

ON THE BALL

Issue 83



Hi Everyone

As many of you already know, Gill has been having chemotherapy for Follicular non-Hodgkin Lymphoma. She is almost through her treatment for now, and after a few hiccups on the way, everything is looking good. As soon as we told Michael he made sure we met up with him before Gill had any treatment. Here we are in London back in February.

We made it to the first preview of *Aspects of Love* which was sensational. Michael brought tears to our eyes when he sang "Love Changes Everything" in a way that we had never heard before. The whole audience were up on their feet cheering when he finished.

The next time we went Michael invited us to spend some time with him in his dressing room.



He told us how very much he is loving everything, and everyone involved in the show. He then said let's go and find somewhere with a nice background to take a couple of photos. The stage will do nicely!

We do know how much Michael is loving his time in *Aspects* and we are very sad that it's closing early.

Many thanks as always go to James Gaden, and to all of you who have contributed to this issue.

Love
Maureen and Gill

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Back cover photograph by Johan Persson

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Dear Everyone,

I'm sat in my dressing room at the Lyric Theatre, just after my birthday surrounded by beautiful flowers, cards, gifts, cake and balloons, having had the auditorium sing happy birthday to me, feeling very loved and very lucky. Thank you so much for thinking of me and especially for being so generous donating to my chosen charities and to Donna again for getting that figure doubled by Netflix to an amazing £8,514!! I can't tell you how grateful everyone is to be remembered and helped by you, especially when things are so difficult for everyone at the moment.

Speaking of that I'm sure you will have heard the news that Aspects will be ending its run in August. Earlier than we had all hoped of course but

Nest End shows are struggling at the moment, not surprisingly, and it was felt that trying to get through the tough autumn months was not going to be possible. Sad of course, but I can't tell you how much I've loved revisiting this amazing show and working with some of the most talented, supportive, funny and gorgeous people. It has been a total joy and I shall miss it all so much. It was also just brilliant seeing so many of you at the stage door and it is wonderful to hear how much you have enjoyed getting to know George.

All of this means I am so busy both doing the show and finishing my memoir 'Different Aspects'. It means I'm still writing the final chapters which has delayed my delivering it to the publishers but the release date is still October and it's been an extraordinary experience to write.

The memories it has brought back have been extraordinary and I can't

wait to share all the stories of this and the original production with you all, as well as some of the journey that got me here.

So, as always, I send you all my love and thanks for another amazing journey that we are all continuing on together. Your support and love and kindness never stops amazing me and truly is what keeps me going. To know we are all there for each other, through out all the trials and joys, highs and lows, laughter and tears is what helps to keep us all going and must never be taken for granted.

I send you all my love and can't wait to see you somewhere soon and until then, take care and God Bless

Phil
X

THE DELAUNAY PRESENTS: AN EVENING WITH MICHAEL BALL O.B.E.

by Jen Garner. Photos by Rose Hall.



'The Delaunay Presents' is a series of events with leading stars of the stage, screen and written word as they share the secrets of their success. Their up and coming guest was none other than Olivier Award Winning actor, presenter and singer, Mr. Michael Ball O.B.E. on Sunday 19th February.

I was in New Zealand visiting my family when the news broke. I had a message off my good friend Rose, asking me that if she could get tickets, would I be interested? Well... is The Pope Catholic?

I knew the tickets would be like gold dust so didn't hold out too much hope. Low and behold, Rose was successful and I had this to look forward to soon after arriving back in the U.K. It already seemed ages since seeing Michael at The Palladium back in December!

Since the 19th of February I have been reliving this evening so much and decided to write down everything I could remember about it. We arrived at The Delaunay Restaurant at 6:30pm as requested and

were cordially welcomed and shown to our table. I must tell you that The Delaunay is a beautiful venue situated on a corner, just off Covent Garden. The tables accommodated approximately 80 guests and were set in a semi-circle around the main table, running along the side of the room.

We mingled with Joan, Sue, Nicki and Family and one or two more familiar faces who had been lucky enough to get tickets. At a table near us was 'Mum and Daughter'. Mum had been a big Michael fan for a long time but in recent years for various reasons had been unable to get to see him. This evening was a surprise treat from her daughter, which Rose and I thought was lovely. I'm sorry, their names escape me, but I'm sure if they read this article, they'll know who they are!

Our first treat was a 'Journey of a Lifetime Cocktail'(tanqueray, belsazar rose, strawberry aperitif, peychauds bitters) It sounded fabulous and it was and quite appropriate after my travels.

At 7 O'clock, Mr. Ball seemed to arrive from nowhere and took his seat in the middle of the long table facing us all. Everyone could see and hear him clearly, as it really was an intimate occasion. The evening was hosted by the veteran journalist Tim Wapshott. He sat next to Michael, introduced him and proceeded to chat and interview him throughout the delicious meal, which lasted over 3 hours. Honestly, I have never known the time fly by so quickly, even at a concert!

Tim Wapshott began right at the beginning of Michael's career, from when Michael was a member of The Guildford Youth Theatre which led to him studying at The Guildford School of Acting. His music teacher first recognized his talent when he sang Edelweiss from *The Sound of Music*. I think this Musical has always been a favourite of Michael's.

Michael talked about his early career and his theatrical debut as Judas/ John The Baptist in 'Godspell'. He said how a young Michael then got the part of Frederick in *Pirates of Penzance* in Manchester. This was in 1984 .



He discussed his West End debut in 1985 playing Marius in *Les Misérables* and was very transparent when talking about his panic attacks and how Cameron Mackintosh rang him up and gave him an ultimatum... simply

to give up or get back on the stage. He told us how he has learnt to control any anxieties that may reoccur, adding that wasn't very often these days. Raoul in *Phantom Of The Opera* was of course his next starring role.



After that, his number 2 chart singles hit in 1989 'Love Changes Everything' from *Aspects Of Love* when he played Alex, did exactly that... change everything for him! He talked about his Eurovision success with 'One Step Out Of Time' in 1992 and what a fun, surreal time that was. The rest, as they say, is history!

Tim asked Michael about his subsequent roles, covering just about all of his career so far. Michael happily responded chatting in depth, giving lots of feedback and various stories, often very funny!

It was amazing, realizing just how much has been achieved including all his albums, Radio 2 Shows, TV presenting including 'The One Show', his film debut as Henry Purcell and of course not forgetting his collaboration with a certain Alfie Boe O.B.E. whom he met in the "disastrous" (Michael's words!) production of *Kismet*. Needless to say... I think a good time was had by all during this production. The bonding obviously resulted in sell out shows and many successful albums.

