

# ON THE BALL

Issue 54



The Shooting Star  
Children's Hospice





Hi Everyone

We are writing this having just come home from Cardiff after the first performance of the touring version of Hairspray. We didn't realise how much we had missed Edna! We are looking forward to hearing from those of you who are going to the different venues where Hairspray is playing so we can include some of your reports in On The Ball SS.

With all that was going on in 2009 to celebrate Michael's Silver Anniversary we wanted to give him something on behalf of all the fan club members to commemorate this achievement. One of our members, Morag Mitchie, had sent us a leaflet about adopting a slate at the Wales Millennium Centre, where Michael will be opening the Hairspray Tour; and we thought this was a wonderful idea, especially with Michael's Welsh connections and the fact that the Hairspray tour was going to commence at that venue. We have included in this issue a photo of Michael accepting the certificate from us together with a reduced size copy that we put in a silver frame for him to have on display.

Also in this issue we have a review and some photos (including the front cover) from Michael's wonderful Shooting Star Children's Hospice concert last December. It was an incredibly moving but very enjoyable evening.

Kerstin Wohlgemuth and Julia Sedat are celebrating the 10th anniversary of the Just Ball fansite in June this year, and you can read how it all started. Part two will be in the next issue.

With the news of Michael's TV series being commissioned it's going to be another great year. Michael has also been talking about his plans for 2011 which include appearing in a production of Sweeney Todd. That is something we all know he's wanted to do for a long time!

Lots of love

Gill and Maureen



Photo by Andrew Ross

Layout by James Gaden - [www.solitaryvision.co.uk](http://www.solitaryvision.co.uk)

© Michael Ball Fan Club 2010 Compiled by Gill Oakley and Maureen Wilkinson-Rouse Website: [www.mbfcc.co.uk](http://www.mbfcc.co.uk)

Dear Everyone,

Well I am having a serious case of Déjà vu. I am writing this in the break, backstage, waiting to start the dress rehearsal for "Hairspray, the tour" and as the song goes... "Everything's as if we never said goodbye".

I can't tell you how happy I am to have Edna back in my life again. I really missed the old girl and she's gone and got herself a new look for the finale. The new cast are so lovely and talented and I can't wait for you to come and see us. It feels so fresh and new and I have fallen in love with the show all over again.

It looks like this year is going to be another busy and exciting one.

Whilst on tour I am going to be pre-recording the Sunday Brunch all over the country, so that will have a brand new feel to it. We are hoping to do a few open air concerts, which will include, as you know by now the beautiful Hampton Court, and then the new T.V. show. It looks to me like we are going to have plenty of chances to see each other somewhere along the road and I really hope you like all these new challenges I am taking on. Hopefully something for everyone.

I've missed seeing you all regularly and thank you for all the lovely cards and letters that have been coming in this week wishing me luck with everything. You are so thoughtful and kind and I can't wait for this

company to get to experience the M.B.F.C. in all its glory. They won't know what's hit them. Well my loves I better get back to the grindstone and if you make it to Cardiff see if you can see my adopted slate on the building. Take care and see you soon I hope

God Bless and all my love,

Mike





# SHEFFIELD STEEL DETERMINATION!

These three photos were sent to us by Michael's dear Dad, Tony. Nurse Sylvia Goodall who, amongst her many other duties of care, looks after the elderly residents of a Residential Home in Sheffield, has been a fan club member since the first year. Sylvia and her husband John made sure that a couple of ecstatic residents of the home joined them for a very special trip to see Michael.

Joyce Williams (*below right*) is an 80 year old resident of the home where she plays the piano for entertainment. She was formerly a headmistress and she taught music. The third guest was Helen McCourt (*below left*) who is the mother of Richard McCourt (TV's Dick & Dom).

Despite being seriously unwell, she was absolutely determined to attend Michael's concert in Sheffield. Well, they all had a fabulous time, as you can tell by looking at these photos. Many, many thanks go to Tony Ball who sent them with his message: *"I thought perhaps you might like to include one (or any) of them in your next publication of my favourite magazine On The Ball."*



# ADOPT A SLATE

Words and pictures  
by Maureen and Gill

Here is the photo of Michael accepting the Adopt A Slate certificate together with the reduced sized version. The words at the bottom are the dedication which we added.





# Shooting Stars Christmas Concert

by Mark Witchell



I have now had time to reflect on the wonderful Shooting Stars Concert which took place on Saturday evening at Feltonfleet School in Cobham. Just having a ticket for this unique and magnificent event was a privilege so I was really looking forward to the concert on Saturday. Sadly a Christmas works party took precedent for my sister so I had to sell the ticket earlier in the week. I arrived in Cobham at about 3pm and was immediately struck about the wealth of the area. I knew many celebs lived in the area, but nearly every house was a mansion!

