

ON THE BALL

Issue 53



Hi Everyone,

Here we are again, at the end of another remarkable year in the life of a Michael Ball fan with so much more to look forward to in 2010.

We have included some of your stories from the tour in this issue and what a tour it was. When Michael said he was going to ring some changes we don't think any of us really knew what a treat he had planned for us. The new format was sensational, with the addition of the 'kids' (to use Michael's terminology) bringing a whole new aspect to the shows. Michael was on top form throughout; we don't think his voice has ever sounded richer. Every one of the concerts we went to held us entranced by the magic of his performance.

We hope you enjoy James Gaden's partly-true story of his night at the Royal Albert Hall (you'll see what we mean when you read it) and if he didn't do such a brilliant job of laying out On The Ball we'd have to severely punish him for his warped sense of humour. Then again, that would prove that everything he says is true, so perhaps we'd better be nice to him!

We need to say our usual thank you to everyone who has contributed to On The Ball during the past year, to Andrew for looking after Michael so well and being so helpful to us, to our own Peter at Webb who does a brilliant job of looking after our American fan club members, to Chris, Phil, Simon, Sarah and Judy, oh and not forgetting James (even if we have to put up with his artistic temperament!)

We're eagerly looking forward to the charity concert to raise funds for the Shooting Star Children's Hospice and no doubt you will be able to read all about it in the next issue of On The Ball.

All that remains is to wish everyone a happy and peaceful Christmas and New Year. Lots to lots of fun in 2010!

Lots of Love
Gill and Maureen

Dear Everyone,

I can't believe another year is coming to an end and what a wonderful one it has been in so many ways.

I had the best time on this tour and loved everything about it. Seeing all of you around the country, sharing the stage with such a lovely, talented bunch of people and performing new and old songs that I love.... and best of all staying cold and flu free (almost) so I didn't miss any shows this time.

I don't know if you've managed to see the D.V.D yet (it might be in your Christmas stocking) but I really think it has captured the atmosphere of what giving me so much love, support and strength in everything I do. You are what makes it all such fun and keeps me going. It wouldn't be the same without you.

God Bless and all my love,

in the show were so thrilled to be performing there as well and they were brilliant. I was so proud of them.

So now its full steam ahead with the charity concert for the Shooting Star Childrens Hospice and thank you for the wonderful support you have shown them. It is an incredible place.

We have also completed the casting of the "Hairspray" tour. How much am I looking forward to getting that pork on again?!! It will be such fun to be shooting Edna's stuff again and I really hope that we will get to see each other at one of the great theatres around the country.

It looks like we are going to have another fabulous year together, God willing and as always thank

MY 21 YEAR AFFAIR WITH MICHAEL!

by Jane Harker



That's a tabloid-style heading worthy of the News of the World isn't it? Woman confesses to secret affair with star of stage and concert hall! How has this been kept under wraps for so long? Well, that's probably because The Beloved and I only met for the first time a couple of weeks ago...

I first saw Michael on tour with Sarah Brightman in 1988. Who wasn't bowled over by those looks and that fabulous voice? I certainly was, and followed his career with passion ever since. Despite seeing him in various concerts and things over time, I could not bring myself to hang around the stage door as many others do. I felt a bit like Michael said he felt about getting the opportunity to meet Barbara Streisand – he didn't want to stand in a queue with others to shake her hand – he wanted to sit down and have a good chat, ask lots of questions all by himself for a while. Well, I felt the same about him. I didn't want to share him with the

other fans, even though we had so much in common.

Over the years, and particularly since his voice is in my kitchen every Sunday, chatting away like an old friend, I have really felt he is someone I know, and is important to me. I decided to go to the Shaw Theatre Q and A session and managed to wrest the microphone from the guy walking around to ask Michael a question. As Michael turned to look at me with a friendly smile I realised – shock – horror! He doesn't know who I am! How can he not recognise me? I know him so well! It should have been a Doctor Who/Donna moment – Michael – it's me! But he smiled and politely answered my question and turned away to the next questioner in the audience.

This year the tour coincided with my birthday. My dear, patient, curly-haired, twinkly-blue eyed husband (who I met the same year as Michael – no, he can't sing!) arranged to take

me to the Royal Albert Hall concert on the Saturday. What a night! Michael was in the finest voice, the show was a delightful surprise, the atmosphere electric. Six thousand people on their feet at the end – amazing. I was walking on clouds when we left at the end of the evening.

I had decided that this WAS the moment – this WAS the day and that I should send all my doubts and demons on their way. I really should get to meet him at last. I booked a Live Nation meet and greet before the Nottingham show. I stood nervously in the foyer with around ten other lovely people, all with their own Michael-love-affair stories. We were lead into a room to wait while he did a sound check and we were given rules of etiquette. 'He knows you love him – just don't throw your arms around him and kiss him please'. Gosh – as if I'd dare...

