

ON THE BALL

Issue 43



Hi everyone,

We can hardly believe that the summer concerts have all come and gone and by the time you get this issue we will have had the event. You'll be able to read all about that and the wonderful Anthony Newley tribute concert in the next issue, but for this one we focus mainly on the open-air concerts.

They started in Scotland at Crathes Castle where Michael gave his first concert in over a year. It was a beautiful evening and still light when we arrived back at our hotel at around 10.30pm. This was followed by a very warm night in Bath, an even hotter one at Oakley Hall, with Southport just scraping in with nice weather. This all changed the following day in Dyffryn Gardens where it rained relentlessly from 4pm until well after the concert finished. Not that anyone let it dampen their spirits!

We're now gearing up for the release of Michael's new album in October called 'One Voice'. Having been treated to a few of the tracks already we know you're going to love it. There is also the compilation DVD for release in November, which features a newly filmed "unplugged" section, to look forward to.

Maureen and Gill



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Dear Everyone,

Well its the day after the event and what a fantastic time I had there. I just hope you enjoyed it as much as I did. Gill and Maureen and their families obviously worked so hard to make it happen and by all reports I think it must have been the best yet. I can't wait for the next one and I'm sorry if my rabbiting on for so long made you miss your train/bus/plane.

It was just wonderful to see so many of you having such a good time and if you weren't able to make it this time I hope you can in the future. I felt so special and deeply honoured by all the lovely things that were said and the support and love that was shown to me and each other. You are all so special.

Summer is over, sadly, but I really enjoyed all the concerts and seeing so many of you again around the country. I now can't wait for the album/D.V.D. release and to get the feedback from you all.

I had such a good time putting it all together and hope that all the effort was worth it and it meets all your high expectations.

The Anthony Newley B.S.C. concert was a revelation for me and if you get a chance to hear it would love to know if you enjoyed any of the songs and think we should include them in the upcoming March / April tour.

It looks like we've got a busy time coming up (which is just how I like it) and I'm really excited about all the new plans we have. I hope it won't be too long before I see you and from the bottom of my heart I send you my thanks, my love and my devotion. It's a 2 way street for us both and I hope I never let you down.

Good Bless and take care.

All my love


X

Michael Ball
FAN CLUB

BATH - LIVE IN CONCERT WITH ELAINE PAIGE



Bath – one of the most glorious cities in the UK – was the backdrop for Michael's first full-length concert collaboration with one of Britain's greatest female musical theatre stars, Elaine Paige. The venue was the Bath recreation ground which in other words is the Bath rugby ground converted into an outdoor auditorium for this three day music festival.

During the afternoon Michael's voice could be heard floating around Bath as they rehearsed – how wonderful to walk around such a beautiful city and have a taster of what was in store for us that evening. The weather was perfect which complemented the two artists performing that night.

This was truly a shared concert – from the very beginning when Michael and Elaine came on stage to the strains of "One Night Only" you could tell this was going to be a very special evening. When you get two performers who are both at the top of their profession it seems to bring out the best in both of them and this is certainly what happened at Bath.

They obviously both have great respect and admiration of each other's talent. There was plenty of banter between the two of them as the show progressed which caused great hilarity amongst the audience especially when Michael departed after one of their duets and Elaine called out "Missing you already" only for Michael's voice to come back from behind the stage "I'm not far!"

Of course musical theatre had to feature very heavily in a concert with Michael and Elaine and they didn't let us down. From 'Evita' through to 'Chess' and 'Sunset Boulevard' the hits just kept on coming as it was a fantastic opportunity to highlight some of the great duets from the musicals including "I Get A Kick Out of You" and "You and I" (from 'Chess'), "The Perfect Year" (from 'Sunset Boulevard') which ended with such a long kiss we were all left feeling very envious of Elaine! Michael entertained us with (amongst others) "This Is The Moment", "Gethsemane", "Hero" (from his forthcoming "One Voice" CD), "Anthem", "Love Changes Everything" and "The Show Must Go On", while Elaine

performed most of her well-known songs including "Don't Cry For Me Argentina", "I Know Him So Well", "As If We Never Said Goodbye" and "Memory". They finished the show with the duet "The Prayer" complete with Michael singing in Italian. All in all this was a perfect way to spend a beautiful summer evening.





CRATHES CASTLE

by Debbie Norris

It's been a long weekend, but so worth the effort taken for the journey and the planning. How could I not go to this, Michael's first concert in over a year? I had the time (I have lots of time) and could stretch to afford it (almost!). I'm just wondering now, what took me so long to decide to go!

It was wonderful to see Michael performing live in concert again, especially considering all his health

problems from earlier this year. From the first notes sung off-stage - "I Was Born To Love You..." - it was clear his voice was in very good shape indeed!

As he always promises, the concert took us on a journey, a journey of romance, passion, drama, tears and laughter, with some dancing thrown in for good measure.

I travelled up to Scotland the day before, and met with my friend

Marie, on Saturday afternoon. We had return tickets booked on a special concert bus trip, and found our way to Broad Street for the 6pm departure. By this time, the clock was ticking too slowly, and I was anxious to be at Crathes, not in the city centre. It seemed to take forever to get there: I tried to enjoy the scenery, but I just wanted to be there!

We finally arrived about 10 minutes after the gates had opened, so there were already lots of people in attendance. The setting and the weather were perfect. A warm sunny day, ending in a balmy evening, and, best of all, the midges disliked my citronella and peppermint spray. My waterproof could be put to a better use than keeping me dry: it could be a ground sheet beneath the blanket. We had a good uninterrupted view of the stage; wished we could have been closer, but it wouldn't have been practical to have arrived any earlier. Besides, the regular bus service would have dropped us a mile or more away, and I couldn't have walked that far, not on those hills. So, content with what we had, we settled back to enjoy the show.

