

"A Place With No Name"

Date confirmed in Damien Shields' "Xscape Origins" ("Jackson was ready to record the lead vocals. The session... took place at Record Plant Recording Studios on September 8, 1998")

Dr. Freeze (Elliot Straite), co-writer and co-producer, "MJFrance" (January 28, 2011) ([archived](#)) ([English translation](#)) ([English translation archived](#))

Quagmire (MJFrance):: Who's idea was it to take "A Horse With No Name" from "America" unto a whole new level?

Dr. Freeze: That's me. Again, I did all the music, and he only had to learn the lyrics. It was at the same time as "Break Of Dawn", but it was not extended and we continued to work on it later. It has improved gradually.

Q: Was it planned for the album Invincible or another project?

F: Initially it was planned for Invincible, yes. It is not out on this album and was therefore kept in reserve as was "Blue Gangsta".

Q: Compared to the extract leak on the Internet, can we expect different mixing?

F: Yes, what you heard was an old mix. One you'll soon hear is completely new.

Q: You said "soon"? I am willing to learn more!

F: "A Place With No Name" and "Blue Gangsta" will both be on the next posthumous album of Michael Jackson. "A Place With No Name" will be different from the leak on the internet, it will be updated...

Q: Did you complete this song with Michael when he was alive lifetime?

F: Absolutely, it has been finalized.

Q: Where did you get the inspiration for the [song]... "A Place With No Name"? How does your creative process work?

F: "A Place With No Name" is itself a kind of escape, a song where you just close your eyes to find yourself instantly transported into a wonderful world. In fact, this song was inspired by "A Horse With No Name" from the group America. The lyrics of this song are very deep. I wanted to refresh it, make a version for the 2000s as well.

Q: Did you obtain the rights to the band quickly? Did you ask permission?

F: Oh absolutely, the group America loved the idea. They found this "update" absolutely terrific. They were really excited about this project. Compared to the extract leak on the internet, many wonderful items were added to the song by Michael. It's more dense, much denser. Believe me, when you hear it, you'll be tapping your foot!

Q: So you did not touch it, will it emerge as you had finalized with him?

F: The song will be released in it's latest version on which we worked. It will be drastically different from the extract (July 2009) version and more enormous. In fact, this song is very cinematic in its form. It would have been a perfect song for a movie like Avatar because it reveals to us a wonderful world, where people are different, but happy. This song is like an escape from everyday life. it's a song where one is literally transported.

CJ DeVillar, bassist and mix engineer, [songworx.com blog post](#)

I was fortunate enough to engineer and play bass guitar for Michael Jackson in 98' after he asked me to record several of his vocal sessions and producers. His passing was some very sad news and my memories of those studio sessions has compelled me to share a few of my experiences and observations about Michael so here's one of a few i'll post.

Several days after Michael's passing a friend of mine came across a TMZ entertainment news exclusive of an unreleased Michael Jackson song and sent me a link to a short mp3 clip at the TMZ website.

To my surprise it was a song I worked on as a recording engineer and bass player as well in 1998 at the "Record Plant" in Los Angeles. The song was called "A Place With No Name" which was a re-make or more like a flip of "America", the 70's rock band's timeless hit "A Horse With No Name" It was a muse track for Michael and producer Dr. Freeze, writer/producer for "Bell Biv DeVoe" and "Color Me Bad" hits. I'm not certain if it was Freeze or Michael who kicked off the idea first, but I know Michael loved the "America" song, though he did work out lots of other music explorations for the fun of it, or at least with no specific outcome in mind other than finding a surprise in the process. An observation.

Actually Michael has hundreds of songs worked up on that premise and I'm certain what I saw was only the tip of that iceberg! That sound clip is definitely a session rough mix since it doesn't have a mix and master polished sound on it. For those unfamiliar with what a session rough mix is, it's from the session multitrack tape that was up on the recording console that day for whatever work was being done to it, which was quickly or "roughly" mixed and recorded to a recordable CD or DAT tape as Michael liked it. Also, my bass track sounds raw and loosely compressed so it just may be from that very bass session, but I can't be certain.

