

ON THE BALL

Issue 75



Hi Everyone,

Well, our feet haven't touched the ground since the last *On The Ball*. Michael's promotional activities for "Coming Home To You" certainly kept us on our toes. It really was a case of 'Spot the Ball' but we hopefully managed to let you know about most of the interviews and TV appearances. How fantastic that Michael had his first number one album in 27 years, what a great achievement and we all played our part in its success.

Prior to the album was the news that Michael will be taking part in the special *LES MISERABLES* season at the Gielgud Theatre in London - this time taking on the role of Javert, although we think he could easily have reprised the part of Marius!

Then came the news that Michael is going to be digging out his high heels and returning to the role of Edna in *Hairspray* next year at the London Coliseum.

It's just been one announcement after another this year but we are not complaining. When we last spoke to Michael he was really thrilled with all that's going on with his career at the moment and it's well deserved.

We hope you enjoy reading the stories about the tour in this bumper edition of *On The Ball*. Unfortunately due to health issues we didn't get to as many of the concerts as we would have liked, but those we did see were simply superb and we waited eagerly for reports of the shows on our Facebook group. As well as Michael's usual letter, you will see that James has conducted the first ever exclusive interview with Michael for *On The Ball* and it makes all the other interviews you will have read pale into insignificance. The difference when someone who is so knowledgeable about Michael's career is talking to him is just amazing. Well done James.

Hope you all continue to enjoy listening to Michael on Sunday mornings on his BBC Radio 2 show and we hope to see you all soon.

Love

Maureen and Gill

Dear Everyone

Well my lovelies, what can I say except thank you for helping to give me the most exciting, thrilling, surprising and AMAZING few months. I can hardly believe what has happened.

Firstly the new album. You helped get it to the No.1 spot and I truly never thought that would happen to me again, but most exciting for me was your extraordinary response to it. You seemed to really enjoy the song choices and the reaction to the songs I wrote myself has blown my mind. I was so nervous about what people would think but I couldn't be more thrilled by your response and it has made me totally determined

to keep writing and hopefully there will be more songs to come.

.....and then we did them live on the tour!!!!

Wow, I loved every second of every single show we did. It goes down as one of my favourite tours EVER and we've had a few 😊. There are too many highlights to single any out but the buzz of the crowds when I did do my new songs was just wonderful.

Thank you, Thank you, Thank you.

Meanwhile, the radio show goes from strength to strength, record listening figures and I still just love doing it. As Don Black once said to me... 'Michael, where did it all go so right'...!

It has been so lovely seeing so many of you at all the gigs around the country and reconnecting with you and I just hope you get the chance to

Come and visit us at the Stage Door
when we do Les Mis over the summer.
I think it's going to be a very special
few months at the Gielgud Theatre
this year.

Right then, I'm literally off to do
the Britain's Got Talent final with Susan
Boyle (I'm writing this in the bar of a
nearby hotel) so fingers crossed that goes
alright. Sometimes I have to pinch
myself.

I'll end by saying for the umpteenth
time Thank You for this special time
in my life. You have always been there
for me and you know I BLOODY LOVE YOU!!

See you very soon God willing and
take good care until then.

ALL MY LOVE

Michael
X



MEET AND GREET & A REALLY NICE GUY

By Christine Godfrey. Photos by Alistair Godfrey.

I was delighted when my husband Alastair managed to get tickets for us to go to four concerts during Michael's first solo tour since 2015. We booked the London Palladium, the Brighton Centre (which included a "Meet and Greet,") the Guildhall in Southampton and, for our last concert, Alastair got front row at the Bournemouth International Centre! Then, to make our tour complete, Alastair gave me a surprise Christmas present... another "Meet and Greet" at Bournemouth!

I was really looking forward to seeing Michael in concert during April and May then on 15th January my world fell apart – I was diagnosed with cancer! My consultant removed a Merkel Cell Carcinoma from my back on 18th January and I had a scan on 23rd to see if it had spread. Much to our horror it had, so I needed another operation and after that, Radiotherapy! Apart from the fact I had cancer, my main thought was that I was going to miss seeing Michael, that upset me almost as much as my health problems!

Fortunately, I have brilliant consultants

looking after me who, when they heard I was desperate to see Michael, organised everything so I only had to miss the first concert at The London Palladium.

I really couldn't believe after all I have been through we actually made it to Brighton to see Michael. When we arrived at the Brighton Centre for our first "Meet and Greet", Guy, who is the Live Nation Representative that organises everything for Michael, was really concerned about me. Guy already knew about my problems because I had spoken to him the day of the Palladium concert.

After Guy had given us our "Meet and Greet" gifts we were taken upstairs to a small room to wait for Michael and Andrew, his PA. Guy asked us to sit on the chairs that had been put in a semi-circle in front of a screen covered with a black cloth which was the backdrop for the photos we were going to have taken with Michael. We cheered when Michael and Andrew arrived. Michael said a few words then we took it in turns to get up and speak to him. He then signed a couple of items before posing for a

photo with each of us. Before each person got up to speak to Michael, Andrew asked us our names so he knew who we were. I was the first person to speak to Michael. As I got up, Guy told Michael that I had really been fighting to be there and it was the thought of seeing and meeting him that kept me going through my awful treatment. Michael was really concerned and gave me an extra hug!

He then spent a few moments talking to each person and commenting on the articles people wanted him to sign. When Guy took each photo he checked that they were in focus and frequently took more than one to make sure.

Once everyone had their moment with Michael he then said a few more words and hoped we would enjoy the show before going back to his dressing room. Guy then told us the running order of the evening and took us all back downstairs to wait for the concert to start.

I thoroughly enjoyed the Brighton concert but because of just having finished

Radiotherapy I could only sit, watch and listen to Michael's amazing performance. I couldn't applaud or stand up during any of his songs. I gradually got better and by our last concert at Bournemouth was able to join in with everyone else and run to the stage at "Party Time" towards the end of Michael's show.

Before the Bournemouth concert, Alastair and I had another "Meet and Greet" which was very similar to Brighton. Alastair managed to get our first "Meet and Greet" photos printed so I asked Michael to sign them for us. So now they are in frames in our lounge.

All too soon Michael's tour will be finished and despite my nightmare getting there I think it was definitely Michael's best tour to date. Now we have Edna Turnblad in the return of *Hairspray* next year to look forward to.

Thank you, Michael for the three wonderful concerts and nearly always giving us something else to look forward to in the future.



STACEY'S FIRST TOUR

In May, I was lucky enough to fly across the pond and be able to attend two of Michael's 'Coming Home To You' concerts. This was my first time in the UK and my first opportunity to see Michael live. Needless to say I was beyond thrilled, yet a little anxious at the same time, because I was attending the concerts on my own. I didn't "know" anyone - although I had connected with several fans through social media.

From my first moments in London, Brighton, and then Oxford, I have never felt more at home! I want to give a SHOUT OUT to all the wonderful people I met in your beautiful country - but most importantly the "family" of Michael's fans. You are the friendliest, most welcoming people I have ever encountered in my travels, whether in the US or any other country.

I had the trip of a lifetime. Meeting Michael (just as charming and welcoming as all of you), seeing his unbelievable performances, and touring lovely England was a dream come true. What a joy to have been so welcomed and been made to feel so comfortable on my first visit to the UK. You are absolutely amazing and I am looking forward to when I return in October to see Michael in *Les Miserable*!

Thanks again!
Stacey Childress
Virginia - USA





Michael Ball Wore My Glasses!

by Jennifer Dyson

Friday 22nd March was the day Michael released his brand new album 'Coming Home To You' and that morning I started early – 3am! Buttons, my cat, woke me up so it gave me the opportunity to listen to Michael's new album on download. I loved it straight away, especially the tracks 'Home To You', 'All Dance Together' and 'Lost Without You'.