By now I felt really nervous, when the door opened slightly and a familiar voice said 'well, you are all very quiet in here!' There he was – I nearly squeaked – 'gosh – you are real'!! I don't need to tell you how lovely he was – we chatted about the RAH, and he was so delighted I had been there. He bounced comments off me in relation to questions from other people. Someone asked what was new in the show – and he asked my opinion as to whether the nudity was distracting! Eventually it was my turn to talk to him, and to have my photo taken. He was just wonderful, and obviously hadn't heard the warning about hugging and bodily contact as he swept me up in the most enveloping hug, and I got that kiss! All too soon he was gone.

Needless to say the affair continues. I think my husband thought it might just go away if I actually met him (poor misguided man). So here's to the future – Michael and me (and I dare say all of you too). One day I will get that one to one meeting – it's just time. Let's hope it doesn't take another 21 years...



1999-2009... TEN YEARS ALREADY!

by Rose-Marie Gazagnaire from France

*"525,600 minutes,
525,000 moments so dear,
525,600 minutes, how do you measure,
Measure a year..."*

I wouldn't have realised just how significant this song was, hadn't Michael most appropriately brought it back on tour... just when I was looking for a way to write a few lines about these last ten years and what they mean to me.

Yes, how do you measure, not only a year, but ten? Ten wonderful years spent in the best of companies, Michael, his music, and the whole new world that came with it. Yes, it's hard to believe but ten years have passed already from the very first concert I went to in Dublin, on September 22nd 1999, at the Point. 143 tickets and about a zillion miles later, at the Royal Albert Hall on September 19th 2009, I celebrated, almost to the day, my tenth anniversary being part of Michael's world of fandom. The timing couldn't have been better!

Certainly, during these ten years, there have been "daylights, sunsets and cups of coffee", most of the time to keep me warm, or awake... or both! There have been many a night spent in hotels, B&Bs, even University Summer lets (when bankruptcy was looming!) and many a day spent in airport lounges, train stations,

even onboard coaches up and down the country. How many hours and how many miles, God only know. There have been all sorts of climatic ordeals as well, pouring rains, gales of wind, snow, freezing cold winters and scorching summers, a few broken umbrellas and some memorable sunburn, and I'm not even speaking of the tendency heavens have to let loose whenever Mr Ball shows up. I do have a couple of treasured memories of well soaked up outdoor concerts!!

But then, looking back at those ten years, what I see now is the way they have embellished and enriched my life.

Realising first of all that I was able to stretch my own limits to travel around (unharmful!) re-discovering a language I enjoy practising, opening up to a country I now love to bits and to a culture I have come to respect, finding out about so many performers, singers, actors, writers I had never heard of, you name it. The blessings are countless, but most of all, what has enriched my life most is getting to know so many people throughout the years, and striking priceless friendships that are going stronger and stronger. Along with comfy spare beds (friends really are the best B&Bs in town!) they provide me with hugs, help and support whenever needed, wine, fun and laughter the rest of the time, and of course, most of all, genuine affection that warms my heart up when I'm back home and feeling lonely. I'm asking you, can it get any better than that?

Of course, none of this would have happened without Michael, his music and the way he shepherds people and takes them with him on an extraordinary journey. While his music talks to your soul his amazing talent and lovely personality talk to your heart. I never feel so complete than when I'm sitting through a concert, letting the whole thing wrap me up, all cosy and comfy. That is what I call "Michael's magic touch", and I will never thank him enough for that.

So now, if I don't really know what is waiting for me in the next ten years, I do know I can hold on tight on these ten past ones, for they only can be measured in love, seasons of love.



AN EXPERIENCE IN CARDIFF

by Sylvia Chater



As usual I booked the tickets for Michael at Cardiff for the 8th October on the presale day as although we live in the West Midlands, we love Cardiff and the C.I.A. I would like to explain something first if I may, as it is relevant to Michael as you will see.

On the 22nd May this year, I retired from my office job after 23 years for the same people, but under different company names over the years. However on the 21st May the two young directors came to my home to pick up all the company books from me to take to their sister who was taking over. Luke, who is the one I dealt with mostly, gave me an envelope and said to open it and he would go through it with me. I couldn't think what it was going to be.

Imagine my surprise when I pulled out the paperwork. On the 7th October, my husband Bill and I would be picked up from home and chauffeur driven to a hotel in Cardiff for 2 night's Bed and Breakfast in

a premium room. He had then purchased 2 Platinum Experiences for us both to "Meet & Greet" Michael before the show. There was also a cheque for £100 to enable us to get a meal too. On the 9th October, he booked us on the National Express coach to return home. This is something we would have done anyway as we use National Express regularly.

