

ON THE BALL

Issue 42



Hi everyone,

Here we are with the first issue of 2006, and once again the year has started differently than planned. As you all know by now, the Woman in White closed in February, and Michael returned to the UK to recuperate after a particularly nasty virus.

This means that since our last issue things have been pretty quiet regarding Michael's activities. We joked that this issue should be called "Not Quite On The Ball" and we think you'll realise what we mean when you read on. Quite a few fans made the journey to New York despite knowing that they wouldn't be seeing Michael and in the case of the fan club trip not even the Woman In White! But everyone made the most of it and enjoyed themselves regardless, so we thought you'd still like to hear about their adventures.

The good news is that Michael has made a full recovery and is now busy working on a new album, due for release in the autumn.

We now have a couple of outdoor concerts to look forward to in the summer, one of them being Oakley Hall in Basingstoke. We were lucky enough to attend the launch for this 3 day festival and were shown the beautiful setting where this concert will take place. As you can see we were also treated to a delicious 3 course meal.

We look forward to seeing everyone during the summer - it's been far too long!

Maureen and Gill



Photographs, unless stated, by Sue Wilde, Tina Lockley, Hilary Irvine, Bev Melbourne, Eliza Gentry,

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Dear Everyone,

Well the good news is that I am feeling so much better after my run in with the various bugs in New York. What a great shame it had to end the way it did but I guess no one can predict these things.

I had such a good time out there and we all had such high hopes but some things are just not meant to be. I can't believe how many of you made it to Patience and W.I.W. from all over the world. It meant so much to me and I'm just sorry for those of you who had planned to come and were disappointed.

Now the really good news is that the new album is well underway with some terrific song choices (I think!!). I'm hoping to preview some of them at the upcoming Summer Concerts. I know how you enjoy the atmosphere at these so let's hope for good weather. I can't wait to see you all. It seems like I've been away for ages.

Hopefully we will get the chance to have a proper catch up on everything at the Fan Club Event in Sept. I hope you can make it.

So, until we see each other I send you all my love and huge thanks for all that you do for me. You are the best,

God Bless Dick
x

MY FIRST 'BITE' AT THE BIG APPLE

Let it snow, let it snow, let it snow.....

As some of you know this was my first time ever abroad - and not exactly being the most competent of travellers, I faced this journey with a bit of a challenge (especially with our main man being out due to illness), but nevertheless I made best of the situation and had a jolly good time actually....

So here goes..... Suebee's Journal of her time in the "Big "Frosty Apple".....

Friday 10th February...

Thank goodness none of my friends saw me at 8.20am in the bar in Manchester Airport having a "swift half" to calm my nerves. My hubby and sister-in-law found it all quite amusing because all I could repeat was "What if.... What if...." Such a tragedy isn't it, when you don't have confidence in these methods of transport....

Anyway, we get called to our gate and off we went on our way - little did I realise that this little escapade down the corridor would literally end me up on the plane!

Here I am on this plane at the eleventh hour wondering what the hell am I doing here (couldn't even use Michael as a motivational excuse at this point), but hey I was there, all strapped into my seat and literally ready to go (or was that "throw"). Honestly it was as bad as that!! Anyway, the jet-setter that I am (NOT), tried to take it all in my stride (didn't want to embarrass the hubby or sister-in-law did I?) sat there like a statue and didn't move an inch for about half an hour. The engines start, the plane moves forward and I'm thinking "Oh holy ****, can this plane seriously accommodate my more than voluptuous figure?". Before I knew it we were up in the air and hubby is snapping away out the window (totally forgot about his quivering wifey), and I'm left thinking "There's no place like home, there's no place like home....." (Dorothy Wizard of Oz - eat your heart out..... this was big time stress!!) As the plane was circling and gaining height I thought I'd need my last rites read

because I did not like the feeling of being out of control which I so seriously did at that point! However, the true professional that I am (hahahahaha), took it in her stride and went along with the ride (literally...).

Things did get better - we got fed and watered and I was able to have a little wander around. Almost sounding confident now aren't I?? Once hubby had worked out how to access the online movies and have me listen to "Broadway Radio" I was on my way.

Anyway, the journey was almost done and I was feeling rather proud of myself that I hadn't been a total wreck. Well that was until the landing anyway.... Here was me thinking we'd already landed because all I could see was land (you seriously do have to excuse my eyesight at times), and then suddenly "THUD, BUMP, BANG, SCREECH, EEEKK!!!!".... Well the first two words that rolled (Graham says I screamed, but you can never trust a man) out of my mouth were less than lady-like, but it seems I wasn't the only one.... "A Bumpy Landing" Graham called it..... The Pearly Gates of Heaven I thought I saw I'm afraid....

Ok, so once on the ground I regained this new found confidence..... "I'm in the U S of A... Oh my God!!! I'm here, I've done it!!!" I felt so proud of myself you'll never believe, especially if travelling doesn't affect you. It was a big thing to me though, especially as I had vowed after 2003 never to fly again!

Anyway, to cut to the chase, we headed to our hotel and met up with our friends. Although it was only 2pm New York time, I was running on UK time, which would have made it 7pm. Sorry but I needed a drink - and yes, a few were put away that night (shamefully), but we all had a good time....

Saturday 11th Feb

Saturday morning and I was awake at the crack of dawn. I somehow think this NYC lifestyle suits me because I am

by Suebee

never awake so early in my own country. Maybe I was still on UK time, but whatever it was, it was good!!! (holiday spirit and all that)...

We did lunch at Planet Hollywood and I had one of the best milkshakes ever to help cure my hangover from the previous night. It was great! I had never been there before (Planet Hollywood and NYC that is) and the gift shop leading into the restaurant had my name labelled all over it ...(Tourist Alert... Tourist Alert)....

Lori and Glen then went to see a show so Graham and I went to have a (rather large) expedition (he calls it that) around Toys R Us.... What a Store!!!!.... I sang on Karaoke, then went on the Ferris wheel, bought out the Barbie Store for Lorren and then had our "Marquee Moment" outside the store. Wasn't quite what I expected as they take your photo on the spot (which was cute), but you only have a set choice of words/phrases to be said on screen. Well lucky for me that Valentines was coming up, because Graham got all-romantic and had the following message printed.



