

“The Robert W. Morgan Special of the Week” Interview

Date Assessed from the fact that Michael mentions that he “was 21 yesterday” (His birthday is August 29th, 1958)

Interview Recorded August 30, 1979 / Radio Special aired [August 9-10, 1980](#) ([archived](#)) (seen on album)

“The Robert W. Morgan Special of the Week” (August 9-10, 1980). speech transcript

Michael Jackson: I thought it would be wonderful to express the way the Jacksons feel about the music and its effect on the people of all races. If politicians and other people of different backgrounds can't bring the world together, we'll try to do it with music. That's what I love about music.

Robert W. Morgan: That's Michael Jackson, and if his thinking seems adult to you, then it's only because he *is* an adult.

Michael: I was twenty-one yesterday.

Morgan: That's right. Michael Jackson, who was only eleven when he sang his first hit in 1969, is all grown up. Problem is, most people think Michael is still only eleven years old.

Michael: Yeah, that's the problem when you are a child entertainer or a child star. Like, for instance, people still expect to see you that small. I don't feel any age. I just feel what I know. See, I always feel age is mental. It's like the old saying, "How old would you be if you didn't know your age?" and you would just be yourself. I see age as what you know mentally. I mean, I've seen some five-year-old men, I've seen some thirty-year-old children. And that's how I see it.

Morgan: If people think of you as a little kid, then they'll treat you as a little kid. And that's always bothered the Jacksons, who were tired of being treated with kid gloves. For instance, when they decided they were big enough to write and produce their own records, people thought the Jacksons were just kidding around. But Marlon Jackson says all they were trying to do was fulfill their own destiny.

Marlon Jackson: Through the years, we've had producers that the Motown--staff writers of Motown and producers--that they were writing and producing the songs... and we were doing what they heard and also putting a little of our things in it, which was great because they also turned out to be hits. But we always did want to write and produce our own stuff, and Motown didn't give us that opportunity. Well, it wasn't in the contract, and--

Michael: Eventually, they would have let us.

Marlon: Yeah, they would have.

Michael: It wasn't in the contract at the moment, and we *did* want to do it at that moment.

Morgan: Epic Records gave The Jacksons their freedom to produce themselves with an album appropriately titled "Destiny". They approached this epic task with no hesitation whatsoever, finding it as easy as ABC.

Marlon: Just jumping right on the stuff, that's what we did.

Michael: Well, the only hesitation is--

Randy: A lot of people didn't know if we could do it or not.

Michael: Yeah, well, you--it's like a lot of things, you have to prove to people, and you go through...

Randy: But we knew that we could do it.

Michael: Yeah, we knew what we could do it and wanted to do it. And finally, everybody gave us a chance and then we did it.

Morgan: Experience is the best teacher and the Jacksons just can't stop 'til they get enough. Enough experience, that is.

Michael: It's mainly experience, it's like in the movie world. I mean, the old MGM days, Judy Garland and Mickey Rooney with their movie back to back to back, and while they were doing this, I mean, they were learning, watching and seeing, and experiencing. Before you know it, they're directing their own films. They're around it all the time, and they want to do it themselves. They want their chance to try it. That's what's wonderful, [what] I love about the laws of experience. You eventually want to do it yourself.

Morgan: Gary, Indiana, a bustling steel center on Lake Michigan. Michael, Marlon, and Randy Jackson were born there, along with the rest of their brothers into Gary's most musical family.

Michael: Yeah, yeah, you can say that. There was always a lot of singing or guitar always--

Marlon: A lot of noise.

Michael: A lot of grit cans and stuff, and grit boxes you could beat on, little things like that. I mean, to me, if you really want to make music, you can make music out of anything. A piece of paper, a bag--

Marlon: Chairs.

Michael: --anything. And, I mean, that's if you really want to make music. That's what we did. We sang every day.

Marlon: Make noise around the house, Michael was the noise maker. Just hollers around the house, just making noise.

Randy: Any kind of noise.

Marlon: Him and his bird Ricky, they take turns.

Morgan: The kids weren't the only ones rocking in the Jackson household. Their mother Katherine was a serious musician, while their father Joe was playing rock and roll long before it was ever called rock and roll.

Michael: That's right.

Randy: Yeah.

Michael: She played clarinet in high school and she sings. And my father had a band. His brothers--three brothers, called "The Falcons". They never recorded or anything, but they were a big vocal group. And they played the guitar, they would come over and jam and everything and play all those... Fats Domino, gutbucket--

Marlon: Gutbucket.