Of course as time was getting ever nearer I was getting excited, so comes the decision of what to wear and take with me. Then on the morning of the 7th our chauffeur driven Daimler arrived on time at 10 o'clock and off we went. We arrived at the hotel in Cardiff at 12 o'clock and although it was too early for our room to be ready we asked if we could leave our case so that we could go for a walk. They said "Yes, of course and you can check in too."

Off we went for a walk to see if the massive re-development that had been going on for about 2 or 3 years had been

finished. Most of it is completed now and looks much better. We had a look in the new John Lewis store which had only been open for about 2 weeks. Very expensive though, but very nice.

Anyway as time got nearer to 2:30 we returned to the hotel and our room was ready. We also found that there was a bottle of Champagne there awaiting us. This is the sort of thing that Luke would do. We had booked a meal for the evening which was very nice and the staff were most helpful, in fact they were very good throughout our stay.

Next day dawned and looked like being a lovely day so after breakfast we went off to see more of Cardiff and some shopping. In fact we saw David Emmanuelle, the Fashion Designer in Bon Marche. Then as time was getting nearer we returned to the hotel to get ready for the big event. We left the hotel around 4 o'clock for a leisurely walk to the C.I.A. We were early, but the Event Manager

saw us and asked if we were for the "Experience" to which we said yes. However he said that Michael hadn't arrived yet so maybe we could walk round to the back of the C.I.A. and catch him arriving. This we did and after about 10 to 15 minutes Michael arrived in his coach. As usual Michael got out of the coach and came across to say "Hi" to us all. Some people asked him to sign programmes and take photos.

After that we went back to the front and the Event Manager was doing the registration. He told us what was going to happen with the "Meet and Greet" and we were then taken upstairs to a room that was ready for us. We could actually

hear Michael doing his sound checks, so we knew it wouldn't be long before he arrived. He arrived not long after, his usual bubbly personality surfacing, and spent a few minutes talking to us before photos were taken with him. He took time to say a few words to everyone as we went up to him.

When it came to my turn I went up and asked him to sign my programme first. He then asked me "Where do you come from?" to which I answered "The West Midlands". He immediately said "I thought so". He then said "I suppose you know I was born in Bromsgrove?" I said, "Yes, we live about 10 miles from there". He did also tell me that his very early

years were spent in Tipton. That also is only about 5 miles from us. My husband Bill also had his photo taken with him and then Michael called me back so that we could have a photo of the three of us together. It was a wonderful experience, something I shall never forget.

After we went into the theatre for the show, the Event Manager came to find us out and gave us the photos on a memory stick. The show of course was brilliant, albeit different from previous concerts.

So next morning we went home on a high after two wonderful days especially as my employers had been so generous!

MY MICHAEL MEET & GREET

BY SHARON YOUNG



What a fantastic and memorable day we had at the Ipswich Regent show. I met Michael at the VIP experience prior to the show and this is the photo which I will treasure. What an unforgettable experience. We had a good giggle with Michael and he is such a warm and friendly person, making everyone feel at ease. My friend, who incidentally I met at a Michael Ball concert 11 years ago and became friends with, came along too. I would love to do it all over again, which, one day I know I will.

MICHAEL BALL'S AUTUMN TOUR 2009

By Christine Godfrey. Pictures by Alastair Godfrey.



My husband Alastair and I have recently been to three of the best concerts that we have ever been to. Yes we have just seen Michael three times. *Hairspray* was great but there is nothing quite like seeing Michael dressed as a man in concert!

Alastair and I went to the first night on 12th September in Oxford. We spent a long weekend in Oxford driving down on the Friday to Tuesday. On the Saturday we went into town to find the stage door for after the show. As we arrived at about 12:40pm there were a

few ladies standing at the back of the theatre and three large coaches. Alastair said they can't be Michael's because they have foreign number plates, but they were - just as we got to the stage door Ben and Adrian got off one of the coaches said a quick hello and went into the theatre. Shortly afterwards Michael appeared. He also said a quick hello and apologised for being in a hurry because he had a lot of rehearsing to do as it was first night. We all went away until the evening and the first concert of the tour and what a concert it was! It was really good to hear Michael sing a lot of his

favourite songs - also some that he had not sung before. As everyone knows the concert tour was to celebrate Michael being in show business for 25 years and a lot of the songs are on the album 'Past and Present' that was released in March of this year.

As usual Michael's orchestra was good. Also the singers that he had with him on stage - Emma Williams, Louise Dearman, Ben James Ellis, Adrian Hansel and their vocal arranger Louise Clare Marshall were great. It was really good to see Ben and Adrian again, they had been in *Hairspray* with Michael! For once in my life I thoroughly enjoyed the singers and when Michael went off stage I was listening to them and not bored. All too soon the concert was over I was very pleased that I had two more to go to. We went to the stage door and waved cheerio to Michael, then back to the hotel thinking roll on the Royal Albert Hall the following Saturday.

