

ON THE BALL

Issue 44



Here we are with the final edition of On The Ball for 2006 - and what a year it's been - starting off with Michael in New York, then the wonderful open air concerts followed by the fan club event and the release of Michael's new album and DVD.

On the subject of the fan club event, those of you who were there will know that it was a wonderfully successful day. So much planning and work goes in to trying to ensure that the day runs as smoothly as possible, it's always a relief at the end of the day when it's surpassed our expectations. Keith Harris and his team hosted the day superbly as always, with many laughs and fun along the way. The highlight, as always, was Michael's arrival on stage towards the end of the afternoon to rousing cheers and a standing ovation from the whole audience. He excelled himself by staying for about an hour and a half, laughing, joking, teasing and answering questions posed to him by Keith and the audience. It's quite obvious that these fan club events are very special to Michael as they give him a real chance to interact with the fans on a more intimate level than at a concert. As always we thank him for taking the time out of his Sunday afternoon to come along and make the day that extra bit special for everyone there.

The event raised £1,550 for The Royal Theatrical Fund, some of which was what was left over from a collection that had gone around the room to buy the two of us a present - a voucher for a wonderful spa relaxation day - what could be more perfect after the rushing around we'd been doing before the event? It was a much needed and thoughtful gift.

Now we have 2007 to look forward to with a UK tour and appearance in Kismet already confirmed. We will look forward to being back on the road and meeting up with everyone - it's always so much fun. We must thank everyone who has helped us over the past year - especially Simon and his team, Phil, Katie and the team at Live Nation, Jackie Gill, James Gaden and Pat Webb, and last but not least our families for their support, especially 'Mum' who opens the post for us every day and makes sure we're kept in line!

Maureen & Gill



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Dear Everyone,

Well, it's been among the busiest few months I can remember and I've enjoyed every moment of it. I'm thrilled by the response to 'One Voice' and the new D.V.D. as well as the various public, T.V. and Radio appearances that I've made. At everyone of them there have been fans waiting to meet and have a chat. I don't always have the time to stop for a long time but I do love seeing you there. I'm sure you understand.

One of the most challenging and enjoyable new directions I've embarked on is on the Radio, presenting regularly. I don't know if I'm what you'd call a D.J. yet but I am running the show technically as well as editorially and loving it. Who knows, I may end up spinning disks at a top rave in Ibiza next summer. Look out Fat Boy Slim.

What I do know is I shall be doing a lot more of this in the future. I hope

you approve. Nothing can replace the thrill of performing and we've got the Tour and Cismet to look forward to next year but you know me. I love trying new things.

Speaking of which, look out early in the new year for "Soapstar, Superstar". I shall be doing my Simon Cowell impression. Should be great fun and not to be taken too seriously.

But for me the best thing will be spending Christmas surrounded by my family and friends, at home. I've made no secret of how hard last year was for me away from home at this time and I make no apology for that. Some criticism has been levelled at me by some people saying that I didn't like being in America or worse still, it was a cynical way of me selling one of the tracks on the new album. All I will say is that I think you know me better than that. I just answer the questions I'm asked as honestly as I can. I LOVE AMERICA, especially N.Y. and was made so welcome by the American fans. I Terry Cart wait to return... and I will. 'Nuff Said.

Anyway, I hope you get to spend time with your loved ones over the holidays. If, for whatever reason, that isn't possible

Just remember there are many of us out there who understand how hard it is to be separated from them. We are thinking of you and sending our love to you.

Take care of yourselves, keep safe and I can't wait to see you in 2007. It's shaping up to be a great year and you are such a huge part of what makes it so special. The world can be such a cold, ugly place at times so any joy we can bring to it is so important.

Have a wonderful holiday time.
God bless and
All my love

Mike
X

Fan Club Event - 10 September 2006

We're handing over to Carol Cox for her account of the Event in 2006. She sums it up splendidly!



Photo: Sue Wilde

A 'Dee-licious Dollop of Muffin Mix' meets 'The Hat'

by Carol Cox

Okay, find a comfy chair, get your reading glasses, ice up your Diet Coke and get your popcorn handy. Then take this article and go off to a corner somewhere to read my account of The Event 2006 (I don't want to be the cause of anyone's eye strain!) WARNING: it is rather long (this may make 'Pride and Prejudice' look like a leaflet) but I didn't want to miss a thing. We all literally had a Ball!

You never know what to expect at a Michael Ball Fan Club Event and The Event 2006 was no different. Preparations had been made, everyone was waiting in anticipation for weeks and finally, the big day arrived. As fans gathered in the lobby of The Ibis Earl's Court, the anticipation was evident... the excitement of meeting

old friends, meeting new friends and of course, the main event... an appearance by Michael himself. And we were not to be disappointed! As everyone had their noses pressed up against the glass to find out what table they were at and with whom, the doors opened and everyone streamed into the foyer to look over the Michael merchandise available and, in my case, to get some much needed 'refreshments'. I had gone to Swansea the day before to see Michael at the Last Night of the Proms with a few others and while it was a sensational night, exhaustion was starting to creep in. Was I going to be able to pull off my 'surprise' for this Event?

Time will tell. We made our way to our tables, meeting and greeting for

an hour or so before the festivities started. I was still debating on whether to ask Michael a question at the Q&A session. I didn't think anything could top the question Carol D and I had put forth at the previous Event with Michael's famous "B flat and 3 encores" answer. But we'll see... only if the opportunity presents itself (oh brother! what an understatement!). I knew very soon after the Event started, when a video of Michael's reaction to that question two years ago was shown, that there was no way I could contain myself from asking him another 'question'. This was going to be good.

Everyone was thrilled to see past videos of Michael and yes, once again, his 'baby pictures' as he called them, were shown. You know, parents always make videos of their children in the bathtub just so they can be shown again some forty years later to (gulp!) 450 of his closest friends, in this case, fans (little do parents realize at the time...!). Judging from the reaction of those fans, the videos were worth the trip to The Event in itself.

