

= Stranger in Moscow =

" Stranger in Moscow " is a song by American recording artist Michael Jackson from his ninth studio album HIStory : Past , Present and Future , Book I. The song was released worldwide in November 1996 , but was not released in the United States until August 1997 by Epic Records . The track was written by Jackson in September 1993 , at the height of the highly publicized child abuse accusations made against him , while on the Dangerous World Tour stop in Moscow . It was originally written as a poem by Jackson , then adapted into a song .

The song 's music video depicts the lives of six individuals , including Jackson , who are left isolated and disconnected from the world around them . This is Jackson 's lowest charting song on the Billboard Hot 100 peaking at 91 . The song was performed on the HIStory World Tour in 1996 ? 97 . It was covered a few times by other artists .

= = Context , production and music = =

In the book The Many Faces of Michael Jackson , author Lee Pinkerton , like many other reviewers , noted that HIStory 's album tracks like " Stranger in Moscow " were Jackson 's response to recent events in his personal life . In 1993 , the relationship between Jackson and the press soured entirely when he was accused of child sexual abuse . Although never charged with a crime , Jackson was subject to intense media scrutiny while the criminal investigation took place . Complaints about the coverage and media included using sensational headlines to draw in readers and viewers when the content itself did not support the headline , accepting stories of Jackson 's alleged criminal activity in return for money , accepting leaked material from the police investigation in return for money paid , deliberately using pictures of Jackson 's appearance at its worst , a lack of objectivity and using headlines that strongly implied Jackson 's guilt .

At the time , Jackson said of the media reaction , " I will say I am particularly upset by the handling of the matter by the incredible , terrible mass media . At every opportunity , the media has dissected and manipulated these allegations to reach their own conclusions " . A few months after the allegations became news , Jackson had lost approximately 10 pounds ( 4 @. @ 5 kg ) in weight and had stopped eating . Jackson 's health had deteriorated to the extent that he canceled the remainder of his Dangerous World Tour and went into rehabilitation . Jackson booked the whole fourth floor of the clinic , and was put on a Valium IV to wean him from painkillers . The singer 's spokesperson told reporters that Jackson was " barely able to function adequately on an intellectual level " . While in the clinic , Jackson took part in group and one @-@ on @-@ one therapy sessions .

When Jackson left the US to go into rehabilitation , the media showed the singer little sympathy . The Daily Mirror held a " Spot the Jacko " contest , offering readers a trip to Walt Disney World if they could correctly predict where the entertainer would appear next . A Daily Express headline read , " Drug Treatment Star Faces Life on the Run " , while a News of the World headline accused Jackson of being a fugitive . These tabloids also falsely alleged that Jackson had traveled to Europe to have cosmetic surgery that would make him unrecognizable on his return . Geraldo Rivera set up a mock trial , with a jury made up of audience members , even though Jackson had not been charged with a crime .

" Stranger in Moscow " is an R & B ballad , penned by Jackson in 1993 during his Dangerous World Tour stop in Moscow . The instrumental portion of the song is based on the end credits theme of Sonic the Hedgehog 3 ( 1994 ) , a video game which Jackson and his tour keyboardist Brad Buxer were brought in to compose music for . Jackson dropped out of the project after scandals involving him arose around this time . The lyrics for the song are based upon a poem written by Jackson . A background guitar was played by Steve Lukather while keyboards , synthesizers and bass are credited to David Paich and Steve Porcaro . Originally , HIStory was planned as a greatest hits release , with a few new tracks . However , Jackson and his collaborators were so pleased with the result of " Stranger in Moscow " that they decided to give HIStory a full studio album as the second disc . Jackson used elements of Russian imagery and symbolism to help promote the concept of fear and alienation in the track , in a similar fashion to Simply Red 's album Love and the Russian

Winter several years later . It concludes with a narrative , spoken in Russian , by a KGB interrogator ( Ed Wiesnieski ) . The narrative , translated into English is , " Why have you come from the west ? Confess ! To steal the great achievements of the people , the accomplishments of the workers ... " .

= = Music and critical reception = =

Stranger in Moscow has a tempo of 66 beats per minute , making it one of Jackson 's slowest songs . The song received praise from music reviewers and producers . James Hunter of Rolling Stone commented " [ Jackson is ] angry , miserable , tortured , inflammatory , furious about what he calls , in ' Stranger in Moscow ' , a ' swift and sudden fall from grace ' ... HIStory feels like the work of someone with a bad case of Thriller nostalgia . Occasionally this backward focus works to Jackson 's advantage : On ' Stranger in Moscow ' he remembers the synth @-@ pop ' 80s while constructing wracked claims of danger and loneliness that rival any Seattle rocker 's pain . "

Jon Pareles of The New York Times stated , " The ballads are lavishly melodic . ' Stranger In Moscow ' , with odd lyrics like ' Stalin 's tomb won 't let me be , ' has a gorgeous chorus for the repeated question " How does it feel ? " . Fred Shuster of the Daily News of Los Angeles described it as , " a lush , gorgeous minor @-@ key ballad with one of the album 's catchiest choruses " .

