



MICHAEL JACKSON

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DANGEROUS



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MICHAEL JACKSON



DANGEROUS

Dedicated to Michael for proving that great artists can never be counted out, for continuing to strive for new musical horizons and always reaching for the stars.

This special Dangerous 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.





# 25 DANGEROUS

**F**or an artist to develop, one has to step outside their comfort zone and grow. This truth Michael knew well. He had done it before when he and his brother's left Motown in pursuit of greater artistic freedom. Done it when he stepped apart from his brothers to pursue a (adult) solo career. And after a triumphant trifecta of solo recordings with producer Quincy Jones, he was once more ready to take another step and assume complete control over his creative output and vision by leading the charge on the creative endeavour that would become *Dangerous*.

Initially conceived as a safer, less daunting project than a whole new album, Michael began work on a handful of new songs to complement a planned greatest hits package entitled *Decade*. As the creative process developed though Michael soon became excited about the future of his music and less so about revisiting the success of his past, and so the writing continued and the *Dangerous* album was born.

Initially Michael began creative sessions with Bryan Loren (of which tracks like 'Do The Bart Man' and 'Superfly Sister' would immerge) and with Kenny "Babyface" Edmonds and LA Reid. However, the output of the sessions weren't pushing Michael in the direction he wanted to move in. So he switched gears shifting his energy to the work he was creating with producer Bill Bottrell and later Teddy Riley to achieve the sound he was looking for.

Recorded between June 25, 1990 and October 29, 1991 the album soon began to take shape. Producing all tracks and writing (or co-writing) 12 out of 14, 'Dangerous' saw Michael further refine his skills as singer, songwriter, lyricist, musician, and producer giving the album a more mature feel and broader musical landscape to dance across. It also allowed him to push for a greater contrast between the darker moods of the album and its lighter, more joyful elements.

Mixing and mining genres as diverse as hip hop, new jack swing, classical, pop, rock, gospel, funk, and R&B, *Dangerous* blends these styles in such a way that delivers an album that is at once varied and, to many, Michael's most cohesive effort.

Released on November 26, 1991, *Dangerous* would chart the world over, spawn 9 hit singles and put the focus once more on Michael's music and artistry above all else.

25 years after its release *Dangerous* not only stands the test of time, it actively defies it. The beats, sounds and melodies it contains still echo in the R&B and Pop of today.

More importantly Michael fashioned an album that was truly of his making and proved to the doubters that his success wasn't beholden to the mastery of Quincy Jones. That perhaps he was, in fact, the secret sauce all along.

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DANGEROUS

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DANGEROUS

Shattering glass welcomes us on a new chapter of Michael Jackson's musical journey. It's as if sonically, Michael is shattering any expectations we may have as to what a new album should or would contain. This isn't going to be a rehash of *Thriller* or *Bad*. This is Michael breaking into a new direction with new musical landscapes to explore and conquer.

Built on an initial bare-boned groove created by Renee Moore and Bruce Swedien during one of their writing sessions, Michael began fleshing out the structure of 'Jam' whilst being ably assisted by Teddy Riley who helped propel the track into a blistering full-on funk assault.

Adding what Riley would call the "icing" to the track, he built upon the bed of synths, layering extra percussive elements, augmenting and fleshing out Michael's vocalised horn scats with actual horns and sampling, and laying down guitar parts to nudge the track into more of a hip-hop neighbourhood without jettisoning the key elements that had made the track a mainstay of the *Dangerous* sessions since they began a few years earlier in 1989.

On first listen 'Jam' sounds like the quintessential dance track with uber hard hitting beats, funk fuelled guitar riffs and stabbing horn jabs. But dig deeper into the track and start to listen to the lyrical content and you'll find quite the atypical 'dance' narrative focused not on partying or love but rather on world affairs.

Inspired in part by sister Janet's work on her 'Rhythm Nation 1814' album as well as his updated global view resulting

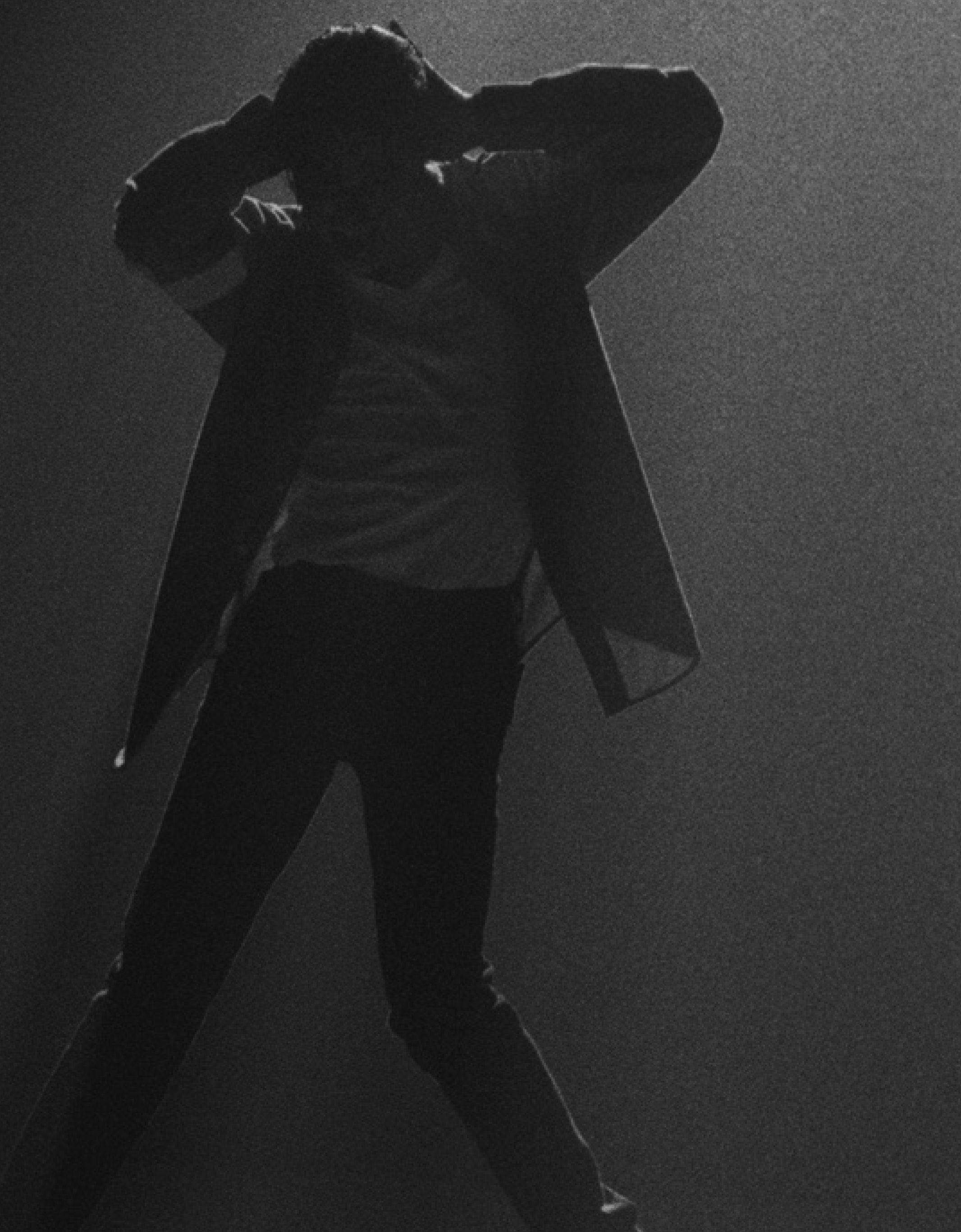
from the world mapping 'Bad Tour', this is an increasingly socially aware Michael reflecting on both the promise and ills of the world at large.

