

“TV Guide” Interview

Date assessed by the fact that Michael was “anxiously awaiting reaction to his latest album, ‘Invincible’” (TV Guide), and the “Invincible” album was released on October 30, 2001.

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Michael Jackson. “TV Guide” interview (November 10, 2001) ([mirror](#)) ([archived mirror](#))

When you have been in show business 35 years – when you have been a legend in show business for much of that time – you know how to make an entrance. At least Michael Jackson does.

The King of Pop doesn’t simply arrive anywhere, and his appearance in a lush room at the pricey Beverly Hills Hotel is no exception. He is two hours late. He is preceded by his bodyguard, whose security check includes peeks behind curtains and into closets and bathrooms. Then the guard dims the lights. When the door finally swings open, it is not Jackson but two small children who bolt into the room: Prince, 4, whose dark hair is bleached blond, and Paris, 3, whose brown curls tumble to her shoulders. Finally, their father arrives.

His image is ubiquitous – his sculpted face and doe eyes peer at us from supermarket stands seemingly daily – and yet unique. He’s slight, wearing a blue military shirt and his trademark short black pants and white socks. And then there is his nose. His famous nose, which, on this day, is covered by gray bandages.

“It is analgesic tape,” he says, quietly but good-naturedly. “For allergies.”

With his children playing on the floor by his feet, he talks about his life, politely and with an amazing sense of poise and self-possession. He is a man at times indignant about the press but able to laugh at himself, which may be the most surprising thing about Michael Jackson. At one point, he doubles over giggling at the thought of how at concerts women have fainted in his presence.

And yet he is apprehensive. At 43, Jackson is at a crossroads in his career, urgently trying to transform himself from ’80s icon to a player in the current pop scene. His first step in a climb back to the top were the two recent concerts at Madison Square Garden, his first public performances in America in 12 years. They have been edited into a two-hour television special titled Michael Jackson: 30th Anniversary Celebration airing Tuesday, November 13 (CBS, 9 PM/ET). He is anxiously awaiting reaction to his latest album, *Invincible* [at press time, its first single, “You Rock My World” had reached No. 10 on Billboard’s Hot 100 Chart, while the video has been an MTV staple]. In addition, he has written and is producing a “We Are The World”-type song called “What More Can I Give?”; its proceeds will benefit victims of September 11 attacks. And he will make a cameo in next summer’s film sequel “Men In Black 2”.

In the end, it was Michael Jackson the father, a man deeply connected to his children and his own childhood, who left the most lasting impression.

TV Guide: This television special celebrates your long career. Do you remember the first time you ever stepped onstage?

MJ: I was 5 years old. And it was at a public school recital. We had to wear white shirts and short knickers. And I remember them saying, “Little Michael Jackson is coming up to sing ‘Climb Every Mountain.’” I got the biggest applause. When I went to my seat my grandfather and

mother were crying. They said, "[We] can't believe how beautiful you sound." That's the first one I remember.

TVG: It's rare for you to do a TV special.

MJ: I've turned down so many because I just don't like to go on television. I get embarrassed. So I'll do a performance, but I won't watch it until almost a year or two later because I'm always disappointed in something I did.

TVG: The concerts that were filmed for this special were packed with big stars. That couldn't have been disappointing.

MJ: The [second] show was good. [The first show] was horrible because, technically, there were a lot of breakdowns and intermissions in between each act. It was very difficult. The audience was waiting and waiting and waiting.

TVG: What does it feel like when you're dancing onstage?

MJ: I am a slave to the rhythm. I am a palette. I just go with the moment. You've got to do it that way because if you're thinking, you're dead. Performing is not about thinking; it's about feeling.

TVG: Do you plan the dance steps?

MJ: Certain steps are set with my brothers. But when I'm alone, it's all improvised. Nothing is planned, ever. All the dance schools now teach kids to count, and that's completely wrong.

TVG: What do you think about current pop groups like N'Sync? Are they imitating you?

MJ: I think they're very good singers. I know them very well, and we hang out every once in a while and laugh and play. I have no problem with them imitating [me]. It's a compliment. Everybody has to start out looking up to someone. For me it was James Brown, Sammy Davis Jr., Jackie Wilson, Fred Astaire, Gene Kelly.

TVG: The special features an appearance by Marlon Brando. How did he get involved?

MJ: Brando's a good friend of mine. I've known him for about 20 years. He comes to my house all the time. He loves to play with the kids. I play with his grandchildren, and we love to watch movies.

TVG: Who else do you spend time with?

MJ: Elizabeth [Taylor], Brando, Gregory Peck, these are very close friends of mine. Either they're much older than me or much younger. I've never had real contact with a person my age level. I think this happened because all my life I played clubs, since I was 5 years old. I saw people drunk, fighting, and it was just disgusting. When people say to me today, "Hey, let's go to a club," I go, "No way." If I go, it's not a party for me - too many autographs and photographs.