Might seem mushy to some, but it was absolutely great to us having our picture and message displayed to the unsuspecting public. A nice moment...

Ohhh heck, did I forget to tell you that I had my photo taken with Count Fosco???? Maybe it's because I didn't want to shamelessly show you that I was in competition for the triple chin award.... (not a good photo Suebee)...



Anyway, that night, several of us decided to go to a Karaoke Bar and have a sing-song. It was definitely an experience for me as I'm used to singing in front of drunken peeps at the local bar/pub, but this was a locked-in-room where you're on show to your friends only. It was seriously scary!!! However, it was so funny and we had such a laugh.

Sunday 12th Feb

9.30am and there was a knock on the hotel door. It was my sister-in-law Paula asking if I'd looked out the window to see the snow. I'd only been in bed for a few hours and admittedly the snow was coming down hard the night before, but nothing prepared me for what I saw out the window that morning. It was amazing!!! Never seen so much white fluffy-stuff in my life! Living in a valley at home, we don't get so much snow, so this was really fairytale material. I didn't realise at the time just how deep it was, but I was totally transfixed to my hotel window and as you can see in the pics, it had no intention of stopping either!



Anyway, we got ourselves together and headed back to the Euro-diner for some Brunch and made plans for the rest of the day. Not sure what the others were up to, but Paula and I decided to head down to Macy's for a spot of retail therapy. The boys stuck it out for about 20 mins before leaving the store to find the nearest pub!!!

Men eh!! Anyway, 4 hours later and x-amount of Pounds/Dollars crammed onto my credit-card, we were ready to drop. Was near on impossible to get a taxi because of the weather, and we were frozen half to death waiting, but eventually we managed to get back to our hotel and thaw out!

We met up with the others in Garvey's for a quick drink and then Paula and Pete took Graham and I for a lovely meal, as she wanted to treat us. Ended up turning into quite a party and we headed back over to Garvey's to finish the night off.

Monday 13th Feb

The snow was still in force, but at least the walkways were now clear, although very slippery, so that put paid to me doing a lot of walking with my dodgy knee. Joyce, Rosie and Mary-Ann went for a lovely Carriage Ride around Central Park (we wanted to save ours for Valentines day), and we decided to head down to Ground Zero and look around Century 21. First of all though we got a taxi to the Apple Store as Graham wanted to drool over the computers (have to keep these men happy) and I wanted a new iPod (much cheaper over there than over here). We found a lovely restaurant close to the Apple-store and had lunch there. Very quaint little place it was with a French feel to it and the staff were really friendly.

We then headed over to Ground Zero and spent a few moments reflecting on the events of 9/11 before heading over to Century 21 to grab a bargain (or two!)

Got back to the hotel at something o'clock and decided to chill out for a wee while before meeting Joyce and Mary-Ann for dinner. With it being our last night, I wanted to spend it with them as it's not every day we get to see our overseas friends and I just thought it would be a nice end to the holiday.

Tuesday 14th February

Valentines Day YIPPEEE!!! But also the day to go home..... BUMMER!!

We were up at 6am and did our packing and were checked out the hotel by 10am. Ever since we planned our holiday for NYC we decided between the 4 of us that we'd love to take a Carriage Ride around

Central Park on Valentines Day. So there we were, sat in our beautiful carriage and Pete sneaked in a bottle of wine and 4 plastic cups (courtesy of the Milford Plaza), for us to have a glass of wine whilst taking in the beautiful sights around Central Park. Was really quite romantic and just perfect.

After that we decided to take a taxi to the Empire State Building to take in the views before heading back to the hotel. I absolutely loved it up there and the sights were to behold. The sky was clear and the sun was shining and it was such a perfect and fitting tribute to our time in NYC.



Soon it was time to say goodbye to the Big Apple and make our way to Newark Airport. Our flight was to be an overnight one and I can't say I was particularly thrilled about that.

However, it wasn't as bad as I thought and I much preferred that to the morning flight as I couldn't see out the window period, so there was nothing to get scared about. Two glasses of wine at dinner followed by a sleeping tablet and I was out for the count for 3.5 hours. Made it a very short flight indeed! At least the landing was somewhat less stressful and I was happy to be on home-soil and to see my kiddies again.

They were thrilled with all their toys and gifts and it made the trip all the more worthwhile to see their beaming faces once again.

As to whether I'll fly again – ask me another time!!!

NEW YORK CITY FAN CLUB TRIP

Despite knowing that they wouldn't be seeing Michael or the Woman In White everyone decided that they would still go ahead and take the trip. It appears they also had one extra passenger as you will see from the photos!

Pictures by Tina Lockley



Gazing out from the 102nd floor of the Empire State Building



Barbara, Helen, Anne and Jean share the bear



First arrivals - Barbara and Michael Bear at the hotel



Acting cool by the ice rink at the Rockefeller



Cheering up Wendy, who was in hospital with a kidney stone



Michael Bear and his harem coming home



Michael Bear pictured with Nora and Shirley



All packed and ready to go



The phone hasn't stopped ringing - everybody wants this t-shirt



86th floor of the Empire State - don't drop me Helen!



A dodgy looking pair with a cool looking bear!



Waiting for the boat on Liberty Island with Kathryn



I need chocolate Barbara!



My audience awaits!



Am I the retail therapy?



What do bears wear under their kilt...?

A TALE OF TWO AUSSIES... AND THREE CITIES!!

As told by Hilary Irvine... footnotes by Bev Melbourne.

What a great city New York is, Bev and I both loved it. Thankfully it wasn't too cold at all when we were there - mind you we were very well rugged up with gloves, scarves, plenty of layers and coats.

We would never have gone without the incentive of seeing Michael. So glad that we did. We just had the best time, seeing a bit more of Michael would have made it perfect but we were both determined to have a terrific holiday regardless. We were blessed to see him when we did, I know that others weren't as lucky. Getting to talk to Michael at the stage door (on three occasions) and seeing him once on stage with Maria were definitely the highlights of our holiday.