As a funky "State of the Global Nation" Michael addresses the plight of civil unrest and natural catastrophes the whole world faces and sets this against the backdrop of our unwillingness, as individuals, to be involved.

When he sings "Nation to Nation / All the world must come together / Face the problems that we see / and maybe somehow we can work it out", Michael is not only calling for a collective effort but places the power to find solutions in the hands of the everyday person and not the powers that govern over them. He is also acutely aware that on the heels of the 80s glorified "ME decade", our priorities have shifted inwards and that we have become too concerned with our own personal well being over that of our fellow neighbour.

Not immune from selfish thoughts and values, Michael at first laments having his plea for help denied in the first verse but succumbs to these selfish norms in the second verse as he sings, "I told 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 and he looks to the generation he is apart of to help. As part of the Baby Boomer generation - history's biggest period of population growth - Michael sees his place alongside others in a collective responsibility and hints at a time when the hopeful and optimistic ideals of youth need to come to fruition with decisive action and aid a world in



constant flux.

He also touches on a sense of spiritual confusion and disconnectedness, with people seemingly willing to pray and do anything to find peace as if happier chasing a religious trend rather than searching for a connected and more spiritually centered truth.

In his own search for inner peace, Michael finds his salvation in music. Throughout his life music has offered him a refuge, a sanctuary, from the confusions and pressure of a demanding and confusing world. When it all gets too much, he escapes to the music. To his 'Jam'.

In the prelude to the rap section we are hit with glorious horn runs that harken back to the signature horn lines of 'Shake Your Body (Down To The Ground)' and 'Lovely One' whilst still feeling current and urgent.

Using Riley stablemate Heavy D on the rap is a genius stroke to meld the sound of the street with the melodic sensibilities of MJ. And here, it fits hand in sequined glove.

Heavy D's rhymes are deliberately playful and echo more the party vibe of the underpinning music and chorus than touching upon the heavy (pun intended) subject matter of the verses. Whether intentional or (more likely) purely coincidental, Heavy's reference to the "Big Boy stands" and call out to 'Smooth Criminal' can represent a subtext to the keen Jackson observer as a nod to Michael's career spanning achievements that started with 'Big Boy' being the minor label first single from The Jackson 5 during their humble

beginnings in Gary. This could be a powerful illustration of how young 'Big Boy' Michael has grown and transcended the segregated confines of his childhood to become the record breaking, all conquering 'Smooth Criminal' that now dominates and redefined pop culture.

Or it could just be a reference to Heavy D's own girth. You decide.

As Heavy continues, he also links to his own career progression from being a fan to working alongside "my man" and dotting his 6-degrees of separation namechecking his work with sister Janet, Teddy's band Guy, and now here appearing on the lead track to a Michael Jackson album.

Opening a Michael Jackson album with an extended dance groove was in no way a new move, and some may argue was indeed a safe bet, but with 'Jam' Michael transcends the dance floor and moves into more of a political and socially conscious space. Whereas previous openers either seduced like 'Don't Stop 'Til You Get Enough' or lifted you up like 'Wanna Be Startin' Somethin'', 'Jam' is almost unrelenting with its power and hard hitting beats. It's a fitting entre into the more modern and progressive sounds of the New Jack Swing era but done in a way that doesn't mimic or present itself as a soundalike but pushes the genre forward.

As Michael was often prone to do, he wraps his message inside an irresistible beat. Called a 'Trojan horse' songwriter by some observers for this subversive skill, it's the message of 'Jam' and its ongoing relevancy to today's world that makes it a constant fan favourite and worthy of closer look.





One of the songs that brought Teddy Riley to the attention of Michael was his (initially uncredited) work on Bobby Brown's breakthrough hit 'My Prerogative'.

Despite not getting his dues when the song was first released (Riley's name is omitted from first pressings of the single and album) the track is pretty much a blueprint for the whole New Jack Swing sound that would dominate the late 80s and early 90s R&B scene.

