

Weekend

The Arts, Leisure, Music, Columns



Superhuman Nature

Michael Jackson croons, twists, shakes, spins and hops his way through a summer performance with his brothers in Knoxville,

Tenn., part of the group's record-shattering Victory Tour (photos by James Parker).

Music

Much ado about plenty: Michael and his brothers' victorious tour

By CHRIS MACKIE
Chronicle Contributor

KNOXVILLE, Tenn. -- Michael Jackson. A simple, ordinary name given to a most extraordinary performer whose vivacious music has already become legendary in the eyes of the rock 'n roll world. His face appears everywhere. His symbols -- a glittering glove, dark sunglasses, flashy jackets and sequined socks -- have become the symbols of a generation.

Moreover, his solo albums "Off the Wall" and "Thriller" have achieved sales volumes that boggle the mind and his innovative music videos provide starving fans with just a taste of his Astaire-flair dancing ability.

Not since Elvis Presley has one man rocked America like Michael has, and not since the Beatles has a tour captivated the public as the Jacksons' Victory Tour has.

After seeing the spectacle in person, one can easily understand why.

When I entered Knoxville's Neyland Stadium that summer Sunday night, my eyes were immediately drawn to the huge platform that stretched from the end zone to the 30-yard line and rested on scaffolding that towered five stories.

On each side of the center stage were large canvas hangings depicting an enchanted forest, and on top of the whole setup stood a 50-foot television screen where the Jacksons' shakes and spins would be projected.

Roving vendors aroused my hunger, so I decided to tour the snack bars located throughout the stadium and maybe purchase a souvenir or two before the opening of the show.

But I was soon rudely awakened by prices that made dining at a movie theater sound cheap. Hot dogs and drinks were \$1.50 apiece while Victory Tour t-shirts ranged from \$14 to \$20 and other Jacksons paraphernalia, such as glitter gloves, programs and posters, weren't much for the bargain shopper, either.

"Michael's voice, which was slightly deeper than on his albums, was smooth and delightful and his extracurricular grunts and squeals were right on key. But as impressive as his execution was onstage, he was equally impressive off of it."

But since this show was an "event" and not a sidewalk sale, I gave in to the money-mongering hucksters and purchased a program for \$8.

My concern over exaggerated expenditures was quickly forgotten when I heard the stadium announcer encourage all spectators to return to their seats as the extravaganza was about to begin.

The Greatest Show You'll Ever See

The stadium lights dimmed and 45,000 anxious fans roared for

what the emcee called "the greatest show" they'll ever see.

My heart began pounding with anticipation and, when 10-foot monsters marched onto the stage, I knew this wasn't going to be just any ordinary concert. As the creatures circled the stage, the audience was told of how they had ruled the earth for thousands of years and that the only way to slay them was to remove a sword embedded in a slab of stone at center stage.

After several knights failed to lift the sword, Randy Jackson, the youngest of the brothers, emerged costumed as a shimmering silver knight, drew the red and green glowing saber from the slab and destroyed each of the monsters with powerful swats, the last of which was accompanied by an explosion.

He then ran off the stage and a vibrant laser light show brought the crowd to its feet. Then a center section of the stage began to rise from underneath and there, on top of a short stairwell, stood the mighty Jacksons, silhouetted against brilliant white lights.

Randy, Marlon, Tito, Jermaine and Michael took one thunderous step at a time until they reached the bottom of the stairs and slowly removed their sunglasses after approaching the microphones.

"Wanna Be Startin' Something" was the opening song and the pulsating melody proved to be an appropriate theme for what was going to be an unforgettable evening of music.

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Films

Three months of the good, the bad and the ugly

Rating the best -- and worst -- among summer offerings

By RHONDA BRANNON
Chronicle Reviewer

As fall closes in, I feel the urge (at the request of my editor) to search through this summer's usual glut of movies for the best and the worst -- the sublime (of which there were a handful) and the ridiculous (Hollywood's cup runneth over).

There certainly was no shortage of comedies in the summer of '84. Moviegoers had their fancies tickled, their funny bones stroked and their sides split. We laughed while four guys chased ghosts through New York, giggled as a mermaid walked naked from the sea and through a crowd of gawking tourists at the Statue of Liberty and snickered at the antics of a group of zany police academy recruits.

"Ghostbusters" gets my vote as for the best comedy of the summer and deals, sparing no expense, with the exploits of four men who "bust" spirits for a living.

