

ON THE BALL

Issue 45



The first issue of 2007 comes at the end of one of Michael's most successful tours. Kicking off in Belfast and finishing with the rescheduled Bristol concert it reached thousands of people across the UK. Many fans travelled from all over the world to witness Michael sounding at his vocal best. He gave up smoking five weeks before the tour started and was still going strong at 10 weeks. The benefits were already evident so it was well worth the enormous effort it had taken. We had a lovely time at the concerts we went to and, as always, it was great to meet up with so many fan club members along the way.

This issue features some inspirational stories including a full report of Michael's trip to Lapland with the "When You Wish Upon A Star" charity, which took place just before Christmas.

So now Michael is about to start rehearsals for *Kismet*, another "first", performing with the English National Opera. He's even said he's going to try growing a beard for the part!

The rest of the summer includes a couple of open-air performances and a concert at the Royal Albert Hall as part of the BBC Proms so we have plenty to look forward to in the coming months.

Finally we can hardly believe that we are now celebrating the 15th anniversary of the fan club. We certainly didn't know what we were letting ourselves in for way back in 1992, or could even imagine we would still be here 15 years later; but here we are still going strong and enjoying every minute of it. Without the members the fan club wouldn't exist so we'd like to say thank you to everyone who has helped to make this club one of the best in the world. Some of you have been with us virtually from day one, and some have only just joined - we just hope you will all continue to enjoy the fun and friendship that the MBFC brings into our lives.

Maureen & Gill



Back cover photo and Lapland pictures by Kip Carroll & Dave Nelson

Layout by James Gaden - www.solitaryvision.co.uk

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Dear Everyone,

I am sat writing this looking out over Ipswich Marina on a beautiful sunny, spring day, with only 3 concerts left in the 2007 tour.... and I am feeling so very happy... and a bit knackered.

I don't think I have ever enjoyed myself on the road more. The response from you all with regards to the show itself has been fantastic. I personally don't think we have ever put a better concert together and I hope the D.V.D. manages to capture the excitement and fun that we had, not just in Hammersmith, but literally every venue we played.

So many of you were able to come to multiple shows, some to just one and a few brave souls to every one and the stories I received about your adventures getting to the gigs, watching the shows and meeting up with one

another have been brilliant. It really does feel like we all go on this journey together doesn't it.

Your cards, presents, smiling faces and applause have kept me going in every town and city we visited and more than ever I realized that I am truly blessed to have your love & support.

I'm going to be so sad when it's over but with so much to look forward to it won't be for long. I hope some of you will be able to come to Kismet or the few outdoor shows we are doing.

Finally, Gill and Maureen, 15 years of the M.B.F.C. It cannot be possible. They have been such an important part of my life in this time and I want to thank them from the bottom of my heart for keeping us all united, informed and cared for. No body does it better girls and I am hugely proud and greatly indebted to you. So it's a big kiss for them and all of you.

With all my love Mike



CHRISTMAS BEGAN HERE

by Brenda Kemeys. Pictures provided by the Royal Theatrical Fund

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

irreligious. 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 Rook'.

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'!

Ooops – We Did It Again!

Many apologies go to Karen Brogan as we omitted to credit her for taking the photo of Michael and Pat Webb at the Event. We'd also like to take this opportunity to congratulate Karen on her marriage to Mark (you may remember that Karen invited Michael to her reception during the Q & A session at the Event) in Las Vegas last October. Here they are after tying the knot:



A WINTER'S TALE

by Dee Colker and Betty Hubbard. Photos by Dee Hubbard

'Twas a cold and snowy evening in December (all right, it was actually January, but December sounds better) and while sitting at my computer, up pops an e-mail message from an unknown person with the subject of "Surprise for Betty." Hmmm, since the last name's the same, maybe it's about my friend Betty Hubbard. With trepidation, I opened the e-mail (praying this unknown sender was not sending me a virus) and YES, it was from Betty's husband.

Betty and I had spent many conversations lamenting the fact that she would not be able to come to the UK for the tour. Lo and behold ... the "Surprise for Betty" was that her husband and his business partner wanted Betty to be able to travel to the UK for some of the concerts and would we (Arlene, Carol, Lila and I) be willing for her to come along with us? Was he kidding? We would LOVE to have Betty go with us. And to make it even better, they were going to contact another friend of Betty's, Bev Melbourne, to make arrangements for Betty to attend several performances of Kismet in London in June (more about that in the next OTB issue from Bev and Betty).

So began the saga of getting tickets

to sold out concerts and hotel and air travel arrangements which would occur during Easter vacation/Spring Break dates. (In spite of the frustrations, spending other people's money is so much fun!). Finally, it all came together with the help of some other great "Michael Friends" and we were all set to present Betty with her surprise.

On a Saturday in February, despite all kinds of dire predictions of snow and rain and sleet, we (Betty, her husband and I) met in Winston-Salem, North Carolina (about a 4 hour drive for me and for them) Betty thought we were only meeting for lunch and to get to know each other personally after so many months of e-mails and phone calls. Little did SHE know!

We arrived at the restaurant at about the same time and I was so excited that the minute we were seated I reached into my little bag of tricks and pulled out a booklet I had prepared with photos of Michael in concert, plus photos of places that our group will be seeing on the mini-tour, along with some Kismet promo photos and blips and at the very end ... a flight itinerary for Betty Hubbard!

Betty did the proper oohing and aahing over the photos and then when

she reached the flight itinerary page, she flipped by it and said "You are so cruel. I wish I were really going." Her husband and I both burst out laughing and said: "You ARE going." The surprise was so complete that Betty had never even considered that the itinerary was for real. I think the photos and Betty's words tell the rest of the story...

To see Michael Ball on tour, in a concert, or in a show in England has been a dream and seemed beyond my wildest expectations. Now it will happen, thanks to these conspirators, with a little support thrown in from a few others: Patric, the leprechaun and hubby's business partner; Dee Hubbard, hubby (Dee 1); Dee Colker, friend and MBFC member (Dee 2); Bev Melbourne, friend and MBFC member.

"Betty's Surprise" was initiated by Patric in an e-mail to Dee 1. This surprise package was completed without me hearing a peep out of them about it – and it took nearly a month to execute. If you need someone to keep your secrets I can recommend at least four, with maybe a fifth or sixth person thrown in for good measure, who can do just that.

A total surprise is what they wanted and a total surprise is what they got. With tickets found to sold-out performances, flights booked, and rooms reserved, they presented me with a dream of a lifetime. Gobsmailed! I was totally disbelieving.

Patric knows of my love for Michael's voice, that I was a member of the Michael Ball Fan Club. I introduced him to Michael's voice, told him about the upcoming tour and the ENO production of KISMET in chit-chat following business meetings over the last several months. He approached Dee about sending me off to the UK – Dee thought it was an excellent opportunity to get me out of the house so he could get some computer work finished. He contacted Dee Colker and Bev Melbourne (behind my back you understand, getting their e-mail addresses off my computer – I never fiddle with his!) to ask if it would be possible at this late date. Well, bless Dee 2, and Bev, they picked up the ball – I'm going!

