

ON THE BALL

Issue 49



Hi there,

As autumn approaches we are thrilled with the news that Michael will be staying with Hairspray until 25 April 2009. It's been wonderful that so many of us have been able to see Michael in his Olivier award winning role of Edna in Hairspray. We've also had the summer concerts and of course Michael's Sunday morning show on BBC Radio 2 to listen to. All in all, it's a great time to be a Michael Ball fan.

The summer concerts were a great success, even rain-soaked Audley End couldn't dampen our spirits. In this issue you will find reviews from all of the concerts plus more of your Hairspray experiences. It's lovely to hear your stories of seeing Michael, even if we don't have room to publish them all here, we still like to read them so please send them in to us at the usual fan club address either by email or by post. We must thank all of our contributors to this edition of On The Ball - both the articles and the wonderful photos some of you manage to get.

As most of you know, our American Co-ordinator Pat Webb, is a talented artist, specialising in American folk art and she couldn't resist the temptation to create a painting to celebrate Michael's Laurence Olivier award, as it represented such a great milestone in his career. What better subject than Baltimore in 1962 and Pat set to work and produced a painting that includes various buildings from Hairspray, for example Patterson Park High School, Mr Pinky's Hefty Hideaway, the Har de Har Hut, and more besides. She even placed the Olivier Award in the window of the Turnblad's house! She very generously decided to give the painting to Michael on behalf of the fan club, and as you can see from the photo he was delighted to receive it.

Finally, we must thank everyone for being so thoughtful on the passing of our dear Mum Ivy on 8 June this year. It's been a difficult year for our family but the love and support we get from all of you has given us the strength to get through these hard times, and we're hoping for better times in the future.

Maureen & Gill



Photo: Carol Duffy

Cover photo by Jason Bell. Back cover photo by Sharon Scarrott.

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Dear Everyone

Well, here it is, the worst kept secret in the world. I am staying in Nasspray until April and it will be the longest I have ever stayed with a show. Do you blame me! We are all having so much fun at the Sheffestown and the way you have all embraced the show and cast and often been to the show more than once is just wonderful.

Thank you for making this such a fantastic summer. It was hard work doing the concerts, Edna and the radio at the same time but I've never been afraid of hard work and I loved having the chance to sing in concert for you again.

All of the shows were great but for me the most memorable was at Paskings. I think because it was the last one for a long time

and it was so well organised,
friendly and DIDN'T RAIN.

What a terrible summer it has
been in Britain but we weren't about
to let that interfere with us fun.
If you were at Hampton Court or
Ankney and you deserve a medal.

So, hairspray for the next
6 months, Sunday Brunch every week but
I still intend to find time to get
into the studio to do new tracks
for an album to celebrate 25 years
of performing. Where does the time go!

Can't wait to see you at the
stage door again sometime. Lets
relish the good times and thank
you for always being there for me.

You really are the best

All My Love

+ Glam Boss

Phil
x

MICHAEL SANG THE CLOUDS AWAY!

By Pam Hancock and Rose-Marie Gazagnaire



It is not every day that you get escorted out of town by the police! But then interesting things always happen to us on the road. Only after a good hour of driving around Nottingham, getting hopelessly lost, out of sheer desperation, we pulled across the path of a police car to ask directions. The officer, after commenting, "My, you ARE lost!" tried to explain to us how to get out of town, seeing the bewilderment on our faces, just said, "Follow me". So we did and, bless him, he took us right to the road leading to Patchings.

We eventually joined the queue, which grew steadily all afternoon, enjoying the

sunshine and a truly lovely atmosphere. Before we get to the concert, we'd like to say a few words about how well organised and relaxed it was. It might have been their first ever concert, but the team at Patchings proved more than equal to the task of organising it and without going into boring details, we just want to thank them for being so "on the ball"...

Just before the concert started, the sky, which had previously been blue with lovely fluffy white clouds, started to darken and in the space of ten minutes became quite black, prompting everyone to fumble in their bags for rain

coats and umbrellas (vivid memories of Hampton Court!) But we needn't have worried, as Michael, after a rousing rendition of 'This Is The Moment', promised to "sing the clouds away" before launching into 'Don't Rain On My Parade'...

The moment he took to the stage Michael appeared to be in tip top form, happy and relaxed, enjoying every minute of it and giving his all to what would be the last summer concert of the year. And what a concert! It is hard to pick out some favourites among the songs, it was all fantastic... 'Boy From Nowhere' was sung with such strength and passion, 'Stranger In Paradise' and 'This Is My Beloved' were just out of this world (Michael, when can we have these on a CD?!) 'The Show Must Go On' and 'I Know Where I've Been' were equally powerful and emotional, and despite being from an old musical, 'Easy Terms' and 'Tell Me It's Not True' are still relevant today. Well, like we said, it's hard to pick out favourites among songs of such quality!

The *Les Misérables* section saw Michael McCarthy, Mike Sterling and the lovely Rachel Wooding join Michael on stage for solo numbers and a rousing 'One Day More'. We would like to make a special mention of Rachel...who would have thought 'Amber' from *Hairspray* had such a beautiful and powerful voice (not to mention the gorgeous frocks!) Her duet with Michael, 'The Prayer', was just superb. We do hope she has the most successful

career ahead of her - by the way, Michael, could this be another song for a CD?

Far too soon (and because we've run out of superlatives!) the night drew to an end, with everybody on their feet for "party time". A cheeky 'Don't Stop Me Now' (NOT a chance!) led into 'You Can't Stop The Beat', complete with dance moves. A good part of the crowd joined Michael in singing 'Love Changes Everything' and the whole company for 'Can You Hear The People Sing'. We were then treated to beautiful fireworks to round off a perfect (and dry) evening.

The event was so well organised that even getting out of a packed car park went smoothly in no time at all, and we drove safely back home in spite of a short, if unexpected, detour around Northampton (what ever did happen to Junction 17?) And this time, we didn't need a police escort!

Once again we must thank Michael for a truly memorable concert.

Oh, what a night!



Above:
Andrew Mills and his baram!
Photo by Barbara Mills

THIS IS THE MOMENT... WHEN THE HEAVENS OPENED!

By Pat Hopewell. Photo by Sharon Scarrott

What a wonderful day at Hampton Court and most of all what a fantastic evening! First of all seeing Michael arrive on stage to rehearse - we were rather naughty as just by chance on making a tour of the Palace we happened to pass a spot where there was a great view of the stage and it was really exciting seeing the musicians getting ready and tuning up - we just knew it wouldn't be long before Michael made an appearance on stage, and when he saw a small group of us, who were also touring the Palace, he gave us a wave. He went straight into rehearsing 'This Is The Moment' (which we were allowed to watch before being moved away by the stewards) - for me it's always magical to be able to listen to Michael rehearsing, and to be able to watch him rehearse just that one number left me feeling very happy indeed - I wouldn't have wanted to watch any more - just that small taste of what was to come in the evening. I felt very privileged and I was walking on air, as usual, to be able to hear the rehearsal in progress during the rest of our tour of the Palace and gardens.

