

**This interview with  
JIMMY JAM and TERRY LEWIS  
was conducted by the Library of Congress  
on April 12, 2021**



**Library of Congress:** You worked with Janet Jackson on her breakthrough album “Control” that she did just before “Rhythm Nation.” When you returned to do the studio with her for “Rhythm Nation 1814,” what did you want to do with her on the new album that, perhaps, you hadn't done the last time?

Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis: Everyone was trying to give us advice on what to do for the next album and a lot of people thought that we should do an album where she talked about her family and call it “Control 2” like a sequel. The main thing we wanted to do was not make a sequel to the first album because it had been four years since we recorded it, and Janet was a different person, so we wanted the album to reflect where she had grown. She was much more aware of the world around her and wanted to speak on that; that’s was how “Rhythm Nation” was born.

**LOC:** You’ve worked with many great talents over the years. What is distinctive about Janet Jackson as an artist?

JJ/TL: Janet is an inspiring artist to work with. She’s not afraid to try new ideas. She also has a wide range of musical knowledge. Obviously growing up in the Jackson family helped develop her exposure to music, but also her passion for all genres of music. Broadway musicals, jazz, Brazilian music, opera, funk, R&B, rock, rap, etc. We always tried to find the intersections of all those elements on her albums.

**LOC:** Do you think there is a signature sound/style to a Jam-Lewis production?

JJ/TL: I would say we’re rooted in the basics of classic songwriting structure i.e. beautiful chords, clever lyrics, memorable melodies, funky beats etc.... But we always try to individualize those elements to the specific artist. Like when a tailor makes a custom suit that only fits you.

**LOC:** I’ve seen people refer to “Rhythm Nation” as a “concept album”—agree or disagree?

JJ/TL: It’s a concept album in the sense that, in its sequencing, it weaves the many themes of the life of a young woman into a cohesive body of work. Starting by recognizing the injustice in the world, empowering a movement to combat the ills of society through music and dance. But also

acknowledging the importance of compassion, togetherness, and understanding as you're living life. Or, as she says, "get the point?... Good, let's dance!"

**LOC: "Rhythm Nation" was a MASSIVE hit when it came out, why do you think it connected so strongly with people at that time?**

JJ/TL: I think part of it was because it was unexpected. We've always thought that Marvin Gaye's "What's Going On" album from the '70's was the blueprint for what "Rhythm Nation" was in the '90's. Marvin's album was very unexpected at that time from an artist like him, and I'm sure "Rhythm Nation" was also a surprise from Janet. It definitely got everyone's attention and once they listened they embraced and loved it.

**LOC: How do you two differ in your process in the studio?—does one of you do one thing and the other is in charge of something else?**

JJ/TL: The basic answer would be that I tend to do more of the music side of things and Terry tends to do more of the lyric side of things but we're both capable of doing it all so we simply just do whatever needs to be done. It's different on every project and every song. We made a 50/50 handshake agreement almost 40 years ago so we never discuss who does what cause we share in it equally.