

# THIS IS IT

## Production Notes

**Release Date:** October 28, 2009

**Studio:** Sony Pictures Entertainment

**Director:** Kenny Ortega

**Starring:** Michael Jackson

**Genre:** Musical

### Foreword by David Wild

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### This Is It.

**In just three words, Michael Jackson managed to say it all.**

Right there in one willfully dramatic phrase, Jackson somehow promised everything -- a grand farewell, a new beginning and a thrilling return to form that would offer a sense of completion if not finality. It was a phrase that meant many things to Jackson: it would be not just a curtain call, but a call to arms, a call for more love in the world.

This Is It.

In his own distinctive and idiosyncratic way, Michael Jackson had always been an instinctively great communicator. He was, after all, such a singularly brilliant vocalist that he could magically lend universal meaning even to those curiously expressive mystery syllables that the rest of us could never even define. Now with just three simple words, Jackson managed to communicate so much yet again. That's the same thing Michael Jackson had done time and time again for decades as he gave soulful voice to some of the most beloved and familiar songs ever to be recorded -- both the ones that he wrote and the ones that he made his own forever just by the act of singing them.

Then in the wake of Michael Jackson's sudden and tragic death at the age of only 50 on June 25, 2009, the meaning of this strangely powerful phrase changed in one terrible instant that reverberated all around the world. This Is It suddenly seemed destined to become the sadly empty promise of a truly global happening that could never happen due to one horrible and historic twist of fate. For Michael Jackson's children, family and closest associates, they had lost a father, a brother, a son, and a friend. For the rest of us, we lost a cultural icon, a popular legend, and even a King.

For the millions of us everywhere who had been moved by the music Michael Jackson made during his fifty years -- and by the massive artistic legacy that he left behind -- the irony of the

timing made his passing feel even more terrible. After all, we all had come so close -- and yet so far -- to seeing exactly where it was that Michael Jackson intended to take us next. Jackson was that rare performing artist capable of transporting himself -- and all of us -- with amazing grace. But with his sudden death, it appeared that what would turn out to be his final artistic statement would be one giant step, one last Moonwalk -- that none of us would ever get to witness.

This Is It was originally to have served as the title for a series of performances, ten initially, then finally an astounding 50 sold out dates thanks to unprecedented public demand. During a press conference at the O2 Arena on March 5th, Michael Jackson had officially announced these performances before thousands of fans and hundreds of members of the international media.

“This is it,” Jackson explained to the world media that day. “I just want to say that these will be my final show performances in London. When I say this is it, it really means this is it.” Jackson went on to add of the shows, “This is the final curtain call.” These highly anticipated This Is It shows were to be held at the London’s O2 Arena between July 2009 and March 2010. Then just a few weeks before Jackson was to take the stage for what he proclaimed would be his final triumph came the shocking news that Jackson died following a cardiac arrest, only hours after rehearsing for his upcoming London shows at STAPLES Center in Los Angeles. Suddenly, it seemed Michael Jackson’s triumphant return was not to be. And that -- it appeared -- was that.

In those days and weeks following Michael Jackson’s death, I spent considerable time talking to some of the friends and fellow musical legends who knew and loved Michael Jackson best, first while contributing to a special Rolling Stone tribute issue to Jackson and then while helping Kenny Ortega, Randy Phillips and Ken Ehrlich on the Michael Jackson Memorial broadcast all around the world from STAPLES Center. What came through loud and clear in every conversation that I shared with such distinguished artists as Stevie Wonder, Smokey Robinson and Lionel Richie was the undying love these individuals felt for their friend Michael Jackson, and the extraordinary respect they all had for him as a fellow artist and performer.

“Right from the start, Michael Jackson was amazing,” the great Smokey Robinson told me. “And Michael was one of those rare artists who never stopped amazing us.” Indeed, Smokey Robinson was among the very first to be amazed by Jackson back in his early days at Motown, especially when Robinson heard Michael sing his still stunning rendition of “Who’s Lovin’ You” with his brothers in The Jackson 5. “There was no way to explain how this kid sang my grown up love song like he had lived every single line. There was just no way a twelve-year-old could sing the way he sang, or move the way he moved. Michael Jackson was -- and is -- a phenomenon, and one of a kind. He amazed me then, and he still amazes me now.”