Betty looks through the concert book



At lunch in Winston-Salem Dee 1, Dee 2 and I got comfortable at our table – Dee 2 showed me the lovely booklet she'd assembled for her group attending Michael's tour in April. After slowly reading through the material a final page was titled "Flights for Betty Hubbard." This seemed to be a nice way to illustrate what the typical flying schedule would be and I continued on through the itinerary, saying: "Wish I were going." Dee 2 said to me "You are going." Well, no way did I believe that, but the thought was nice.

To say that I was shocked and surprised, to truly understand that preparations were complete, flights paid for, tickets purchased and rooms reserved, all of this instigated by Patric, is to put it mildly! Leprechauns and fairy godfathers are rare people and I love them.

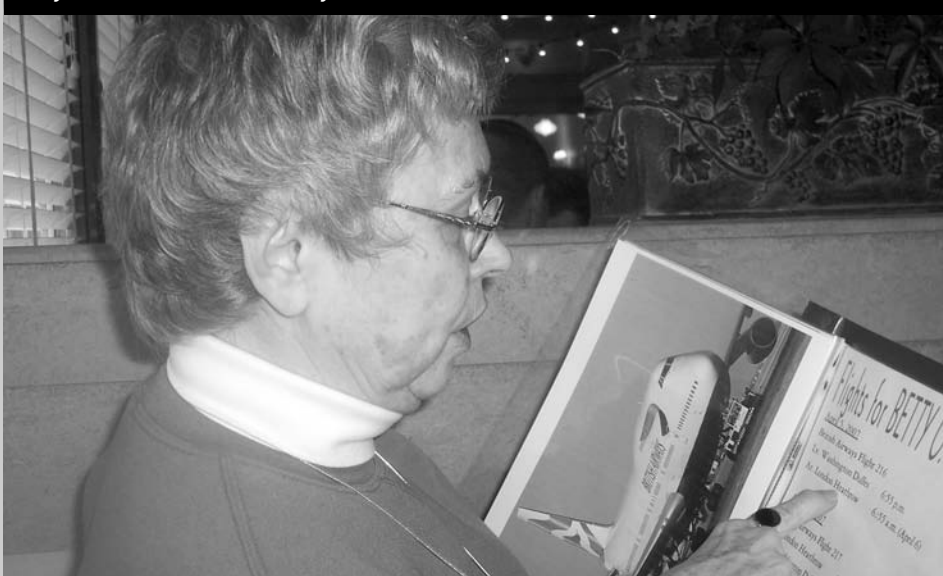
Now I do realize I am going to join them and others and to have a BALL – a whale of a good time. Michael on tour and KISMET!

I'm flying high and it will be a great time – twice!

Maureen and Gill finish the story:

We met Betty during her trip and what a wonderful time she had. She has promised to do a follow up about this and her visit for Kismet for the next issue.

Betty discovers the itinerary



Betty realises it's not a joke!



SOAPSTAR SUPERSTAR

By Susan Feeney

How do I start, I was surprised no shocked to find my boss had managed to get me two tickets for 'Soapstar Superstar' for none other than Semi-Final night on the night of January 12th 2007. A million things rushed through my head all at once, I need a hair cut, what to wear and of course then thoughts of the dreaded Manchester weather. The first thing to do was to phone my partner in crime Carol to see if she was available that night and didn't have something more important on... as if! With all the yelling and laughing we didn't need a phone line between Blackburn and Oldham.

Then we started with the usual planning, which is always fun... where to park, who will be driving, what time, all this is important stuff when you are a MB fan - it's like a military campaign! In the end it was decided that Carol's chauffeur (John) would pick me up on route and then he would pick us up afterwards and drop me off home. So a couple of days before, all plans and times were arranged, so we could relax and get a little excited. I still hadn't managed a hair cut so I was starting to look like Leo Sayer (poor Leo). On the Friday just as I was leaving work to go home I got a call to say I didn't need the

priority tickets I had in my safe (only kidding) as our source had managed to upgrade us to VIP tickets and access to the Green Room before and after the show! People must have wondered why I was doing a jig across the car park with mobile in one hand and work bags in the other. When I finally managed to get into the car and unscramble my brain, more thoughts hit about my untidy hair!! I phoned Carol at work to say things had changed and what the new arrangements were so this meant more laughing and screaming this time between Leigh and Chorley. Who said we don't live the high life?

John and Carol picked me up at 6pm and surprise, I was ready! We set off to Manchester with me giving directions, and pointing out places of interest,



Dawn Radford gets a birthday hug from Michael as he arrives at the Granada Studios in Manchester for one of the Soapstar Superstar shows. Photo by Melanie Doherty.

Housing Units of Hollinwood and other important land marks between Oldham and Manchester. Once we got to the CIS building in Manchester, John took over as I didn't have a clue where I was, as normally I don't drive into Manchester. I am ok on foot but totally lost if it involves one way streets and ring roads.

We arrived at Granada on time and were taken to a reception area to wait to be taken to the Green Room. We were called to have our handbags searched and VIP bands put on. Next was the metal detector and pat down by security. Some of you may remember how at Amsterdam airport on our way to New York Carol had set off the security alarms and had to go through a couple of times, before a very tall Dutchman asked what she had in her boots, by which time panic set in and she asked if he wanted her to take them off. To this he pointed to a curtained area and said she could go in there. It turned out Carol had had her boots heeled and the cobbler had put nails in and these were triggering the alarms. I jokingly asked if she had had her boots done again, but no, we were both ok except for my watch, so they let us go through. I had done the Granada tour a number of times when it was open but had never done this side of the studios

through the warehouses and storage areas; you had to watch your feet.

We finally arrived in the Green Room and decided to live dangerously and have a small white wine rather than our usual water. We joined two lovely ladies on a sofa made for four small bottoms (all of us of course) and chatted about the show, the weather and the celebrities in the Green Room. A number of the celebrities who had been knocked out were in there - Matthew, Leon, Alan and Gemma and some members of the Coronation Street cast who had come to watch Antony, namely the Webster girls and Fizz. Time was moving on and it was announced that we would be taken shortly to the studio so anyone who needed to visit the powder rooms, now was the time to go. Of course, like most places in the world only two ladies' toilets were available.

When we were shown to our seats we were asked by our usher who we wanted to win. When we sat down we had heads on sticks to wave and a large pink card with "G'Day" written on it. This, we decided, was something to hide behind if the camera came too close. Our seats were on the left, behind the judges and sat in front of us were the parents and friends of the celebs who had been knocked out, so we did plenty of people

watching. Just before the show started we were given our instructions by Ted Robbins and the floor manager and the judges came out to loud applause... and a little booing.

I will not bore you with what happened as most of you will have been watching. The highlight for us was when the breaks came on and about five or six assistants came out to titivate the judges hair, make up and lip gloss. A sight that will stay with us is a hair stylist smoothing over Billy's bald patch from behind, I don't think she was the "Blind Stylist" he had referred to on previous nights. We stayed in our seats and behaved ourselves like always and really enjoyed the show, especially the dancing from Antony.