At last the time came for the show to start. The moment Michael slowly began to saunter down the staircase with such an impish grin on his face I just knew that it was going to be an evening I wouldn't easily forget - you could tell that he was enjoying every single

moment and lapping up the warmth and affection shown by his fans that greeted his entrance on stage. He looked stunning wearing a dark blue suit and a lovely silk mauve tie and strutted about the stage enjoying every minute of it. He was really having a ball. BUT, Michael had only sung the first notes of 'This Is The Moment' when the heavens opened, for about 30 minutes! It had been spitting with rain when the musicians swung into the overture but it needed Michael to actually sing the words 'This Is The Moment...' which was the cue for the downpour! Michael was trying very hard not to giggle as he saw us all hastily donning our rain-gear!

After the wonderful opening number from *Jekyll and Hyde*, Michael then sang a couple of Bacharach songs - 'Reach Out For Me' and one of my favourites, 'Arthur's Theme', which takes me back to 'Cuddly Dudley' (the lovely Dudley Moore) and the film 'Arthur'. I just love the way Michael sings it - so dreamy!

The heartrending 'With One Look' from *Sunset Boulevard* is a song that Michael sings with such feeling, it really does tug at your heartstrings.

Then on to two numbers that Michael quips has probably caused the sudden downpour as 'Him up there' knew that they were part of the programme - 'Prepare Ye The Way Of The Lord'/'Gethsemane'! Well, he could be right! However, both were sung beautifully, particularly the mov-

ing and extremely emotional rendition of 'Gethsemane' where Michael gave his all. Breathtaking!

I'm always over the moon when Michael includes songs from *Les Mis* and he didn't let me down. I must admit I hadn't heard of Emma Kershaw and Michael Sterling, but I suppose that doesn't mean much as I've lived in Spain for the last 42 years so I'm not always familiar with perhaps new names, although I'm a great theatre lover and spend my time theatregoing on my trips to London. Emma sang 'I Dreamed A Dream' and Michael sang 'Bring Him Home' - both beautifully. It was lovely to see Mike McCarthy again singing 'Stars' - a very stirring song. 'Our' Michael's rendition of 'Empty Chairs, Empty Tables' is always a real tear-jerker for me! Then to close the First Act was the rousing 'One More Day' sung by Michael and his guests - it was awesome!

This was followed by a 75 minute break for a picnic on the lawn in the Palace gardens or a Gordon Ramsay dinner for the luckier concert-goers. However, it was really great to enjoy a picnic in the beautiful Hampton Court Palace gardens. Something I really appreciate not living any more in this green and pleasant land that is England!

Back to our seats for the Second Act which opened with the Overture from *Evita*, followed by Michael's rendition of 'Oh What A Circus' from that show. Michael then gave us his interpretation of the Anthony Newley song 'Feeling Good' from *Stop The World I Want To Get Off*, reminding me of that wonderful evening at the Hackney Empire when Michael gave a tribute show celebrating the life and work of Anthony Newley.

I was so pleased when Michael followed that by singing 'Stranger In Paradise' and 'And This Is My Beloved' from *Kismet*, which has to be my favourite show of my teenage years. It brought back such happy memories of the past and also of Michael as 'Haji', the poet, in what Michael describes as a shocking production of the show! I do understand what Michael means with regard to the sets, costumes



and staging of the production, but the cast, and above all Michael, gave a wonderful performance in my humble estimation! Must have been so frustrating for the cast though working in such adverse conditions!!

Next came 'The Prayer' - Emma Kershaw has a really lovely voice and sang 'The Prayer' beautifully, but my favourite version has to be when Michael sang it with Emma Williams at Repton.

Now came the moment to show the great acting talent that Michael is gifted with - two songs from *Blood Brothers* - 'Easy Terms' and 'Tell Me It's Not True' - real tear-jerkers when sung with such emotion as Michael does.

Then came 'The Show Must Go On' - Michael shows so much passion and fer-

vour that you really feel deep inside every word that's sung. Life must go on whatever heartbreaks and failures come our way. Brilliantly sung.

The last part of the Second Act was such a lovely surprise, with so many *Hairspray* songs included - you could tell that Michael was having the time of his life and was thinking of his colleagues at the Shaftesbury and what they would be doing at that particular moment in time - just as I do! I often look at my watch and think of what Michael will be doing on stage at a particular moment during an evening - almost like reliving the show from afar! Of course, Michael singing 'I Know Where I've Been' was fabulous and it was lovely of Michael to have mentioned Johnnie Fiori's name - Johnnie does a really wonderful job with this number in *Hairspray*, but Michael, your rendition was absolutely fabulous too.

It was then time for 'Love Changes Everything' followed by the great show stopper 'Do You Hear The People Sing' with Michael and his guests ending the evening on a real high.

After the concert a spectacular fireworks display was given in the gardens of the Palace to make a perfect end to a fantastic evening with Michael.

Thank you Michael for making life such fun - there's always something to look forward to, some new challenge you are about to undertake and in which involves us too, your fans, of course. And thank you for bringing together such a lot of lovely people from all over the world, who would never have known each other if it wasn't for you. That's all part of the fun as well!

Still on cloud nine!

hairspray

by Christine Godfrey

At last I have seen Michael again!! Not only have I seen Michael but I have met him, had my photo taken with him and got an autograph!

The last time that I saw Michael was at Oakley Hall, 20th July 2006, in fact that was the last time I was really fit. Since then I have been really ill I spent the whole of December 2006 in the Oaks Hospital, Colchester. While in there I had a major operation from which it has taken me eighteen months to recover. Consequently I had to sell my concert tickets last year and could not make *Kismet*. When we were told last year that Michael was going to be in *Hairspray* I was hoping that he would be in it for a while so that I could get fit enough to see him, especially as I had another operation in the Oaks in December 2007.

Much to my delight Michael is still in *Hairspray* and on Saturday 12th July my husband Alastair and myself went to London for the weekend to see the show. We had really good seats in the stalls row E and the whole show was magnificent - but Michael as Edna Turnblad was really

wonderful, it is a long time since we have both enjoyed a show so much. Leanne Jones as Tracy was also good as was Ian Talbot as Michael's "husband". There were times when Michael and Ian were laughing so much that they forgot the script and were making it up as they went along!!

