ON THE BALL

Issue 52

Hi Everyone,

It's a very exciting time as we put the final touches to this issue of On The Ball. We will soon be preparing for Michael's first tour for over two years and we know many of you are excited at the prospect of seeing Michael as "himself". We are hoping to get to quite a lot of the concerts and as always really like to say hello to as many people as possible. Can we ask a favour this time? As most of you know, Maureen had a serious illness which has resulted in some problems with her memory, especially with regard to remembering what people look like. If you're someone we haven't seen for a while, or have never met before, can you introduce yourself by name when you see us - this will greatly help both of us!

Michael certainly didn't hang up his dancing shoes for long did he? The announcement that Michael will be taking Edna on tour certainly surprised a lot of you, but it's good to know that we will be able to see him up and down the country in Hairspray next year.

We hope you enjoy reading the reports about West Wycombe and Michael's farewell to the London production of Hairspray, as well as a look back at the past 25 years of Michael's career. The next issue will have all the tour reports so if you have an interesting experience at any of the forthcoming concerts don't forget to put pen to paper and submit an article to us.

Finally, as you will see, Michael is now supporting the Shooting Star children's hospice and many of you have already been extremely generous with your donations. We will be bringing you more information about their work in the next edition of On The Ball.

Lots of Love
Gill and Maureen

Layout by James Gaden - www.solitaryvision.co.uk Cover photo courtesy of Universal. Back cover photo by Nancy Garcia

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Dear Everyone,

Well, it is now 3 weeks since the most amazing last day at the Shaftesbury Theatre, and it still seems like a bit of a dream.

So many of you came throughout the last week to say hello and goodbye to Edna in London. So many cards and gifts and laughs and tears and wonderful memories. The Theatre has never seen anything like it and I was so proud and happy and sad and downright knackered. Will anything top it?

Now, having recovered from a nasty bout of swine/man flu work has started in earnest for the tour and I am so excited about it. Great

songs and singers and seeing you all again around the country, wearing trousers, and opening up the voice again after what seems like ages. I can't wait.

I do hope you are going to be able to come and see us somewhere along the road and won't it be lovely to catch up with Ben and Adrian from the Hairspray cast as well as Emma and Louise and a new girl to the family team Louise Dearman. Its all looking like being the best tour ever.... touch wood!

And now the news is out the Edna is taking to the road next year and that is the best news for me. I would have missed her too much to say goodbye forever just yet... how about you?

So, my lovelies, thank you for giving me the best time of my life and being such a joyous, supportive and empowering group of people. You really have shown how special you are and I have so many treasured memories of our various meetings at the Stage Door in Grape street. Here's to many more times together, maybe another 25 years and lots more laughter and love.

God Bless & love always,

Nikki

x

HAIRSPRAY REVIEW

June 4th 09 - Thoughts from Anna Marie aka Star2bno1

I preferred seeing *Hairspray* this time round. Last time I was so taken aback at the fact Michael was playing this mother figure, and the last time I saw Michael in a musical was as Caractacus Potts. So I wasn't paying that much attention to the show. This time I did!

The musicality was superb, the jokes hilarious! I even noticed the garter that I had read so much about. Liz and I had a friend with us that night, who had never seen any of the films and knew nothing of the musical, she loved it from the curtain up at the start to the very last song.

The second half was even funnier than the first. The jail scene was great to watch as it gave most of the cast and ensemble a chance to shine. The long note Michael sang sent shivers down me. If it's even possible his voice keeps getting stronger. 'Timeless to Me' was so funny, you kind of knew they would try and put each other off. But I don't think they were expecting the little "accident". If you were there on the night, you may know what I mean!

The show was just so high energy and it was hard not to tap along. It is one of the best feel good shows out there.

After the show Liz and I said to our friend we should try the stage door. We got round and started looking for the faces we knew from the MBFC who we had spotted at the interval. So hello ladies if you're reading. A gentleman who did charity walks with some of the cast, asked if we would like Leanne over, we said yes please, she was lovely - very chatty and approachable.

The same gent sent Verity over and again she was very lovely and wanted to know about Northern Ireland and Belfast as she had never been.

Then the gent who we didn't catch his name (please pass on our thanks if you know him or if he reads this) sent Michael over. After the hello's Michael asked which of us knew Caroline Sheen, confused, but the penny dropping, I said me. He told us how she had texted him to tell him we were there and Michael said how lovely she was. I have to agree!

