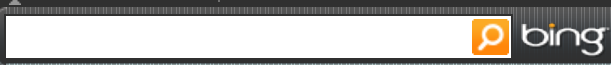


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By Ryan Nakashima, THE ASSOCIATED PRESS, cp.org, Updated: April 21, 2010

Cirque du Soleil to put on live touring show based on Michael Jackson; Las Vegas gig to follow



(THE ASSOCIATED PRESS/Cliff Schiappa, File)

LOS ANGELES - First the Beatles and Elvis, now Michael Jackson.

The acrobatic troupe Cirque du Soleil announced Tuesday that it will put on a live touring show featuring the songs of the [King of Pop](#) starting late next year.

That will be followed by a permanent production in Las Vegas in 2012 at a property owned by MGM Mirage Inc. The casino company did not say which venue will host the show. A nightclub in Las Vegas will also open with the show.

Cirque and Jackson's estate will each own 50 per cent of the projects and share equally in the cost of putting them on. The estate will also receive royalties from the use of Jackson's music and other assets.

Jackson, who died at age 50 last June after a drug overdose, was described as a "huge fan" of the French Canadian performance group.

He saw their first tent show in [Santa Monica](#), Calif., many years ago with longtime lawyer and now estate co-executor, John Branca. And he visited their Montreal headquarters in 2004, Cirque CEO Daniel Lamarre said.

"He said he was an acrobat himself," Lamarre said in an interview. "As an artist he had this amazing way of bringing some visual element to his performances."

Jackson even saw "Love," the Cirque show based on the legacy and music of the Beatles, shortly after it began at the Mirage casino in [Las Vegas](#) in 2006, and wanted to do his own version, said Jack Wishna, the president of consulting firm CPAmerica Inc. and a prospective business partner.

Ideas for Jackson's own Cirque show ranged from basing it on his hit video "Thriller" to him performing dozens of his No. 1 hits, Wishna said.

"But he passed away and everything just went by the wayside," he said. "It's a little different now, but at least it'll still get on. The music will still be there."

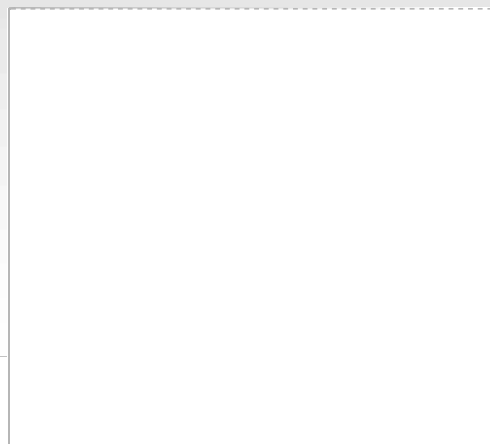
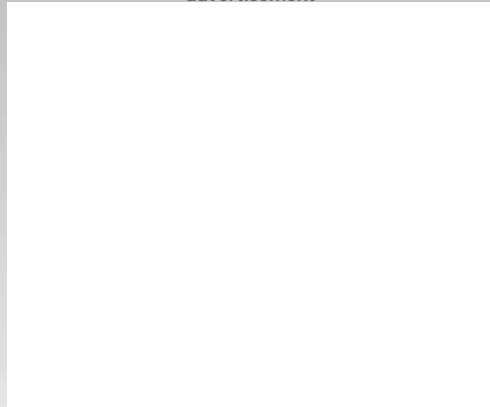
The touring show, which will begin in North America before branching out around the world, will be a simulation of a Jackson concert, while the Las Vegas show will be more theatrical and more technologically advanced, Lamarre said.

"The expectations of Michael Jackson fans around the world are going to be huge," he said. "And we have to deliver."

There are no plans for other members of Jackson's family to perform.

Before Jackson decided on a series of comeback concerts at the O2 arena in London, he was seen several years ago in Las Vegas and considered performing there.

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Branca said Jackson would have approved of a Cirque tribute.

"I'm not convinced he would have gone to Las Vegas and performed like [Celine Dion](#) did," he said in an interview. "But this is something Michael would be very excited about."


Unreleased Jackson recordings may become part of the shows' musical numbers, and his biggest hits will likely be remixed and mashed up so fans will hear his music in a new way, Branca said.

The other co-executor, [John McClain](#), a Jackson friend and music producer, has discovered more than 60 songs that Jackson recorded but never released. They form the backbone of a seven-year deal with Sony Music Entertainment worth up to \$250 million. A new album from the recordings is set for release in November.

Jackson's mother, Katherine, said in a statement, "Our family is thrilled that Cirque du Soleil will pay tribute to my son in such an important way."

Jackson died after overdosing on propofol and other sedatives. He was about to start a series of comeback concerts he called "This Is It." The concert movie based on rehearsal footage went on to gross \$252 million worldwide.

His personal physician, Dr. Conrad Murray, has pleaded not guilty to a charge of involuntary manslaughter. He is expected to go to trial this summer.

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