

Exclusive Interview With The Singer: Michael Jeffries

Written by Patricia Turnier

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Michael Jeffries was born in Memphis.□ His family moved to Oakland, California in 1962.□ Michael began his love for music at a young age.□ He teamed up with elementary school classmates to create a group that became known as “The Two Things in One”.□ The band had early success with two singles featuring Michael Jeffries as the lead vocalist,□ “Silly Song” in 1971 and “Together Forever” 1973.□ During the early 1970s as the front man of the group he opened for prominent artists such as Earth, Wind and Fire, War, Bill Cosby, Funkadelic, etc.□ In 1977, Mr.□ Jeffries was recruited by The Bay area’s own Tower of Power (this group had two Grammy nominations in 1982 and 2006) as their lead singer.□ We Came to Play! is an album by Tower of Power released in 1978. It marked the debut of singer Michael Jeffries, who would stay with TOP through the mid-1980s. Jeffries recorded a total of four albums with the group including “Back On The Street” in 1979, and the last one “Dinosaurs Track” in 2000.□ In 1986, Michael Jeffries co-wrote for the songstress [Denise Williams](#) □ the Billboard top 10 and R&B top 5 single "Never say Never". □ He also contributed to the soundtrack of the film Wildcat with the single “Razzle Dazzle”.□ In 1987, Michael Jeffries collaborated as a

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**featured vocalist along with
Jeff Lorbers' CD "Private Passion".** □ □

[Karyn White](#) on

Michael Jeffries released his first solo album, the self-titled "Michael Jeffries" in 1989 on Warner Bros Records. It featured singles produced by Jellybean Johnson and the legendary duo Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis. Michael Jeffries' last project the "Family Affair" CD is a collaboration with his children: daughter Anikol and son Mike J. The trio is called Michael Jeffries Daughter & Son. Listeners will find uplifting songs such as "Believe in Me", or singles with a classic early 60s sound influence like "Plans". In addition, people will discover encompassing elements of contemporary R&B, overtones of jazz, funk-infused up tempo sounds and a smooth duet with another soul artist Lenny Williams on "Rewrite". *Mega Diversities had the pleasure to speak to Mr. Jeffries on July 24th 2011.*

P.T. Growing up, who were your influences you in the music scene?

M.J. I became a music lover since my childhood. The radio was always on. The popular songs of the day provided the background and sometimes the foreground to everyday life. This was the golden age of the Motown and Memphis sounds. It was an era when Radio DJs were stars and people would tune in to listen to what the top jocks played. During this period of my life, I lived in Tennessee which had its own music scene with its specific sound.

I grew up in the Motown era. I was inspired until now by its sheer sound, especially Stevie Wonder. I like him not only as an artist but also as a humanitarian. James Brown also was amazing; he captivated me. I loved watching his performance on the Ed Sullivan Show. This entire James Brown craze led me to the record store with my 50 cents to buy "I Feel Good". I played that record until the grooves wore thin! I thought I would die when my mother took me to see the man himself live at the Oakland Coliseum in 1966. James blew my top off and I haven't been able to get it back on ever since. So, I became at the time an 8-year-old fan [Laughs]! With a mirror and a brush for a microphone I skated and hollered until my parents thought I was good enough for half time entertainment at some of their house parties! I would get so excited when I would hear them tell their party guests that I was really good at doing the James Brown. They would come and get me to give an impromptu performance. I looked forward to those opportunities and I never shied away from the slightest request. In addition, it was great for me as a kid to be encouraged by my family. Later, I was involved with the band 'The Two Things in One'. We opened for several artists and we almost opened for James Brown. Mr. Brown didn't like the notion of a local act on his show, so we got the boot. It broke my heart to hear that, but life goes on.

I would like to add that hearing “Sly and the Family Stone” was definitely pivotal in my musical development in the ‘70s. I enjoyed the fusion of Soul, Funk, Rock, R&B and Psychedelic sound of this group. “Sly and the Family Stone” initiated a musical revolution and was probably the first truly integrated group in the history of popular music. In the 1998 Joel Selvin’s book *For the Record: Sly and the Family Stone: An Oral History*, the author sums up the importance of Sly and the Family Stone's influence on African American music by stating "there are two types of black music: black music before Sly Stone, and black music after Sly Stone". The melody of that era was called message music and I was hooked.

P.T. How was it to work with your adult children for your latest CD?

M.J. It was really rewarding to work with my adult children. It was awesome to share my passion with them. We are all music lovers. It was a fulfilling and positive experience to participate in the creation of the album with my family. It challenged us to do better.

P.T. I believe that when the relationships are great between family members, it is the best thing to work together because the money stays in the family.

M.J. I completely agree with that. We were able to accomplish a common goal with the production of our CD and we enjoyed the entire process (the writing, etc.). It allowed me to be closer with my offspring and explore more in-depth their artistic range. Everybody was bringing something to the table and we have respect for one another. In addition, it was also rewarding for me to transmit my knowledge of the music industry to my children. Actually, it is a process that I started many years ago and I guess that my passion for this realm was contagious [laughs] because my kids were influenced by it. I was also learning with our CD production about the new trends through my son and daughter. So, this journey as a trio is definitely a rich experience for me.

P.T. What message do you want the public to take away from your latest CD?

M.J. It is like what I was saying earlier, our CD is about message music. I try as much as possible to stay away from songs which degrade females or talk about putting down any

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community. I choose to sing about uplifting themes. For instance, our single "Don't Forget 2 Say I Love U" is a song that can make the listeners feel good and it can make them appreciate the music. We also have a song to unite people of the world and to give hope with our title track, "Family Affair". Our single, "Mother's Love", is a tribute to all mothers in the world. If the listeners pay attention, every song has a message.