Anyway, of course I had a lot of fun recording Michael and Freeze, but what was most fun was playing bass on the track and how it showed me Michael's relentless musical energy so vividly. A few days before my bass session, Dr. Freeze expressed that he and Michael wanted to have a "bass guitar" sound on the track. I told Freeze I can play and would be happy to lay something down for him. I brought my bass down to the studio, and a few days later Freeze was ready to record it. The problem was I was a bit concerned to play on MJ's tracks while MJ was around. I just didn't want to jeopardize my position as an "Engineer" goofing around on Michael's music, but in the end it was unfounded paranoia on my part. Regardless, we waited till late in the eve when Michael usually slipped out for home long before that, at least based on his MO from the previous few weeks.

When I was certain Michael had left the studio I plugged in my bass and started to play around with the track with Freeze. But the very second I plugged in, I saw Michael emerge from his studio lounge through the vocal booth glass and into the control room, so I was like; Uh oh!, since I kind of felt busted in a way. Michael immediately said; "what are you guys doing"? I replied sheepishly; laying down some bass Mike. He said; let's hear it. So I played a few bass licks and he immediately got excited and said; are you recording!!? Umm, no Mike, I'm just trying to find a vibe. Mike said; play and record it all! So I dropped in (hit record) and jammed on the song. Well, Michael turned up the big main speakers LOUD! and was loving what I was playing.

After several seconds Michael was in my face rockin out while I pulled off all kinds of bass ideas. At the end of that pass he said to do another and off we went again. Michael was groovin, playing air guitar while we pulled out rock poses in front of the console. He would say; Oh yeah CJ, that was stinky!, sooo stinky (a good thing for Mike) Lets do another! Ok Mike, I dropped in a total of five or six times with the last one being a solid groove track so we didn't have to comp a bunch of bass ideas to make the song listenable right away. Which sounds like that bass pass in the "A Place With No Name" mp3 clip if my memory serves me. After more than a half-hour of rockin with Michael and a few more loud playbacks, I put together a quick rough mix and made him a dat tape to listen to. He graciously thanked me again and then went home for the day.

[The MJCast Episode 54 \(April 12, 2017\)](#)

CJ DeVillar: I engineered a bunch of stuff [for Glen Tipton], so I took the bass credits, and the same thing sorta happened with MJ. Actually, almost exactly the same happened with MJ on "A Place With No Name". I mentioned I can play, I brought my bass down, it was kind of a fluke. And just--Michael loved what I was playing, so...

The MJCast: Share *that* story then!

DeVillar: That was a lot of fun. I mean, working with Michael alone, what a thrill that was. The energy of the man is--it's true, it's just--the musical aura of this guy is huge and, of course, I grew up with Michael, so I had a different, maybe a more powerful reception to that, but I was also in production for many, many years, so I wasn't starstruck anymore. So I can't say that I was starstruck with Michael, I just felt that he really was a real musical power. So, when I was working with him--I had only been working with him for a couple months.

...**MJCast:** Ok, you worked on those songs with him, and then later sort of came back for "Place With No Name"?

