

MICHAEL JACKSON

THE IMMORTAL

WORLD TOUR™

CIRQUE DU SOLEIL®

SET DESIGN

THE IMMORTAL World Tour invites the audience inside an imaginary world inspired by Michael Jackson's Neverland. Once inside the gilded gates, we discover the Giving Tree, a representation of the great oak tree in which Michael would climb up to seek inspiration and write his songs and poems.

Setting the stage

Neverland was also the venue chosen to hold the first meeting of the show's creative team. "I remember going to Neverland with the creative team and meeting the grounds people who have remained faithful to Michael," Jamie King reminisces. "I recall seeing the Giving Tree where he wrote among other things most of the *Dangerous* tour that I danced on, and I truly felt that I was at the right place creating this show." The Giving Tree was chosen early on as the main scenic element to anchor the project.

Set Designer Mark Fisher created a tree that is not a replica of the original tree; it has many personalities and undergoes various transformations during the show. The structure is articulated and can break apart depending on the scene. It turns into a root system for the *Thriller* scene and becomes a hi-tech object toward the end of the show. A metaphor as well as a centralizing piece, the Giving Tree creates a symbolic world for Michael's memory to occupy.

"Working on a rock show without a live artist can be challenging," Fisher explains. "In this case, the set design takes on a whole new meaning. Its role is to fill the shadows as it were, and to evoke the artist's presence."

The props as storytelling devices

Props and Scenic Designer Michael Curry, who was one of the designers on the *THIS IS IT* concert tour, has developed props that serve as storytelling devices. For example, a huge book of tales and an upside down tree serve as acrobatic devices. Michael's famed glove, hat and shoes become giant props inhabited by nimble dancers. Curry's goal was to tap into and trigger the fans' memories of Michael, and to focus attention on the performance. Many of the props are subtext for the songs or support the narrative.

The projections – In Michael's image

The projections in *THE IMMORTAL World Tour* not only act as storytelling devices, they play a key role in making Michael's presence palpable. Projection Designer Olivier Goulet has integrated video content such as footage of Michael's performances and real-time projections of the performances on stage.

Set design close-ups

- THE IMMORTAL's versatile stage is highly technical with multiple lifts for scene changes. A large, multi-purpose LED screen was developed: it starts flat on the stage, stands up to act as a projection surface, turns into a ramp, and surrounds the Giving Tree like a gradient LED ramp. In the middle of the stage, there are large drawers that serve as steps for artists to perform on.
- The stage out in the house – called the B Stage or runway – is equipped with a conveyor belt, a lift and video screen.
- The tree is 12 m high and weighs 5,500 kg.
- The elephants are more than 2 m tall and weigh 9 kg each. They are manipulated by two hidden acrobats and were inspired by Baba and Gypsy, the two elephants given to Michael by Elizabeth Taylor.
- The giant shoes directly reference Michael Jackson's famous penny loafers. They are 2.4m long and are created from orthopedic foam with a vinyl skin.
- The giant hat is large enough for two performers to hide inside. It is constructed in a way that mimics the softness of a real hat.
- The glove is a soft sculpture that allows the dancers inside to create various hand positions using their full body. The glove is 1.8 m tall and is light-weight.
- The scrim (translucent screen) is equipped with four 20K projectors; there are four 10K projectors and two 20K projectors on B stage; the tree has two 10K projectors.
- The total projection surface in the show is 500 m².
- The young Michael in the balloon is an animatronics puppet (animated by means of electromechanical devices) styled after Michael when he was six years old.
- The balloon and its equipment weigh only 4 kg. Free flight is made possible by using a helium balloon outfitter with drive fans. It is remote-controlled by a ground-based technician.
- It took more than 9,000 hours to create the props and puppets.