So it's no surprise that when tapped for the *Dangerous* sessions one of the tracks Riley was interested in developing with co-writer Bernard Belle was a song that tackled the constant barrage of attacks Michael suffered and penning his response a la 'My Prerogative'

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 ours and the media's preoccupation with his life (and by broader strokes, celebrity in general) at the sacrifice of the real world issues going on all 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.

Rattling off the real issues that should be getting media coverage and airtime over celebrity lives, Michael touches on "world hunger", "school teachers who don't wanna teach" and "strange diseases but there's no cure" before simply asking, in the light of all that is going on, "Why you wanna trip on me?"

The chorus unfurls with its multi-stacked

harmonies begging, "Why, why, why?" driving home the point in a way that is seductive rather than confronting, allowing that burst of anger to hit in Michael's lead vocal.

One of *Dangerous*' sparsest tracks, the instrumentation in 'Why you Wanna Trip On Me' is kept to a minimum with just the beat and funk guitar riffing behind Michael's lead vocals in the verses. It's only in the chorus that extra arrangement comes in to help flesh out and lift the track.

The song shunts and jostles through its 5+ minute runtime like a heavy locomotive barreling down the tracks. This single-minded groove doesn't let up and the arrangement stays locked on, dispersing with any need for diversionary bridge or momentary pause. There's an underlying aggression present, not only in the hurtling groove but also in the way Michael spits out the lyrics. There is a bitter disdain for the hypocrisy of our global interests and celebrity fixation.

The final coda plays out like a grinding system malfunctioning and struggling to reset before buckling under its own weight and wheezing its last breath. It's as if we are running out of time to correct our focus. After spending much of his life the victim of such tabloid misdirection, Michael is no longer pleading but almost warning us to get right before it's too late.

Funky and fierce, 'Why You Wanna Trip On Me' is Michael firing on a social consciousness tip. It has almost become the unofficial song in his career long battle with a tabloid press and holds a mirror up to our own off kilter values and priorities. And in a world still obsessed with instafamous celebrity, it is now more pressing and relevant than ever



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.

For an artist with a cultivated 'Peter Pan of Pop' persona this was a daring if not bold move. And whilst his contemporaries such as Prince and Madonna had well and truly crossed this threshold, for Michael this was relatively new territory. Sure, he had explored carnal desires before but everything was hinted to or alluded to. 'In The Closet' by comparison was more straightforward and up-front about his sexual desires, the exploration of sexual pleasure and his own sexual expression.

The provocative title was guaranteed to pique our collective curiosity but from the outset Michael reframes our expectations with regards to the content making the song decidedly heterosexual and letting us know this is an exploration of desire "woman to man".

Contrasting the tracks that had come before it on the album, 'In The Closet' has a fuller, richer sonic texture to it. The groove itself is multilayered with sprinkles of percussive accents from clav sticks to chimes to subtle rim shots all designed to constantly draw the listener further into the track. Augmented with Michael's own beat boxing and ad-libs the underpinning groove becomes hypnotic and fittingly seductive.

Lyrically, Michael charts the song with a sense of built up desire. There is anticipation, flirtation, seduction and finally, copulation. The first verse focuses on building desires under the driving beat whilst the pre-chorus offers tempting invitation with as

"She wants to give it / ahhh she wants to give it" is set against Michael's ad-libs of "Dare me?". As raw a proposition as this is, Michael underpins it with a sweetness via the swooping "ooooh - ooooo" of the backing harmonies.

In the second verse Michael succumbs to the desires letting us know "you cannot waste it" and the return to the pre-chorus now has Michael confirming, "She's gonna get it".

As the chorus hits with its intoxicating "There's something about you baby / that makes me want to give it to you" the deal is sealed. The only condition is that this sexual tryst be kept under the covers or, in this case, "in the closet". Here, Michael seeks intimacy with caution. Love without being sold out. It's not a far reach that for a man whose every facet of life has been sold for tabloid copy that there is a reticence to trust and fully give of himself. And so he pleads, "Just promise me whatever we say or do to each other", that this most intimate of shared private life remains private.

Musically at the 4 minute mark there is a swirling build to ecstatic release as Michael allows himself to be carried away with emotion as he ad-libs his way through the final moments.

A true master of melodic and vocal hooks, Michael 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", he continues to draw you in.

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





So far on our *Dangerous* journey Michael has presented his take on New Jack Swing. Each song taking the style and playing with it, reinventing it and pushing it forwards. By contrast 'She Drives Me Wild' doesn't try to mess with it and instead seems content to just fully embrace the style and present the key elements to the listener.

The only real moment of inventiveness is the way that various car sounds are manipulated to create the musical landscape from tooting car horns, to speeding tyre skids, to slamming doors, to revving motors, creating a looping, and infectious groove.

During the *Dangerous* sessions 'She Drives Me Wild' languid a little as a cool groove but not much more. It wasn't until Michael began to flesh it out with vocal melodies that the song truly became a serious contender. With rhythmically charged vocals Michael blurs the line between singing and rapping in the verses before dropping some simple yet hooky backing vocals for the chorus.

Brief and to the point 'She Drives Me Wild' doesn't pretend to be any more than it is; a killer new jack song aimed squarely at the street and dance floor. Not unlike many of the other new jack tracks of its day, it's built on a solid groove that propels the track forward. Not as hook driven as many of the other songs on the album it is a bit of a departure on Michael's insistence on great grooves *and* great melodies. This time however, Michael was content to stay firmly grounded in the groove, drop in a hint of hip-hop production and let the beat drive the song.

One of the clear-cut dance tracks off *Dangerous*, 'She Drives Me Wild' remains fresh and playful. And despite being one of Michael's lesser known songs, it is one that always delights new listeners due to its unapologetic new jack roots.



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 thus far, 'Remember The Time' is joyful in its whimsical reminiscence on a relationship that lingers in one's heart and mind.

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

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

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 carefree feelings of *Off The Wall*'s finer moments. This, of course, was by design with Michael and Teddy composing a song that simultaneously looked back to the beautiful melodies of the past and looked forward to the future of R&B and New Jack Swing.