And now in a way he could not have foretold, Michael Jackson posthumously gets the chance to share this hello and goodbye with the world, after all. Here, then, are a few more hours for this singular performer to amaze us one last time. And this time around, we get to see not just the magic, but also the magician at work.

Here too the ironies are profound. Michael Jackson had spent his life being filmed, photographed and endlessly documented, as he experienced the good, the bad and the ugly of our modern media world like perhaps no one else on earth. Some of this attention was thrust upon Jackson,

and some he brought upon himself. Either way, this man experienced celebrity in its purest and often harshest form. And yet for once, the fact that the cameras were rolling in his final weeks as he prepared to bring *This Is It* to life onstage now allowed Michael Jackson – thanks to his friend and chosen creative collaborator Kenny Ortega -- to share this parting act of the creative genius of Michael Jackson with the fans of the world.

And so here it is, just as he had promised -- Michael Jackson's grand farewell, a whole new beginning and his final return to form. So how on earth do you bring any sort of fitting conclusion to one of the greatest and most surreal stories ever told?

Like this. And like the man said before he left us, *This Is It*.

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The story of Michael Jackson long ago became the stuff of legend. It's the remarkable tale of a kid from the steel town of Gary, Indiana, who sang his heart out with his brothers and became a superstar. Then he sang his heart out some more on his own, and in the process became the single biggest star on the face of the earth.

Yet *This Is It* is far from being some posthumous star trip, nor is it one more rehashing of the past events of one man's celebrated and controversial life. Thankfully, *This Is It* is something infinitely more interesting, valuable and artistic. What Kenny Ortega presents here is a powerful, revealing and ultimately moving portrait of the artist as a grown man. For all that we have seen of Michael Jackson over the years, and we have seen a lot, we have never seen this. *This Is It* offers a beautifully clear window into the creative process of Michael Jackson's last announced theatrical work. Over the course of a few compelling and illuminating hours, the film artfully takes the viewer inside the rehearsal spaces during what turned out to be Michael Jackson's last days on earth as he prepared to make what he knew could very well be his last artistic stand as a live performer. *This Is It* is not the way to see the show's final destination, but a fascinating opportunity for the first time to see exactly how he was getting there.

To borrow a phrase from Quincy Jones, everyone here appears to have checked their egos at the door. We witness the ease, the joy and the very human kindness of Jackson's communication with other performers. Yet there is no doubt that Michael Jackson who appears here knows what he wants and is calling the shots. The kid once trained in the extraordinary Motown artistic assembly line has grown up, and he becomes more teacher than student. "You have to let it simmer," he meaningfully tells his Music Supervisor and keyboardist Michael Bearden as they work to perfect a musical tone for the beginning of "The Way You Make Me Feel." What we are seeing in mostly empty halls here is a musical giant using all his instincts to work towards the show he's already seeing and hearing in his creative mind. What emerges here is a far more confident and assured artist and professional than we might have expected simply because of the complicated persona that rightly or wrongly has been projected onto Jackson over the years.

Often appearing in the shadows urging his friend on or helping to solidify and express his vision, Ortega comes across an exceptionally sensitive and simpatico creative collaborator, as are many others on the winning team they assembled here, including long-time choreographer Travis

Payne and Bearden and all of the other dancers, singers, musicians and others who came together to make This Is It. But lest there be any confusion, it is finally Michael Jackson himself leading the way towards a remarkable destination that already seems to exist in his head and in his heart. “We’ll get there,” Jackson says repeatedly, and one believes him.

What makes This Is It so stunning is that we are all right there as Michael Jackson is getting there -- as this show simmers before our eyes and ears. Somehow, from materials never meant to serve quite this purpose, Ortega has artfully weaved together different rehearsal run-throughs to create performances here that honor his late great friend’s legacy. On a number of occasions captured here, Jackson has to remind himself not to go all-out as a singer or dancer, yet in the end he simply cannot help himself from being great.

As originally envisioned by Jackson and Ortega, This Is It was always going to be an artistic statement with a strongly cinematic point of view. We watch here as the pair express their shared passion for Old Hollywood in a segment in which Jackson’s “Smooth Criminal” from the Bad album becomes a way to allow Jackson to co-star with some of the greatest movie stars of all-time in a new black and white short film that draws upon moments from classics like Gilda and His Girl Friday. We also feel their boyish excitement as they bring Thriller a whole new monstrous second life.