We got to see eight other Broadway shows during our stay. Apart from WIW - the highlights were Jersey Boys, Wicked, Spamalot and Chita Rivera (now there's a legend!). It was almost impossible to get tickets for Wicked and Jersey Boys but we persisted over a number of days and were finally rewarded with great seats for Jersey Boys (5th row centre orchestra) and a bit further back for Wicked but good seats nonetheless. We just loved these shows. Jersey Boys because of the music of Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons and Wicked was just so much fun and the costumes were brilliant. For some of the other shows we were lucky enough to get the "half price seats" option at the



box office in the middle of Times Square. What a magic place Times Square is. The first night we just stood there, totally gobsmacked, taking the whole thing in.

Our hotel was on 49th street and the Marquis was on 45th street. Being so close to everything we walked everywhere. Just loved Central Park which we walked around for six hours



one day and still didn't see it all. Tavern on the Green was brilliant, so beautiful. Would have loved to have seen it at night but ran out of time. On the second last day we had a carriage ride around the park. Bev didn't get the snow that she so desperately wanted to fall there - it must be a Queensland thing. I live 2 hours from the Snowy Mountains and was happy that the jolly stuff stayed away. We also get snow in Canberra most winters so it's no novelty for me. I see that since we left that they have heaps of it - timing is everything, isn't it?



On each Monday that we were in NY we took a bus ride to the two closest cities Washington and Boston. Washington reminded me a lot of Canberra, a very planned, beautiful city. We took a tour of the city and Arlington Cemetery, which was amazing and very moving. Magnificent views of the city from there also and this was followed by the obligatory stroll past The White House - very impressive. In Boston Bev finally saw snow. Just brilliant!! I have



this memory of sitting in a bar in Boston, waiting for a tour bus, shoes and socks off trying to dry them at a heater. Isn't it great when the snow turns to slush and you have no option but to walk through it to get to where you want to go? Just love that!!!! However, apart from that memory I loved Boston and must admit that the snow looked great - from out of the bus window, very pretty!!! I'm glad that we took the time to go to these cities it was really worth the effort. When I first thought of the 4 hours each way journey I must admit to not being very enthusiastic about the whole idea. My partner in crime is very persuasive!

Footnote: As Hilary is a member of the "if it's moving - I'm sleeping" club - those 4 hours each way passed very quickly for her. Oh and by the way - I first saw my longed for snow two hours before we reached Boston, - shhhh - don't tell her!!

Other places we visited were Staten Island, Statue of Liberty, Central Station, Rockefeller Centre, Radio City Music Hall, and the Chrysler Building and walked across the Brooklyn Bridge. Caught the (free) ferry to Staten Island and I was ready to go back almost as soon as we got there - it was cold and miserable! However, my persistent friend decided that we go for a hot chocolate at a nice little internet café that we found. We got on the Forum to read all the gossip while sipping our chocolate and eating a lovely toasted "bun" that the nice man had prepared for us. The whole thing, including the internet time, cost us just over \$8 - we had been paying \$6.90 for half an hour on the internet in NYC. The nice man also told us to catch a bus to "Snug Harbour" which was being visited that

day by the Mayor of New York. On the way out of the café I commented to Bev how cheap the café had been and asked her - the keeper of the Privy Purse - how much she had tipped the nice man? Oh S***! said Bev, quite eloquently I thought? Anyway off we went to find a bus to the harbour and on boarding found that they only took coin - we didn't have any! "Oh go on, then" said the nice driver. Got to the harbour and it seemed deserted except for several rather official looking people who kept telling us to "move along" "come this way" etc., until we got to a nice lady with a clipboard who asked us for our names: How friendly, I thought and wondered if I should ask for hers! When we told her she informed us that they didn't have us on her list. (FBI and NY cops starting to look really suspicious by this time!) Explained that we really hadn't expected to be on their list!! Thank goodness they seemed to realise that it had just been a bit of a misunderstanding and we were allowed to look around - albeit watched carefully by men in big black coats with wires hanging out of their ears and quite a few of NY's finest. As we hadn't had the opportunity to spend any money we still hadn't any coins to give the (other) nice driver on our return bus trip!! That was definitely the cheapest day of the whole trip!!!



Seeing the Statue of Liberty was something that I never imagined I would ever do. When we went to get our tickets for the ferry we were told that there were no more tickets available to go inside the Statue that day. Apparently tickets are like gold dust now after 9/11. So there we were at the Statue taking the compulsory photographs when we started talking to this very nice policeman - who just happened to have been in Australia a few years earlier and was quite partial to

having a nice chat. Moved on from there and was standing taking photographs when said policeman came up and asked if we had tickets to go in. Of course we didn't but he said to see him back there at 3 pm and he would see what he could do. Went back at the arranged time and true to his word our new best friend had been able to organise some passes for us. How good was that? Unfortunately you can only go up the top of the Pedestal these days but it was still well worth it.

Footnote: During our very enjoyable lunch at Sardi's one day - our waiter was chatting to us and asked if we had heard of the Hunger Monument??? No we hadn't - "nor have most people" he replied and proceeded to give us directions.

A couple of days later we went looking for it and after walking around in circles for some time decided that our waiter may have been "having a lend". We eventually found it and there in the midst of skyscrapers/priceless real estate and not far from Ground Zero was this very simple but amazing tribute to the millions of Irish souls who either perished or left their homeland during the potato famine - a very special place..... to be sure!!

We really enjoyed spending time with all the other fans that we met in NY. I can honestly say that everyone was lovely to us and it was great to have the time to either have a meal or a drink with most of them. We just loved our nightcap at the hotel with "the Bunnies" Julia and Kerstin (from Germany) - what lovely girls, and what a fantastic last night in NY. They stayed until 3 am and we had to get up at 6 am the next day to catch the plane home! Luckily we were able to sleep on the plane to Japan.

Footnote: Have to confess that I was the first to nod off this time - you know that you're tired when you fall asleep as the plane is taxiing out to the runway.

In conclusion we both loved New York. Thank you to Michael and to the others who helped to make a trip of a lifetime.

News From The NABA

Hello to the Michael Ball Fan Family!

We here at the North American Ballfest Adventure (NABA) would love to be able to bring you news of our gathering this year... sadly though, there will not be one.

After some careful and agonizing consideration, the NABA has elected to suspend operations until further notice. Many, many factors were taken into account in reaching this decision.