At first listen the arrangement may seem sparse and more typical of the bare bones approach of many a New Jack track. But it deceives in its simplicity as repeated listens reveal a song with a lot of hidden warmth and depth within its layers upon layers of little musical nuances.

In the intro alone, accompanying the dominant bubbling organ there's slinky synth bass runs, jutting synth horn stabs and building strings that add an instant warmth to the track.

Listen carefully also to the verses leading up to the chorus. There layered amongst Michael's backing vocals of "I betcha remember" you will also hear Michael

mimicking the bass line notes, vocalising "do da do do do" buried deep in the mix, barely audible at first pass.

It's all these little elements coupled with Michael's pure joy at singing this song (one can almost hear his smile in the recording) that makes 'Remember The Time' still sound fresh and inviting 25 years later.

Lyrically the way the song is structured it can take on 2 meanings. The first, being a simple reflection on the innocence and safety of young love. Whilst the second can be seen as an attempt for reconciliation with Michael reminding his love of their connection in the hopes of rekindling that flame.

Unlike other songs on the album, such as 'In The Closet' or 'Give In To Me' that deal more with an overpowering sexual desire, 'Remember The Time' holds an innocence and romanticism to it that reminds us of first love. There's a halo effect on the memories, presenting them in the golden glow of nostalgia that has Michael wondering "so why did it end?" Rather than examine the reason for the breakup, Michael is more interested in recapturing that feeling by living in the memory of a special love.

Together with the then unreleased, 'Blood On The Dance Floor', 'Remember The Time' was one of the first track that Michael and Teddy Riley collaborated on and it would lay the foundation and set the benchmark for other tracks to follow.

And whilst, for many, it might not be a song of Michael's 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 loving it by the time the first chorus hits.





## CAN'T LET HER GET AWAY

Closing out the 6 song run of New Jack Swing inspired tracks, 'Can't Let Her Get Away' does what it is tasked to do. It delivers a pure dance oriented track to those fans who had felt Michael's sound had drifted from the streets and dance clubs.

Whilst not an overly strong stand out on *Dangerous*, the song still has elements that make it fun to listen to starting with that vamp that builds the excitement and anticipation, harkening back to vaudeville, the Apollo and the ilk of James Brown and the Famous Flames.

So it's no surprise that when the beat drops 'Can't Let Her Get Away' dials up the funk within its new jack packaging with Brown-esque horn stabs and incessant guitar picking.

Whilst the beat alone is straight forward and borders on generic, what elevates it is the constant and exuberant beat boxing of Michael's - complete with lip smacks and accented gasps. There's

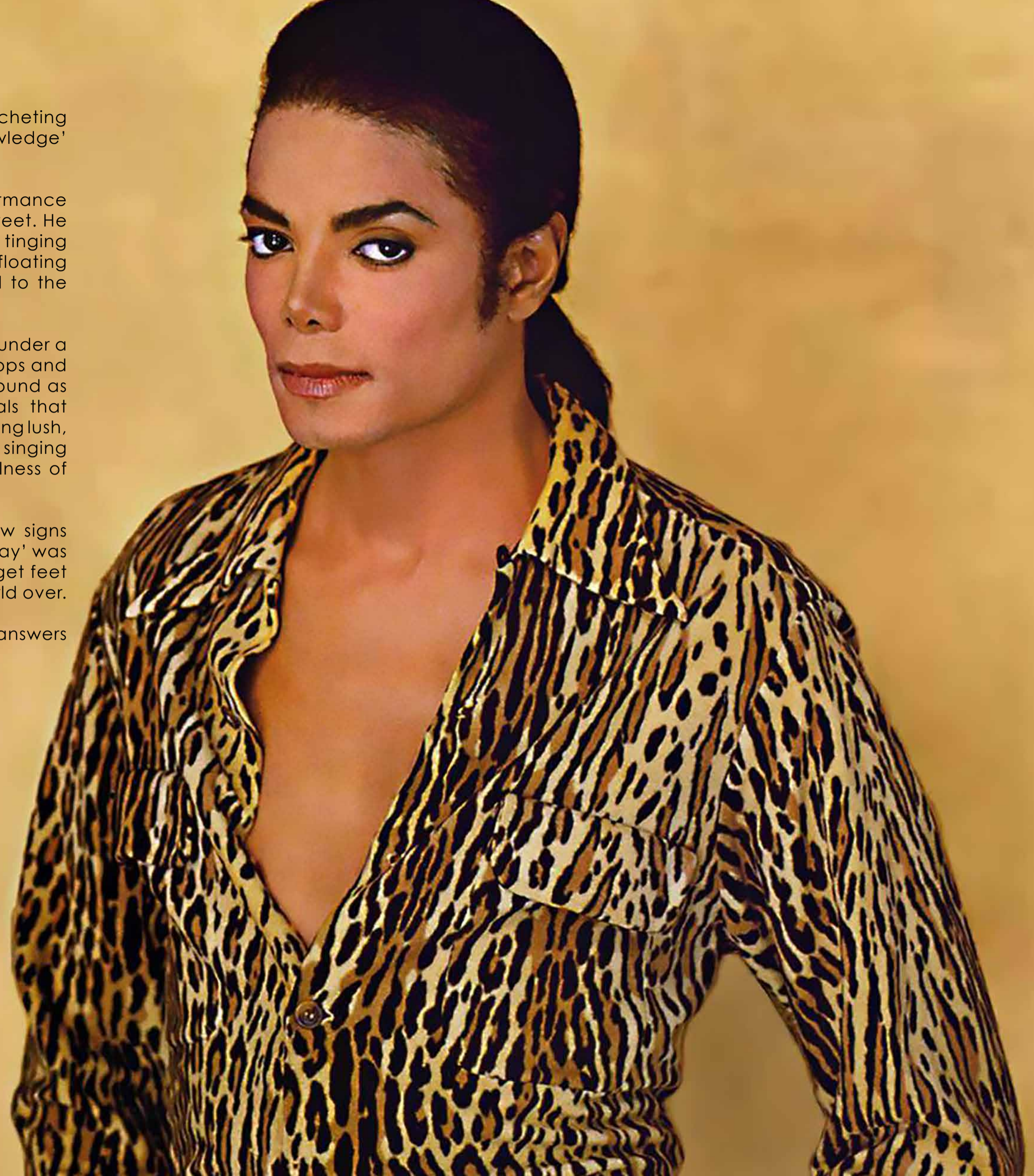
even elements of metallic ratcheting a la Janet Jackson's 'The Knowledge' thrown in for good measure.