I had planned to get the tram and bus to see Michael in Manchester for an album signing, but luckily my fiancé John drove me to the

Trafford Centre. We were there super early so I got my spot by the fountain outside the shop. The three and a half hour wait went relatively quickly as a few other fans came and sat waiting as it got close to 12 o'clock. John went off to the cinema as he didn't want to queue with me and as soon as I was allowed I joined a queue which I found out later went right to the back of the shop!

The final hour passed by as fans shared Michael related anecdotes and then 1 o'clock came. I cheered as I saw him and took lots of photos, some of which are in this report. At one point Michael needed to read something on his phone and he said he couldn't see because he didn't have his glasses, so I lent him mine. Unfortunately that meant I couldn't see what he looked like – but apparently it was funny!

Before I knew it my turn had come round. I gave him some whisky truffles and an invitation to my wedding party. I told him I was getting married in Las Vegas in September and my brother was going to walk me down the path at Paradise Falls to 'Love Changes Everything'. Michael said he was honoured. I got close for photos and I have to say the manager at WHSmith did me proud, lots of really

good pictures and memories. I also told him I'd been up since daft o'clock listening to his album. He asked which tracks I liked and I told him.

As always Michael was fabulous and he spent time with each and every person there. I loved every second of it and it made my day! People say never meet your heroes but I have met Michael a few times and each time is special. I have been a fan for a long, long time and I will always be!



HOW TIME FLIES!

by Liz Howell

Thirty years ago I stood nervously outside the Prince of Wales Theatre waiting for Michael to appear after I'd seen him in *Aspects of Love*. As you can see from the photo he had not long got out of the shower!

Despite having seen him a few times in the intervening years, I never had the chance of another photo with him - until he came home to me in Hull! I was lucky enough to see Michael as he arrived and I showed him my original photo and asked if I could possibly have another one!

"Come on then!" he said and put his arm round me. And here is the new photo!

He is such a lovely man!



THE RETURN OF EDNA TURNBLAD!

Look who's back! Michael is reprising his Olivier Award-winning role as Edna Turnblad in *Hairspray the Musical*, which will be at the London Coliseum from next April for a strictly limited 12-week season.

From the original award-winning creative team of director Jack O'Brien and choreographer Jerry Mitchell, the show features infectiously feel-good songs 'Good Morning Baltimore', 'You Can't Stop the Beat' and 'Big, Blonde and Beautiful'.

The ENO state "this inspirational, fun-loving and fabulously uplifting musical sensation is back and bigger than ever. It's the show that gives maximum lift... but for 12 weeks only. Don't miss out – book now!"

Tickets can be bought from www.londoncoliseum.org

ON TOUR WITH MICHAEL!

By Angie Taylor

I have been lucky enough to see eight concerts, starting with the opening concert in Nottingham and finishing with the final concert in Leicester! In between I've done York, Liverpool, Manchester, Sheffield and the two Birmingham concerts. I also treated myself to two meet and greets, one in Nottingham and one in Birmingham!

I met up with lots of my 'Michael Friends' at the various venues. The concerts had me on a rollercoaster of emotions – I laughed, I cried, I sang, I danced and enjoyed lots of "party time"! For me, the set list was perfect – familiar songs plus new ones which quickly became firm favourites. I'm a little sad it's over, but there is so much more to look forward to. Thanks to everyone I've met on the way – far too many to mention! Can't wait to do it all again!



GILL GETS THE GOLD

By Gill Tee

Just a few days after my birthday I received an email from Gill and Maureen telling me I had won the prize draw they had run through the Fan Club. I honestly thought someone was messing around as I could not believe I had been so lucky! An email back to Maureen and Gill confirmed that I really had won the first prize – a gold disc of Michael's, for sales of 'The Musicals' album!

Once I had confirmation of the parcel being sent, I was like a child on Christmas morning. The parcel was tracked throughout its journey so each time I awoke during the night, I checked online to see how far it had got. It had a very interesting journey from Essex to Sussex via Manchester,

Heathrow and Gatwick and finally arriving in Sussex mid afternoon.

The box was huge and along with the framed disc there was lots of other things including old OTBs, some old tour brochures, photos and lots more.

The following Sunday I had planned to go to Wogan House to see Michael and meet up with some lovely friends who I have made at various MB events. I decided I had to get a photo with my prize with Michael. So the frame was securely wrapped in bubble wrap for its journey to London.

Mission accomplished! Now the disc, along with the photo, has



pride of place in my living room. A prize I will treasure forever. I would like to say a huge thank you to Maureen and Gill for

running the prize draw, and an even bigger thank you to the Sharkey family for donating it to the Fan Club.

WELL WORTH THE WAIT!

by Janet Pearson. Photo by Carolyn Bell.



I have been a fan of Michael's for many years but have only just recently been able to get to see him. Work and finances usually got in the way. Once I retired I was able to go to Brighton for the second Ball & Boe tour and loved it. Soon after came *Chess*, then a guest spot at Stansted Park confirmed I wanted more. When a solo tour was announced and once again Brighton was on offer, my hubby agreed to come along, I think in his words to see what the fuss was about – I have tried to educate him, believe me!

What can I say about my evening at Brighton this time around – I don't think there are enough words!

It was my first full solo Michael show, and from the opening song and title track of his amazing, addictive album, he had me totally hooked. How lovely to hear these songs live, plus unexpected additions such as 'I Won't Send Roses' along with 'The Rose' which were amazing. Who can't be moved by 'Anthem', 'Bright Eyes' and the haunting 'Lost Without

You'? And that's not forgetting the *Les Misérables* medley.

I love the songs that Michael has written, they are the most addictive... I couldn't get hubby to howl along in 'Blood Red Moon', but I did of course!

All I can say is roll on Hampton Court, *Les Mis* concert and *Hairspray*! A girl's gotta have something to look towards!

Michael made a comment that it had been twenty seven years between his number one albums and it was worth the wait. I have possibly waited that long to see him in concert, and oh my God, it was certainly worth waiting for! I even dragged my hubby to the stage door afterwards and that is something I am not used to doing, but I did steal a glimpse or two!

Thank you Michael for being one in a million, I'm proud to be a fan of the loveliest guy in the business. You bring so much joy to so many people in everything you do, much love and thanks!

MICHAEL IS NUMBER ONE!



When *Coming Home To You* was released, it reached Number 1 in the album charts, making it Michael's fourth chart-topping album in total – his two collaborations with Alfie Boe, *Together*, and *Together Again* both reached Number 1, but this is his first Number 1 all by himself since his self-titled debut in 1992.

Speaking to www.OfficialCharts.com, Michael said:

"It's the most exciting news! Thank you so much for supporting the album, to the fans who've connected with it and bought it. The hard work has been worth it and this is just the icing on the cake. Amazing!"

Here he is seen celebrating the award with his boys, Dylan and Danny, who also can be seen making an appearance in the video for the title track.

ESTHER AND FAMILY MEET MICHAEL

One of Michael's younger fans, Esther, wrote down her thoughts about meeting Michael and seeing him in concert in York. Her mum Rebecca sent in her message:

I had the best Easter Sunday ever. My Mum, Grandma, sisters and me were really lucky when we met Michael outside Radio York before his Radio 2 show. We spent time talking to him and taking pictures.

In the afternoon Michael was interviewed by Neil Foster from Radio York and I sent him a question about 'Blood Red Moon'. It is my favourite song and I wanted to know why he had written it.

I really enjoyed the concert at York Barbican. The best parts were hearing 'One Step Out of Time', 'All Dance Together' and 'Blood Red Moon'.

When I went to the concert I bought everything that I could, including a dog collar for my pet unicorn (I don't have a dog!).

Esther, age 10.



MICHAEL'S FIRST TRIP TO HULL

by Jean Nichols. Concert photos by Chris Thompson.