At the very end of the show Michael stepped forward and started talking to the audience as Edna but then said that he had to talk to us as himself which would be weird as he had a dress on!! He said that the next day Sunday 13th July all the female members of the cast were running the 'Race For Life' to raise money for cancer research. Michael said that he had offered to join in but was told that he had got a "little something" that prevented him! Make of that what you will, he said! Michael then told us that the cast would be coming amongst us with buckets to collect money preferably the folding kind and anyone who wanted photos taken with the younger members of the cast could pay for them.

Alastair and I then made our way to the stage door where there were only people who wanted to see Michael and fortu-



Photo: Alastair Godfrey

nately not too many of them! After a short while Michael came out smiling at everyone ready to sign and pose for photos. Michael signed my programme and then I asked him if my husband could take a photo of him and I.

Alastair and I had a coffee then walked back to our hotel (Holiday Inn Regent's Park) I was still on cloud nine having just seen and spoken to Michael!

This time last year I was virtually housebound and couldn't even get to Colchester, let alone London. In fact I thought that I would not get to see a show again. What a fantastic way to start "living again". I still cannot believe that I have had Michael's arm round me and that he has spoken to Alastair and myself!!

THE DAY MICHAEL PLAYED MY CLASSIC ALBUM TRACK!

By Sue Lockyer

Along with many other MB fans I excitedly tuned in to Radio 2 at 11am on 6th April to hear the first broadcast of Michael's new Sunday Brunch programme. Then I'm sure like many others, I decided that it would be interesting to register my Classic Album Track on his Radio 2 website. I duly filled out the required details, hit the 'send' button and pretty much forgot about it.

Imagine my surprise then when on Wednesday 7th May as I was finishing a long hard day at work I realised that I had a missed call and a voice mail message on my mobile. I assumed that it was either my husband or daughter making their usual enquiries about dinner so when I heard a woman's voice introducing herself as Fiona from Radio 2 I nearly fell off my chair! She went on to ask me if I'd still like to speak to Michael about my classic album track on Sunday 11th May - I mean is the sky blue?

She apologised that it had taken a few weeks & that I'd most probably forgotten about it but that they had several to work through. She left her number and after performing a victory dance around the office, much to the consternation of my male colleague who was finally confirming his previous suspicions that I actually am mad, I rang her back! She was very chatty and asked me a few questions about my family and where I work. She finished by explaining that on Sunday she would ring me at about 11.20am to check that I was awake (she really knows nothing about MB fans - when there's a chance to meet/speak to HIM, who SLEEPS?!) and that I would be 'on air' at about 11.30am. I checked that she had my home telephone number (irrelevant really as she'd already spoken to my daughter Charlotte at home before ringing my mobile... but it's always best to double check these little details!) and then she was gone.

I pinched myself, decided that I was awake and definitely not dreaming. I rang my husband, babbling excitedly

down the phone to him... he took it all in his stride, as always, bless him, he's so patient with me!

Can time ever pass so slowly? Thursday, Friday (lots of encouragement from my other work colleagues, promises to listen in & good lucks) Saturday and finally after a sleepless night... SUNDAY!

11am - Michael is on air & I'm pacing the room incapable of keeping still, much to the amusement of my husband, Bob. I check the phone for the umpteenth time to ensure the dialling tone is there... it is! I put the cassette tape in the stereo and press 'record' at 11.15am.

Then, armed with water (this hayfever is a curse) I go quickly upstairs to our bedroom and the phone. I put the radio on and wait... and wait! 11.20am comes and goes! Bob calls up the stairs that I'm not important enough and that Michael has forgotten me! This really helps to settle my nerves! I decide I feel sick - a sip of water helps! I continue to pace the floor then... the phone rings! I spring into action, turn off radio and leap over to answer the phone.

Fiona says 'Hi, just checking you are awake and all is ok'. Everything's fine, my stomach is doing somersaults but I'm great! She tells me that she will ring back in five minutes. I resume my floor pacing for what seemed like an eternity. I can hear the radio rumbling away downstairs but decide against turning mine back on.

Finally, respite came in the form of the phone ringing again. I'm calm, I decide - it's just that my trembling hand hasn't quite received that piece of information yet! Anyway, Fiona performs a few sound checks and tells me that once the song I can hear stops playing I will be speaking to Michael. I'm very chilled about this... who was I kidding?! Then finally there HE was and the rest I'm sure many of you will have heard. In

many ways my chat with Michael seemed to last for hours in other ways it was over in seconds. The reality was that it lasted a lot longer than I thought it would and it was fantastic, surreal and scary all at the same time. Such was my concentration to hear his questions and responses clearly I almost forgot who I was speaking to.. well I did say 'almost'!

All too soon 'my moment' with Michael was over and Fiona was back telling me I'd done very well and had sounded very confident... was that ME she was referring to?

As I returned downstairs Bob and Charlotte congratulated me saying it had sounded great and texts received from my work colleagues seemed to confirm this.

The worst part however was still to come - the TAPE PLAYBACK! How would I feel I sounded? Suffice to say that I don't think I disgraced myself and I had nothing to feel 'Guilty' about!

My classic album track? 'Run Wild' from Barbara Streisand's 'Guilty' album!

Thank you Michael for playing this and for allowing me the opportunity to share my memories with you and all your listeners.



HAPPY BIRTHDAY MICHAEL!



This photo was taken of Michael wearing the belated birthday present Faye Langford had given him!

MICHAEL'S BIRTHDAY AT HAIRSPRAY

By Joan Johnson

June 27 2008 and there were quite a few fans at *Hairspray* to help Michael celebrate his birthday. The atmosphere was very good. Edna made reference to 'her' own birthday when singing 'Timeless To Me' and then Wilbur mentioned it again when he sang...just a very brief mention each time, but of course it delighted us! Link shouted out 'Happy Birthday' to Michael when he came out of the hairspray can in the finale. Other than that everything was normal. Ben said they had a cake made for Michael, and he thought they were all going to have a slice before the show.