First and foremost was the escalating cost of travel both abroad and domestically. We are finding that the majority of you are more inclined to spend your money to actually go and see Michael than to follow us around the country... and that is the way it should be. Additionally, with the disbanding of ROC on December 31st 2005, we no longer have an active charity that both we AND Michael support.

We do wish to express our heartfelt thanks to the many people who have supported us through the years: our attendees, our crafters, Gill, Maureen and Pat from the Fan Club, Brian, Gavin and of course Michael himself. With all of you helping we managed to raise over \$20,000 to support Research into Ovarian Cancer. You can all be very proud of yourselves.

Please be assured that we remain committed to Michael and his career. With Michael casting an eye across the pond occasionally (and following with body and voice), the chances of actually seeing the man in person have grown greater and we want you to take advantage of that! Who knows, perhaps there will be another Salt Lake City down the road. Rest assured, we will be there and we hope to see you there also!

We urge you to keep up the spirit of Ballfest... the laughter, the camaraderie, the silly games, the 2am Margarita runs (optional, of course) and most of all the warmth of knowing you belong in a great, big, beautiful international family...warts and all. We will look for you soon, we hope. Until then we remain...

Ballfestingly Yours,
Lynn, Sharon, Lora and Patty
The NABA Committee



WHEN LIFE DOESN'T GO ACCORDING TO PLAN

by Eliza Gentry

When *Woman In White* was announced, I knew that it would be a great chance to see Michael. Since New York City is only two and a half hours from my home, I had originally made plans to see the show 4 times – the first time during previews, the second time with my two daughters, the third time with a group of co-workers, and one final time when I had front row seats for my birthday. It's a bit over the top, but New York is so much closer than London that I decided to splurge. Little did I know what the future would have in store for me!

Two of the trips went as planned, and they were great fun. During previews, I met up with Chris from NYC and attended a Sunday matinee. What a special day we had! It was warm, and we were the only ones at the stage door waiting for Michael before the show. We were having such fun chatting that Michael walked right by us – imagine that! But when we spotted Andrew, Michael stopped and came back to say hello. I enjoyed the show – Michael was fantastic, and Lisa Brescia, who was in for Maria Friedman, was also excellent. However, I must say that the video sets took a little getting used to.

Jill Paice



Then came the first change to my plans – I was able to go to opening night. What a magical experience! I hadn't planned on attending opening night, but I was talked into a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to be at an opening night performance with friends. So I quickly ordered a ticket. Then I heard that Lila had an extra one – and I jumped on the chance to bring my eldest daughter who is also a huge fan of musical theatre. She is a bit of a dreamer, and I shouldn't have been surprised that she missed the train, lost her ticket, and left her map of NYC at work... Needless to say, our plans to meet for dinner before the show were cast aside, and we were on cell phones: to replace the ticket, and to provide directions so she could find the theatre. Eventually, she got to the theatre 5 minutes before the curtain rose. There were a lot of fan club members there, and several exchanged seats so my daughter and I could sit together. I enjoyed seeing Maria Friedman as Marian, with her energy and stage presence, she brought the role to a whole new level. All the performances carried well to the back of the theatre – we could even see the pool shot that Michael took (keep practicing Michael!). Of all the performances, I thought Michael and Maria's really held the show together, followed closely by Ron Bohmer as Percival Glyde. After the show, the best way to describe Michael was that he was radiant. He was excited to be there, the performance had gone well, and the audience enjoyed the show. I was so excited about the show that I returned for cheap seats at the Sunday show a few days later!

The last trip that went as planned included my two daughters. They have been away from home for several years, and we planned a Girls Night Out over Christmas

Daniel Torres



break. We spent some time shopping in New York, and enjoyed local eateries, including a deli that served a sandwich with a whole pound of meat! Once again, we were the only ones at the stage door before the show, and Michael walked right by us, without any of us noticing. You'll notice a trend – twice Michael has walked right by me! My daughters were embarrassed by standing at the stage door, but I had a nice hello from Michael, and he acknowledged the girls with a tip of his hat. Little did I know that this was the last time I would see Michael in the show.

The next trip was a long awaited chance to introduce some good friends to Michael's performances. We had planned for everyone to take a day off from work in early January, and enjoy New York. Of the 10 original participants, only 1 successfully made it to New York and back. The reasons were many: a business issue prevented me and several of my staff members from going, several others had to work in the morning and missed the train to New York, and one friend broke her foot in New York while walking to the show. We all scurried around and found people to take some of the available tickets. Ultimately seven women went and they all had a great time. They raved about the show, enjoyed Daniel Marcus in the role of Fosco, and couldn't imagine how Michael could be any better. Because of the success of this trip, we have plans to see *Les Miserables* when it opens in the fall!

Later in January, I happened to be in New York City, on my way home from a business trip, and I was able to stop by the stage door when Michael arrived, and enjoyed



chatting with some fans, but I needed to get back to Philadelphia, and was sadly unable to attend the performance. It turns out that that was his last performance.