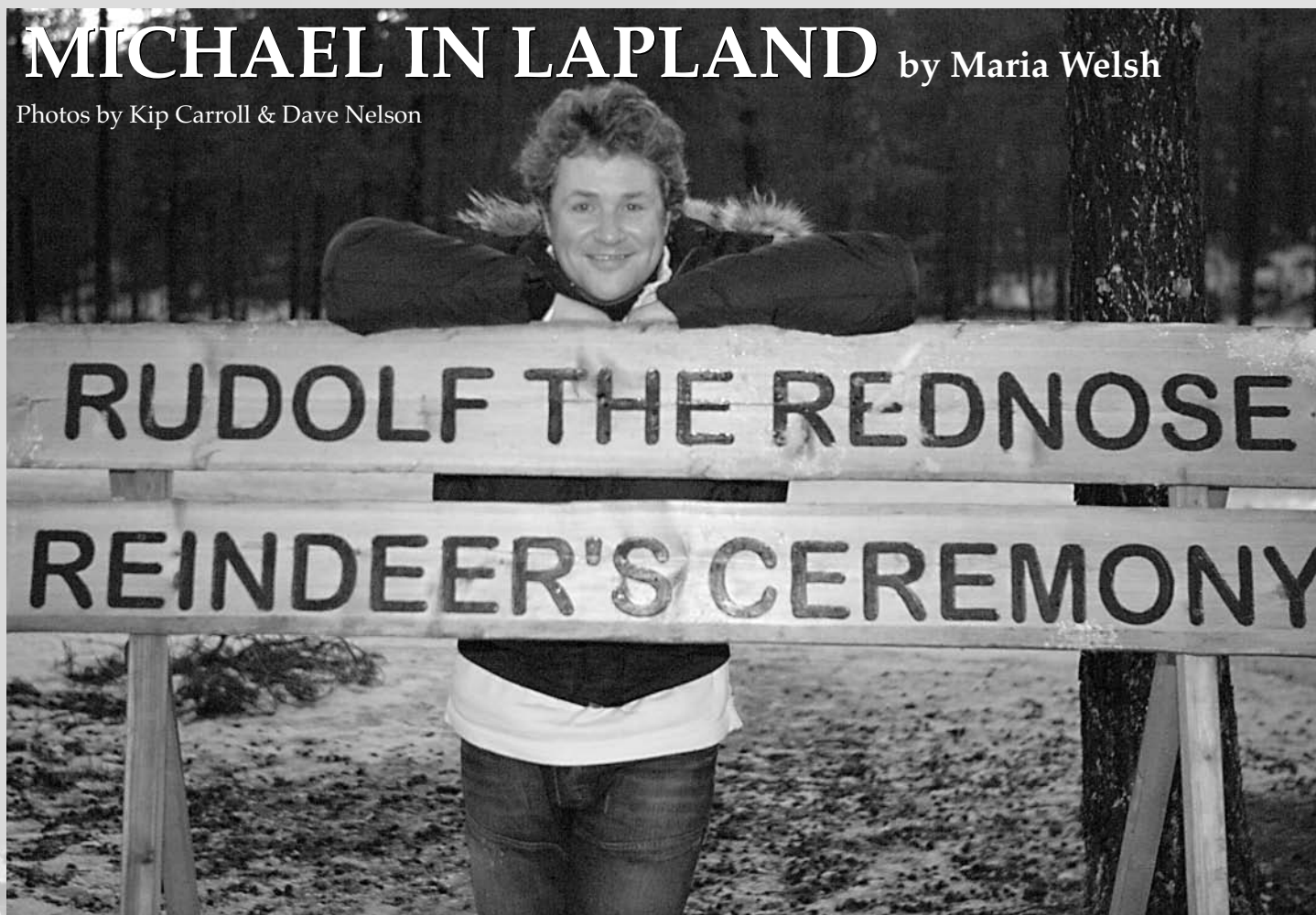
After the show we went back to the Green Room and met up with our new friends and a little more wine was drunk. A number of the celebrities came in and mingled with the guests and it was all fun to observe.

We didn't manage to see Michael except in the studio from our seats but that didn't matter we had a great night and we enjoyed the whole experience, and it was a bonus to see Antony win the final.

MICHAEL IN LAPLAND

by Maria Welsh

Photos by Kip Carroll & Dave Nelson



It was early in November when I first had the phone call from Hello magazine asking if we had space to take Michael Ball and his agent to Lapland with us on 12th December. I had met Michael a couple of years earlier and told him about our charity, and invited him to join us on our special day in the Arctic Circle.

Our charity is 'When You Wish Upon A Star' and we grant wishes for children suffering from life threatening and terminal illnesses. We are asked for loads of different wishes, the favourites being to swim with dolphins or to spend a day in Lapland and meet the real Father Christmas in Rovaniemi, Finland. We charter our own plane and take 100 children plus their parents, celebrities, team helpers and a full medical team comprising of oncologists, paramedics, and specialist paediatric nurses. A total of 235 people, and our job is to take care of them all day!

We were to fly from Manchester Airport at 7:00am for our visit to Santa. This was the tenth flight that

we were due to take and over the years had met several celebrities, but none had ever been as high profile a star as Michael.

Michael arrived at the hotel the night before the flight and when I met him, he asked what time was he due to check in at? I told him 5:00am! He nearly collapsed!! He asked us to be gentle with him, well!! I told him ok and suggested 5:30am, so I think he was happy with that, especially when we said that all the children would be there at that time!

We arrived at Terminal One at 4:00am and the children and parents began to arrive soon after. The scene was amazing, a hundred kids all running around being chased by clowns, Disney characters, glittery reindeer on stilts, and to top it off loads of celebrities.

We were delighted to have Wendi Peters who plays Cilla in Corrie, Helen Flanagan who plays Rosie Webster in it, Nikki Sanderson who played Candice from Corrie, Saracen

(one of the Gladiators - gorgeous), the four boys from Eton Road, (The X Factor) and of course Michael Ball.

Michael was on the Purple Prancer team and, as we took off into the early morning sky, was up and down the plane meeting families and children, and hearing all about their lives and how different illnesses have affected them.

We always fly with Monarch Airlines and the crew are always amazing. This year was no exception. Michael and his agent Jackie Gill were sat in the front section of the plane opposite the stewards and they ribbed him good-naturedly all day, as did Jackie! A stewardess called Kristie had a cerise Santa hat with rhinestones on it, and Michael took a shine to it. Eventually she let us auction it off on the plane and Michael bought it for £200 and the donation went to the charity! Poor Kristie lost her hat, but Michael looked better in it!

