

US

THE ENTERTAINMENT MAGAZINE

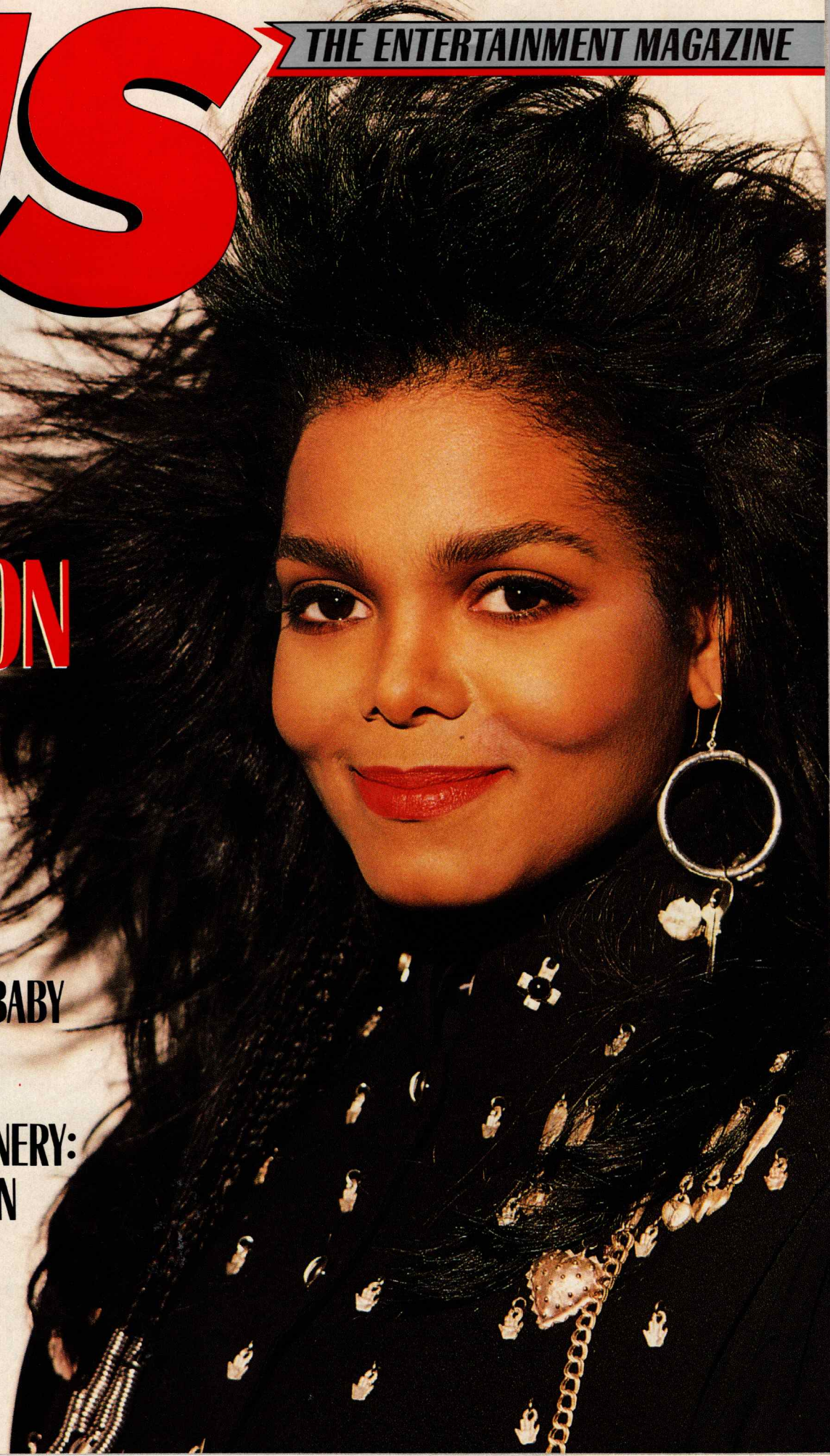
NUMBER 123 MARCH 5, 1990
\$1.79 US \$1.95 CANADA £1.50

JANET JACKSON

ON HER OWN
AND LOVING IT

TRACY POLLAN
ON BRINGING UP BABY
(AND MICHAEL J.)