The 'identify the Michael song played backwards' contest had everyone putting their thinking caps on and one table got 5 out of 10 titles and deservedly won nice prizes for each person at that table. You wouldn't believe how difficult it is to think of the title of a song played in reverse... basically it's a challenge of identifying the tempo, the voice fluctuations and the music tone... not easy. Lunch time came along with the first opportunity for everyone to go around to view the hats for the hat competition. There is a contest at each Event to design something that goes along with the theme for the year....this time it was to design a hat featuring Michael's solo albums. Well! I decided that if I'm going to go all the way to London, I'm going to design a hat that will not only win but everyone would not forget any time soon! It took about two months to 'build' my hat....after the initial idea came to me in a dream one night (or was that a nightmare?). I remember seeing a photo of Michael in Australia in 2004 wearing a hat with little stuffed animals hanging all around it and thought... 'that's it!' So I designed

my hat with CD's hanging around it, then it got bigger and bigger (where have we heard *that* before?) until it became more of a 'billboard' than a hat. It's amazing what you can do with a wide brim straw hat, an empty bleach bottle, a package of stick on labels and 28 feet of 'litewire' along with 12 batteries to power it all. Then the question was... how do I get it to London? I had to break the hat down into several parts that could be reassembled once I got it there... *if* I got it there.

Going through airport security in Miami was not easy. "Ma'am, could you please open your suitcase for inspection?"

"Do I *have* to?"

"Yes, ma'am... you *have* to..."

There I was trying to explain to the TSA guys why I had all this wire attached to battery packs in my suitcase and who this 'Michael Ball' was and what 'One Voice' in green neon meant but they finally let me through. Good thing I went to the airport three hours early... just in case. I arrived in London a day earlier than planned just to reassemble that hat before The Event! I managed to carry it down the elevator from my room for the competition.

There were eleven other entries and we all stood in front of the stage so everyone could see. We were judged by the 'clapometer' method... loudest applause gets the prize. Need I say more?

As we 'spun' through the years of Michael's career, we were treated to video clips from past albums and songs of Michael's. Then came the 'Ball Or No Ball' competition, patterned after the popular show 'Deal Or No Deal'. There were 12 lucky contestants on the stage and in the end, were able to keep the prizes in their boxes... from a 'cuddly toy' to a grand prize of concert tickets for Michael's next tour and signed photos. As the 'spin the years' continued, we finally came to 2006 and as 'One Voice' echoed throughout the room, Michael made his entrance to a cheering, standing ovation from everyone in the room. What a thrill to have him visit us... which I'm sure is why almost everyone was there.

Michael took the microphone and entertained everyone with his wit, charm, charisma and charming personality (you can't say 'charm' too many times when it comes to Michael!).

Just so those who weren't there can get an idea of what it was like, here's a recap in a nutshell... a very *big* nutshell! Michael mentioned how far it was for him to come to the Event... "nearly a mile..." much to everyone's amusement. (He doesn't live very far from Earl's Court).

He then asked who had come the furthest. Answers included Somerset, Belfast, Arizona, Seattle ("does Seattle beat Arizona?" he asked). One was from Valencia, Spain. "We should have come round to your place!" was Michael's reaction to that. He then asked "why is it whenever we do these things, it's always the most beautiful day?"

I muttered under my breath "Because I bring the sun with me!" I live in Miami (in case you didn't know.) Then someone said they were from Tokyo. "Tokyo? Sorry, luv. Seattle's impressive. Seattle, Tokyo, Somerset, Tokyo... blimey!" were Michael's comments.

He continued with "Tokyo the farthest? Canton?" (laughter). "Well, *that's* brave, isn't it?" (more laughter). "Spain? I love Spain". Violeta told Michael "you need to come more often!" Michael laughed and said "I do come quite often!" (More laughter).

Keith then asked about the new album. Michael began explaining how, when a 'turn' comes out with a new album... "a turn is a performer... I'm not actually a 'turn', I'm a *top* 'turn'!" which prompted cheers from everyone.

"If I can't say 'turn'," he continued "when serious artists come out with a new opus... I'm not going to lie to you... it's the best! 'Music' was my second highest selling record, it kind of shocked me. I wanted to make an album in that same vein, something that would surprise people."

Michael talked about how he gets the ideas for the album and the songs.

"Like last night, we did 'One Voice' because we had the choir and it went down really, really well and we hope to

perform that in concert. 'Hero', 'Home'... I love that new song. And 'Since You've Been Gone'. I've got to find a way of replicating that song on stage 'cause I'm going to be rockin' to that one... I'm really, really pleased with it... I can't wait to hear your feedback! I'll be singing a load of new songs on tour." This prompted cheers from everyone again. He mentioned the release date of the new album is October 30 and also a new DVD will be coming out.

He explained the new DVD as a 'best of' which was split into sections: best of party time songs, best love songs, personal favorite songs, musical theater songs... "and there's one other section, isn't there?" to which everyone replied "Unplugged!" "I introduce every one of the songs myself," Michael told us "and I explain why I liked doing the song, what the song means to me - a personal anthology, a personal favorite of all my live performances."

He explained about the idea of the unplugged section.

"Guess how many songs we used?"

"Seven!" replied everyone.

"Yes!" he replied to everyone's cheers. Michael said it took two hours to film the unplugged section... they just "kept doing them and doing them... This is what we do when we're sitting around rehearsing a song... a genuine 'one take', take it as you find it. It's a big section of the video."

"It was lovely seeing the old videos," Michael continued "and seeing how thin I was (laughs) except in the Cafe de Paris... that size? What the hell? The voice was cracking... but I stuck a couple in there, I'm not proud, not me." (laughter). Michael said the release date for the DVD was November 30.

Keith asked Michael if there was one specific song that meant more to him than others.

"The Michael Buble song 'Home'... beautiful song, when I heard it I was in America. I was a bit naff to be homesick but I was". (Awww's from everyone.) "You can't expect everyone to up sticks and follow you wherever you go... you do a show and you're all full of excitement and then you go back to your apartment and you kind

of sat there watching the telly and there's no one to share it with" (more awww's). "You see places and meet people and feel privileged but... I love my creature comforts. I missed the end of Big Brother! I'm obsessed with reality programs. I heard this song and it absolutely says what you feel. You want to be home - you can face anything knowing you've got that to come back to. You get your strength to carry on."

