

Talent

Michael Jackson: It's Tough Juggling Careers

There's Little Time For Group & Projects

By PAUL GREIN

LOS ANGELES—The hardest part of Michael Jackson's career at the moment is juggling his own album and film projects with the Jacksons' album and concert activity.

"This has been the major problem for me," the 21-year-old singer confesses—"trying to work with the group and do solo things as well."

"It took seven months to film 'The Wiz,'" he remembers, "and my brothers wanted to travel and start work on the 'Destiny' album, but I couldn't. And now I want to do more films and things."

Does Michael see the day when he might leave the group? "Not where I would just walk off," he says, "but I think that will happen gracefully in the future. I think the public will ask for it."

"That's definitely going to happen anyway," says Jackson, "when I get into films more, which is what I really want to do."

Jackson says he's been offered a number of film projects in the wake of his well-received debut as the Scarecrow in "The Wiz." He's been pitched a part in the film version of "A Chorus Line," to be directed by "Wiz" director Sidney Lumet; the title role in a film biography of "Mr.

Bojangles" Bill Robinson and a part in a musical called "Summer Stock." He also is interested in a project about Charlie Chaplin.

Jackson confirms that he will be involved in the next Jacksons album, its second since the group took over production reins. That desire for control, he says, was the reason the group left Motown in 1976 for Epic.

"I learned so much at Motown," he says, "but we always wanted to do certain things and we couldn't. We wanted to write our own songs and own our own publishing company. So we went elsewhere and then got the same thing from CBS: they said they didn't think we should, so we did two albums with Gamble & Huff."

How did the group finally get the green light from Epic? "I had a meeting with Walter Yetnikoff," says Jackson. "I told him to give us that chance. I said I know my potential and I know what we can do."

"I think what really convinced people," says Jackson, "was when we wrote a song on the 'Goin' Places'

album, 'Different Kind Of Lady,' which was a big hit in the clubs. Even Kenny Gamble came and told us, 'You all are good enough to do your own stuff.'"

Jackson says the group learned a lot from Gamble & Huff, while acknowledging that the artist/producer pairing (set by Ron Alexenburg) didn't really reflect the group's identity. "It was a sound they had on the O'Jays and a lot of other groups they were doing," Jackson says.

Jackson had just one instruction for Quincy Jones when he agreed to produce "Off The Wall," his first solo album in more than four years. "I said I didn't want it to sound like a Jacksons album at all. And it's a lot different: the harmony sounds better and there's a lot of different styles on there."

Since "Off The Wall" has been in and out of the top 10 for four months and has produced two chart-topping singles, it's somewhat surprising that Jackson says he has no plans to cut another for about two years. "One thing I hate," he explains, "is over-exposure."

When he does return to the studio, Jones will again handle production chores, with the number of tunes written by Jackson likely to increase from three to about half the album. After that, Jackson wants to write and produce a concept album by

himself. He even has a theme in mind dealing with children, old people and starvation. "I feel real deeply about it," says Jackson. "I've been putting ideas together for about a year now."

Jackson says he's more interested in record production. "I'm really becoming a studio nut," he says. "I

want to get in the studio and take my time; I hate rush jobs." He spent three months recording "Off The Wall." "Destiny" took about six weeks.

On the back of the Jacksons' "Destiny" album is this message by Michael and Jackie Jackson: "Of all the bird family the peacock is the only bird that integrates all colors into one, and displays this radiance of fire only when in love. We, like the peacock, try to integrate all races into one through the love of music."

"That's one of my main goals," says Michael, "since politicians have so much trouble trying to do what they want to do. When we're in concert and we can get all these different races of people holding hands and screaming and dancing, that's something politicians can't do; that's power."

During the Jacksons' just-ended tour, Michael's voice gave out, causing the cancellation of seven shows. "My throat was badly infected," he says. "It had blisters on it and I couldn't talk or sing at all. The doctor made us cancel two weeks of shows."

Even then Michael had to take it easy. "It was so bad Marlon would hold down certain notes I was supposed to do and I would stand there pretending I was singing."

This was true even though the keys have long since been lowered on the early Jackson 5 hits. "We had to change the keys," Michael says. "I sounded like Minnie Mouse on those things."



Michael Jackson: The energetic vocalist works to blend his individual image with that of his brothers in the Jacksons onstage group.



Billboard photo by Ruth Bernal

NARAS AWARDS: Bob James left, president of Tappan Zee Records, shares a table with Ron Carter, who won a player of the year award as top acoustic bass player.

N.Y. NARAS Fetes Session Sidemen

NEW YORK—Some of New York's top session musicians were honored with player of the year awards by the New York chapter of the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences at a reception here recently. The winners included:

George Marge for flute and oboe. David Sanborne and George Young tied for alto sax. Michael Brecker for tenor sax. Ronnie Cuber for baritone sax. Jimmie Buffington for French horn. Eddie Daniels for clarinet. Wally Kane for bassoon. Margaret Ross for harp. Ken Bichel for synthesizer. Frank Owens and Richard Tee for acoustic piano. Don Grolnick and Pat Rebillot for electronic keyboards except synthesizer and Jay Berliner for acoustic guitar.

Also: Jeff Mironov and Vinnie Bell tied for electric guitar. David Nadian for violin. Emmanuel Vardi for viola. Charles McCracken for cello. Ron Carter for acoustic bass. Will Lee for electric bass. Steve Gadd for drums. Ralph MacDonald for percussion. Jean "Toots" Thielemans for miscellaneous instruments/harmonica.

Also: Luther Vandross and Kenny Karen for male backup

singer. Patti Austin for female backup singer. Randy Brecker for trumpet and Urbie Greene for trombone.

**DON'T
BE
VICTIMIZED**
by the house piano...

DEMAND

to tour with
German Steinways,
Bosendorfers, Yamahas
and All Electric
Keyboards from...

ProPiano



S.F. 415/621.1210
L.A. 213/852.1400
N.Y. 212/662.8226

**COMING
ATTRACTION**

Springfield Civic Center and
Symphony Hall **COMPLETE**
ENTERTAINMENT COMPLEX
PHONE TODAY FOR DETAILS:
Kerry P. Felski, Executive Director
(413) 781-7080

1277 Main Street
Springfield, Massachusetts 01103
(413) 781-7080

SPRINGFIELD CIVIC CENTER
and **SYMPHONY HALL, INC.**