I thought Oxford was good but Michael at the Royal Albert Hall was even better. The concert was being filmed for a DVD so the orchestra was larger - there were female violinists. At the end of the concert Michael was absolutely gobsmacked because the whole of the audience were standing up applauding and cheering. I don't think he wanted to leave the stage! Once again we went to the stage door to see Michael leave; as he was still being filmed he came out fairly quickly.

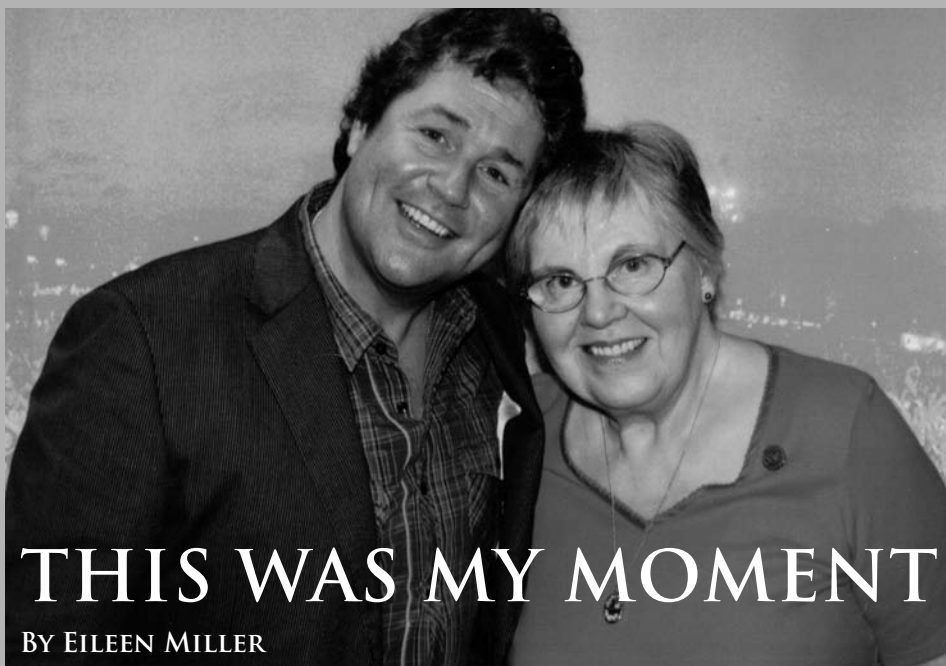
My third and final concert was in Cardiff. Alastair and I went to Cardiff for a week because we were seeing Cliff Richard and The Shadows two days before Michael. I said to Alastair that I did not mind what we did for the rest of the week but Thursday afternoon I wanted to be outside the C.I.A. waiting for Michael to arrive. Alastair was very good and actually checked in the morning to see what was going on!

We both went to the theatre about 3:00pm there were quite a few people waiting for Michael. It was well worth the wait because when he arrived on his



coach he came out and spoke to us all and signed autographs. I eventually got the brochure that I bought at Oxford signed, Alastair stood across the road and took quite a few photos of Michael as he was talking to all us ladies. We then went to Costa Coffee for a drink and a cake, the two girls in there were really excited because Michael had been in there Wednesday afternoon! They couldn't believe that we had just been talking to Michael and wished that they were going to see him in concert. Back to the hotel to change for my last concert for a while, once again a fantastic time had by everyone including Michael as he was performing on "home ground". Needless to say we went to wave Michael off at the stage door.

As I said before, three really wonderful concerts. I can't wait to see Michael again in whatever he is doing. Meanwhile I will have to watch the DVD. I ordered it after Oxford – it is the first time that I have ordered a DVD before it had been recorded!!



THIS WAS MY MOMENT

BY EILEEN MILLER

After months of waiting the day had at last arrived - I was going to meet Michael! My husband and I left home mid-morning arriving at Bournemouth in plenty of time to book in at our hotel and have lunch. After a relaxing meal we went to our room shortly I would have to start getting changed..

I made my way over to the B.I.C where I was greeted by a representative

from Live Nation who gave me a Tour Programme and a gift. When those meeting Michael had all arrived we made our way to the suite where we would meet him. It was not long before the door opened and we heard that familiar voice say 'Hello'. I must admit I was nervous beforehand but had no need to be Michael put one at ease immediately chatting to us and saying how he had enjoyed a boat trip at Christchurch the

previous day. My turn came for the photo to be taken as I was introduced Michael sang a few words from the song 'Come on Eileen' - this was my moment, one I will never forget! All too soon the meeting was over but we still had the show to look forward to...