Vocally, Michael gives a performance that is equal parts gutsy and sweet. He attacks each line in the verses, tinging them with lament, before floating above the despair in the build to the chorus.

Even in the breakdown section under a more hip-hop inspired mix of loops and scratches, Michael holds his ground as he spits out syncopated vocals that verge towards rap before unveiling lush, warm harmonies that glide in singing "Can't Let Go" with the soulfulness of his Motown days.

Although it's beginning to show signs of aging, 'Can't Let Her Get Away' was designed first and foremost to get feet moving on dance floors the world over.

And on that count, it more than answers that brief.



Michael was no stranger to the global anthem by the time *Dangerous* was released. One need only look at his work as co-writer of 'We Are The World' to see that he well and truly knew the power of a simple, singable melody to push forward a social agenda and affect change.

Even earlier in his cannon Michael had touched on social issues such as a plea for global unity in 'Can You Feel It' as well as the issues of poverty, famine and the pointless suffering of war via 'Be Not Always'. Additionally a composition called 'What About Us' (later renamed 'Earth Song') was also up for consideration for *Dangerous*. So in this context, a song like 'Heal The World' becomes almost mandatory if not inevitable.

Originally composed as 'Feed The World' (a title that might have seemed borrowed from Band-Aid's charity single 'Do They Know It's Christmas' with the same refrain) 'Heal The World' was a song that came together almost instantly. Composing lyric and melody simultaneously, it's been reported that it took only 20 minutes to write. This might be due to the relative simplicity of its melody (in stark contrast to a song such as 'Earth Song') but it's this simplicity that makes it instantly accessible to listeners of every age the world over.

With its folksy arrangement and borderline nursery rhyme vocal melody 'Heal The World' is a song of refuge and hope. From the opening line Michael presents us with access to an utopian existence and shows how its path is laid in the love in our hearts. Here there is no pain, no sorrow, no hunger, no war. And the way to get there is to 'care enough for the living' both in a human existence perspective but also for all living things including mother nature herself. All it takes is to keep a part of you heart open, or as Michael sings, 'Make a little space.'

Lyrical and melodically twee, the chorus

hones in on his message of shedding one's own (selfish) concerns and instead shifting focus to the needs of those around us, and in doing so, we will all reap the rewards. But it is done with almost cringeworthy clichés that ultimately lessens the power of its message. There's no denying Michael's earnestness here, but the desire to present the message in a simple singsong way so that (especially) a child could sing, it sees it drift into overly sweet and saccharine territory.

It's really only in the bridge that the lyrics move from Hallmark to true poetry, and once more in the final verse when Michael references the book of Isaiah 2:4 suggesting the nations of the world pursue beneficial rather than destructive tools and turn their 'swords into ploughshares'.

With musical backing supplied, in no small part, by the members of Toto (a mainstay of many a Michael recording session) the song lifts and lifts in the final moments with each successive pass of the chorus. Even then though the result is more Disneyesque than powerful. Deliberately designed to hook in and uplift the listener it at once succeeds in doing so, but does without real conviction. Maybe its just a tinge too cutesy to be taken seriously.

And that's a shame as, for Michael, this would become a centerpiece for his push into the realm of charitable foundation and a heartfelt commitment to really try and make a change in the world - and through his 'Heal The World' foundation he would. But such worthy and commendable humanitarian efforts deserved a more inspiring theme song. Especially when the far superior and musically rich and daring 'Earth Song' was on offer.

At the end of the day though, this was the song Michael wanted to present, and one of the songs he was most proud of writing. Whilst it may feel too sweet and idealistic, its heart is in the right place.







The ideal choice for lead single, 'Black or White' encapsulates the best parts of *Dangerous* and Michael's new musical terrain in its punchy 3 plus minutes. The way it fused a great rock riff with pop sensibilities and a healthy helping of rap, it was the perfect declaration of where Michael's music was heading.

While the whole misunderstood kid and overbearing father exchange ("It's too late!") overstayed its welcome by around 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 (Michael had not publicly acknowledged his vitiligo at this stage), 'Black Or White' continued to put forward Michael's "one world" ideology and the idea of looking at a person's character not their skin tone.

'Black Or White' with its skipping, shuffling groove grabs you from the first beat and doesn't let go. The guitar hook is as classic a rock riff as anything from The Rolling Stones (and likely inspired by), and Michael's vocals (taken from the first take) are totally on point. Whereas at other points on the album 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.

Like he had done with 'Jam', Michael presents lyrics that are deeper than one initially thinks when first hearing them. There's a hint to an interracial relationships and the prejudice that goes along with it in the observation "Boy, is that girl with you?" that is lost on most listeners. His reply, "Yes, we're one and the same" reaffirms his "we are all one" belief that he first touted in 'Can You Feel It'.

There is a sweetness and almost romantic tone in this opening verse as Michael professes, "I believe in miracles / and a miracle has happened tonight".

Compare this to the second verse where his tone becomes sharper as he lays out his take on equality. Again the line, "I ain't second to none" could be seen as simple cocksure boasting (a la 'Bad') but when presented against the backdrop of equality this is a riff on 'All men are created equal' and quite the politically charged statement. For Michael, prejudice or preference has no bearing on his view of people. It doesn't come down to one's skin colour but rather "wrong or right".

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

The song dramatically shifts gears in the breakdown segment as Michael focuses squarely on social injustice and bristles with anger as he alludes to racism caused by either "brothers" or "sheets" as being equally reprehensible. The raucous guitar track searing underneath echoes his frustrations as it grinds and fires like a machine gun.

