

British Theatre Guide

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Thriller Live

Original concept by Adrian Grant
Sunderland Empire and touring
(2011)

If you're a fan of Michael Jackson, you'll love this, as last night's audience at the Sunderland Empire did. It's non-stop Michael Jackson music, from his earliest days with the Jackson Five, performed by a group of singers and dancers who have tremendous energy and drive. Sometimes they mimic a Jackson video, sometimes the choreography is new, but everything they do is in the spirit of the man they call The King of Pop.

Cheers greet favourite songs. Every moonwalk is wildly applauded. Every body that is popped is welcomed with joy.

The set is simple: two flights of steps at either side of the stage up to a bridge; below are panels onto which video and gobos are projected and which can be opened to reveal the band. Occasionally another panel is flown in above head height onto which more video is projected. Much use is made of moving lights which occasionally, along with other banks of static lights specifically there for the purpose, shine into the audience. It's very rock concert rather than music theatre.

Song follows song, with the lead vocals swapping between a number of singers, and the full company is onstage for most of the time. Occasionally one of the vocalists, A J Lewis, passes on some information about Jackson's career - one of the few chances for the company to take a breather, although they are probably doing a hurried costume change backstage - and sometimes similar information is projected onto the back panels.

The audience are encouraged to join in, to stand up and clap, sing or even dance, and there's a even a panto songsheet style competition between two halves of the audience to see who can shout the loudest. The Empire audience loved it!

If, however, you are not a Michael Jackson fan, then this is a show to avoid. What text there is is sloppily written - Lewis sounds like he is reading extracts from a book or lecture (not his fault but the fault of the text itself) - and the "songsheet moment" is badly placed early in the first half (and, frankly, is not very well done). But for me the show reached its nadir in a section which seemed to be the first step in the beatification of St Michael, where his "contributions" to the cause of peace and love throughout the world are compared to Martin Luther King, JFK (hmmm...) and John Lennon among others (but who the others were I wasn't able to see clearly as at this stage the audience were all on their feet and many heads obscured the projections).

For fans, like the first night audience, a great night, but for the rest...

Reviewer: [Peter Lathan](#)