The songs represented here take us through a lifetime of artistic expression and shared memories. We see Jackson finding his way, a bit tentatively at first, through a medley of the early Jackson 5 hits that first made him famous and revealed his singular and soulful gifts – “I Want You Back,” “The Love You Save” and “I’ll Be There,” a modern standard that he reclaims powerfully here. At the end of the run through, he movingly thanks the members of his family -- the people who knew him back before fame and fortune.

We hear many of the biggest hits from Thriller and Bad era when Michael Jackson started breaking all sort of sales records, and redefined just how popular pop music could be. Yet at times we can hear these songs anew, such as when he sings part of “Human Nature” with minimal accompaniment as he reminds us once more of the magnitude of his gift as a vocalist. We also hear some more recent triumphs. Indeed, it is the socially and environmentally conscious “Earth Song” from the HIStory collection that seems in a way to be at the heart of This Is It, giving Jackson a chance to express some of his thoughts and emotions about a subject larger than himself.

Finally, there is “Man In The Mirror,” that powerful song of change and reckoning that reminds us that for all his artistry and all his fame, Michael Jackson was a real man – a son, a brother, a father, and a friend --- and now that man is gone.

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In his too brief lifetime, Michael Jackson rocked our world. But despite coming of age in the spotlight, fame did not always rest easily on this man’s slight shoulders. For better and for worse, Michael Jackson lived his life, as Madonna said in her lovely tribute to him at the 2009 MTV Video Music Awards, “under the magnifying glass of the world” for his entire life.

In the wake of Michael Jackson's shocking death, countless prominent artists would come forward to express their undying respect for him -- not just his mentors and contemporaries, but many of today's most popular and inspired artists who Jackson helped inspire in the first place.

"He was magic," Beyonce said of Jackson. "He was what we all strive to be. He will always be the king of pop."

For Justin Timberlake, Jackson had provided a sort of transcendent template. "We have lost a genius and a true ambassador of not only pop music, but of all music," Timberlake said. "He has been an inspiration to multiple generations, and I will always cherish the moments I shared with him onstage and all the things I learned about music from him and the time we spent together."

Michael Jackson's impact went beyond just the world of music too. Martin Scorsese who had directed Jackson's "Bad" video recalled "his absolute mastery of movement." Steven Spielberg expressed his respect for Jackson's singular talent when he noted, "Just as there will never be another Fred Astaire or Chuck Berry or Elvis Presley, there will never be anyone comparable to Michael Jackson. His talent, his wonderment and his mystery make him legend."

The man in the mirror is gone now, but his legend lives on. And now the world has a final chance to take a closer look and see just how this legend came true.

[This Is It.](#)

**-- DAVID WILD**

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## March 5, 2009

On March 5, 2009, the world woke to the news that Michael Jackson, the King of Pop, who had not performed in more than a decade, was planning to return to the stage. Jackson said of his announced performances, this is it – the final curtain call – the capstone to an extraordinary career. The initial announcement of 10 shows, which was soon expanded to a record-breaking 50 to meet demand, sold out in hours. More than one million people had tickets to see Jackson perform THIS IS IT in London.

As Jackson prepared for the historic concerts, the cameras were rolling. Adding up to more than 100 hours of rehearsal footage shot in Los Angeles, this behind-the-scenes footage captures everything, from the casting of the featured dancers and background singers to Jackson's plotting with Travis Payne of the complicated and clever choreography to Jackson's collaboration with the talented band. Most intriguingly, because it was never intended for wide release, the footage captures Jackson as most have never seen him: vulnerable and unfiltered. As he leaves STAPLES Center on the evening of his last Los Angeles rehearsal, as the company prepares to move to London for dress rehearsals, Jackson is happy, even jubilant, sharing his love with the room and saying, "See you tomorrow."

But before these extraordinary shows could commence, the world was stunned again: just hours after that final Los Angeles rehearsal, Jackson passed away on June 25, 2009. Shocked and saddened, Jackson's THIS IS IT collaborators searched for a way to honor their leader, mentor, and friend, and the answer was in the footage. The resulting film is Michael Jackson's THIS IS IT, a unique look at the performer at work, rehearsing, building, driving, and perfecting his masterwork. Michael Jackson's THIS IS IT captures one of the greatest entertainers the world has ever known, showing his true spirit and genius.