Our plan to see Michael in our home town for the first time seemed ill-fated at the start. I couldn't pre-book because Ticketmaster said my credit card was out of date - it wasn't, but I eventually booked for four of us. Then my friend Christine developed a trapped nerve in her back which caused her to regretfully pull out, so friend Jean stepped in... then Christine's back improved but she wouldn't take her place back. Two weeks before the concert my other friend Chris (confusing I know) had a call from Jimmy's in Leeds to say her husband's follow up cancer appointment was on the afternoon of the 24th, so she probably wouldn't be back in time - which meant Christine stepped back in!

Our first visit to the Bonus Arena proved confusing after we were sent up to the second level, only to be told to come back down again, our tickets were being changed... to the middle of the second row! It was just unbelievable – Michael could have been performing in my lounge, we were so close! He was of course incredible... and oh, that voice.

What I appreciated was the audience listening until the last note faded, then tumultuous applause. After all that, I even made it onto his selfie - I'm far right, two up, wearing a light top, with glasses and a necklace. Thanks for coming to Hull, Michael – and please come again!





Prior to the Hull concert, Neil Till managed to meet Michael as he arrived at the venue. Neil was lucky enough to get this great photo, and states that it was his first time meeting Michael, who he found to be “an extremely nice and friendly guy”. Neil also got his copy of ‘Coming Home To You’ signed for good measure!



GOIN' BACK

Interview by James Gaden. Photos by James Hole.

The release of 'Coming Home To You', Michael's first solo album since 2014's 'If Everyone Was Listening', saw him get more immersed than ever before with a record. He co-wrote four of the tracks on offer, describing it as a "labour of love" and "never having been so closely involved with every aspect of the creative process". The formula worked, with the album hitting number one, his first since his debut to have done so.

Michael did a mass of TV and radio appearances to promote this album, but many of those were short interviews tailored to get the word out, with few delving into the record itself and the process of making it.

My full time job is as a graphic artist and aside from doing this magazine, among other things I design a nationally distributed publication called *Fireworks Rock & Metal Magazine*. As well as doing the page layouts, I also contribute to the writing and over the last 14 years, I have been fortunate to have over 150 interviews published in it, ranging from up and coming acts to household names. With Michael being so proud of his creative contributions and having it paying off so spectacularly, I suggested the idea of doing an interview with him to focus more about that. I offered examples of my work to show I had experience of interviewing and I figured if anybody would be interested in hearing more about the album, it would be the Fan Club.

The request was sent through and I was thrilled to see it had been granted. Michael was coming to Hull for the first time, on the fourth date of his tour. As that is my home town, I received a call from his PA Andrew, inviting me to the Bonus Arena where I could talk to Michael prior to his soundcheck. I was taken backstage to his dressing room where I found Mr. Ball was his usual jovial, charismatic self...

What I wanted to do Michael, was as you don't seem to have done much press for this album...

(Sighs) No, none at all. (laughs)

The thing I noticed was most of your interviews didn't talk too much about the record itself, so that's what I wanted to do.

Fabulous, right, lets do it!

Let's start at the beginning then, it's time for a new album, so what's your starting point? Do you have a theme in mind, a title, do you just collect songs...?

Do you know, it's really daunting, you know it's time to make one but you think "what the hell am I going to do this time?" I sort of knew in my head the sound I was looking for. I had a few songs in mind, my initial idea was to call the album 'Goin' Back', after the Goffen and King song. It was all going to be songs that were relevant to milestones in my life, songs that I loved and were things that I had listened to. I compiled a great big list but going through it, I felt I really had to do something new on this album, not just do covers. The covers are nice to do but it's even nicer to do something different. So I persuaded the record company that I wanted to do some originals and they said "Okay, we'll try and find you a couple of new songs." So they sent some to me from outside writers but I said "No, these aren't... they aren't good!" That was when I met up with Jack McManus and Ben Earle. I asked if they wanted to write for me and they turned around and said "Well why don't we write with you?" That kind of gave me the spur, to start with the writing process and *then* to start thinking about what other songs to bring in, figure out what worked with what. It happened organically. I can't tell you that I sat down and said "Right, I'm doing that, doing that..." because things just happened. The Freya Ridings song 'Lost Without You' came up and I thought "I *have* to do that", because I just loved it. Jimmy Webb submitted one which I wanted to do, so the theme became fairly loosely woven, which is why I changed the title to 'Coming Home To You'. That just felt right. Musically I'm coming home, and what I ended up with just felt like a good collection of songs.

I'm glad you mentioned 'Lost Without You' because that's one of the things I like most about your albums, you often introduce me to songs and artists I've not crossed paths with. I'd never heard that before and I was blown away by it.

Oh, great! It's such a good song, I love being able to bring songs to people, either with records or the radio show.

You've introduced me to a lot of Country stuff as well.

Yeah, I always loved that, I just love the rhythms and harmonies of it, the sentiment. I'm not a hardened Country artist by any means but it does have a flavour of that going on on this record.

And you've got some Elvis on there, which is always good.

Can't go wrong there, can you?

I'm really pleased you went with 'I Just Can't Help Believin', if I were to pick my favourite Elvis record it would be 'That's The Way It Is', narrowly beating 'Elvis Country'. I know you love The King, do you have a particular favourite record of his?

I do really like him but I think I'd go for one of the live albums, I don't think you can beat the 1968 Comeback Special. It's got everything in there, just amazing.

Another great song you picked is 'To Love Somebody', by The Bee Gees, an absolute classic, almost a standard now...

And it's the song I sang with them on my show years ago.

You did, which was awesome, but did you realise it's also been recorded by both Michael Bolton, and Michael Buble as well?

No, I didn't!

So I wanted to know, with that in mind, now you've done it too, do you think there's a risk of people's minds being blown or the fabric of the space time continuum being ripped apart?

(Laughs) There it is. Do you know what, worlds will collide. It will be like *Avengers Infinity War* and *Endgame* all

rolled into one! We'll all be out on tour and one of us will just suddenly disappear into dust!

With it being such a classic song, your version puts a different spin on it, a different arrangement. How hard is it to approach and record it without just instinctively singing it as it was originally?

What I did was I knew it worked as a song done the way the Bee Gees did it, so I imagined that it had been sent to me as a demo, just a voice and piano, or just a voice and guitar. So for all the songs, I took them back to demo form and just sat with a pianist or sat with a guitarist and said "There's the dots, here's the voice, we're copying nothing". We didn't listen back, we didn't reference the original, we'd look to find the key that suited me and find our own route through the song. Of course there is an influence from memory, but when you record it and then go back to the original, you can hear it is quite different. It's the same with the Elvis song, that's really different, this version you could almost imagine Glen Campbell doing it.

That was one of the big things about it, I've got probably half a dozen versions of 'To Love Somebody' and they are all done like the Bee Gees, except yours, and yours stands out as a result.

'Miss You Nights' is another one, it had a very late seventies, early eighties Pop sound, it had harmonies and all sorts so I said no to that. All the harmonies on it are just my voice, multi-tracked. Between that and a change of style to make it fit with the others, it didn't feel like a typical cover.

With you compiling all these songs for possible inclusion on the record, bearing in mind how many times you played it on the radio, how close did the insufferable ditty 'Baby Shark' come to being included on the album?

It's actually a hidden track, you obviously haven't found it yet.

No, thank God.

(Laughs) Wasn't that the most annoying thing?

It's horrendous, I have a three year old nephew and it's his favourite song, we have him every Sunday and he insists on playing it repeatedly.

Oh God. "Baby Shark, do doo do doo..."

Please don't! It's not in the set is it?
(Laughs) No, you're alright.

That's a relief. I just had this horrible vision of you kicking off 'Party Time' with it.

Do you know, you've just given me the most wicked idea...

Nooo! If you're going to do it, can you do it at one of the gigs I'm not at?

(Laughs) Alright. That is *such* a good idea though.

It's really not! Unless you do one of your proper covers, change the style to make it fit, make it a bit more Country perhaps. Or Punk. Thrash Metal?

