

Many Facets of the MAN IN THE MIRROR

By Christina M. Parmelee

Eccentric. Androgynous. Reclusive. There are countless adjectives that have been tossed around to describe the peaks and valleys of Michael Jackson's personal life and epic career. Now, Crown Theater located in Rio All-Suite Hotel & Casino hosts this timeline of Jackson's most memorable musical moments at "MJ Live," starring Michael Firestone.

Upon arrival at the Rio, a long line of fans managed to escape the heat and waited excitedly to sing and dance along to their favorite songs. The nightclub had been transformed into an intimate showroom filled with round tables seating four. The room was near-full with young kids all the way up to retirees. His eight attractive back-up dancers warmed up the crowd while the anticipation built for, arguably, the most impressive and uncanny Michael Jackson impersonator in the world.

The show began with "Wanna Be Startin' Somethin'," a fitting blast off as the first song on Michael Jackson's *Thriller* album, released in 1982. As a child of *Thriller*, I wore out my cassette tape listening to "Billie Jean," "Thriller" and "Beat It." Michael Firestone performed them all with trademark moves and costumes. All the vocals were live and his rendition of "Human Nature" was stunning. "Thriller" showcased signature dance moves and "Beat It" kicked the energy up a notch featuring a back-up dancer face off a-la "West Side Story." Other notable songs included a passionate and heartfelt "I'll Be There," "Smooth Criminal" complete with the trademark white suit and neon energy, a tribute video and memorable vocals of "Man In the Mirror" and the age of disco reenacted to Jackson 5's "ABC." "Dirty Diana" and "The Way You Make Me Feel" reveal a buried sex appeal as Firestone flirted and danced seductively with his sexy female dancers. The show truly nailed all the songs that made Michael Jackson the King of Pop.

As a self-described "white guy who can't dance," star impersonator and REEL Award Winner (the tribute industry's OSCAR'S) Michael Firestone is as surprised as anyone to make it as a pop-icon impersonator. As a teenager, Firestone practiced Michael Jackson's moves with obsessive determination surrounded by mirrors, and found his life's calling one moonwalk at a time.

When Firestone first landed in Las Vegas in 1998, the only thing he was sure of was he didn't want a "normal" job. He knew he wanted to be an artist, just found a different kind of canvas to display his talent.

As he perfected his freaky-familiar look and crotch grabs, he performed in cruise-ship revues,

tribute ensembles and variety shows around the world. Throughout Jackson's rocky career, Firestone's act stayed true to the positive aspects of Jackson's stardom and let the press do the mudslinging. Drag queens took him under their wing and showed him how to perfect his makeup and affect the mannerisms that would make him an impersonator with true star power.

Firestone landed the gig as a Dealertainer at Imperial Palace and dealt blackjack to tourists in between getting up on stage to perform. One



of the few memorable features of the Imperial Palace, the Dealertainers are all looking for their big break. And Firestone would eventually get it, his own headlining show in Las Vegas.

Upon hearing the news of Jackson's death on June 25, 2009, Firestone thought about hanging up his dancing shoes but soon saw his gift as an opportunity to honor his idol's memory. Now, fans approach often moved to tears, expressing ways Jackson touched and enhanced their lives.

With large, sparkly gloves to fill, Michael Firestone is poised to fulfill his destiny as the best MJ impersonator who ever lived. See the show and be warmly reminded of era long gone by.

Tickets can be purchased at the Rio box office, online at www.riolasvegas.com or by calling 702.777.7776