We asked for a photo at which point our dear friend turned the camera off by mistake, which lead to Michael and ourselves having a conversation on how point click wind up cameras were easier than digital sometimes. Michael noticed my accent and said he thought it sounded familiar (in his best Belfast accent) and wondered if we knew Zoe (Amber) who was from the same neck of the woods. I said a friend from home knew her but she had left before we got to the stage door, so we couldn't say hello. I'm sure Liz will remember more, I do know Michael had to wait till we moved as we blocked

his car. He said "safe journey home" and that it was a shame that he wasn't touring near us. We got a kiss each, he got into his car started waving and I waved back, and that was that. Hopefully Liz will fill me in on the stuff I forgot!

Thank you to everyone from Caroline Sheen to the MBFC for making our night, and thank you Michael, good luck in your tour!

P.S. - There was also the music box last year, Liz and I were over a day before Michael's Birthday and gave him a little music box. Liz started describing this to Michael and once we mentioned the song it played "Danny Boy" Michael described it and told us he had played it and it worked, considering it was the size of a match box.

Liz Says: This was my second time seeing *Hairspray* and I will admit it's even better than the first time when I saw it last year. I loved everything about the show and found that I was seeing bits that I had previously missed or had forgotten about. *Hairspray* to me is such a feel good show as the music is fantastic and the cast is perfect. I have never laughed so much in such a short space of time during some of the scenes. Especially during 'Timeless to Me' tears were streaming I was laughing that much. Michael yet again has proved how versatile he is. I have never met such a well known popular 'star' who is so down to earth; you can do nothing but smile in his company. I will be back when Michael is next on stage and it is just a shame that he is not performing in Belfast.

SANDRA MARSHALL

Sandra tells us she's waited 20 years for a photo like this with Michael. It was third time lucky on the 3rd June as on previous occasions, just as the photo was being taken, someone stood right in front!

A FAN FROM AFAR

by Megan Walters

As the crowd built in Grape Street London, I watched! Not from a cafe across the road, but on a traffic webcam. Carol in America had alerted the forum that it was available.

I have never seen *Hairspray* but thanks to technology I have felt part of the journey. The fanclub forum and the Justball.net website have been truly wonderful. They have kept 'the fans from afar' in touch. From the official announcement that Michael was to be Edna, people have been so generous sharing their experiences. The photos, the reports and the general chat have helped me appreciate the show. I have come to admire the cast and yes, perhaps envy the fans that have enjoyed so many visits to the Shaftesbury. I have been able to appreciate their joy at meeting Michael.

So why am I a fan of Michael's when I live so far away? I didn't go to his Australian concerts. At that time my daughters were younger and finances limited.

Now I am a card carrying, badge-wearing fan. I bemuse my workmates with Michael news. (I am hoping his appearance on the Ovation channel might enlighten some people.) Why this devotion? It is quite simple. Michael is special!

It's not just his talent. Michael the man (and he is 'just a man') is so generous to his fans and appears to have a genuine interest in them as people. His radio shows illustrate his intelligence and interest in current affairs. He has a warm interview technique with his guests. Listening to the show is a treat after work on Monday afternoon.

Michael takes me away from the mundane worries and cares of everyday life. I understand when people write of 'Michael medicine'. While I have been content being a fan from a distance, I am really looking forward to the tour when I will experience the 'magic of Michael' in person!

I'm sure by now all has been said about the West Wycombe concert. To sum it up in one word: WOW!! I was privileged to be present along with so many other fans and witnessed a truly awesome concert! I had to return back to the States too soon as always, but I was lucky to have brought home a few reminders of my time in London and West Wycombe. This included a British "tan" (Oh yes, an oxymoron if there ever was one!), the delight of meeting even more fans, having my picture taken with Michael, and a very special pair of boxer shorts.

As I said, the concert was just incredible and towards the end, patriotic songs commenced. Being from America, these are songs that are not commonly heard here at home so it was exciting to hear them sung live by Michael and his guests. When they starting singing Land of Hope and Glory I noticed Michael picking up what appeared to be a Union Jack flag. I saw him wave it around a bit. Having such a great view and camera in hand, I just started snapping pictures. I thought he would eventually unfurl it and there would be the flag. Michael is so proud of his England; I was hoping to catch a picture of him waving his flag. What a lovely image it would be!

As the song was ending, Michael suddenly wiped his brow with "the flag" and flung it out into the crowd. All I remember from that point on was that my arm automatically went straight up into the air and "the flag" landed in my hand.