Two local musicians gave a 20-minute or so set. They were good, and I'd have taken more pleasure in their work if I hadn't been so eager to see Michael! After an interval, familiar faces from past concerts made their way onto the stage; a few different band members, but there was Callum McLeod to conduct, and Annie, Dean and Shena, to sing back-up. It's been a long year since the last concert, and it was good to see them all again.

As soon as Michael made his appearance, the audience was on its feet, clapping along to "I Was Born to Love You", and a surprise second song, in "One Step Out of Time". He did say he wasn't going to perform this one again: it is fun in concert, though I'm not sure it entirely works so early in the show. It's great to have an up-tempo beginning to get the audience revved up from the start, but perhaps this one belongs in party time. It will be interesting to see if Michael keeps "One Step..." in the

repertoire for the rest of the summer shows. Don't get me wrong - not a criticism - it was fun!

A change of tempo, with the lovely "When You Tell Me That You Love Me". Would that I could remember the exact order - "As If We Never Said Goodbye" was a very welcome reprise from the 2005 tour. This was a song I'd suggested would be suitable for Michael some time before, and the altered lyrics make it absolutely perfect for the context and for his voice. For the first time that evening he was able to give leash to the full power of his voice - always a thrill to hear that - and the line "I've come home at last" had added oomph, and was greeted with a great cheer. His success in America is a great pleasure to me, but I have missed him over here!

The first new number of the evening was "Hero", not one I know well, so I am particularly looking forward to this on the forthcoming CD. Michael introduced the number by saying he had planned to dedicate it to the England football team, but as they'd just lost their World Cup quarter final match, it didn't seem appropriate. Not much support for England amongst the largely Scottish audience

Whilst in New York, he had spent some time with Stephen Sondheim, and I was delighted to hear him reprise two of my favourite Sondheim numbers, "Not While I'm Around" and "Being Alive", the latter being another song I've requested of Michael several times

More concert favourites with "Walking in Memphis", and "This is the Moment", and another new song, "Home". Written by Michael Buble, this one is perfect for Michael Ball. He said he was pleased to occasionally be mistaken for Michael Buble, as he is such a great singer.

Having heard "Home" on his Radio Wales interview with Aled Jones last week, it's already a new favourite of mine, and was beautiful in concert. Difficult to be away from home and all that home means for a

long time, but good to be on the road for short bursts!

I think "Music" was next. This was a terrific highlight of the 2005 tour, and I was very curious to see how it would work outdoors, in daylight, and without Lucia Macarelli. I am pleased to say, it worked fantastically well. It is such a dramatic piece, and the band were great. And who needs Lucia on violin, when you can have Michael Ball on percussion? During the second non-vocal section, Michael made his way to the back of the stage, and holding up a drumstick, joined the percussion player for some thunderous pounding! Afterwards, he said "I played the drum. Do I get paid more for that?"

A fluffed line in "Empty Chairs" didn't throw him off: I suspect he's been spending most of the rehearsal time working on new material, but it is over a year since he last performed this one! He still makes it so moving, even after all these years.

"The Show Must Go On" and "Life On Mars" were very powerful, both so dramatic and perfectly displaying Michael's ability to perform rock with a very rare vocal clarity. He conveys so much meaning in everything he performs.

A change of pace with another new song to his concerts, with the Eagles' "Desperado". Michael told us that he'd had a great night out seeing the group in concert a couple of weeks before. He was really impressed with their live show, and has recorded another of their songs for his next CD.

I had removed my shoes earlier in the evening, but the slow intro to "Don't Stop Me Now" gave me warning that it was time to put them back on. Party time was here, and we were "having a Ball"! For the Queen song, "Dancing in the Dark", and a new one to Michael, "Since You've Been Gone", we were all on our feet, clapping along. I can't wait to hear how Michael has recorded this Rainbow classic. It wasn't exactly head-banging, but he was rocking!

Seated again for another change of pace and mood, we were amazed and thrilled when Michael said he'd heard "on the grapevine" that some fans wanted him to perform a piece, made famous by the King. He'd only had the opportunity to rehearse it once, so he hoped it would work. He began to sing Dixie, but a mistake was made, and he hoped we didn't mind if he started again. We didn't mind at all! He said he would only sing it if he could get it right, and he did. When "The American Trilogy" was discussed on the Forum recently, I wondered if it wouldn't be a bit of a holy cow. It is very American, obviously, and Elvis had made it very famous. All my doubts have vanished, having heard Michael sing this. Like Elvis, he has those warm tones, and the ability to move quickly and easily between an intimate voice and great expressive power. It was fabulous. If you've ever sat on the grass for a concert before, and you're not as young as you wish you were, you'll know it's not so easy to give a standing ovation as it is when you're in a theatre. But he got a much-deserved standing ovation for this!

Staying on our feet for the finale, we were treated to "The Wonder of You", another Elvis Presley number that Michael has managed to make his own. We knew it wasn't really the last number, as "Love Changes Everything" could not be omitted. He was just teasing, and returned to the stage for that, and the last number of the night, "You Raise Me Up", which he dedicated to all of us present. "You" in the song could be a love, a spiritual entity, or an audience, lifting the performer. After all the powerful notes hit throughout the night, after all the midges, and the up-tempo numbers, Michael's voice came through in those honey smooth tones that just go right through you. How does he do that?

MICHAEL BALL - QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Michael takes time out to answer questions from the fans....

Name: Elizabeth Lamb

Question: Now you've conquered dancing in Chitty is it something we'll see much more of you doing? (How about following Lesley Garrett into the Strictly Come Dancing scene?)

Not if I have anything to do with it! I don't think it's my natural... I love moving around the stage. I love getting into things. I'd love to be able to dance, I really would. In fact I did a private show for the Red Cross and they had Ian Carr and Camilla Dalrymple there and she took me through my paces a bit and I really enjoyed it but it will be a guilty pleasure that I may not share. But if the show came up that required it of course I would do it – or have a stunt double!

Name: Linda Sharf

Question: I live in South Florida, but would travel anywhere in the US to see you. You are the best singer ever! Will you be coming to the US anytime soon?