Randy: Gutbucket.

Michael: Get down with some real rock and roll stuff, Chuck Berry, Little Richard tunes and stuff, and we would listen in.

Morgan: Joe Jackson, former leader of The Falcons, knew his sons were boys of a different feather. As soon as they could sing together, he added them in local talent shows where The Jacksons' dancing machine was like a money machine.

Michael: What really made me know that we were kinda good was when--I mean, you'd be up there dancing and all these quarters and dollars would be thrown at you, and you're doing splits

and picking up money, and putting it in your pocket, and he dan--I mean, our pockets were so loaded with money that we couldn't keep 'em up. I mean, we would only make like \$15 a night doing the show. Most of our money was made [from] people throwing money on the floor. I mean, we'd be loaded with money.

Marlon: We were talking the other day, we used to sell our pictures... and just said, "Who'd want our pictures back then?"

Michael: Yeah, we really--we'd go in the audience selling pictures. Then we'd think that they--who would want those pictures? [laughs]

Morgan: Back during their formative wonder years, The Jacksons may have been ranked as amateurs, but they worked like true professionals, never missing a trick.

Marlon: Well, my father saw that. We just--he kept us in line. My mom and my father saw that.

Michael: And he kept rehearsing us...

Marlon: We used to travel in the van, go to New York, do the Apollo, seven shows a night, go to the Regal Theater, go to the Uptown, Kansas City, St. Louis, in a VW van with all our equipment, the five of us, and the drummer, and the keyboard player. This was in 1966.

Michael: And we would do like six shows a night with Jackie Wilson, James Brown, The Miracles, The O'Jays, guys like The Pips. And, see, we would come on amateur hour. See, these people were--they had like a local record going. And so we would come on amateur hour. We would win the trophy every time. And then we did the Regal, and this guy named Bobby Taylor and Gladys Knight told Motown about us. So we decided to do a little audition. We auditioned for Berry Gordy in Detroit at his--I mean, he got a mansion house there, it's like indoor pool. And here we are singing, and all the Motown stars with Diana Ross, Temptations, Smokey Robinson, and we're singing, and all these people are watching us, and we did our whole show and they loved it! They really raved over it, and Diana Ross came over to us and she said especially, "I loved what I saw", and she said she wanted to take special interest in our career. And Motown moved us out to California, half of the group stayed with Berry Gordy, half the group stayed with Diana Ross. And we recorded and recorded and--

Marlon: And ate out her refrigerator... [Michael and Marlon laugh]

Michael: We must've lived with them for about two years. And our first hit was "I Want You Back".

Morgan: A Hollywood scriptwriter couldn't have come up with a better scenario. Five hard-working brothers from a small Midwestern town are discovered by Motown's biggest moguls, record four number one singles in a row, and become international teen idols, all overnight. So, naturally, when the five Jacksons went back to Gary, Indiana, they received a hero's welcome.

Marlon: When we went home right after we did the album, we flew in a helicopter, didn't we? Remember that?

Michael: Yeah, we did.

Marlon: Yeah, and it was "Jackson Five Day" and the street we used to live on was 2300 Jackson Street... so now it's "Jackson Five Street".

Michael: "Jackson Five Boulevard".

Marlon: Yeah, in Gary Indiana.

Michael: And our old house is still sitting there.

Morgan: Unfortunately, it was while the Jacksons were back in Indiana that they learned a hard lesson. Now that they were celebrities, they could never again be considered as just five of the gang.

Michael: Yeah, they'll look at you differently. They look at you as being a star or entertainer. I look at me as being just a regular person, but very thankful--but I'm different, 'cause I do a different job than what they do, and I'm happy to be chosen to do it.

Morgan: From the beginning, the Jacksons had the best of both worlds: shrieking teenyboppers were thrilled by the group's innocent sex appeal, while hardcore music freaks got up to the Jacksons down-home sound. But instead of letting their popularity go to their heads, the Jacksons graciously took it all in stride, until the Saturday morning Michael and Marlon turned on their TV set and saw themselves as cartoon characters.

Michael: To me, that was the biggest gas in my whole career.

Marlon: Yeah, because we were at that age at that time. We loved cartoons.

Michael: Shoot, I still like cartoons.