I immediately clenched it and held on to it for dear life! At the very end of the concert, Michael was presented with a cake to celebrate his birthday, followed by a great fireworks display, including one that said "Happy Birthday Michael". As Michael said his farewells to the crowds and the fireworks started, I slowly unraveled my treasure. Everyone's attention was towards the show in the sky, but there in the darkness, alone in the crowd, I had a very exclusive and hilarious laugh. It was NOT a flag but a pair of boxer shorts! It was definitely a unique souvenir from the concert. At that point, all around me became aware of my concert trophy!

Well, the boxer shorts made their trip across the Atlantic to their new home in New Jersey, USA. Now what to do with them. I had talked to a couple of other fans who had suggested that I get them signed by Michael. Lila was heading to London for the last week of Michael's stint in *Hairspray* at the Shaftesbury, so she offered to take them with her. The boxer shorts made a return trip to England. If they would have had an Executive Club membership with British Airways, they would have been racking up the miles.

Now the wait...

Like so many other fans, I checked out the MBFC forum during that time and noted just how many fans were present for the last week. I saw the pictures of Michael arriving and trying to get through the crowds to the stage door. I saw him doing his Evita imitation from the window

Past and Present - the 25th Anniversary Scrapbook

by Carol Cox

Godspell and Les Mis

Michael once said that he was told that he wouldn't get any serious acting roles until after the age of 40. Are the roles of Count Fosco in 'Woman In White', Reginald Bunthorne in 'Patience' or Edna Turnblad in 'Hairspray' considered serious roles? An Olivier award in 2008 will verify that Michael is indeed a serious actor, even if the roles he has played are more camp than serious. This year, 2009, marks Michael's 25th year in show business and what a journey it has been for him and his fans. After graduating from Guildford School of Acting in 1984, his career began in musical theatre in 'Godspell' followed by 'Pirates of Penzance' in 1985.

He landed the role of Marius in the original London production of 'Les Miserables', a role he reprieved in the 10th anniversary production at the Royal Albert Hall. Michael also appeared on Coronation Street during the early stages of his career. In 1987, Michael took on the role of Raoul in 'The Phantom of the Opera' but perhaps the pivoting role in launching his musical theatre career was in 1989 when he was cast as Alex in 'Aspects of Love'. This role also sent him to Broadway for the first time when Aspects transferred across the ocean.

Pirates of Penzance

Coronation Street

from 'Phantom' to 'Aspects

With the success of 'Love Changes Everything' released as a single, Michael's musical career was also launched. He represented the U.K. in the Eurovision Song Contest in 1992 with 'One Step Out Of Time', which topped the U.K. charts. He also released his first solo album 'Michael Ball' which initiated a highly successful recording career, followed by his second album 'Always'. During this time, Michael also had two sell out national tours. In 1993, Michael appeared in his first television series, hosting major recording artists such as Cliff Richard, Ray Charles, The Bee Gees and Tammy Wynette.

with the Bee Gees

Eurovision entry

Michael's third album 'One Careful Owner' was released in 1994 along with the second series of his television show, with guests such as Lulu, James Brown and Cher.

with James Brown and Ray Charles

Guests from the show....

Michael also had another successful U.K. tour that year and released his fourth album 'The Best of Michael Ball'. His successful career continued in 1995 with open air concerts and singing at the opening of the Rugby World Cup. That year also saw Michael reprise his role as Marius in the 10th Anniversary Concert of Les Miserables. Michael was one of the founders of R.O.C. (Research Into Ovarian Cancer) and released a single 'The Rose' in 1995. He also starred as Henry Purcell in a production of 'England My England' and ended the year with a Christmas television special with guests Dusty Springfield (her last television performance) and Michael Bolton.

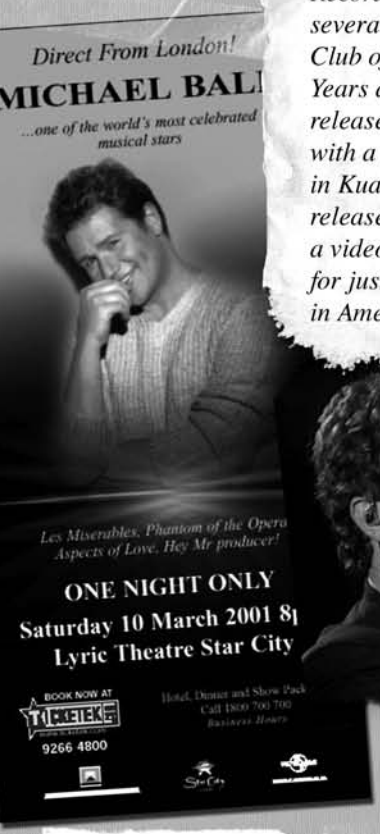
England, My England

with the OTHER Michael B!