THE SEXIEST CONNERY:
SEAN'S SON JASON



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PHOTOGRAPHS BY M. S. PHOTOS/Outline; Styling: Lauren Lendau for Spike; Hair: Jessi Zeltoun; Makeup: Phyllis Cohen; Shirt: Le Garage at Ecot; Belt: Barry Kellarsimon at Maxfield

"A lot of people say they think I'm sexy," says Jackson. "I don't see it."

BY STEVE POND

JACKSON'S HEIGHTS

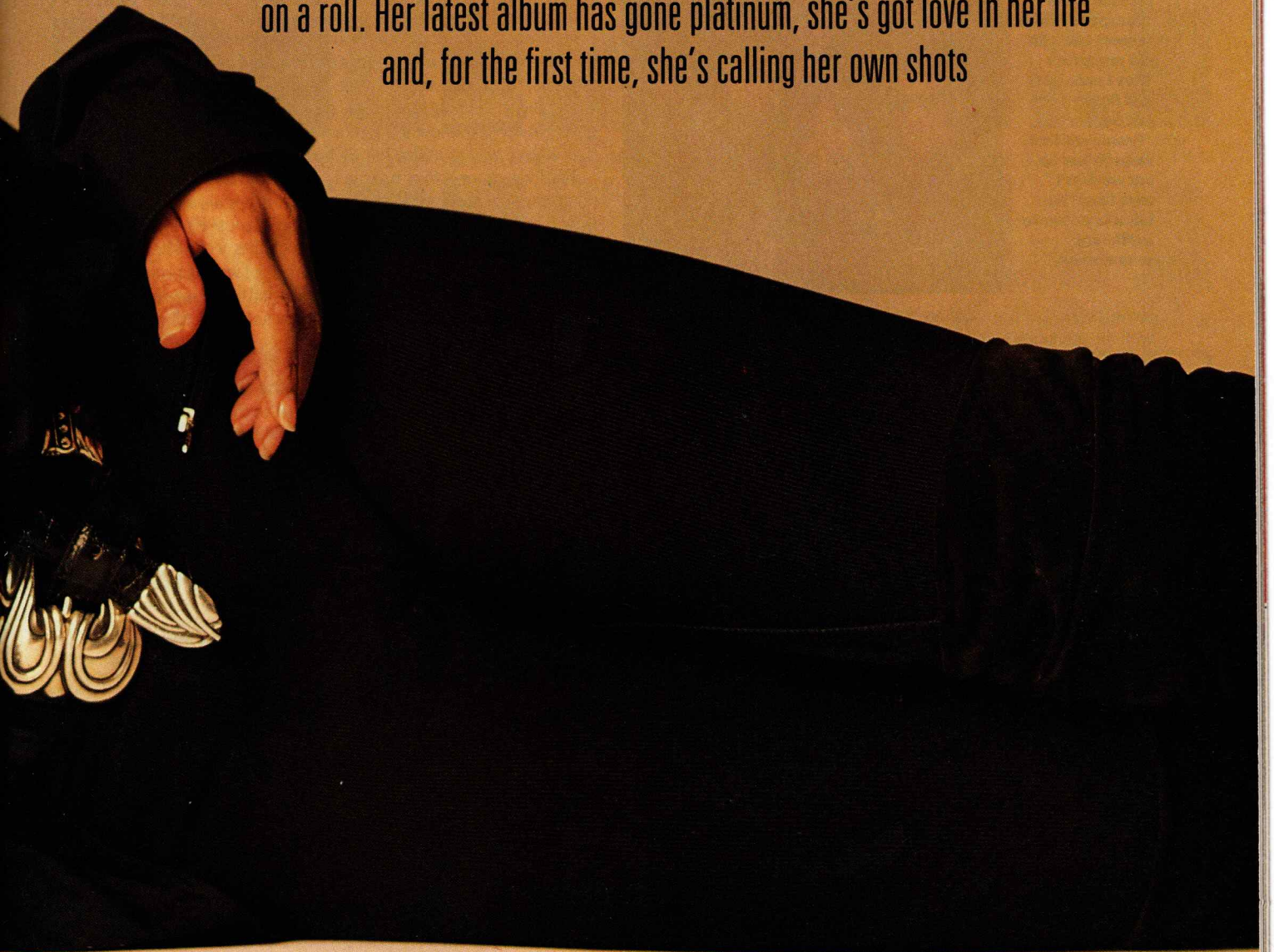
This looks spontaneous, but don't let your eyes deceive you. In a soundstage on a corner of the Paramount Studios lot in Hollywood, here's Arsenio Hall, grinning like a mischievous little boy and dragging a camera crew with him as he heads next door to crash a Janet Jackson rehearsal. And here's Jackson, rehearsing the single "Miss You Much" with her band and dancers, then gasping as she turns to find Hall's crew on her turf.