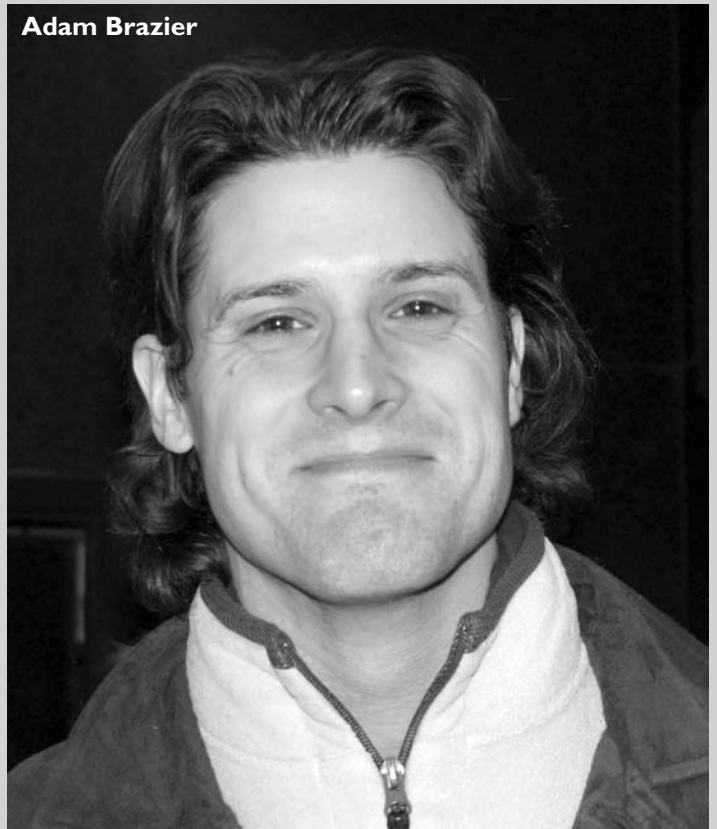
A few weeks later I went to two shows knowing that Michael would not be there. In the middle of February, I went to New York to meet good friends who had travelled from the UK. We enjoyed lunch at Planet Hollywood, then a matinee, followed by dinner at Bubba Gump. This time, Norman Large was Fosco, and he played the role so much darker than Michael, that it detracted a little from the plot. With his characterisation, the chemistry was missing between Marion and Fosco, and it wasn't plausible that Fosco would let Marion go, rather than simply kill her. At the stage door, I took time to chat with some of the other

actors. Maria Friedman, Adam Brazier, Jill Paice and Daniel Torres were particularly friendly.

I travelled to New York one last time, to re-take a picture with Pat Webb with some of the cast. I'm glad I went, as it was a chance for me to see the show with Daniel Marcus as Fosco. Daniel's Fosco was much closer to Michael's, and I was able to see what my co-workers had raved about in January. Needless to say, I thought Michael's portrayal was the best of the three, but Daniel's was a close second.

Although the show closed before my birthday, I'm not disappointed. I look back at the fall and winter, and realise what a unique experience it was to have Michael in New York for both *Patience* and *Woman In White*. In my wildest dreams, I wouldn't have thought that I'd attend opening night on Broadway for one of Michael's shows. I never thought my eldest daughter would see him perform, yet she saw him perform three times – once in *Patience*, and twice in *Woman in White*, including *Opening Night*. I'm glad I was able to take advantage of the opportunities to see him in the theatre, and I hope he is able to return to Broadway in the near future.

Adam Brazier



NEW YORK CITY, AND A HUGE 'THANK YOU' TO MICHAEL!

by Michelle Rasdall

My 9 year old daughter, Hayley, was sulking as she had wanted to see *WiW* in London but didn't get chance to see Michael before he left. Each time I went I was staying over with friends so she missed out – and then NY was announced! Further sulks had followed when I 'nipped over' for *Patience* in October so I decided to surprise her and book a trip for January... just the two of us... for our first 'girly' trip away without her brothers or daddy!

Well, what a wonderful weekend! The flight out was the worst I had ever

been on. Halfway through serving the meal they said the turbulence was so bad that they would have to stop serving or someone was going to get hit with a flying wine bottle!!! Still, Hayley was fine and we got to the hotel (the Marriott Marquis) to find we had been upgraded with a fantastic view over Times Square! Hayley was so cool about the whole NY bit and just took it all in her stride. She was at home right away and has totally fallen in love with the place. Friday she woke up at 4.30 am and didn't go back to sleep until Midnight!!! In the space of about 6 hours she had dragged me to Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island, used the subway, (which she loved), walked to Ground Zero, then subway again to Empire State Building....up to the top and down again.... then walked back to the hotel by 4 pm.... just 5 mins after we got back to the room (mum was exhausted and begged for a rest!) we received THE PHONE CALL!

(To digress a moment I run a ballet school and have raised several thousand pounds over the years for ROC, which we adopted as the school charity (well a 21 year MB addiction has to have a good side as well!). At the end of 2005 I had a cheque for £1000 for ROC but before I could hand it over we received the news that ROC had closed! As I was going to NY, I took a note addressed to Andrew (MB's PA) and asked him to ask Michael which charity I should give it to, and told Andrew that I would be at the stage door the next night so he could let me have an answer back to the phone call.....)

We had just settled in for an hour's kip to catch our breath when Andrew rang the hotel room and said that Michael would love it to go to The Royal Theatrical Fund, oh, "and would we like to pop in for a few mins at 6.30 pm that night and have a photo with Michael!" I don't know who jumped higher on the bed, Mum or Hayley! Knowing Michael

has been ill and in fact had only been back for 4 shows, we really didn't even know if he would be in the show, let alone have a few minutes for us as well!

We waited inside the stage door area and Michael arrived at 6.40 and to be honest he didn't look well. He came in, and said "Hi Hayley, you're gorgeous (in that voice that makes you go to jelly!), thanks so much for my money but what I really need is a kiss" and planted one on her cheek! (well, yes OK I got one as well). We had some photos taken with the cheque (which are terrible as the flash didn't work but I didn't realise until later!) and had a chat for a while. Michael said he had been better but was feeling rough again and didn't know if he was going to make it for the weekends shows. He had lost loads of weight and said the Fosco face hardly fitted him now as his cheeks were getting hollow!

As my friend Karen had not been able to make the NY trip, which was to have been her 40th birthday treat, Michael very kindly recorded a 'Happy 40th Birthday' message for Karen on my camera. We had a bit more chat than he had to go. However before he went (it was really role reversal time) he turned to Hayley and said "don't suppose I can



Hayley with Adam Brazier

have just one more kiss can I?" She blushed like mad and said yes please! (bless her) ... and then he said "and we can't leave mum out can we...?" and with that he headed off to make up.

Hayley floated out of the stage door with a huge smile on her face (not to mention her mum's face!) and we went to watch the show which I personally thought

was better than London; tighter, more slick, better costumes and a wonderful 'Walter' (Adam). Michael, as expected 'put on a good show' and was as fantastic as London, just a bit more 'greasy' and definitely more sinister. However towards the end he was obviously beginning to feel a bit rough so cleverly changed the end to some of his big notes.