DeVillar: "Place With No Name" was fall of '98 was when I played bass on that... "Blue Gangsta", that was '98, '99. The story for the bass playing--so I was working with Dr. Freeze, who is a real awesome cat, man. He did "A Place With No Name"... he did "Poison", those early New Jack Swing hits back in the day. So he was working on--he was Michael's producer, one of Michael's producers, and we were dropping in some rough vocals. Michael was still kinda writing lyrics with Freeze, and we were dropping in some quick, rough mix lyric stuff... they said, "Oh, maybe some real bass", they meant live bass, 'cause Michael is usually on a synth bass... So they mention that, "Well, maybe I want live bass" and then--so Freeze thought that was a good idea. Well, the minute I heard that, of course, I was like, "Ok, well I play bass... Listen, I've played for years, and I can drop in, see if you guys like it at least, maybe you hear something... I can bring my bass down."... And they said, "Yeah, bring it down". So same thing, I bring it down, and I take it out of the case, and I sit it in the corner so they can see it. 'Cause I'm not gonna mention it again, you know what I mean? I don't want to be forward and rude, I don't want to be discovered, I don't want to be forceful, you know? So Freeze says, "Hey man, this might be a good time to drop in and try out some ideas". Well, it was a bit early, and I knew Michael was still in the lounge, 'cause I didn't--Michael didn't know me as a bass player even though I mentioned it to him. I didn't want him with me while I did it. I wanted--that would be a major distraction to have Michael Jackson in your face while you're trying to work out, "What am I gonna play?" You want to go there in your mind, you know? So I told Freeze, "I wanna wait 'til he goes", and he said, "Yeah, ok". So, a few hours later, it was later in the evening. Michael's

always gone by then, but we don't check up on him, like, "Have you gone yet, Michael?" We're not gonna do that. So I just figured he'd left, 'cause he had never been there that late, for a while at least. So I strap on my bass, I plug in, I get myself a sound, I'm going through modules and things, and I find a sound, I'm like, "This is pretty heavy, I kinda like this". And then I hit play on the recorder, and Freeze is right there... I'm just sort of jamming around, trying to get some sounds. I'm sort of feeling around, I think I have something I want to do, and then I see Michael walk out the door of his lounge. Now there's nothing but glass in all these booths, so Michael has to go through two rooms of glass before he comes in our third room. So there's a long walk from Michael leaving that room, walking into the studio, 'cause I'm like going, "Awww, damn" [laughs] "Awww, so I'm not even gonna get a chance to play. This is it. I'm gonna have to put the bass down, he's gonna want to do something else" My moment--I already was like, I was resigning to it, like going, "Oh well". I was pretty good, I gave it a good shot, you know? So he walks in, I stop tape immediately, like I got caught. He's going, "What are you guys doing?", and I'm like, "Just laying down some bass". And he's like, "Can I hear it?" And I'm like, "Yeah, ok." So I didn't record anything, so I go to the top, I hit play--I'm on input again--so I'm playing along, playing the idea, and he's going, "Yeah, ok". So I'm coming up with this lick at the same time, I'm still searching for notes and it was a very simple thing. And simple is hard. If anybody hears a musician, being original and simple are the two hardest things you can put together. And so Michael is in my face while I'm trying to do this, and he's going, "Are you recording any of these ideas?" And I said, "No". And he's like, "Oh my God!, What are you doing?" He's like getting mad at me, and I'm like, "Ok, ok, ok, ok". But he was excited, he wasn't mad, he was just like, "Let's do this! I'm liking it!" And so I hit record, and I just take off like I'm a rock star, so I'm playing, and he is just--he's grooving with me, he's playing air guitar, he's biting the lip, he's getting in the face, he's clapping, he's throwing up his arms, he's like--he's jumping up and down with me. It was really kind of throwing me at first, [then] I realized that he's trying to get me going. He--this was after the session, I realized, that he was all about inspiration, and he just wanted to inspire me... I gotta say, I guess he did, because I ended up coming up with the part kinda during that. And so I stopped tape at the end of the song, and he's going, "Oh, I love that, that's so stinky, CJ, it's so stinky". Stinky for him was like, "Awesome! I love it!" and he goes, "Let's do it again!", so I go to a new track, I drop in, I'm playing, I'm trying some different ideas, and I'm all over the place though, I'm having fun, because I'm playing slides, and I'm in his face too. We're both... it was kinda like being on stage with Michael. That's what we were doing on the studio floor. It'd be like if you saw a show with him, and he's got the guitarist, and he's in the guitarist's face, and we're like, "Yeah!" so it was that kind of a thing. So I dropped in three or four more times, and I laid down another one that was really solid, because I knew as a musician, like "Oh wait, it's not all there". There's sections I didn't play, and if they try to put this together, it won't all be there, so I played a really solid track, so they can at least assemble something. And then that was the one I used for a quick mix. So after I was done, Michael was ecstatic. I was going, "What the hell's going on" at that point, 'cause I was like, "Oh my gosh, he's loving what's--" I mean, in thirty minutes, I did all this, you know? So I did a quick mix, and he thanked me again, and he left the studio. And that was the last I heard of it. That was it. I was like, "Well, that was fun. There's no way I'm ending up on this record, but that was fun". That's what I thought. And then that was it until... TMZ leaked thirty seconds of that song, right?