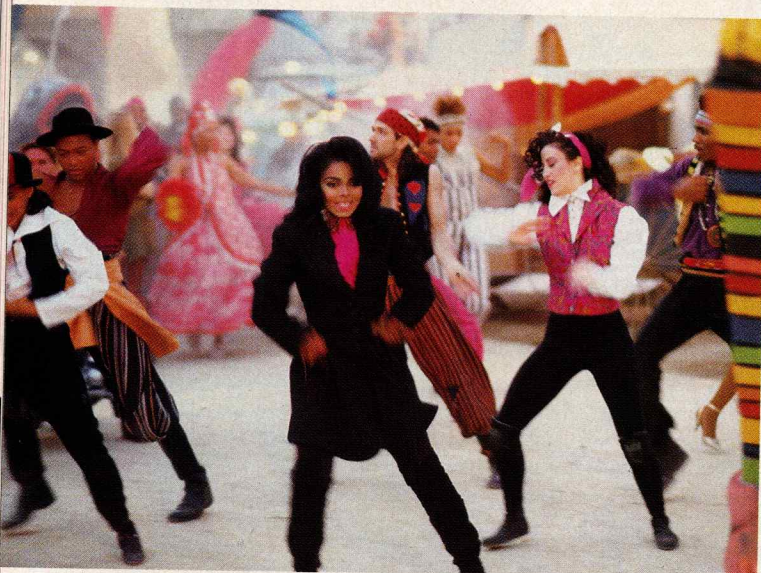
In truth, none of this is really spontaneous. In truth, rehearsals for Jackson's upcoming world tour have been

taking place miles away, at a different rehearsal hall in the San Fernando Valley. In truth, Hall got permission to interrupt this "rehearsal" after months of negotiations, carefully planned leaks to the press, and promises that he'd mention Jackson in his monologue every night for a week. In truth, a stage manager alerted Jackson of Hall's approach — and when he walked in on her she wasn't concentrating on the choreography for "Miss You Much," she was wondering if she should toss her chewing gum.

But, of course, it doesn't play like that on Hall's →

As she kicks off her first world tour, Janet Jackson's on a roll. Her latest album has gone platinum, she's got love in her life and, for the first time, she's calling her own shots





Jackson in her "Escapade" video (above) and with her producers Terry Lewis (left) and Jimmy Jam last September "People say that we grew her up, but we didn't," says Jam. "We introduced her to a different environment."



show. Instead, it plays like another coup for the only talk-show host with the gumption to interrupt one of the *Jacksons*. And it plays like a way for Jackson to promote her upcoming tour without doing the typical talk-show shtick, and without putting up with any irksome questions about her brother Michael or other troublesome topics.

And in the end, Jackson comes across as charming and shy and, at the same time, talented and driven. In other words, she has illustrated the dichotomies that fuel her career: She's the perfectionist who leads her band and dancers through the split-second choreography of "Miss You Much" with a fierce determination; she's also the withdrawn young woman who giggles girlishly, and nervously shifts on her heels around outsiders.