He spoke with affection and pride of meeting and recording with Captain Tom Moore resulting in 'You'll Never Walk Alone' going to the top of the charts and making a lot of money for The N.H.S. Michael then had a short break between courses and walked out of the room passing close to our table, acknowledging us which was lovely and unexpected.

All the aspects (pardon the pun) of Michael's career were discussed whilst we were enjoying our wonderful choice of meal, namely Beef Fillet starter, Roast Landaise Chicken main course and Arctic Roll for dessert, finishing off with coffee and accompanied throughout with a rather pleasant Sparkling Rose wine. Whilst savoring our food and drinking our coffee, the floor was opened up to questions for Michael to answer.

One of his scariest moments he said, was when the car from *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* broke down in mid-flight and that performance had to be cancelled. He was asked what was his favourite role and the one that meant the most to him. He again admitted Edna in *Hairspray* was probably his

favourite but he loved them all and that the title role in *Sweeney Todd* was one he was very proud of. He also said how thrilled he was to have his first book 'The Empire' published and to be now known as an author too.

I can't tell you how enthusiastically he spoke about the up and coming production of 'Aspects of Love'! The idea of bringing it once more into The West End came to him as he contemplated reaching the milestone age of 60 years young and looking back over the years, it suddenly came to him that this was what he wanted to do. Immediately he rang Andrew Lloyd Webber asking his opinion and straight away Andrew was on board and now we have it.... another rip-roaring success for Michael and team.

Back to the questions – Michael was asked to sing for us and duly obliged by standing up and singing 'We'll Meet Again' to everyone's delight. Then, out of the blue, Mr. Tim Wapshott was stood by me with a microphone, asking me if I had a question for Mr. Ball? I hadn't prepared anything but quickly replied "Yes I do!" Michael said "Hello love, nice to see you and how are you?" I replied "A bit jet-lagged", he asked why and I explained I'd just got home from New Zealand to which he quipped "Ooh, get you'– ha ha!" I proceeded to ask him if he was planning to tour in the near future? At this, he teased, taking off my Lancashire accent and asked if I had not been listening as he was just about to go into The West End to



play Uncle George at The Lyric Theatre until November! Laughingly, he added he knew what I meant and hoped to do a solo tour next Spring and planned to team up with Alfie again the end of 2024.

Well, what a night we all had, ending with Michael signing our menus. Certainly an evening to cherish and remember and lock away in our memories.



THE TRIP THAT ALMOST DIDN'T HAPPEN

by Pat Webb

It was almost four years to the day since the last time I saw Michael in person. Trust me, that is a very long time for someone who was a regular visitor often several times a year.

My absence was due to foot surgery, followed a couple of years later by a fractured and dislocated kneecap in December 2020. That was when Covid was rampant, and vaccines weren't available. I guess if there's a good time to be confined to home, it was then, even if I was in a brace and on crutches for almost four months! Covid caught up with me about a year ago, but thankfully, I had a very mild case. I finally got my foot and knee working enough to plan a trip. When my friends decided it was time for a reunion, we thought a trip to *Aspects Of Love* would be perfect. I said I would crawl if I had to, but I was coming!

Everything was booked and I was ready to go. One week before my departure, I woke up to a screaming right ear and went running to my doctor in a panic. "I have to be on a plane next week!" I had fluid in my right ear and he wasn't sure about a flight anywhere. I saw him daily and my ear cleared enough



to fly 24 hours before my flight was due to leave! Phew!

So after four years away, I found myself at the Lyric Theatre watching Michael. It was one of my happiest days.... just to be there. I've heard him sing 'Love Changes Everything' countless times over the years, but seeing him in a role singing it gave me chills.

I've always been a fan of sitting as close to the front as possible. However, with this show, I was glad I was several rows back so

I had a good view of the panels used during scene changes. I think they really added to the show.

I went to the stage door before the show hoping to see Michael arrive. I didn't see him coming up behind me and then I heard... "and I am going to give you the biggest hug" which was what he did! Seeing Michael at the stage door and getting a picture (thank you, Joan Johnson!) was the icing on the cake.

I had my friends with me during my entire stay and they made sure I didn't trip or do anything else to hurt myself! These are all friends I've met through our interest in Michael years ago and it's impossible to say how much their friendship means to me.

Now that I know I can manage my way around London, I cannot wait to return!

Maureen and Gill:

It was so good to see you Pat, along with our other dear friends. Here we are from left to right, Gill from Colchester, Beth from New York, Michelle from Nr. Evesham, Sherri from California, Pat from Watertown, MA, and Maureen from Colchester:



ASPECTS OF



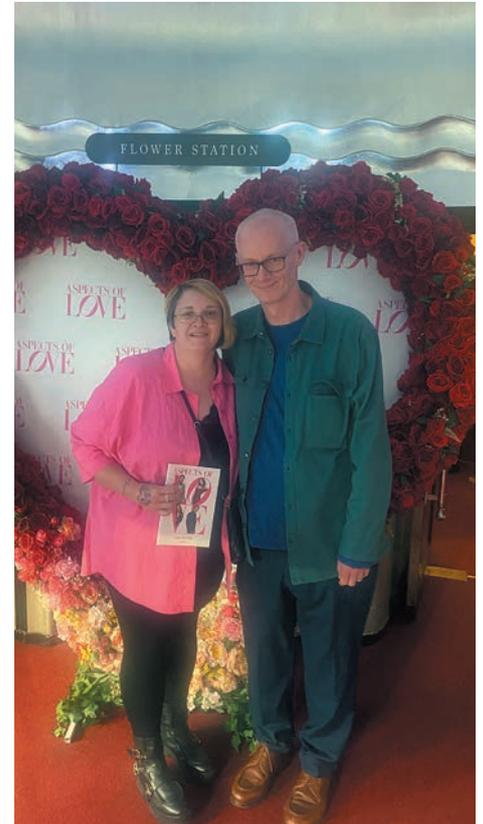
In May, Michael returned to a musical which has constantly been associated with him – *Aspects Of Love*. As most fans know, Michael played Alex in the original *Aspects Of Love* London production, and the song ‘Love Changes Everything’ was released as a single, where it stayed in the UK chart for 15 weeks, peaking at No. 2 and establishing Michael not only as a West End star, but a recording artist in his own right.

34 years on, Michael headed back to the romantic musical, now playing the role of Alex’s uncle George, in a new revival.