Not to perform at the moment, I have no plans at the moment to come and perform but of course I want to and we're looking at doing some concerts there next year.

Name: Ella

Question: Is it just a rumour, or is Andrew Lloyd Weber really working on a movie version of Aspects of Love?

I have no idea about this. He seems to be putting most of his stuff on film. Whether I would be involved? I think even with the best lighting in the world playing 17 year old Alex may now be a bit of a push. But who knows? Uncle George might be the role for me (laughter). Of all of his shows I think it would make the best film.

Name: Rosalee Mohney

Question: Will you ever schedule a tour that would bring you to Seattle? All you would need do is sing a piece from Les Mis and hearts would melt everywhere!

What a lovely thing to say. I'd love to go to Seattle. I'm a big fan of Frasier, you



have the best coffee and apparently it rains almost as much as it does here in England, so I would feel very much at home and I know there is a great Seattle posse out there. So yeah I'd love to come there.

Name: Forrest

Question: You are an amazing performer all around. I am aspiring to be an actor as well. Do you have any advice for me and others pursuing this career?

The only advice I can give anybody wanting to pursue a career in this business is - first of all develop a very thick skin, second work as hard as you can and do as much as you can in as many different fields as you can. And watch as much as you can, you learn so much from watching other people perform. That's certainly what I did, and get as much experience as possible on stage, even amateur dramatics, putting on stuff with your friends, doing workshops, going to classes, whatever, and be prepared to face rejection because it happens to all of us whatever stage we are at in our careers, but when it works there is no better job in the world. It isn't a job it's a joy, so go for your dreams always, even if they turn into nightmares (laugh)

Name: Ashley Hope

Question: In some of your recordings, I can detect a really sincere Country & Western feel - and it's gorgeous. Would you ever consider doing a Country & Western album?

Well I did an album called 'This Time It's Personal' which had a lot of country and western kind of songs on it, and on a number of other albums there have been little nudges towards it. I love that kind of music - I make no bones about it. There's a great synergy - they're looking at each other because they don't know how to spell it! (laughter) (flipping cheek! G & M) - between doing musical theatre and country because they are songs that are story songs, they are lyrical songs, they are songs from the heart, they tackle big emotions just as musical theatre songs do, and they usually have great great melodies and great arrangements. I'm a big big fan of country and western, so well spotted, yes I do lean towards that in quite a number of the vocal performances I do and will continue to do so.

Name: Lynne Jennings

Question: Michael, I have seen you in concert and I think you have the most amazing voice. I have heard you sing some Elvis songs on your albums and was wondering if you have ever thought about singing American Trilogy as I think apart from the King you would be the only performer who could pull it off and do it justice.

I've actually sung American Trilogy, not for years and years and it is the most phenomenal piece of music, so maybe you've put a good idea in my head, maybe I'll revisit it at some point, it's quite nerve wracking though when you try and sing a song that's been done so definitely as American Trilogy has, but if enough people would like it and wouldn't take the mickey out of me for doing it then maybe I'll give it a go (laugh). But I have sung it and yeah I'm a huge Elvis fan, I think he has a superb voice and great taste in songs, I'm a real fan of the latter stuff as well, the 60s and 70s, I like Vegas Elvis I really do, from the comeback onwards, If I Can Dream, and all of those great songs.

Name: Reg

Question: Are you English or Welsh? It would be nice to think that an Englishman could have a voice like yours!

Alright let's set the record straight. I'm Welsh. (laughter). My mum is Welsh –

and if you go by – I don't know what the laws are but in the Jewish religion you take on whatever nationality or religion that the mother is. I've always had a huge affinity for Wales. Technically I'm not, I'm English, I am very proud to be British. I don't think I am going to differentiate between the two unless it comes to rugby and war. If we go to war or we fight an international on the rugby pitches I'm a Welshman. I am supporting the English football team – I don't think there's any point in supporting the Welsh, but I'm a big fan of watching the English football. But yeah I'm British but I have Welsh ancestry and I'm very proud of it, so I'm a Wenglishman.

Name: Clare Haley

Question: What is your favourite role that you've played? Where does being Marius rank on the list?

Marius ranks really highly on the list because it was the first West End role that I did. It was such a well written part in such an extraordinary musical and to be the first person to get the opportunity to play it was a wonderful experience. I have to say for sheer joy nothing I think will beat Reginald Bunthorne in *Patience*. I have never had so much fun on the stage in my life, it was outrageous what I got away with and I'm so glad I did, it was hysterically funny. I've really been blessed. I've loved all the roles I've played for different reasons. Caractacus Potts was brilliant fun. *Giorgio in Passion* that was a tough dark role, I loved it and Alex of course in *Aspects of Love*. I could go on. I've been really lucky there's no role that I've said I don't like it, but if it's for pure unadulterated fun then our man Bunthorne's the bloke.

Name: Ariel C. Bethany

Question: Forgive this being such a broad question, but of all the songs that you have sung over the many successful years, do you have a favourite?

I go in and out of what my favourite song is. I love singing *Gethsemane* but I don't do it in every concert because I think people will get tired of it. I love singing *Boy From Nowhere*, so no I really don't have a favourite song, whenever I'm doing a concert and there's normally different songs and different routines in them there's usually one I'm really looking forward to singing. I do love Joni

Mitchell's song *River*. I've always said that, I think it's one of the best recordings I've ever made, for personal reasons. I just think that song is a masterpiece.

Name: Sal Marsden

Question: As you lead a hectic lifestyle how do you ensure a normal family life? More importantly when are you coming to Australia again?

As soon as I can I want to come back to Australia and we are looking into going back there and touring and releasing a new album down there. But no dates are actually set. I know it's horrible when you hear that but we are planning truthfully we are, because I had the best time down there, but it's getting the right promoter and getting the time to go down there. As far as having a normal family life, as soon as you come home and close the door it's a normal family life. It's hard being away from home it really is. I've recorded a song on the new album that explains how I feel about that. It is hard but the up side is so enormous and this is the business I've chosen to be in, and all you can do is treasure the normal moments – you know the family meals, the family holidays, and never take them for granted.