And if the whole thing is staged to make it look as if Jackson is too busy to do a *real* talk-show appearance, well, that's not so far from the truth. Last month alone her new album, *Janet Jackson's Rhythm Nation: 1814*, neared the triple-platinum mark; she rehearsed for her first solo world tour that begins March 1, a special-effects-laden spectacle; she shot two videos; she appeared on the American Music Awards (and won two while she was at it). And she took one day off. That was New Year's Day, when she went to Disneyland.

As overwhelming as the demand for her talents may seem, at 23 Jackson is a music-business veteran: She first appeared on a concert stage with her brothers at the age of 7. So once the videos and tour preparations are finished, she should be able to slip right into the actual performing phase.

"To be honest with you, I never slipped into it to begin with," Jackson says with a sigh. "Every time I've done a show, it's always

been, 'Okay, this is the part where you come in.' That's the way it was when I was performing with my brothers when I was little. Now, it's like all the attention is going to be on *me*. I can't slip into it again, because this is something I've never slipped into *before*."

Rene Elizondo is frowning. "I'm worried about Janet," he says as she lies on the floor of an L.A. photographer's Melrose Avenue studio. "She's been on a 900-calorie-a-day diet, and with all the work she's been doing, that's not enough." A former dancer of Latin extraction in his late 20s, Elizondo has been creative consultant, all-around aide-de-camp and boyfriend to Jackson for two years. The couple met when he danced on her 1986 "Nasty" video (he may appear as her love interest in her upcoming "Come Back to Me" video).

Already, he says, she collapsed on the set of a half-hour video she made for the *Rhythm Nation* LP. (She woke up shaking and vomiting and, she says, couldn't stop crying until she got to the hospital, where they found she was suffering from exhaustion and dehydration.) And on this day, with 48 hours to go before the American Music Awards, a dance routine that needs to be rehearsed, and another day of photos needed for the tour booklet, it looks as if the star attraction is overworked and undernourished. "Maybe," Elizondo muses, "we could put the band behind Janet while she's sleeping, and take the group photos that way." He grins, to let you know it's a touch of sarcasm. "I mean, can't we figure out a way to utilize her 24 hours a day?"

Finally, Jackson's tour manager, Roger Davies, calls a halt to the photo session. Jackson slumps into a chair in her dressing room. "I'm tired," she groans. "I must say, this is the craziest it's ever been."

She giggles when she says this; she giggles when she says most things. Up close, the resemblance to Michael isn't as pronounced as it is in photos, her face looks more human and less porcelain. And her manner is no longer so stereotypically Jacksonian: Still soft-spoken, she is far more assertive than she was when her breakthrough album *Control* came out in 1986. Back then, it was hard to imagine Jackson, then managed by her father, Joseph, calling the shots. These days, you can believe that she's working herself to the bone because she's a perfectionist, not because somebody told her to.

"I don't feel that I work *that* hard," she says, shrugging. "When I look at the rest of my family — take Michael, for instance. He's →

Vital Statistics

FULL NAME: Janet Damita Jackson
BORN: May 16, 1966, in Gary, Indiana
HOME: Los Angeles
SIBLINGS: (oldest to youngest) Rebbie, Jackie, Tito, Jermaine, La Toya, Marlon, Michael, Randy
ALBUMS: 'Janet Jackson's Rhythm Nation: 1814' (1989), 'Control' (1986), 'Dream Street' (1984), 'Janet Jackson' (1982)
TELEVISION: 'Fame' (1984-85), 'Diff'rent Strokes' (1981-82), 'A New Kind of Family' (1979-80), 'Good Times' (1977-79)
MARITAL STATUS: marriage to James DeBarge annulled (1984 to 1985); has been dating Rene Elizondo since 1988
AWARDS: American Music Awards for Favorite Soul/R&B Single (1990); Favorite Dance Music Single (1990); Favorite Video (combined Pop/Rock-Soul/R&B, 1988); Favorite Soul/R&B Female Video Artist; Favorite Soul/R&B Single (1987)
DOGS: Puffy (mutt), Buck (Chow), Snow White, Tivoli (Shar-Peis)





Shirt: Agnes B.; Chain: M Gallery, L.A.

a workaholic; compared to him I don't even come close."