When we landed in Lapland there was great excitement as the Sami

guides in their traditional costumes, ringing cowbells, met us at the airport. They ushered us onto heated coaches and we were all driven into the heart of the countryside to the Enchanted Forest. The guide on Michael's coach was called Kaiser and she wears Reindeer fur coats as the temperature there can drop as low as -50 degrees!! On the day we were there it was only -2 so it was ok. On the way to the forest Kaiser told us all about her country and their customs, she also said that she knew there was a very famous British singer on board called Michael and would he sing for her. Which he duly did! I think it was 'Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer' and also 'Winter Wonderland'. I think at this point I had to pinch myself to realise that Michael Ball was sitting on this coach singing Christmas carols on the way to the Enchanted Forest.

Once we were there the fun began immediately. Michael had found himself a girlfriend for the day as he told us all. She was a little girl named Emily and was 8 years old. Michael helped to lift her onto a sleigh and then pulled her all around the forest, helping her onto reindeer rides, skidoo rides and all the other exciting things in the snowy forest. There are several large bonfires and lots of twinkling lights in the trees and hidden in the snow all over the place. One of the huge bonfires has an open barbecue and the Lapp guides cook sausages and marshmallows over the fires, and there are huge kettles of hot chocolate and berry juice merrily bubbling away all day, to help to keep the children warm. Michael was spotted several times munching on a sausage! He thought they were delicious. He was then dragged into the Arctic Circle ceremony, which entailed him being initiated by Guide, he was flicked round the face with a reindeer tail, drank warm reindeer milk and then as the guide daubed charcoal on his nose, he was told that he could now come back as a reindeer in his next life! He looked cute!!

Michael seemed to be everywhere as the photos show. He was on the skidoos, quad bikes, skis, reindeer sleigh rides, he carried children all over the slippery ground, down to the husky rides and back and posed with

them and their parents with reindeer, nothing was too much trouble. Including the numerous snowball fights that he got involved with.

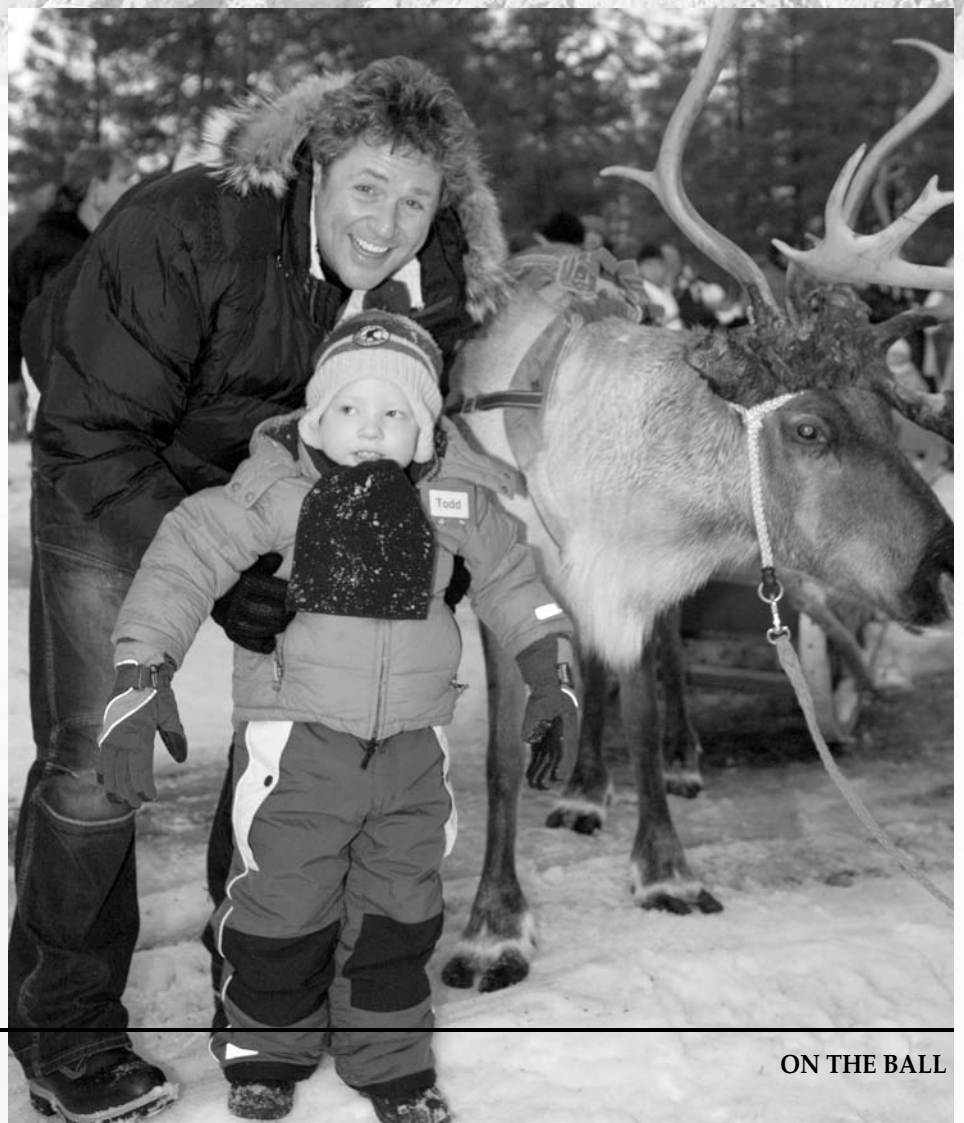
One of the highlights of the forest was when Michael, Cilla, Rosie, Nikki, and Eton Road all sat around one of the camp fires and were videoed singing White Christmas. It was really quiet and a certain beautiful voice soared above everyone else's, it was a beautiful moment.

Back on the coach we left the forest and as we drove through it, beautiful silvery fireworks leapt up into the dark sky as we passed through, and all the children were excitedly pointing out the sparkles as they flew into the sky. We were then on our way to the Pohianievi Hotel for our buffet dinner and the famous meeting with Santa.

All our Team members line up and serve our families and children with their meals, then once everyone has eaten and tried the gorgeous ginger biscuits with fresh cream (delicious) Santa arrives. Wendi Peters (Cilla) sat

with Michael and introduced him to this delicious treat, and he did enjoy it! Wendi also sings and is trying to talk Michael into singing a duet with her sometime in the future.

Michael then got on the stage and started singing Christmas carols and everyone joined in. This went on for about ten minutes and then we started to wind the children up by asking them to sing Rudolph as loudly as they could so that Santa would hear them and come to the hotel with Rudolph. There is only one hour of complete daylight at this time of year so as the children stood on their chairs and looked through the huge picture windows into the forest waiting for Santa, the atmosphere was electric. We had put the children who were in wheelchairs by the windows, and the rest of the children were edged nearer to the windows to see Santa, then the singing suddenly increased in volume, little faces were rosy with excitement, and suddenly there he was! Out of the forest came a huge Santa Claus with Rudolph pulling a sleigh with a sack of presents





on it and a couple of elves to help him.

The children all screamed and yelled, a couple fell off their chair in the excitement, and I have to say that several parents shed a tear. It is always an emotional moment when the kids first spot Santa, and as he walked round the hotel, he then came in bringing Rudolph into the room with him! The children couldn't believe it! Santa greeted all the children and asked the question 'Have you been good? Of course they all had! He then was introduced to Michael and asked him also! And of course he said that he had!