Name: Bryce Bartu

Question: Do you still keep in touch with all the cast members from *Les Misérables*? I know you probably get this question all the time. I just recently got into the music and am floored through every listen. I was just wondering whether or not you guys hang out every now and then. You guys created something unbelievably special to me. Thank you.

I'm so glad that you loved *Les Mis* obviously as much as I did. The thing about this business is you go from show to show and from company to company and you become very close, like a family and then you move on to the next show and they become your family and you become very close to them. But there is something very special about *Les Mis* and all of us in the cast, whenever we see each other, or run into each other we have such amazing memories and it always ends up in a big old party. We're not in daily or weekly contact but I've seen Colm a lot, Frances Rufelle, Rebecca Caine, Alun Armstrong, just about everyone, those from the chorus. The great thing about *Les Mis* because it's

run so long there are so many reunions we all get to see each other again. It was a phenomenal first cast and because *Les Mis* has gone on to be the success it has we feel very proud to have been part of the very start of it and have such fond memories of it, so yeah I count them all as my friends.

Name: Amaria Spivey

Question: I love to sing and I've never had any training, but I've heard that you haven't either. What do you do to keep your voice so wonderful? I've always been told to do vocal warm-ups before a performance, but I also heard that you don't know any. So, what do you do right before a performance? Is there some sort of a routine you always do? Thank you, I hope you are both doing well. You're amazing!

Well, I haven't had training, that's absolutely true but I do do vocal warm ups. I think it's very important to do that, you can't just walk on to a stage cold and do it, even if it's just sitting around in the dressing room while you're getting your clothes and your make up on, humming and stretching your voice.

The vocal chords are a muscle and you have to limber them up. If you're going to do a race you have to stretch your body out, if you're going to do a concert, you have to be warmed up. You kind of find that the more you use your voice the stronger it becomes, and the more you do a concert tour for example, you get what we call your "chops" which is your voice and body get used to singing the songs you are singing so it doesn't require as much effort as when you are first hearing it and first learning it.

I would advocate if you are starting doing it there's no harm in having singing lessons as long as you hold on to your personality, if you don't it becomes all about technique because singing is all about your heart not your head, especially if you are singing contemporary musical and pop songs. It's a whole different matter when it comes to opera and classical music. Yeah you have to take care of yourself. We're all human. We all lose our voices, we all get colds, we all get tired and a lot of the time you can push through that and work through that. There are times for all of us when we can't, but you can't abuse yourself too much when you're working hard, and yes, always warm up, that's my advice.

OAKLEY HALL

20th JULY 2006

By Trudy Bradburne



I don't know why, but when I haven't seen Michael for ages I tend to go "off the boil" to some extent. I don't mean I go off him – I play his records throughout the year and I am still very interested in his career and visit the forum to see what's going on pretty much every day.

However, I always seem to forget over the course of several months just how brilliant a performer he is when he is on stage. It's over a year since I saw him last (Hammersmith, June 2005) so when I set off from Yorkshire to Hampshire last Thursday morning my only thoughts were "Oh, no! All that way and in this heat too!"

I always seem to forget how much it's all worth it (though obviously never enough to stop me from booking!)

Well, it was a long hot journey all right and all I wanted to do when we got to our hotel was not to visit the undoubted delights of the beautiful

Hampshire countryside but to have a lie-down on the bed! (An air conditioned room – what bliss.)

I had gone for one of the £85 tickets. Although the idea of the higher priced hospitality tickets is somewhat controversial, I had decided that the idea of not having to queue or run, together with a "welcome" drink, a buffet and an allocated seat sounded like good value for money.

It was too. Not only was it very pleasant to have a table in the marquee where you could chat in comfort to other guests, but the meal itself was excellent and the service was extremely good. I won't be able to afford that every time but, if I am able to, then I would do it again. It was lovely to meet up with friends and I spent a very pleasant hour or so before the concert.

I was very fortunate in getting a decent seat at the end of a line. Being 4'11" tall this is always a very welcome

bonus! Normally I take my seat and then watch out for the 6'9" giant coming in. That's them I think. The one that's going to sit in front of me!

The seating was rather amateurish I have to say – a bit like a school assembly, with no tiered or raised chairs. I noticed some people deserted their seats to sit on the raised grassy banks at the side. Thankfully I had no such problems and I had a perfect view but I did feel for those I met later who had had some trouble in seeing.

Julian Lloyd Webber was really good as of course you would expect. My husband particularly enjoyed the performance as he loves cello music. I don't know why but I had always thought Julian seemed a bit po-faced but in fact he was nice and smiley with a good sense of humour.

As soon as Michael came on then of course I always know straightaway why I travel several hundred miles to see him. He looked just wonderful in his white suit. He also was looking very trim and fit and I'm pleased to say is hanging on very well to his youthful good looks! His hair was gorgeous. I am just such a sucker for all those curls! When Michael has his hair all chopped off I always feel like going and giving his hairdresser a good talking to! ("DO YOU KNOW THE DISSERVICE YOU HAVE JUST DONE TO WOMANKIND?")

OK – white suit, lots of curls, gorgeous looking, what else is there to say?

Oh, right, the songs! Well, I'll leave it to others to list the songs as I am hopeless at remembering. I never take any photos and I never write any songs down – I am always too busy enjoying myself! It's just as well that other more organised fans take all the details and take such lovely photos.

I know he sang many of my favourites ("Walking in Memphis", "This is the Moment", "When You Tell Me That You Love Me", "As If We Never Said Goodbye") and also treated us to some new songs too. If the new songs he introduced to us ("Hero" and "Home") are an indication of the quality of the new album in October,

then we are really in for a treat. I also loved "The Show Must Go On" and "Life on Mars". "Music" was also fabulously done and really dramatic. Great stuff.

