

"Scared of the Moon"

Date range confirmed by Buz Kohan in Mike Smallcombe's "Making Michael"

Mike Smallcombe, author. Making Michael

One of the earliest completed demos was called 'Scared of the Moon', which Michael worked on in early 1984 with his friend, Buz Kohan. During this period the pair would often have lengthy phone conversations, carrying on late into the night. "All kinds of things would come up in our conversations," Kohan recalls. "Michael was going with Brooke Shields at the time, and one night he called me and told me about Brooke's sister; he said she was scared of the moon. And I said to him, 'Michael, that's where the word lunatic comes from, a lunatic is someone who is scared of the moon.'" Inspired by the conversation, Michael wrote a song about a girl being scared of the moon. He created the music with partial lyrics, before calling on Kohan to help him complete the song... Scared of the Moon [was] a song recorded in 1984, also with Kohan.

Frank Cascio, friend. My Friend Michael

Michael told me that he wrote that track after having a dinner with Brooke Shields during which she told him that one of her half sisters was scared of the moon. He said, "Can you imagine? Being scared of the moon?"

Damien Shields, writer/author. "Scared Of The Moon" – The little song that could!

One of the thirty-three songs that Jackson had written during the sessions that ultimately resulted in 1987's 'Bad' album was called "Scared Of The Moon". It did not make the final cut and for many years remained unknown to fans and unreleased.

"We used to record on tape," recalls Brad Sundberg – Jackson's longtime studio technical director and engineer. "Big two-inch, 24-track tapes."

Matt Forger, another of Jackson's longtime collaborators and studio engineers, recorded the original demo to "Scared Of The Moon" at Westlake Studios. Jackson, a true professional, laid down all the vocals in a single session.

"They just did the background vocals, the lead vocal and the piano. That was it," adds Sundberg.

"Then Matt broke the number one rule that you never break – he gave Michael the master tape. And once you hand anything to Michael Jackson you may as well just chuck it off a pier because you're never ever going to see it again."

A month or two passed by after recording Jackson's "Scared Of The Moon" vocals, before Forger got a call from the engineer at Evergreen Studios.

"The engineer was there at Evergreen, calling Matt, saying, 'Hey I've got this Michael Jackson session for 'Scared Of The Moon'. Michael is here and the string players are here but we don't have a tape. Can you run the tape over?' And Matt's like, 'I don't have the tape... I gave it to Michael!'"

So they went back and forth for a while, trying to figure out what could be done.

Fortunately, Matt still had a cassette copy of the original session, so he drove the cassette over to Evergreen. It wasn't the original multitrack, but it was something.

They then proceeded to transfer the cassette tape onto the new multitrack, recorded the strings onto the multitrack, and then mixed it down.

“Now, from a recording engineer’s standpoint that’s just breaking every rule in the book,” says Sundberg of their experiment. “You can not take a vocal from a cassette and then put it back onto a multitrack and have it still sound that good.”

“Cassettes always have a little bit of hiss or warble, and I told Matt that it’s pure genius,” continues Sundberg. “It’s just absolutely amazing that it worked because that was the original vocal, and it was just a hokey, cute little song that Michael wanted to do – and we did dozens of those – we’d do lots of little snippets where Michael would have an idea and we would do a demo. But how ‘Scared Of The Moon’ came about technically shouldn’t have worked, but it does. It was like the little engine that could. It’s the little song that could.”

“Scared Of The Moon” was not selected for 1987’s ‘Bad’ album, and did not re-surface until around 1999, shortly after Jackson commenced collaborative sessions for the ‘Invincible’ album. “There are things that just stuck in his mind,” says Michael Prince – who worked extensively as one of Jackson’s trusted studio engineers between 1995 and 2009.

“Sometimes he writes new songs, and sometimes he wants to bring up something from the past that he knows is an unpolished gem.”

“I remember we did a little work on ‘Scared Of The Moon’ for the ‘Invincible’ album, actually. And I remember Steve Porcaro joking, ‘Oh that song again?’ It’s so funny because I’d never heard it before. But that’s Michael’s way of doing things – he always revisited some of his favorite stuff. He’d say, ‘Why didn’t we put this on our last album? Let’s listen again. Can we make it any better?’ Sometimes it makes it on the album and sometimes it doesn’t.”

In the end, the little work that was done on “Scared Of The Moon” during the ‘Invincible’ sessions was not applied to the pre-existing version of the song, and it went back into the vault in its pre-‘Bad’ state.

Then, in November 2004, Sony Music Entertainment’s Epic Records released a career-spanning box set of Michael Jackson’s finest work, consisting of both released and unreleased material. The set, called ‘The Ultimate Collection’, features a newly mixed version of “Scared Of The Moon”.

Matt Forger was fittingly called back to put the finishing touches on the track, which is justly listed on ‘The Ultimate Collection’ as a “demo”. Forger’s final mix includes the 24 tracks of strings, the original cassette vocal/piano and guitar tracks.

Despite the demo being officially released on ‘The Ultimate Collection’ four years earlier, Jackson still wasn’t done with “Scared Of The Moon” in 2009.

It, along with many other tracks from different stages throughout his career, was featured in an extensive “to do” list Jackson never had the chance to action during his life. The handwritten note, seen below, details the titles of 28 songs he had hoped to “finish” (including “Cheater”; also from the ‘Bad’ sessions – also released on ‘The Ultimate Collection’). The note was found taped to the King of Pop’s bedroom wall at the time of his death, on June 25th 2009 – twenty-four years after that “hokey” little demo was recorded at Westlake Studios.