TVG: Was that true at your post-concert party at [the] Tavern on the Green restaurant?

MJ: It was worse then - I couldn't breathe because everybody [was crowding around].

TVG: And you fainted?

MJ: That's a rumor. It was sensationalism. [The press] made it up. As usual. They love doing that to me.

TVG: What did happen?

MJ: Nothing. I didn't faint. Not even close. [The press has] done this for so long, and it's disgusting. [*Gently, to Paris, who is skipping around the coffee table*] Paris, you can't make noise. You can't - no, don't bump the table. [The reporters are] tape recording.

TVG: Liza Minnelli also sang at your tribute concerts. You two seem very close.

MJ: I speak to Liza every week. We come from the same planet. Like Elizabeth does.

TVG: What planet is that?

MJ: It's called Capricious Anomaly in the Sea of Space. *[laughs]*. Gee, I can't name it. Just beyond our solar system, I think. But this is true, and this is not to be taken lightly: People who grew up as child stars have the same thing in common. You're cute, they love you; you go through the awkward stage, they don't accept you anymore. Very few make the transition to adult star. And most of them become self-destructive. And it's very sad.

TVG: How did you avoid self-destruction?

MJ: I think religion entered in?

TVG: Are you still a Jehovah's Witness?

MJ: Yeah. I've done, you know, we call it pioneering. We do 90 hours a month. I don't do as much now because I'm busy. You go door to door. I wear a fat suit, pop-bottle glasses, mustache, buck teeth, and, like, an Afro wig. And I knock on the door and say we're Jehovah's Witnesses.

TVG: This special is in conjunction with the launch of your seventh solo album, *Invincible*. Is this your comeback?

MJ: I don't see it as a comeback. I only do an album every four years. It's just that I've been on hiatus, writing.

TVG: The album features rap stars Will Smith and Jay-Z. It's hard to imagine you working with Jay-Z, whose image is a bit rougher than yours.

MJ: *[He]* was just so sweet. And you hear these crazy stories about something *[some of these rappers]* did the next day, and it's hard to believe. I always see them to be very kind. Perfect gentlemen.

TVG: What's the message of "Unbreakable", the first song on the album?

MJ: That *[I'm]* invincible, that I've been through it all. You can't hurt me. Knock me down, I get back up. *[To Prince, who begins to bang his Snapple lemonade on the coffee table]* See the noise you're making? You've got to be nice and quiet.

TVG: You are known for being eccentric. Did growing up in the limelight have something to do with that?

MJ: *[Smiling coyly]* It depends on what kind of eccentricities you're talking about.

TVG: People call you Wacko Jacko.

MJ: But that's not nice. They do that because they're jealous. I haven't done anything. I go to hospitals and orphanages. And we take huge bags of toys. I spend thousands of dollars. What's so wacko about that?

TVG: Because of the way you are portrayed in the press, people wonder, "Is he strange?"

MJ: *[Exasperated]* I did Oprah. I did Diane Sawyer. *[People]* saw me. *[The press]* is just completely jealous. And it's just one of those things that I have to deal with.

TVG: How do you deal with it?

MJ: I turn it into positive energy. And I write about it; it's in my movement, it's in the expression on my face. And it becomes a part of me, part of my creation. And I try not to let it get to me. Because if you do, you'll go crazy.

TVG: Your first video, for the single "You Rock My World", is actually a 15-minute short film. How did you come up with a gangster theme?

MJ: I don't know - the idea just kind of happened. In Cuba. Hot summer night. A club run by these hoods. I just wish [MTV] would show the long version. The short version I don't like at all. It's not entertaining enough.

TVG: How much are you involved in the video-making process?

MJ: When you say Michael Jackson, people always think of an entertainer. They don't think of the fact that I write songs. I'm not trying to brag, but I write them, and I direct a lot of [the videos]. I don't think [younger artists] are aware of those things, which I think would be inspiring for them.

TVG: When you were making this video, did you think, "I want this to be as good as the one for 'Thriller'"?

MJ: NO, because I know I didn't have the time to execute that. There are ones that are coming up that will be better.

TVG: Do you let your kids watch MTV?

MJ: At a certain age I will, not now. They are going to have to be 15 or 16.

TVG: Do you watch TV?

MJ: I love PBS, the Discovery Channel, The Simpsons. I love Sesame Street. I could watch it for hours. But my favorite show is Malcolm in the Middle. It reminds me so much of [my brothers and me] when we were little.

TVG: Which character do you relate to?

MJ: Malcolm. Mainly because he tries to fit into society, and he doesn't - like E.T. or Bambi, he can't adjust to other people's concepts. And I feel like that a lot of times. Once I'm offstage, I feel awkward, like this is not where I'm supposed to be.