Jackson was such a legendary figure that over 5,000 dancers applied to audition for him; just 11 of the best-trained dancers were hand-selected by him for these concerts. In the film, these collaborators and others explain why working with Michael Jackson meant so much to them: how often do you get to work with a genius, the man who inspired you to sing, to dance, to become who you are? When that opportunity comes up, you say to yourself, this is it – this is what it's all about.

As Jackson was determined to perform the songs that his fans most wanted to hear, Michael Jackson's THIS IS IT shows him rehearsing and performing many of his most famous hits. In complete command of the stage, Jackson is the architect and principal mind driving the team forward – instructing the dancers, singers, musicians, and artists and design team on his ideas for the show. Michael Jackson's THIS IS IT shows Jackson in a way that very few artists of his stature have ever been captured before: unguarded, raw, in the midst of his meticulous creative process as he crafts the show he would be unable to present. From conception to his final L.A. rehearsal, Jackson ministers over every beat, every step, every thread as he guides THIS IS IT through the months of planning, and all along the way, the great artist reminds all around him why they are there: they must all rise to the occasion in order to give the fans the show they want, expect, and deserve.

Director Kenny Ortega, Jackson's longtime creative partner and director of the show, took on the responsibility of framing these hours of footage into a feature film. While the show was never finished, Ortega felt that the production was far enough along and the cameras had captured enough that he could present to the world Jackson's final gift to his fans: not the concert itself, but what they were planning as they were moving towards their goals and building the dream that they hoped to realize on the stage in London.

The result is not the concert – no one will ever see that. While nothing can ever take the place of seeing Michael Jackson perform live, the film does grant us something lasting: a window into the creative mind of one of the greatest entertainers of all time.

# Michael Jackson's THIS IS IT Roundtable

**KENNY ORTEGA**, Michael Jackson's THIS IS IT creative partner and director of the film

**TRAVIS PAYNE**, THIS IS IT choreographer

**RANDY PHILLIPS**, THIS IS IT producer and producer of the film

## What is Michael Jackson's THIS IS IT?

**KENNY ORTEGA:** I've referred to it as a musical mosaic; truly, this is the show that no one was going to ever get to see. At the time, we didn't know we were making a film – we were in the process of building our show. So this film is like a backstage pass, a private peek into a world that otherwise no one would have seen, a glimpse into the creative process of Michael's final theatrical work.

When I came on to direct this film, I called my friends – friends that were very familiar with various genres, documentaries, concert films. I wanted their guidance. Was there another story, another film I could look at, that would guide my path. And there was nothing out there that was quite like this film.

**TRAVIS PAYNE:** When fans go see Michael Jackson's THIS IS IT, they're going to have Michael back, just for a little while. I think that's what was so wonderful to all of us – when you watch the film, it's like he's there. People are ready to celebrate his music, his ideas, his genius and artistry, and that's what they're going to see in this movie.

**RANDY PHILLIPS:** What makes this footage so compelling is that Michael is so open and unguarded. From March 5 when we did the press conference to June 25 when Michael died – we had a three-person crew with HD cameras. We don't have that kind of window into, say, Elvis Presley or Frank Sinatra, but we do have this raw, real movie of Michael, this genius at work.

## Kenny, why did you want to direct this film?

**KENNY ORTEGA:** It became a responsibility for me. Who else was going to do it? I was there, and I felt that I could protect his ideas and the integrity of his last theatrical work.

But the real reason it became so important to me is that I heard an outpouring from fans, people who said, I had tickets to the concert, tell me, what was it going to be like? What I wanted to do, in the best way I could and with the help of other artists that were in collaboration with Michael and me, was to create a film that would help the fans come to know what Michael's dream was

for THIS IS IT. We formed together the final documentation of Michael Jackson, creating a musical mosaic that tells the story of what we were trying to accomplish.

### **What do you think Michael's goals for the concert were?**

**KENNY ORTEGA:** He wanted to thank his fans by giving them another opportunity to see him live on stage again. He loved his fans – he would say they were the most loyal fans of any artist. Also, he had deep concerns about the health and future of our planet – he felt the messages in his songs were more important than ever. In addition, he wanted to share with his children the work that he loved all of his life, now that they were curious and old enough to appreciate what it was that he did. All of those things are part of this film – those messages are there.