“*Aspects Of Love* holds a very special place in my heart,” Michael said. “I am absolutely delighted to revisit Andrew Lloyd Webber’s glorious score in a re-imagined chamber production in the West End.” Over the next few pages fans have shared their experiences of going back to where, for many, it all began...

Production photos courtesy of Johan Persson.

I thought I would share my wonderful experience and some photos. I went to see *Aspects Of Love* on Thursday 1st June. I wasn’t really sure what to expect but wow, what a wonderful show! The cast, music and staging were amazing. The show was made all the more special because Michael Ball plays George. He was superb, gave me chills when he sang ‘Love Changes Everything’.



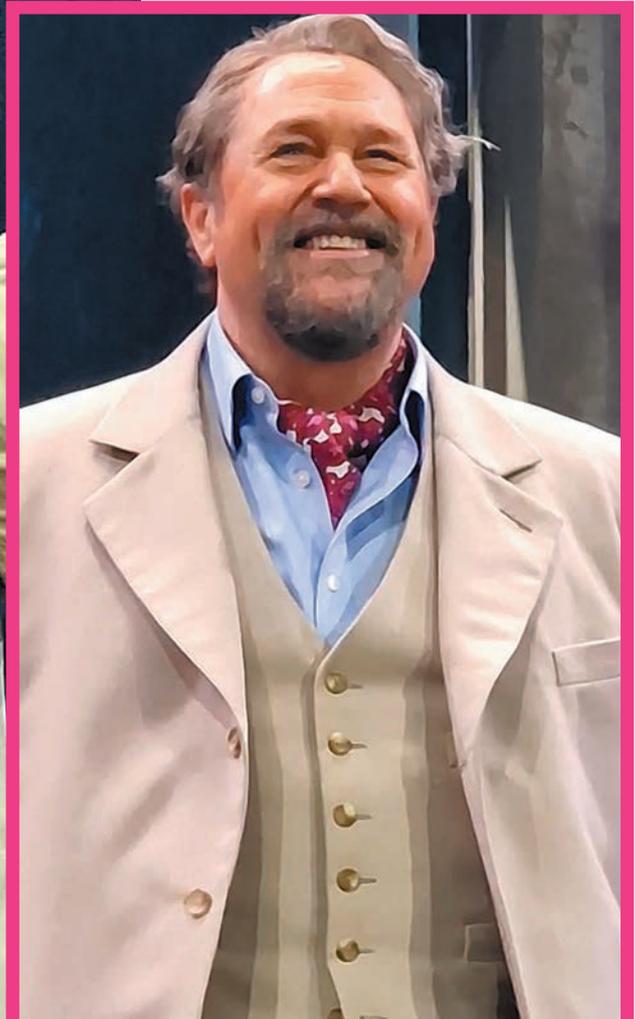
Before the show I had a nice photo taken next to his picture outside the theatre and got a lovely photo with my husband Mark courtesy of The Flower Station. After the show we decided to go to the stage door to see if I could get my programme signed. It was so worth the wait – I got to meet Michael





On 27th May I was lucky enough to see Aspects of Love and WOW – what a show! I didn't get to see Aspects in 1989 so I wasn't sure what to expect but I wasn't disappointed. Clever and beautiful staging (which was different from anything I've seen done before – no spoilers!) an incredible cast who acted their socks off, and great score. Obviously the highlight was Michael singing 'Love Changes Everything', which was breathtaking!

Julie Vidler



We went to the *Aspects Of Love* matinee on Saturday 27th May. We certainly did have a good time. Michael stopped and had photos with everyone waiting and was very pleasant.

The show was brilliant. All the cast were superb and sets and backgrounds were very cleverly worked.

Marie Tierney



I (Suzette) and my twin sister Yvette went to see the matinee performance of *Aspects Of Love* on Wednesday 7th June. We tied it in with our 60th Birthday presents which we were given from a friend – what made it extra special is our birthday is the exact same day and year as Michael's – 27th June 1962!



We had a visit up the Shard and a meal and a glass of bubbly at Marco Pierre White's restaurant which ended the day nicely. The show was amazing, more so as Michael was just fabulous. It was made more special as we got to meet the man himself outside the theatre beforehand. He is just so lovely with the fans. Here is a photo we managed to have taken..what a great day!

Su Trickett





My husband Trevor bought me tickets to see *Aspects of Love* for my birthday. I was very excited, especially as he decided we could go by train instead of him driving, which I find very stressful !

We got the train from Salisbury and had a very relaxing journey to London. My first thought was to make sure we knew where the theatre was before finding somewhere to have a bite of lunch, which we did. We then walked along the street beside the theatre and saw a few people waiting around. I said "let's wait for a while" which I did while Trevor went for a walk. When he got back I persuaded him to give it another five minutes. We were chatting when he pointed out a car pulling up. It was Michael, looking absolutely gorgeous! He was so generous with his time and let everyone who wanted a photo with him have one. I was the last and he was so lovely, as he headed for the stage door he waved and said "I hope you enjoy the show".

He looks lovely on the photo of course while I look silly!

Trevor and I had lunch then headed back to the theatre for the matinee. We loved it, although it is different from the original version. It took me by surprise at times, as I have seen it before and nearly worn out my CD of the original cast recording.

Michael was amazing as Uncle George and putting 'Love Changes Everything' where it is seemed so right. I thought the rest of the cast were great too. I loved the way they did the scene changes, so simple but very effective.

My one complaint would be the ending.....maybe a ghostly Uncle George reprising 'Love Changes Everything' would have finished it off better!

Aspects is one of my favourite musicals to listen to and it certainly didn't disappoint! After the show we had a meal and caught the train back to Salisbury, returning to the peace and quiet of the Salisbury Plains with lovely songs going through my head all the way home!

Penny Gill



I saw Michael at the Stage Door the same as 34 years ago, when *Aspects Of Love* was running the first time around. The show was excellent all the cast were amazing, especially Michael of course. I can't wait to see a few more times!

Shirley Mullins



On Wednesday 7th June I made the 3 hour journey to London to see Michael Ball in *Aspects of Love*. Through information gained from the Fan page on Facebook, I knew he arrived between 12.30pm and 12.40pm. There were a few other fans waiting so I waited patiently hoping to see him.

At 1pm, slightly later than usual, he walked towards us smiling and welcoming us all. Even though he was late, he made time for his fans and happily posed for photos, hugs and a chat. He is such a charming man who gives his own time freely to all his loyal fans.

Onto the show. The stage set is brilliant and very clever. The other artists were all extremely talented and professional. The score is simple but effective. The newly adapted rendition of 'Love Changes Everything' sung by our very own Michael Ball had most of the audience in tears. He was truly magnificent as always. The show ended with a standing ovation from everyone.