Keith mentioned a good cup of tea. Michael told him about Lipton tea in America.

"Lukewarm water, tiny bag...they get a broom and sweep around the corners... and ship that to America. I'm sorry for the Americans out there but you need to learn to make tea! Coffee? No problem, you're a genius at that! Tea? Awful! Cosmopolitans they do really well. (laughter). A cosmopolitan is ... a 'beverage'...I had one or two."

Switching subjects to the outdoor concerts, Michael mentioned the great weather "except bloody Dyffryn Castle!" especially in Scotland at Crathes Castle, Bath and Southport. Then when he drove down to Wales, he woke up to "sheets of rain" and the only thing worse than that was Hampton Court a few years before when he walked out onto stage to sing 'Don't Rain On My Parade'. Michael thanked everyone for "sticking it out."

He mentioned Last Night of the Proms.

"Did you see it on the telly? Very posh until this 'anarchy' at the end" and said that would be the last gig for awhile (another round of 'awwww's from everyone). Keith asked Michael if he'd been rehearsing for Kismet, to which he replied (very quietly, I might add) "No. I've watched the movie". He mentioned about the Coliseum Theater being "done up" and the ENO being "posh." Michael said he asked the co-conductor Simon Lee, who was also the musical supervisor in The Woman In White, "is this right for me?" He said there were great songs, great music and "the right place for my voice" and that the character is so funny. "Musically, it's going to sound thrilling", and that it "was nice

to be back in theater as well."

He then turned to the fans in the room and said "you know what you all bloody did? Being the big mouth that I am, at Menier Chocolate Factory, I said I was going to do this and tickets were going on sale in November. The day after that interview, we had a panicked Coliseum, ENO calling up saying no one can get through to the box office to buy any other tickets for any other production because Michael Ball fans have flooded the lines... can we announce we're doing it? Yes!" (laughter).

Keith asked Michael if he was going to tour again.

"Yes, we're going back on the road". He said he loved the last tour and the announcement will be made around the time of the album coming out. "The end of March through April so it'll be spring... I think we've got 23 dates". ("Whoo hoo!" from everyone).

"I love tours," he continued. "I love concerts as much or more than anything else I do... come and see us!" Keith asked what songs would he do, to which Michael replied "new stuff from the album... some old, some new, it's hard to keep a balance."

Someone shouted out 'Goldfinger' so Michael talked about the Anthony Newley tribute that he did a few weeks earlier.

He said of Anthony "He wrote 'Goldfinger' for Shirley so I tried it... if I walk out to an audience and started doing 'Goldfinger' you'd think I'd gone mad or auditioned for 'Stars In Their Eyes' so I don't know but I very much doubt I'll be doing that". (More 'awww's and laughter).

Michael sang the first line to 'Do You Mind' and talked about Newley's "most profound song" 'The Man Who Makes You Laugh', telling about Newley's cabaret performance in Vegas and how he sang that song while putting on white face makeup, and how trying to please an audience ruined relationships because of his love of an audience.

Michael said that "the very first series of 'Stars In Your Eyes', they asked me if I would do it... I actually thought 'who could I do?' There was Gene Pitney, has everyone heard of

Gene Pitney? Yes? No, you haven't." He then did a crude imitation of '24 Hours From Tulsa', à la Gene Pitney to rolls of laughter, then Johnny Mathis 'Smoke Gets In Your Eyes. (Michael could do an entire show of impersonations, he was hysterical!). He explained that "it was really difficult doing this concert to not go into a Newley impression". Michael sang (in his own style) "What kind of fool am I, who never fell in love... but I want to go..." and repeated the song à la Anthony Newley - brash and loud in Newley's trademark accent.

We thought our sides were going to split laughing so much. Michael said it was really difficult *not* to do an Anthony Newley impression and that he wasn't sure when the show would be on (he was told September 22nd but that's apparently now been changed to the 29th on BBC2's 'Friday Night Is Music Night'.) He said he might do a 'Newley' section on tour Michael then told Keith that he never seemed to age ("Who's your surgeon?"). Keith then told Michael "we've spent the whole day watching and admiring your talents" which got a 'Whoo hoo!' from everyone. Michael replied "It's great to be here again!"

Keith asked "Apart from the new album, is there a special song that you could never leave out?"

Michael said "Loads! Albums? 'This Time It's Personal' is one of my favorites. Song? 'If Tomorrow Never Comes' and 'The Dance' on the unplugged thing."

Michael said he got a letter from Cameron Macintosh saying Les Miz would be 21 years old on October 7 this year and it's a "special gala night for Les Miz and a few of us come back to just be on stage... I don't know actually what we'll be doing."

He then told about being in Swansea the night before and how a young guy in the choir told him "if you don't feel like singing 'This Is The Moment' I'll go on and do it for you!" Michael said "Great! He wasn't born when I was doing Les Miz!" He talked about working at the RSC with the best directors and best people 21 years ago in Les Miz, "the best musical ever written" and how they were learning "still wet bits of music".

Michael said "Songs that I really want to perform, that I really want to do for myself... 'Love Changes Everything' is a great example even though you think 'oh, not again!' It's such an important song for me, such an important song for other people for their own personal reasons. And it's a good song and it would be wrong not to sing things like that. I go through different periods of time when songs mean more to me than others."

He said one song that he does very rarely is 'River' by Joni Mitchell. It is one of his favorite performances of himself and "one of the few I listen to. I remember so clearly," (he heard it the first time when he was 17), "what a talent this woman was." Michael said hearing your own songs on the radio "takes your breath away when you hear it and you think of the journey you've been on. All the songs are special to me but there are songs that are more special than others. It changes at different times with my own personal situation... what I'm into at the moment, what I've rediscovered."

Keith told Michael he had a very powerful voice and "Have you considered singing..." and before he could finish, Michael said "Yes, I've considered singing!" to much laughter. Keith finished his sentence with 'American Trilogy'. Michael told him that he had sung 'American Trilogy' and how they had dug out the arrangements before the Scotland concert and how "literally the afternoon of the sound check, we tried it. We went horribly wrong, we lost it but we did it and it had a fantastic response. It's an amazing song. I worried it was much too iconic... too connected with Elvis" but that he might put it in the tour.