Over the years I have always enjoyed the concerts but this 25th Anniversary one was excellent - with the change of format it was the best. Michael sang the usual musical favourites introducing on this occasion *Hairspray* and two from *Starlight Express*. He should never have been worried about performing 'Mack the Knife' it was great he was persuaded to sing it.

It's good to see an established artist bringing new talent to his concerts Ben and Adrian sang 'Just When' - a song written by Michael which brings a lump to ones throat. Emma Williams joined Michael to sing 'The Prayer' - brilliant.

One cannot forget the final song of the evening, 'The Impossible Dream,' which he sang at his audition for stage school... and we all know the final outcome - Michael is our top and most successful musical artist.



"Golden dust covers his vocal chords..."

by Andrea and Daniela Kohler.

"Hurry up, listen to that British singer. His voice is covered with golden dust!" my sister says. Her purchase last year of the Andrew Lloyd Webber Anniversary DVD brought back some memories of musicals we saw years ago in the West End... we had almost forgotten about London's magical district!

After watching with wide eyes (and ears) to that (so far unknown to us) brilliant singer, we immediately rushed to our computer, googled MICHAEL BALL... and booked a trip to London! *Hairspray* became our passion... no matter how difficult life can be sometimes; Edna and "her family" always put a big smile on our faces and into our hearts!

It was sad about Edna saying goodbye, but we were very happy about the announcement of a tour, and we did manage to get some of the very best seats for the two concerts at the Royal Albert Hall. We have never been there before, and we were stunned about that venue and its history! What a magical place! We joined a very interesting tour through the building and waited afterwards in front of the stage door. Even though it was going to be a long time to wait for Michael and the other artists, we never got tired or bored, because we got the chance to talk to so many of Michael's fans from all around the world. Some of them knew Michael since the beginning of his career... what a shame we missed so much in the past! Thanks to email we can keep chatting



Photo: Roy Wilkinson-Frouse



with some of our new friends!

The waiting was worth every second - our hurting feet were immediately forgotten! We were able to talk to Michael and even got a lovely picture with him and Ben, Adrian, Emma and the two Louise's! What a wonderful remembrance to a superb time we had! The concerts were more than brilliant! Michael and his guest singers gave 101% and both of us were having the time of our lives! Unforgettable!

To earn a little bit more money for more trips to see Michael, we had to get

back to Switzerland, back to our jobs. We were a little bit sad that we didn't have the opportunity to see every concert of the tour, but we also gave 101%! After the announcement about the Christmas concert in Cobham, Surrey, we called the office and took a "sick day off" (please, don't tell!) and phoned almost the whole day long to get 3 tickets (one extra for our mom, who in the meantime has become a big fan of Michael as well!) and what fortune... we got them! Next day, feeling so much better and recovered from the sudden illness, we went back to work with a big smile in our hearts!

We truly admire the work of "Shooting Star" and don't think Michael could have made a better choice for a charity to support!

In a few days we're going to be in London again for the evening of "Sing on a Star"... we are very excited about this event! We hope to see all our friends there!

Maureen, Gill and Joan, thank you guys so much for everything and thank you Michael for being what you are!

THE AFFORDABLE ART FAIR by Gill and Maureen

At the end of October Michael opened the private viewing of the Affordable Art Fair, in Battersea Park, London, in aid of the Royal Hospital for Neuro-disability. We had the pleasure of meeting one of the artists, Barbara Garnham, and this is her biography together with a photo of her and Michael taken on that day.

I started painting at school and continued throughout my life. But it wasn't until I had an accident and became paralysed, that I took it up seriously. I appreciated enormously the opportunity we were given to paint, first at Stanmore then Charing Cross Hospital, but it was when I came to the

RHN that I began painting in earnest.

It formed a large part of my recovery both physically and mentally. I was given the challenge of painting pictures for our ward and also told I could exhibit for the hospital's 'Art on the Hill' event, where I sold a number of works.

To start with I painted foreign subjects, South of France, Tuscany, Greece, as if to escape from my surroundings. Now, having been at the RHN for 13 years, I feel so grounded and privileged to live in such an amazing community, I look to the beautiful grounds for inspiration...

I now feel I don't have to travel to paint what I love, it is right here where I am. The only problem is finding enough time in our busy lives to capture the beauty of the RHN.



“YOU POOR LONG-SUFFERING BUGGER!”

by Bev Melbourne



So, with those few words and a very cheeky smile, Michael confirmed what Brian (my darling husband of 42 years) had long suspected !!

We were at the stage door at Sheffield and it was my first opportunity to introduce Michael to him.

