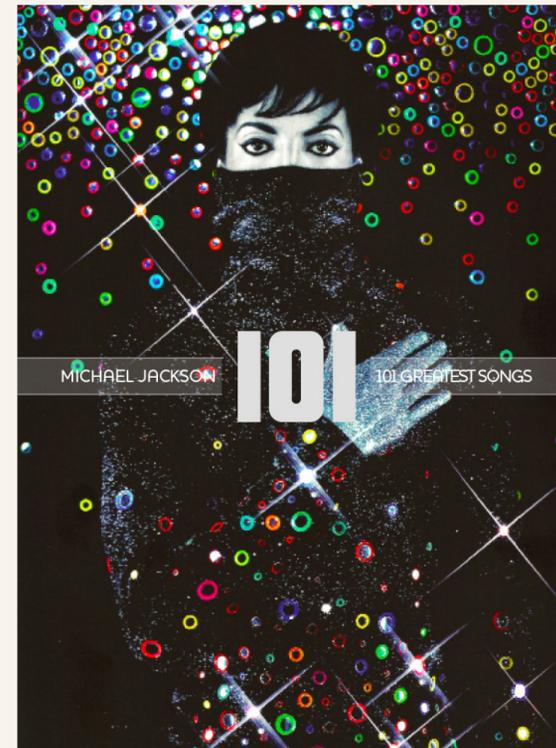


I hope this exploration into HIStory has made you want to revisit and dig deeper into the album and give it another listen. Send comments, feedback and thoughts to mj101@outlook.com



mj101.squarespace.com
twitter: @mj_1_0_1





MJ 101 - 101 Greatest Songs



MJ 101 - The Short Films

Also available at mj101.squarespace.com



MJ 101 - The Remixes



MJ 101 - The Performances

MICHAEL JACKSON

101

HISTORY