MJCast: Yeah, that's correct. That happened just after he passed away, I'm pretty sure.

DeVillar: That's right, that's right. And then a friend of mine played me that, and I said, "Oh my gosh, that's the song. Oh my gosh, that's me playing bass", so I'm like, "What is going on". This is ten years later. So I was really excited to hear that. "Wow, I'm on a little thirty second clip with Michael Jackson." I took that as like, "I'll take that. That's cool". I got *that*, I got a story, I got a clip, everybody--'cause I was telling the story, but I had nothing to--I had no proof.

MJCast: Nothing to back it up. Everybody's like, "Yeah, sure you played with Michael Jackson."

DeVillar: Right? I didn't get a *whole* lot of that, but you get that in everybody's mind. Or it wasn't solid enough. So then I heard he was making a record, I heard there was a record coming out, and I realized that, "Wow, what if they put this song on there? How do I get a credit?" I had no idea how to get a credit. I tried to call the camp, everybody was different. I tried to get to the managers and the Estate people, no one can get me a call there. I called an attorney friend of mine, and I said, "Listen, I'll pay you, just badger these people, let them know I played bass on this song". And he said, "There's nothing I can do. They're just--it's locked up right now." And I said, "It's crazy"...I was calling at the exact time they were working all this stuff out, which is really--that's when the doors sorta close. People are jockeying for positions, it's highly politicized, getting a credit on an MJ record. And I was already sort of--I worked on "Break of Dawn", and I didn't get credited on that... I had no power. I had nothin'. I didn't have representation, I didn't have an attorney, I was kind of a loose punk rock engineer at the time. I wasn't--I didn't have my shit totally together, fellas... I was swimming with these big stars, but I was on my own. You know what I'm saying? Anyway, at that point, I think it was a couple years before then, I wanted to tell my story, right after the TMZ clip came out, so I wrote a post. I wanted to tell my story, I wanted to tell it in a way, because I was getting a lot of emails about it and what was going on, so I wrote out that story as best as I could. I'm not really a story-teller, but I wrote it myself. It reads ok still, but I wish I could change it... And then, to make that long story short, the record came out, and there I was. I'm just thrilled, and the engineering stuff's good, I got engineering credits on a couple songs, that's great. But the bass one is the one, because it was with Michael, we did it together, it was inspired. I mean, literally, I don't know what to think of it, other than I come up with these little factoids, I think, in my mind, like "That has to be the quickest bass session on any Michael Jackson record ever." [MJCast crew laughs] I mean, this guy takes five years to make a record, you know? And that was literally, it went down in five recording passes. That went down in thirty minutes, you know? And then he worked on it for ten years. I was reading some of Freeze's stories, and they were going to studios with it, and when I read the stories after the fact, I was like, "Oh my gosh!" Michael had all the chance in the world, and all the means in the world, to put somebody else on there, to change the bass, to get the greatest, to get whoever on there, and he never did. So I get a big thrill out of that. So the bass credit is the one. It's the creative credit. It was a creative process with Michael Jackson is what I cherish the most about the whole thing...

MJCast: When we got to hear the original, oh my God, it's such a good track...

