

Meet the fan who's keeping Michael Jackson alive in Dubai

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EINPresswire.com/ -- The airing of HBO's Leaving Neverland has left the legacy of Michael Jackson on tenterhooks. Billie Jean doesn't love him anymore. He's Bad. He's a Smooth Criminal. But his fans don't want to Leave [Him] Alone and are launching a charm offensive to restore his reputation and preserve his legacy.

The star's life has always been riddled with controversies, but there are fans and then there are die-hard fans who are determined to change the public perception of the King of Pop.

[Mudassar Hussain Mohammed](#), a tribute artist of Michael Jackson, says the resurfaced child abuse allegations have hit both his business and emotions. "In April, I was supposed to perform at a private gig in Burj Khalifa and at another club in Dubai. I was doing my vocal rehearsals when I got calls from their event managers that both the shows had been cancelled. It set me back by Dh35,000," says the 39-year-old expat from Lahore, Pakistan, who has been singing and dancing like Jackson for 20 years. An impersonator if you will, but he prefers being called a tribute artiste.

"Michael did many things by taking his popularity and using that element to help people - Heal the World Foundation, for instance. He supported artists, people and humanity. He



did many great things, especially for children, that were taken for granted. They were used against him. He was never an abuser. He was never a wacko. Don't connect all these elements to a good human being," he adds.

Mudassar says he's going to stand up and speak up for Michael as the artist, who dedicated his entire life to singing, no longer has a voice. "My way of paying tribute to the King of Pop, the entertainer of the world, is to be able to sing like him, dress like him, and present him in a way that's justified. I try to give people the same memory that they could have had at a Michael Jackson concert. I am not exactly the same, but I try to be. I try to sing his songs - any song and every song." During the day, Mudassar is a simulator pilot at Dubai World Central airport. But when the costume comes on - shiny black jacket, curly wig, black hat, black shoes and silver gloves - Mudassar transforms into Mudassar Jackson, his stage name.

Looking back at his journey, he reminisces about the challenges that came with trying to be Michael Jackson. He started imitating the pop star's songs and moves when he was 10. He was scolded countless times by his father for breaking dozens of shoes while doing the moonwalk. He would start practising Michael's signature moves wherever he was - at home, on the streets - and try to learn the steps. Even now, he breaks into MJ moves whenever he can. The tipping point came in 1993 when he donned a white hat, white trousers, hair gelled and curled just so, and performed Smooth Criminal at his high school in Sharjah. The crowd was, at first, silenced by his striking resemblance to Jackson, but quickly erupted into loud cheers and applause. That's when he knew what the rest of his life was



going to look like. In the 10 years that followed, he performed just for fun until the impersonation gigs became a freelance occupation. He says he has performed all over the UAE in hotels, private parties, concerts, and even for the royal family. His most recent show was at an Emirates Airline Catering corporate event where he performed in front of thousands of people.

Looking like Jackson isn't easy. It entails hours of patience and layers of makeup. The most challenging part, he says, is wearing the lipstick and eyeliner. "I never realised how difficult wearing makeup was until I started doing it myself. Now when I see women wearing makeup, I make sure to compliment them for their hard work and finesse," he says. "I have dressed up several times as Michael Jackson and gone on the streets, but I always had to have guards with me or else I would be robbed or kidnapped," he laughs. "I was once in a long limousine with my makeup on. I rolled down my window and looked outside. We were at a traffic signal near the Dubai Mall when two ladies spotted me and went into a complete shock. The signal turned green but they wouldn't go," recalls Mudassar. He was in splits.

Michael Jackson passed away in 2009, but Mudassar considers himself fortunate to have had the opportunity to meet his role model - a memory he will cherish for life. "I met Michael Jackson in 2003. At that time, I was working at Dubai's Air Traffic Control tower as an Air Traffic Control specialist. We could see who's arriving and on which aircraft. When my colleague told me that Michael Jackson was coming, I couldn't control myself. I immediately took an early leave and went straight to meet him in the airport's majlis area. Michael had come to meet one of his friends in Dubai, Mohammed bin Sulayem, who is one of the world's fastest rally drivers." An emotional Mudassar says, "My staff pass allowed me to enter any part of the airport, but I was stopped by his security guards. I was in tears and begged them to let me meet him."

The time finally came. He walked up to him. There was the King of Pop, standing right in front of his eyes. Mudassar still remembers what Michael was wearing - black pants, black shoes, white socks, green shirt and black sunglasses. "I can't believe I am seeing you," Mudassar told his idol, with tears in his eyes. "Why can't you believe? I am alive, I am here," Michael told him. Mudassar recounts the funniest thing the icon said to him, "Do people in Dubai love me?" He told him reassuringly, "Michael, the whole world loves you." Mudassar says he went on to demonstrate some of his moves that left Michael impressed.

"He gave me his blessings and asked me to keep performing. We spoke for a few minutes and then, sadly, he had to leave with a promise of meeting again. But that chance never came. If he hears me right now, I would just tell him, come back. The world needs him. The world needs his music."

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