Live in Glasgow

Michael's fifth album 'First Love' was released in 1996 and later that same year, his sixth album 'Michael Ball The Musicals'. He also appeared in Sondheim's musical 'Passion' and ended the year as a headliner in the Joy To The World Christmas Concert at the Royal Albert Hall. Michael appeared in many one- off's in 1997, the year which also saw the release of his video 'The Musicals and More' He also appeared on television in the National Lottery Shows and numerous open air concerts, including Proms In The Park. He had another sellout tour in 1997 and was also a guest at The Royal Variety Performance. Michael had another television show in 1998 called 'An Evening With Michael Ball' with guests Lesley Garrett, Ronan Keating and Martine McCutcheon. He also appeared in The Andrew Lloyd Webber 50th Birthday production, which was filmed for release as a video. He had more sell out open air concerts and released his seventh album 'The Movies.'

In 1999, Michael was honoured as The Variety Club of Great Britain Recording Artist for 1998. He had another sellout tour and performed several open air concerts as well. He also received The Theatregoers Club of Great Britain Most Popular Musical Actor Over the Last 21 Years award. He appeared in many shows throughout the year and released his 'Live At The Royal Albert Hall' video and album, along with a Christmas album. At the end of the year, he appeared in a concert in Kuala Lampur. Michael enjoyed another sellout tour in 2000 and released anther successful album 'This Time It's Personal', which led to a video of the albums songs at The Cafe de Paris, an intimate concert for just 300 fans. He also made appearances at PBS television stations in America to promote showings of his Live at RAH video.



Shakin' a Tail Feather

In 2001, Michael appeared in Australia for the first time and also recorded another album 'Centre Stage'. He had many sellout concerts across the U.K. He also starred in his own one man show at the Donmar Warehouse 'Alone Together', which was also released as a video as well as another U.K. tour in December. Michael starred as Caractacus Potts in the London stage production of 'Chitty Chitty Bang Bang' in 2002 and into 2003. After 'Chitty', Michael released a concept album titled 'Love Story' followed by another U.K. tour. He ended 2003 at the Royal Opera House with a gala Christmas concert

Chitty!

Alone Together...

a love story...
MICHAEL BALL

← With Catherine Hyde Stanbaugh...

...and Danielle Everett →

Michael returned to Australia in 2004 for a five concert tour, including a standing ovation at the Sydney Opera House. Upon return, he performed with Petula Clark at the Cork Opera House in a production of Sunset Boulevard, after which he performed two concerts in Salt Lake City, his first American concerts. He performed several out door summer concerts in the U.K. and later reprised his role in an updated version of 'Alone Together' at the Theater Royal Haymarket. 2004 also saw the release of his double album 'The Essential Michael Ball' .His 'Live In London' show from 2003 was released as a DVD in 2004. He also appeared as Jean Valjean in a mini production of Les Miserables at Windsor Castle and appeared at the opening of the Millenium Centre in Wales.

Count Fosco

2005 brought what many consider was a turning point in Michael's career when he was offered the role of Count Fosco in the London production of 'Woman In White'. He also cohosted 'This Morning' on British television while appearing in 'Woman In White' He had another successful U.K. tour then appeared as Reginald Bunthorne in the New York City Opera's production of 'Patience', after which he reprised his role of Count Fosco in 'Woman In White' on Broadway. He also released one of his most successful albums, 'Music'.

Playing Reginald Bunthorne

In 2006, Michael appeared in a tribute to The Rocky Horror Picture Show as Dr.Frank N Furter. He recorded a follow up album in 2006 title 'One Voice' and performed in many open air concerts. He hosted a tribute to Anthony Newley and appeared as a guest with Petula Clark. That year also saw the release of another DVD 'The Best of Michael Ball Live'. He also sat in as a guest presenter for Johnnie Walker's BBC Radio 2 show and appeared on the National Lottery Show.

The Prom, and Kismet

Michael started 2007 by being a judge on the television series 'Soapstar Superstar'. He then had another sellout national tour in the spring along with summer concerts. He appeared with the English National Opera in 'Kismet'. One of the highlights of his career came in 2007 when he had his own Prom at the Royal Albert Hall. 2007 was also the year of another peak in his career when he starred as Edna Turnblad in the London production of 'Hairspray'.