Marlon: I like cartoons, but it just blew me out, so--[laughs]

Michael: I--that was fun to see yourself in animation. Then when--some children would actually walk up to us and expect to see us in a cartoon form. They really would, and they would suddenly get upset, they really would. It was so funny! Sometimes I would hate to face children when they see you in person. They wonder, "What happened?"

Morgan: Although they're regarded as a typical American family, the Jacksons appeal has always been universal. In fact, England was in the grip of "Jackson mania" in the early '70s when the Jacksons found themselves competing against an even more typical American family.

Michael: It was really something. I mean it's really a historical event. The Osmonds came in the next day, stayed in the same hotel, okay, and the fans were outside the hotel all night. They would go to the Osmonds' side, scream for them, come back on our side, scream for us. They would stay out here all night long, then they would come upstairs and run in the rooms. We would go in our rooms and find 'em in the shower, hiding in the closet, under the beds, it was really somethin'.

Morgan: The British treated the Jacksons just like royalty. That's why everyone was so amazed when the five treated British royalty just like Jacksons.

Marlon: It was so funny. I mean, it wasn't funny--it was great, because the Queen, the lady said--they said, "So what did she tell us to do when we meet the queen?" Bow, and then they said, "Your Majesty". So we did, then the Duke came along, and he said that he was asking so many questions. "How many are in your family?"

Michael: I mean, it's like an interview, it was great. He is so great. I like the Duke.

Randy: His hands were in his coat pocket and his shirt was open.

Michael: And he's so cool.

Randy: You see, he is just much cooler and more handsome.

Morgan: When the Jacksons decide to ease up on their recording and performing schedule, Michael Jackson doesn't say "Rats!". Instead he concentrates on his singing and acting careers, like co-starring with Diana Ross as the Scarecrow in the movie "The Wiz".

Michael: I mean, I think most kids fall in love with the scarecrow, and I never thought I would play the part. And when I did my scenes--I would get reports and different reviewers telling me

how the kids in the audience would be crying and everything, because these crows would torture me so badly. Even my nephews, they walked out on the movie, because they said--you know there's one scene when the bad witch actually takes this big saw, this fast saw that turns and cuts my whole body. And my nephews got so mad that they said, "Let's go! They cuttin' up Uncle Michael!", and they got mad and they left [laughs]

Morgan: The musical director of "The Wiz" was legendary composer, arranger, performer, producer Quincy Jones. With credentials like his, it's no wonder Michael had a jones for Quincy to produce his solo album, "Off the Wall".

Michael: We got along so good. I mean, it was like brothers on the set. And I called Quincy. I said, "Quincy, I'm doing my album soon, I would like somebody to produce it. Do you know of any producers?" Honestly, I wasn't, in a slick way, trying to say, "Quincy, do my album" or such and such [laughs] I didn't even think about him doing it! And he said, "Smelly--", well he calls me "Smelly". I always say something's "smelly", like "That's a smelly song", meaning it's incred--more than bad, incredible, it stinks. But, he said, "Smelly, why don't you let me do it?" I said, "That would be wonderful!" I said, "Are you serious?"

Marlon: Like he wasn't thinking of it before!

Michael: No, I wasn't, come on! I wasn't hitting around [laughs]

Morgan: Quincy Jones has worked with everyone from Duke Ellington to Ringo Starr, so when the maestro calls Michael Jackson a maestro, you better believe him.

Quincy Jones: It's ironic too, because I think sometimes about writing for Count Basie--who's 75 years old, and then doing an album with Michael, who's 21 [laughs] A long ways away, but Michael's got, at 21 years old, has 15 or 16 years' experience, and probably one of the most professional people to work with. He's got an old man sense of awareness really. I mean, it's way beyond the experiences that he's already had. It's just like a gift, he just got touched on the shoulder. And I think if everything goes the way it's going now, Michael could be the star of the '80s.

Morgan: So far, we presented the Jacksons as the "sunshine boys" of popular music, but not everything has been sweetness in life. One of the original members of "The Jackson 5", Jermaine, is no longer germane to the group, having left for a solo career in 1975. Randy was seriously injured in a traffic accident in early 1980, and then there was their bitter departure from Motown, fought out in the front pages of the music trade publications. But through it all, the Jacksons have remained, well, brothers.

Marlon: You know something? People used to ask us, we've never fought before.

Michael: I mean, I've slapped Marlon a couple of times...