Keith said to Michael that he played a lot of characters but "is there a specific character you've enjoyed?"

Michael replied "Well actually, if I'm truthful, I loved Count Fosco but before that... (with a sigh!) doing Patience - Reginald Bunthorne! I don't know how I got away with that!" Michael explained how it was a Gilbert and Sullivan operetta at the



New York City Opera, and "They're not straight laced at all!" He mentioned how opera was the forerunner of musicals. He said it was popular entertainment and that you have to "approach it in an idiosyncratic way... that's the best way to put it... to make it relevant. People at the New York City Opera were just lovely. How do I make the character my own? Every camp comedian... Frankie Howard, Kenneth Williams... Americans don't know who these characters were... they thought I was being the most inventive... and they just let me go with it. All the rest of the cast around me started doing their own thing as well. I would have loved to have seen it!" Michael told us about Bunthorne reading 'Memory' and the audience going 'what the hell is this?' and 'I Dreamed A Dream'.

"I loved doing him... he was very, very funny!"

It was then question and answer time. I have to admit that a moment of panic set in... Should I or shouldn't

I ask him a question? Gulp! Oh why not? It's all just for fun... (I hope).

Michael said if anyone has an interesting or relevant question to raise their hand, although "I may ignore you!" The first question came from a lady who asked if he would go on 'I'm A Celebrity, Get Me Out Of Here'?

"No way" was Michael's reply... "I'm a punter. Celebrity Big Brother? No way! No! No! No! No! I love X-Factor and the 'Maria' program... you feel kind of safe in your own front room watching them. The idea of someone watching me for 24 hours... I'd never go to the loo! (laughter). I'd be very nervous."

There was a question just after that but unfortunately I was unable to hear it and unable to hear Michael's complete reply but he did say something about skeletons in his closet and how his great, great grandfather on his mother's side was hung for sheep stealing or smuggling!



Photo: Sue Wilde

He recounted how he remembered going to his grandparent's diamond anniversary ("60 years! Bloody hell!") and that his grandad was one of ten children and his grandmother one of eight children. "Imagine how many cousins and second cousins... some of them, I think they've stayed married within the family..." which resulted in hysterical laughter from us.

Another lady asked Michael if he was going to do Jean Valjean at any time.

"I did that thing at Windsor... no is the answer, I don't think I will. I certainly don't think I'll do it in the show... don't wanna! Never say never... it would be really difficult for me. First of all, watching some other bloke play Marius - it was great doing one off but to be there night after night, it's really a tough part and quite difficult to do. And with memories of being in the show in the beginning, I kind of want to keep those precious."

The next question was "have you ever turned down a role and regretted it?"

"Um... there was a time...when men were kind (Michael singing)... Not regretted, but really wished I'd been able to do it... Sunset Boulevard is the case. They asked me if I was interested in doing Joe Gillis, but with the tour, album and all of that, it was impossible for me to do and I would have really loved to have done that.

What was fantastic was the chance to do it in Cork with Petula Clark. So I got to act and sing the role and see what it was like. Fantastic musical, beautiful score, great story and to work with Petula who is a great kisser!" (laughter). "That's something I would have loved to have done."

Someone then asked if he would record some Al Jolson.

"Like what?" Michael asked back. She named a song and he said "Sing it!" (laughter). "Now you know what it's like! I don't know... I won't go out and search."

Michael then heard someone's cell phone ringing.

"Who's phone is that? Who is it?" he asked with a little laugh. "Who is it? Two missed calls? So I don't know." he finished, going back to the question.

Laura C. then told Michael she didn't have a question but wanted to thank him for the friends, "many of whom are sitting at this table."

Michael said "I don't know if you heard that" and repeated what Laura said. I'm going to write out his entire answer here because I think it underscores the entire day and just what the fan club means to everyone.

Michael said "Don't thank me, you need to thank Maureen and Gill. Thank the fan club for bringing people together with friends". (Clapping from everyone). "And it is

really lovely to hear, I know that so many really great lasting enduring friendships have been forged because of the fan club and it's really the joy of it and the beauty of it, the fact that you can pick up the phone to a mate when you've got a problem, who's maybe not in your immediate circle of friends... people who've been through the same sort of things, people who really do care, people you can just have a laugh with, you know, that every now and then you can meet up and say 'look, let's go and see Michael, he's doing a gig', have a bit to eat and have a laugh and misbehave... Hi Jen!" (laughter and clapping).

"You know, I really love that bit... you've been ill or members of your family have been, there's always someone you can get in touch with who's been through the same thing who's got advice who can maybe point you in the right direction. If you don't take advantage of that then I think you're mad because within here and all the people who have been able to make it, there's a wealth of kindness, of caring and of support and knowledge, you know, the best gift we can all give to each other I think is the gift of support and the gift of sharing our knowledge. If you've been through something, the kindest thing you can do is to share that knowledge, to guide someone else, to help someone else, you should never be afraid to ask for that because none of us are particularly strong on our own, we all need support and sometimes we can't find that from the people who are the closest to us. We need to look somewhere else so if you can take advantage of that, that truly is the best thing about it, we can have a laugh and we do... it's inspiring... look to those around you and yeah, it's great to have support from people."

Bless you, Michael!

Someone asked about when he did the Parkinson show on BBC.

"I really loved doing Parky's show... what a great thing. First thing that happens is the first record goes wrong... I was cool. I did enjoy it and we talked a lot with the BBC and I like doing the bits and bobs that I do with them and if the right thing came along, if I could find the right format, if I could find the right ideas, it is something that I'd be interested in

because nothing will ever stop what I do as a performer and as an actor. I like talking.” (Laughter). “I’m interested in people, same with This Morning... the secret to it is listening. You find so many journalists and presenters who have a list who don’t listen. ‘When was your first big break?’” (Michael goes into a “zzzzzz!” and snoring, accompanied by our laughter). “That’s why Parky’s so good, he listens and follows up with questions and that’s what I try to do so it may happen!”