In the spring of 2008, Michael was awarded the Laurence Olivier Award as Best Actor in a Musical for his role as Edna Turnblad in Hairspray. This was truly the highlight of Michael's career in show business. He continued in the role of Edna for another year. Michael also had his own Sunday Brunch show on BBC Radio 2 each Sunday morning, taking over Parkinson's former slot. Michael also found time for several open air concerts between performances of 'Hairspray' and released another solo album 'Back To Bacharach" . A DVD of his highly successful 'One Voice, One Special Night' tour in 2007 was also released.

Michael continued his role as Edna Turnblad in 'Hairspray' to mid 2009. He released an album showcasing his 25 years with 'The Best of Michael Ball, Past and Present'. Another national tour is about to start, as well as a DVD of one of the tour shows. After that, who knows... only Edna Turnblad will tell!

DREAMS DO COME TRUE!

By Katrina Johnson. Photo by Andrew Ross.

Once upon a time (20 odd years ago) in a land far, far away (well New Zealand is about as far away from London as you can get!) a musical theatre craze swept the world and a legend was born. The nation watched as Michael Ball became a star, his music was being played everywhere and many people became steadfast fans, including me. So naturally when I moved to London in 2003 the first thing I did was join the Michael Ball fan club and start going to as many concerts as possible. I would wait along with numerous other fans at the stage door, hoping for a photo or autograph, my own 'Michael moment' but he is so popular I could never get near him!

With the help of Maureen and Gill I was lucky enough to be in the front row for Michael's 'One Voice' concert at the Hammersmith Apollo and was even interviewed for the DVD - I can recall rambling enthusiastically about Michael's phenomenal talent, how he puts so much emotion into every song and what a huge fan base Michael has in NZ and was asked "have you come all the way from NZ for the concert?" "Well no," I answered... quickly adding "but I would"! After the concert I again attempted to get the long sought after photo/autograph but missed out and resigned myself to thinking the front row would be as close as I would get.

But then... Christmas 2007 the hospital I work for had their annual party at the Royal Academy of Music. The singers usually perform Christmas carols but announced this year it was something different... songs from musicals! And not only that, they were turning it into a competition - first prize to whoever could name the most songs and the musicals they came from. At this point it seemed like the whole room turned to look at me, knowing my 'past life' as a dancer in many musicals. They then announced the prize... "Two tickets to the show *Hairspray* and a backstage pass to meet the star of the show..." I gasped and grabbed the two colleagues either side of me.

"What?" they asked in unison. "...Michael Ball!" finished the announcer. "Oh," said my colleagues, again in unison. It is no secret what a huge fan I am! One of my colleagues then quickly went to fetch me an entry form muttering something about how insufferable I would be if I didn't win.

The moment came and they announced the winners - a tie for first place. One of the consultants had got every song right but so had someone else, me! You can imagine my excitement; I was actually going to meet the man, the voice, the legend... after being a fan for so many years. However there was some mix up about the prize, the person that organised it couldn't be contacted and after many months of trying I gave up.

One of my colleagues knew how much it had meant to me and unbeknownst to me managed to contact Andrew, Michael's P.A. and explained what had happened. A few more months went by and then out of the blue I had a call from Andrew, Michaels P.A.! After much to-ing and fro-ing Andrew organised it all and finally on the 14th of July 2009 my dream came true and I had my 'Michael moment'! It really was all I'd dreamt of and more. I had the full VIP treatment and tour of the *Hairspray* stage and behind the scenes. After the tour my friend and I were chatting to Andrew and then in walked Michael! I have no idea what I said to him, he just appeared and I was star-struck! Thank goodness I now have the long sought after photo otherwise I would still be thinking it was just a dream!

Michael was very gracious and it was such an honour to meet him. He said to give him a wave at the next concert which of course I will do along with many of you I'm sure! A huge thank you to Maureen, Gill and Andrew... and of course Michael. It was well worth the 20+ years wait!

Mayhem in London!

BY CHRIS TIETJEN

Although Doris Laurini and I have only known each other for 18 months, having met through the Fan Club Forum, we have become close friends. It was one of Doris' wishes that she could come over to the UK to see Michael in concert with me – although she had seen *Hairspray* a few times, she had never seen Michael sing live in trousers! So, his birthday concert turned out to be a good opportunity to take the plunge. Whilst Doris arranged her travel pans, I made the rather more exciting plans!

So, Doris arrived late June, and had a couple of days to get used to her accommodation (my spare room!!) before our mayhem began! I had managed to arrange a long weekend off work, so our first full day was Thursday – and what a full day! We arrived in London, bright and early, ready for the matinee performance, having booked in to the Travel Lodge right next door to the theatre – we had decided to stay over, as we had things to do the next day!! Unbeknown to Doris, Brenda Kemeys had been in touch with me, and travelled down from Gloucester to meet us. We also met up with Ruth Whiting, Nancy, Lila, Joan and the Bunnies as we were waiting for Michael.