After the show I rushed back round to the stage door. After 10 minutes Michael was back out once again to greet his fans. He signed my programme amongst others. He is simply amazing. After a rigorous 2 and a half show he still took time out to see us all knowing he had to perform it all over again later that night.

To say I was on cloud 9 was an understatement. Having met him twice in one day, what an unforgettable day.

Samantha Mason





We went to see Michael in *Aspects Of Love* on Saturday 27th of May for the 2.30pm matinee. We were looking forward to seeing this show again after 34 years of seeing the original – which we didn't get to see with Michael, as he was doing the show on Broadway. We saw the London cast at the time which was wonderful. Anyway, when I heard that Michael was bringing *Aspects Of Love* back to the West End and I also had a special birthday this year, my 50th, I wanted to come back and see Michael performing as Uncle George this time. Tickets were booked and we just had to wait for the time to come.

The day arrived and we wanted to find the badge from the original show, which we did. We dressed up in our best clothes and got transport sorted out in advance. We then got to the theatre stage door and saw the pub where we were going to eat. Unfortunately it was really slow and we missed seeing Michael at the Stage Door when he arrived at the theatre. We really enjoyed the show



– the cast were wonderful and Michael was fantastic as ever. We were so glad he got to sing ‘Love Changes Everything’.

All the songs are just wonderful and the scenery very beautiful too. We felt like we had the best seats in the house too – stalls Row F seats 3 and 4 with no one in front of us and enough leg room. Even with my back problems I wasn’t going to miss seeing Michael back in the West End again! My sister Annette enjoyed it as well and said that Michael was fantastic in the show. We waited at the Stage Door for a while after the show but then had to get our transport home. We did managed to meet Anna Unwin, who plays Jenny, and get an autograph but we were disappointed we had to go and couldn’t wait for Michael.

We bought the programme and a keyring



with the T-shirt of ‘Love Changes Everything’ and *Aspects Of Love* on the sleeve. Michael’s signature song from the show – we hope Michael gets one to keep as well!

Thanks to Michael for returning to the show after 34 years – it means so much to him... and us as well.

Helen and Annette Easton



On Saturday 20th May, my long-term partner John Mitchell and I headed to London to see *Aspects Of Love* at the Lyric Theatre. We hadn't travelled to London since pre-Covid-times, so everything was so very new. I was mesmerised by the hustle and bustle of London's West End. I was so thrilled when the night had arrived, I was in awe from start to finish - the strength and quality of all the voices and actors, just how do they do this so excellently? It was a faultless performance and I was instantly immersed in all the emotion and excitement. I was sat on the front row, it made me feel like I was on stage - every aspect of my entire being was touched. I have absolute admiration and



praise for the incredible talent I had the privilege to witness. John allegedly agreed to come to the show because of me but ended up "enjoying it just as much!" Now that's a statement and a half!

treasured programme with a big kiss and posing for a little selfie. Thank you sweet Michael Ball OBE - from the bottom of my heart - and, like I said to Michael; "I'm glad you came back from the dead!" He chuckled but honestly, his acting is phenomenal as is the depth, quality and perfect soul of his voice... Michael, you melt people's hearts and you do change everything for me. I love you so much lovely man! Thank you for absolutely everything, God-Bless!

Afterwards, a very unexpected bonus... meeting dear Michael at the Stage Door! It was by chance, as we were passing to go for an after-show drink. Despite clearly being absolutely tired out, he was the ultimate gentleman, saying hello, smiling with his gorgeous warm smile and signing my

Alison Dowse





Cheryl Lowe had a great time at *Aspects Of Love* – and not only did she meet Michael at the stage door, she invited him to her wedding by giving him a save the date card!



ASPECTS OF LOVE – A FAN REVIEW

BY CHLOE FLANAGAN



WARNING: CONTAINS SPOILERS IF YOU ARE YET TO SEE THE SHOW!

6.15am – Alarm goes off, usually at this point I'd be hitting snooze and refusing to believe it was time to get up already, but not today! Today I jumped out of bed and quickly got ready, grabbed my overnight bag and got straight into the car. Today is the day I make the drive to London to watch *Aspects of Love*!

As a lover of all things musical theatre and a fan of Michael Ball since my ears were developed enough to listen to music, I had been excited about this trip for months. This is the first time I will see Michael on a theatre stage, live, doing what he does best, and I will be sharing the whole experience with my lovely Mum!

The drive to London was smooth, we checked into the hotel and headed straight back out to locate the Lyric Theatre and of course the stage door! The theatre from the outside looks great. The large sign high up on the wall can be seen from way down the street and highlights the main cast characters, by the doors the cast portraits are on the wall, of course once the matinee crowd filtered into the theatre my Mum and I took our photo alongside the poster of Michael. We then off we went to explore London before it was our turn to be in the audience in the evening.

7.00pm and we arrive at the theatre. The buzz in the queue is magical, everyone so excited and talking to people they have never met before, the doors open, tickets scanned and in we go, grabbing a programme as we head in. We locate our seats in the stalls, Row D 13 & 14 and flick through the program. Whilst we are here primarily as fans of Michael Ball, looking through the programme highlights the quality and experience of this whole cast and production team. If you are visiting this show I highly recommend buying a programme

and having a read about the magnificent efforts that have gone into creating this show.

7.30pm and the show starts promptly. The orchestra begins and we hear for the first time the wondrous, unmistakable sounds of an Andrew Lloyd Webber show. The score to this show, which is completely sung through, is breath taking. Motifs of 'Love Changes Everything' and 'Seeing Is Believing' are entangled throughout and the quality of the musicians in the orchestra are top class. Rose (Laura Pitt-Pulford) opens the show, her voice is effortless and her stage presence is excellent. We soon are introduced to the character of Alex (Jamie Bogyo), who we all know has some pretty big shoes to fill in this show and he does not disappoint. His voice is strong, and he captures his audience immediately. The story moves quickly with Alex falling for Rose immediately and inviting him to spend two weeks at his villa, which we soon discover actually belongs to his Uncle George.

The set quickly changes and we are transported to Paris where we meet George (Michael Ball) and Giulietta (Danielle de Niese). Michael immediately grabs the attention of the audience, his character is mature, commanding, yet fun and slightly humorous. His voice is effortless and tonight absolutely note perfect throughout – couple that with his natural stage presence and acting abilities, he makes for a perfect casting for George! Seeing Michael on a theatre stage is a real treat and one that I will certainly remember for many years to come! Danielle de Niese holds her own against Michael too, her voice is stunning and she portrays this complex character with ease! In this scene the character of George learns that Alex has broken into his villa and he sets off to see what is happening.