Nope, I'll do it exactly as it is. "Baby Shark, do doo do doo..."

And have all the backing singers choreographed, doing the movements?

Yes! I don't know if I *will* put it in the set, but it's in my head now. Your fault. (laughs)

Oops! Getting back to proper song writing, this album features more of your own compositions than any of your previous records.

Yes, these ones I feel I properly wrote, the others from the other albums felt more like I was dabbling. They were... they were alright, but this was a proper, sitting down, "I'm on a mission to write songs" thing.

From your older ones, I thought 'Someone Else's Dream' and 'Just When' were very good and I was a big fan of 'Never Coming Back' from 'This Time It's Personal'.

Oh yeah! I did like that one, I must admit.

But you rarely include them on your previous records – this time about half of the record is your own stuff, and they are a different level. And people obviously

like them, because the album went to number one.

Thank you! Did alright, didn't it? I do intend to include more originals from now on. Wouldn't it be great if I ended up with an album of entirely new material? No reason why not. That would be incredible.

Well your Decca label mate Lulu did that with her last album. After years of doing other people's songs, her latest album had only one cover and everything else was her own stuff. It got great reviews and she felt it was a truer reflection of her as an artist, because it was her words, her choice of style, not songs picked for her to sing.

That's exactly it – it's not going to stop, the important thing was that the new songs



stood up and they weren't fillers. And you'll see it tonight, the kick I get out of people singing back to me something I wrote, it's just amazing. It's such a buzz!

What is your approach to writing, are you a lyrics man, melodies, do you get involved with chord structures, what's your input?

All the lyrics and some of the melodies. I'll take suggestions of course, and whoever I'm writing with, if there's a riff or something I might say "I can hear it going here, or doing this..." And I'm the king of the key change. The times I've heard "Not another bloody key change!" Yes! Another one! Trust me!

Had you been writing here and there ever since 'If Everyone Was

Listening' came out?

No, not at all, these are all new, in the moment, for this album. It was a proper series of song writing sessions. Each of them were done in a day. I might tweak the odd thing when we went into the studio to record them but generally the song was done. We would start in the morning and have a rough demo of a song done by the end of the day.

Do you have a listening panel of people close to you for feedback, or do you trust your own judgement?

I pretty much know myself. Cath's great at listening to them and offering advice of course, but she's not perfect! There is one that made the record and she said "Oh, that's terrible" and I said "Nope, I promise you, that is going to work". She was adamant it wouldn't, the first night I played it in Nottingham the whole audience were on their feet, clapping and joining in. I just looked down and winked, saying "Told you". (laughs)

Was it 'All Dance Together' by any chance?

Yep. I think it's alright, it is what it is.

A lot of the fans like it, when I polled on the Facebook Group what people's favourite song was from the new album, that was right up there, it was second only to the title track.

Brilliant. For me, I think my favourite is 'Tennessee Dreams'. I'm really pleased with that, I think it's a clever song, it's witty, it's got a good vibe, I like that one.

How did Jimmy Webb get involved in writing a song for you?

I met him, we were going to be doing a documentary for Radio 2 that actually got axed... well, not axed but he was sick so we couldn't do it. I mentioned to him that I liked the songs he'd written for Glen Campbell and was considering covering one and he said "I'll write you a new one". And he'll be at the Palladium, so that's alright isn't it?

So no 'Baby Shark' that night then?

(Laughs) No, he might wish he'd written it!



With ‘All Dance Together’ being such a great track for the concert, do you have the show in mind when you’re making an album or do you cross that bridge when you come to it?

Certainly with that song, that was definitely written with a live performance in mind but that was the only one, the others were all about how they’d work for the album. That one though, I could just see how it would work both live and on record.

Years back you did a cover of ‘Why Haven’t I Heard From You Lately’ which was meant for ‘This Time It’s Personal’, but you didn’t include it on the album because you felt you couldn’t capture it in the studio properly. You still played it live though. Has that happened with many other songs?

Not many, a couple.... there’s one I’ve got in the bottom drawer, not because it didn’t work musically but I felt it just didn’t gel with the rest of the album. It’s a Dan Fogelberg song called ‘Longer’, you’d probably know it if you heard it, it’s

a lovely song but I thought we had that vibe already on the album, so that’s just been put away for now. I tried writing a song with Guy Chambers but it didn’t quite come off. And I also tried writing with Paul Carrack actually, but we just didn’t really click.

That happens sometimes, you’ll see song writers who on paper might sound like a dream team, but I’ve talked to some who said “Oh, I went to write with so-and-so but it didn’t work, we cancelled each other out because we had the same strengths”.

Totally! So it didn’t pan out this time but that doesn’t mean to say it won’t in the future.

One thing I have to ask about, which fans always ask when you tour – the live DVDs. We haven’t had one since 2013.

I know. Nobody makes them anymore. That is the bottom line, it’s purely down to finances. If a TV company offers to film you then great, but it just doesn’t make financial sense otherwise because they cost

so much to make, what with the production, paying everybody involved...

I wondered if it was because you have a big band and you do have a lot of other people’s songs in the show, whether the performance fees and songwriters royalties were the issue.

It’s more the production. We just don’t sell enough because sales are down generally, with Netflix and things, people aren’t really buying DVDs now. A live music DVD just doesn’t sell in the volume needed these days to cover the costs.

That’s a shame. What about following your Elvis example from earlier and making a live album then? You’ve only done the one, the Royal Albert Hall one. And that was twenty years ago.

That’s not a bad idea. Yeah, all the rest were filmed weren’t they? Wow. A live album... That’s not a bad idea at all!

Just don’t put ‘Baby Shark’ on it...

I will - bonus track! (laughs)

MICHAEL'S TOUR SELFIES

GLASGOW



HULL



GATESHEAD



LONDON NIGHT ONE



LONDON NIGHT TWO



SHEFFIELD



BRIGHTON



SOUTHAMPTON



OXFORD



BOURNEMOUTH



PORTSMOUTH



PLYMOUTH



Michael took a selfie at each concert performed on the 'Coming Home To You' tour and posted each of them on his Twitter feed (with the exception of the first night in Nottingham, and he didn't upload the York one he took because it was "totally rubbish"). For those without access to Twitter, and for those who want just to relive the moments, here are the selfies in chronological order, starting in Glasgow and ending in Leicester with Michael showing off his (fake) sleeve tattoo. The tour got better as it went on, and so did the selfies!



STORIES FROM THE ROAD

When Michael goes out on tour, so do the fans. Here are some of their tour experiences...



Ruth Price met up with Michael at Radio York and then was lucky enough to do so again, joined by Sue Walker, Val Standing and Ros Spencer, at Media City before the Liverpool concert. The great photo was taken by Michael's PA, Andrew.



Linda Logan got a great keepsake from the tour as she managed to acquire Michael's publicity poster after the Glasgow gig.



I was the lucky lady at York on Easter Sunday, 21st April, 2019. I felt truly blessed to be singled out by Michael while he sang 'The Wonder Of You' and will treasure this moment forevermore!

Many thanks to Helen Eckersall for capturing the moment. It was so lovely to meet her and her mum at the show and we all have truly wonderful memories of a fabulous night with Michael.

I have been a fan for 30 years and my daughter, Kathryn, loves Michael too. We saw the show as part of birthday celebrations for my daughter and Michael signed the programme for her after the show which was simply beautiful, awe inspiring, emotional, uplifting and a privilege. He is a complete legend and superstar who keeps on giving!

Sue Deston (Sue Elizbeth)



Claire Shorter and her mum Janet Delasalle made the decision to wait for Michael at Ipswich and it paid off – both managed to get a picture prior to the concert.





Helen Easton wrote in to say she decided on “a special London trip to The Palladium to see Michael in concert again and to cheer myself up due to having problems with my back at the moment. The Palladium is our favourite theatre which has wonderful memories, because that’s where Annette and myself met Michael backstage after seeing him in *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*. Michael’s concert was fantastic as ever and was over too soon. It was a most enjoyable evening out.” Helen added she particularly enjoyed hearing the new songs and singing along to ‘Love Changes Everything’ and ‘One Step Out Of Time’.