THE CITY OF CULTURE HAD A BALL!

by Alana Wadkin

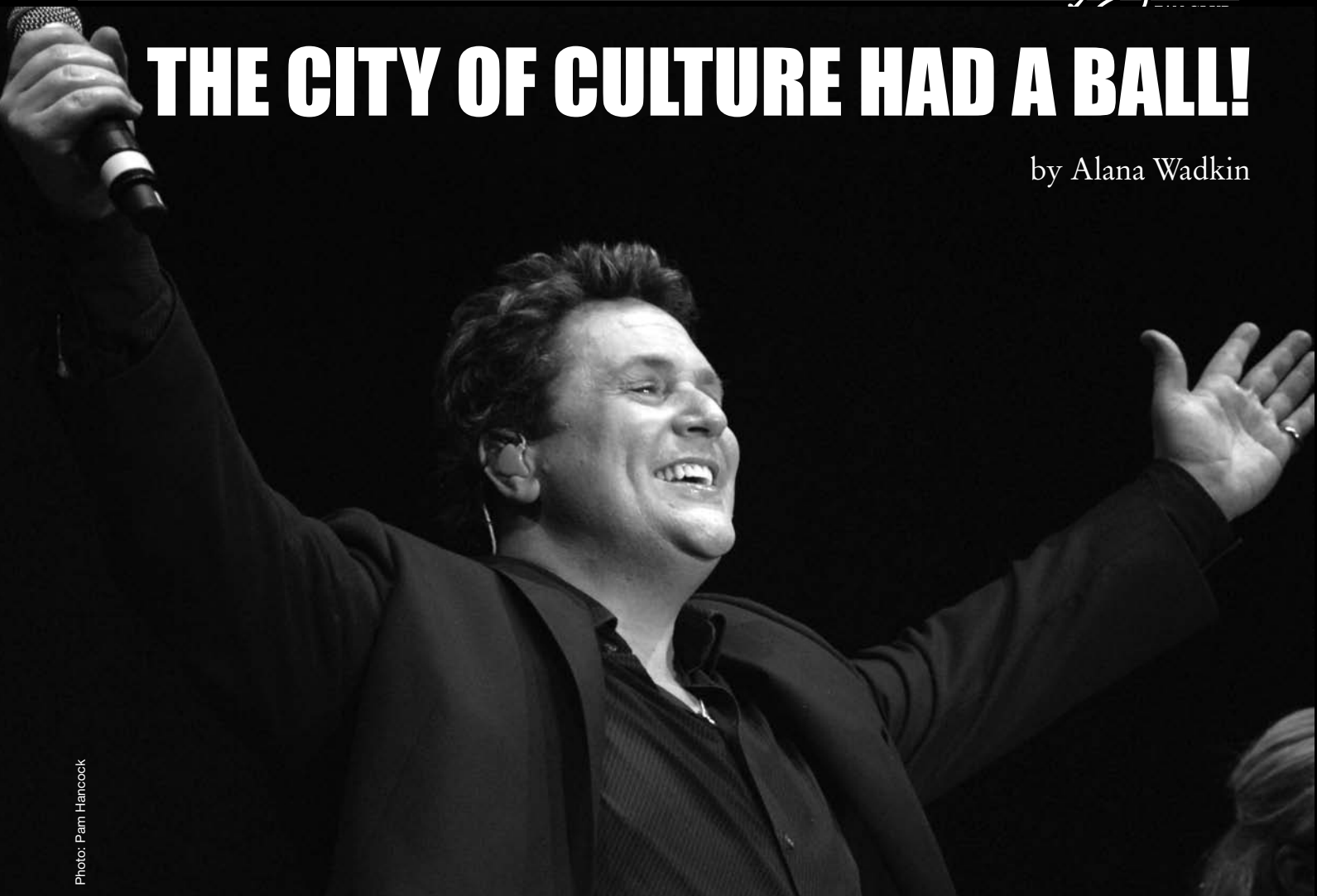


Photo: Pam Hancock

Saturday 19th July 2008 turned out to be a day I will never forget in a hurry - it was the first time this year that I have been fit enough to see Michael. I was so excited because the concert was in my home town of Liverpool at the new Echo Arena, which meant everything because I didn't have to travel far. My mum, dad, cousin Adele and myself decided to go on the train and get there in plenty of time because we knew Liverpool would be busy with the Tall Ships, the Open Golf and of course Michael's concert. We had a look at the Tall Ships (what's the fascination?) and a walk through the Albert Dock before going to the Arena. It was lovely to see my friends again and Maureen and Gill, everybody looked really well!

The next thing I knew, I was given a VIP backstage pass and we were escorted to the Green Room. I didn't know what was happening - Adele had been in touch with Andrew and Michael to ask if Michael would meet me because I haven't been well and had to cancel seeing *Hairspray* several times. Michael kindly agreed and wanted to meet me again. I was com-

pletely surprised and shocked, we were actually in the Green Room and I was about to meet Michael! The reality hit as Michael walked in; talk about totally overwhelmed - I couldn't smile or do anything. Michael was so LOVELY and CARING - we had a talk and a good laugh! His cuddle was the best; Michael looked and smelt gorgeous - all ready to go on stage! Michael asked how I was and if I heard him reading my name out on the radio. We had some photographs taken and my dad made a video; good job he did as mum never took any photographs of Michael and me apart from one of our legs! Michael, we were right about the photographs! At least, I can take some stills from the video... Michael noticed that I was wearing his necklace and my t-shirt, which I designed and said how much he liked it and "you're so clever." I was so delighted; I couldn't resist smacking Michael's bum... He was a bit surprised by this and said "she has just smacked my bum!" Everybody fell about laughing... I wanted my t-shirt signing; my mum came out with "Michael would you sign her boobs?" (mum had been thinking of Michael in *Hairspray* and Edna's boobs) -

Michael laughed and made a very funny comment and was happy to sign my t-shirt; I was made up!!! We said our good-byes; Michael went to his dressing room then came back with two different ties. He wanted advice on which to wear, Michael asked "which one do you like Alana?" I chose a purple/mauve coloured tie and Michael said "OK, that is what I'll wear..."

I am still in shock now and I can't believe Michael wanted to meet me again. Once was a lifetime's dream but TWICE is just incredible!! I would like to thank everybody involved, especially you Michael, from the bottom of my heart! Words can't express how I felt and how very grateful I am! It has made me feel so much better and I am the LUCKIEST person in the world. Meeting Michael was the best medicine that I could ever have... Nobody knows how much Michael and his music have helped me cope over the past 18 months. I would have given up a long time ago, only for Michael and my friends at the fan club. I appreciate all that everybody has done for me.

The concert was fantastic, we really enjoyed it and had a ball - I danced for the first time in 10 months. The lights dimmed, the band started to play the overture. Michael appeared (with that gorgeous smile) at the top of the stairs to rapturous applause, cheers and screams. He was wearing a pin-striped suit, pink shirt and that purple/mauve tie I chose. The first song was a sensational version of 'This Is The Moment', I will never get tired of Michael singing this fantastic song as I can identify with the lyrics. Michael then sang 'Reach Out For Me' from his latest album *Back to Bacharach*, which I loved because it was lively. Michael said how great it was to be back in Liverpool and explained how he was feeling by singing 'I'm Feeling Good' by Anthony Newley, followed by 'Do You Mind?' Both my cousin and I really enjoyed these songs. There was the usual cheeky banter with the audience which always makes me laugh! Another song from the *Back to Bacharach* album Michael did was 'Arthur's Theme', which was beautifully performed.