The man himself arrived, looking very trim and handsome, in a flowery shirt. We managed to hand over gifts we had for him, including a shirt Doris had found in the States, which had Michael "written all over it" (not literally, you understand!!), a miniature bottle of Welsh malt whiskey and an album of 100 "Michael Mayhem" pictures which we had made up for him. We managed to show him some of the pictures, and he gave a great big grin and said he'd love looking at them! He posed for a few pictures, and off he went inside. A quick lunch and nice natter with Brenda, then the matinee for us. Another great show, of course!

Then a between show stage-door, when Doris was so thrilled to see Michael was wearing her shirt – a perfect fit!! We managed to ask if he had seen the album, and he said he hadn't had chance to look yet, but Andrew said that all the cast had been passing it around and giggling at! He said the cast had loved it!

Off we went to eat again – *Oliver!* beckoned us for the evening show. A good show, but boy, was it hot in the theatre! The show finished early, and just as we got outside Doris said "What time does *Hairspray* finish?" I looked at my watch, and at Doris... and if you've never seen two old 'uns sprint (well...I exaggerate slightly!) from Drury Lane to the Shaftesbury... we made it just as everyone was coming out! Quite a rugby-scrum, with Andrew trying to protect Michael, and poor Ben disappearing under a sea of young girls – not sure if he minded or not!

Next day we were up bright and early for a trip on the London Eye, and a quick visit to Westminster Abbey, before our tour backstage at the Shaftesbury. Whilst waiting to go in, we met up with Marie, Celia, Lila & Nancy again, and had a nice hour or so tour, learning about the show and the theatre - and we can boast that we have stood on the same stage as Michael and co! After a quick liquid refreshment with Celia & Marie, we made our way back to Essex, to get ready for Wycombe the next day.

Five of us travelled to Wycombe – me, Doris, daughter, granddaughter and daughter-in-law, all in t-shirts I had made for the birthday bash! Apart from the trouble finding the entrance, and talking to a chap who had also got lost (who turned out to be Mike McCarthy!) the concert was great! The fireworks were a spectacular finale, but getting out of the venue was another story!! But we had met our previous stage-doorers again, and also Barbara Mills, Maureen & Gill & families, Alana, Gilly J, and so many others!

It wasn't quite the end of our Michael adventures, though, as Doris went to meet Barbara for a Thursday matinee stage door, whilst I sulked as I was back at work! However, we had decided just a couple of weeks before that we would like to see the show one last time, and my granddaughter had been nattering on and on about going again. So, 4 seats (Ellie's mummy insisted on coming!!) in row C of the stalls called us on the 4th of July!! After managing to extricate Ellie from Hamleys (only with the promise of seeing Ben!) we went to the stage door. Michael was running very late, and only had time for a quick hello, and promised to come out later – but Doris managed to give him a present before he disappeared again. A few days before, we had been shopping locally when we saw a t-shirt, which we both laughed at, and said the same thing... Michael written all over it (again, not literally!!) We must have walked past it half a dozen times, before Doris gave in to temptation and bought it! The wording on it was "Sex, drugs and sausage rolls"! As we didn't see Michael wearing it, we "Mayhemed" a picture of what we think it may have looked like!!

We also met up with friends again, including Ruth (Yorkshire Rose) and her delightful twins, who had made the trip to the show from Yorkshire, and fitted it in with meeting us. We had also made up a small album of Mayhem pictures of Leanne / Tracy, and gave it to Leanne, who was thrilled with it!

A great matinee, as usual, and Ellie was so fascinated being so close to the stage!! And, despite my daughter's thoughts that Michael wouldn't bother to come out, he did, and so did Ben, for pictures and autographs. We managed to tell Michael that it would be our last *Hairspray* before he finished, thanked him and told him how much we'd loved it all. And then he was gone for his dinner!

A wonderful 2 weeks together for Doris and I, and lots of special things and people to remember. Doris is now back home in Florida, and life continues as usual in Essex, but we are in contact virtually every day, to share our Michael Memories!

FAREWELL EDNA... OR RATHER 'SO LONG' FOR NOW!

By Sue Rogers. Pictures by Maureen Wilkinson Rouse

The day finally arrived, Michael's last day in *Hairspray*. I'd been to previous 'last nights' but this one was real. Our journey into London was fairly chaotic with road works etc, but I didn't want to be late - not today, my hubby was going fishing for the day so he was dropping me off in the vicinity of the Shaftesbury (he was all *Hairspray*-ed out after coming with me more times than he really wanted too!)