One of my favourite sections was when Julian accompanied Michael to "Unexpected Song" – it's a beautiful understated song. Michael did very well to recover his composure after teasing some poor unfortunate who picked the absolute wrong moment to walk in front of the stage! "I" sang Michael. Lady runs back from the loo. I thought she handled it very well as she curtsied to him when she got back to her line of seats! He was sort of cross/amused. Off he went again "I have never felt like this" – I am always impressed at how he recovers after being distracted. A true professional.

Towards the end of the concert Michael introduced an Elvis classic, and I could scarcely believe my luck when the opening of "An American Trilogy" started up. Everyone who knows me knows I am a lifelong Elvis fan and to hear Michael do justice to a song so strongly associated with Elvis was absolutely wonderful. Yes – worth all the travelling and the sweating!!!

Somehow I don't think I can have been the only Elvis aficionado in the audience. As soon as the song started we were "treated" to hundreds of voices joining in and it was obvious that people knew every word! I decided that if you couldn't beat them you might as well join them, so I had a good sing as well! I might be wrong, but I don't think Michael was too impressed. I think the idea of singing the song was to create a bit of dramatic thunder, which was ever so slightly lost in the general sing-a-long. (Perhaps if Michael makes a habit of singing the song (yes, please) he would prefer to do it in the section of the concert when everyone is sitting down?)

If the charge to the front and "party time" were to end then I wouldn't complain. However, I don't see its demise just yet so, again, if you can't beat them, join them and just have a good time. My friend literally propelled me out of my seat and pushed me down the aisle as she was obviously not about



to be done out of getting a good view of Michael! All I could think of was that I was glad I had put my shoes back on (I had taken them off earlier and was cooling them on the grass until I thought I might be being bitten by several million mozzies.)

The atmosphere down the front was actually brilliant and although my feet were killing me by the end I really enjoyed myself! I noticed a lot of young fans down there too, which is always nice to see.

Michael went off to rapturous applause after his final encore of "You Raise Me Up" (wonderful) and then we were treated to a lovely firework display. All in all, I think Oakley Hall put on a great show for us. It was well organised in every way – I just think they need to address the seating a little more so that more people have a better view.

Also, it would have been better if

they had got all the guests in the marquee to sit down before Michael came in. They had him on a little high podium of some sort so that he was raised up but I don't believe everyone had a decent view of him. Still, this is up to the organisers to think about – you can't expect people to sit down when they are excited about Michael coming. He looked very tired but he still managed to be both gracious and funny. Apparently, there had been a little white picket fence to keep fans back, which Michael thought highly amusing. AS IF! Obviously the Oakley Hall management didn't do any research into Michael Ball fans!

So, that's another lovely memory of a beautiful summer's day and a perfect summer's evening doing the most enjoyable thing I can think of – watching Michael Ball in concert. Thank you Michael.

A NIGHT OF MUSIC & MAGIC



Oakley Hall was such a wonderful night – the weather was perfect and we were in a beautiful place. Julian Lloyd Webber's music "set the scene" and when Michael came on as the sun was going down, it was pure magic. I have seen Michael many, many times live on stage, but this was the first time I've met him personally – a fantastic, never to be forgotten night.

Keeley Goodall

SOUTHPORT SIZZLED DAY & NIGHT

IT WAS SUN BY DAY AND MICHAEL BY NIGHT!



The day had come myself and fellow Lancashire Lassies had been waiting for - Michael was finally coming to perform an open-air concert at Southport Summer Classics right on our doorstep.

We went down early to Victoria Park to eagerly start queuing, and fortunately found only a handful of fans in front of us, so we duly set up camp for the day. The sun was already shining through and as the day went on it became a real scorcher, a fact we had the proof of the following day - tanned/red faces, arms, backs and fronts and white marks where straps and tops finished. The comradeship in the queue was great, all were there having a great time and eagerly meeting up with friends, catching up on news, and watching over other fans belongings whilst they went off for loo breaks and to dine throughout the day. It was wonderful to meet and talk to so many 'old' and 'new' fans whilst in the queue.

Michael arrived at Southport about

1.30pm driving himself, and as he turned around the corner to face the queue he gave a loud toot toot on his horn, to which he received a rousing cheer. I think once Michael had arrived the sense of excitement was apparent, and everyone was the eagerly awaiting Michael to start rehearsing, so we could sit back and hear the familiar sound of him singing across the park.

At 6pm on the dot the gates opened and that was the start of "the run" to get a bit of turf on which to place your chair for the night. I am so relieved that it was only a few hundred yards, but believe me when your running it feels like miles. Thanks to Clare, Joanne, Cheryl, Edith, Babs and myself who all drew the short straw to complete this "marathon", we managed to get a good area at the front in the centre. We mustn't forget though the poor "mules" who had to carry, cart, drag or use whatever other means to bring all the chairs, bags, cool bags etc - thanks to Sue, Marie, Gilly, Chris, Nick (and Bernie

later with the wine supplies) who had that task.

The Tivoli Trio were already on stage as folk poured into the park, and played a selection of songs which suited all ages, including a selection from Les Mis. It was very nice to sit and picnic listening to this Trio, and when they ended their performance at 7.45pm they received rousing applause.

By now the park was full, and we had been told over 4500 tickets had been pre sold so there was a great crowd there for Michael's concert.

The buzz was by now apparent as fans were eagerly awaiting those familiar overtures by Michaels band and to hear those first sounds from Michael. "I Was Born To Love You" could be heard as Michael started singing off stage, everyone started clapping, and when Michael came through the backdrop everyone was on their feet clapping and

dancing along to the first song of the night. Michael was wearing his familiar white suit, white shoes and pale blue shirt and looked stunning stood there in the spot and sun light. He went straight on to sing "One Step Out Of Time" where everyone joined in with the arm punches, and we all knew it was the start of another SIZZLING CONCERT.

Michael then spoke to say how pleased he was to be up in the North again, especially Southport, making remarks of "posh" Southport.