We are quickly transported back to the Pau Villa and it is here that the story really starts to unravel. Alex and Rose are involved in a quick and happy romance but Rose quickly falls for Uncle George and things start to take a turn. At the end of the scene Michael sings the song everyone in the theatre has been waiting for; 'Love Changes Anything'. This song, as cliché as it may sound, remains one of my favourite songs of his and this version is just stunning! Words can not do it justice, it is performed to perfection, like you will have not heard it before. It begins with an almost spoken start and grows and grows, he performs this song whilst acting in the role of George, telling a story. The whole audience silent, I am beaming ear to ear while watching in complete awe! As he effortlessly belts out his powerful and well sustained ending note you can hear a pin drop, then suddenly the whole theatre erupts into a huge applause, the longest of the evening by far! Just amazing!

The story continues to unfold, Alex goes off to serve in the forces and two years later returns to see Rose living with his Uncle George. Jealousy gets the better of him and he shoots Rose – not to worry, it is only a flesh wound! George sees Alex is infatuated with Rose and leaves to be with his other mistress, Giulietta, Rose follows George, has a very brief romantic encounter with Giulietta



and then goes on to stay with George. Fast forward 12 years, Rose's career as an actress has taken off, she is married to George and they have a young daughter. George's character here really flourishes as we see the bond he has with his daughter Jenny. The young Jenny, played by Kate Mitton tonight, is incredibly talented and definitely one to watch in the coming years!

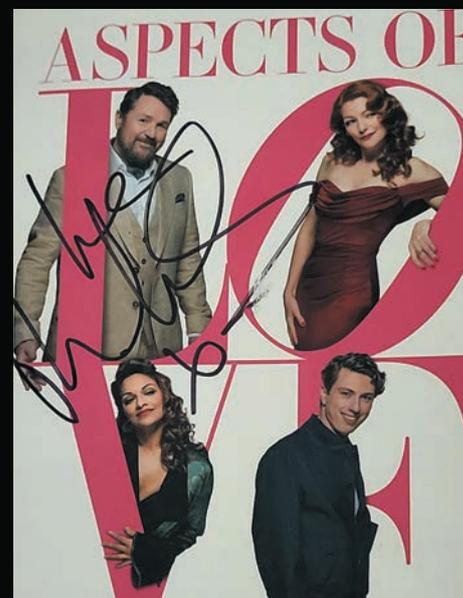
Alex now returns to the scene after watching Rose perform and accompanies her back home to the Pau villa. George is happy to see him and Alex begins to get to know his young cousin Jenny. It is here the storyline becomes even more entwined in a strange and somewhat questionable love circle as it is quickly clear that Jenny is very fond of her older cousin.

We quickly fast forward another 6 years and Jenny is now 18, the same age Alex was when he first met Rose. Jenny, now played by the fantastic Anna Unwin, is clearly in love with Alex. Alex bats her away but she does not give in. They share a brief romance much to George's disapproval, and ultimately the stress of it all proves too much for George and he passes away. The funeral scene is fast paced and the complicated love circle continues, Alex has a fling with Giulietta,

Jenny is furious, Rose is distraught at the loss of George and the show ends with all key characters ending up alone in a rather abrupt ending and the curtain comes down.

The final bows are well received by the audience, all characters are given the appreciation they deserve and of course, and deservedly, the biggest cheer is reserved for Michael. The show ends and we are left to soak up and take in all we have just seen. This show is incredible, with an undeniably strong cast, every actor/performer that enters the stage has a huge impact, no one is left behind. The orchestra, who are located above the set, are fantastic and so well directed by Cat Beveridge, they are perfect throughout. The set design can not go unmentioned, it is clever and stunning. The way the screens are used to quickly transport us from scene to scene is flawless and beautiful. This show may have moments that question your moral compass with the entangled love stories but the staging, orchestration, lyrics and incredible cast make it a show well worth seeing. I booked this show to see Michael Ball, I was not disappointed, but what I didn't expect was to see a show with a cast, production team, musicians and set of this calibre – outstanding!

With the show having ended there was only one thing left for my Mum and I to do – head to the stage door. We waited, not too long, for Michael's exit, he was, as ever, so kind and thankful to his fans, though he must be tired from that breath taking performance. He took time to talk to fans, sign memorabilia and take photos. This man is amazing and we are so lucky to have him! Thank you Michael for this experience tonight, one that I will continue to talk about and look back on for many, many years to come.



HARRISON'S DREAM COMES TRUE



Recently Michael became involved in an amazing story regarding Harrison Holmes, who has cerebral palsy. He has faced unimaginable adversity but has defied all the odds, and recently his dream came true. Mum Joanne Holmes explains:

Harrison was born by emergency three months early, weighing 1lb.06 oz. He was really poorly and endured a whole year of dealing with a rollercoaster of different illnesses, including his body turning black and charcoaled with what was diagnosed as a fatal bowel



infection. It was decided he would finally come home with his family around him to pass peacefully as he wasn't expected to live for much longer. He was ventilator-dependent, his heart was failing, his lungs damaged. The family had already spent a year apart, with me staying with poorly Harrison who was in a specialist children's hospital hours away from home, while his Dad stayed with the elder two children at home. We only got to see each other at weekends.

Financially we struggled with all the travelling expenses but emotionally it was taking an even heavier toll on the family. We decided to rally around and try to raise money to get Harrison home for Christmas. After our local newspaper asked for help on our behalf, our home town rallied around and within a week they had raised enough to buy two ventilators – we needed one as back up, not to mention all the sats monitors, oxygen and several other items of equipment needed on the long list to bring him home. He wasn't expected to survive for long, being so poorly. If by chance he did, we were told he would not have any quality of life, like being able to walk or talk.

As a mum to two other children, the only way I could get through this was to stay positive, so I believed Harrison would live. I couldn't give up and we put all our energy into this thought. We asked for help from family and friends and each one had a role to play in his survival, from physio sessions to feeding, to cleaning, and making sure our other two children didn't miss out. We even had the school head teachers involved and when Harrison got too poorly on days and had to be admitted, they were there, ready and willing to take the children back to their homes for tea, until we could collect them. Harrison was definitely supported by a whole village of people and we

can not take all the credit.