**TRAVIS PAYNE:** THIS IS IT was going to be his return to the stage, but I think there was a greater purpose for him. I think he wanted to use it as a vehicle to continue to convey the messages in his music and visuals: the condition of the planet and how, as humanity, we've lost sight of so many things that are important to survive. He has been talking about these things for years – “Earth Song,” “Heal the World” – and I think sometimes people don't really listen, because it's easy to dismiss it – “Oh, it's just a song.” Well, now when people hear those songs again and see those images again, it will have a totally different meaning to them.

**RANDY PHILLIPS:** This was a man very much in command of his art and his craft and what he wanted to do. In many ways, everything that was the purpose of his life appears in this movie in some way.

### **It also seems that how Michael delivered those messages was just as important to him.**

**KENNY ORTEGA:** Well, Michael did like pushing the limits. Not only did he want to freshen up old ideas, but came to the project with new ideas that were possible with new inventions in technology. In this case, we could make steps forward with video, costuming, lighting, sound, and pyrotechnics. So whenever we approached a number, our first question was “Can we do that better,” because I knew that Michael just wouldn't accept it if it wasn't original. But the truly amazing thing is that as big and loud as things got on that stage, he made everything seem like it was just an extension of him. You never lost him – you could create big visuals, spectacle on a stage, but you never lost Michael.

### **How did the concert come about?**

**RANDY PHILLIPS:** I was lucky enough to be Michael's concert promoter. It started when I suggested to Michael that we'd like to work with him on a series of concerts at the O2 Arena, which is run by our company. And Michael turned us down. That started a two-year process of trying to convince him to do it. He eventually agreed to do 50 shows, and it became his show. On the night of that last L.A. rehearsal, the Wednesday before he died, I was transfixed – he was on stage, dancing and singing, and I got goose bumps. And when we left to go to our cars, he put his arm around me and said, “Thanks for getting me this far. I can take it from here.”

### **How were the songs chosen?**

**KENNY ORTEGA:** In his press announcement, he said, “We’re going to sing the songs the fans want to hear.” He put it out in a poll online, and millions of people responded.

**TRAVIS PAYNE:** Michael made a chart that showed us the running tally of the fans’ favorites. It made it very easy for us to know what content should really be considered. Ultimately, there’s not time to do every song, but we did the best we could to let the fans decide what this show would be – we wanted to give them a show that the people would really, really love.

**ORTEGA:** Our choices of songs were constantly evolving. Michael would say, “We’re going to keep ‘Stranger in Moscow’ in there, because one night I might just want to do it, and ‘Smile,’ one night I might just want to do it. I love ‘Will You Be There,’ but if we do it, are we repeating ourselves? I still want to do ‘Earth Song.’” So it was a process of elimination, with Michael the deciding voice. And the band learned everything. The band was ready to play everything and anything at any given notice. It was incredible – they must’ve learned every song from every album and had them all ready, even when we got down to the 22 or so that we were really serious about.

### **What was it like to collaborate with Michael?**

**KENNY ORTEGA:** He called it “creative jousting.” Normally we just built on each other’s ideas, and we’d keep each other on the page as the idea developed. But every once in a while, Michael would want to do something and I’d want to do something else, and we didn’t necessarily agree. We’d go back and forth, debating. One time, Travis said, “OK, guys,” and Michael said, “What? There’s nothing wrong. This is creative jousting – I love it.” And he really did – one of the reasons we enjoyed working together is that we weren’t afraid to disagree. But always, Michael was the architect and we were his builders. The biggest ideas always started with Michael.

**TRAVIS PAYNE:** The thing about “creative jousting” is that not only does it help come up with the best idea or presentation of an idea, but also helps you grow as an artist. Working with Michael and Kenny has helped me grow into the artist I’ve always imagined I could be, and I’m grateful for that.

Approaching any creative process with Michael... you never know what it’s going to be. The process is different every time – the only common thread is that there are no boundaries. We always had the ability to create freely. There were so many amazing ideas flowing – often, more than we had time to execute.

**ORTEGA:** He was so loving, so generous. Whenever he had something to share with you creatively, whether it was critical or not, he never made anyone feel small. “Do it with love,” he would say. “Sing it with love, say it with kindness. If you can’t, then don’t say it.” With all of his genius and talent, he also had grace, kindness, and compassion in the way he went about everything he did.

### **How did you decide what to include in the film?**

**KENNY ORTEGA:** Every day, I'd wake up in the morning and ask Michael to be with me. Watch over all of this with me. And I'd think about the fans – what do they want to see? How can I make this film a gift to them?

