

# Paying tribute to the 'King of Pop'

*YouTube sensation Jeffrey Perez steps into Michael Jackson's very big shoes*

By **JEREMY D. BONFIGLIO**  
Sight & Sound Editor

**BENTON HARBOR** — On Feb. 27, beat boxer Shaun "Anointed S" Roig, uploaded a video on YouTube of he and Michael Jackson tribute artist Jeffrey Perez performing "Leave Me Alone," a song off Jackson's "1987 "Bad" album.

A few week's later, Perez got a phone call.

"Shaun calls me up and says, 'I think we're going viral! I think we're going viral!'" Perez says during a phone interview from Las Vegas. "We've always done videos together and we vibe off of each other a lot. We were like glue and we were promoting a show we were doing and we just decided to do this little short clip, but for some reason it caught fire."

The video did indeed go viral with more than 40 million views worldwide. One of those viewers happened to be Ellen DeGeneres, who invited Roig and Perez to perform another Jackson song, "P.Y.T.," on her daytime talk show in April.

"When I got to Ellen I was kind of freaking out," Perez says. "It happened so fast. It hit me when I was on stage and I looked over at her and she has those big blue eyes. And I looked up and saw her watching us with those big blue eyes. We were on 'Ellen.' It was crazy. It was surreal."

The video and appearance on DeGeneres also has given a bump to Perez's job as one of the tribute artists featured in the touring production of "King Michael: A Glorious Tribute to the King of Pop," which stops Friday at the Lake Michigan



Photo provided / Marco Torres

**Jeffrey Perez is one of the performers featured in "King Michael: A Glorious Tribute to the King of Pop" at 8 p.m. Friday at Lake Michigan College Mendel Center Mainstage Theatre, 2755 E. Napier Ave., Benton Harbor.**

College Mendel Center Mainstage Theatre.

Jackson, whose contributions to music, dance and fashion made him a pop culture sensation, won 13 Grammy Awards in his career. "Thriller," his 1982 recording, remains the best-selling album of all time, with estimated sales of 65 million copies worldwide. Jackson's other albums, including "Off the Wall" (1979), "Bad" (1987), "Dangerous" (1991) and "HIStory" (1995), also rank among the world's best-selling albums. Despite allegations of child sexual abuse, for which he was acquitted in 2005, Jackson's death in June 2009 triggered a global outpouring of grief.

"King Michael," a multime-

dia show that has been running since 2010, represents all eras of Jackson's musical career, including songs from the Jackson 5 to his greatest hits.

"Finding people who can sing the role live and look a little like him is not easy to do," says Steve Love, the executive producer of "King Michael." "But Jeffrey embodies Michael Jackson. That's what Ellen saw and that's what the world saw and that's why he became a viral sensation."

Perez doesn't remember when he first started emulating the pop star. He was only 1 when his parents said he began to bounce to the beat of the "Bad" album, and became obsessed with the entertainer by age 3.

"I just remember Michael Jackson always being a part of my life since I was a little kid," Perez says. "I could barely walk and I was dancing to Michael Jackson. I listened to his music and watched his videos for many, many, many years. I was hooked at a very young age. We moved a lot because we were a military family, but I did school plays and choir, just anything I could do to get on stage."

He grew up mastering Jackson's sound, body language and look. Winning his high school talent contest as Jackson cemented Perez's career trajectory.

"Everyone was so into it that it stuck with me," Perez says. "I would bug other Michael Jackson tribute artists to get advice

## IF YOU GO

**What:** "King Michael: A Glorious Tribute to the King of Pop"

**When:** 8 p.m. Friday

**Where:** Lake Michigan College Mendel Center Mainstage Theatre, 2755 E. Napier Ave., Benton Harbor

**How much:** \$26-\$46

**Contact:** 927-1221 or themendelcenter.com

**Artist info:** www.kingmichaelshow.com

and started gearing everything toward that. It sparked a fire."

Friday's show will feature both Perez and Brandon "Michael" Jones as Jackson at various career stages with additional vocals by Charlie Charles and Candace Chavez backed by musicians Ron Simpson (bass), Barry Reed Jr. (keyboards), Joey Trujillo (guitar), Ashton Burris (drums), and dancers Terrill "Mekka" Ladd, Javaun Scott, Stephen Rollins and Aaron Smith.

The material includes hits such as "Bad," "Beat It," "Billie Jean," "Man in The Mirror," "Rock With You," "The Way You Make Me Feel," "Thriller," and more.

"I cover much of the younger era of his life," Perez says. "Getting inside the character takes some time because of the make-up and the full costume, but also because you have to get your mind right. They are really big shoes to fill. No when can ever be Michael Jackson so it is always a learning and growing process. We just try to give the best tribute possible, and we all do it from our heart. Michael Jackson had something special that no one else had. There seemed to be magic in his music. That's what we are trying to capture."

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