“Yes, my lovely,” he said as he pointed to Rosie. She told him she went to New York City in February and he wasn’t there and she has something for him.

He replied “If you have something for me, get down here! If it’s a puppy I think... I dunno... thank you!”

It was a hat (“who!” was our reaction) which he put on and modeled.

“Any others? In the back - yes you!” A lady asked about the cameraman at the stage and if he was videoing but Keith told her it’s not a video but just a camera to show everyone in the back (on the two big screens on each side of the room) everything happening on stage. Awww!

A lady wanted to thank her lovely friend for her birthday cake and could she give Michael a piece please?

His reply was “You can give me a piece any time you like” (giggle, giggle). “I’m on a diet though... which one are you on? See food.” (as in see food and eat it!). Michael wished her a happy birthday then said “I hate dieting, I’m so sick of it. Would you mind if I became huge?”

Our response was a resounding no!

“Right!” Michael continued, “we’ve got time for two more...”

Oh no! Should I ask him my question or not? I timidly raised my hand but he didn’t see.

“You’re very near so I’ll hear you,” he told someone else. The lady told him she loved the Menier Chocolate Factory interview and would he consider writing an autobiography?

“No! No! Who knows? I think, you know, you have people like Jordan who’s written three... you write those things at the end of your life, you

know, you write memoirs... sort of an obituary... You can write it for me! We’ll wait and see. I haven’t thought about it... I’ve been asked ah, but I don’t know, because I kind of want to, you know, to a certain extent, I’m quite private and I don’t know...” Michael said some writers write “things all lovely like except for the time I fell down and hurt my knee... nobody’s life is like that!” Keith told him he could lie but Michael said he wouldn’t want to, but he’d think on it, as they say.

A lady asked him what the best piece of advice he’d ever been given? Oh no, we could hear this coming!

“Wash up as far as possible, wash down as far as possible and *always* wash possible!” (Laughter, clapping... of course!)

Gulp! Here goes...

I asked “Um, on your birthday last June, fans were posting things on the fan club board and I’d like to know what your reaction is to being referred to as a “dee-licious dollop of muffin mix.” (laughter from everyone, including Michael - thank goodness!).

“You didn’t hear that, did you?” he told everyone and proceeded to repeat the question, as Gemma claimed ‘ownership’ of the original phrase. Good one, Gemma!

Michael’s replied “I have absolutely *no* problem with that!” (laughter).

Then I said “Can I lick the spoon?” Yikes! Did I really say that?

“Can you lick the spoon?” (clapping and cheering). “Absolutely!” Oooh! Then he said something about all the lumps in the mix and laughed to himself but I just couldn’t quite catch it amidst all the laughter. I’m so glad he’s a good sport!

Michael then said “I’m going way over time but I don’t care!” Neither did we!

A lady said she was getting married in Las Vegas and wanted to know if Michael could come along.

“What’s the bloke’s name?” Michael asked.

“His name is Mark”.

“Oh... she’s mad! Don’t do it! (jokingly). What’s a good Elvis song?” (as he broke into ‘Crying In The Chapel’). “You want me to come to the reception? Yeah! I’ll be there!” (I

suspect he might have been joking). “Congratulations darlin’ and many many years of happiness!”

A lady said she turns 30 next year and asked if Michael could come?

“Write a list of where I’m to go and I’ll get around to all your houses.” We wish!

Someone asked a question about about Howard Keel.

“Did I get to meet Howard Keel? Yes I did! He came to see ‘Aspects of Love’. When Paul McCartney came to see Les Miz, we all came on and the whole show... Paul McCartney over there”... (singing to the Les Miz overture). “Howard Keel asked if he could come backstage afterwards and I was thrilled. He walked in and had a tear in his eye. He was quite emotional and he said ‘I can’t tell you what a thrill it was seeing that show and seeing a young guy up there with a voice like that. I feel I’m passing on the mantle of proper musical theater.’” (Awww! from us). “That really, really meant something to me, it’s one of the reasons I’m doing Kismet.” Michael mentioned Vincent Minelli and how he had apologized for doing the movie so poorly.

Michael asked for the last question. “This will be the last one... Jen... don’t! Come on, Jen...” (laughter... poor Jen!) He repeated her question.

“When will you all see me again? What? Live and in person? Oh God, I don’t know... what are you doing next week?” (Laughter). He said he’d be doing lots of promotions for the album. Everyone asked about a record signing but he didn’t know - that was up to the record company. Michael said the next gig he’s doing would be a “charity thing with Maria Friedman in a couple of weeks... it won’t be long, I promise, and we’ll seriously get together obviously when we do the tour. Maybe there will be a surprise along the way, there may be a few little things up my sleeve, who knows...” (I hope Michael has short sleeves!) To be continued... next slide please!

“I better get on, I want to draw the raffle! And I brought something”. Now everyone is looking for their raffle tickets. “I’m going to present things first... thank you for listening.”

Keith then announced "first of all, we did have a hat competition earlier on, the lady who won it, as I promised her, if she would come to the stage, my love, to receive your prize from Michael". From Michael? Why can't I just *have* Michael? Oops!

"It was Carol Cox." Michael then shouts "Carol Cox, come on down! Where's your hat? We need your hat!"

Oh dear, I had to have three people quickly help me get my 'hat' onto my head and balance it while tying the ribbon to keep it on. Hold on, Michael, I'm coming, I'm coming!

"Bring your hat!" Keith tells me. "Michael hasn't seen it."

Michael added "No hat, no pressie! Got to have a hat to have a pressie!"

Keith also asked that Joan Johnson make her way to the stage as she was the winner of the limited edition print. At this point, I had made my way to the stage and Michael's first reaction was "Lovely!" (much laughter).

"Blimey!" Michael was flabbergasted... or 'gobsmacked' might be more appropriate. Michael's reaction was captured on camera, and you can see it at the beginning of the article, and the now infamous hat pictured on the opposite page.

He looked at my hat and asked "Did you come from America with that? How the hell did you get it through security?" It's a loo-oong story, Michael...!

Keith then said if anyone else had presents for Michael to bring them up now but Michael was still 'engrossed' in my hat.

