



A serious Michael Jackson show they did, enlisting Firestone, choreographer Missy Cochran and music director Gene Sironen to develop a show worthy of the moonwalking man in the mirror. Aside from the songs and dancing, *MJ Live* includes a Jackson 5 segment (“I’ll Be There,” “I Want You Back”) complete with Afro wigs and costume design inspired by *Soul Train*. “MJ” himself stays in the *Dangerous* zone, with fashions seemingly inspired by Jackson’s fashion sense from the late ’80s to early ’90s. “It took off right away,” says Feeney. “Originally we started with prerecorded music, just tracks and dancers. And then we added the band.”

MJ Live packs a lot of punch into its hourlong length. Hits are segued into each other rather than played from beginning to end, a sensibility Feeney adopted as a producer for shows such as *An Evening at La Cag*. “Onstage, two seconds of dead time is like five minutes,” he says. It’s up to Dean, Franca, Firestone and Kouns to maintain the illusion once the show starts, though. There are true believers in the audience who want to dance and shout, and be moved by the spirit of Michael Jackson.

Rio, 9 p.m. daily, \$63.55–\$89.75, children 12 and under free with adult ticket purchase (one child per adult). 702.777.7776

DANGEROUS DAYS

MJ LIVE TAKES AUDIENCES BACK TO WHEN THE KING OF POP RULED THE CHARTS

BY MATT KELEMEN
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The hits come one after the other at *MJ Live* inside the Rio’s Crown Theater. “Wanna Be Startin’ Somethin’,” “Bad” and “Don’t Stop ‘Til You Get Enough” are delivered to the audience with propulsive force by the three-piece live band as a singer whose appearance evokes Michael Jackson’s post-*Bad* image performs fierce, physical renditions of the songs. Justin Dean is that singer for this performance, and he owns the stage, save for when the guitarist comes front-and-center for “Beat It” or “Dirty Diana.” The way Dean inhabits the role, with the exception of more sentimental moments such as “She’s Out of My Life,” is almost as if he wants to blast apart the tabloid years and make the audience only feel the raw essence of the King of Pop and remember the excitement he could generate.

And the crowd eats it up. A team of dancers backs Dean or Jalles Franca, the two MJs most likely to be onstage for the seven-night-a-week production (Michael Firestone and Tony Kouns also handle the role), playing key parts during songs such as “Beat It” and “Thriller.” But it’s never unclear who the star of the show is, no matter who plays him, and it’s inarguable what he stirs in the audience members. “They want to believe,” says producer Dick Feeney.

Feeney, a 40-year veteran of the entertainment industry—aside from having helmed several long-running shows, he owns the Flying Elvi skydiving team that appeared in *Honeymoon in Vegas*—was producing *The Rat Pack Is Back* at the Rio two years ago at a time when his “landlord,” entrepreneur Darin Feinstein, was booking an Elvis-meets-Michael concept. “He asked me if I wanted to get involved,” says Feeney. “I said, ‘Listen, if you want to do a serious Michael Jackson show, let’s do it.’”

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