Lisa Tootil sent in a screenshot of a magical moment for her – ‘the kiss’ from ‘The Wonder Of You’, taken at Birmingham on May 14th.

Lisa explains “I went to the Sunday show with tickets for the Tuesday at the ready. I knew on the Tuesday I would be getting health test results but had not expected them to be what they were and very nearly didn’t go to that evening’s concert. My doctors and friends persuaded me to attend as I would only regret it if I didn’t, and I’ve never missed Michael in concert before. If I hadn’t listened to them, this moment would never have happened, and although it’s a grainy screenshot, I shall be forever grateful for it. It is a moment in time that I very nearly didn’t get to experience, because that day I found out that my tomorrows may not be as plentiful as we go through life assuming.”



Sandra Birmingham got to say hello to Michael when he appeared at the Trafford Centre for a CD signing.



For twenty years I have been a fan of Michael Ball. I’ve been to many of his concerts but I have never met him. It has been my dream to meet him and in Liverpool it came true! I arrived at the Empire Theatre about 12:30 and I waited until about 3pm with some other ladies for Michael to arrive. We were told he was asleep so I waited and before long he came out of the coach. I went straight over to him and asked for a photo. He was so lovely, especially as he just woken up. It was the best experience of my life and a day I will never forget!

Mel Dormer



Heather Turner is "thrilled to bits" with her photo with Michael outside BBC Radio York. And rightly so!



Kathryn Horner managed to see Michael outside of Wogan House after one of his radio shows.

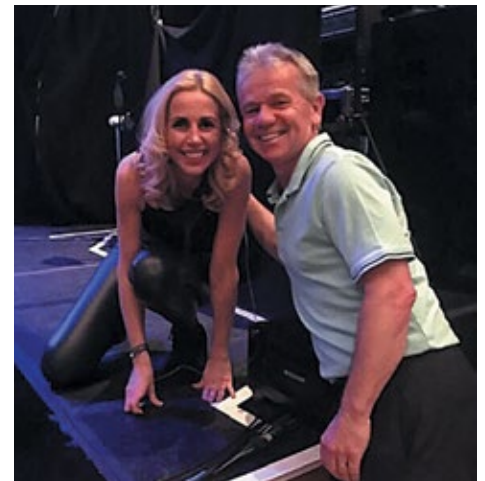


Louise Oakley took her daughter Sophia with her to meet Michael at Wogan House in February.



Dot Wilkie managed to get this picture of Michael as he was on his way to Symphony Hall in Birmingham. She was sporting the T-shirt her husband Larry had organised, with the picture of Dot and Michael from the Stages Cruise, which was mentioned in the last issue of *On The Ball*.

Not to be left out, Larry grabbed a picture with one of the members of Michael's band, the superbly talented Lindsay Goodhand.



Pam Handley sent in the following:

My friends and I went to the meet and greet at York, it was the first time we had done it and it was a great experience. It was a small group and Michael was lovely. He was pleased to hear that we have been friends for many years, meeting through going to his concerts and being his fans, but our friendship is so much more than that and we get together at other times too.

From left to right: Hazel, Kate, Gill, (Michael!) Helen, Pam, Norma



Marion Gray went with her mum Alice to see Michael at Southampton Guildhall. Both had been to concerts before but Marion and Alice also got to say hello to the main man, which was the first time Alice managed to get a photo.



Janice Lazarus says "Being able to share great friendships made through Michael has changed my life so much." She is pictured above with Claire Hutton, Julie Hutton, Helen Grenville and Julie Vidler.

While in London, she and her friends Alison and Gina grabbed a picture with Michael's dad, Tony, who was in attendance, for good measure!



Blossom catches up with Michael

Blossom Anna Liberty Lunt is the Fan Club's first baby, with parents Steve and Emma, both Fan Club members, meeting at a Michael concert and marrying a year later. Blossom was naturally introduced to Michael prior to a performance of *Mack And Mabel* in 2015. Fast forward to present day and you can see mum Emma with Blossom, who was happy to see her Uncle Michael again!



Coming Home To You

By Claire Stockil



I'm sure that most of you will agree that a bit of 'MB Therapy' is the best tonic – well for me, the timing of Michael's 'Coming Home To You' album and tour was perfect! After a very difficult and sad time at home, I had the album launch, signing and tour to look forward to.

On the 22nd March, I set off in plenty of time to meet friends at Manchester Trafford Centre. Unfortunately my second train connection was cancelled, as were subsequent trains on that route so it started to look unlikely that I would arrive at Manchester in time to see Michael. I decided to try an alternative route followed by a swift taxi ride across Manchester, and thankfully I arrived just in the nick of time. Frequent phone calls and texts kept me up to date with proceedings at The Trafford Centre and Ros had actually already very kindly got my CD signed prior to my arrival, just in case I didn't make it. I joined the end of the queue, which was very short by the time I arrived and within minutes, I was with Michael, having a quick chat and a much needed hug, before meeting my lovely Bally friends and Diane, who I met on Stages Cruise. We all then headed off for refreshments and a catch up, where we bumped in to Jen, who had experienced similar train problems and unfortunately arrived too late to see the main man. The journey for me had been stressful but the outcome thankfully well worth the hassle! Once back home, the CD

was immediately put on repeat and has been so ever since .. I absolutely love it and couldn't wait to hear the tracks performed live on stage.

My first show was at York Barbican on Easter Sunday and we were fortunate that it was a glorious, sunny day. Having never been to Wogan House, my Michael and I decided to make the most of Michael broadcasting from BBC Radio York and meet other fans outside the studio. There were around 20 of us waiting and Michael was his usual lovely self, chatting to fans, having selfies etc before heading to the Barbican for the sound check. We then met up with Sue and Angie for a coffee and leisurely walk around York before meeting up with more friends for a pre-show meal. The fellas then went off on their pub crawl leaving us ladies to enjoy a night with Mr Ball ... and were we in for a treat! He included three short lullabies in the set list, one sung in Welsh, which were lovely but pretty emotional given recent circumstances. As usual, lots of fans headed to the stage door afterwards to wave goodbye after what was a perfect day and phenomenal show. Myself and others were on such a high following the show that we were still chatting on messenger at 3am!

I didn't have to wait long for my second show, which was at The Sage in Gateshead.



This time the hubbie was coming with me and we were fortunate to be sitting towards the centre of the front row, thanks to Steve and Emma for very kindly offering us the tickets. What a venue with amazing sound, perfect for round two of Mr Ball. All too soon the show was over but we were treated to fireworks as we left the Sage. Due to us enjoying the firework display, we missed seeing the tour bus leave, but we had been fortunate to see Michael arrive earlier so were quite happy. This time we met fellow Ballettes Hazel, Les and Emma – sorry Les, don't know what the male equivalent of a Ballette is! *[It's a Ball-Boy, surely? - James]* They very kindly treated us to a lovely pre-show meal at The Hilton. Another brilliant day spent with lovely friends!

The following day I definitely had the post MB show blues, having seen my two shows so early in the tour ... but my lovely friend, Annie, came to the rescue and invited me to join her and Angie at Sheffield! For family reasons, I couldn't commit until the very last minute but my goodness, was it worth it. Again, I met up with lots of lovely friends at the stage door. This time it was cold and wet and Michael kept us waiting, but it was lovely to see him briefly



and to witness his excitement about the recent *Hairspray* announcement! We then headed to a cocktail bar to thaw out before enjoying tea at a local bar. Michael was amazing as always and the show was over all too soon. Someone threw three pairs of knickers on to the stage at one point, which Michael found amusing then very kindly donated them to Daniel, saying that they were his colour ... before asking for a bit of decorum!

