

Michael Jackson must soon speak out about molestation charges Facing Up

By Linda Shrieves
THE ORLANDO SENTINEL (KRT)

ORLANDO, Fla.

For Michael Jackson — and for a nation that has watched him grow up — what a long, strange trip it's been: From cute front man for the Jackson Five to solo superstar to bizarre celebrity.

Recently, when authorities announced they had issued an arrest warrant charging the 45-year-old singer with multiple counts of child molestation, it was one more episode in an increasingly sordid soap opera.

Jackson surrendered to authorities.

The charges come at the end of a particularly bad year for Jackson, one in which his financial empire has begun to crumble and the entertainment industry has virtually ignored his new music.

Instead, he's been dogged by the aftershocks of a TV documentary last winter in which he admitted that he slept in a bed with many children and carted his children throughout Europe, wearing masks. In 2002, photos and video showed him dangling his child, Prince Michael II, over a balcony to adoring fans.

Jackson's relationship with children has long been a source of speculation. In 1993, Jackson was accused of molesting a 13-year-old boy. He denied the allegation, but reached a reported multimillion-dollar settlement with the child and his family.

The public is no longer fascinated with Jackson's music; it's his behavior that captures people's attention.

"In Michael Jackson's case, his celebrity status of the past decade has been the carnival sideshow," says Gary Hoppenstand, a professor of American studies at Michigan State University. "People perceive him as a freak."

This month, when he released "One More Chance," a song written and produced with hit-making producer R. Kelly, "radio shrugged its shoulders," said Chuck Taylor, senior editor at Billboard magazine.

For music industry observers, watching an amazing musician turn into a spectacle has been painful.

"I'm inclined to give him a lot of slack," says Glenn Gass, a music professor and rock historian at Indiana University. "Short of Elvis, I don't think there's anyone who's had to go through what he's had to go through," Gass said in reference to Jackson's lifelong celebrity. "I think it's hard for us to imagine what kind of hyper-reality he lives in."

Born in Gary, Ind., in 1958, Michael



Jackson admitted that he had slept in a bed with children in a television documentary last year. Now the King of Pop faces multiple child molestation charges.

didn't have a "normal" childhood. By age 6 he was performing with his brothers, and he was 11 when the Jackson 5 signed with Motown Records and recorded Diana Ross Presents the Jackson 5.

His career turned white-hot in the 1980s, after the release of his solo album "Off The Wall." He followed up with the 1982 album "Thriller," which won seven Grammys and sold more than 46 million copies — and remains the best-selling album of all time. But after he released "Bad" in 1987, his personal life began grabbing headlines.

There were reports that he slept in a hyperbaric chamber, that he tried to buy the Elephant Man's bones, and that his best friend was his pet chimpanzee, Bubbles.

With more media attention, Jackson withdrew to his ranch, Neverland, appropriately named for the place where Peter Pan never had to grow up. And though he counts as friends celebrities such as Liz Taylor and Liza Minnelli, many of his friends are children.

Jackson likely surrounded himself with children because they couldn't exploit him the way adults would, says Steven Berglas, a Los Angeles psychiatrist who has written books about the stress of success.

"What you see among lots of famous people, like Howard Hughes and Michael Jackson, is that they get entourages to surround them," says Steven Berglas, a Los Angeles psychiatrist who has written books about the stress of success.

Jackson's entourage consists mainly of bodyguards and children.

His increasing reclusiveness seemed to coincide with dramatic physical changes.

With each album release, the nation watched as Jackson slowly transformed from a cute African-American young man to a pointy-nosed, pointy-chinned, light-skinned man. Some observers suggest the changes started in 1984, when his hair caught on fire during filming of a Pepsi commercial. His burns required

surgery, and rumors of more plastic surgery began to circulate.

Earlier this year, when Dr. Pamela Lipkin, a New York plastic surgeon, studied photographs of Jackson over the years, she noticed his face changing at about age 23, when he had apparently had his first nose job.

By 1987, she told ABC News, Jackson's lips were thinner, his eyebrows were higher, suggesting a forehead lift, and he had a cleft in his chin that wasn't present before.

In 1993, he told Oprah Winfrey that he had undergone only two rhinoplasties and that his skin color was changing because he had vitiligo, a disease that causes the skin to lose its pigment in blotches.

Even today, many in the medical community are unconvinced.

"I'm not going to argue with his dermatologist," says Dr. Vail Reese, a San Francisco dermatologist who operates a Web site called skinema.com, "but rarely do people have vitiligo that spreads and covers nearly all of their skin."

Instead, Reese suspects Jackson may suffer from "body dysmorphic disorder," a psychological condition in which patients "have a vision of beauty in their minds that they try to pursue with plastic surgery and other treatments."

Jackson is an enigma to many fellow celebrities.

In this week's Time magazine, Russell Crowe tells of phone calls in which Jackson "used to put on these funny voices and then giggle, 'Oh, Russell, it's Michael.'"

At a dinner at Katharine Hepburn's home, she struggled to find a topic of conversation to engage Jackson, says author Scott Berg in his biography "Kate Remembered."

Yet Hepburn was amazed by Jackson. "He's an absolutely extraordinary creature," she told Berg. "He's worked his entire life, entertaining professionally since he was 3, and he's never lived a single moment. I mean not a moment, in the real world."

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Now he is involved in several business ventures including ownership of a national medical temporary services company that employs medical professional to train and treat cancer patients.

Alleycat, a former drug dealer and street hustler, said Brown's encouragement, plus his own business savvy saved him from the streets. He now owns a DVD magazine.

"What began as 900,000 turned into 1.5 million dollars and now, 2.5 million in 12 months," he said.

Like Brown and Fullard Alleycat hasn't chosen to spend all his money on elaborate

things such as cars and jewelry. All invest their money wisely. They encouraged students to avoid getting deep into debt.

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