Brian and I had promised each other many years ago that we would one day do the grand tour of the UK. Little did we know that when the time finally came, we would be accompanied by my now ‘partner in crime’ Hilary and the ‘other man’ in my life, who just happened to be embarking on a Grand Tour of his own.

We flew into London on the 11th September and after picking up our hire car the next morning, set off for Oxford.

That was the beginning of four wonderful weeks spent catching up with dear friends and seeing some of

the most beautiful countryside, towns and cities.

Favourites for me were York, Whitby, Inverness and Edinburgh... along with pretty much all of what we saw in Wales – especially Cardiff.

We had a lot of fun, met so many lovely people - speaking of which, I must give a special mention to the staff of the Premier Inn at Edinburgh – top notch, every one of them and so much fun as well.



Of course, Hilary and I squeezed in as many concerts as possible – thirteen in all and we loved every minute of them. Brian, who was already a fan of Michael's came along to four with us, including the amazing Saturday night at the RAH – a night that we will never forget.

It was apparent from the start that Michael's fans were going to make this very special tour one that he would also remember. The Colonies were well represented and apart from our happy trio, it was wonderful to see Mary and Barry and Frankie from N.Z. Also Megan and Gary from Melbourne as well as our other lovely friends Libby and Ian Maurice.

Of course this trip wasn't just about Michael (who am I kidding !!) You see, Brian was lured there by my good self on the promise of seeing lots of nice planes and Air Museums. His passion is flying and he is the very proud owner of a great little 'ultralite' plane which he built himself. For those who understand these things, it is a "Savannah" and it's a little beauty. I'm pleased to say, that in between his driving and part time stage door filming duties, he did get to see some brilliant displays.

By the way, on the subject of stage door filming, Brian (aka "Cecil B. Demented") did a truly fabulous job, considering the awesome responsibility! He was a bit slow to get started, but by the end of the tour was having a lovely time and thoroughly enjoyed chatting to the ladies and the occasional fella.

All too soon, it was the 10th October and we had an appointment with a couple of other planes at Heathrow and the promise of a very... looong ...flight home.

However, as always it was worth every minute that we had to spend on those planes – Hilary and I would not have missed this particular tour for the world.

Michael, you and 'the Kids' were amazing, thank you for those thirteen brilliant nights.



A BALL IN THE HALL! by James Gaden

I started this journey by becoming a fan of Michael the recording artist, rather than Michael the musical theatre star - it was hearing one of his records that first impressed me, and then watching him on the 'Live At The Royal Albert Hall' DVD that blew me away. I love his live concerts, but with Michael being in *Hairspray* for such an extended time, tour dates were thin on the ground. I went to see *Hairspray* and I really enjoyed it, probably more than any other musical I've been to, but since seeing Michael twice on the 'OneVoice' tour, I was really looking forward to him hitting the road again.

When he announced dates to celebrate a marvellous twenty five years in the business, I was delighted and decided I would see two shows. Some fans go to loads of shows on the tour, and while I love Michael and his work, I don't want to hear it to death, especially with there being a DVD promised - the show isn't going to change drastically from night to night, and I can't afford to do all those concerts without it being at the expense of something else I want to do. So I chose Manchester, and noticed that there was a Saturday night at the Albert Hall planned. That leapt out at me for so many reasons - I'd always wanted to see a show at the Albert Hall, and I could think of no better person to see there than Michael. I knew a lot of fans would be there, and figured if he was likely to record a show, it would be this one. It was going to be Cardiff, but I struck lucky and of the two nights, he chose to film the one I was going to be at.

So, like a dutiful Ballette (I know there's not that many of us, but we really need a male equivalent for us blokey fan club members, because being called a Ballette is doing major harm to my burning raw animal magnetism and testosterone fuelled appeal) I got my tickets in the fan club presale, booked my trains and my accommodation, and was all set.

It soon got around to my trip to London, and the next thing I knew I was on my way to the Albert Hall. I must admit to have got a twinge of excitement when I saw the building for real - it has a real presence about it. I scanned the faces near the door I was to go in and spotted Chris Kitchen and chatted to her for a while. I knew Maureen

and Gill were in attendance also, but with the pair of them being well documented bullies, I figured I would respectfully say hello only when there was safety in numbers. I have seen the rage of the one they call Maureen first hand - I remember the one time I met Michael at the stage door at *Hairspray*, and when I told him I was the guy who did 'On The Ball' he blanched, and apologised profusely that his letter for that issue was only half written. He'd been besieged by texts demanding it from Maureen, then more texts from Gill telling him to do it in his own time. A classic case of them using the 'good Ballette, bad Ballette' technique.



After talking with Chris for a while, I got settled into my seat. I loved the interior of the Albert Hall, and had a great view from the left of the stage, without any obstructions. I bought a programme, and read about the extra singers. I was a little bit worried that having five other vocalists would encroach on the show somewhat - this is a Michael Ball concert after all, but whenever I've been unsure about one of Michael's decisions, he's always gotten it right, so I treated it with an open mind.