Obviously Harrison's spirit and cheekiness got us through everyday, even back then his sense of humour was evident. With no communication at that point, his party trick to get attention was to pull his tracheostomy tube out, which turned him blue instantly! He found this hilarious when we all had a panic on, we couldn't turn our back for a second!

As Harrison got bigger it was clear his lungs were getting stronger too, as his admissions to hospital got less and less. He weaned himself off the ventilator and the oxygen and started his milestones, eating bits, crawling and even talking. At the age of two and a half he heard his own voice for the first time, when I persuaded doctors to try him without his tracheostomy as it was causing him too many infections.

His first week he started singing and music kept him going from the very start. My eldest son, who was eight at the time, played the violin to him and he always got a reaction. So we knew music was Harrison's thing. If he got stressed or frustrated then we just played songs and he relaxed. This has helped throughout and still does to this day.

We believe his singing has definitely made his lungs as strong as they are today. He's always had a thing too for opera style music and from a young age he loved Michael Ball. He has a huge range of music taste but his absolute favourite has always been Michael!

There's lots of Harrison's story to tell, we could literally write a book. We were asked to go to London when he was eight



and his story was told for the WellChild charity on how being at home can help you thrive. He saw Prince William for private meeting and also Prince Harry. Duncan Bannatyne came for tea at our house! Harrison's become quite a celebrity where we live, with the whole town keeping him supported with his music. He is always asked to sing at local festivals and schools as Harrison just naturally belongs on the stage – entertaining is his happy place.

He just loves making other people happy and loves to see people smiling. He's raised so much for local charities. In 2021 he did the Rickshaw Challenge with Matt Baker, raising over £2 million. He's such a funny, caring



soul and everyone just loves him and wants him to do well.

In lockdown, he struggled with his mental health as he was absolutely terrified (and so were we) for his wellbeing. We just thought he had got this far in life, is this awful virus now going to take him away from us? It was one of the scariest times, even though he's had over twenty eight operations in his life, including heart surgery and other major surgery. This virus terrified all of us and Harrison, being locked behind doors and not seeing his family, really struggled. As a family we decided to keep him going through his music. He sang everyday to our local community through a Facebook community site, singing requests, birthday

and get well wishes. He had so much support from people saying that he was keeping them going. He even ended up having an interview with a reporter in America about it!

Harrison's love for Michael Ball became very well known in our area – a Facebook page was shared around our community to try and help Harrison to meet Michael Ball but after everyone's attempt it still never reached London or came to Michael's attention.

We tried to explain to Harrison how busy Michael is and how impossible a dream like that is. When Harrison left school and college he was really lost as the only thing to offer him was a day centre. Yet again I took to the local community for help in finding Harrison employment, so he felt some self-worth and could say he had a job like his elder brother. That's when offers came in for Harrison to sing at local festivals and events which he really enjoyed. It's all voluntary but he does get so much out of it.

I asked around at local radio stations too, saying his idol is Michael Ball and he listened to him on Radio 2 without fail. I thought this would be a great starting point. I did have a few negatives from this as I was questioned by some about Harrison on radio, with him not able to communicate like he should. However I just knew that Harrison could do it, through his music. It's not always about words and the more you get to know Harrison, then the more you do understand what he's saying.

Our local hospital Furness General, where Harrison has spent some time in the past, offered him a trial on hospital radio. They said the training can



just went along with our days as normal.

About two weeks later I was up a ladder cleaning windows when I had a phone call from Steve Saul from North West BBC saying he can make Harrison's dream come true! I literally nearly fell off the ladder! I got down and kept asking him if it was true, when he convinced me it was, I couldn't stop jumping and screaming. It's just better than winning the lottery, the hardest part was not telling Harrison, as it was a secret until it was all organised. Then it was announced to him whilst he was live on the radio show at the hospital by Steve Saul. Harrison was led to believe that he was interviewing Steve about how he got into radio. Well what a moment that was... a video call from Michael Ball! He said "Now I've been hearing all about this amazing presenter on Radio Lonsdale. At Furness General, Harrison Holmes, it's you I'm talking about! I've heard all about you, you're passionate, you're entertaining, you're kind and you're a real character. Well, I'd like you to show me how it's done. So I'm going to invite you to join me here on BBC Radio 2, right here in Wogan House. Does that sound like a plan? Great! I think you're an inspirational young man. I can't wait to meet you, God bless".

take up to twelve weeks, but actually within three weeks he impressed them so much with his understanding of the technology side that he got the offer to become a member. My husband does step in the with the talking side if needed but Harrison does all the technology side as my husband said it went over his head. Harrison has taken to it like a duck to water though! He loves playing requests and he knows more than anyone what it's like being a patient and how happy a simple song or friendly voice can make you feel at ease.

Our local paper, the Evening Mail, put a story in about Harrison doing his local DJ show, they call it the Harrison Show and just by chance a reporter from Newcastle called Alex read it. He was impressed and wanted to follow it up. He came and filmed Harrison doing the radio show for a BBC reel and asked Harrison during his interview what his dream was. Harrison said to meet Micheal Ball and work on Radio 2. We never thought much more about it. We were so used to Harrison saying this, we





