

(((THE JACKSON 5)))



ALL THEM WHAT YOU WILL

– the Jackson 5, the J5, the Jacksons – they were, in the end, Michael and four of his brothers. And call him what you will, but Michael Jackson was and is one of the greatest stars ever to grace this business we call show. ∞ HE STILL SENDS CHILLS up and down my spine

The Brothers
Jackson: Jermaine,
Jackie, Marlon,
Michael (standing),
Tito (from left)

when I play the Jackson 5's version of "Who's Lovin' You," with its bluesy curlicues, executed by a singer aged all of eleven years. He still amazes me with his moves – from his preteen spins learned faithfully from James Brown to his post-J5 inventions that placed him in league with Fred Astaire

and Neil Armstrong. ∞ BUT IT WAS WITH THE JACKSON 5 that Michael came to light, and the entire group deserves credit for shaking up the music scene of the early Seventies. ∞ THEY BEGAN BY shaking up Motown Records. The label had begun the





Marlon David Jackson

had no choice but to follow. The engineers of the Motown Sound, which had set the pace for so much of pop music, now chased after the innovations of others. Some artists, writers and producers departed for competing companies. And Motown's signature group, the Supremes, was breaking up. Berry Gordy and company badly needed an injection of youth and energy.

Enter the Jacksons. Born and raised in the small, industrial town of Gary, Indiana, they ranged in age between seventeen (Jackie) and ten (Michael). Between them were Tito, 15, Jermaine, 14, and Marlon, 11.

At a time of acid rock and psychedelic soul, of war protests and black power, Motown could offer a wholesome family group in 'fros and mod duds, dancing, playing and singing nonthreatening pop music. On the surface, it was black bubblegum. Pseudo-psychedelic fashions to the hokey hilt. Cutesy choreography behind the dervish that was Michael. But, on closer inspection, they were clearly no mere novelty act.

They had been whipped into shape by their musician father, Joe, who put his boys through countless rehearsals and talent shows. After a few wins, the Jacksons got a nightclub engagement in Chicago, sharing the stage with comics and strippers. Playing the Regal Theater one night, they caught the eye of Bobby Taylor, leader of the Motown group the Vancouvers.

Taylor persuaded Motown to give them an audition, helped produce their first couple of sides, and, a few weeks later, a dazzled Berry Gordy Jr. was introducing the Jackson 5 to the rest

Jermaine La Jaune Jackson



Sixties with an exhilarating string of hit records. Motown, set up in a couple of Detroit houses, was the Sound of Young America, with a stable of artists whose very names exuded confidence: the Miracles! The Temptations! The Marvelettes! But by the end of the decade, Motown was a different company. The label, for years a pioneer with its inventive songs, producers, arrangers and artists, found itself surrounded by competitors, some of them paving new paths that Motown

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of Motown at a party at his Detroit mansion. The group performed, and, as Michael recalled, "They gave us a standing ovation. Diana Ross came over at the end and kissed each one of us." Ross would later introduce the Jackson 5 to the press at a Beverly Hills nightclub, leading to reports that she had discovered the group. Shipped to Hollywood and reshaped by Motown's vaunted Artists Development group and The Corporation (writers

and producers Freddie Perren, Deke Richards, Fonce Mizell and Gordy), the Jacksons attacked the studio, the stage and the charts. Gordy had promised that their first three singles would go to Number One. The kids did him one better. Their first *four* singles hit the top of the chart: "I Want You Back," "ABC," "The Love You Save" and "I'll Be There." In the next two years, seven more singles would reach the Top Twenty.

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I met them in early 1971 for a *Rolling Stone* cover story.

Michael took the cover all by himself. By then, he was a certified star and would soon cut his first solo single and album. The story emphasized family, and I discovered a group of down-to-earth individuals. Yes, they'd been disciplined and molded into an entertainment machine, but each Jackson had his own mind.

Jackie was looking ahead to business school and called his J5 work "something like a hobby." Tito was into music theory, Jimi Hendrix and the blues. "I have one B.B. King record about as old as me," he said. Jermaine, who sang lead until Michael took the mike, was busy writing songs.

"I've got some saved up," he said, "for when we go bankrupt." Marlon didn't say much, but

onstage, he reminded me of Bubba Knight, Gladys Knight's pip of a brother. Behind the star, he was the most natural, the smoothest mover. Michael was the picture of calm backstage. Seconds before showtime, he asked for a hot dog; instead,

he was hustled onstage to face thousands of ecstatic fans. He took them in stride, too. "If it weren't for the screaming," said the twelve-year-old Michael, "it wouldn't be exciting."

The Jackson 5, in turn, invigorated young people everywhere. The paper *Soul*, began devoting a full page to J5 fan mail:

Dear SOUL:

I want to say how proud all us kids are to have a group like the J5 today. It wasn't too long ago when kids got on the stage and were laughed at. The J5 can communicate with young and old, Black and white. — C.E., New York

The Jackson 5 inspired imitation by groups both black and white. They were the first pop act since the Beatles to become a cartoon show. And they were in the center of Motown's artistic and commercial revival.

The Jackson 5's greatest contribution to pop culture, however, was Michael Jackson himself. The fact of his being is reason enough that the Jackson 5 are being inducted tonight into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. ◀



Toriano "Tito" Adaryll Jackson



Michael Joe Jackson

The early Jackson 5, circa '68: Tito, Marlon, Jackie, Michael, Jermaine (from left)

Sigmund Esco "Jackie" Jackson