My personal favourite "When You Tell Me That You Love Me" was the next song to be given the wonderful Michael treatment; I will never tire of Michael performing this one. "As If We Never Said Goodbye" followed with Michael giving us some very convincing facial expressions, showing his acting skills creeping in.

Before Michael performed "Hero" he made comment on past troubles, and said it had very poignant meanings for some people. This is fast becoming another favourite of mine.

Michael then spoke a little about Sondheim, and then said he could see a man in the crowd with a baby and the next two songs - the first could be what he sang to his baby and the next he said with a sigh, could be to his wife. After singing "Not While I'm Around" and "Being Alive" you could see Michael look over at the man and acknowledge him, a very moving touch I think.

Two more favourite songs were then sung - "Walking In Memphis" and the show stopping "This Is The Moment", which gave rise to the well deserved standing ovation from the whole crowd, and I mean whole, as I did look back and see the whole audience on their feet.

Home was next performed, after Michael had said it was a very meaningful song to those artists who when they performed away from home still had a longing and a thought of back home.

Michael then spoke of how the next song could sum up entertainers, and tongue in cheek said except for Dean (obviously a joke between them). The now familiar chords of "Music" were then

heard, and Michael then entertained us all with a show stopping performance of this mind-blowing song. Whilst the instrumental part of this song was on Michael could be seen standing half way up the centre steps, with his back to the audience, moving in rhythm to every note. It was then indulgence time for Michael when he went to the top of the steps, took the large drum sticks in his hand, held them aloft grinning greatly, before turning to the drums and beating away with the music, and adding the extra crash of the cymbals in. Once again the audience were stood on their feet, clapping and cheering and giving another well-deserved ovation.

After a short intermission Michael came back on stage in a dark suit, white shirt and sparkly tie to give us his own version of "Evita", which is always a popular song for me and for audiences. The recognisable tune of "On The Barricades" began and Michael perched on his stool to sing a very moving "Empty Chairs, Empty Tables", this seems to be another of Michael's "own" songs.

"Life On Mars" a very popular song since Michael first sang it in Alone Together brought rapturous applause for him.

Another personal favourite was next to be given the Michael treatment - "Any Dream Will Do" and one that Michael encouraged the audience to sing along with him.

Michael then began to talk of quality groups and of one that was a particular favourite of his, and of him going to see their 'last' show (not really their last show though he said they kept saying that). He then made comment that he too would make it HIS last show tonight, to which you can imagine he got what he wanted to hear, cries of NO. Michael said it was The Eagles and received loud cheers as he introduced his next song "Desperado".

Queen's number "The Show Must Go On" then followed, and I feel his rendition of this song though different from Queen's is one that is popular and pleasing to all Michael fans.

It was then time for a very popular and a very cheeky 'party time' to begin with Michael belting out "Don't Stop Me

Now", and there was no stopping him he was certainly 'having a ball'. "Dancing In The Dark", and by now it was dark was next, everyone was on their feet, as far back as I could see the audience were stood up enjoying the party atmosphere. Before the next song Michael and backing singers adopted the upright stance, with arms folded up aloft, and Michael said they were going to bring culture to the night seeing as they were in posh Southport. The music struck up and the rock number "Since You've Been Gone" was belted out, much to the audiences enjoyment. A very moving "The Wonder Of You" followed, and again had the audience swaying along to it. An old favourite and a very popular one came back in to the concert, a somewhat cheeky version of "Help Yourself", and Michael did not disappoint he was 'hot' and very 'cheeky'.

Michael spoke of 'The King' and how he had heard rumours a while back of fans wanting him to perform the next trilogy of songs. What followed was an amazing rendition of the famous "American Trilogy" and what applause he received for his wonderful version of this collection of songs.

The end of the concert was drawing near as the familiar notes of "Love Changes Everything" began. At this stage Michael took his earpieces out and encouraged the audience to sing this one with him, which seems to have become the norm of late. Hands joined up and arms were held aloft, as fans swayed in tune to the music, and joined Michael in singing his signature tune.

"You Raise Me Up" a very poignant and meaningful song was the last song of the evening, and brought an end to an absolutely amazing concert at Southport. Michael said his farewells to his fans and audience and looked visibly moved by the rapturous applause he was receiving.

After the concert we managed to say a quick farewell, and thank you to Michael at the park gates, as he left on way to Cardiff for yet another open-air concert.

MICHAEL A BIG THANK YOU FROM YOUR LANCASHIRE LASSES FOR GIVING US A SIZZLER OF A CONCERT AT SOUTHPORT - WE HAD A BALL!!

THE YOUNG ONES!

Michael seems to have universal appeal across all age groups, and in this section we look at some of the brand new additions to the army of Michael's supporters! Who is the youngest fan?

AMY BARKER

This is Amy, daughter of fan club member Emma Barker. Isn't she gorgeous? Is she Michael's youngest fan at 6 months old?

Well no, she isn't as the story below will tell you... but she does claim to be Michael's smallest fan!



MARIA ANN HURLEY

Maybe this is Michael's youngest fan? Maria was born 6 weeks early on 14 August 2006 weighing 4lbs 13.5ozs. Maria was in the Special Care Unit at Musgrove in Somerset but did well and we're delighted to tell you that Maria is now home with mum and dad, weighing a healthy 5lbs 5oz. Her proud parents seen here with her are Caroline and Nick.

However, Joshua, opposite, has already attended a concert....!



MY FIRST MICHAEL BALL CONCERT



JOSHUA STONEHAM

It was Friday 28 July 2006 and all week the big debate was whether my Mummy and Daddy were going to take me with my big sister Hannah to see Michael Ball at the Victoria Park in Southport. Finally Mummy decided, as it was such a beautiful day, that I was going. Great, I'm twelve weeks old and I'm going to see Michael in concert, what more could a baby ask for. Life just doesn't get better.