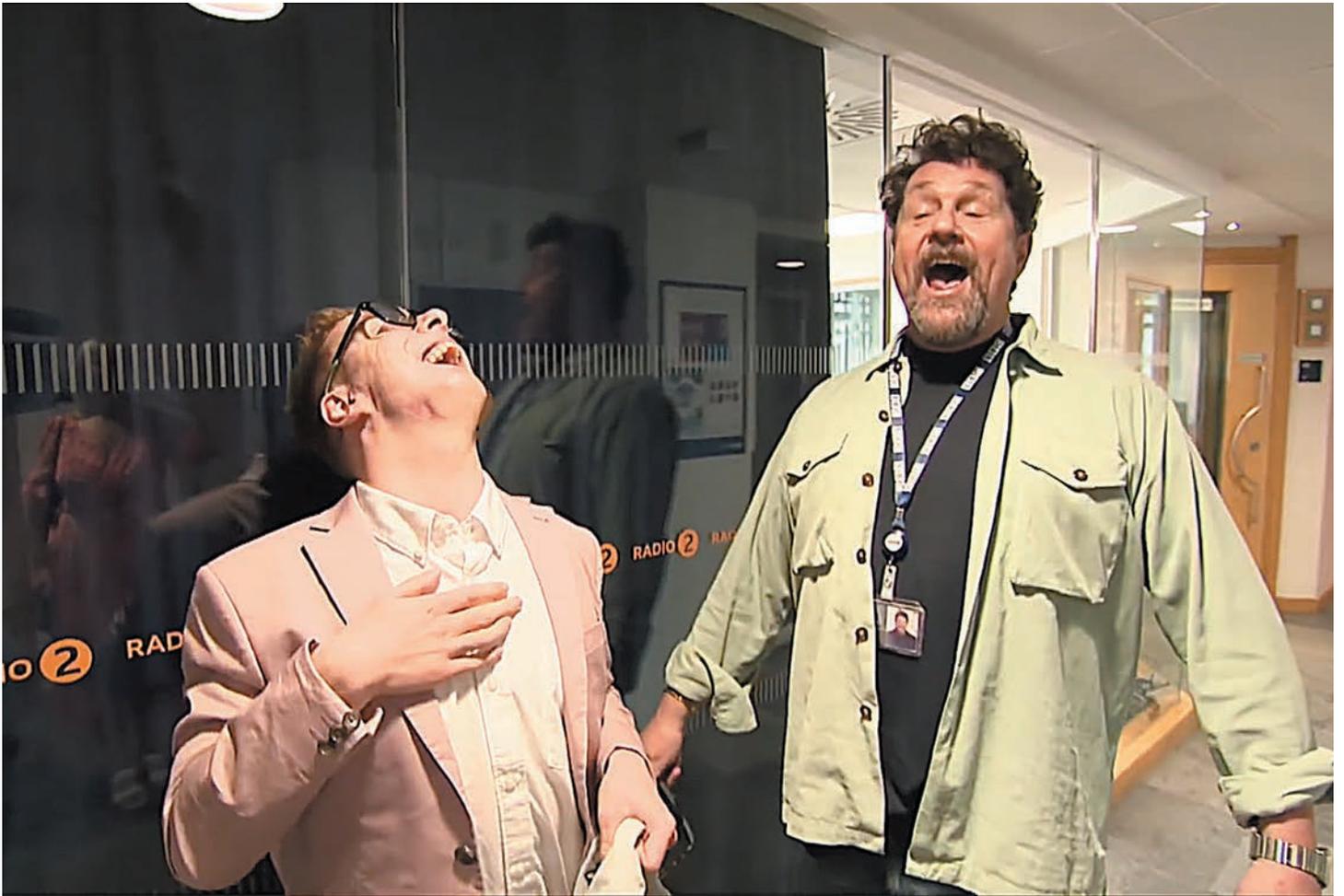


Harrison was so pleased! They set it up that we travelled to London the following week, arriving at Wogan House early in the morning with the TV crew. It was so exciting!

What a guy Michael Ball is. It was like Harrison had known him all his life when he met him. Such a warm friendly greeting and big hugs all round. Michael is a very special man and so genuine and down to earth. Harrison instantly felt at ease and laughed and smiled even kept up his cheeky banter with Michael that had him nearly falling off his chair laughing! Harrison meeting Micheal has been a life changing experience for him. He's fulfilled a dream that we could never imagine would possibly happen! It did, and Harrison still can not believe it!

Harrison now has a new mission in life and it's to have regular visits to Radio 2 with Michael and his guest to put them through their paces. While he was there he received messages from DJ Gary Davies and Alfie Boe, then the BBC even gave Harrison his own jingle! Michael and Harrison then duetted 'Love Changes Everything' in the corridor afterwards! We cannot thank Michael and Radio 2 enough for doing this for him. They have not just shown Harrison that there is hope for the future, but also that you can achieve big things, even if you have a disability. It shows anyone out there with the same struggles – keep on following your dreams, they can come true!





CORONATION FUN WITH MICHAEL

On the day after the Coronation, myself and Julie Vidler went to see Michael at Wogan House. He kindly posed with myself and my flag which had endured its time in the heart of the action on The Mall. It was too good an opportunity to miss.

Myself and Julie had both attended the Coronation the previous day having camped out since late on the Friday. We were joined by Sharon Scarrot on The Mall.

Pammy Aird also joined us outside Wogan House on the Sunday to say hello to Michael.

Nikki Guttridge



Julie Vidler also wrote these lovely poems regarding Michael and the *Aspects Of Love* revival:

*Michael a man with a voice of gold,
An amazing talent that's a joy to behold.*

*From Marius to Edna and characters in between,
He's really a star of stage and screen.*

*On Radio 2 he' 'On The Ball'
if you want quiz fun, give him a call*

*From his West End debut in '85
His music's made me feel alive*

*Since then I've been a massive fan
And go to see him whenever I can.*

*Thank you Michael for everything you do,
You cheer us up when we're feeling blue.*

*Through the fan club I've made lots of friends,
And my love for your music will never end*

Look forward to seeing you in Aspects in May,

Counting down to this magical day!

*Aspects of Love is where it began
When I became, a super-fan*

*From his debut album i got to know,
My love for his music would begin to grow.*

*Les Mis was where a star was born
A talent that, would thrill us all.*

*Amazing music and brilliant shows
What's next for the future, nobody knows.*

*Whatever he does, we're in for a treat.
Michael is someone, no one can beat.*

*From Marius in Les Mis, to Sweeney Todd,
He's an amazing actor who's got the lot.*

*George in Aspects he's next to play,
Looking forward to, the end of May.*

*Can't wait for the next album to hear what's in store
But, one thing for i know,
We'll be wanting more.*

*So Michael Ball OBE
With UK fans and Overseas
A big thank you from everyone
For continuing to be
Our number one star that ever we'll see!*

WHO DOESN'T WANT TO MEET MICHAEL?!

By Jane Cornish

I found this in my Michael photo collection. It was taken at an album signing in London, not sure what year. My daughter Gemma who is now 33 years old was the only lady that day that did not want her photo taken with Michael! I just love the look on his face. Now she's older, she does like a dance to 'One Step Out Of Time' though!

[This looks like a signing for 'One Careful Owner', which would put this photo around 1994 - James]



FAN CLUB RAFFLE WINNERS



On the left is the winner of the most recent Fan Club Raffle, Carole Sandelle, who emailed the Fan Club to say she had safely received "the fabulous box of Michael goodies which was received for me by my neighbour (also a Michael fan). We opened it together and she was as excited as I was!"

Equally delighted was runner up Linda Neal, pictured below, who shared her story with us:

"Many thanks for my prize which arrived today. I must admit it brought a tear to my eye seeing all the older photographs, as that was when my mum kept talking about this very good-looking, amazing singer and how he was absolutely gorgeous and she thought I'd like him. She asked if we could we go and see him. Nothing unusual in all this, other than the fact my mum (who had always had an eye for young good looking men) was no spring chicken at the time and I wasn't exactly young either (married with two children). I bought her a recording of one of his concerts to watch together and I was hooked. I started taking her to concerts whenever I could get tickets and buying the concert DVD's.