One of my highlights was seeing Michael sing 'With One Look', a very special song to me because it is my signature song (with not being able to talk, I communicate using my eyes) - the first few lines say it all... The best highlight was when Michael sang a breathtaking version of 'Prepare Ye The Way Of The Lord' and 'Gethsemane' - it was completely outstanding! I was completely spell bound at this performance and judging by the audience's response, they loved it. On to the *Les Misérables* medley, one of my highlights; it was brilliant and included all of the special guests - they all have outstanding voices. Michael's special guests were Rachel Wooding, Michael McCarthy and Michael Sterling. All of the songs were sung with passion but mine and Adele's favourite was 'Empty Chairs, Empty Tables' and everybody loved 'One Day More' judging by the audience's enormous applause and cheers.

After the interval, Michael walked back on to the stage wearing a dark blue suit, purple/blue shirt and a similar tie. 'Oh What A Circus' was the first song, Michael performed it superbly- and seemed at ease. Michael then sang 'High Flying Adored', which was lovely. Michael sang wonderful versions of 'Stranger In Paradise' along with 'And This Is My



Beloved'. Everybody seemed to enjoy it.

I enjoyed Michael's beautiful duet with Rachel Wooding 'The Prayer', she has a lovely voice and I can see why Michael loves this song. Then Michael mentioned that Liverpool was "The City Of Culture" and that he has happy tour memories from Liverpool, which led on to Michael singing 'Easy Terms/Tell Me It's Not True' from *Blood Brothers*. Both songs were performed brilliantly.

Another favourite was 'I Know Where I Have Been' from *Hairspray*; the song really does suit Michael's voice. Michael sung it with so much power and passion - you could tell that he is really loving being in *Hairspray*. Michael then did an excellent rendition of 'The Show Must Go On' -

another one of my personal favourites. My final highlight was the 'Party Time' section; it started with 'Don't Stop Me Now'. It was sung superbly and made everybody start dancing!! After that came a crowd pleaser 'You Can't Stop The Beat' - just amazing, Michael even did all the dance moves. I got completely carried away and started dancing as well as screaming..!

My family certainly were having a good time for the first time in ages, I am so glad they did. Michael said his thanks and goodbyes then walked off the stage to deafening cheering and clapping (cue the encore). We definitely wanted more; everybody made this known by clapping and stamping! Michael returned to sing a special song especially for Liverpool - 'You'll Never Walk Alone' - everybody joined in and started swaying. Michael sung his signature song 'Love Changes Everything' and told everybody to sing along. The special guests sang the last part with Michael. After another encore - they sung 'Do you Hear The People Sing?', which was just amazing. What a wonderful concert! This special night will always stay with me for as long as I live...



Photo: Pam Hancock

It's Not Just About 'Hairspray'...



...It's Really About Friendship!

As a serious American Anglophile, I was astonished in 2003 to 'discover' Michael while listening to digital music on television in my home in Sarasota, Florida! I had been to England many times, so how could I not know about this fabulous voice and lovely gentleman?! After my introduction with 'Driving Home For Christmas' and 'Happy New Year', I made it a point to learn more about him. I finally joined MBFC in 2006 after several years of lurking and getting to know the cast of characters on the Forum. I chose the name, Little Dorrit, because it was similar to my real name and was a Dickens' character I greatly admired... sitting quietly in a corner, sewing and being thoughtful - a great role model!

About six months later, in Tucson, Arizona, a lady named Linda Colleen was searching YouTube for videos of Josh Groban singing songs from *Chess*, which he had done for a charity event on Broadway in 2003. As fate would have it, she came across Michael Ball and Elaine Paige, singing 'You and I' and

suddenly, she was curious about a 'new' singer, Michael Ball! Unlike me, she joined MBFC right away, asking lots of good questions to get up-to-speed quickly from 'the experts' in the Ball field. Turns out her mother's best-loved book was 'Little Dorrit' and next thing we knew, we were friends, as well as fans. We did what new friends do, learned about the likes and dislikes of each other, and vowed on the phone one day, that if ever Josh and Michael were in the same place at the same time, we would DEFINITELY have to be there, too. It wasn't too many months later that Michael had announced his role in *Hairspray*, and Josh had let slip that he'd be appearing in *Chess* at Royal Albert Hall in May, 2008. We mused about the possibility of actually going to London and seeing both of 'our guys', and one autumn day, tickets went on sale for *Chess* and we booked two in the 10th row! We were on cloud nine as we kept fingers crossed that Michael would extend his run. When he did, we quickly booked tickets for the Friday after *Chess*. I joined the Friends of Josh

Groban fan club to get acquainted with some of the people I would be meeting on our trip, and Linda and I had the idea to mention our plans on both FOJG and MBFC and before we knew it, there were quite a few Grobanites anxious to join us at *Hairspray*, which resulted in twenty people from that fan club going to see Michael the same night that we did.

As if that weren't wonderful enough, sharing the fantastic, high-energy show and Michael's award winning performance with so many others, Linda and I happened by the Stage Door quite early that afternoon, and while discussing our plans, Michael himself strolled up for an early massage (you know, 'because of the high heels and boobs'), and was as cordial and kind as ever, even commenting that he had been to see *Chess* a few days before and thought Josh's performance was 'phenomenal'! It was the icing on the cake! Our Michael and Josh dream really DID come true!

Well, that was the American story... now for the English one! After joining FOJG, I communicated with 'Essexfan', who was one of the Grobanites who also enjoys our Michael and had already seen him in *Hairspray*, but was happy to go again. She's Val S, a teacher in Essex who knew she would have some difficulty getting into London for all the FOJG events. Meanwhile, back on MBFC, I made a new friend, the effervescent Chris T, who amused me no end, and was eager to catch up with all the Michael Ball doings she may have missed whilst raising her family and working hard. As an Examinations Officer for a school in Essex, it was imperative for her to find a relaxing hobby away from work. Michael was the perfect answer to that exam question! Now here I was with two new friends, both educators in Essex... do you think... another perfect answer, YES, they DO know each other, and have been friends for well over twenty years!

It's wonderful to be part of global unification because of Michael Ball, isn't it?

Chris put the cherry on top of the icing that fateful night at *Hairspray* by surprising me at dinner before the show and joining us when I thought she couldn't get away from school! After thoroughly enjoying Edna and Wilbur and all the gang, it was my turn to smile while Chris met Michael at the Stage Door for the very first time, after seeing him in countless productions and concerts over the years. It was the most fun I've ever had, and Michael, replying to my suggestion that he might have smiled for the camera more than any other person on earth, said 'I'm just a happy guy!'

And there it was again, another smile... thanks, Michael!