Hayley with Maria Friedman



Hayley and Jill Paice

I don't suppose regular audience would have noticed but I did worry he had come back too soon to the show. We were in the front row and during the show both Adam, Maria and Jill all kept smiling at Hayley and waved to her at the curtain call. After the show, Maria made a great fuss of Hayley at the stage door, kept cuddling her, asking if she felt ok after the long flight etc. Then Jill came out and asked Hayley if she would like a photo. She bent down to her level and said 'now do you know which one I was ...' and they then had a lovely chat. Finally Adam came out and poor Hayley is, for the first time in her life SMITTEN (sorry Michael!) She blushed, she flirted and when he got down on his hands and knees to be next to her for a photo it was just the end! I said to her afterwards, now you know why we all do the stage door to which she just smiled, knowingly for the first time!

Poor Michael came out and said he really wasn't well and that he wouldn't be doing the rest of the shows that weekend. In fact, he didn't do any more and we had actually been as his last performance as Fosco.

So Michael, thank you so much for taking the time to make a little girl's trip to NY so very special, even when you were not feeling well. It meant so much to Hayley and I was able to put the photo on the notice board of my ballet school so that all the pupils could see where their fund raising ended up for 2005. It really was a trip to remember and we even went back to see the show on the Sunday, knowing that Michael wouldn't be in it but loved it just as much (well almost).

We've added a small post script opposite, to Michelle's article

which is from the friend Karen that Michael kindly did the birthday message for.

WONDERFUL 40TH BIRTHDAY SURPRISE

I was really disappointed not to be able to accompany my friend to New York in January. I was all set to go when work basically pulled the plug (as luck would have it I would have seen Michael's last performance.) As this was to have been a 40th birthday present from my husband it made the situation feel worse.

Imagine then my surprise when on my birthday I received a card with a cd inside and instructions to load immediately onto the computer. As I am a good girl and do as I'm told (or curiosity got the better of me) I did.

You could have knocked me down when Michael appeared on the screen wishing me a happy 40th and blowing me a kiss. I can't tell you how much I appreciated this and my heartfelt thanks go to Michael for making the time to do this when I know how rough he must have been feeling. Also to Michelle and Hayley for making it all possible.

As if I hadn't been spoilt enough my husband bought three very lavish tickets for my friends and I to go to Oakley House in July as a birthday treat, I think everyone concerned has done more than enough to make up for my disappointment in January for which I can't thank them enough.

Karen Johnson

WITNESSING BALL ON BROADWAY!

by Kathy Chelsen. Photos by Cheryl Curran

In December 2004, I made plans that I would take my job-required long-term break in November/December 2005, so that I would be able to spend Thanksgiving and Christmas with my family in New York. Little did I know then how fortuitous this decision would be.

Flash forward to the summer of 2005...after weeks of speculation, it was finally announced that Michael would be returning to Broadway after a 15 year absence to create the role of Count Fosco in the Broadway production of *The Woman in White*. Maria, Jill, and Angela were also going to be in the New York cast, with Maria and Jill making their Broadway debuts. Opening night was going to be November 17. I was finally going to be able to see Michael on Broadway!

The first of my several visits to the Marquis Theatre came the night after the show opened. It was lovely to meet up with so many friends at the stage door, and meet some of the New York cast. I had a strong sense of anticipation as I took my seat that first night, and I was not disappointed. Maria, Jill and Angela were all in fantastic voice. It was interesting to see different actors playing the roles of Walter, Mr. Fairlie and Glyde. Adam Brazier impressed me with his portrayal of Walter. He seemed to really connect emotionally with the character. I was stunned



to see tears on his face as he sang "Evermore Without You." Walter Charles and Ron Bohmer both had deeper singing voices than their London counterparts. I was especially taken with Ron's portrayal of Glyde. Whereas Oliver Darley seemed to keep a tight reign on Glyde's emotions throughout the show, Ron was much more demonstrative. Indeed, during the document scene he unleashed a temper so furious that one almost believed Glyde would have all but killed Laura right then.

Michael was simply outstanding. His voice was much fuller and richer than when I had last seen him in the role, seven months earlier in London, and the accent even more pronounced. The change from jovial bon vivant to calculating schemer was a bit more jarring in New York, because some dialogue changes showed the audience that Fosco was not as fond of Laura as he seemed to indicate in the first act. Michael really shone, however, in his final scene. His interaction with Beatrice brought about the predictable reaction from the audience -- laughter and some trepidation as he picked her up. His voice soared as he sang "You Can Get Away With Anything". Then came the seduction scene -- somewhat shorter than it had been in London, but no less filled with tension as Fosco thought his dreams had come true, and pressed forward with making Marian his own. When Fosco ultimately realised that she had played him for a fool, the switch from paramour to rejected suitor was startling and chilling. The venom and derision in Michael's voice as he sang the words "old maid" sent a shiver up my spine.

The audience that night really seemed to enjoy Michael's performance. As he left the stage singing the end of "You Can Get Away..." the audience was enthusiastic with its applause. When Michael came out for his curtain call that first night, the gentleman sitting next to me gave him a standing ovation, as did several others. The reaction to his performance was similar on my subsequent visits.

On my next two visits to the show, I brought my niece, Danielle and my sister-in-law, Trish, respectively. Both times we visited the stage door beforehand, as I wanted both of them, Danielle especially, to see Michael as himself, since they would find it hard to recognise him on the stage. Michael was lovely with Danielle, and she really enjoyed meeting him. When I talked with her after the show, she said she found it hard to believe that the man she saw at the stage door was the same person who was in the fat suit on the stage. Danielle enjoyed the show, but did admit it wasn't really her favorite style of music. Trish, on the other hand, really enjoyed it, and thought Michael was fantastic. She, too, had trouble believing it was the same man.

Having seen the show a few times in London, it was interesting to overhear some comments from the people around me on my various visits. Mostly it was speculation about the secret, but I did hear a few nice comments about Michael here and there and nice comments about the show in general. Trish and I ended up sitting next to a couple who were fans of Michael -- if I remember correctly they had seen him in *Aspects of Love* in NY. During the intermission we talked about Michael's career, and this couple commented that they



owned the only concert of his on Region 1 DVD -- the RAH concert. I took the opportunity to let them know that Michael's *Alone Together* Concert had just become available on Region 1 DVD earlier that month.