TVG: Which one of your kids is most like you?

MJ: Both, but in different ways. Prince likes to tease, to the point where you want to pull his hair. I always used to tease my sisters all the time.

TVG: And Paris?

MJ: She's the tough one.

TVG: How is their mother, Debbie Rowe? *[A former nurse, she was married to Jackson from 1996 to '99. Jackson was married to his first wife, Lisa Marie Presley, from 1994 to '96]*

MJ: I heard she's doing good, she's fine. Paris is strong like Debbie.

TVG: Regarding your finances, there are rumors that you are bankrupt and that's why you charged high prices for the concert tickets.

MJ: That's tabloid garbage. They make things up. They're looking for something to sell a paper.

TVG: With the state of the world right now, you must be concerned for the kids. You were in New York when the terrorists attacked, right?

MJ: Yeah, I got a call from overseas that said America's being attacked. I said, "What are you talking about?" They said, "Turn on the news." And I couldn't believe what I saw. And I screamed down the hallway, "Everybody, quick, get up, we've got to go." And everybody got dressed, and we got in the car and drove farther out [from the city].

TVG: The attacks prompted you to write and produce an all-star recording of the song "What More Can I Give" to benefit the victims. *[Reba McEntire, Celine Dion, Boyz II Men, Mariah Carey, Ricky Martin, Gloria Estefan and Usher are among the artists scheduled to perform.]*

MJ: I was sick over the notoriety of the attacks. I don't know if [television news] played it too many times, but we went from fear to hate to anger to vengeance. And I think the media had a lot to do with that.

TVG: We hear you are planning to talk to President Bush about the song and its proceeds.

MJ: I talked to [Bush] senior. We have a phone call coming up very soon with the president. They told us that they're very proud of what I'm doing and that he said I'm an international hero.

TVG: Your mission seems to be about helping people.

MJ: I've always done that, yes. It's funny now, because of the this [terrorist] attack, everybody is trying to regroup, find songs about this kind of stuff. I've done it all my career: "Heal The World", "We Are The World", "Will You Be There", "Man In The Mirror", about the planet, earth songs. And nobody was doing it but me because that's where my heart is. I care. My biggest dream is to have a Children's Day, where children can bond with their parents.

TVG: Do your kids travel with you everywhere?

MJ: Everywhere I go.

TVG: What will happen when they start school and can't travel as much?

MJ: I'm going to build a computer school on the grounds [of Neverland, Jackson's estate]. With other children.

TVG: So they can go to school online?

MJ: Yeah. How can they go into society? He's Prince Michael Jackson. She's Paris Katherine Michael Jackson. It would be too difficult.

TVG: Why do you think you have such an affinity for children?

MJ: I'll tell you exactly where it comes from. Because I never had a childhood. When they're in pain, I feel their pain. And when they're in despair, I feel their despair. I have such concern about the plight and the state of our children today. If there was one day where kids could get with parents and bond, this would make such a difference. If I had that one day with my father, it would have made a difference in our relationship today - just the one day.

TVG: What is your relationship with your father?

MJ: It's much better now. He's a much nicer person now. He's mellowed out a lot since he's had grandchildren, you know. He has thirtysomething grandkids now.

TVG: What did your dad think of the concert special? Was he there?

MJ: He was at the show. But my father, if he feels you've done a good show, he'll just go, "Good show". He won't say, "Oh, you did wonderful." I don't think he knows how to show affection.

[Michael looks at Prince, who is crawling around the room with a rubber ball stuck on his nose, chattering and poking certain reporters on the cheek.]

MJ: *[Sweetly]* Prince, shh! You promised me you'd be quiet, remember?

TVG: What else do you want to do with your career?

MJ: I love movies. I'm going to direct more and act more. I feel the most powerful artistic expression in the world is film. I want to do a film with Liza Minnelli. We are planning a movie together. It's about two struggling entertainers trying to make it; they get turned away everywhere they go. With some of the best dancing ever. I'm not joking. Because I see it, I feel it here. *[Points to his heart. Meanwhile, Prince toddles across the room and sits at his father's feet. Paris crawls into Jackson's lap and sits there curled up, while he strokes her hair.]*

TVG: Michael Jackson as a father. It is an image we never see. Are you a good father?

MJ: I try my hardest. I try to bring them a lot of fun. Once a year I dress up like a clown, with the whole gear - the nose, the paint. And I give them candy and cookies.

Prince: [*Smiling*] And ice cream.

MJ: And ice cream!

Frankie Muniz, role of Malcolm in "Malcolm in the Middle". [Twitter \(June 25, 2009\) \(archived\)](#)

[Michael] told me my character "Malcolm" reminded him of himself when he was a kid.