After thinking that Sheffield was my last show, I was extremely pleased when I had a very last minute opportunity to join friends in Blackpool for the penultimate show of the tour. A large group of fans met at Winter Gardens but unfortunately due to there being numerous entrances, the majority of us missed Michael arriving. We made the most of the glorious sunny weather and enjoyed cocktails on the sea front before heading for a pre-show meal. Michael was absolutely buzzing and gave another exceptional performance, which was over all too soon. It was so nice to see and chat to the lovely Mr Ball Senior who was sitting near us in the audience. A quick dash to the train station concluded another perfect day.

I feel very fortunate to have been able to enjoy four amazing shows, meet Michael and spend quality time with all the lovely friends that I have met through Michael and his Fan Club. Michael is not only a first class performer with an amazing voice but also such a lovely, genuine, caring person who so deserves all his successes – long may it continue! Michael, you and your fans are the best, thank you.



HATS OFF TO MICHAEL!

by Jen Garner



Whilst the sun is still setting on Michael's wonderful tour and the memories vivid, I'm putting a few of my own thoughts together.

Firstly and most importantly, I want to thank Michael for making it all happen and for the thought gone into such a beautiful choice of songs. Also to add congratulations on the four songs he wrote himself, 'Home To You', 'Tennessee Dreams', 'Blood Red Moon' and 'All Dance Together' – which we did with much enthusiasm! It was a concert that had everything, fun, nostalgia, power ballads from Musical Theatre, other classics, more recent songs and at times was very emotional. My personal favourites were 'Tennessee Dreams', 'Evermore' and 'The Rose'. My only regret is that I didn't hear Michael sing 'When The Loving Was Easy', such a gorgeous song, at The London Palladium but hopefully he may treat us to that sometime in the future.

The backing singers, Gary, Tor and Daniel were fantastic as were Marsha, the violinist and percussionist and Lindsay on reeds, flute and percussion. The orchestra was as amazing as always and the effective, colourful, meaningful and clever graphics all contributed to making this show totally superb.

I'd like to say a huge thank you to my lovely 'fan friends' who helped me book tickets, hotels and shared travel, meals and perhaps the odd prosecco or cocktail (or both!) chatted at stage doors making this tour so happy and enjoyable.

Blackpool is full of bright lights, fun, 'Kiss Me Quick' hats, candy floss and toffee apples but it is also home to some of the best live shows and entertainment in the U.K. It's also where I was born, bred and there I received the kiss in 'The Wonder of You' so that concert was particularly special! It was also the place where Sue Walker managed to get Michael to wear her pink hat!

I know you'll agree that this particular tour was probably 'The Best Tour Ever'.

Hats off to you, Mr. B!!

Top photo L-R: Rose Heath, Sue Walker, Jen Garner, Ros Spencer, Val Standing.



MEETING MICHAEL ON TOUR

Aside from the obvious draw of seeing Michael sing live, when he goes out on tour it also affords fans the opportunity to take advantage of a Meet And Greet opportunity to have a professionally taken picture with Michael. Or you can try your luck waiting at the venue in the hopes of catching him. Here are a selection of fans who enjoyed the Meet And Greet experience, or were successful in their venue stakeout!



Sandra Oliver, Emma Oliver and Sarah Oliver-Field



Janet Salari



Sue Knight



Claire Kuczma



Caroline Old



Nicola McClelland



Helen Grenville



Jane Harding



Michael Ball Blasts into Bristol!

By Mark Witchell. Live picture by Carolyn Bell.



It was an absolute delight when we heard the news late last year that Michael was releasing a brand-new solo album entitled 'Coming Home to You'. It was even more exciting to learn that Michael would be undertaking his first UK solo tour in four years in Spring of 2019. When the dates were released there was no surprise that Michael was visiting most of the cities and venues that he has been travelling to since his first tour back in 1992. Michael had announced a return to Bristol, where he had played the Hippodrome a number of times on some of his earlier tours. Since 2007 Michael had been playing the nearby Colston Hall which is currently undergoing a refurbishment. Michael also performed at the Hippodrome in 2011 when he closed the UK Tour of *Hairspray* playing Edna Turnblad. The Hippodrome is a lovely 1,951 capacity Grade Two

Listed Theatre designed by Frank Matcham in 1912. Frank also designed the London Coliseum and London Palladium.

I was lucky enough to be attending a Meet and Greet with my mum Sue. We got to the Hippodrome and were greeted by the Live Nation representative Guy who informed us there were only three other people at this event. He then took us through to the foyer where we took our seats and waited for Michael's arrival. After a few minutes we suddenly heard Michael's voice as he arrived with his PA, Andrew Ross. It was so nice to be able to have a chat with Michael. It is lovely to be greeted with "Hi Mark, how are you? It's been a while...". I congratulated Michael on the success of 'Coming Home To You' reaching Number One in the UK Charts. I also asked if Michael would

he be singing 'One Step Out Of Time'? He replied "Well if I am, I am truly expecting you to be at the front showing everyone the dance moves!"

I then asked Michael if he would be touring with Alfie in 2020 when they release their third album together. Michael said "Of course we will be doing a few gigs together next year. But first we have Hampton Court and *Les Mis* to practise!"

So on to the concert! Callum McLeod and his band walked on to stage at precisely 7.30pm. Michael was joined by backing singers Tor Hills, who has backed both Michael and Alfie Boe previously, Gary Watson who featured on the 2011 'Heroes' tour and Daniel Boys – a big star from Musical Theatre and a finalist on BBC One's *Any Dream Will Do* in 2007. Returning to Michael's

band were Neil Angille (Piano/Keys), Don Richardson (Bass), Neal Wilkinson (Drums), Lewis Osborne (Guitar), Sam Grimley (Guitar/Keys), Marsha Skinns (Violin/Percussion) and Lindsay Goodhand (Reeds/Flute/Percussion). A talented bunch!

As the overture started, we were treated to an arrangement of Antonin Dvorak's 9th (New World) Symphony which had been turned into a song aptly entitled 'Going Home'. Michael then suddenly appeared at the top of the stairs and blasted into a rousing rendition of 'Home to You'. Michael then segued into 'I Just Can't Help Believin' – an Elvis Presley classic. Michael said "Good evening Bristol! I love it here at the Hippodrome where we did *Hairspray* many years ago!" before singing 'I'll Have To Say I Love You In A Song' written by Jim Croce.

Next came the beautiful 'Sail On', originally recorded by the Commodores and later by Lionel Ritchie.

The famous beats of 'Something Inside So Strong' started, which Michael has been performing since his 'First Love' album in 1995 – what a powerful performance it was! Michael said "When you release an album you have to answer a lot of questions. One of the most popular questions is always 'What is your favourite musical?' It is like saying 'Who is your favourite child or dog?'. You all have one but you just can't say which one! How can you choose between *Hairspray* which we did here at the Hippodrome or *Les Misérables*? I do have a top three. I'm not going to tell you which order they are but there is a song from each of the top three in the show tonight. Let's kick off with *Sweeney Todd* which we did at the Adelphi Theatre back in 2012." Michael sang the moving 'Not While I'm Around' before adding "So what's the second most popular question I'm always asked? 'Do you have any regrets?'. Just one. I wanted to be a Disney prince. It nearly happened! So back in the mid 1990's I was contacted by the Disney corporation. They wanted me to play a role in a brand-new Disney musical they were bringing to London. No – it wasn't *Aladdin* or *Prince Charming*. It was *The Beast* from *Beauty And The Beast*. I said no as I didn't want to cough up furballs every night! I did miss out though on singing this incredible song and I'm going to sing it for you tonight." Michael then delivered a truly stunning version of 'Evermore'.