This is the way she likes to talk about her brother, as a point of reference for her own career. Otherwise, she says, she's very wary of interviewers' motives: "They'll start with 'What's Michael like?' And I'll answer, even though I really don't like talking about him. And then they start on *the stupid stuff*." She flashes a meaningful look. "And that's when I *really* get mad."

But even if she's on her own — currently living in L.A. with Elizondo — and eager to escape the shadow of her family, Janet knows that she might not be a singer if she hadn't been a Jackson. Growing up, she wanted to be a jockey, but her father, a strict parent who managed all his kids' careers, asked her to sing in a Vegas-style revue that included all nine children (Janet is the youngest). Jockey dreams were replaced with thespian ambitions, but Jackson kept making song demos, and when she was 14 her father heard one and told her that she should return to music. "I told him, 'I don't feel that my voice is good enough yet,'" she says. "He said, 'It is.'" So at 16, just as her acting career was getting off the ground, she signed on with A&M Records and began making albums. It was after working on the TV series *Fame* for a season (1984-85) that she made the decision to dedicate herself solely to music.

Her personal life was also in transition. James DeBarge, member of another singing family, had been a friend since she was 10, her "first love" a while later, and her husband when she was 18, though just about everybody advised against it. Logistically, the marriage didn't work: She'd shoot *Fame* during the day while he slept in her dressing room, then when her day ended he'd go into the recording studio. The marriage didn't work in other ways either, and in less than a year the couple got an annulment. "I don't regret it," she insists. "I don't think that it was a mistake."

After the split Jackson threw herself into her music. John McClain, then an A&M Records executive whom she had known since childhood, suggested she work with producers Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis, two Minneapolis denizens who had a string of dance hits under their belts. Jackson went to Minneapolis to meet them, bringing a bodyguard and a girlfriend. Jam and Lewis met her at the airport in a Chevy Blazer rather than a limo, and let her fend for herself when fans approached her. "We introduced her to a different environment," says Jam, "and she grew up."

The bodyguard went home, the girlfriend stayed and everybody went to work. The result, *Control*, was an album about a young woman breaking free from parental restraints and exploring dangerous new worlds. It was, she admits, all about Janet Jackson. It was also a smash hit that sold over five million copies, contained six hit singles (including the chart-topping "When I Think of You") and helped provide the blueprint for the kind of sleek, sassy dance music that would soon dominate the charts. Paula Abdul, who would take the same kind of approach on her hit debut album, choreographed four videos from the LP. (Jackson dismisses reports that there's now a feud between the two, saying, "Paula is like a sister to me, and there is no competition between us.")

After the success of *Control*, the heat was on for another winner. "There was an added pressure," Jackson admits. "A lot of people said, 'Ah, she's just running off her brother's success and it's not going to happen again.' That just fueled the fire. It made me try even harder just to prove them wrong."

Worse than the pressure, perhaps, was the public scrutiny, usually aimed at Michael, but now focused on her. "I like to keep my private life private," she says emphatically. "I think what →

"I'm a lousy loner," admits the fun-loving Jackson. "There are times when I want to be left alone, but it's not that often."

SMEAL/Galella



Jackson with beau, Rene Elizondo (above, April 1989) Jackson eloped with James DeBarge (right, 1985) in 1984; the marriage was annulled a year later: "I don't regret it," she says.



RON WOLFSON/London Features

my brother went through has a lot to do with it, because there was a point where I was *crying* for him. Then I realized, 'This is stupid. This is really getting tired and old. It happens. They do it to everyone. I'm just waiting for who's next.'