DeVillar: Michael loved that song, I mean, who didn't love that song, especially if you grew up during that time. It's still a huge classic. Michael is a real artist's artist's artist. He wants to work on things just 'cause he wants to. I don't think Michael sort of much makes plans with music, I think he sort of just muses and goes forward, and just lurches, and has fun with music, and we

get the benefit of doing what he wants to do, so I think he just loved that song so much, and so did Freeze, and the hip-hop culture, it's very natural to flip anything. Just flip any song you want... That was Michael and Freeze just putting love into it. I don't think they went after that track like it was supposed to be put on a record. I think it was even more personal than that. Although I think Freeze tells it a little different, that they went after it in a way... I would go with what he says over what I say, but the feeling I got during the time was that they were just having so much fun trying to play with this melody and the lyrics, and the music, and really having a good time flipping this classic track. And a successful flip isn't easy, and I thought that was just wonderful. I thought it was great when I heard it too.

MJCast: Well, America liked it as well. They had great things to say about the new version.

DeVillar: Yeah, and I suppose it helped me, loving that song, when I was playing the bass I suppose. 'Cause before I played on Michael's version, I had heard that song ten thousand times since I was a kid, so I gotta wonder if that wasn't in my spirit, so to speak, while I was playing, while Michael was in my face trying to inspire me too. I almost channeled that bass part, I think, through all those things at that moment... Studio magic, I'm a firm believer in it. It seems kind of a little magical thing to say, but that's what those people are all about, those people. Huge stars or huge music makers, they understand how to get inspiration down to disc or whatever you want to call it, and that's what matters. And Michael, I think, may have been the greatest at that. Another thing I noticed about him was that musical energy was relentless. I don't know--he was like a child in a discovery sense. Like, usually, a guy around his age is somewhat jaded, kind of over it, the studio's old, you're like going, "Come on". Your ears are a little like--you're a snob. I mean, you can't help it as you get older, especially for--Michael and I were in our--he was in his forties at that point, just in his forties, but he still had that wide-eyed, like searching for magic thing, and it was very obvious, and every time I worked with him, he was reaching for that, and so few people do...

MJCast: I think [Stargate] actually probably would have went the direction that you guys were going, like they were supposed to, if they would've heard [your version] beforehand.

DeVillar: A thing they could've done with that particular mix that--it would've been ok, other than they took all the backgrounds out of the hook. They just made it kind of solo Michael singing a hook. And when you hear the original hook, it's got the huge ridiculous Michael pad that we've all grown up with. And if they would have had the huge Michael--let the bigness come into his vocals, it would've been--I'm getting a little production-technical here--but I felt going through the solo voice was a little too stripped down. I don't know, they sort of missed the mark on some other areas. Also, if you're gonna go with that big [unintelligible], that doesn't translate on a lot of systems that people would normally listen to a Michael Jackson song. It's kind of a thumper that really won't translate over smaller systems, so it sounds a little empty on systems that don't bump. I don't know, it was okay. I kinda like the fact that everybody likes the version I played on best. I can play that a little bit, I'm not exactly mad...

...**DeVillar:** I've got one more story, it's my favorite story. I've told this to a couple reporters, but they won't print it, I think, 'cause it's a little risqué, I guess. And I threaten to write it down on a blog post sometimes, but I'll tell it to you anyway, 'cause it's absolutely hilarious. It's my greatest Michael Jackson story. And it's kind of pertinent right now. Ok, so it's a bit risqué, so I know

some of his listeners are really sweet people, so I don't want to harm their ears, but I know you guys are going, "Yes, yes".

MJCast: Yeah, absolutely. We are ready, we are ready [laughs]

DeVillar: So this was at the Record Plant, and I believe we were working on "A Place With No Name" actually. And it was during that exact time, during those sessions. This was the time when Bill Clinton--the Monica Lewinsky dress was getting tested for Bill Clinton's DNA. You remember that?

MJCast: Yes. Yep.