The next few hours were spent with the children and families going up to Santa and telling him their wishes for Christmas. Several had brought letters for him, and one or two brought small gifts for Santa. Santa gave each child a cuddly reindeer as his gift to them.

Michael was outside for part of this time, having more pictures taken with the children and reindeer, which for obvious reasons couldn't stay indoors all the time.

Then our meeting was over and we were back on the coach and off for the final part of our day, shopping at Santa's village. This is an amazing place and actually has little lights, which mark the actual Arctic Circle line. There is an ice slide and Michael was straight on this with all the kids, he took some down it, he caught others at the bottom, and I think that he was part of the group with the boys from Eton Road who all went down together, fell over and all ended up in a heap at the bottom with wet trousers and all the children laughing at them all struggling to get up.

We spent a couple of hours there and then it was time to say goodbye to Lapland and take our final coach ride to catch our plane home. As we left the village, the night was black and our guide Kaiser sang a Finnish lullaby to us. She has a lovely voice and always sings. As everyone was applauding, she asked Michael to sing one last time for us. He sang all of 'Silent Night', and you could have heard a pin drop. As I glanced around our coach I noticed several parents with tears in their eyes, it was a

definite lump in the throat moment. As we turned onto the approach at the airport, Michael's beautiful pure voice hit the last note absolutely spot on, everyone broke into applause and cheers, just proving that after being flown 3,000 miles, playing with families in the snow, husky riding, sliding, and of course not forgetting the hot sausages and ginger biscuits, that amazing voice was still that, amazing!

We said goodbye and had a hug from our friendly guides and assured them that we would be back again next December with another 100 children for them to share the experience of the Lapland day with them.

On board our plane the Monarch crew had been busy getting our dinner ready and some presents for the children. Wendi Peters served the dinners out and a great trolley dolly she was. The X Factor group Eton Road came to Michael's end of the plane and sang Christmas songs with Michael on the microphone onboard, then Cilla and Rosie joined them and they all sang together.

At the end of the flight as we were taxiing to a halt in Manchester at 11:00pm, our stewardess Kristie announced on the mike that Monarch Airlines would like to thank us all for letting them share our day, everyone clapped and then with a twinkle in her eye, she looked straight at Michael and told the whole plane she'd also like to thank Michael BOLTON for a great day!! And what a fantastic singer he was! The plane went into absolute hysterics. Michael was crying with laughing!! She got her own back for Michael buying her Santa hat!

As we came into the arrival hall at Manchester there were all the families waiting for their wives and children, we had arranged for a gospel choir to sing, plus a Santa foil balloon for each child and chocolates. It looked amazing. The choir were fantastic in their purple robes, and Michael went to join them and sang a few bars with them, great jam session. The crowds couldn't believe their eyes at who they were seeing! It's not every day that you see Michael Ball in an airport



singing with a gospel choir. As all the kids came through very tired but extremely happy, Michael and the teams said goodbye to the families that they had spent the day with, and there were several emotional mums and dads as we saw them off on their way.

One little boy told us as he was going that 'This has been the best day of my life'. The kids manage to make us all feel humble on this special day, and we all felt extremely privileged to have been able to spend it with them.

We have a date in our diary for Tuesday 11th December 2007 to once again take some extremely brave children to meet the real Santa Claus. We'd like to invite Michael once again to join us in the Arctic Circle this December, and help us again to give them all the best day of their lives!

Michael made some very special memories for many of our children and of course their parents. One

young boy and his father also spent time with Michael, and I know that they have been invited to go to see him when he is on tour. He worked tirelessly all day and those famous dimples didn't stop smiling the whole time.

What a Guy!

WHEN YOU WISH UPON A STAR.....

.....need your help. The charity relies totally on voluntary donations and fund raising to continue creating magical memories for these special children and their families. If you want to help please write or call to:

When You Wish Upon A Star
P O Box 394, Unit 24,
Hillgate Business Centre, Swallow
Street, Stockport SK1 3AU
Tel: 0161 477 7277
Email: sue@wishonastar.org
www.whenyouwishuponastar.org.uk

THIS IS THE MOMENT

Michael Ball, live in Hammersmith 31st March 2007

By James Gaden

It had been a long time coming, but on the 31st March, I was finally boarding a train to see my first Michael Ball show. I've been to a lot of shows for a lot of different artists in a lot of different places, but I have to say I was particularly excited about this one. I've become a bigger fan of Michael with every release he's done since I got 'Centre Stage' and I couldn't wait to finally see him live.

Since I joined the fan club, Michael had been busy first with 'Patience', then 'Woman In White', so there hadn't been a tour to catch him on - I actually contacted the fan club about becoming a member about a week after the last tour finished. I'm not into outdoor shows as a rule, so I decided not to make the trek for a summer show and wait for a proper indoor venue as part of a proper tour.

I'm a lucky person by nature and I picked Sheffield to go to, before changing my mind and picking Hammersmith, for three reasons. Firstly, I wanted to meet Maureen and Gill in person after having the pleasure of doing this very magazine with them - and it was only fair to let them experience my legendary presence in person - email can be so restricting! Secondly, I knew Michael would have a good gig in front of his home crowd and thirdly, I figured if he was going to record any show for a DVD, it would be Hammersmith, so that's the ticket I booked. Boy did I make the right choice!

I checked into my hotel and made my way to the venue. As I walked in I spotted Gill chatting to a gentleman. I said hello and she introduced me to the man, who was also called James, and he turned out to be Michael's former manager. I turned around as Maureen appeared who started things off just right by saying 'I know this good looking gentleman!' I'm always open to flattery, especially from someone other than myself and Maureen took advantage of

that with some quite outrageous flirting and groping before some more forum members arrived and saved me.

I was introduced to Cheryl from Castleford, Lori who had come all the way from the States and the Karaoke Queen herself, Suebee. I found them to be like all the forum members I ended up meeting throughout the night - lovely, friendly ladies. I ended up talking to Lori and Suebee about rock music and karaoke and the next thing I know it's almost show time and I hadn't even seen the opening act! I was enjoying myself though, so I can try and catch Tara in Scarborough.

I went to the merchandise stall while it was quiet to get myself a programme, a tradition I do with any show I go to, and found myself behind a woman in the queue vacillating between two different Michael Ball fleeces. One was pale blue, one was dark blue and she was utterly torn between the pair. After watching her agony for a minute or two, I pointed to the dark blue one and said "That one." She looked at me, shrugged and bought the dark blue one. My work done, I got my programme and took my place for the show.

I had a fantastic seat three rows from the stage, on the left, and a totally unobstructed view as the only people sitting in front of me were two little girls - the seats directly in front were empty for camera equipment by the looks of things, so I lucked out there. I got the buzz of anticipation that always hits just before one of my favourite artists hits the stage. The atmosphere really was charged and when the overture started I knew from the first bar it would be a good night.