Stephen Thomas Erlewine of Allmusic noted of HIStory , " Jackson produces some well @-@ crafted pop that ranks with his best material ... ' Stranger in Moscow ' is one of his most haunting ballads . Longtime collaborator Bruce Swedien , has described " Stranger in Moscow " as one of the best songs Jackson had ever done . Patrick Macdonald of The Seattle Times described " Stranger in Moscow " as " a pretty ballad interspersed with sounds of rain . " Further praise came in 2005 when it was felt that the song had successfully portrayed " eerie loneliness " and was characterized as beautiful by Josephine Zohny of PopMatters . Tom Molley of the Associated Press described it as " [ a ] ethereal and stirring description of a man wounded by a ' swift and sudden fall from grace ' walking in the shadow of the Kremlin " .

Chris Willman of Los Angeles Times stated " ' Stranger in Moscow ' , is a step removed from the focused paranoia of much of the rest of the album , more akin to the deeper , fuzzier dread of a past perennial like ' Billie Jean ' . Jackson imagines himself alone and adrift in a psychic Russia , pre @-@ glasnost , hunted by an unseen KGB : ' Here abandoned in my fame / Armageddon of the brain ' , he sings in the somber , constricted verses , before a sweeping coda kicks up four minutes in and the stalkee suddenly breaks his cool to wail about a desolate , inconsolable loneliness . Here , in this song , is the real genius ? and probably real personhood ? of Michael Jackson " .

Rod Temperton , one of Jackson 's songwriters from his earlier career , believes that this is his best song .

= = Music video plot and influence = =

The song 's music video , directed by Nick Brandt , and shot in Los Angeles , is focused around six unrelated people living in a cityscape while the rest of the world moves around them in slow motion . The first half of the video introduces these figures . Five of the figures are a man looking down at the city from his bedroom window , a woman sitting alone in a coffee shop , a homeless man lying on the damp street , a lone figure feeding pigeons , and a boy ostracized from a game of baseball . The sixth figure is Jackson himself , seen walking the city streets while he sings . Special effects are used to show birds and wasps flying , glass breaking and coffee spilling , all in slow motion .

In the second half of the scenario , heavy rain descends on the city and the citizens try to flee , all again seen in slow motion . From the safety of shelter , the six " strangers " watch everyone 's futile attempts to avoid the sudden change in weather . Eventually they decide to go outside , where they look up at the sky and allow the rain to soak them . The video ends with Michael whipping his hair . During this scene , you hear a voicing softly in Russian , a reference to Moscow .

The music video also appears on Jackson 's video albums HIStory on Film , Volume II and Michael Jackson 's Vision .

Jackson 's biographer J. Randy Taraborrelli , has stated that the video is based on Jackson 's real

life . He used to walk alone at night looking for new friends , even at the peak of his musical popularity . The 1980s saw him become deeply unhappy ; Jackson explained , " Even at home , I 'm lonely . I sit in my room sometimes and cry . It 's so hard to make friends ... I sometimes walk around the neighborhood at night , just hoping to find someone to talk to . But I just end up coming home . "

= = Live performances = =

Jackson first performed the song during the HIStory World Tour , which also turned out to be the last live performance of the song . Jackson always performed the song wearing golden jacket and pants . The song was always lipsynced , instead focusing on Jackson 's robotic and gliding dance moves . Along with ' Shake Your Body ( Down To The Ground ) , " " Billie Jean , " and " Smooth Criminal , " it was one of the songs where Jackson did the moonwalk . The song was also due to be performed for the This Is It concert series , but the shows were cancelled due to his death .

= = Cover versions = =

The German electronica group Transformer di Roboter released a cover version of " Stranger in Moscow " on their MySpace page on January 1 , 2002 . The bass line of the track was replicated using the iconic Apple Macintosh startup chime .

The British act Alpines uploaded a cover version on their ' covers ' MySpace page on January 1 , 2010 .

British singer Leona Lewis did a live rendition at the Michael Forever ? The Tribute Concert

Kevin Parker released a cover by his Australian psychedelic rock band Tame Impala on SoundCloud on March 12 , 2014 .

= = Charts = =

= = Track listing = =

= = Personnel = =

Written , composed and produced by Michael Jackson

Vocal arrangement by Michael Jackson and John Barnes

Solo and background vocals by Michael Jackson

Keyboard , synthesizer and bass by David Paich

Keyboard and synthesizer by Steve Porcaro

Background guitar by Steve Lukather

Michael Jackson 's heartbeat recording by Dr. Eric Chevlen : digitally processed in the Synclavier

Rhythm arrangement by Michael Jackson and John Barnes