

Manchester, England (Destiny World Tour)

New Musical Express (March 3, 1979)

...I stood on the balcony of a typically grandiose Northern theatre, just before the house lights were due to go down, wondering if the magic would still be there; after all, young Michael is all grown up now (isn't he?), and so are all the other young contenders who spent all those fast, warm, saline nights grooving to the likes of "ABC", "I Want You Back", and "Little Bitty Pretty One".

Make or break time: below me, the musicians moved furtively into position as the theatre grew dimmer by degree. The band broke into a funky-losing jog, and clouds of dry ice ebbed and belched out of a hidden pipe that seemed to be situated under the hugely elevated drum kit, disguising and distorting the entrance of the main attraction.

Gradually, The Jacksons appeared through the diminishing cloud, jumping airily on the spot, keeping good time, showing a lot of attitude.

The formation lurched open, slick as you please, with only four Jacksons--bro Jackie was laid up with the flu--and MJ assuming complete control immediately, singing, dancing, and working very, very hard indeed to an audience who would have accepted virtually anything. Preaching to the converted with a feverish, committed, rapturous elegance.

This was 15 years of total dedication going through its grueling paces. Ten years of million sellers: a whole lifestyle, a beautiful vision. A great show.

The young, wispy-boned girls still scream at Michael Jackson, still get hysterical when he sings "I'll Be There" and "Ben", even though most can have hardly been out of the nursery when the songs were first released.

On paper, this may seem a little puzzling. After all, Michael ain't the baby of the show anymore. Young Randy is three years his junior and, presumably, a lot closer in age to the little bitty pretty ones who are making all those hysterical waves.

But when you see the show and hear Michael sing--his voice almost as pure and lucent as ever--things appear more rational.

You see, the point is that Michael Jackson seems not to have grown up at all. Which is not to say he's physically retarded, or some kind of mentally arrested dummy--far from it--but simply that Jackson seems absolutely untouched by the seedy, trying, disillusioning side of adulthood. Peter Pan, in a nutshell. In a way, you can see why. Ever since he was five, Michael Jackson has been singing and touring with his family. Since the age of ten, his voice and presence have accounted for a whole basketful of million seller singles and albums. His whole lifestyle has been geared to the showbiz rhythm. For three quarters of his life, he has been closely closeted in the glitteringly surreal confines of the world of top-flight entertainment.

Michael Jackson has evolved as the ultimate troubadour, totally dedicated to his profession, because he has known no other way of life. He has matured in a totally manufactured environment, so completely cloistered by that environment that he can only regard the false situation as reality.

Quite simply, Michael Jackson has never been allowed to grow up. He doesn't smoke. He doesn't drink. He doesn't use drugs of any kind. Watching him on stage, watching him off stage, and listening to those who are close to him, you can't help but get the impression he

approaches his business like a dedicated sportsman: constantly in training, persistently on his guard.

Under these circumstances, it would be understandable if Michael Jackson had grown up a thoroughly precocious, self-centered, arrogant young man.

I am about to find out that hasn't, which comes as a pleasant surprise.

[Story continues in February 18, 1979 document]