

Glasgow, Scotland (Silver Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II)

"Black Echoes" (May 28, 1977)

It was not a case of blowing royal minds. Performing just three numbers in front of the Queen in Glasgow, The Jacksons could only sound a warning to every other Soul group. Even so, they undoubtedly stole the Jubilee Gala show.

Their new single, "Show You the Way to Go" is set to hit the pop charts and their London Concert at Hammersmith Odeon is sold out.

"Black Echoes" was in Scotland to witness the group's first UK concert performance since '72. Here is Robin Katz' report.

It was the morning of the Royal Variety Show in Glasgow, a week before the London show. The Jacksons had rehearsed the night before and were off to see Loch Ness.

At their hotel, it was quiet except for the few David Soul fans who kept racing between the main entrance and the kitchen entrance waiting for the arrival of their hero, who was already tucked away safely inside the hotel.

...Here I was in Glasgow waiting to see a family I hadn't seen in four and a half years.

Had all the hard work embittered them? Would Jermaine's absence be very noticeable on the stage? Did Michael Jackson still have that distinctive charisma? I had no doubts that they could still dance anyone off any stage. You don't lose a gift like that. Were they still close as a family or did they feel chained to one another?

Would they still bounce off each other? Did they still have their down to earth warmth and sense of humor? Would Michael still be as observant of everyone's clothing as he once had?

I may have been the only journalist who traveled with them in '72, but I wasn't foolish enough to think they'd remember me. For a start, they've been traveling in a lot of countries since then.

Prior to this visit, they'd covered Japan, the Philippines, Australia, Africa, and most recently, Venezuela. Randy, who had celebrated his tenth birthday in London's Churchill Hotel, was now fifteen and a half. Four and a half years had seen a lot of hard work for The Jacksons, endless rehearsals, hours in the studios, and interview after interview.

When The Jacksons returned from Loch Ness, I had this subtle way of deciding whether Michael had changed, I deliberately wore a flame red silk Chinese shirt over my jeans.

"Michael", said the pressman. "This is..."

"Robin", smiled Michael.

"Robin Katz, where did you get that shirt?"

"How have you been?", smiled Jackie.

"We read the article you wrote in 'Black Echoes'", said Papa Joseph, Marlon, and Tito in overlapping fashion. "That was a heavy piece you did on us."

Well, never has one usually so gregarious been so delighted to be outnumbered so quickly.

Four and a half years had literally melted in seconds.

The Jacksons politely squirmed under "interview" conditions, but as usual the atmosphere was the best when they were doing the asking. What was Wembley Empire Pool like? Was their London concert well publicized? How high had their last single gone? Was this one doing well?

Who was the last Motown artist I had interviewed? Were they the only ones who couldn't understand a word of Glaswegian? Why wouldn't the Queen stop to take a proper posed picture

with them after the show? How were Elton John's concerts in London? Had we been to Harroda? Was it worth a visit?

Answers

There were a few answers too. There are two misconceptions hanging over their heads. One is Jermaine, of course. There is no feud. He and Hazel come by to visit often. Secondly is their performing sisters, Maureen, Latoya, and Janet. The girls only perform with the boys in Las Vegas where they team up for tap dancing, nostalgia, and comedy routines. For concert tours, it's the five men down the line. Home is still the house in Encino where Randy and Michael share a room. The married brothers all live nearby... Randy and Michael are whiz kids with video equipment, while Latoya and Maureen are devoutly religious.

There's a new album finished for Gamble and Huff and a stage show costing \$100,000 that we may never get to see. It features an enormous traveling stage in the shape of two stars with tons of elaborate lighting and sound equipment. British venues were discussed in depth. It was decided that The Jacksons might fit one of their stage "stars" on to the stage of the Wembley Empire Pool.

Rumors of Michael's love life abound. He's been matched up to date with every under-seventeen year old from Jodie Foster through to Stephanie Mills and Tatum O'Neal. Yes, he and Tatum have gone to a couple of parties, but they are strictly friends. Jackie kids that Linda Blair (of "Exorcist" film fame) is still ringing Mike up. Michael prefers to tip out quietly on his own. But he does ask after 14 year old Heather McCartney, who he met at the Wings party last year. "They have a house in Scotland. I thought they might be up here."

Performance-wise, a Royal Variety Show is a nightmare for any music fan. The audience is so poised and pretentious that your heart aches for the artists who must feel as if they are playing to a hall of corpses. The Jacksons had to open the second half of the show. The Queen was in her seat, but half the high heeled patrons were rushing back from the bar. Michael's mike went dead for reasons best known to Scottish television, halfway through the first number. It didn't look like they had a lot of stage room to dance on. Still, they were excellent. Jackie, Marlon, and Michael dance as if they're one person connected by an invisible axle.

Michael may be much taller with a lower voice, but his charisma is intact. I can't think of another male performer who can come within a mile of his quick stepping, high dancing. He's simply the best there is.

Randy is hidden behind the congas. The Jacksons only performed three numbers for the Queen, so perhaps Randy gets to come up front and dance with the rest of the team. Tito is quiet but effective behind his guitar and their backing musicians are as tight as ever.