Marlon: You know, and I'll spit at him--nah, we just kidding [laughs] No, we never really fought before. I think it was too much in our music, really. 'Cause we--you know, we have disputes, because everybody have disputes, but fist fights and stuff like that, we never really did that. And people say, "All brothers and sisters fight. You all don't fight?" "No, we don't." And, I take it like--

Michael: Well, we're no angels, don't--

Marlon: No, we're not no angels.

Michael: I mean, I'm in between devil and angel...[laughs] Nah, I try to do what's right and do what I think is right. But I'm not gonna make myself an angel, 'cause I have a cr--

Randy: Crooked halo, huh?

Michael: 45-degree angle halo here,

Randy: It's cocked to the side.

Michael: It's mainly a beginning.

Randy: I think because of us writing and producing, I think it's, like, writing--

Marlon: Whenever you step into something new, it's the beginning, you know? We were in this business seven years prior to the ten. We were born in it. So, actually it's been 17 years and we're looking for a lot more. There's no zenith. No, you haven't reached the peak yet.

Morgan: The Jacksons have been in show business longer than most seasoned veterans, and yet, they're only just beginning. The Jacksons feel a certain responsibility to never let their fans down, treating their artistry and their success as a sacred trust. That's why, as fascinating as it's been to see them grow into manhood, it'll be even more rewarding to watch The Jacksons fulfill their destiny.

Marlon: The only thing that we would like to say is that we've been in the business professionally for ten years, and we appreciate what the fans have done for us. We appreciate them accepting our music, and without them we wouldn't be where we are today. And remember, they're the ones who made us where we are today, and we will never forget that. And that's what we love them for.

Randy: I think we have such a close relationship with our fans, and as long as we keep this, I think everything will be fine.

Michael: I mainly thank God, 'cause we've been doing this a long time, and my health is still good, and I've been all over the world two times, and I'm still doing what I'm doing. I've entertained many races. We need people, and everywhere we've gone, the response have been really incredible. And I'm thankful to be chosen to do it, and I want to do more things and better things, and to keep on going, and thank all the people.

January 15, 1984 Radio "Spotlight Special". 8/30/1979 interview outtakes (in brackets)

Michael: [We appeal to all ages from 50 going down, and all colors of people, which is beautiful. We were really--and I would say the first--young group to ever have hit number one records...]

Michael: I mean, I think most kids fall in love with the Scarecrow. [I always was mad at the Lion when he came out and made Dorothy mad like that, and start made her running. I would always get mad. So, I mean, I fell in love with the Scarecrow...]

Michael: [I wasn't nervous at all (about "The Wiz"). I just--I've never been nervous. I just signed, and I knew the material was good, and I did it.]

Michael: [Well, Berry Gordy would tell me--say, "Your record's number one, you know that?" I said, "Yeah". Didn't really even think about it. I just enjoyed doing it. The only real thing that made you really think about [was] when we went on our first American tour. It was--God, it was real mania. I mean, it still is, but the screams and the girls fainting and everything, it was--you look out in the wings, you go "Wow", and that's what made you think about it. I mean, you saw the reaction from the songs and what we were, you know?]

Michael: [What was great about the whole command performance--it's just like people imagine it and like a storybook fairy tale. That means she actually [is] from head to toe in diamonds and rubies--nothing's fake--the crown. They rolled out the red carpet, she don't walk on any wood. I mean, red carpet, the big Rolls Royces, and the horse and the chariots, and the men whipping

the horses, and hordes of people from blocks and blocks and blocks, looking to see the Queen, taking pictures. I mean, when she come to town, God, it's like a big, big, big event. I mean, it's just like I imagined it, and that's what was great about it. It was really something, and what was--we stayed at the Churchill Hotel.] The Osmonds came in the next day stayed in the same hotel...

Michael: Some children would actually walk up to us and expect to see us in a cartoon form. They really would, and they would suddenly get upset, they really would. It was so funny! Sometimes I would hate to face children [cause they--it kind of ruins the illusion] when they see you in person. They wonder, "What happened?"

Michael: [When I first met Paul McCartney, he came up to me, he said, "How are you doing?" I said, "Fine". He said, "Linda and I wrote a song for you." I said, "Really?" He said, "Yes". I said, "You're kidding!" And he starts singing, said (unintelligible)? I said, "Okay" and they started breaking out singing. So we switched numbers and everything. They gave me their Scotland number and their England number. And we got in contact with each other, and we talked and talked. It started Heather, who's a good friend of mine too.]

Michael: [I don't like to be limited. I like to reach out to all colors and all levels in every which way and form. Just grab.]