Michael went on to say "Back in 2015 I decided to bring a revival of the musical *Mack and Mabel* back to the UK. This Jerry

Herman musical has struggled to reach a big popularity since it's 1974 Broadway failure. The main characters are the silent movie-maker Mack Sennett and his bright, particular star Mabel Normand – the show charts their rise and fall. I got to sing this next song in which the complexities of the couple's amorous relationship are explored in a haunting way." Michael then performed the moving 'I Won't Send Roses' which led to 'The Rose', a song that carries as much meaning as when Michael first recorded it back in 1995.



Michael then sang the 1979 classic by Art Garfunkel 'Bright Eyes' which was performed in tribute to Michael's Tibetan Terriers Ollie and Freddie which he sadly both lost within an 18-month period. A picture of Michael with the dogs came on the computerised backdrop screen on stage which was extremely emotional. Straight away Michael started to sing 'Lost Without You' – a wonderfully poignant new song by Freya Ridings. Next came 'Tell Me It's Not True' from Willy Russell's 'Blood Brothers' which never fails to deliver. I don't think you can beat the end to that musical when Mrs Johnstone is cradling her twin sons' bodies after the double shooting.

Michael then said "This time last year I was at the London Coliseum in the English National Opera's revival of *Chess*. Night after night I got to sing this amazing song and the words mean just as much now with the current state of the world right now". Michael then closed the first act with 'Anthem' to a well-deserved standing ovation.

Act Two began with the sound of the African Savannah as Michael bounded on to 'He Lives In You' from *The Lion King*. He said "One of the best things

is this next song which I have recorded for the album." Michael then sang his wonderful version of 'To Love Somebody' before his take on Cliff Richard's 1976 hit 'Miss You Nights'.

The famous chords from *Les Misérables* then struck up as Michael sang a magnificent medley from the show containing 'Empty Chairs At Empty Tables', 'I Dreamed A Dream' and 'Stars'. 'Stars' had even more significance as it previewed Michael undertaking the role of 'Javert' during the All Star Staged Concert of at the Gielgud Theatre in London from August 2019 for 16 weeks only! Michael said "*Les Misérables* is 34 years old this year. We are so lucky to have Sir Cameron Mackintosh in the house tonight – the man who made it all possible!"

Next came 'Blood Red Moon' another of Michael's self-penned tracks before "party time" kicked off with another original from Michael, 'All Dance Together' – which sounded great live! Michael then said "Do you fancy a dance? Then let's do it!" 'One Step Out Of Time' was quickly followed by 'You Can't Stop The Beat' from *Hairspray*. Michael then exited the stage for the playoff before returning to sing 'Love Changes Everything' and the now obligatory Elvis Presley classic 'The Wonder Of You'. All too soon the concert was over. The atmosphere was electric and Michael left the Hippodrome stage to a full standing ovation. What a concert! What a tour! I got to relive the whole experience again at Plymouth Pavilions on 18th May. Let's hope it is not four years again until another solo tour but in the mean time we have *Les Misérables*, *Hairspray* and the return of Ball and Boe to look forward to! Exciting times ahead!

The Best Tour Ever? Well If Those Jeans Are Anything To Go By...

By Clare Miller



Photo: Carolyn Bell

Being a Michael Ball fan for 27 years, and having been to every tour since 1992, many friends and colleagues often chirp up with: "You're going to see him again? Isn't it the same every time?"

It's a question that I have got used to hearing and something that I am happy to defend because no concert, show or event is ever the same. This, has never been more true than on the 'Coming Home To You' tour this year.

This tour was littered with 'firsts' for me. From being at the opening night in Nottingham with my Mum (who has never seen him on tour) to being at the final night in Leicester (a venue I have never been to before) this tour was probably one of the best ever, and not just because of the existence of the tightest jeans ever known to man...!

Nottingham is my nemesis when it comes

to Michael. Trying to get there after work, on a week day has very nearly brought me to tears on many occasions. It is always busy. The traffic is always horrific. When we went to see *Mack and Mabel*, I missed the first ten minutes as there was nowhere to park and on the last Michael and Alfie tour, it took us longer to get from the motorway to the city centre than it did to travel the 50 miles down the M1. Add to that my friend's inability to read a phone's map and taking me down a tram line, it's safe to say I was slightly nervous about getting to Nottingham with my mother in tow. However, we made it in one piece and settled into our seats. The show was great! I felt some nervous tension in the air from Michael who, I guess, was wondering if people would respond favourably to his live versions of his recent No.1 album's songs. I am also guessing that there may well have been a 'new' audience in attendance to some extent too, after his most recent duets with Alfie. He needn't have worried at all; the

reaction from the crowd was incredible and his nerves, if they had been there, dissipated as the evening progressed. Mum thought he was wonderful and marvelled at how her usually calm and composed daughter slowly changed into a crazed fan (well as crazed as you can be at 42) as the night progressed... One show down, four to go...

By chance, the timing of this tour fell just right for me. Being a Headteacher, travelling the country during term-time is generally impossible but Michael timed it just right for my Easter holidays this year. The dates within reasonable distance for me fell brilliantly, even if it meant doing two stints of two nights on the trot, which again some friends don't understand!

The following evening was York Barbican – a venue I love – and my first front row of the tour. This time I was accompanied by my lovely work colleague and friend, Jackie, who had also never seen Michael in concert before despite being a fan of him and his music. She was duly initiated into the Michael tour routines on the A64, in the front of a tiny Kia Picanto, as we belted out 'One Step Out Of Time' and practised the arm manoeuvres. Within 10 minutes, she was a pro and did a fabulous job when it came to the real thing later. York was also the place where I became re-acquainted with Ruth Price once again. We had spoken before (at the Alhambra in Bradford, I believe) and it was nice to find out what she had been up to and what this tour had in store for her. As it turned out, we were to meet up on a few more occasions as the tour progressed. The show was, again, amazing. Michael was overwhelmed with the support and love from the crowd, and at times seemed



close to tears. His confidence had grown from the previous evening and his banter and conversation between songs seemed more natural and relaxed. It was at this point that I knew this tour had the makings of something special – I had a funny feeling it might be the best one yet!



The next ‘first’ was when my hubby and I arrived at the Sage Gateshead in the pouring rain. “Let’s set off early”, I said. We had never been to the Sage before and knew nothing about the venue or its whereabouts. Well it turns out it is practically two straight roads from my house – although granted those two roads add up to 120 miles in total. So, in two hours we were there, waiting backstage (in the rain, way too early – my husband continues to remind me) to see if we could catch Michael going in. We spoke to a number of fellow fans that afternoon, including Jen Garner who it was nice to say hello to again and a lovely lady, Pauline, with her husband and friend. Michael arrived and was his usual chirpy self. He spoke to everyone, signed autographs and had numerous pictures and selfies. I am often ridiculed for being small by my so-called friends, but I genuinely cannot take a good selfie because my arms are too short! No fear, Michael obliged and took a lovely picture which Pauline managed to photograph from afar. The show itself was, once again, brilliant. I sat next to another new acquaintance, Tracey Slater. If you were the couple sat behind us, who talked non-stop through most of the show until I lost my temper at your sheer ignorance and rudeness and asked you to shut-up, please realise that people pay to listen to Michael, not you!

The Sage is a gorgeous venue, the show was amazing, especially ‘Anthem’, which Michael sung by far the best I have ever heard it, it made the hairs on my arms stand on end. When I thought the day couldn’t get any more special, fireworks on the river at the end of

the show made a magical night even more beautiful. I am not sure if it was part of the Sage’s entertainment or not, but I loved it!