DeVillar: So it was huge news, and of course everybody was waiting--the whole world--was waiting for the DNA report. Is it Bill Clinton's on the dress? So I show up to the Record Plant early, get ready for a session with Michael, and Michael's already there. I'm like, "Oh my God, I can't believe Michael Jackson beat me to the studio. I feel like an idiot", right? So, I'm like, "Oh my gosh", so I walk in the studio, and Michael is walking right at me, he goes, "CJ! CJ! You won't believe at what just happened!" I'm like, "Yeah?". He goes, "Bill Clinton, his dress, the DNA, it's his DNA! It's for real!"... I mean, he is like, "Oh my gosh". He's just beside himself. And he's looking at me like I should respond, and I'm like--and of course, I already had my views about it, it was already in the news for weeks or months at a time, he was getting impeached, and this other stuff. And I go, "Michael, I know. All this mayhem over a lousy blowjob". And then Michael doesn't like hearing bad words, I forgot. But I was incensed, because I was like, "All this stupidity over this", you know? And so, when I said that, Michael hit the ground, he screamed out loud a blood-curdling scream, and he was on the carpet. He fell to his knees, and put his face in his hands right in the carpet, and screamed out loud in laughter. So he was like, full-on boisterous, huge haha's, and so he's there, right at my feet, down in the carpet, laughing, and I'm standing up. And I'm thinking I'm fired. I throw up my hands, and I'm looking down at Michael Jackson crying, practically, and I'm like, "Oh CJ, you blew it". That was a mistake, 'cause I get too comfortable sometimes with people. I do what I do, I'm who I am. So he gets up, slowly, and he's [in an exasperated voice] "Oh my God, oh my God", he's like that. And I'm like, "Michael, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to say that." He's going, "No, no, that was so funny." And then he's walking away, laughing, wiping, he was crying, he was laughing and wiping his face, and he walks into the lounge and closes the door. And I'm like, "Okay". I didn't feel like I was--he didn't let me off the hook, I felt like I'm fired anyway. He's going to be nice to me, and then in two hours, I'm gonna get a call from the manager, and I'm out. So I waited [laughs] and a couple hours later, I didn't get the call, and then we kept working, and then we worked for a few more months. So I didn't get fired. But I gave him a big belly laugh though, he thought that was hilarious.

MJCast: What a story!

DeVillar: Yeah, very funny.

MJCast: He was friends with the Clintons. There's some great shots of Bill meeting Michael's kids and hanging out with Michael.

DeVillar: Oh ok. Yeah, yeah, ok, well then it's come full circle, has it? But yeah, I guess he was excited about that news because it wasn't him, and it was very sensationalist. It was very sensational, and it was huge, epic news. Everybody was waiting for this. Who doesn't like to hear a test result like that? Ridiculous news, and ridiculous amount of time spent on the news

cycle, it was just ridiculous. I was incensed by it, but obviously it's hilarious and it's sad fact of how it turned out, but it was comedy at the time. It certainly was.

MJCast: That was a terrific, terrific story. Thank you.

Damien Shields, “Xscape Origins” excerpt ([3] and [5] are from his exclusive interview(s))

On September 7, 1996, Michael Jackson kicked off his record-breaking *HIStory* World Tour at Letna Park in Prague, Czech Republic. The tour, a grueling 82-date trek across the globe which saw Jackson perform in front of 4.5 million fans, in thirty-five countries, on five continents, came to an end thirteen months later, on October 15, 1997, at Kings Park Stadium in Durban, South Africa.

During a five-month break between the first and second legs of the tour, Jackson's record label, Sony Music, released *Blood on the Dance Floor: HIStory in the Mix*—a compilation album including five “new” songs (two of which had already been released six months earlier as part of the 40-minute *Ghosts* film) and eight dance remixes of tracks taken from 1995's *HIStory* album. Jackson personally expressed his dissatisfaction with the remixes on the album, saying, “The least I can say is that I don't like them. I don't like it that they come in and change my songs completely, but Sony says that kids love remixes.”

Moreover, the fact that only three of the songs on *Blood on the Dance Floor*—“Morphine,” “Superfly Sister,” and title track—had never been heard before left fans hungry for more new music from the King of Pop.