Michael appeared to rapturous applause and cheering and kicked things off with 'One Night Only'. He looked very happy and invigorated as he blasted through it and he sounded great, before following up with an excellent version of 'Since You've Been

Gone'. It was a classic up tempo start to a show and had everyone in good spirits from the word go.

I had avoided the forum to make sure I had no idea what songs he would perform in the set and I had threatened people with all manner of hideous deaths reminiscent of medieval torture should anyone spoil it. As such, Maureen, Suebee and Lori were all very good saying I would be surprised at some choices but impressed, without telling me what these songs were. I wondered if he would put any Anthony Newley songs in the set after the great concert he did for the BBC. Michael did just that by including 'Feeling Good' and 'Do You Mind', both of which were superbly delivered. He then pulled out 'The Living Years' and 'Home' from the 'One Voice' album, which I did expect, but he paired the latter with 'A House Is Not A Home' to great effect.

It's hard to pick out highlights in a concert full of highlights, but a jaw dropping version of 'This Is The Moment' from 'Jekyll And Hyde' to open the musical portion of the show has to be mentioned. It was just staggering and had an exuberant crowd on its feet the second he hit the last note. Michael weaved his way through timeless pieces by Stephen Sondheim and Andrew Lloyd Webber, including songs such as 'High Flying Adored' from 'Evita', 'All I Ask Of You' from 'Phantom Of The Opera', the ever popular 'Empty Chairs, Empty Tables' from 'Les Miserables' and 'Tell Me It's Not True' from Willy Russell's 'Blood Brothers'. He also previewed a couple of songs from 'Kismet' as a preview of his next theatre appearance, neither of which he gets to sing in the show! After hearing the job he did, to paraphrase Mr T, I pity the fool who has to try and follow Michael's versions of 'And This Is My Beloved' and 'Stranger In Paradise'.

Apart from the great songs, one of the best things about the gig for me was Michael laughing and joking and obviously enjoying every minute of the show. There's nothing quite like live entertainment when your enjoyment is mirrored by that of the artist - it takes things to another level.

For Children In Need, Michael



Children In Need Auction winner Sian Crisp at the after-show drinks party

auctioned the chance to sing a duet with him. I'll freely admit I wasn't best pleased when I saw how much it went for and I found out by contrast my bid was smaller than Jordan's sensible underwear collection. When Michael announced he was bringing the winner on to duet with him, I wanted desperately to hate this sixteen year old upstart called Sian Crisp. I wanted to hate her even more when she delivered a very impressive version of 'A Little Fall of Rain' with Michael, seemingly with no nerves at all. Yes, she was better than I would have been. There, I've said it!

After Sian had been presented with flowers, she left the stage and Michael picked up where he left off with an aptly chosen and suitably rousing 'The Show Must Go On' from the 'Music' album. Michael hit full flow with his story from the Savoy and drunken excess. He obviously loved telling the story, peppering it with accents, feigned inebriation, funny faces and wry looks, all for comic effect. The resulting story, cleverly fabricated in just the right places, rivalled any of the tales of rock and roll excess I've chronicled, with the purpose being to lead up to an unlikely cover of 'Rehab' by Amy Winehouse. Personally I think Amy is deplorable and as I realised the story was leading up to Michael covering one of her songs, I was dreading it. However, once again Michael proved how versatile he is and he delivered a truly remarkable version that he made his own.

'Party Time' was introduced with a delightful 'Don't Stop Me Now', along with Michael demonstrating the power to stop the charge of adoring fans with a wave of his hand that

rivalled Moses parting the sea. He followed that by belting out 'Dancing In The Dark' and cannoning us all down the home straight to the end of the show.

It really was anything goes now in a set that also included Gnarl's Barkley's 'Crazy' and Michael went for some 'pure self indulgence' by delivering a great version of the Scissor Sisters' 'I Don't Feel Like Dancing'. The main set ended there with everybody on their feet, and Michael returned for his first encore by treating us to a stirring 'One Voice'. The second and final encore was the ubiquitous 'Love Changes Everything' and the show was over in what seemed like the blink of an eye.

It was a fantastic concert and one of the best vocal performances I've had the pleasure of hearing. I certainly picked the right show to attend. I was stopped a few times in the hotel where a lot of the fans were staying by people who recognised me from the forum, which did my monstrous ego the world of good, so for that, I thank you! It was nice talking to all the fellow fans and the band, singers, Callum and of course Michael delivered in spades. The DVD should be something special.

Is it out yet then, or what?!





BALL BOWLED ME OVER!!!

Michael FEVER hit the North West! By Alana Wadkin

It all started in July last year... my mum bought me tickets to see Michael's open air concert at Victoria Park, Southport as a graduation present. She knew how I always wanted to see him live. I was delighted as I have been a huge fan for many years but couldn't go to any concerts while I was studying for my degree. I loved my first open air concert and became completely hooked on Michael ever since. He is extremely talented and has a magnificent voice! Michael doesn't just sing the songs, he uses his acting skills to give each phrase and note extra meaning. A few days later, I contacted the fan club to say that I was a fan and how much I enjoyed the concert as well as asking if Michael was touring the following year. I received a lovely reply back, so I decided to become an official fan club member. I am so glad I did, everybody is really kind and friendly especially Maureen and Gill. They are absolutely lovely and so helpful.

When I saw Michael was touring the UK, I booked my tickets and wrote a

letter to Michael's management asking if there was any chance of meeting Michael at one of his concerts – never expecting anything from it. A couple of weeks went by, I received an email saying that Michael himself had read my letter and how he was touched by it and he would love to meet me at his Manchester concert.

The week before felt like an eternity; I did everything to pass the time – regularly checking the fan club forum for any news and reviews. When I read that Michael was having some throat problems; my heart sank and I was very anxious. My cousin Adele came over during that week to see how I was and to make concert arrangements. The day of the Manchester concert finally came, I was still a bit worried but *really* excited. The worry soon went after I received a nice reassuring email from Maureen at the fan club. It felt very surreal, I was in a daydream. As the day went on, the reality set in - I was actually meeting Michael Ball in a few hours! We picked my cousin up and drove to Manchester. Along the way I

received a phone call from Michael's tour manager Barry saying the meeting time had changed. We eventually arrived at the theatre after getting slightly lost! We went for a drink in the nearby pub while we were waiting until the 'meet and greet'. I met a few other fans, which was nice. We went to the stage door to make ourselves known and we talked to the security guards until Barry arrived and took us backstage. Barry was so nice and friendly, he even helped my dad to lift my wheelchair up the stairs. While Michael was just getting dressed – we had a good nose around backstage.

