

Daughter brings dose of reality to Michael Jackson's farewell

The public memorial for Michael Jackson concluded with remarks from his daughter, Paris, aged 11.

"I just wanted to say ever since I was born daddy has been the best father you can ever imagine and I just want to say I love him so much," the tearful girl told the 20,000 audience at the Staples Centre in Los Angeles.

Paris and her brothers, Prince Michael, 12, and Prince Michael II, seven, had joined a host of stars on the stage at the end of the tribute singing along to We Are The World.

Speaking after tributes from Jackson's brothers, Jermaine and Marlon, Paris said she wanted to talk and struggled only slightly with adjusting the microphone to her height.

"Speak up," her aunt Janet Jackson said softly, just as Paris began to talk.

A day of sombre but star-studded ceremonies for the music superstar got under way shortly after 8.15am on Tuesday (0115 AEST Wednesday) as Jackson's family gathered for a private service at a picturesque mortuary in the Hollywood Hills.

As the ceremony ended, pallbearers carrying Jackson's golden casket swathed with red flowers emerged and loaded it into a black hearse, under the watchful eye of mourners and around 20 media helicopters hovering overhead.

A motorcade of luxury vehicles then made a stately procession to the Staples Centre, where family, friends and celebrities rubbed shoulders with ordinary fans who had won tickets via an online lottery.

The service got under way with soul legend Smokey Robinson reading letters of condolence from stars and world leaders unable to attend, which included a tribute from former South



African president Nelson Mandela.

"Michael was a giant and a legend in the music industry. And we mourn with the millions of fans worldwide," Mandela's tribute read.

Motown diva Diana Ross meanwhile - named by Jackson in his will as an alternative guardian to his children - said she had chosen to mourn privately.

"Michael was a personal love of mine, a treasured part of my world, part of the fabric of my life," Ross's tribute said.

"Michael wanted me to be there for his children, and I will be there if they ever need me."

Veteran poet and writer Maya Angelou paid tribute to Jackson in a moving elegy read by Queen Latifah.

"Sing our songs among the stars and walk our dances across the face of the moon," Angelou wrote.

Pastor Lucious W. Smith of the Friendship Baptist Church in Pasadena gave the invocation, followed by Mariah Carey singing the opening performance with a rendition of the

Jackson 5 ballad I'll Be There, a duet with Trey Lorenz.

"We come together and we remember the time," said Smith, riffing off one of Jackson's lyrics. "As long as we remember him, he will always be there to comfort us."

Lionel Richie gave a gospel-infused performance in front of a shaft of light evoking a cross.

Tributes to Jackson from friends and associates, were punctuated by performances from Stevie Wonder and Jennifer Hudson as Jackson's family looked on approvingly.

"This is a moment that I wished I didn't live to see," Stevie Wonder said before his performance.

Hudson sang Jackson's hit Will You Be There and John Mayer played guitar on a whisper-light rendition of Human Nature.

Jackson's brothers all wore matching suits and their sibling's signature solo sequined glove.

Brother Jermaine Jackson took the stage and sang the standard Smile as he fought back tears.

One of the biggest ovations came after remarks made by Berry Gordy, the founder of Motown records who launched Jackson's career.

"The more I think and talk about Michael Jackson, I feel the King of Pop is not big enough for him. I think he is simply the greatest entertainer that ever lived," said Gordy to sustained cheers.

Among those who saluted Jackson were the Reverend Al Sharpton, Brooke Shields and basketball greats Magic Johnson and Kobe Bryant.

The Reverend Lucious Jackson then made the final remarks.

Outside the Staples Centre an additional 1400 police officers were on duty to provide security, while several city blocks surrounding the venue were sealed off for hours beforehand.

Deputy Police Chief Sergio Diaz, operations chief for the event, said authorities had expected a crowd of 250,000. Besides reporters and those with tickets to the memorial service, the crowd around the Staples Centre perimeter numbered only about 1000, he said.

"We asked people not to come out and just be on the street and spectate from a distance, and it seems to have worked," Diaz said.

A live feed of the service was made available free to television networks, while the event was being streamed via social networking websites Facebook and MySpace, officials said.

Fans gathered to sing Jackson's greatest hits and watch his music videos ahead of the event in cities across the globe.

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