

# WHO'S THAT MAN IN THE MIRROR?

MICHAEL FIRESTONE PAYS TRIBUTE TO THE LATE KING OF POP DURING **MJ LIVE**

BY NATALIE SYMES • PHOTOS BY RICHARD FAVERTY

In the darkened, circular Crown Theater at Rio, a hushed crowd waits patiently—eyes directed towards the glittering, curtained stage—for a chance to witness a singing production that will bring to life the legendary Michael Jackson for just one more night. When lookalike Michael Firestone take the stage, they know they'll get what they came for. In a pared down production that puts Firestone's startlingly Jackson-like voice on display, *MJ Live* fills the void that the King of Pop's early death left in the hearts of his many fans. Covering all of Jackson's hits, from "Billie Jean" to "Human Nature," "Beat It," "Black or White" and, of course, "Thriller," Firestone and his cast of talented dancers (you'll love their charming gang-style dance-off during "Beat It") create a concert experience Jackson would've been proud to inspire. We talked to the man behind the Michael you have to see to believe and found out about how he created *MJ Live*, what led him on his path towards a career as an impersonator and even found out what a day in the life of a Michael Jackson impersonator looks like.



**WO:** How did your appreciation for Michael turn into a career?

**Firestone:** I didn't ever really plan on it. I just learned to dance to try to make friends and be cooler in elementary school. Then, over the years, I got [more] attention from dancing and started entering talent shows and winning. My voice naturally sounded kind of like his and I saw a couple tributes in my teens and decided to give it a shot.

**WO:** What are your personal keys for creating a really true, believable Michael for crowds; what do they want to see and what don't they want to see?

**F:** They want to see Michael Jackson. They like to see the right costumes, the right dance [routines]. The voice is where it starts for me. He was a singer first. I think when you open your mouth and don't sound like him, you kind of lose half of the audience. A lot of guys can dance, but not many can sing. [Audiences] don't want see someone who thinks they are going to replace Michael, either. No one will ever replace him. I am happy if I come 15% as close. He was like Superman. Batman can never be Superman.

**WO:** Do you ever get people coming to the show who seem to forget that you're not Michael for a moment?

**F:** Yes. Tonight I had a lady break down. It makes me sad. I loved when he was still with us because I could fool them and they would walk away thinking they just met him. Now it's just sad because they know they never will meet him.

**WO:** What does a day in the life of a Michael Jackson impersonator look like?

**F:** Busy. I wake up and then eat about six hours before the show. Can't eat after that because food and spinning don't mix. I start stretching and do vocal warmups about five hours before the show. Then I take an Epsom salt bath, start makeup about two and a half hours before the show. After the show, I do a meet and greet, which I love. Then I take the makeup off and prepare costumes and wigs for the next day. Usually I watch *Goodfellas* while I attempt to sleep, which is impossible after the rush of performing. Wake up the next day and start all over. I perform seven days a week at the Rio and the days I'm off I fly around the

country doing shows in other towns. I never really have a break, but I feel like I've rested enough in the past, so it's cool.

**WO:** Can you tell me about the process for constructing the show; how you decided what to include and what feel you wanted to create?

**F:** I wanted it to fit the title of *MJ Live*—old stuff, new stuff and everything in between. I worked with my brother, Eric Martin, for about two weeks getting the stuff together. It was pretty easy because we work together all the time. We wanted to rock people, make them cry, then rock them again.

**WO:** What's your favorite song to perform during the show?

**F:** "Human Nature" and "Billie Jean." They're placed in the show at good times to get good reactions. The crowds have been excellent here in town. I'm very grateful for the tourists who come to the show, but especially to the locals who come out every night. I've met some wonderful people.

**MJ Live | Nightly, 5 p.m. | \$19.72, \$46.99 | Rio | 888-727-6966**