And so, shortly after the completion of the tour, Jackson turned his attention towards his next full-length album, returning to the recording studio to work on ideas with his team of trusted collaborators.

As was customary when recording a new album, Jackson also invited a number of *new* personnel into the fold—with whom he had not yet worked—to see what they could bring to the table. One of the new personnel was singer, songwriter, and producer Elliot Straite (a.k.a. “Dr. Freeze”), best known for his New Jack Swing style production, and for having cowritten R & B boy band Color Me Badd's 1991 hit “I Wanna Sex You Up.”

“I knew [Jackson's] manager, John McClain, and I was working on an album with my partner, Spydermann,” recalls Freeze. “After completing the album, things did not go as planned and we had to cancel the project. I was very upset. And then John McClain said, ‘Don't worry, Freeze. I have another project for you. You'll be in business with Michael.’ I said, ‘Michael who?’ And he said, ‘Michael Jackson!’”

At first Freeze thought McClain was crazy, not believing that Michael Jackson would *actually* want to work with him. Then one day, when Freeze was talking to his father on the phone, someone called him on the other line. Freeze put his father on hold and took the other call. It was Jackson.

Soon after their initial phone introduction, Freeze began preparing a collection of songs to present to Jackson. Once the songs were ready, Jackson came in, and they got to work on the ones Jackson liked best.

“I introduced him to many songs,” says Freeze. “The main songs on which we worked were ‘Break Of Dawn,’ ‘A Place With No Name,’ and ‘Blue Gangsta.’ These three songs were our priorities... He adored them.”

Though already an accomplished artist in his own right, and fully capable of holding his own in a recording studio, Freeze, like most of those who encountered Jackson in person for the first time, was intimidated by the experience.

"It was pretty scary for me," recalls Freeze. "I felt like I was back in primary school, and not knowing anything about production. With Michael, I relearned everything. The other producers and I were [like] students facing a teacher. With Michael, it was as if we knew nothing [about] the business; we had to start over and relearn everything. He taught us to do everything the best way possible. Michael was a perfectionist... I was very nervous. Very nervous, but very honored. He knew all about the music industry; everything about everything. Nothing was foreign to him, and he taught me a lot."

"Michael and I, we have a knack for melody," Freeze continues. "So every time I proposed something, it was easy for him to study the song because it was as if he already knew it. I gave him some songs that he adored. He cherished them... I did all the music, and he only had to learn the lyrics."

"'A Place With No Name' is itself a kind of escape; a song where you just close your eyes to find yourself instantly transported into a wonderful world," says Freeze. "This song is very cinematic. It would have been a perfect song for a movie like *Avatar*, because it reveals to us a wonderful world where people are different, but happy. This song is like an escape from everyday life."

"[The] song was inspired by 'A Horse With No Name,' [by] the group America," explains Freeze. "The lyrics of this song are very deep. I wanted to refresh it [and] make a version for the 2000s."

"Michael knew the guys from America," recalls Jackson's recording engineer Michael Prince, "so he called them to ask if it was okay to use the sample from 'A Horse With No Name,' and they said yes." [3]

"America loved the idea," says Freeze. "They found this update absolutely terrific. They were really excited about [the] project."

This wasn't the first time that Jackson had taken someone else's song and covered or repurposed it for his own project. Jackson performed a rock version of The Beatles' 1969 number one hit "Come Together" in his 1988 feature film, *Moonwalker*, later including the track as a B-side on his "Remember The Time" single in 1992, and again on the *HIStory* album in 1995. The *HIStory* album also features a stunning Jackson rendition of "Smile," originally composed as an instrumental by Charlie Chaplin for his 1936 film *Modern Times*, and later recorded by Nat King Cole in 1954 featuring newly written lyrics by John Turner and Geoffrey Parsons.