On another visit, a Wednesday matinee, I had several older women seated around me, who, unfortunately, tended to whisper among themselves during the second act. When Michael picked up Beatrice in his final scene, I heard one woman loudly whisper, "is that real?!"

Little did I know that the matinee would be the last time I would get to see Michael as Fosco. My final visit to the show was during Christmas week, by which time Michael had been out for a couple of days. I was disappointed, naturally, but I was pleased to have a chance to see someone else in the role. I thought Norman Large did an extremely fine job as Fosco. He really captured the spirit of the character, and his scenes with Maria were extremely well done. I also had the privilege of seeing Maria's understudy, Lisa Brescia, twice in the role of Marian. Lisa has a beautiful voice, and was excellent in the role.

Like everyone else, I was shocked and saddened at the way things turned out not only for Michael but for Maria and the rest of the cast. I thought *Woman in White* was a wonderful show, and was sorry that it just didn't seem to find an audience in New York. I am glad that I was able to see the show in New York, as it introduced me to many wonderful actors, people I hope to see again on stage in the near future. In the meantime, I look forward to whatever Michael has in store for us next.

LOOKING BACK.....

We thought we would start an occasional look back at some past issues of On The Ball and where better to start than Issue 1 which was produced in September 1992.

EUROVISION SONG CONTEST



Well, what can we say about the Eurovision Song Contest? We all know Michael was the best performer there and he should have won, but there's no accounting for taste!

Two of our members, Lien van der Horst and Simone Tak, from Holland were lucky enough to go to Malmo for the song contest and we thought you would be interested to read some of their comments about it.

"After a thirteen hour voyage by land and sea we finally arrived at our hotel. We were a little tired but also very excited.

The next day, we went to the 'Isstadion' where the Song Contest was to be held and you won't believe it but there were some tickets left for the rehearsal that evening.

Needless to say we had a great time that night. Michael's performance was more than outstanding. But what's more, when Michael came on stage, we got up from our chairs and started cheering so loud that Michael looked our way and started waving. Of course we waved back with the English flags we had bought and when the music started we regretfully had to sit down again but had a hard time in staying in that position, especially because we sort of imitated Michael's moves during the song. You can guess what happened after the music had died. Yes indeed, same story. We jumped up from our

chairs again, waved the flags and Michael threw us a kiss. When he then got off the stage we realised that everybody in the audience were gazing at us, so we slowly sat down in our chairs again.

The following day was the big day and as it progressed we got more excited. The doors of the Isstadion would open at six thirty but we started dressing at four. We couldn't be late.

A journalist interviewed us and took our picture for a big newspaper. We must say that they looked funny when we said that we came from Holland, because we were holding the Union Jack.

Anyway, about the contest again. Well, as you have seen, he came on stage and gave it all. He started singing and we could feel that everybody was impressed with his voice. And that's quite an achievement, because there was a sort of competition between the majority of the Swedish audience and the audience of the other countries. But the fact is that nobody could get around Michael. When he's there, he's there. And whether you like the song or not, his voice intrigues. You heard for yourselves what happened when the song had ended, what a noise!

But what you didn't see is that just before Michael left the stage again, he showed his appreciation towards his fans by making a fist and sticking his arm in the air. He was very confident, and so he should be.

As you know, Michael's song didn't win, but ended second. Now this is of course a wonderful and great achievement. We think we speak for all of us, he is and always will be number one."

Thanks very much to Lien for such a detailed account of her trip to Sweden, it made us wish we had been there!

BACK ISSUES

A few years ago we sold off all our back issues of On The Ball up to issue 24. Since then we have accumulated quite a few more and thought it was about time we had another clear out! Below is a list of what is available with some issues having quite limited stock. If you are interested in purchasing any of these back issues please send a cheque or postal order, made payable to the Michael Ball Fan Club and send it to MBFC, PO Box 2073, Colchester, Essex CO4 3WS, UK. Prices are as follows:

Issues 24, 25, 26, 27 and 28 are £1.50 plus postage and packing per issue which is 50p for UK, £1 for Europe outside UK and £1.50 for the Rest of the World.

Issues 30 – 41 are £2 plus postage and packing per issue which is 50p for UK, £1 for Europe outside UK and £1.50 for the Rest of the World.



On The Ball Issue 41 was sent out to Fan Club members on 16 December 2005. It features reviews of "Patience" along with "Woman In White" in New York, plus a lovely long letter from Michael.



On The Ball Issue 40 was sent out in September 2005 and features several reviews and photos from the 2005 Tour.



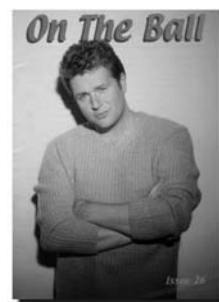
Issue 38 of On The Ball - issued back in December 2004 - featured reviews of Singular Sensations at the Haymarket Theatre in London, as well as a back cover photo of Michael dressed up as Jean Valjean.



On The Ball Issue 37 contains reviews from the Fan Club Event of 2004, plus various concert reviews including Salt Lake City, Bolton and Llangollen.



On The Ball Issue 32 has lots of Chitty reports adorning the pages of this issue together with a report on Michael's ROC concert at the Palladium.



On The Ball Issue 26* contains some reports from Michael's PBS appearances, the filming of "This Time It's Personal" and the 2000 Tour.



On The Ball Issue 36 covers Michael's first ever tour of Australia and performances of Sunset Boulevard in Cork.



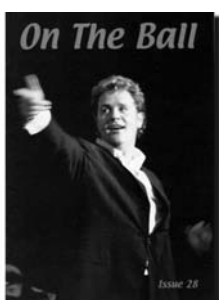
On The Ball Issue 30 was a special souvenir issue to celebrate the fan club's 10th birthday, which looked back over the years.



Featured in On The Ball Issue 25* is the 2000 Fan Club Event as well as concerts in Edinburgh and Chippenham.



On The Ball Issue 35 covered the 2003 Tour being filmed and followed by a concert at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden. You can read all about it in this issue.



On The Ball Issue 28* featured a "look back" article that focused on the first time we saw Michael perform in Phantom Of The Opera.



On The Ball Issue 24* was the first issue of the new millenium and looked forward to the 2000 Tour as well as the fan club Event.