By Doris Laurini



My Memorable Michael Moments!

by Chris Tietjen

Well, where do I start? Ok, the beginning seems like a good place! I "found" Michael back in the very early 90's, probably through *Aspects* and 'Love Changes Everything', although I had seen him in *Phantom*, and not realised! So, many years of loving the guy to bits, and going to concerts and shows when I could, I had never had the opportunity, time or courage to try to meet the man. However, having been looking at the Forum for ages, and finally deciding the time had come to join the fan club, I was amazed to find out that so many of you had met him! Jealous or what?

Having joined the forum/fan club, I quite quickly began to correspond with Doris Laurini (Little Dorrit to you all!). Doris is a real pal, and writes great tales. Doris asked one day how large was the town I lived in, and did I know a girl called Val... did I know Val? Well, kind of! She is my granddaughter's reception teacher, a good friend of a good friend of mine (still following me?) and she was also my son's reception teacher 27 years ago - although she doesn't like me mentioning how long ago! So, yes, I knew Val!

Doris was due to visit the UK, with Linda Colleen, as a part of a 'Grobie' delegation to see *Chess*. (For those of you who have got lost, a Grobie or

Grobanite is a Josh Groban fan - a bit like a Ballette!) Val is also a great Grobie, and the groups were not only going to see *Chess*, but *Hairspray*, too. As Doris was so busy during her trip, it was going to be difficult for us to meet up, but Val & I both decided on the spur

of the moment that I should try to get a ticket for 16 May, and surprise Doris & Linda. So, with one ticket in hand we managed to keep the secret. On the night, off we set, Val having asked Doris & Linda if they fancied meeting up for fish & chips, and I crept in behind





them. I'd like to think Doris was as pleased to see me as I was her! We had a good gossip, lots of hugs, a nice meal, and made our way to the theatre.

One great show later, and we made our way to the stage door. As it was a Friday night, it was crowded, but I think when Michael appeared, for me, the crowd just melted away! I was lucky enough, after inching my way to the front, to get an autograph, and a hug and photos, and stepped away with my little (ok, not so little!) legs shaking like a leaf! I had managed to give Michael a miniature bottle of vintage malt whisky, which he passed to Andrew to put inside, since Michael said he was on his way out for after-show drinks! But a bit tongue-tied on my part wasn't in it! And that's something I almost never am! Then he was gone! My immediate thoughts were "Oh my! He's REAL!" Yes, well, what else did I expect him to be... but to find out he really is a walking, talking living doll (to quote a phrase!) was a humongous surprise! Everyone had taken photos, so we all floated back to deepest darkest Essex in a happy haze. So delighted to have seen Michael at close quarters, and met Doris, who is now

such a good friend. Thanks guys!

Fast forward two weeks to school half term and the day dawned that my daughter-in-law Tina and I had planned for ages and ages. I train my family well (or is it brainwash?) when it comes to Michael Ball-ness! We were going to wait by the stage door for the Thursday matinee. Now, as I had been so lucky to meet Michael briefly not long before, I was desperately hoping we'd get to meet the man himself again, as I knew Tina was excited at the thought of meeting Michael - she'd probably never talk to me again if she didn't get to see him! We had red roses for him, and a drawing for Edna from Ellie, my 5-year-old granddaughter, who I'm taking to see the show in August. She had heard us all talking, and thought it was her turn that day, so was very put out, as she'd done a "special" drawing for Edna! So, one lovely little picture of a butterfly came with us, addressed to Edna, with the promise that if we met him/her, I would present it. You see, even at 5, a Michael fan! Brainwashing? Who, me?

So, 12.30pm saw us propping up the wall outside the stage door with a few

others. Some of the cast popped past, and then... oh my God! There was a very familiar figure walking nonchalantly down the street! As he got closer, someone said "Take the shades off, Michael!" upon which he said "Oh, yeah, sorry!" and promptly removed them! And this time, I actually managed to talk some sense... I gave him the roses, telling him they were for Edna, as we figured she doesn't get much in the way of gifts, which made him laugh! Then, Ellie's picture, with the explanation, and he said "Oh, how lovely, how sweet!" I beamed from ear to ear! MY little Ellie's picture in HIS paws! Then we asked him for photos, which he was only too happy to do, so me with him, then Tina with him. Trouble is, I had a new camera, and heard his very familiar voice say "erm.....you've just turned it off!" upon which Tina said something about that's what happens when you get old, and I managed to wail "No! It's what happens to us when YOU appear, Michael!" The resulting picture of him teasing me is just gorgeous!

As he was making his way to the stage door, I asked if he was rehearsing for Hampton Court, and he replied "Nah-I'm gonna wing it!" I said that would be fine by all of us! And then, as quickly as he'd appeared, there he was - gone! And, yes, the legs were still shaking! And then Tina and I hugged each other with relief and sweet satisfaction. We'd done it! And guess what? He was still REAL!

But the fun went on - Ben was a dream, Rachel was sweet and Leanne was really lovely. I asked her what it was like to get hugs from you-know-who each night, remembering to tell her I meant Michael not Ben, and she said "Well, what do you think? He's a good hugger!" Yes, we know!

Johnnie Fiori turned up in a long black dress, and bright orange flip-flops. I asked if she was in good voice for the shows and she said she was always in good voice! That was me told! Then sweet Adrian came along and signed for us. Adam (Edna & Wilbur understudy) spoke to us for quite a while, he is so lovely, not a bit actorish! Asked what it was like kissing Michael/Edna every night, and he said a few things I can't repeat, with a naughty glint in his eye!

He then said there was a layer of lipstick separating them!

He was playing Wilbur during Ian's holiday, and said he had found it hard to get back into, as he hadn't played him since January, but that he was used to playing Edna now every Monday. I'll certainly keep an eye out for Adam when he leaves *Hairspray*, such a nice, normal bloke... Ok, so what's normal about dressing up as a woman for a living? Inez was lovely, as were Terel, and Tracie.

And what a lovely, lovely day we had! We came back so happy, with our photos, autographs, and lovely memories! And one happy little granddaughter, who couldn't believe it to see her drawing in "Edna's" hand in the photo! As Michael has said "It's nice when you meet people you adore and they don't disappoint!" How very, very true in Michael's case! Thanks, Michael, and all of the other *Hairspray* guys for an afternoon to remember for always. And roll on Hampton Court and the "winging it"!

Fast forward another few weeks, and this time I have my five year old granddaughter Ellie with me. Well trained in the "Edna/Michael" roles, she waited patiently in the rain, and was rewarded with a big hug, and the picture of the three of us! Just a perfect way to end the summer! One happy little girl and her Nanny! Thanks Michael!