Impact

"When we were kids we used to sit back and let everything come to us", Jackie later told me at the party given in their honor. "Now we're involved with the business side. There are always a lot of businessmen in the music field. But how many of them get up on a stage and know how to give an audience what they want? It's no longer a question of making impact, it's enduring."

Fortunately, for The Jacksons and us, their audiences, it's blatantly obvious that the enduring is still secondary to enjoying. The hectic lifestyle has more perks than pressures and pains. The spontaneity, the curiosity, and humor haven't wanted with the years of maturing. It may have been too long, but The Jacksons are back. If they tour this country again before the year is out,

I'm convinced they'll make believers out of those whose enthusiasm has been dormant for a long time now. The magic hasn't gone, and methinks there's potential for hysteria all over again. So remember fans, Michael is spelled A.E., not E.A. Do I hear an 'M'?

"Record Mirror" (May 28, 1977)

The Jacksons seem like a slightly strange choice for a Royal Variety Show. For a start, they haven't appeared in this country for four years. And second, of course, they're black boys on an otherwise whiter than white hill.

Still, here they are to Glasgow, and they're all lined up and ready to go.

...The group are billed as "America's Top Teenage Group". but today, that description doesn't quite fit. Three of them are respectable family men these days, and Jackie is expecting the latest Jackson to arrive at any time.

Screams

Soul is somewhere on the same level - today, the screams from outside are all for him.

Pardon my ignorance, but after all these years, I still haven't sorted out which Jackson is which. (I could never quite work out the Osmonds either). It's Tito and Marlon that are the problem - the rest are easy. Jackie is the tallest and broadest, Michael has aged only a little, and is still small and slight with a slightly strained, high-pitched voice that explains how an 18 year old can still hit these high notes. Little Randy, meanwhile, is the chattiest, least self-conscious of the bunch.

The story so far that the group are no longer with Tamla Motown. They've moved to Epic, and now record in Philadelphia with Gamble and Huff.

They say the change wasn't too drastic: "The people there were very friendly. They made us feel right at home."

"Yeah, they let us sing free", adds Jackie.

When they moved, they left behind their brother Jermaine, who's now working as a solo artist.

At the time, there were rumors of a deep tilt within the family, but if there was any trouble, it seems to have been sorted out now.

They talk happily about Jermaine's two kids, and his interest in horses: "He and Barry White are really into horse-riding", says Michael.

Barry goes horse-riding? You're joking...

"He rides the strongest kind of horse you can get", giggles Randy.

"Yeah, it's a camel", laughs Marlon.

In the States, it seems the boys are still as big as they ever were. They have their own TV show, and there's still hysteria whenever they appear live. Their latest album, "The Jacksons" did very well in the US charts, as did the single, "Enjoy Yourself".

Over here, the album didn't show at all, and the single went no higher than the Top 40.

So why did you leave it so long before coming back, fellas?

"We were misled", says Michael. "We were told that our records weren't selling so well over here, and there wasn't enough interest in us.

"Also we were looking for a promoter - we wanted to find the right promoter.

Amazing

This time, they're only doing two dates - this one and a show in London. But if there's a sufficient interest in them, they'll come back and do a full tour.

Sufficient interest? Well, let's see if they can still cut it.

The crowd in the £25 a throw seats at the Kings Theatre, sitting stiffly in their evening wear, are hardly soul fans. Scots country singer Sydney Devine and Ronnie Corbett are more their sort of act.

Still, the star of the first half is undoubtedly Dolly Parton, looking amazing in white trousers and floaty embroidered top. Shame she didn't wear her pink catsuit though--that might even have outdone the Royal Gown, which is a sort of glittery turquoise.

Dolly has four numbers - "Jolene", "Bargain Store", "I am a Seeker", and "Coat of Many Colors", which is dedicated to "my own mama", who would have been so-oo proud to see me here tonight."

The Jacksons' job is to open the second half. Someone along the line has mis-timed their entrance - they're onstage while most people are still finishing their choc ices or shuffling back from the bar.

They have their own band with them (mostly composed of Jackson cousins) but they also seem to have picked up a totally unwanted orchestra from somewhere.

They break into "Forever Came Today", and the old energy's still there, even if the sound isn't. It's not their fault--musically, shows like this are always well below standard. Michael's voice is more or less inaudible, so that their chances of generating any real excitement are dashed from the start.

But visually, they're amazing - Michael performs a twitching, twirling boogie across the stage and then back again.

The number that comes off best is the new single, "Let me Show You", which is a slowish ballad with smooth harmonies - much more what this show's about.

They finish with a medley of their early hits, but for me, it doesn't work too well. There's no turning back now.

Highspot

The Jacksons have a hard task ahead of them, rebuilding their reputation in this country almost from scratch - this time, with a whole host of other soul groups in competition.

Nevertheless, on this showing, they are one of the musical highspots in an otherwise dreary bill. The only other act that's of interest in the second half is David Soul, and he has a definite off-night. Paralyzed by nerves, dropping his guitar strap and rambling painfully between numbers, his spot is definitely best forgotten.

After the show, there's a reception for the Jacksons. They've been presented to the Queen, who apparently asked them if they'd flown in specially for the show.

"But the one who really talked to us was Prince Phillip", says Jackie. "He seemed really interested, and asked lots of questions about us and our music."

Could there be a secret soul fanatic in the Palace...?