We approached the theatre and couldn't find any where to pull over to let me out so it was a case of "the traffic lights are on red, get out now!!! As I walked down the now familiar Grape Street I could see a fairly big crowd already and a familiar face of Brenda (one of the Gloucester Girls!!) who had decided that she should visit one more time, chatting to friends who were appearing by the minute. We noticed that the police had arrived to block off the top of Grape Street with tape and a car, surely that wasn't for us? It was quite sensible really as the crowd was swelling by the minute; we noticed Andrew walk to the top of the road and knew Michael's arrival was imminent. Michael arrived in a car waving as he passed by. He stepped out of the car and stood on the sill of the door for a quick chat before going into the stage door for one last time.

I went for coffee to kill time in a coffee shop by the theatre which was full of Michael fans, so lots of chat. Arriving at the theatre and taking our seats, row A of the upper circle, great view, the lights went down, this was it the last matinee, great applause for Leanne singing 'Good Morning Baltimore'... Michael's first appearance, holding up a Michael Ball pillowcase, on his shelf with a MB plate and mug!!

From then on it was spot the fooling around! The show was terrific, so much energy, could they possibly do this again tonight? There were some tears from Leanne as she danced to 'You Can't Stop The Beat' for the last matinee. Walking out of the theatre it was straight to the stage door, huge crowds, cast members hanging out of their dressing room windows to take photos of the faces below, they were loving it. Michael appeared at a window to huge cheers and camera flashes. He went on to ask if we were going back in tonight and this show would be proper, no shenanigans!!

After something to eat we made our way back to the Shaftesbury for one last time, took our seats, a few butterflies of anticipation, the overture started and there was Leanne the applause and cheers were deafening (this carried on as each leaving member appeared) the show was the best I'd seen, they did manage to put in the energy and each move was sharp, precise and fantastic. Before long the show was ending and Leanne danced to 'You Can't Stop The Beat'..." for everyone "

Michaels appearance from the 'Ultra Clutch' can was met with thunderous applause, the show had finished and the producer came on stage for a lovely speech and presentation of huge bouquets of roses... 600 roses in all one for each performance. Michael, Leanne and Ben each made a speech, tears flowed, one last dance to 'Y.C.S.T.B.' and they were gone.

Arriving at the stage door, there were huge crowds again, people with cameras

poised on the window for Michael's appearance, there he was all spruced up for the party afterwards, he thanked us all for the support and being great audiences..."sing, sing" the waiting crowd chanted. Michael obliged, saying "Only if you sing with me..." He went on to sing "We'll meet again..." there was a lump in my throat but I did try to sing along... it was lovely and a fitting end to what has been a great time with Edna and friends. I managed to have a photo taken and programme signed along the way. What next - the tour? Looking forward to that.

As Michael got into the car he said "Do you think you've seen the last of Edna?" With that he was driven out of Grape Street for the last time... I wondered if, or when, that familiar form of the lady in the red dress will appear next. Now we all know!

The Shooting Star Children's Hospice

Michael is now supporting The Shooting Star Children's Hospice whose website can be found at http://www.shootingstar.org.uk.

The Shooting Star Children's Hospice provides care, support and advice for children and young people with life-limiting conditions and their families. These care services are offered free of charge to families, 365 days a year.

Shooting Star opened in 2005 and now supports 250 families. The care services are based around the needs of the whole family, so as well as caring for the children and young people, there are activities and support groups for siblings, parents and other relatives.

Families benefit from Shooting Star's care services in the community, in their own homes and at Shooting Star House, the purpose-built facility based in Hampton, Middlesex. These services include Short Breaks (respite care), Day Care, Outreach Care, Family Support and Therapies and End of Life Care.

It costs £3 million every year (£8,000 a day) to maintain the care services offered by Shooting Star, and with no long-term statutory funding, the majority of this comes from voluntary donations, fundraising activities and events.

This wonderful organisation have asked if you could send any donations you want make to the usual fan club address (MBFC, PO Box 2073, Colchester, Essex, CO4 3WS) by cheque/postal/money order to "The Shooting Star Children's Hospice", rather than doing it through the website. We can then forward them for the attention of a representative so they know they came from Michael's fans.