THE PRICE OF A MICHAEL SONG... DO THE MATH! by Nancy Garcia

This past June I did something I would never have dreamed of doing just one year ago. I went to London for the sole purpose of seeing a concert.

After my first trip to see *Hairspray* in January, I promised myself that I would return for Michael's final night in October (so I thought). Yet the chatter on the fan club forum convinced me to make another trip before October. I heard so much about the open air concerts that I just had to be part of it. I had missed the start date for ticket sales but thanks to a forum participant and her friend, I was able to obtain a great ticket for Hampton Court in June. And of course, coming to London would also mean seeing *Hairspray* again.

I was asked by many back home why I was going to London to see a show and a concert. What could possibly be in London that we did not have in New York? The answer was simple. We didn't have Michael. But those that do not know of him just don't understand.

As I was planning my unexpected trip to London, I heard about the Shaw Theatre One On One with Elaine Paige. Great! One more opportunity to hear the man speak... so a ticket was purchased.

I arrived on Friday the 13th, saw *Hairspray*, traveled to Hampton Court on the 14th with many a fan, saw *Hairspray* again on Tuesday, went to The Shaw on Wednesday, and had to catch *Hairspray* one more time that evening before leaving London on Thursday morning.

There is no need to give reviews on the above activities as I am sure others have already done so. I can guarantee that they are all fabulous reviews because they were all amazing performances!

Six days in London all scheduled around Michael Ball activities - oh yeah! I was also able to sneak in some more sightseeing and shopping on the off days when Michael was not performing.

When I got home, I was asked by my co-

workers just how much it had cost me to attend Michael's concert. This was a pondering thought.

Well, I have actually done the math and am now able to put a price tag on a Michael song. And no, it is not the cost of a CD... it is far beyond that type of expense. After totaling the airplane fare, hotel bill, airport transports, ticket prices, and miscellaneous expenses, it cost me \$147 (£74) a song to hear Michael sing twenty two unforgettable melodies live at Hampton Court.

Would I do it again? In a heartbeat.

Well, I'm heading back in October even though it will not be Michael's last bow in *Hairspray*. The airline ticket has been purchased for months now. My only problem is how to explain to my non-Michael Ball fan co-workers that I am going to London for a long weekend... just to see *Hairspray*!



A MICHAEL BALL TRIPLE PLAY! by Carol Cox



Photo: Sharon Scarrott

I've always said I don't do 'one night stands' so when I heard that Michael would be performing two outdoor concerts in one weekend and also perform in *Hairspray* on the Friday night just prior, I knew it would be the perfect 'triple play' for this Michael Ball fan. This time, my husband Stuart agreed to come along with me to see why I had seen *Hairspray* twelve times so far and see for himself why Michael had won an Olivier award for his role as Edna Turnblad in *Hairspray*. He wasn't disappointed!

We arrived in London on Friday, rested up, had lunch at the White Hart (their food is so good!) then waited to greet Michael at the stage door. Michael had a little laugh on us while we waited that day. Andrew, Michael's PA, came around the corner from the side of the theatre and

asked if Michael was in yet. Now it seemed strange that Andrew, of all people, didn't know if Michael was in yet and he was asking us? Then I saw the smile on his face and knew something was up... and then I heard a familiar sounding laugh as we stood facing Andrew at the stage door. There behind us was Michael smiling like a Cheshire cat and telling us that he'd caught us! Well now, he was certainly in a good mood that day! Michael came around to the stage door and chatted with everyone and posed for photos. I told him I'd brought my husband along this time and he waved to Stuart and said hello.

After Michael had to go in, we went off to our favorite little restaurant on Shaftesbury Avenue where we had a leisurely and delicious dinner. Back to the theatre, we were

in the second row on the aisle so Stuart could have some leg room. From the moment the music started to the final reprise, Stuart was smiling from ear to ear and enjoying the show as I knew he would....it's impossible not to enjoy *Hairspray*! It was a wonderful performance, even with five of the regular cast out that night. We waited for Michael after the show at the stage door and waved goodnight as he left. Another wonderful night of entertainment.

The next day, we headed to Kenwood House mid-afternoon under gorgeous, cloudless blue skies. We had our picnic dinner in the sun while we watched Michael and Lesley Garrett rehearse with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra with Callum McLeod at the helm. We then enjoyed the concert with Michael and Lesley entertain-

ing everyone with a variety of songs ranging from pop to musical theatre to opera and classical. Lesley pleased the audience with her beautiful voice and gowns while Michael... well, Michael is always a crowd pleaser no matter what! When they sang 'Come What May' together, I knew it was worth the effort of getting to Kenwood from our home in Florida. We were totally pleased with the concert and the setting.

The next day at Audley End, the weather would not cooperate, however. We arrived early in the day and while the skies were hopeful for a while, come concert time, it was not to be. We enjoyed watching the rehearsal (sorry, Michael!) and had our picnic but then the skies opened and it poured buckets until the end of the concert. It certainly rained on Michael and Lesley's parade that night. We were cold and soaked to the skin but we endured and by the end of the concert, the rain had stopped long enough for the fireworks marking the last night of the Audley End Proms. Michael and Lesley proudly sang the finale wrapped in Lesley's Union Jack flag and it was a rousing and fitting end to a soggy but musically delightful evening.

It's not often we get treated to a Michael triple play, except maybe on tour....but that's another time and another year. Congratulations to Michael on twenty five years of doing what he does best. 'Come what may' next year but I hope it's as good of a year for Michael as this year has been so far.

The Shaw and the Shaftesbury

By Marie Thomson

I've never had any hassle with National Express having always arrived at my destination a few minutes either side of the stated time of arrival. Of all the days to be 30 mins late! I should have arrived at Marble Arch at 11.10 am and I got off the coach at 11.38am and set off up Oxford Street, Tottenham Court Rd and finally Euston Rd. I wasn't sure of the buses in that direction and didn't want to get myself lost by trying to take a shortcut, so I got the most exercise I've had all year! I arrived at the theatre at 12.40 - phew! I looked like I'd been dragged through a hedge backwards. Having got drenched that morning on the way to the coach and not having had time to buy something to tie my hair up with... anyway enough of all that, on to 'The Shaw'

Well I don't know about everyone else but I could have quite happily sat and listened to Michael talk all afternoon, it was fascinating. Perhaps if in future there is no theatre production looming on the horizon, 'An Evening with Michael Ball' would be a good idea. Lots

of anecdotes from all aspects of Michael's career and a few landmark songs thrown in... sounds like a plan to me! I was a little disappointed that Elaine Paige didn't do the interview but mainly because I haven't seen her live before. Mark Shenton did a fine job in her place.