With Michael extending his run in Chitty Chitty Bang Bang, On The Ball Issue 33 contained more stories from fans near and far who travelled to see the show.



On The Ball Issue 27* covered Michael's first concert in Australia at the Lyric Theatre in Sydney.

** Issues marked with an asterisk are one of our older style issues and is in A5 size rather than A4*

THE ROYAL THEATRICAL FUND

As you know, Michael is a Director of the Royal Theatrical Fund and since Christmas we have passed on over £300 in donations. Here is part of their acknowledgement:

"On behalf of the President, Chairman and Directors please accept and perhaps convey our most sincere appreciation to the fans for their generosity. Your donation will help us to continue to provide support, advice and some degree of comfort to other less fortunate members of the Profession."

Maria Friedman Update

We're delighted to tell you that Maria is doing great and after taking a short holiday will be appearing for a season (May 2 - June 3) at the Café Carlyle in New York. She will then return to London to start work on a new show in the Summer.

I PETTED HIS FURRY PRECIOUS!

by Judy Lynn



Michael and Judy

Dinga and I had a wonderful time in New York and I actually got to pet his "furry precious" (this is how Michael referred to his rat during the tour). As the handler was bringing her in her cage to the stage door he stopped to chat and I asked if I could pet her. He actually opened the cage door and she came right to my fingers and was so sweet, sniffing them and wondering who I was! When Michael came, I told him I petted his furry precious! He looked startled at first, then smiled and said, "So you petted my furry precious, did you?"

He then touched my boa (scarf you will see in photo) and said "This is very pretty." I forgot to tell him I had made it. Then, I finally had a chance to show him the bracelets that I had made, one of photos I took in Salt Lake City and one from the stage door at Patience. He twirled them around and smiled and thought it was great fun. Then, (am I in Heaven or what?) he pushed my sweater sleeve up a bit and asked what my tattoo was of. (I am proud of myself, I did not show him my other tattoos - I was a lady for once !)

Dinga asked if it were too cold for a photo and he said of course not. So I was first and as he held me, Dinga said something like gaze into her eyes, he pulled me closer (sigh !) he winked and said, "just take the picture!" Then it was her turn to be in his arms. As he went to the only other fan there, a gentleman who wanted him to sign things, I remembered I had forgotten to give him his present and said "Michael, wait, I forgot to give you

your cookies!" He then looked again at me and remembered they were the potato chip cookies and he said he enjoyed them but he really shouldn't have them, but he took them anyway. He was just wonderful.

After the show we waited again, and it was turning much colder. There were a few other people there so Dinga and I held back. I just complimented him on how much I enjoyed the show and told him I was glad that Reginald hadn't completely gone away - and told him he was a shamelessly wonderful scene stealer. He enjoyed that and said, "I am, aren't I!?"



Dinga and Michael

A RETURN TO THE WOMAN IN WHITE by Arlene Freedman



One of my recent trips to NYC was the middle of January when I took the train up from Philadelphia to spend 3 days with some of my Michael friends. It was on a Thursday that I

arrived and Michael had just returned to the stage earlier in the week from his illness. Thankfully, I was able to see him in the show both Thursday and Friday nights. I had seen him

perform a few times before during this Broadway run of WIW, but felt very honoured to see him again after this siege of sickness.

A special thank you to Lila and Cheryl for our good times together (and to Dee for the same good fun last November) Also to Linda, Lori, Gretchen, Carol D, Bev, Hilary and Laura. Forgive me if I left anyone out. Some of us (I won't say who!) went to Macy's for a glamorous makeup job. We also took a carriage ride in Central Park, carried on like kids in FAO Schwartz and on the ferris wheel in the Toys R Us store on Times Square. Walked on 5th Ave. and Madison Avenue, shopped, had a few drinks, took a very looo-ong subway ride (unintentionally might I

add), stagedoor, saw WIW, shared laughs and drowned our sorrows in a few pints of ice cream after Michael sadly emerged from the stage door and told us he was ill again.

I wasn't ready to go home when my husband and two of our friends came up Sat. to spend the day in NYC and take me home. Each time I spend even a few days with my Michael friends the days seem to fly they are so full of fun, excitement and the warmth of friendship.

Girls, thanks for the sweet memories. Can't wait to repeat some of them with you soon!

Photo by Linda Doffek

THE MICHAEL BALL FAN CLUB ONLINE

You can find our website at

www.mbfc.co.uk

Our site has recently been given a revamp and features a very active forum where many a debate has gone on between fans from all over the world. You can also find all the latest news and photos - why not check it out today?



MOVING HOUSE?

Don't forget to let us have your new address so you don't miss out on any important information

Please remember to enclose a stamped addressed envelope if you want a reply to your letter

INFOLINE NUMBER

UK Members:

0871 221 7811

Overseas:

+44 8707 422224

PEN PALS / TRAVEL TALK

This section is for those of you who either want to meet up with fellow fans in your local area or get in touch with people from further afield. Maybe you want to find a travelling companion or maybe you simply want to arrange a get together to chat about Michael. To be included simply drop us a line with your details at our usual address.

MARK GILLIGAN
hummelcreche@netzero.net

Apologies to Mark as we got his email address slightly wrong in the last issue of On The Ball.

PEARL ROUSE
FLAT1/132 SUTTON ROAD,
ERDINGTON, BIRMINGHAM, WEST
MIDLANDS B23 5TJ

Pearl was lucky enough last October to speak to Michael in a radio phone-in on Capital Radio. However, she didn't get a recording of the conversation and wonders if anyone out there has one that she could have. She would love to hear from you if you can help her.

JULIE THOMASON
59 HEReward GREEN,
LOUGHTON, ESSEX IG10 2HF
Tel: 07766 942461

Julie would very much like to hear from anyone who is able to give her a lift to and from the Oakley Hall concert on 20 July. She is more than happy to share the cost of petrol, etc.

CHARLOTTE BROWNE
34 CLOVERDALE CT, LYME REGIS,
DORSET DT7 3ED
Tel: 01297 448272

Charlotte would love to hear from the person who took a photo with her digital camera of her with Michael at the stage door of the Woman In White on 2 April last year.