We set off early and parked the car and then got in the queue. At last the gates opened and Hannah and Daddy ran to find a good spot. Mummy and me took our time. We found Daddy and Hannah and then had a picnic. Mummy, Daddy and Hannah had sandwiches and cakes (yuk) I had milk. There was a string trio playing music and I got a bit upset because I wanted to see Michael.

Finally the moment had arrived we were all excited as Michael's

band came onto the stage. Then the music started, not long now, and then there he was on stage. This was better. I was really enjoying the concert when Michael was talking about his next song when he mentioned that he could see a baby with his Daddy. He'd seen me and then sang his next song "Not While I'm Around" for me. What a great guy.

We watched the rest of the concert, although I'm sorry to say that I missed a bit when I nodded off. Well I am only little. Then all too soon it was over and Michael had sung his last song.

Mummy and Daddy thought it would be great if Michael would have a photo taken with me and although he had to get away he made time to come over. Michael gave me a lovely cuddle and held me tight. My first Michael Ball concert and I get to meet him. Being so close to him was brilliant and he was really nice.

Daddy took some photos of Michael, Hannah, Mummy and me and then Michael went to run back to his car with me saying that he was going to take me with him. But he was only joking.

Michael gave me back to Mummy and then gave Hannah a big cuddle. (She hasn't stopped smiling since). It was time to go home but I'd had a fantastic time. Thank you Michael for a wonderful evening. Mummy and Daddy helped me write this, as my hands are a bit small for the keyboard at the moment.

Joshua Stonham Aged Twelve weeks (at the time of writing).

15 YEARS IN THE MAKING

BY ALEXANDRA



I am no writer, but I have a feeling that if I don't say this now and commit it to memory I won't believe it actually happened after 15 years.

I think it's only fair that I offer some background to who I am, as I don't really believe the impact will be understood otherwise.

My name is Alexandra; I am now 27 years old, married with 2 Labradors, chocolate Bailey and yellow Troy. I work as a risk analyst but also sing Opera and Classical.

When I was about 12 I remember being in the kitchen with my mum when my dad shouted to me that 'some guy' was on the TV that was good. I went to see what the fuss was about, and there was Michael, fresh as daisy singing "Love Changes Everything". A few weeks later my Dad bought me the album titled 'Michael Ball' and I had a crush. I was always good at singing but started professional singing lessons within the next few months. Throughout my school life my crush never wavered. I would see boy bands come and go from the walls of my friend's bedrooms but Michael stayed firmly in place (a dodgy poster of Guns and Roses may have joined him at one time though!).

I remember begging my mum to buy a white jumper with Michael's face on the front with a bit of holly in the corner, after seeing him live in Manchester for the first time. I wore it to 'own clothes day' at school. I was picked on for weeks but my crush still didn't waver. It's a fact that people from school will still say that if they hear of Michael or see him on TV they think of me – what a lasting legacy.

I started to grow up and the posters came down but I still went to see Michael every opportunity, and of course the fan club kept me updated.

I also remember an incident at a rock club when, a few too many drinks later I am standing on the table declaring my love for Michael Ball with a lot of people thinking I am absolutely crazy. I think I was about 20.

I also went on Blind Date (yes, for my sins) and told Cilla (and the whole of the UK) about my crush on Michael. On my wedding day I was given a card from my Dad at the end of his speech, it was a wedding card from Michael. It meant the world.

I never wavered and there is many an album or song that brings back certain memories growing up.

So, fast forward to Sunday 23rd July 2006 and I am sat at home watching TV when suddenly I get a phone call from a very good friend to say that she has won two tickets with Century 105 radio station to see Michael at Southport on the 28th (I had previously been unable to obtain tickets due to financing). I was very excited, especially when Century then phoned me direct to ask, that as I was such a big fan, would I speak to Michael on the radio – of course I said yes! So I am on the phone hanging on my mobile in a panic as I had one bar left and I was sure the battery was going to die. Luckily Century came back on to me and I asked them to call me back on a landline, little realising that in my total panic I gave him my parents phone number. Not to worry though, they managed to get me back. I am now sat on the phone listening to Michael's interview who is on a very bad mobile when suddenly he says my name and that he is looking forward to meeting me on Friday! I burst into tears. Century told me that they couldn't let me speak to Michael as he was on a bad line, but the long and short was that my friend, Karen, had not only won two tickets but managed to win the meet and greet as well.

I phoned everyone in my phone book, my husband said I was going to be unbearable and jokingly (I think!) asked me to move out for the week. I went into work the next day and booked the Friday off.

Fast-forward again to Friday 28th July 2006. The whole week had dragged beyond belief and at 17.30 Karen and I were let onto site and I was told I would be meeting Michael at 19.30, oh my God! 2 hours was a long time to wait. I sat down at the front with a glass of wine. Then I saw this massive group of ladies running like the wind towards me to grab front row places. I am sad to say that I was not met with a warm welcome, as I understand that some ladies had been queuing since the early hours and were not best pleased at seeing Karen and I sat there. I had no idea whether to say anything or not – was I going to be lynched? I took the bull by the horns and told them who I was, thankfully after that we all talked and everyone was really quite lovely.

Time is dragging now and I keep running to the loo in a panic, there really was no point me bringing a picnic, I couldn't eat anything!

19.30 arrives - and finally after 15 years I got to put my arms around Michael Ball.

You know sometimes people's heroes are not quite what you had hoped? Michael I am pleased to say didn't let me down.

Everyone said he was a perfect gent and would put me at ease and they were right. I was worried I was going to

freeze but no, I just whittered on! When the photo opportunity arrived I think I may have squeezed him to death!

I had taken some photos with me of my reaction on my wedding day when I got a card from Michael, he thought they were very funny and laughed quite a bit and thanked me for taking them - he also checked I was still married, I was pleased to report yes! Michael then asked me what my favourite song was which is "When You Believe In Love" from the 'First Love' album. I did cheekily tell Michael that as he had never sung it live it was about time! We then started a conversation about music

in general. Some of the fans who were sat near me at the concert asked me to mention that we wanted more concerts in the North West and so I passed this onto Michael who told me that he is definitely touring in March 2007. Time was running out and I could tell Michael was eager to go get ready for the concert although he never once made me feel unwelcome. I asked him to sign my 'First Love' album and I left regrettably as I had so much more I wanted to say.