Then Michael came running down the corridor shouting "Alana!" and straight over to me. Imagine my face; I was completely shocked but absolutely delighted! He gave me this huge hug and several kisses. Michael said "I have seen your pictures on the forum but they don't do you justice, you are far more beautiful in person." I was stunned and was taken a back for a second; then the rest of my family finally met Michael. My cousin totally lost it - very star struck! He looked very handsome – far better in the flesh! The sparkling blue eyes, his gorgeous smile and the curly hair did it for me... We asked if we could take a video and some photos – "yeah sure, you can do whatever!" I am not just saying this; Michael is the *most* lovely, charming, down to earth, genuine person I have ever met! Michael even noticed I was wearing his necklace, which was designed by Michael himself. He made me feel so *special* and totally at ease with his adorable way and gorgeous smile with those dimples, how can anybody resist that smile! Michael was so caring, which completely surprised me! From the first moment we met, I realised we both had the same cheeky way and sense of humour as well as a passion for music. We just instantly clicked and had a fantastic laugh! Michael thought it was very funny when my mum tried to record with the lens cap still on the video recorder – he said "taking the lens cap off might help! Shall I video while you answer Alana's questions?" I was amused watching my mum's reaction – sheer panic and embarrassment; everybody found this hysterical!

My cousin bottled out reading my pre-typed questions, so my dad had to read them out to Michael as I can't talk. Michael answered every question in-depth and laughed at certain comments I

wrote especially when I said "you are a pretty good dancer especially when you do the pelvic thrust! Hehe!" Michael actually did the pelvic thrust for me, which I thoroughly enjoyed and he said "you don't miss a trick, do you?" Michael certainly knows how to treat his disabled fans, he spoke directly to me not to my family, I was delighted and my face lit up – not many people actually speak to the disabled person, they tend to talk to the carer. Michael looked directly into my eyes when he spoke, this way I could hold a conversation with him using my eyes and facial expressions. My family and I were really impressed at this. As my dad read out what my favourite songs/albums were, all that you heard was "ahhhh, you certainly have good taste in music." Michael seemed really surprised about 'Someone Else's Dream' being one of my favourite songs. Michael launched into a short burst of the Blues Brothers' 'Shake Your Tail Feather' which is another song I love.

I then asked "why haven't you written anymore songs? 'Someone Else's Dream' and 'Just When' are beautiful songs with fantastic lyrics, you should definitely write more." His response was "I haven't had ***** time – I have been too busy to write any more" with a cheeky grin, this made me laugh. I got to ask some questions that I was dying to ask Michael, especially "was there any specific reason why you did 'Alone Together - Live at Donmar'?" He looked at me and answered "I wanted to do something completely different from the tours – the audience could interpret it as they want, it was something which surprised and scared some people." I named a few songs I would love Michael to sing; he seemed to like my choices and said he would consider performing them, which I was very pleased about. Michael was very interested in how I accessed the computer with not being able to use my hands, I explained that I used a neckswitch, this led to a conversation of our own. After more photos and several lovely hugs and kisses, Michael had to get ready for the concert... The time just flew by, I forgot to ask Michael for his autograph (I was that overwhelmed) but I felt so lucky and privileged to have the pleasure of meeting Michael. I would like to thank everybody that was involved in making my lifetime dream come true, especially you Michael. I hope you liked your special card made from the heart. Words can't express how I felt and how

very grateful I am! This special memory will always stay with me for as long as I live.....

I was lucky enough to go to Liverpool as well as the Manchester concert. Both venues had amazing atmospheres. At Manchester, the wheelchair section was at the front to my delight, I could actually see everything. We were sat next to Liz, another fan club member and her family, they were so nice. I absolutely loved each concert; I never stopped singing, dancing and screaming!! Michael was absolutely amazing; what an outstanding voice! I thought Annie, Dean (Andy at Manchester) and Hazel were fantastic on backing vocals. There is nothing better than a live band to enhance the quality of the songs; Callum did a brilliant job with the music arrangements. The concerts had so many memorable moments that I will never forget... With this section of the article, I intend to give an insight into the entire concert from the two venues. The song list was the same at both concerts except for three songs that weren't performed (I think it was due to Michael had some throat problems) and Michael's duet with Hayley Tameddon (Delilah Dingle in Emmerdale) at Manchester, which I will talk about later.

Both evenings began with Michael's voice over the sound system introducing his support act Tara Blaise. She is an Irish folk singer with a nice voice. Tara performed mostly her own songs and a couple of covers. She only had an acoustic guitar accompaniment, I liked her performance.

After the interval, the lights dimmed,



the band started to play the overture which was a medley of tunes, mainly 'One Voice'. I focused on the stairs at the back of the stage and Michael appeared (with that gorgeous smile) at the top of the stairs to enormous applause, cheers and screams. He was wearing a pin-striped suit, black shirt and a striped tie, he looked absolutely gorgeous! Michael opened with a lively version of 'One Night Only' from the movie Dreamgirls, which I really enjoyed – an excellent opening song. Following more applause, Michael mentioned that the 'One Voice' album was his 14th solo album, which nicely led on to the Rainbow classic 'Since You've Been Gone' - a favourite of mine from the album. I loved the rock beat and how Michael sung it live. Judging the response at both concerts, the audience seemed to really like it too.

Michael explained how he was feeling by singing 'I'm Feeling Good' by Anthony Newley, I definitely got into the mood of this song and so did my cousin. He then



referred to the Anthony Newley Tribute Concert and said how he would "like to do a whole show of them" but was only going to do one more, then Michael launched into 'Do You Mind?' The audience seemed to really enjoy it because Michael encouraged everybody to participate throughout the song. During the song, Michael came over to where I was sat and gave me a smile, I was thrilled. My cousin kept nudging me and saying "did you see that?"

'The Living Years' (originally by Mike & the Mechanics) is another song I adore from the 'One Voice' album and Michael performed it brilliant live. It was certainly given the 'Ball Magic'. At Liverpool Michael told of his time away from home last year and how he felt very "alone and homesick" for family and friends as the introduction to a beautifully sung 'Home' (originally by Michael Bublé), which then lead into a song from one of Michael's very early albums - 'A House Is Not A Home'. Sadly, Michael didn't sing either of these songs at Manchester.

"Do you like musical theatre?" Michael asked the audience, was the lead up to the 'Musicals' section of the show. This was a special part and a highlight of both concerts for me. What a more appropriate song to open this section with than one of my favourites - 'This Is The Moment'; a very popular song with the audience, you could hear a pin drop

as Michael performed this fantastic song and got a well deserved standing ovation at both venues. At Manchester, my cousin and I noticed Michael kept looking over in our direction, we knew why, earlier I mentioned to Michael how I can relate to 'This Is The Moment' and how I absolutely love him singing it. At the Liverpool concert Michael then sang 'High Flying Adored', which I've never heard him sing before and I thought it was a lovely song. Unfortunately, this wasn't in the Manchester concert due to Michael having throat problems. I really enjoyed 'All I Ask Of You' and 'Loving You', they were performed with passion. Michael then told us of how he was "going up in the world", this was the introduction to informing the audience that he would be performing shortly in Kismet with the English National Opera in London. Michael chose to sing two songs, which he wouldn't be performing in Kismet, 'And This Is My Beloved' and 'Stranger In Paradise'. I was quite surprised I liked them because I thought they were operatic numbers, I was so pleased they weren't! Both songs were sung amazingly, the audience seemed to love them. Michael then delivered a breathtaking version of 'Empty Chairs, Empty Tables', which everybody loved at both concerts. At Liverpool, as Michael went to sit on his stool, he told us that his own stool had been "nicked!" when it had been left unattended outside the theatre that afternoon, much to the entire audience's

amusement. At both concerts, 'Tell Me It Isn't True' was a firm favourite - just fantastic!

