

THRILLER: MICHAEL JACKSON'S SURPRISING SUCCESS

The album that would become the most successful record in music history went unnoticed by the magazine *Time* when it was first **released** 35 years ago, on November 30, 1982. But it didn't take too long for that to change, as the album sat atop the charts for weeks and revolutionized the entire record industry and the music-video culture. About a year after its **release**, *Thriller* was still selling 200,000 copies a week. By the time Michael Jackson appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine in 1984, the album had become the best-selling album ever (and it still claims that title).

But, while it could be said that a success of that magnitude is always a surprise in some way, *Time*'s music critic Jay Cocks also suggests a deeper reason why the editors at *Time* may have **overlooked** the album when it was first released:

For the record industry, *Thriller* was a restoration of confidence, a rejuvenation. Its effect on listeners, especially younger ones, was nearer to a revelation. *Thriller* brought Black music back to mainstream radio, from which it had been **banished** in the mid-'70s. "No doubt about it," says composer-arranger Quincy Jones, who produced the albums *Off the Wall* and *Thriller* with Jackson. "He took us right up there where we belong. Black music had to **play second fiddle** for a long time, but its spirit is the whole motor of pop. Michael connected with every soul in the world."

Thriller does not have the mean, challenging immediacy of rap, but it is consummate contemporary rhythm and blues. Jane Fonda, one of Jackson's pals, put it as nicely as any music critic: "Michael had a fresh, original sound. The music is energetic, and it's sensual. You can dance to it, work out to it, make love to it, sing to it. It's hard to sit still to."

The pulse of America and much of the rest of the world **beat** in time to the tough **strut** of *Billie Jean*, the asphalt aria of *Beat It*, the cool chills of *Thriller*. *Thriller* was on the Japanese charts for 65 consecutive weeks, and local teens were copying Michael's moves and singing his songs. *Thriller* was also South Africa's top seller: "Jackson bridged the apartheid gap," declared one record executive. The Soviet press in Moscow denounced Jackson, and his fans couldn't buy his records in any stores, but **bootleg** tapes were swapped and treasured.

"Michael used to say, when he wrote, he'd write for everyone," says his mother Katherine, "even though the music business would list it as rhythm and blues because of him being Black." Jackson was the biggest thing in music since The Beatles. He was the hottest single phenomenon since Elvis Presley. He just may be the most popular Black singer ever.

This success, Jones says, "had never happened to a Black performer." Rock critics (who are mostly white) liked *Thriller* well enough and wrote respectfully of it when it was released in December 1982, but they were as surprised as record-company executives (who are mostly white) when the album started **burning its way into** the country's collective musical consciousness. The message is obvious anyway: soul is for sharing, not segregating.

When Jackson died in 2009, *Thriller* was still remembered by many as a high point in his career. "For a generation, the magic is partly nostalgic; everyone in his fifties remembers exactly where they were when they heard *Beat It* for the first time," wrote *Time*'s Richard Corliss in his remembrance of the pop idol. "As a piece of music, it remains the greatest pop album of all time."

Text adapted from an article by
Lily ROTHMAN. *Time* [online] (November 29, 2017)

to release: publicar

release: publicació / publicación

to overlook: passar per alt / pasar por alto

to banish: bandejar / desterrar

to play second fiddle: ser a l'ombra / estar en la sombra

to beat: marcar el ritme / marcar el ritmo

strut: estil de caminar fatxenda / pavoneo

bootleg: còpia pirata / copia pirata

to burn one's way into: establir-se ràpidament i amb força / establecerse rápidamente y con fuerza

Part 2: Writing

Choose ONE topic. Your answer should be 125-150 words in length. There is no specific penalty for exceeding 150 words in length. Extra points are not given for exceeding 150 words.
[4 points]

1. Do you buy music or do you pirate it? Some people argue that we should put an end to music piracy, as it generates huge losses for the record companies and music artists. Others claim that the record companies already have enough money, and that the prices they charge are too expensive. **Write a for-and-against essay** in which you state the pros and cons of paying for music.
2. You have missed a flight due to unexpected delays but you are not offered any rebooking or any compensation from the airline. **Write an email** to the customer service department complaining about the service and asking for compensation. Make sure you do NOT use your own name in your email.

Grammar	
Vocabulary	
Text	
Maturity	
Total	
Nota de la redacció	