I returned to my seat sat back and enjoyed the wonderful concert with a very big grin all over my face.

MENIER CHOCOLATE FACTORY

31st July 2006, by competition winner Beryl Eldridge

I had not been able to attend any of Michael's summer concerts this year for one reason or another so when details came through for the recording of Radio 3's programme "Stage & Screen" at The Menier Chocolate Factory, I decided to enter the competition to see if I could win the two tickets that Maureen and Gill had available.

I couldn't believe it when a few days later I got a call from Maureen to say that my card had been picked out and I had won the tickets.

My sister-in-law was able to join me and we travelled down to London by train and met up with Maureen and Gill outside the theatre in order to collect the tickets.

The meal before the recording was excellent and it wasn't long before we were able to go through to the theatre for the recording. It was a tiny theatre only seating about 130 people.

The producer of the show explained that Edward Seckerson would be interviewing Michael and about ten songs would be played on disc at intervals during the recording. After the first song had been played Michael entered the room together with Edward Seckerson. I won't mention anything that was talked about so as not to spoil it when the programme is broadcast except to say that we did learn that Michael is to perform in 'Kismet' next year at the London Coliseum. After the recording finished we were then invited to ask Michael questions, that was when he said he is hoping to tour next March and April before rehearsals start for 'Kismet'. All this news caused great excitement amongst the audience!!!

I thoroughly enjoyed the whole evening, it was very interesting and I look forward to hearing it all again when it is broadcast later in the year.

I would like to thank Maureen and Gill for the opportunity to attend such a unique recording.

Beryl enjoying her meal at the Menier Chocolate Factory prior to the interview



WET, WET, WET! PRINCE'S TRUST CYMRU BIRTHDAY NIGHTS - DYFFRYN GARDENS, CARDIFF

By Sissel Bærø Nyheim



surroundings were beautiful, the garden divided in two with a stream and a fountain in the middle - as it turned out, there seemed to be more water outside the stream than in the stream!

I'm Norwegian, and thought I knew the most about bad weather, but "raining buckets" now has a whole new meaning.

At the concert I had a river pouring down my face. My chair had become a little lake, and my raincoat and rain trousers didn't hold the rain out at all. I was wet through to the skin. I do hope my friends didn't get a cold - they were soaking wet - and had a very long drive home.

To illustrate the weather I think this is a good example - I bought a programme before the concert started. When the concert was over, there was no longer a programme, only a rather large paper pulp.

Unfortunately, I have no pictures from Dyffryn Gardens. No cameras allowed at the venue (management rules). Well, in this rain, any camera would have been destroyed, so we left them in their plastic bags.

Michael and his guests did their best to keep us warm, and gave us the best they could under the circumstances. If it had been any other artist, we would all have left in the interval, but no, for Michael we stayed to the end. They gave us the best from the West End - West Side Story, Les Miserables, Phantom Of The Opera and more.

Michael's selection of songs was a mix of old and new, and I was a very happy lady out there in the rain. Two duets made the concert for me - Michael and Laura Michelle Kelly performing "The Prayer" - outstanding singing in Italian and Michael and Caroline Sheen singing "You And I" from Chess. Michael's rendition of "Gethsemane" was also outstanding. I've never heard anyone interpret the song the way Michael does - one can really believe in Jesus' struggle.

Michael closed the two concerts with "You Raise Me Up". Once again a great way to end a concert. This song was written as a tribute to all affected of 9/11. Rolf Løvland was in New York under 9/11, and wrote the song there as a homage to those involved. It was originally performed in NYC just after the incident had happened. There are now more than 125 versions of this song recorded. I didn't like any of them, until I heard Michael sing it last year. Now it's a favourite of mine - Michael's version.

Thank you to Michael and the rest, who gave us two memorable nights in a memorable weekend in July. So nice meeting up with friends again, and meeting lovely people for the first time.

Now, I'm looking forward to September. The Event and Last Night of the Proms... Whatever happens in Swansea, it can't be worse... or can it?!

My husband and I spent a part of our holiday in England and Wales this summer, driving around parts of England and Wales. We had of course, plotted in Southport and Cardiff on the route. We could not be in the UK and miss the opportunity of attending two Michael Ball concerts in one week end!

We had a wonderful time in Southport, and the show in Victoria Park was the perfect open air concert. Good weather, surroundings, atmosphere and of course Michael, backing singers and a band in top form. A pure delight, from beginning to end.

Saturday morning, we headed down to Cardiff. A rather long drive, with traffic delays due to road work and accidents. On passing the border to Wales, the rain started. We thought it would stop - but no way, it only increased the rest of the day.

We arrived in Cardiff in the middle of the Saturday rush, couldn't find the hotel, couldn't find anywhere to park - a nightmare really. Eventually we sorted it all out, and headed up Dyffryn Gardens to meet friends we hadn't seen in a long time, and looking forward to the "musicals" concert. Next to Michael, my money goes to John Owen Jones.

It was set up as a kind of "a horn of plenty" concert. Kind of similar to the Penshurst "Musicals on a Summers Eve" concert in 2004. Not only did Michael have John Owen Jones with him on stage, this was really a night set up for us musicals lovers - Laura Michelle Kelly (Mary Poppins), Caroline Sheen (Truly Scrumptious), Celia Graham (Christine in Phantom) and Stifyn Parri were all part of the show.

It was a sad thing the rain tried to destroy it all. The

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

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Overseas:

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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.

JUNE ROBINSON
8 SANDRINGHAM ROAD,
THORNABY-ON-TEES,
STOCKTON-ON-TEES TS17 7JW
June would love to hear from anyone, anywhere. She lives for her grandchildren and the post!

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Michael Barry
FAN CLUB

