

Throwback: Jesse Johnson: Can You Help Me



“Can You Help Me” is the second single from Jesse Johnson’s 1985 debut album, *Jesse Johnson’s Revue*. Johnson was the lead guitarist of The Time and the co-writer of their biggest songs, “Jungle Love” and “The Bird,” with Prince and Morris Day. Johnson also wrote “Bite The Beat” with Prince for Vanity Six. Johnson had very few speaking parts in *Purple Rain*, but he was labeled the sex symbol of the group despite Day’s over-the-top charisma. Johnson and Morris Day left The Time soon after the success of *Purple Rain* and Johnson scored a record deal with A&M, which was the start of his solo career. “Can You Help Me” was R&B that made its foundation with a funky synthesizer and Johnson’s enthralling guitar work descended from Eddie Hazel and Jimi Hendrix. Minneapolis vocalist Germain Brooks, who was a member of the Andre Cymone-founded group The Girls, sang backup with Johnson on the single. Promoted after “Be Your Man” and before “I Want My Girl,” “Can You Help Me” was the most popular single from the album, with it being heard on the radio, in the clubs, roller rinks, and on the street.

The success of Johnson’s first album made him one of the few members from The Time, including Morris Day, Jimmy Jam, and Terry Lewis, to make it outside of Prince’s camp. Jesse Johnson released five solo albums, with the most recent one being *Verbal Penetration*, released in 2009. In 2025 he celebrated the 40th anniversary of *Jesse Johnson’s Revue* with several online interviews. Johnson still tours and is currently working on his sixth solo project.

Throwback: Jesse Johnson-Be Your Man

Jesse Johnson is best known as the original guitarist for The Time. His early years were spent between his native Rock Island, Illinois and St. Louis. He moved to Minneapolis, Minnesota in 1981 and met Morris Day. Enterprise was the name of the group that Day was fronting at the time and he invited Johnson to be his guitar player. When Prince took members Terry Lewis, Jimmy "Jam" Harris, Monte Moir and Jellybean Johnson from local funk band Flyte Tyme, he added Day as the singer and enlisted Johnson to be the guitarist for his new band The Time. Johnson's virtuosic funk/rock guitar playing gave shrill sonic voltage to the band's jams ["777-9311,"](#) ["Jungle Love,"](#) ["Get It Up"](#) and ["Ice Cream Castle."](#) Johnson also received credit for co-writing "Bite The Beat" with Prince on the Vanity Six project. In addition to playing guitar he co-wrote The Time singles "Jungle Love" and ["The Bird."](#) By 1984 the band broke-up and Johnson signed a solo deal with A&M Records. *Jesse Johnson's Revue* would come out the next year and produce three singles "Be Your Man," ["Can You Help Me"](#) and ["I Want My Girl."](#) That same year Johnson produced an album for a group Ta Mara And The Seen who had success with the single ["Affection"](#) and ["Everybody Dance."](#) By the time of his second solo album *Shockedelica* was released in 1986 Johnson had managed to fulfill a dream Prince never did by working with Sly Stone on the R&B hit ["Crazyay."](#) *Every Shade Of Love* was his next solo release in 1988 and it maintained the solidity of his previous works. The Time reunited in 1990 for the Prince movie "Graffiti Bridge" and a new album *Pandemonium*. After the reunion projects Johnson did a lot of soundtrack work for the

films "The Breakfast Club," "Pretty In Pink," "Another 48 Hours," "White Men Can't Jump" and "A Time To Kill." [Bare My Naked Soul](#) in 1996 would be his return to solo recording. Soul would unravel Johnson's complete Jimi Hendrix sensibilities giving his fans the kind of guitar work that was usually sidestepped for the R&B side of things. *Ultimate Collection* in 2000 compiled his essential singles, B-sides, 12" versions and the unreleased song "Vibe." In October of 2009 Johnson returned with the outstanding double album *Verbal Penetration Volumes 1 and 2*.

Kickmag's 2009 Picks

1 .Q-Tip *Kamaal The Abstract*

Q-Tip does funky reflective fusion and it works.

2. Raekwon *Only Built 4 Cuban Linx 2* More than competent return from Wu-Tang grime master.

3. Al B. Sure *Honey I'm Home* Classy R&B from a New Jack Swing era survivor.

4. Teena Marie *Congo Square* More timeless soul from the original vanilla soul child.

5. Sa Ra *Nuclear Evolution: The Age Of Love* Freaky free funk in the middle of a calcified R&B mainstream.

6. Blackroc A hodgepodge of mostly New York rappers backed by the hillbilly rock of The Black Keys presented by Damon Dash
7. Chico Debarge *Addiction* Soulful sensuality from the Debarge tenor on par with *Long Time No See*
8. Chrisette Michele *Epiphany* Jazzy R&B sweetness mediated by pop sensibilities.
9. Jay-Z *The Blueprint 3* Hova representing for his hometown with his superior slick hardness.
10. Mos Def *The Ecstatic* Dante Smith may act most of the time but he still raps well.
11. Jesse Johnson *Verbal Penetration* Former Time guitarist releases first solo album in thirteen years and his chops are still intact.
12. Maxwell *Blacksummer's Night* Everyone's favorite male "neo soul" singer makes good again after an eight year hiatus.
13. J.Dilla *Jay Stay Paid* Another lovely but sinister posthumous release of divine beat science from the Detroit master.
14. Whitney Houston *I Look To You* A nice comeback record from the '80's and '90's pop darling
15. Living Colour *Behind The Sun* Funk metal kings assert their deadly acumen once more after scaring fake rock fans with the brilliant *Collideoscope*.
16. Meshell Ndegeocello *Devil's Halo* The R&B deconstructionist rightfully picks apart the usual musical assumptions proving

again why she is the most important R&B artist of her generation.

17. Ledisi *Turn Me Loose*— The singer reinvents her sound with a much needed faster pace and fire.

18. Buckshot & KRS One *Survival Skills* The Boot Camp Click hustler and the legend collaborate on a back to the basics type of hip-hop album.

19. Melanie Fiona *The Bridge* Sassy but not tacky R&B from the Canadian newcomer.

20. Snoop Dogg *Malice In Wonderland* Party music from everybody's favorite West Coast rapper.

21. The Clipse *Til The Casket Drops* Potent cocaine rap.

21. Shabazz Palaces *Abstract* funky hip-hop from Digable Planets' Ishmael.

22. Souls Of Mischief *Montezuma's Revenge* A much appreciated reappearance of the West Coast's Wu-Tang Clan type crew.

23. Kam Moya AKA Superstition *Splitting Image* Down to earth lyricist willing to be himself in world of flossy rappers. Refreshing.

24. Wale *Attention Deficit* Punchy delivery from the D.C. rapper with one of the biggest buzzes this year.

25. Q-Tip *The Renaissance* Ok it came out at the end of 2008 but it's nominated for a Grammy and it should be. Soulful hip-hop without the extraction of the boom bap.