"Could we have a round of applause?" he told everyone as he gestured towards my hat. "Congratulations, love... that's... barking! You know, you really are... well done, fantastic!"

Michael seemed to be at a loss for words for my 'creation' at this point. "Only in America" he said as he turned his back to everyone and chuckled a few more times.

He gave me my prize (a beautiful framed collage of his solo albums with a handwritten note in the center - something I'll always treasure!) and a

kiss (now *that* was the best part of my prize!).

I wanted to warn him not to poke an eye out on my 'hat' but instead uttered some ridiculous thing about his name now being on a security risk list and how he can never come back to America... did I really say that? Good grief! I hope I at least thanked him! I tell you, there's not enough money in the world that could ever take the place of all the fun I had that weekend! But moving on...

Michael announced the raffle prize and said "whoever wins, I will sign it for you!" ("Ooohh!" from everyone). "I only got it three days ago, it's a gold disc." (Everyone applauded). Michael told about how it was presented to him for over 100,000 sales. "We actually sold 250,000" he said, which caused even more applause. Then he joked "I've changed my mind, you can't have it! Okay, let's do the raffle and whoever wins, I'll sign it for you, alright?"

Michael then said to stand up if your 5 digit number on the top are two zeroes...". Nobody stood up. He then asked "Nobody's stub begins with zero?" At that point, everyone stood up because *every* ticket begins with zero! "Stay standing if the second digit is a 2... stay standing if the third digit is a 1, stay standing if the fourth digit is a 6...", which resulted in an "Awwwww!" from almost everyone at that point!

"Stay standing if your entire number is... 02166... a winner!" We all started clapping. The winner was Sharon A.

"Congratulations... there you go... could I just have a pen?" (Why does Michael *never* have a pen? We need to get him a pocket liner and pens for Christmas!). "All signed, congratulations!" Michael told her as he handed her that wonderful prize.

Gill then introduced Pat Webb (pictured with Michael, right) and her folk art painting, which was absolutely lovely. Michael then told how when he first met Pat some ten years ago that he "loved her style and was fortunate to have a few things you've made for me." He told her this painting was "exceptional" and "really, really beautiful and is the best way for me to

remember what has been a really special day for me... thank you so much indeed... thank you all!"

Thank *you* Michael!

Maureen then said the winner of the competition to spot the 'Michael' connections in the painting was Joan and asked Michael if he would sign it.

"Of course I will!" he told her. Lucky Joan! "There we are! Here we are, Joan, be careful, this is glass." (clapping). And then Michael said "Well, that's it". Awwwww! As he launched into a verse from 'Tie A Yellow Ribbon'... "I'm goin' home, I've done my time... and I've got to know what is and isn't mine..." at which point one lady shouted "WE ARE!"

He laughed and said "Thank you ever so much for making this, as always, such a great event... thank you and thank you Keith and Gill and Maureen and thank you all for making the effort to be here. You all are really the best, I'm the luckiest 'top turn' that I know. God willing, we'll be back here for years to come. Take care". The room was filled with the sound of clapping and cheering.

As Michael left, 'Since You've Been Gone' echoed around the room, much



to everyone's enjoyment! What a day! But it wasn't over yet! We were then treated to clips of Michael's new DVD showing him introducing a few songs - but very conveniently cut off when the song started. Nothing like a 'teaser' to keep us on the edge of our seats until the new DVD comes out! The day finished with more raffle drawings. I searched everywhere for my ticket but alas, it was gone. It must be somewhere on that 'hat'!

One anecdote: when I got home, I had lost my monthly train pass to get to and from work. When I told my supervisor, he asked 'did you look on that hat?' Who knows what may be in there!

The Event 2006 was over and we were all tired but very happy! So many people have told me I should give my 'billboard of a hat' (thanks for that phrase, Suebee!) to Michael to help promote his new album since it has 'One Voice' flashing in green neon but somehow I don't think it would help

sell many albums... maybe get him committed but not sell albums! So I broke it down and stuffed it back into my suitcase and it now has a permanent place in my 'Ball Hall of Fame'. Strange, no one at Heathrow questioned 28 feet of wire attached to 4 battery packs in my suitcase. That's brave!

It was a magical day needless to say and everyone was so pleased with what was another successful, well thought out, marvelous way to spend a gorgeous (sunny) day in London! Thank you again to Maureen, Gill, Chris and Keith from all of us! And to all my wonderful 'Michael friends' and especially to 'our' Michael! He was 'spot on' when he said "this is what the fan club is all about!" Roll on 2008! (don't let Maureen and Gill hear that!)

Dee-licious dollop of muffin mix, indeed!



Photo: Maureen Wilkinson Rouse

CHRISTMAS BEGAN HERE...

By Brenda Kemeys

The Royal Theatrical Fund's Annual Christmas Carol Festival was held on Wednesday 29 November 2006 in St. Paul's Church, Covent Garden. It is a fascinating church, with memorials to past members of the theatrical profession from way back to the very recent. It was light and cheerful with enormous chandeliers, loads of candles and two Christmas trees decorated with gold stars and fairy lights.

Despite being welcomed by the Rector, the Revd. Simon Grigg, with a prayer and sent on our way with the Blessing, the evening was not overtly religious. In fact, many of the readings were completely wacky and extremely irrereligious. We were informed by the Rector that all of the readings were personal choices and he had nothing whatever to do with them. The readings were by: Giles Watling, Stephanie Cole, Paul Chapman, Margaret Wolfit, Richard Pascoe, Charles Grant, John Nettles, David Michaels, Geoffrey Palmer, Barbara Leigh Hunt and Sir Donald Sinden. My personal favourites were Richard Pascoe's 'Lost chapter of Genesis', John Nettles'

'Advent' by John Betjeman (he told us that he had got tired of digging up dead bodies in the Midsomer area and had gone off to make a film about Betjeman), Geoffrey Palmer doing a superb Alan Coren piece about 'Stocking Up', which listed a host of improbable gadgets which should be extremely useful, and Sir Donald Sinden, in his own inimitable style reading Tennyson's 'The Brook'.

In between these readings there were three of the more rousing Christmas Carols, so that everyone could begin to loosen their vocal cords, ready for the Carol Services to come.