From my vantage point I could see lots of the fan club members, several of which I have in my Facebook friends but have yet to meet in person. I saw Nikki Louise Blackstone near the front, and Maxine Storey not far from her, then my eyes rested on Gill, who spotted me, nudged Maureen, pointed and they waved - I think it was a wave, it might just have been a couple of fingers, I couldn't be sure.

The show - well, it was superb. I've not seen such a thing as a weak Michael Ball show, but this took things to a whole different level. The opening took me completely by surprise - 'I Was Made For Loving You' by KISS! I'm a KISS fan and I love Michael doing the up-tempo rock stuff and having fun, but I'd never have thought he'd have picked one of their songs. The only thing that could have made it better is if he wore the white face paint and seven inch platform shoes, but while an interesting idea, it would probably have been criticised by the majority in attendance.

The restructuring of the show made a massive difference. 'One Step Out Of Time' worked really well early in the set... better than as a party time piece for my money. To move from that to The Killers... a band I'm not mad about, but Michael has a knack of taking songs and making them work for him, and I have to say I really enjoyed 'Human'. 'Don't Stop Me Now' was even better though, which each guest singer taking a section. Any doubts I may have harboured about them maybe over saturating the show were instantly quashed. I was particularly impressed with Louise Dearman, because, although all five singers were brilliant, I didn't fancy any of them like I did Louise.

There were so many things I enjoyed about the show. The vocal work on 'Seasons Of Love' was just amazing and gave me goosebumps. The tribute to one of my favourite musical scores, *Jesus Christ Superstar*, was fabulous. Adrian really excelled here, and I thought Ben and Louise did a superb job of 'I Don't Know How To Love Him'. Then it closed with 'Gethsemane' - it doesn't get much more awe inspiring than that.

At the interval I tried to hide behind my

programme but Maureen bellowed that I had to come down and say hello, which I obediently did. Gill acted very pleasant and apologetic about her sister's demeanour because other fans were nearby, but I knew that they would both be slagging me off as soon as I returned to my seat. I had a chat with them and was forced to look out for them at the stage door afterward.

I wasn't very knowledgeable about *Starlight Express* (like Michael!) but I liked what I heard, and was quite surprised to find 'Love Changes Everything' come next. I thought this was great - it seemed to revitalise it, because normally as soon as you hear the opening notes you know you're at the end of the show. Not so at this one, and as I had stayed away from reading the setlist, I could enjoy the second half not knowing what was next.

'The Prayer' with Emma Williams was spectacular and I understood why so many fans raved about Michael and Emma singing together. Another tune I'd never have guessed would be included was 'Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy'. It was superbly sung, good fun and well choreographed. The same would go for Duffy's 'Mercy', the version I witnessed instantly becoming the definitive.

All that, without mentioning 'You Can't Stop The Beat', 'This Is the Moment', 'Empty Chairs...' - I could go on and on about the show, but it's just not necessary. Everybody on the forum, everyone I met, everyone who saw it, loved it. That's not because they were all gushing about Michael, it's because this was the best concert he's put together. The shuffling of songs, mixing old with new, adding five spectacular voices, it was all a stroke of genius.

When it finished, I made my way out, and my exit was right next to the stage door, so I was fairly near the front of the crowd that was already gathering. I managed to say a quick hello to Nikki who I saw a few feet away from me, but next thing I knew, there was a massive crowd of people and Michael appeared at the stage door. I've never seen so many people at a stage door before - Michael spoke briefly (which is captured on the DVD) before making his way to the car. What rounded the night off perfectly though was as he walked past, he winked as he saw me and said "Hello mate!" That was awesome - I've only met him once and was thrilled he

remembered me. I watched the DVD and although I'm not in the shot, the 'Hello mate' is present, captured forever!

I threaded my way through the crowd and found Gill, who introduced me to Chris, and then I met Roy, Maureen's husband. He said he was glad to meet me, and glad I could appreciate all he had to put up with. He said he liked my sense of humour and said he needed one like it, being married to Maureen. I was about to offer some strong, manly words of encouragement about keeping a stiff upper lip, but Maureen overhead and threatened to beat us both fiercely.

Andrea and Daniela Kohler who had travelled all the way from Switzerland came over to say goodbye to the ladies, and Maureen instantly transformed herself into a lovely and gracious lady. I glanced at Roy who just rolled his eyes, and Gill threatened to stick my mouse and keyboard where the sun doesn't shine if I didn't play along with the façade. Andrea and Daniela loved the show and their story is in this issue too. They took some photos, but you'll see on the one included below of myself, Maureen, Gill, Chris and Roy that Roy had to step back to hide the bruises.