Then, just as his anger reaches breaking point the track shuts and shunts into an infectious funk groove complete with chicken scratching on the guitar underpinning 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".

Having confronted the issue of racism head on, 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 in the lyrics is played off against the sublimely joyous backing vocals that coax you to sing along with each infectious “yeah yeah yeah”.

Once 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 “Shamone” uttered under his breath in the final moment of the track.

For an artist often criticised for playing it safe and chasing hits, ‘Black or White’ is quite an unusual and unexpected composition that would challenge expectations.

Its multigenre melding buzz of activity should be seen as inspired rather than calculated. It's a song that dares to be pigeon holed - is it rock, pop, hip-hop? The lack of a real chorus hook - in fact no chorus at all - is also something often overlooked, especially for a lead single from a “Pop” artist, and doubly so for a song that would chart at number 1 the world over.

In retrospect it is easy to see it as a foregone conclusion that ‘Black or White’ would be a hit. But to be selected as first single when perhaps other more “current” and radio friendly songs were available was indeed a brave move. Perhaps because it was one of the very first songs Michael worked on when he began recording for the abandoned *Decade* album the overall inventiveness of the track may have been minimized to the team. Seeing it rapidly ascend the charts proved it was a wise choice, but its success shouldn't undermine just how bold a choice it was. On paper, a multigenre socially conscious no chorus singalong track shouldn't work. But it does and does so well.

In fact, it's surprising to note is that in a era of music lauded for, and perhaps defined by the birth of grunge, ‘Black or White’ would go on to become the biggest selling rock single of the 90s. And it still sounds just as vibrant and vital.







**W**ith 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.

The introduction is a serene and heavenly siren song that draws you in; it's the lightness and purity of love. The innocence, and perhaps naivety, of it is soon taken over by a darker more jarring reality.

With a heavy plodding bass line, the drums pound in unison as they swing. Every 1 count hits heavier and harder than the rest - a key accent of funk - as the impending doom approaches.

Lyricaly, the desperation and paranoia that follows a breakup is palpable in the way Michael sings with a mix 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 at his own culpability 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 see his pain as he suffers 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, Michael layers the song with several melodic hooks without straying too far from the firm groove of its foundation. This allows moments of punctuating strings and lush synth beds to draw the listener deeper

and deeper into the track. Each musical refrain seems to ratchet up and tighten the tension a little more, as if dragging us spiralling down into the depression of heartbreak and love lost.

Without doubt this is 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. There's a darkness that looms over the song. Even when there is a momentary lift in the music at each pre-chorus it quickly descends back into turmoil.

In the choruses Michael also chooses to keep it tight and minimal. Gone are the rich multi-stacked harmonies we are so used to. Instead, Michael keeps it simple with a narrower harmonic blend that feels like the recriminations that swirl in one's head, berating your actions over and over.

With its running time of 6.34 'Who Is It' remains keenly focused and never for a moment feels too long or even gives a 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 most personal.

Like many of his other darker tinted views on relationships (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 both writer and producer. Just himself. His heart and his talent. Raw and honest. And immediately intriguing.

It remains one of the brilliant high points in an album that is jam packed with them.



## GIVE IN TO ME

Some critics of Michael's work often pointed to a style over substance belief as justification to dismiss or belittle his artistry. Confusing the tabloid persona with the artist on record, critics 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 soon discover that throughout his career for every fantasy driven song critics would point to as justification for their rationale and limited viewpoint (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 In To Me'.

Perhaps they (along with some segments of his fan base) didn't want to see a more mature, sexual Michael. But even as far back as 'Heartbreak Hotel' and 'Don't Stop 'Til You Get Enough' many of his songs had a sensual, if not immediately sexual, component to them. He was a multifaceted man (and as he would profess later in the album, "only human") and 'Give In To Me' is a prime example of this.

Created out of a spontaneous writing session between Bill Bottrell and Michael, the song quickly took shape. With Bill noodling away on his guitar, the main melody began to form while Michael fleshed out the vocal melody with his usual mix of notes, sounds and words. With a refinement of the guitar line under Michael's direction and a further fleshing out of the melody, the chorus quickly fell into place and before long the main structure of the song was forged.

With its haunting guitar melody, 'Give In To 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 ongoing desire 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 the ravenous flames of desire.

The verses act as brooding retellings of the doomed relationship, while each chorus explodes with passion and aggression as Michael demands "Don't try to understand me / simply do the things I say" before unleashing his desire as he sings, "Give it when I want it."

There is a sense of conflict between his carnal desire and his pious beliefs as he collides "satisfy my feeling" with "tell it to the preacher". Simultaneously giving in to, and confessing of, his sin.

Buzzing with electricity, the song is as unpolished a production as you are likely to get from Michael. There's a sense of dust speckled across the high sheen gloss here. Little moments of vocal or guitar distortion, or glitches in recording. This is Michael choosing to preserve passion over perfection in the recording process as he delivers a song that growls out of the speakers.

Adding to the furnace, Slash's guitar solo runs the length of the fret and adds a powerful punch to the song as it dials it all the way up to 11. It's filled with fire as it sears and crackles with energy.

Following the enormous breakthrough success of 'Beat It', Michael's follow-up rockers were constantly and unfairly compared to it, often seen as lesser versions or straight-out 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, he also demonstrates that there is a breadth and depth to his rock songs that goes far beyond just being token or calculated.





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 lyrics; ones that would carry extra weight in the years that followed.

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

With an angelic refrain heralding the transition from one master composer to another, the song begins and we are transported from the purity of the heavens to the reality and struggles of what it means to be human. This idea, the struggles of a human existence, is the cornerstone of 'Will You Be There' making it a listening experience that is rich in emotion and feeling.