As it turned out, it was another Jackson who would be next. Trying to generate publicity for her 1988 album, *La Toya*, 33-year-old La Toya Jackson decided to make her private life *public*: She announced her intention to write a tell-all autobiography and posed nude for the March 1989 issue of *Playboy*.

"When *La Toya* did *Playboy*," says Jam, "Janet was very much 'So what? That's my sister, I love her, she can do what she wants to do.' She didn't come out in the press like Jermaine, who was on a show saying he thought it was wrong. I think Janet's way of handling [family issues] is to say, 'Look, I'm doing my own thing here. If you want to talk to me about that, great.'"

Jackson returned to Minneapolis to work on the post-*Control* project with Jam and Lewis, this time bringing along Elizondo. "They get along great," says Jam. "All I can say is, she was very happy the whole time. Which obviously makes our job very easy."

But making the album wasn't easy at first, because A&M Records had an idea: Since *Control* was about only Jackson, why not make the next LP about her famous family? They even had a tentative title — *Scandal*. Jackson wasn't thrilled: "I said, 'What's the point in that? So people can talk? There's enough stuff going on

The Jackson clan posed for a family portrait (sans La Toya) last July for the Jacksons' "2300 Jackson Street" video. Left to right from Janet (with cap): Mother Katherine, father Joseph and Michael



LGI

as it is.' " But she gave in and wrote "You Need Me" (released as the B-side of the "Miss You Much" single), a song to a distant, neglectful father who's asking for help. "It isn't really about my father," she hastens to add. "Everyone loved the song and said, 'We've got to do more stuff like this.' And I started thinking, 'Oh God, no we *don't*.' "

Changing direction meant saying good-bye to McClain. Since *Control*, he had become one of the most powerful black executives in the record business, his status based largely on his role with that album. But there was talk that McClain, no longer with A&M, may have taken *too* much credit for the success of the record. "I hate stuff like this," Jackson says. "I mean, it was his idea to put Jimmy Jam, Terry Lewis and me together. To be honest with you, that was it. On the second album, he came to Minneapolis and wanted to stay, but we convinced him that we could take care of it and he should just go back to L.A. And he did. That's when the *Rhythm Nation* concept began, and it wasn't the family thing anymore."

Instead, it was a concept inspired when Jackson read about the various "nations" that have been formed around New York City, originally among groups of blacks seeking to assert a common identity by banding together as, for example, the Zulu Nation. "I thought it would be really neat to do a rhythm nation," she says. "I found it so intriguing that everyone united through whatever the link was. And I felt that with most of my friends. Most people think that my closest friends are in the business, and they're not. They're roller-skating rink guards, waitresses, one works for a messenger service. They have minimum-wage paying jobs. And the one thing that we all have in common is music. I know that within our little group, there is a rhythm nation that exists."

So she wrote their national anthem, *Rhythm Nation: 1814*. "They *still* don't have it right," says Jackson of the speculation about what those numbers mean. "Everybody goes, 'Oh, R is the 18th letter in the alphabet and N is the 14th. That's true, but that's a coincidence. What actually happened was that while writing *Rhythm Nation* I was kidding around, saying, 'God, you guys, I feel like this could be the national anthem for the Nineties.' Just by a crazy chance we decided to look up when Francis Scott Key wrote the national anthem, and it was September 14, 1814. And when I finally told the company what it meant, they didn't want me to say. So I didn't." She grins. "They still don't want me to →



"I like to keep my private life private," says Jackson emphatically of public scrutiny (with her Shar-Pei Snow White).

say, but everyone keeps asking me."

In other words, Jackson will go along, but only up to a point. "She's shy, but she knows what she wants," says Davies. But for the past few years she's also been surrounded by accomplished pros, and it's tempting to ask just exactly who is in control: the retiring 23-year-old who gets her picture on the album covers, or the vets behind the scenes? Jam, for one, says the answer is easy. "Janet has an ability to take our songs and make them bigger than they would be without her," he says. "And she had the ability to take someone like Paula, who was basically an inexperienced choreographer who'd done the Laker Girls — Janet took what Paula did and made it the thing. Not just another set of dance moves, but *the thing*. She takes what people give her, and she *sells* it."