We had so much footage – I'm not even sure how many hours; I've heard different numbers. But it was a lot. And not all of it was of Michael – some of it was behind-the-scenes, people building sets, costumes, scenery, interviews with dancers and singers and band members. I was surprised, actually, to discover that we had as much as we did.

Our goal was to make a film that gave an idea of where we were going with each of these performances. So to do that, sometimes we cut together two or three different performances from Michael, woven into one. Sometimes you'll see Michael in one solid rehearsal, going through a song. A few things we were working on, I'm sorry to say, didn't make it into the movie – we were still building, still conceptualizing. But this movie does give you a healthy idea of what THIS IS IT would have been.

### **How did you meet Michael?**

**KENNY ORTEGA:** Back in the late 1980s, he called me at home. My niece, Jennifer, was there, and she answered the phone – she screamed across the house, “There's someone on the phone saying it's Michael Jackson.” I picked up the phone and said, “Hello?” and I heard Michael's voice, “Kenny?” I said, “Oh my Lord, Michael, I'm so sorry,” and he said, “Don't worry, it happens to me all the time.” He couldn't have been more charming – he just said, “I'd like to work with you and get together and discuss some ideas.”

Funny enough, but we had actually met years earlier, when I was a little boy myself. I was in the cast of “Oliver!” at the Circle Star Theatre in San Carlos, California, and Michael and his brothers – the Jackson 5 – were touring and performing in that same theater. I saw him backstage, and I was too scared to say anything, but I made eye contact with him. Michael gave me a big smile and said, “Hello, who are you? I'm Michael.” He must have been seven or eight years old, but I just remember his graciousness.

**TRAVIS PAYNE:** I've been a dancer since I was eight years old, and of course, I was inspired by everything Michael Jackson did. So after being able to dance with him for a while, in 1992, I got a chance to choreograph a number for him, “Dangerous,” for the American Music Awards. That later became part of the “Dangerous” tour and the MTV Awards in 1993. He gave me my big launch into choreography.

**RANDY PHILLIPS:** I've known Michael for 25 years. Actually, during the time of “Thriller,” I represented him on a deal with a shoe company. And I have a gentleman working in my division, Paul Gongaware, who oversaw production and tour direction on Michael's last two tours. He's also a producer on this film. I think that's how this concert came together – Michael was very comfortable with Paul and me.

### **What was it like to be with Michael when he wasn't performing?**

**KENNY ORTEGA:** We had a heart-to-heart connection – we truly loved each other. Of course, we shared many enthusiasms. We loved theater and film, adventure, sci-fi, even horror films. We love Broadway and pop music, and classical and opera and books and sculpture and art. When you're with a good friend, you never struggle for conversation. My goodness, we had airplane flights that sometimes lasted 10 hours or more, and we would sing the entire libretto to a musical. There was just so much that we had in common with each other.

**What was most memorable about this experience for you?**

**TRAVIS PAYNE:** Well, we didn't know it at the time, but looking back – I was in a small group of people that saw Michael Jackson perform some of his greatest hits for the very last time on stage: to watch “Billie Jean” or “Earth Song” for the last time and not to know it. That's something I'll cherish – we were there, and he looked great, and he told everybody he loved them. And then he left, and that would be the last time we saw him.

**RANDY PHILLIPS:** The thing I'll remember is being struck by his kindness. You know, it's very easy to remember him as the greatest dancer I've ever seen, one of the greatest recording artists ever – when it comes to his craft, onstage, he was magic and I was awe-inspired. But offstage, he was just so considerate, so kind and loving, and that's what I remember the most.

**What do you think made Michael such a remarkable talent?**

**KENNY ORTEGA:** I do believe that Michael was born with an extraordinary gift – he was singing with the maturity, soulfulness, and know-how of a 30-year-old at seven or eight. But he had another special gift: his love for what he was doing. That combination was what made Michael Jackson Michael Jackson. With his love for his craft, he was inspired by Quincy Jones, Berry Gordy, Diana Ross, Judy Garland, Fred Astaire, Liza Minnelli, Bob Fosse, James Brown, and Sammy Davis, Jr. He was never imitating any of them – he was always, always himself – but he was inspired, and he learned, and he built and imagined himself into an artist that was like no artist we'd ever seen or perhaps ever will. He was an entertainer's entertainer. I've worked with so many greats, but Michael, without question, was the greatest of them all.