Luckily there was more to come. Friday 3rd May was the start of another brilliant bank holiday weekend as I made my way to my ‘almost hometown’ venue, Sheffield. Things were about to get seriously more fun! My Michael Ball tour buddy and ‘bezzie’ mate, Sarah, was back from holiday (how on earth she booked that at tour time, I have yet to work out!) and we were having a Michael weekend! We sang our way to Sheffield and got very giddy as we took our front row seats. I don’t know if it is because it is our hometown venue, but I always feel slightly nervous at the City Hall. It was lovely to see Tracey there, who I met at Gateshead too. As this was show number four, I had developed some firm favourites in the set. ‘Anthem’, as previously mentioned was a spectacular end to the first half but ‘Evermore’ and ‘Lost Without You’ were amazing too. Michael’s version of ‘Lost Without You’ reduced me to tears on several occasions this tour, as he sung it with such genuine emotion and passion. The orchestral accompaniment made Freya Ridings’ song feel so much deeper and more evocative than the original; team that with the staging, and I would argue it is possibly one of the best moments on any of Michael’s tours, ever. In the second half, ‘Tennessee Dreams’, ‘All Dance Together’ and of course the “party time” set made our evening in Sheffield perfect.



The next day was tinged with sadness as it was to be our last show but we were determined to make it special. We arrived in an absolutely *freezing* cold Manchester – we weren’t sure it was actually May at all as we stood at the back of the Bridgewater Hall in thick coats, hoods up and umbrellas at the ready. Sarah decided that she had had enough of waiting for Michael to arrive at around 3.30pm, and kept giving him

ultimatums of ‘two more minutes then I’m going’ but where she was going to go, given that I was driving and had the car keys, I am not entirely sure! Her ultimatums must have worked (so she said) because suddenly, as if from nowhere, Michael and his entourage arrived having walked to the venue. Once again, Michael obliged with photos and autographs for the many people waiting and we finally retreated to our hotel to warm up before the evening show.

What a show it was! When people (and Michael himself) talk about music bringing people together, he is spot on. At the start of “party time”, where Michael absolutely insisted that we stood up out of our seats, we noticed a young boy (we thought about 8 years old or so) trying to get in at the front of the stage to wave to Michael. He was having no luck at all. As mums of boys ourselves, and as teachers with a strong passion for inclusion, our nurturing sides kicked in and we let him stand with us at the front in the centre. He had the absolute time of his life! He cheered, he shouted, he danced, he held our hands and waved through ‘Love Changes Everything’ with us, and even more special, he is on Michael’s selfie photograph from Manchester. Michael also shook his hand and spoke to him from the stage. I spent the last few songs in tears – this young man made my night and the tour. He helped create new memories for us, attached to some of the most beautiful songs imaginable and he showed me how music can, and does, bring people together. When Michael posted his selfie on Twitter, the young man’s sister and Mum got in touch with us to thank us for letting him stand with us and explained that due to a rare genetic disorder his behaviour can be a little unpredictable, so he just ran to the front. Well, to be honest, we have all done that at a Michael show, haven’t we?! I would like to say though that the pleasure was all ours – we are so grateful for the love and happiness he brought to us that evening and we will never forget that show.

So, that was the end of the tour for us... we thought... until after spending inordinate amounts of time on websites, my patience finally paid off and the De Montfort Hall released some tickets for the final night of the tour! Another first – Leicester, and my first ever final night of a tour. I won’t go more detail, but needless to say it was absolutely brilliant. Thank you, Michael, for a brilliant tour, amazing memories, a lot of new ‘firsts’, the selfies, the laughs, the tears, and of course for the tightest jeans ever... We will never forget them!

THE COMING HOME TO YOU TOUR

Relive the amazing tour with this fantastic collection of fan pictures from shows around the country!

By Julie Vidler



By Janet Delasalle



By Claire Stockil



By Janet Delasalle



By Carolyn Bell



By Sara Lloyd Burt



By Holly Barber



By Carolyn Bell





By Carolyn Bell



By Alistair Godfrey



By Chris Kirchen

2019 TOUR SET LIST

ACT ONE

Overture

Home To You

I Just Can't Help Believin'

I'll Have To Say I Love You In A Song

Sail On

Something Inside So Strong

Not While I'm Around

Evermore

I Won't Send Roses

The Rose

Bright Eyes

Lost Without You

Tell Me It's Not True

Anthem

ACT TWO

He Lives In You

Tennessee Dreams

Goin' Back

To Love Somebody

Miss You Nights

Les Misérables Medley:
Empty Chairs At Empty Tables
I Dreamed A Dream
Stars

Blood Red Moon

All Dance Together

One Step Out Of Time

You Can't Stop The Beat

Love Changes Everything

The Wonder Of You



By Helen Greenhill



By Julie Vidler



By Lisa Sinden



By Fiona Gardiner

In London Michael included 'When the Loving Was Easy' due to Jimmy Webb being in the audience.

In York and Cardiff Michael sang a personal lullaby medley which included a Welsh lullaby, 'Little Man You've Had A Busy Day' and 'Little Pal'.

Compiled by Mark Witchell

The Day My Favourite Men Met My Favourite Man!

By Nicola Goodchild



Four tickets came up for Portsmouth Guildhall and Mum and I on the spur of the moment bought them. This would be our 8th show of this tour and we thought taking my hubby Rich and Dad with us would be a great end to the tour for us! Combined with a night away in Portsmouth it certainly was a fun break.

Rich and Dad know alot of our Michael friends so they certainly didnt feel uncomfortable waiting at the stage door! Dad was joking around saying how he wanted a piccie with Michael – Dad your wish is my command! He arrived and walked down to say hello to us all... and I asked if Dad could have a picture. Michael beckoned him over and the outcome was great, Rich also had one too! Both photos came out great - Dad was actually chuffed to bits!

Michael did say to Rich as he

was having his photo with him “I feel sorry for you mate”... he was joking about being married to me! Not the first time either, but I love the banter!

The concert was totally breathtaking and both Dad and Rich commented on what an amazing showman he is. They’ve seen him before but not met him properly, so it was a brilliant day all round!

During the show Michael was talking about his audiences and how some come to many, some was their first and would they come back? Rich decided to shout out “Only if I can have the kiss Michael!”.... to which he responded “You can have the kiss mate, but breath mints, yeah?” It was very funny!

As we waited for the coach to leave (yes, the boys were happy to do that too!) Rich positioned himself in a great place so as the coach came



past he shook some Trebor mints at Michael, pointing at them! Michael laughed out loud and blew Rich kisses – absolutely hilarious! We managed to catch it on video but we’ll have to make so with screenshots in a magazine!

It was a brilliant day and night all round- full of laughs, cocktails, special moments with life long friends!.... but most of all it was the day my favourite men met my all time favourite man!





Jill Clark and Geraldine Pike managed to meet up with Michael in Southampton, where Jill took a picture of Geraldine with Michael (above) and Andrew captured the one of Jill.



PENPALS

LILA LINDEMANN

Long term Fan Club member Lila Lindemann is still as Michael-mad as ever, and would love to hear from any fellow fans who might like to get in touch with her.

Lila Lindemann
c/o Island View Family Care
715 Route 213
Rosendale, NY 12472

LINDA STROUDE

Linda Stroude would like to hear from any lady who she could go to Michael's concerts with. Her email address is **lindastroude1997@gmail.com** and she lives at **97 Five Acres, London Colney, St Albans, Herts AL2 1HY**.

SARAH FROM STAFFORDSHIRE

Sarah from Staffordshire is looking for ladies or gents to talk about Michael and other subjects. If you would like to email her, she can be reached at: **tinypop37@gmail.com**

PAT ALEXANDER

Pat is looking for people, ideally in the Kent area, who will write or email her to talk anything Michael related. She is located at **27 Beach Court Park, Faversham Road, Whitstable, Kent CT5 4FE**. Her email is **alexanderpatricia20@yahoo.com**

If you would like to be featured here for like minded fans to contact you via email or post, then please send in your details to **james@halo-graphic.com** and they will be printed in the next issue of On The Ball.

THE MICHAEL BALL FAN CLUB ONLINE

www.mbfanclub.co.uk

The Michael Ball Fan Club is now completely free to join – simply visit the website address above and register your email address and you will receive notifications every time there is some Michael Ball news to report. There is also a members area where you can download past issues of On The Ball and access Michael's past Infoline messages.

The password to access it is: **MBFC27**