Jackson herself knows these kinds of questions have been asked. "Just because you're not loud doesn't mean that you don't have control of your life," she says, quietly but firmly. "It's just like my brother Mike: He's the shyest of us all. I don't think I could ever find anyone with more control of their life than he has, and he's very soft-spoken, very shy. He's quiet. My whole family is like that. Just because we've pretty much been sheltered and our parents have been very strict all our lives, it doesn't mean . . ."

She trails off, frowns, then starts again. "It *was* very difficult for us, in the beginning, to step out into the real world, to learn how to

deal with it. But it doesn't mean that someone else must be handling all that stuff because 'She's too shy, she can't do anything on her own.' When it comes time to be assertive and put your foot down, somehow you do it. It has to do with being walked over a few times in the past. You let it happen, you let it go by, and then it happens again. And you get madder and madder each time and then, finally, you say, 'I'm not going to take this anymore.' " And when was she walked over? "If I say, 'When I was younger,' it sounds so silly, because I'm only 23. But it's happened to me a few times, and I've also seen it happen to my mother. My mother is a real sweet lady — 'It's okay, baby, just forgive them.' And I say, 'No, Mother, you can't let that happen.' And finally, she's become like that, too."

This looks easy, but don't let your eyes deceive you. Rehearsing for the American Music Awards in an all-black outfit, Jackson eases her way through a five-minute routine set to the new single "Escapade," lazily lip-synching and making it look as if she can handle the moves without breaking a sweat. She jokes with Tina Landon and Karen Owens, old friends who are dancing on either side of her. When Landon begins one routine by pulling her arms inside her loose black sweatshirt and giving herself an enormous bosom, Jackson can't stop smiling. "In rehearsals, she just loafs through these things," says Elizondo, laughing. "Sometimes, that worries directors."

But that's just rehearsal. Three days later, it's time for the real thing, and when Jackson takes the stage, the ease she showed earlier is gone. Instead she executes the moves with precision, lip-synchs accurately and wins one of the night's biggest rounds of applause.

And in contrast to the severe look of some of her videos, she seems to be having a great time, lightening the forbidding *Rhythm Nation* persona and letting the little kid come out to play. It makes sense: This is a woman who, when she wasn't recording, spent lots of time in Minneapolis at the FAO Schwarz toy store. "I realize now that I really *did* miss out on my childhood," she says. "So I see myself doing things that I wish I had done when I was younger. That's why I love hanging out at the toy store. Even in L.A. I'll go to Toys 'R' Us and just walk through the aisles."

Meanwhile, she reserves the right to return to more grown-up pursuits. Careerwise, she wants to appear in a feature film, and on the home front she says, "Of course, some day I'd like to get married again." Anytime soon? "No," she says quickly. "I'm not bitter about what happened, and I still think marriage is a beautiful thing. I'd like to have 12 kids. I'd like to adopt as well as have some of my own. But it's nothing that's in the near-future." Although, she adds, "I'm a lousy loner. There are times when I want to be left alone, but it's not that often. I like being with my friends and doing things, even if it's just at home, just playing games or something."

The night she performs "Escapade," Jackson wins two American Music Awards, but loses a third to Abdul. Jackson takes it in stride, insisting that awards aren't as important to her as they once were. "The real reward," she says, "is the kids enjoying the music you're making. That's who I'm really trying to reach now: the kids."

Just before her monologue gets completely mired in clichés, she grins. "What really bugs me," she says, "is people who go, 'God, how naive can this girl be?' I know that my songs or my albums are not going to change the entire world. [Musician] George Clinton once said, 'Free your mind and your ass will follow.' I heard that some guy said, 'Janet Jackson's got it the other way around.'"

She breaks into a fit of giggling. "I'm laughing about it now: 'Free your ass and your mind will follow.' But, you know, it's true." **US**

Shirt: Agnes B.; Vest: Romeo Gigli at Gallay; Pants: Euro Star, L.A.