My lovely mum sadly passed away 4 years ago aged 92 after a long struggle with dementia and right to the very end she had a photo of Michael and one of his Christmas Cards next to her bed in her lovely care home – always telling people he was her wonderful husband. We had carried on going to Michael's concerts through the years, even when she had to go into a wheelchair. My own daughter started coming along to help me with the wheelchair and she also fell in love with Michael. Now me and my daughter go along to his shows together. My mum would have loved all those photos and I'm so grateful that this prize has just bought back so many wonderful memories of me and my mum. What a truly wonderful man our Michael is in giving so much pleasure to so many people."



BBC RADIO 2 RECAP: THE MICHAEL BALL SHOW SUNDAY MARCH 19th 2023 by Deborah Fezelle

Deborah Fezelle is one of Michael's Stateside fans who writes wonderful weekly recaps of Michael's Sunday morning radio show on The Michael Ball Fan Club Page on Facebook for those who are unable to listen to it or just want to re-live it. The author of five novels, Deborah's next book about her years of training in the Drama Division at Juilliard in 1970's NYC will debut this summer. Most importantly, however, she's an enormous Michael Ball fan! Here she walks us back through Michael's Mothers Day show:

For most of us, our relationship with our mother is a special one. We are connected to them in ways that defy definition. Is it because they had us to themselves for the first 9 months of our existence? We learned to rely on them for everything early on. As we grew, they filled every role for us: Caregiver, personal ATM, short-order cook, maid, chauffeur. They even served as our spell-check advisor and math tutor. Despite this, we thought we were so much more clever than they were, but very little got past them. They saw right through our machinations and attempts to outwit them. Just imagine an ornery little Michael Ball trying to outmaneuver his oh-so-smart mum Ruth. I'll bet she has some hilarious stories to tell.

"I've got a lovely show for you," Michael opens his radio program with familiar words. "Are you ready? Let's crack on with it then." And we're off on another Sunday morning adventure. "Happy Mothering Sunday," he adds. He wants to hear all about your mums. And he reminds us once again that this is OUR show, not his show. Michael does a big shout out to his mum, hoping she got the flowers and the card, and telling her he loves her.

After Ste played today's choice of theme music from *Hawaii 5-0*, Michael was exhausted and needed a lie-down! Well, okay, maybe that music kind of does get your blood pumping.

On the Ball. First contestant is Alex who is the head of drama at a secondary school - which Michael adores. They part company however when it comes to the gym. Alex gets up at dawn to work out. Working out is not high on Michael's list, especially early in the morning. The second contestant is Alex's husband, Steve. Michael is rooting for Steve because of what Alex has to do if he loses. Our man can be oh so vengeful!

Orna has a bad cough. Apparently, lots of people are getting sick around Michael.

He has a leg of lamb waiting at home, but Emma just came down with COVID, so it will have to wait. Michael then complains to Orna about all the road work going on around London. About how it took 2 1/2 hours - 2 1/2 hours!!! - to get into the West End because of road work. There's too much roadwork! Too much! Orna interrupts, wanting to continue with her traffic report, asking, "Can I tell you about a breakdown?" Michael's response: "I'm having one."

Michael's first guest is so interesting I don't know where to start. To begin with, Sam Neill lives on a 12-acre farm & vineyard in New Zealand, and he names his animals after his co-stars in past films. For example, he has a cow named Helena Bonham Carter, a ram named Jeff Goldblum & a pig called Anjelica Huston. Today Michael discusses Sam's autobiography 'Did I Ever Tell You This?' This book is a memoir of Sam Neill's amazing life both onscreen and off. In it he surprisingly reveals he was diagnosed last year with Stage 3 blood cancer (T-cell Lymphoma). While undergoing treatment he had nothing to do, so he began writing this book, and it



got him through, talking about the extraordinary moments in his life. He wasn't sure anyone would even want to publish it, but three publishers leapt at the manuscript, as anyone would expect. As for his illness, Sam Neill is now in remission, which is great news. This interview is rich with information and emotion and straight talk - It's not to be missed. I'm a long-time Sam Neill fan, and I learned so much from Michael's brilliant questions. I absolutely *must* read his book! Michael says he tells such fascinating stories in it.

Michael's next guest, Samantha Barks, is currently starring as Elsa in *Frozen* in the West End, a role she calls a dream come true. She's been in the show a year and a half and still loves every moment of it. This lady's list of credits is endless, including the film of *Les Misérables*. She's also a part of *The Big Night of Musicals* (as is Michael), which is coming up, and



she'll also be performing a special show at London's Theatre Royal Drury Lane on 30th May when she'll sing tracks from her album 'Into The Unknown.'

Michael Ball has always revered the women and mums he's worked with on the stage. But Michael - I'm now talking about "the regular guy," the one who comes to the BBC Radio 2 microphone every Sunday - cherishes the mothers in his personal life, beginning with his beloved Gran whom he still

speaks of with great emotion. His mom Ruth, his sister Kat, his soulmate and partner Cathy and his stepdaughter Emma have always meant the world to him, and he puts them before everyone and everything else in his life. Our guy wears his heart on his sleeve, one of the things we adore about him. He's not afraid to show his love for and devotion to his family.

Today we honor all UK moms, but I want to give a tip of the hat to Michael and his lovely mum

Ruth. Also to the bevy of mums who populate his life. He's lucky to have them, and I can only imagine how much this complex and fun-loving man must mean to them. And before anyone criticizes me for calling Michael complex, think about it. All men are complex, and we wouldn't have it any other way.

As he closes the show, Michael reminds us to cherish those who are our mother figures. And he lovingly mentions those whose mothers are no longer with us. The tenderness in his voice got to me, along with this quote he cited. I freely admit it. He got to me:

"The world changes from year to year
Our lives from day to day
But the love and memory of you
Shall never pass away."

Happy Mum's Day to everyone out there...

PENPALS

The fans below would love to hear from other fans of Michael:

PAT ALEXANDER
email: alexanderpatricia20@yahoo.com

LINDA STROUDE
email: lindastroude4@gmail.com

KATHRYN HORNER

Interested to know if anyone wants to meet up once a month in Wigan?

email: kathrynhorner47@gmail.com

Sandra Rhead
email: sandra.rhead@outlook.com

Sandra would love to hear from anyone living in the Dorset area.

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: **MBFC30**