Then at Manchester Michael introduced Hayley Tameddon as "the person who should have won Soapstar Superstar", they sang this most beautiful duet of 'The Prayer'. Both voices were blended exceptionally well; this breathtaking performance got an outstanding response. Hayley is a fantastic singer; I was so pleased to have seen her singing live. In my opinion, the mood changed as Michael sung another one of my personal favourites - 'The Show Must Go On' (originally by Queen) from Michael's 13th album 'Music'. The great Freddie Mercury had something in common with Michael - he was a fantastic showman! Michael is an exceptional showman, who does this brilliant song justice. I loved this performance.

When I first read the song list, I wasn't sure about the next few songs. Michael sang 'Crazy' by Gnarls Barkley which surprised me, but by the middle of the song, I was into it - dancing away. At Manchester Michael walked over to where we sat and sung a couple of lines straight to me. He seemed to enjoy himself and have fun with this song. Then he went on to tell the memorable story of that night in the Savoy. This was another highlight of the concert, he was hysterical!! Everybody knows that Michael likes to tell stories. Apparently Michael was sitting with the Royal Family at the Southbank Awards - no it wasn't the real Royal Family.... but Caroline Aherne and Ricky Tomlinson from the alternative Royle Family and he got absolutely rotten drunk! This got a brilliant reception at Liverpool because Ricky is a fellow Liverpudlian. Michael thinks he'd told "her indoors" that it was only a lunchtime do and he'd be home by 3pm, 4 o'clock at the latest. Just fast forward to 10.30! Nobody wanted the party to end, so they all decided to move the party to the American bar, which is one of the fanciest bars in London - "you have to wear a tie, and I was - around my head!" They gathered around the piano, Amy Winehouse played and they were all singing, all drunk! Then the manager came over to him and said (cue the campiest, funniest impression of a French man that I have ever seen!!) "Excuse me sir, singing is not allowed in here" and Michael went



(he did a good impersonation of himself drunk!) "What? Do you know who you're talking to?" (I was hysterical, I couldn't move with laughing!). After Michael explained who they were, the manager still said "I'm sorry sir but I must ask you to leave." By this time, he'd finally worked out that it really was time he went home, so he says he practised his mantra all the way home "pay the taxi, unlock the door, get undressed, get into bed - pay the taxi, unlock the door, get undressed and get into bed!" but Michael got it slightly wrong. What he actually did was pay the taxi, get undressed, unlock the door... and walked straight into Cathy, who had her arms folded, tapping her foot, looking at her watch! So he threw his arms round her and slurred "I really, really love you", Cathy said "had a good time, have you?" and he went "I can't talk at the moment!" and went to bed. The next morning he got up, feeling dreadful, to find his clothes all over the driveway and Cathy had asked "who was there and was he proud of himself?" He said that among other people, Amy Winehouse had been there, so Cathy said "that's interesting, she does a song that I think maybe you ought to listen to and think about"... and then Michael went into Amy Winehouse's song

'Rehab'. I am not keen on the original but absolutely enjoyed Michael's version

My final highlight was Party Time - the rock/pop section of the concert; it started with another Queen classic 'Don't Stop Me Now'. It was sung fantastic and made everybody start dancing! My cousin had to move me closer to the stage because I couldn't see a thing (I felt so sorry for the rest in wheelchairs and very guilty that I eventually could see); a gang of people came rushing to the front blocking everybody's view. Michael then went into Bruce Springsteen's 'Dancing In The Dark', also a firm favourite with the audience. You could see that Michael was enjoying and loving every minute of it... The final pop song that Michael absolutely performed and sung excellent was the Scissors Sisters' massive hit 'I Don't Feel Like Dancing'. I thought the backing singers' and Michael's vocals were amazing throughout this song. I will always remember Michael's dance, some 'Saturday Night Fever' moves! I completely became carried away and did the 'Night Fever' moves as well, much to the amusement of the people near me.

Michael said his thanks and goodbyes then walked off the stage to deafening cheering and clapping (cue the encore). We definitely wanted more! Michael returned to sing Barry Manilow's 'One Voice', which was totally magnificent. He sang the first few lines un-companied, which showed the quality of his voice. Both my cousin and I held our arms up and started swaying in time with the music. Michael again kept looking over and smiling. Then after another encore and standing ovation, Michael encouraged the audience to sing along with him to his signature song 'Love Changes Everything', I absolutely adore this song. Michael took his final bows, came to the side of the stage, looked directly at me - blew a kiss and walked off stage to rapturous applause.

WHAT AN AMAZING CONCERT –
WHAT A FANTASTIC, CHARISMATIC,
GORGEOUS, CARING PERSON!

THANK YOU MICHAEL, KEEP THAT
BEAUTIFUL SMILE!

I really didn't want the special night to end... We are now looking forward to the open air concert at Repton School, Roll on July!



Doris Lanning was lucky enough to have her photo taken with Michael at the stage door before the Portsmouth concert. And you'll never guess who took the photo - Michael! Is there no end to this man's talents?!



This lovely photo was sent to us by fan club member Erica Mackney whose grand-daughter, Edna Mackney pictured with Michael, played the role of Cosette in the 21st Anniversary show of Les Miserables. Erica was able to meet Michael at the party later in the evening, a dream come true having been a fan for 20 years. *Photo by Perry Mackney*

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?

There is also a Fan Club Members Forum for fan club members only. The password to access it is 'forever'.



St. Richard's Hospital CHARITABLE TRUST

Registered Charity No. 1049201

At the end of Michael's Portsmouth concert a collection was taken up for the St Richard's Cancer Day Unit Appeal which totalled £3,000. This was also Michael's chosen charity on 'Who Wants To Be A Millionaire'.

Anyone wishing to make donations to this appeal can do so by sending to Veryan Grant, Head of Fundraising.

Veryan Grant
Head of Fundraising
St. Richard's Hospital
Spitalfield Lane
Chichester
West Sussex
PO19 6SE

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.

JEAN SHERLOW
1 SCARFF COURT, HAYLING
ISLAND, HANTS PO11 9JJ

Jean is trying to find some one who lives in her postcode area PO11 9JJ or nearby to pal up with, and is as nuts about Michael as she is.

MARGARET YOUNG
16 CARFAX CLOSE, BEXHILL-ON-
SEA, EAST SUSSEX TN39 5EG

Margaret would love to hear from any members in her area, e.g. Eastbourne/Hastings. She is a young 66 year old widow and has been since 1997. She likes all sorts of music but of course her favourite is Michael. She also likes Jane McDonald whose fan club she also belongs to.

CALLING ALL SOUTH YORKSHIRE FANS!

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