The Shaw theatre is very small. A low stage had two high backed chairs either side of a table. On the table there was a small vase of yellow flowers - I can't remember what kind, next to a clear glass jug of water and glasses. I, like everyone, probably had the same thought - please sit in the chair opposite me, so I have a good view all interview! Shallow I know, but there you have it. Thankfully for me Michael did just that!

Mark Shenton was introduced by a representative of the Shaw (I think) and he briefly explained that Elaine was poorly and he'd been asked to conduct the interview. There wasn't really a long drawn out introduction and very soon after Michael came through the door

and was on stage to plenty of cheering and applause.

Some of the things covered as fans we had heard before but it was great to hear things be told in a unrushed manner. Things like how Michael ended up going to drama school, *Pirates*, being spotted for *Les Misérables*, *Aspects* and *Passion*, Eurovision... and how he was coping with wearing a dress (which one of the youngsters asked him)! All these stories were told with bags and bags of humour and with the luxury of time to relish them, rather than being crammed into a ten min interview. Although sadly we didn't get to the Prom, *Kismet* or *Alone Together*. I can't remember everything that was asked, or mentioned in the interview, but some things mentioned were as follows.

Mark Shenton pointed out that Michael hadn't done anymore plays since rep... why? Answer: The ones offered had not appealed. That there were lots of people within his age group already working in that area, who would be far easier to cast. He said that he thought a long run in a play would be much harder to do because the music isn't there to drive it/you along. Finishing by explaining he loves and is passionate about the medium of musical theatre. He did agree with Mark's point though that plays generally don't run as long as musicals.

Michael was asked if he would like to direct? This wasn't completely dismissed although he thought he wouldn't be very good at it, as he'd be too tempted to get up and show them how to do it instead of letting them get on with it.

He was asked about going to New Zealand specifically but broadened it out to include other overseas. He said that what he did was expensive to take the band, backing singers etc overseas, so promoters have to think that a show would be a viable proposition and that there is an audience for what he does.

Michael was asked about the process of putting a concert together. He said it was a case of balancing new material but keeping in older stuff that people want to hear. He likened it to when he goes to see Neil Diamond soon, if he doesn't sing certain songs, he'll be livid.



There was a question of an album in the spring - there was some mention of it being a musical theatre one to celebrate twenty five years and all that. BUT I don't know how set in stone that is, so don't take my word for it.

I thought all the questions asked were justified and answered with the same consideration whether they were from student or fan. There were several questions from the stage school children (Sylvia Youngs I think if the SY on their school badges was anything to go by).

One girl asked Michael if he thought it was worth doing their A levels. Now if she thought he was going to say "Nah! Don't bother with them!" she'd have been disappointed. She was advised to do them, get as much experience of the world as they could because it wasn't possible for everyone in the business to be working and you need to find something to support yourself during those times.

Michael was asked if there was a theatre role he wanted to do. He answered Sweeney Todd. When asked which show was his favourite show, he replied without the need for another seconds thought "*Hairspray*".

One of the Guilford students asked Michael if he had a view on reality casting shows. He said that they made great TV and he didn't begrudge anyone their break however it came. Those who won had done their training and Jodie had done her apprenticeship also. Other non winners had gone on to do very well and proven themselves - Ben and Daniel Boys were mentioned here. He stressed that training was important (the wording of the question seemed to ask was it worth training these days).

Michael was asked about concerts and recordings he mentioned the radio show. This was a spotlight on Michael's career and the students amongst us must have been interested in this. Michael said they will probably have to diversify in the

business if they want to survive. Here was living proof it can be done. Michael spoke about the change of work ethic of how "In my day" (his words not mine) you went in to work regardless of a tickly cough etc because if you didn't go in, you didn't get paid. People are generally quicker to miss shows these days than back then (this just doesn't apply to theatre in my opinion, it's indicative of today's society in general). He spoke of his own work ethic of being in on time, knowing what is expected of you, knowing your lines etc. It was a fascinating interview in which Michael must have inspired but didn't over glamourize the industry for those students among us.

HAIRSPRAY

As I was in London I thought might as well pop along to the Shaftesbury for my third viewing of the show.

I didn't think it could get any better but it had. Ben has certainly grown in confidence. Ian Talbot had just taken over the last time I saw the show and he has really settled in now. 'Timeless To Me' had a great reception last night it has grown as a number since the last time I saw it and is magnificent. Edna has truly blossomed, she's very light on her feet. Michael's take on Edna is so convincing the young lady next to me who was there seeing the show kept saying "I can't believe that's Michael Ball!"

Each time I've seen it I'm surprised that the "We must have a talk about crooners" line at the ironing board doesn't get more of a laugh, another indication perhaps that by then, the audience have forgotten about Michael's day job and are just seeing Edna up there.

All in all it was a fab day in spite of the rain and the marathon between Marble Arch and The Shaw. A blooming brilliant way to spend the day!



This photo was sent to us by fan club member Nicola Jackson after her mother, Carole Head also pictured, died in a car crash at the beginning of July. She wanted us to print the photo and a few words in her memory. This is what she wrote:

"She was not a fan club member because she lived that through me. This photo was taken in November 2007 of her and me with Michael at the stage door of *Hairspray*. I have been a fan for over 20 years now and have tried so many times over the years to say hello and get a photo with Michael and mum has always been by my side. We finally managed to meet him that night and we were both so excited and happy. It is a memory I shall carry with me forever. We so enjoyed travelling the country together to see Michael and she always sang too loudly and clapped out of time, she was so full of life and such a wonderful person. She was my friend and my mum and an inspiration to so many people, she would drop everything to help anybody if she could."

THE MICHAEL BALL FAN CLUB ONLINE

You can find our website at

www.mbfc.co.uk

Our site 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 .



MOVING HOUSE?

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

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

INFOLINE NUMBER



Overseas:
+44 8707 422224

PEN PALS / TRAVEL TALK

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

"SOUTH" GET-TOGETHERS FOR ALL MICHAEL BALL FANS

New fan club members are very welcome, every two months (next one will be in October – contact us for details) at the BIC in Bournemouth, Dorset. We meet up in the café area inside main foyer from

2:00pm to 4:00pm.

Anyone interested in joining us for tea-coffee and chat about "our favourite man", please contact Jill Clark or Barbara Mills:

email: lilaclondoncorgi@yahoo.co.uk or post:

30 Whitehaven Park, Chapel Lane, Blackfield. Southampton. SO45 1YZ.

We would love to see you, (we have had 13 of us at some of our get-togethers - so it's "growing" and it would be really nice to see you all whether you are a new fan or a not so new fan).



LESLEY STIFFELL

Lesley is 51 years old and likes concerts, shows, reading, photography, films and music. She also likes people with a good sense of humour, so if you have one drop Lesley a line.

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