Bill Murray and Dan Akroyd, alumni of "Saturday Night Live," star, with Murray's wisecracks serving as catalysts for nearly every

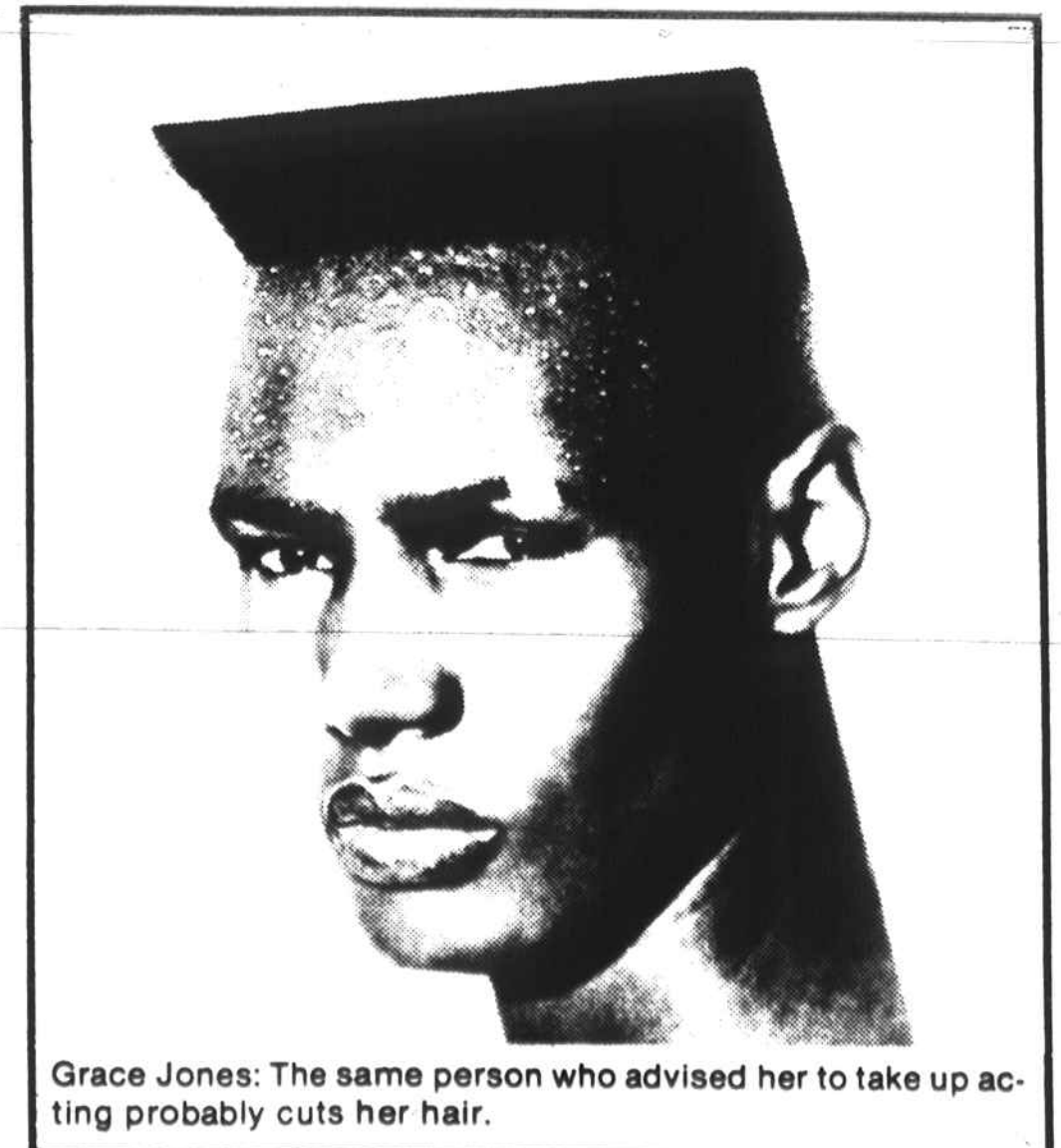
laugh in the movie. Murray, the master of "deadpan dementia," is the perfect complement to co-star Akroyd. Akroyd plays mainly a straight man to Murray in "Ghostbusters," which can also be said of his roles with the late John Belushi.

As a result of this successful new pairing, I foresee more films with this winning duo. And I foresee more special effects, which have become a necessity in today's movies (if the scripts don't work, a laser-light show might). The effects in "Ghostbusters" are at once fantastic and hilarious. Spooks materialize, hover, read books, seduce and "slime" unwitting victims with ghostly glee.

The final battle between man and spirit, which takes place on the roof of an apartment building, is a technical marvel. And the soundtrack, especially the No. 1 title song by Ray Parker Jr., is another plus. This movie has something for everyone -- laughs, romance, special effects and great music.

"Best Defense" and "Cannonball Run II" tie for the worst comedies. In the former, Dudley Moore again (yawn) plays the slightly

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Grace Jones: The same person who advised her to take up acting probably cuts her hair.