The King of Pop's 1998 reimagining of "A Horse With No Name" also wasn't the first (or the last) time a Jackson had recorded a track inspired by America's music. In 1985, Michael Jackson's sister, Janet, was working on the follow-up to her *Dream Street* album, released the previous year. Janet had recently hired John McClain as her manager, who brought Minneapolis-based production duo Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis on board to help produce the album, ultimately called *Control*, which was released in 1986. One of the first tracks Jam and Lewis penned for the album was "Let's Wait Awhile," which bears striking similarities to America's 1975 hit "Daisy Jane," although a cowriter credit was not given to the group. Fifteen years later, Jam and Lewis penned yet another America-inspired track, called "Someone to Call My Lover," released as part

of Janet's *All For You* album in 2001. "Someone to Call My Lover" directly samples the Dewey Bunnell-written guitar riff from America's 1972 track "Ventura Highway."

Bunnell recalls that "Ventura Highway" was inspired when he, his brother, and their father encountered a flat tire during a family trip many years earlier. "It was 1963, when I was in seventh grade," says Bunnell. "We got a flat tire, and we're standing on the side of the road, and I was staring at this highway sign. It said 'Ventura' on it, and it just stuck with me."

In what one can only assume to be a massive coincidence, thirty-five years after the Bunnell family's flat tire, Dr. Freeze dreamt up the same exact scenario for Jackson's "A Place With No Name," writing, "*As I drove across on the highway... I noticed I got a flat,*" in the song's opening lyrics.

"A Place With No Name" was first worked on at the Los Angeles-based Record Plant Recording Studios in August of 1998. At the time, CJ deVillar was assisting Freeze with the engineering side of his work with Jackson. During a recording session, Freeze mentioned to deVillar that he wanted to have a live bass guitar on the track. DeVillar, an accomplished bassist himself, told Freeze he could play, and would be happy to lay something down for him.

Before the bass was laid, Jackson recorded a scratch vocal for the track with deVillar and engineer Eddie Delena, whom deVillar was initially working for as a second engineer. Once the scratch vocal was done, and Freeze was prepared, the bass could be added.

DeVillar insisted that he and Freeze should wait for Jackson to leave the studio before entering the booth to record the bass, because he didn't want to jeopardize his position as an engineer by being caught playing something that Jackson had not requested.

"Michael usually left around the same time every evening," recalls deVillar, "so we waited for him to leave before I did my thing. The reason I didn't want Michael to see me play was in case he didn't understand that I'm also a bass player. I was scared of him seeing me and wondering why his engineer was messing around with his song. I didn't want to get fired." [5]

It was a Tuesday evening on August 25, 1998 that deVillar finally laid down his bass parts at the Record Plant. And it was that night that his worst nightmare became a reality, with Jackson catching him in the act almost immediately after plugging his bass guitar in.

"I saw Mike appear from the studio lounge through the glass right when I had just started playing," recalls deVillar, "and I was like, Oh, God! But when he walked in, and heard what I was playing, he became very excited." [5]

Jackson asked deVillar what he and Freeze were doing, to which deVillar replied sheepishly, "Laying down some bass, Mike." [5]

Jackson wanted to hear what they'd done so far, and questioned whether anything had been recorded.

"Um, no, Mike," said deVillar. "I'm just trying to find a vibe."

Jackson encouraged deVillar to keep playing, and for Freeze to record it all, which is exactly what they did. Jackson liked what he heard so much that he entered the booth and began rocking out with deVillar.

"I had Michael in my face, and he cranked the speakers up *loud*," recalls deVillar. "I'm hearing his voice; he's dancing, popping and locking. I've got total Michael Jackson immersion. It was like I'd been zapped, like some crazy channeling was going on. It was like some kind of musical blessing that his aura and his power ended up in my space. And that bass line was created." [5]

“It wouldn’t have happened if he wasn’t there, because he’s standing right in front of me. He’s dancing. He’s making faces. He’s cheering me on. He’s playing air guitar. He’s giving me affirmations while I’m playing, and I’m absorbing these affirmations like he’s a fan in the audience. It was like a live concert, and he was producing me live on stage. He kept saying...”[5]