I would like to add that no matter how old we get, how far we travel or what paths our futures take, there is one influence that we can never escape----family. Who we are and where we end up can be determined by where we come from. The relationship that I have with my children is celebrated in our CD which is a combination of our two great loves: family and music.

P.T. What are your future projects that you can share with us?

M.J. Earlier in this interview, I spoke about the group 'The Two Things in One' that I was a part of when I was a teenager. We recorded three singles which did really well regionally. However, our record company wasn't honest with us and never paid us our dues. We were working on an album at the time that we didn't finish because the label was not respecting the agreement. The record was practically finished but never released because of our difficult relationship with the label. At the time, we were practically kids. We were circa 14-15-years-old.

Everything was stolen from us. It was a rude awakening for us. However, it allowed us to quickly understand the business aspect of the industry. So there was a rare never released recording by our group. The names of some of the singles were "Choirs In My Teardrops" and "Let's Get It Together", produced by ROCK-WAY RECORDS back in 1970.

To go back to your question, a UK company, Ace Records purchased the master of 'The Two Things in One' album which was never released and will put it on the market in October 2011. I am involved also in rehearsals because our band will make live performances. We are also working on upcoming videos.

P.T. You wrote in the past for artists such as Denise Williams. Is it something that you would like to pursue in the future?

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M.J. Actually, I co-wrote songs with Denise Williams and some other artists. I enjoyed delivering good opuses to performers. It was interesting to pen for a large publisher which is now owned by Universal Music because I could submit demos and a big team could work on them afterwards. However, if I were asked to write again for other artists, I would carefully choose the publishing company to collaborate with because some play games regarding the financial aspect, in other words in sharing the proceeds.

P.T. What is the biggest lesson you learned in the music industry so far?

M.J. You need to have an ego and humility. Ego is required to believe that you have what it takes to make it in the business because you will always meet naysayers on your path. You need confidence in what you are doing and in tandem you have to find balance to be able to learn from others. In other words, you have to be humble. In addition, you need the skills to negotiate effectively for making wise financial choices and remaining solvent. A thick skin is a prerequisite to not let anybody intimidate you. It is important to understand globally how the music business works: the royalties, the 360 deal, etc. You have to grasp who is really making the money in entertainment: the songwriters, etc. You can't allow as an artist to have an idyllic view of the music industry.

It is also an asset to know how you can get income with the new technologies available on the Internet. So, for me it has been a lifelong process to learn about the business, because there are always new elements in this realm. The indie performers use the Internet which is a tool to access a greater platform because it allows the world to discover many artists. In this regards, it is a must to master these components. On a more personal level, I had to avoid the pitfalls of the industry, such as drugs because your head needs to be clear if you want to continue to make great music. I had to make sure to not take a destructive road.

P.T. Speaking of the younger stars of today, who do you enjoy watching and why?

M.J. Beyoncé, Ne-Yo and John Legend. I believe that they stand out with the quality of their songs.

P.T. Do you have a message for our readers?

M.J. Knowledge is power and freedom, ignorance is slavery because you put yourself in a vulnerable position when you are deprived of information. We hear often this cliché but it is the truth. The more you are informed, the better it is. You can't just rely on the music (for instance if you are in the entertainment industry) and have a myopic view of the world. It is imperative to know the industry inside and out. With knowledge you are equipped to make clear decisions and you have more control over your life.

I am speaking from experience. I released my first solo album in 1989. At that time, I reached London to promote the record. All the interviewers thought the Bay area was flat to the ground. Maybe it was a bad sign because my record didn't quite do the numbers we expected. I found myself without a record deal and with all the responsibilities of a family. I chose to step away from the financial uncertainty that comes with trying to get back on that horse. I had to think about my family. I thank God for showing me the way through that time and leading me back to this place with my family at my side.

To conclude, education is the basis of everything, whatever your career path, and it gives people options. You need to be armed with knowledge. So, my final message for our readers and especially the young ones is: learning is a lifelong process. It never ends, and it provides tools to go forward in life. Knowledge brings wealth and self-reliance; nobody can take it away from you. I believe that it does not matter who you are or what is your background, success can be achieved if you are willing to work for it. Most individuals are able to accomplish their dreams with hard work, determination and willpower. You may get knocked down, but it is up to you in the end to get up and dust yourself off.

P.T. Thanks Mr. Jeffries for this interview, it was a real pleasure to speak to you!

To buy Michael Jeffries' latest CD go to <http://www.mjmartist.net/>

Michael Jeffries' Discography:

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1971 Silly Song w/ Two Things In One (Music City Records)
1973 Together Forever w/ Two Things In One (Music City Records)
1974 Overdose w/ Two Things In One (Music City Records)
1978 We Came To Play w/ Tower Of Power (CBS Records)
1979 Back on The Streets w/ Tower Of Power (CBS Records)
1981 Direct To Disk w/ Tower Of Power (Sehfield Labs Records)
1985 Wildcats Soundtrack w/Various Artists (Warner Bros Records)
1986 Private Passion w/ Jeff Lorber/ Karyn White (Warner Bros Records)
1987 Never Say Never Top 10 ASCAP Award (CBS Records)
1989 Michael Jeffries Michael Jeffries (Warner Bros Records)
2000 Dinosaur Tracks w/Tower Of Power (Rhino Records)
2006 Do It Duhe w/Robin Duhe (Blaze2 Records)
2011 Family Affair w/Anikol/Mike J (MJM Artist Records)