OK - I know I've not mentioned him yet! It's called saving the best until last. Michael was looking very smart in a dark suit, white shirt and grey-blue tie. His two songs with the Amersham Stagecoach Children's Choir were a joy. He didn't just stand in front of them, reducing them to backing singers. He was in among them, and his delight couldn't be disguised. The smile was never very far away, as he occasionally looked around at them, encouraging them. They performed

'When A Child Is Born' and 'O Holy Night'. He looked particularly delighted towards the end of the latter, when the children had some tricky harmonising to do.

Following the formal part of the evening, we were invited to partake of a glass of wine, and, hopefully, also, sign a petition which was needed quickly to try to stop the Theatre Museum from being closed down. From the resultant scrum, I think most people achieved both.

I managed a quick word with Michael in the midst of the crowd for the wine, to thank him for playing a request for the Gloucester Girls during one of his Sunday afternoon radio shows.

Whilst drinking wine and chatting with a few people, a certain amount of celebrity-spotting went on. Some of which was of the 'I know the face, but cannot put a name to it' variety. Whatever - it was great to be part of the occasion.

Debbie and I had one last nice experience at the end of the evening. We were standing outside the church, when Sir Donald Sinden left. He passed us with a cheery 'Good night, girls!' We really liked the 'girls'!

MICHAEL BALL SINGS ANTHONY NEWLEY

Words and photo by Pam Hancock



What are some of the most annoying words you hear as a Michael Ball fan? "You just missed him!" must be right up there. Well Rose-Marie and I had only just left the tube station at Hackney when we met some friends who told us just that! It wasn't a great start to the day, but we decided to go to the Theatre and have a look round anyway. As we went round the back we could hear singing. The voice was familiar, but not the song? It was Michael rehearsing, and he was in stereo! Through the open door back stage and the open door of the BBC mobile unit. Heaven! We paused for a few minutes, but there were people coming and going and we did feel a bit conspicuous, so we went and sat outside at the pub, conveniently placed next door.

We sat there trying to listen and were soon joined by two other fans who had loads of photos for us to share. We were so engrossed that we nearly missed Michael coming out in his break for a breath of air! He was looking gorgeous in a pink T shirt, and his hair was very curly. We chatted for a few minutes and I asked if I could take a photo, Michael smilingly obliged. He said he was looking forward to the concert, then "Oh dear, that's my intro music, I have to go" and off he went, leaving us feeling elated. It was one of those special moments.

I took my seat in great anticipation. I was so taken by surprise when the box office said I could have a seat in the front row that I only got one for me, so there I sat only a few feet from centre stage. The BBC concert orchestra started the overture. I must admit that I was not too familiar with

Anthony Newley's music, so I was surprised that I seemed to know all of the music.

Michael started by singing "Once In A Lifetime". It was fantastic, and suited his voice so well. Hopefully most of you have heard the concert on the radio or the net. It was a really good show and they only left out the bits where mistakes were made, or Michael had a fit of the giggles. I just loved it all, but will try and pick a few favourites.

"If I Say I Love You, Do You Mind?" was one that just must make an appearance on tour. It got quite a few laughs with Michael's cheeky rendition, and him making eyes at the audience! "Pop Goes The Weasel" was one song I did remember from the sixties, but it was never a favourite. Amazing what effect Michael can have on a song, I found my foot tapping along. The beautiful "Who Can I Turn To" was sung with such emotion that before I knew it the first part had come to an end. Was that really an hour?

I got talking to the couple next to me in the interval. They were big Anthony Newley fans and had seen him many times, even at that very theatre. What did they think of Michael I asked? The man had a tear in his eye as he said "He's good, very good" and the lady said "Fantastic, and so gorgeous!" (A new fan in the making I think!)

We were back with the overture to the "Good Old, Bad Old Days". Michael's first song was "Candy Man". Here I have to say that he had changed from the light cream suit he wore in the first half to a dark suit. It's no good asking me details of what Michael wears, I mainly just watch his face! (I know, strange but true. It must be the photographer in me.)

Annie and Capitol voices came on stage and treated us to an accappella arrangement of "Your Imagination". Very pretty, but I don't think any of us were ready for what came next! We saw Michael do Count Fosco without the fat suit, now we saw him do Shirley Bassey without the frock! "Goldfinger" will never be the same again! Even on radio you get the idea of how much we loved it, even the orchestra applauded! I think if Michael did sing this one on tour he would bring the house down. (Please Michael, you could make it part of an Anthony Newley montage. It would work!!!)

A complete change of atmosphere came with the poignant and moving "The Man Who Makes Me Laugh". If I had to choose a favourite this would be it. No Newley tribute would be complete without "What Kind Of Fool Am I?" This brought us all to our feet, where we stayed while all of the singers came on stage to sing "Thank You Very Much". Michael ended with the moving "I Will Live Again".

I left the theatre that night with a greater appreciation of the talent that was Anthony Newley and the talent that is Michael Ball.

Thank you once again Michael for a magical evening.

PETULA CLARK AND GUESTS

by Maureen Wilkinson Rouse. Pictures by Pam Hancock



I've never been a great fan of Petula Clark and wasn't lucky enough to see *Sunset Boulevard* in Cork, but this concert was a revelation. From the moment she walked onto the stage at Drury Lane you could see why she's an international star of such long standing. Her devoted fans were rapturous as she performed hit after hit along with new material being performed for the first time and a poem written in the wake of 9/11.

Michael appeared pretending he was going to do something very serious, but we all knew it was the opening to "Since You've Been Gone"! He then went on to sing "Home" and "One Voice". Having missed Swansea (we were just a bit too busy the night before the Event!) it was lovely to hear him sing this live.

Petula joined Michael on stage and they sang "A Perfect Year" from *Sunset Boulevard*, and then a song called "Together" which Petula has recorded with Andy Williams.

The song writer Tony Hatch was also

one of Petula's guests having worked together since 1964 when he wrote "Downtown" for her. He gave us a medley of all his "TV Themes", such as "Crossroads", "Emmerdale", "Sportsnight" and of course "Neighbours". He went on to say that he had one song that needs to be sung by a great voice and luckily tonight there was someone who could do it justice – Michael. The song was the beautiful "Joanna" which was a big hit in the 60's for Scott Walker, and he was right, Michael certainly did do it justice. This is "must record" for the future I think!