Steeped in warm, deep harmonies that swell around him, Michael sings with a sense of honesty that inspires and attracts the listener as he begs for support and compassion, "Hold me, like the river Jordan / And I will then say to thee, you are my friend / Carry me like you are my brother / love me like a mother / will you be there?"

The stripped back arrangement, with its shuffling beat and click-clacking rhythmic accents, lets the vocals truly shine and you can hear the pressures of life cracking in Michael's delivery as he proclaims, "But they told me / A man should be faithful / And walk when not able / And fight to the end / But I'm only human" - a fact lost on many a journalist and fan alike.

As if addressing the price of his fame and his publicly perceived place in the world 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 rises like a gentle climb up to a glorious summit; each step carried by the call and response of Michael and the Andrae Crouch Singers. Each bar pushes higher and higher, gathering the listener up in the process. Echoing the lyrics of the opening verses, the call and response section talks of nourishing the soul and spirit, and renewing one's energy so as to continue on in life triumphantly and feeling fully supported. Here, Michael's voice cracks and strains occasionally as he lets his spirit sing and move him.

The soft, floating landing of the final two minutes allows Michael to reflect on his life in a moving spoken word. Expressing his own vulnerability and fears with words that would become strangely prophetic for the years that would unfold, he asks, "In my darkest hour / in my deepest despair / Will you still care? / Will you be there?" This isn't your usual pop fare and remains one of Michael's purest moments on record. There is a real honesty here and, as Michael would later say, we get to hear the from the "person not the persona". This is Michael emotionally naked, stripped of self-assuredness and ego. He is fearful, concerned and plagued with doubt. What could be taken as a plea to an intimate friend, transcends a one-on-one exchange and taps into a deeper universal truth of the fear and doubt we carry in all of us, and the desire within each of us to find a place where we are understood and accepted. Michael resolves the piece by offering hope within the despair as he talks of renewal in the guise of "the promise of another tomorrow" and the mutual reward of getting support by giving support.

For those distracted by the tabloid fodder and sensational headlines that littered his career, here is the real Michael Jackson. Raw. Honest. Human.





Extending the gospel inspired theme, 'Keep The Faith' picks up where 'Will You Be There' leaves off. Co-written with 'Man In The Mirror' composers Siedah Garrett and Glen Ballard, 'Keep The Faith' sees Michael fully utilising his gospel and soul roots. Due to his songwriting partners, it is often compared to 'Man In The Mirror' but to simply see it as a carbon copy is to do the song a great injustice.

One of the tracks that ran the breadth of the *Dangerous* sessions, the musical accompaniment was recorded months prior to Michael recording his final lead vocals. When it came time for Michael to record his lead, it soon became apparent that the key the song was originally recorded in was placing too much strain on Michael's vocals. Devastated and distraught, Michael fled the recording booth in tears and there were real fears the song might be scrapped. Thanks to the tenacity of engineer Bruce Swedien, the team gathered to fix the key issue and Michael returned to the mic several hours later to deliver the vocal performance you now hear on record.

Brimming with optimism and hope, the song reveals itself like the dawn of a new day. Almost answering the plea for help of 'Will You Be There' with a healthy dose of self-actualisation. Here Michael extols the virtues of belief in oneself and the power to create one's own destiny no matter what obstacles are faced. In a bit of "fake it 'Til you make" philosophy he decrees building determination and drive until "your confidence will win out". No matter how hopeless it feels, he sings, "you got to keep the faith".

Whilst beautifully written and arranged, it doesn't really take hold until Michael shifts from singer to preacher in the third chorus after the bridge. Now things really start to fire up. Michael goes for broke, laying it all out as he delivers line after impassioned

line backed by the Andrea Crouch Singers who help transport us all to another place with one glorious ascending "fai-ith".

Just listen to how Michael attacks each line with all the fervour of a preacher in full conversion mode. He's up there, strutting his stuff, preaching to the congregation and taking us all with him. The final few minutes of the song are worth playing on repeat; one pass to just feel the power of Michael's voice buzzing off the stereo, and another to soak up the heavenly harmonies of the choir.

As the song continues, with each pass of the chorus you expect it to wind down but Michael just ramps it up again and loops us back around before delivering us to the soul packed breakdown. Listen to Michael's voice as he adds subtle trills and bends notes in a way that harkens back to his often overlooked soulful performance of 'You Can't Win' from *The Wiz*. And in the final chorus he adds extra growl to an already sublime performance. Thankfully, Michael refrains from adding a spoken "Keep The Faith" to the choir's final note and lets the impressive power of the preceding 6 minutes just sink in.

Knowing how devastating the previous session must have been for Michael, and the inevitable self-doubt that would have accompanied it, for him to turn it around so completely and deliver one of the most powerful vocals of his career is astounding. It is a testament to the talent and sheer determination he himself displayed. It's as if the lyrics took on extra special meaning in that moment, if Michael was going to get there he had to "dust off your butt / and get your self respect back". And boy did he get there.

Whilst it may not hold the timelessness or connection of 'Will You Be There', 'Keep The Faith' does give it a run for its money and is worthy of revisiting.





**W**ritten by Buz Kohen (who co-wrote 'You Were There' which Michael sang at the Sammy Davis Jr tribute) and Larry Grossman, 'Gone Too Soon' was a song searching for a home. Originally performed by Dionne Warwick in 1983 as a tribute to singers Karen Carpenter and Janis Joplin, the song had never been officially recorded or released.

Recorded in tribute to close friend Ryan White who passed away during the *Dangerous* album due to complications resulting from contracting the HIV/AIDS virus following a blood transfusion 'Gone Too Soon' is a mix of melancholy, lament, reminiscence and hope.

The song has a simple, beautiful melodic structure that mixes loss with hope, sadness with joy and sees Michael step up to the mic to deliver heartfelt vocals that induce goose bumps and tears. The somewhat syrupy and borderline cliché lyrics give the song a Broadway-esque feel to it, but despite this, Michael manages to rescue each line with a sense of humanity. You can hear his heartbreak. This isn't emoting, this is real and personal.