I told Gill and Maureen about Michael recognising me in the crowd and we talked about just how much attention Michael

pays to his fans, remembering them, and how he goes out of his way to be charming and accessible, something every fan already knows, but anyone can see when they see the extras on the DVD.

I had a fabulous night, which was as much fun as writing this article. After being away from it for a fortnight, I was amped up and ready to see it again in Manchester. I had third row seats right in the centre, and took my girlfriend Sara with me - although I kept quiet about how much I liked Louise Dearman - I'm no mug.

I had taken a CD with me to give to Michael which I thought he'd like, but was unable to catch him in the chaos that was the Manchester Apollo stage door, so I sent it on to Maureen to give to him next time she see him - if she hasn't decided to use it as a coaster instead after reading this. The show itself was just as good the second time around, and I met a lot of fans at that show too - Carol Youngs and her daughter Wendy, Pat Collier was in the seat next to me, Gary Hewitt was sat behind me and I got to meet Alana and her lovely mum and dad as well. That's what makes Michael's shows such fun - great music, by a man we all have a common appreciation for, and everybody I've met from the fan club is just so approachable, fun and absolutely lovely.

Even Maureen and Gill.



Photo: Daniela Kohler

The Shooting Star Children's Hospice

Our Visit – A Humbling Experience by Maureen and Gill



As you know, Michael has taken the Shooting Star Children's Hospice charity to his heart and we were keen to find out more about this organisation and the work they do. The opportunity came when they invited us to their open day in September which gave us the chance to find out a lot more about what goes on there.

We arrived at Shooting Star House, which is in Hampton in Middlesex and were greeted straightaway by Karen Sugarman who is the Director of Fundraising Development – within a few minutes we were chatting away like old friends as she gave us a personally guided tour of the building. Immediately we were struck by what a beautiful place it was, with a cheerfully designed interior. The hospice cares

for children from birth to 18 years of age so they have a very wide range of ages to cater for. We couldn't believe what an uplifting, inspirational place it is – the staff are indeed very special people who manage to keep a positive disposition despite some of the extremely distressing situations they have to deal with.

We were particularly impressed by the sensory room, hydrotherapy pool and spa, and the music room where we understand Michael sang to all the children when he visited recently. Everywhere we went we were greeted by staff who were dedicated to their profession with a cheerful attitude to their work. They do everything they can to make life just that little bit easier for families who have children with life-limiting conditions including family suites where parents and siblings can stay whilst their loved one is being cared for.

We had to get the tissues out when we visited the Tranquil Suite which is

where bereaved families are able to spend time grieving on their own and where they can say a final farewell to their child, a truly humbling experience just to try to imagine what it must be like for those parents. Outside there is a small garden area with a "memory tree" where parents can hang a silver star with their child's name on if they wish.

What also struck us was how pleased and grateful the hospice are for Michael's support, and in turn the support they have already received from his fans. It really does make a difference to them – they need £8000 a day to provide all of the facilities so fundraising is a continuing challenge for them.

The Hospice opened in August 2005 so will be celebrating their 5th birthday next year – and your contributions will make a huge difference to their continuing success in providing care free of charge to families who need their help.

If you wish to make a donation to the hospice you can send your payment to MBFC, PO Box 2073, Colchester, Essex CO4 3WS, making sure all cheques and postal orders are made payable to Shooting Star Children's Hospice. We are then able to pass the money on to them with the knowledge that they will know the donation is as a result of Michael's involvement. Alternatively you can find more information at their website: www.shootingstar.org.uk.




**The Shooting Star
Children's Hospice**



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.

ANN DYE

Ann Dye
11 Kerrocrin
Kirk Michael
Isle of Man
IM6 1AF

Email: anndye@manx.net

Ann would love to hear from any members in the Isle of Man who would be interested in meeting for coffee and chats about our Ófavourite manÓ.

MARILYNE LADE

Marilyne Lade
Hunterdean

North Croft
East Hagbourne
Nr Didcot, Oxon
OX11 9LT

Email: mblhunterdean@btopenworld.com

Marilyne would love to be in contact with other members who live in or around her area with a view to corresponding, sharing travel to shows or meeting up to have a chat.

JEAN MORRIS

Jean Morris
13 Hornsey Road
Anfield,
Liverpool
L4 2TN

Jean is 45 years old and single and would love to hear from anyone in the Liverpool area to travel to concerts with.

"SOUTH" GET-TOGETHERS FOR ALL MICHAEL BALL FANS

South Meet Lunch is at The Hermitage Hotel, Bournemouth at 12.30 for 1pm on Saturday 9th January.

Numbers to me please by the end of December on either 01305 832286 or andrew@jazzy123.force9.co.uk.

