Thriller Live

Programme Notes Act One

Thursday 14th June 2018

Denise Reeves – Audio Describer

Good Evening everyone and welcome to the Theatre Royal Plymouth, for this spectacular production of Thriller Live. Directed and choreographed by Gary Lloyd, the show features a selection of songs by Michael and The Jackson Five.

I am Denise your audio describer for Act One which lasts for one hour followed by a 20 minute interval. My colleague Pam will then describe Act Two.

Direct from London’s West End, Thriller is a spectacular concert created to celebrate the career of the world’s greatest entertainer. Michael Joseph Jackson was born on 29th August 1958 in the town of Gary, Indiana, the eighth child of Joseph and Katherine Jackson. Joseph supported his family by working as a crane operator at a steelworks, but he was also a member of an R&B band called The Falcos. However, he soon recognised musical talent in his three eldest sons and formed a new band with them, together with two members outside of the family circle. They began performing in the local area in 1962. Soon the two youngest brothers – Marlon and Michael – came on board and the band became The Jackson Five.

Michael continued performing with his brothers until 1982, when he released an album that not only outstripped the success of The Jacksons, but eventually became the biggest selling album of all time. That album was, of course, THRILLER.

I will now give you a brief synopsis of Act One followed by a description of the set and costumes.

Synopsis for Act One.

The show was conceived by Jackson family friend and author Adrian Grant, who had started a British fan club for the band in 1988.

Thriller Live has no story or indeed plot relevant to the personal and often bizarre life of Michael Jackson. What it does do, is take you on a magical journey through the magic of Michael’s 45 year musical history. This is done through clever visual and audio effects providing an electrifying concert performed by talented lead vocalists, energetic and lithesome dancers. All of whom perform live with flair, precision and passion as they pay homage to the non-stop hits from pop to rock, soul to disco of Michael’s legendary music.

I must make you aware that there is some strobe lighting throughout the show.

The Set

The whole set is framed in lights and resembles that of a concert stage with lots of lights flooding from the large ring of lights in a metal frame that hangs above the stage, with a bar of lights behind it, to the footlights on the floor at the front. Three towers of lights line up on both sides, each with a gauze screen on which are projected relevant visual effects with each song. At the back of the stage is a bridge of metal which acts as a walkway and additional dance area. Leading down from the bridge on either side are two flights of stairs – again in brushed aluminium. The first flight is of five steps then a platform used by the dancers, followed by a further five stairs leading down to the plain black floor. Each stair has a strip of lights which change in colour to enhance the visual picture. At the back of the stage in between the stairs are closed doors which slide open and acts as an entrance and exit. It also doubles as a projection screen.

The show opens with phones ringing, followed by thunder, howling, laughing, door creaking and slamming … the word THRILLER is lit up in red and white across the sliding doors at the back with the word live in italics below. The strip lights on the stairs glow in red and four spotlights from the long metal bar above blare down in deep blue on the floor below. Welcome to THRILLER LIVE.

The stage goes to black followed by the back panel changing to blue with pictures of clouds. With a flash, the whole stage is drowned in a blue haze as two vocalists emerge from the back with another two on the platform below the first set of stairs. The lead girl vocalist is dressed in a tight fitted gold catsuit edge in black with black knee length boots, whilst the lead vocalist (who is visually reminiscent of Michael Jackson) wears black trousers with gold stripe down the sides, and a striking black jacket with gold frontage and cuffs. The other two male vocalists are similarly dressed in black and gold. Then as the musical pace picks up the rest of the dancers and vocalists appear to deliver a selection of Michael and Jackson Five hits.

There is lots of moon walking and Michael Jackson dance moves throughout, with pictures of him projected on to a drop down screen. At various times the vocalists enter into a narrative to tell the story of Michael Jackson, before taking you on a roller coaster ride through his hits. These include such classics as “I’ll be there”; Blame it on the Boogie and ABC. At times, such as the song “Rockin’ Robin” they invite the audience to join in by clapping, shouting and even dancing either on the spot or in the aisles. During Rockin’ Robin a screen drops down at the back with a video of the very young Michael singing the tune as the dancers dance around a very colourful set. The girls are dressed in red cat suits with wide flares and with white inserts at the bottom of the flares and in the wide elbow length sleeves.

During the song “Shake your Body” the back panels slide open to reveal the live seven-piece band and we are introduced to Andy Jeffcoat the Musical Director who also plays keyboards. Two lead vocalists then divide the audience into two and have a Dancing & Shouting competition as they “Shake the Body”.

The Costumes

There are fast and furious costume changes galore throughout the 20 songs in Act One, each complimenting the time and mood of the song. Throughout each song, the costumes are very colourful, dazzling and at times full of glitter.

“Remember the Time” has a distinct Egyptian flavour and opens with the picture of a girl’s eyes projected on the back screen. The whole stage goes red with lights all around. Feathered fans are carried by a couple of dancers who are dressed in Egyptian costumes of black and gold. The back screen becomes a wall of Egyptian hieroglyphics.

The occasional ballad is also very moving. Like the song “She’s out of My Life” in which one of the lead singers is alone on the stage. He first appears under a pool of blue light with his head bowed, leaning against the stairs, simply dressed in casual black jeans and short sleeved T shirt. As he moves around the stage the blue mood follows him and you forget that this is not Michael Jackson, but the song is very emotive and leaves you with goose bumps.

The last song in Act One is “Can you feel it” and is once again full of colour. It begins with the stage bathed in a blue haze, then each light changes to a colour of the rainbow. A big rainbow cuts across the back screen with a picture of the universe behind it as it moves closer to the rainbow. Everyone is dressed in colourful costumes. The girls wear hot pants, or tight white jeans with glittery tops, the boys in trousers with very decorative jackets and in sheer Michael Jackson style. The audience is invited to join in the song as the song reaches its’ crescendo and the end of Act One.

The Performers

There are black, white male and female singers, but you quickly forget the oddity of this as all of them are so talented and perform with such feeling, whether the song is upbeat or a ballad.

The lead vocalist and Resident Director is Britt Quintin

Two female lead vocalists are Adriana Louise and Ina Seidou

Three male lead vocalists are Shaquille Hemmans. Eddy Lima, and Rory Taylor.

The dancers are all so very talented and versatile with acrobatic skills as well as each possessing Michael Jacksonesque dance moves.

THRILLER LIVE celebrates the music and dance of a great entertainer and the infectious energy of the cast provides an extraordinary show. As each song segways seamlessly at times into another, there is little time to set the scene, so on this occasion, we will simply let the music do it for you.