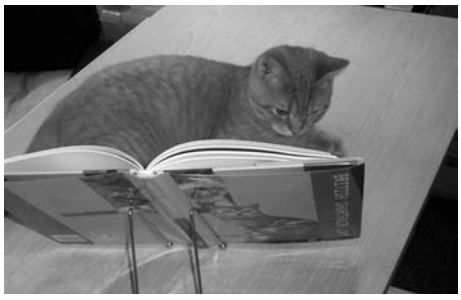
FINDING THE PUR-FECT PARTNER!

US Co-ordinator Pat Webb says her new assistant is just pur-fect!

Pat Webb has been helping to co-ordinate our American membership for many years now, sending out renewals and news updates from her base in Massachusetts. When she said the work was getting too much for her and she needed an assistant to help her out we decided we had to conduct the interviews in person to ensure she got the right sort of help.

As we both didn't want to be away from the UK office at the same time, we flew over at different times to interview the new employee to make sure he had the correct characteristics to cope with the demands of working for MBFC.

After gruelling testing, such as chasing the small ball around the house, playing with various toys and making sure he did exactly as Pat told him, James Michael Webb impressed us with his willingness to help and he was hired straightaway! He posed for some photos to add to our helpers' gallery which are reproduced here.



ODE TO HAIRSPRAY BY ANNA FELICES

Anna penned this before we knew about Edna's return, but we wanted to include it!

When news first hit of this latest role
Some thoughts were filled with doubts
But just one glance of the Turnblad's was
To instantly discover their charms

They took us through time, a journey so fun
They made us laugh and cry
But the ride soon had to come to an end
And it came time to say goodbye
Goodbye to the characters
We know and love
And the music that lives in our hearts
We'll try to remember, as one journey ends
Another invariably starts

And so, though we'll all miss our new friend
We may see her again down the track
But we can't deny that in our hearts
We're happy to have Michael back!

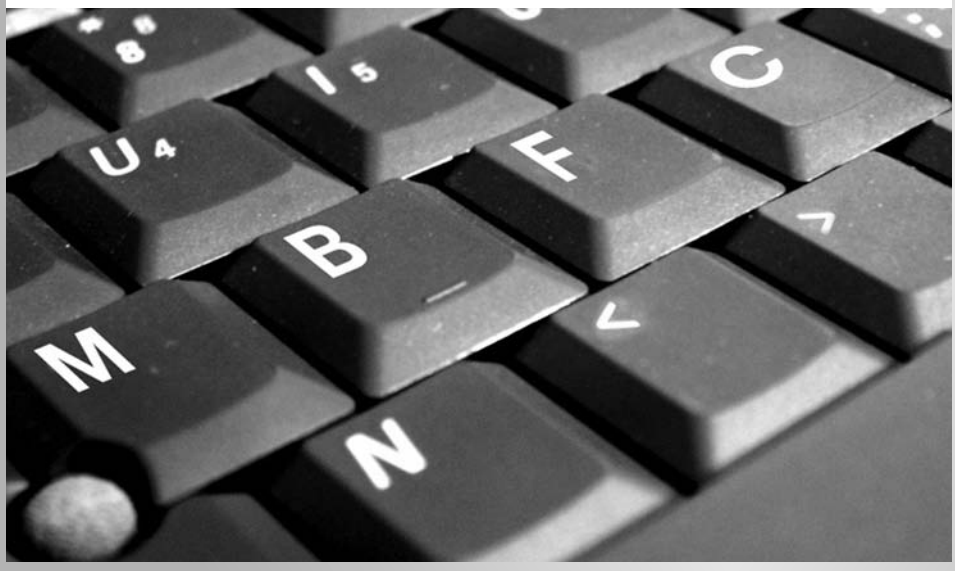
THE MICHAEL BALL FAN CLUB ONLINE

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 silver.



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.

IMPORTANT!

Please remember to use the correct postage when sending items to the fan club, especially if your envelope is larger than 240mm x 165mm as it costs more than the standard size!

INFOLINE NUMBER

0871 221 7811

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.

DUTCH FANS

We have a request from Joke Bruines especially for any other Dutch fan club members:

Hoi,

Ik zou het heel leuk vinden om kennis te maken met Michael fans uit nederland. Misschien kunnen we als het klikt ooit samen een concert bezoekn, dat zou ik geweldig vinden. Ik ben 51, vrolijk, positief en uiteraard een heel grote Michael fan. Dus ik ik hoop dat er iemand wil reageren.

Tot mails of schrijfs

Joke Bruines
Patio 161
1628 LJ Hoorn
jhm.bruines@quicknet.nl

JEAN HAMLYN

Jeannie is looking for some Michael fans in the Milton Keynes Area, hopefully to travel to concerts with.

4 Greenways
Bow Brickhill
Bucks
MK17 9JP