Petula joined Tony Hatch for another medley this time of the hits he had written for her, one of them being "I Couldn't Live Without Your Love", which Michael joined in with.

The last duet Michael and Petula performed together was "You're The One" and everyone returned to the stage for the finale to a wonderful evening, one I shall look forward to listening to again when it's broadcast on Radio 2 on 15th December.



HACKNEY EMPIRE

31st AUGUST 2006 by Phyl Watts



It has been a lovely summer, and with Michael's outdoor concerts even better. We enjoyed the two concerts that we went to Basingstoke and Cardiff very much, but were looking forward to the Anthony Newley Tribute concert at the Hackney Empire. As we live in Essex we decided to take the car but unfortunately the car had some kind of battery problem. We left home at 1.30 which was just as well because the car had to go to the garage, so we had to get a taxi to the local station where we got the train to Hackney, which only took about an hour.

We arrived about 3.30 and thought we would go by the stage door with the hope of seeing Michael, but there was nobody at the stage door so we thought he must have already arrived. We waited for a while just in case, after about 10 minutes we started to walk away then I noticed a side door open. I could see Michael's lovely curly hair, I could not believe my luck there he was with just me and my husband, so I was able to talk to and have my photograph taken with him as well, how lucky was that. It was so lovely to talk to Michael at long last what a fantastic man he is, even my husband was impressed!

Now to the concert! What a fantastic show it was, especially Goldfinger, we didn't want the show to end! We had a lovely day and evening after a frustrating start with the car problem, but will always remember meeting Michael for the first time. I have listened to the concert on BBC Radio 2 and have also taped it so will always be able to relive the memory of that wonderful day in Hackney with Michael!

YVONNE MEETS MICHAEL



This lovely photo is of Yvonne Harris and Michael taken on the day of the fan club Event. Yvonne is Keith's wife and has become quite a fan herself over the years that he has been hosting the Event for us.

A LACK OF CREDIT!

We must apologise to Hanne Pedersen as we forgot to credit her for the lovely photo of Michael with Elaine Paige that we used for the back cover of issue 43. Here it is again, with much thanks to Hanne for letting us use it.





MICHAEL MEETS MACKENZIE AND MEGAN

Words and pictures by Maureen Wilkinson Rouse

My grandson Mackenzie had never met Michael before and Megan had only met him briefly when she was a year old so we took the opportunity at the Event for a quick hello and photo.

Mackenzie took it all in his stride and was happy to shake hands but Megan was very shy and when Michael told her she was gorgeous she hid behind her Mum. He soon won her over by noticing her “diamond” earrings that she’d just got and by telling her that she looked at least 10 when she told him she was 5!

He then asked her if she’d be his girlfriend when she grew up and she shook her head, leaving her Mum to explain that she already had a boyfriend. Afterwards Megan said to me “I might change my mind, but I think I’ll stick with Ashton!” She’ll learn.....

Above: Michael with Megan and MacKenzie

Left: Michael looking surprised when Megan told him she was only 5 years old.



VOICE OF MUSICAL THEATRE 2006

by Sue Rogers



We arrived in Cardiff to pounding rain and thoughts of Dyffryn Gardens entered my head but at least we would be in a theatre this evening, The New Theatre in Cardiff, a lovely theatre too, lots of character and a good place to see The Voice of Musical Theatre 2006. There were six finalists Lucy Durak, Aimie Atkinson, Christian Billet, Helena Blackman (of 'How Do You Solve A Problem Like Marie'... fame) Gabriel Vick and Gemma O'Duffy. The winner of the first competition in 2000 was Laura Michelle Kelly who had appeared with Michael in the summer concert in Dyffryn and took the original lead role in Mary Poppins, so I knew the standard would be high.

I went to meet Sue from the forum as I knew she was going too and we had a chat about what to expect, Sue said the judges were to sit in the circle. Along with Michael on the judging panel were Annie Skates, Elaine Paige, Julia McKenzie, and Jae Alexander. The stage was set with the orchestra on stage and Ken Bruce from

Radio 2 was compere, he introduced the judges to great applause and the show got under way with all the finalists singing one song each from shows such as Les Mis, Wicked, Rags, Avenue Q and many more. The standard was very high but to my mind one winner, Ken Bruce then went on to get comments from the judges, we had a screen on the side of the stage so that everyone could see the judges, and Michael gave his thoughts on the acts. We had an interval and in the second half the finalists sang another two songs back to back and the judges were once more asked to give their views on each performance. This was followed by another interval while the winner was decided. After about twenty minutes we were all called back to our seats as a winner had been chosen, all of the judges were invited onto the stage and Elaine Paige announced that the winner was Aimie Atkinson to wild applause, I think she was the favourite as she was the only complete amateur in the line up and my personal favourite. It was a great night and

a joy to be part of. I'll look forward to following Aimie's career.

I wasn't going to go to the stage door but we had to pass right by it to get to the car park and I noticed Sue was already there with Faye from the forum, so stopped for a chat. There was quite a bit of activity in the foyer of the stagedoor with cameras following Aimie around (maybe for screening later) and we saw Elaine Paige and Julia McKenzie coming out and they asked if we had enjoyed the show. It was then that my hubby John tapped me on the shoulder and said "Michael's behind you!"

I turned to see Michael who seemed to be standing on tip toe and straining his neck saying "I'm waiting for Michael Ball, has he come out yet!!" as there were only half a dozen or so at the stage door he signed autographs and had a chat before going off down the road to the hotel (I think) next to the theatre. It was a great night... the icing on the cake was seeing Michael afterwards.

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?



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

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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.

RIA FAUCI
5 WELLS MANOR LANE, APT.72,
RHINEBECK, NY 12572, USA

Ria is looking for someone in her area (Mid Hudson Valley) to get together and chat, and maybe even travel with to a Michael appearance. She would also love a penpal in the UK.

CALLING ALL SOUTH YORKSHIRE FANS!

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