There is a beauty to the sadness, a warm glow that connects us to the loss and shows that when stripped down to the bare minimum Michael can still record a moving vocal.

Sadly 'Gone To Soon' would be a song forever tied to Michael beyond its initial release. When Michael died unexpectedly on June 25, 2009 'Gone Too Soon' became the unofficial soundtrack of the day. 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 behind the microphone delivering those truly heartfelt vocals.



As Michael had often done previously in his career, he began work on the *Dangerous* album by reviewing songs that he had written for other projects. His hope was that a song that wasn't right then might be shaped into something right for this new album. 'Dangerous' was one of those songs.

Originally built around the bass line of one of the Bad era's castoffs, 'Streetwalker', 'Dangerous' evolved into its own musical beast when Bill Bottrell and Michael worked on the track in early 1990. An early demo version of the song can be heard on *The Ultimate Collection* which, by Bottrell's own admission, has a very 80s sound to it. When Teddy Riley was brought on board to give the new project a more pressing, current feel 'Dangerous' was one of the songs ultimately turned over to him. In exploring the transformation of the song its important to go back and listen to the lineage from 'Streetwalker' to Bottrell's take to the final album and see how the song transformed from a dark, brooding track into a taunt, sonic attack that the world would come to know.

The beat coils up in tension as Michael overlays the intros to each verse in a deep spoken rap. Part confessional, part tease Michael pays homage to the film *The Bandwagon* by incorporating key parts of dialogue ('She came at me in sections / the girl was bad / the girl was dangerous') into the narrative.

In the pre-chorus Michael switches gears from spoken word to singing as he moves from observer to participant. Actively engaging the seduction as he begins "walking the line" of betrayal.

As if caught up in the moment, Michael's vocals in the chorus are equally seductive as he elongates and teases out the word 'Dangerous'. Aware of the bitter-sweet nature of the attraction he steadies himself to resist. But he can't.

As the song progresses Michael finds himself caught up in the attraction, guilt ridden in his own betrayal and is left feeling helpless. It's as if the power of lust is all consuming and his actions were almost inevitable. This mix of attraction and confusion comes to a head as Michael revisits the chorus extolling how "I have to pray to God / For I know how lust can blind". It is the constant interplay, (and often conflict) between the divine and human desires that we've seen echoed in Michael's work.

As Michael slides into the bridge he surveys the aftermath of his actions - he is left restless, alone, manipulated and broken. Despite, or perhaps because of, the fallout he finds himself being seduced once more. The adulterous nature of the act is reflected in his reference to Proverbs 5:3-4 which states "For the lips of a strange (forbidden) woman drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil, but in the end she is bitter as gall, sharp as a two-edged sword." As a confession Michael admits it is in fact the forbidden that powers the attraction "But I loved it / 'cause it's dangerous". Michael has succumbed, given in (almost wilfully) and despite knowing it is against his better judgement, cannot resist.

With its smattering of trademark ad-libs, 'Dangerous' crawls along with a sense of menace and impending dread almost stalking the listener. With a familiar narrative at play, Michael once again 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 a solid industrial funk dance floor filler.

One of the few songs Michael continued to tinker with in live performance by constantly stop starting its rhythm, it could suggest a level of dissatisfaction with the final product. But 25 years later 'Dangerous', along with the album it is named after, still sounds as exciting and engaging as it did on that very first listen. And promises to do so for another 25 years.







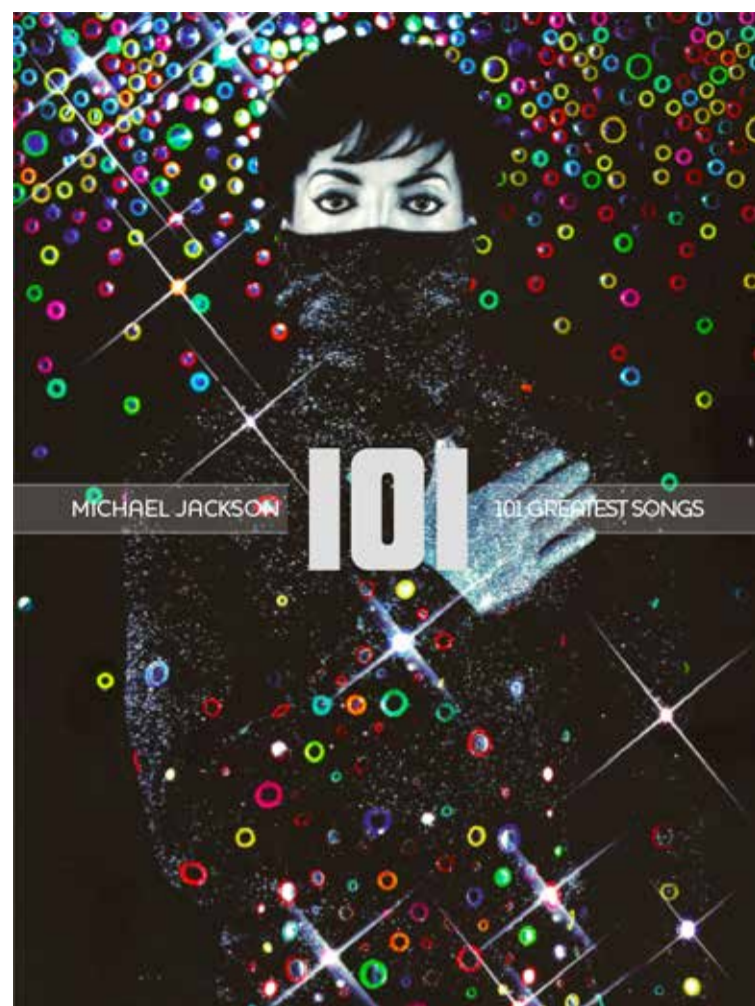
I hope this exploration into Dangerous has made you want to revisit and dig deeper into the album and give it another listen. Send comments, feedback and thoughts to [mj101@outlook.com](mailto:mj101@outlook.com)



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