



Jacko's voice from beyond

The King of Pop's vocals live on with the help of some special studio magic



HE Eagles, Jennifer Lopez, Christina Aguilera – audio

engineer Greg Rule has worked with some of the biggest names in the music business.

But *Michael Jackson The Immortal World Tour* pushes his specialist craft to a whole new level.

Since Cirque du Soleil's spectacular, arena-style show must be performed without a lead singer, it's Rule's job to give voice to the late pop icon.

He is able to achieve this thanks to a special partnership with Michael Jackson's estate and Sony records, which allows Cirque access to all of

Jacko's original recordings.

"It lets us have Michael's

real voice for the concert, as opposed to an impersonator or a soundalike," says Rule.

"There have been a lot of cover bands who do Michael's songs but nobody has been given access to these original recordings the way we have."

Musical director Greg Phillinganes and designer

Kevin Antunes spent many months at Cirque's Montreal headquarters rehearsing and building the show.

Having access to the master

tapes meant they were able to separate out Jackson's vocal tracks to allow him to be accompanied live on stage by a stellar bunch of musicians

– many of whom, such as Jonathan "Sugarfoot" Moffett, and bassist Don Boyette, were long-time collaborators.

"In a way, it's like we actually have Michael with us on every song thanks to these recordings," says Rule, who like the Wizard of Oz, pulls the strings from behind a curtain.

More than 300 shows in, Rule says Jackson's voice still has the power to surprise him.

"Michael was unbelievably expressive when he sang. You really hear the emotion like never before when you strip everything else away and hear only his voice. He was incredibly passionate with the way he delivered these songs.

"He also did a lot of interesting sound effects with his voice. Sometimes people don't even know it's Michael doing it – they think it's maybe a drum machine or a synthesiser."

Band members wear an earpiece through which Rule counts them in.

"This is how Michael sings in our show. The band is listening to the click and they are able to follow his voice. It has limitations, because obviously we can't improvise, everything has to lock to Michael. But most hi-tech tours have a rig like this nowadays. And listening to that pulse for the whole show keeps the musicians all locked together."

The music legend might not be there in person, but it seems he's still calling the tune.





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