I arrived at the hotel and everything went smoothly. I got to Feltonfleet School at about 6.15pm and joined the long queue who were waiting to be admitted into the concert venue at 6.30pm. I noticed Michael's trucks from the tour outside the venue. Eventually we were let in and had our tickets rigourously checked by Shooting Stars staff! The school is really big and magnificent in beauty - something all the staff and students should be truly proud about. We were let into the Sports Hall for the show and I was amazed that Michael had taken his full stage, full orchestra and everything that was at the Albert Hall with him!!

The Headmaster came on to stage shortly after 7pm to talk about the show, the school etc. At about 7.20pm, Karen Sugarman (Director of Fundraising Development at Shooting Star) came on to the stage. What she said was extremely

moving and touching and the charity appreciates Michael's efforts immensely.

At 7.30pm, Callum Mcleod was introduced on to stage and the orchestra kicked off with a medley from 'The Impossible Dream' to 'You Can't Stop the Beat', with 'Don't Stop Me Now' and 'Jesus Christ Superstar' to finish. Michael bounded on to stage to sing 'This Is The Moment' to a standing ovation. Party favourites 'Don't Stop Me Now' and 'One Step Out Of Time' followed before a welcome return to the set list of 'Feeling Good'. Michael then sang the classic Joni Mitchell song 'River' which was so beautifully sung. *Les Miserables* and *Blood Brothers* are the longest running musicals in the West End, so hearing 'Empty Chairs At Empty Tables' and 'Tell Me It's Not True' back to back was very poignant.

It was a brilliant surprise to see Caroline Sheen come on to stage to sing 'The Prayer' with Michael. She then sang 'Feed the Birds' from *Mary Poppins*, which she is taking to Broadway in the New Year. Congratulations Caroline, who looked beautiful I may hasten to add! Michael talked about how the pupils at Feltonfleet will go on to become some of the most important decision makers of the country, and linked it to how *Hairspray* is so poignant in deciding how people should live their lives. 'I Know Where I've Been' is turning into a 'Michael classic'. 'Mercy' was so much fun as always, before Michael was joined on stage by the Feltonfleet School Choir. Together they

sang 'Any Dream Will Do' which was fantastic. The choir then gave us a medley from *The Polar Express*, which was well orchestrated by Goldie!

The choir and Michael then gave us a truly emotional performance of 'When A Child Is Born'. We were then treated to some truly emotional and gripping pictures of children from Shooting Stars, with 'You Raise Me Up' backing the video. Michael then spoke about how the Hospice gives so much love which truly does change everything. This led nicely into 'Love Changes Everything' which we all joined in with. Party time kicked off with 'You Can't Stop the Beat', continuing into 'Put A Little Love In Your Heart'. Michael left the stage and said he had to be finished by 9:00, but said he had time for 'Have Yourself A Merry Little Christmas' which is one of my all time favourite Christmas songs.

He had to end the evening with 'The Impossible Dream' which was a truly great way to end the evening to a standing ovation. What a powerful song! I then left the building and made my way back to the hotel. Thanks to everyone who said hello - lovely to have my photo taken with Steve. I'm sure it will make it's way on to the forum at some point. Jean - always a pleasure saying hi. Nice to meet Brenda and Maxine too. Anyway, so lovely to have a Christmas Concert at the school and may it be the first of many truly amazing experiences with Shooting Stars. £50,000 was raised so WELL DONE ALL!!

If offered the chance to ask Michael anything at all what would YOU want to know?

Last November that is exactly what happened to me when BBC Radio York contacted me and offered me the chance to help morning show presenter Russell Walker interview Michael about his 25 years in show business.

These slightly amended extracts from my diary give an insight into how I felt before, during and after interviewing Michael!

## Friday 27 November 2009

I was sharing a coffee in Morrisons with Mum when I got a phone call from my husband to say Radio York had phoned to ask if I would like to talk to Michael next week. Would I? YES YES YES!!! I was straight on the phone to the production assistant who explained that they would introduce me as a local "superfan" and I would get the opportunity to ask Michael the two things I have always wanted to know about him.

## Saturday 28 November 2009

Looked through my diaries to see how many times I have seen Michael live and to try and find inspiration for those all important questions. It is so hard to think of what to say - I don't want to sound too geeky, or too personal, or to ask something I already know. Also, this is being broadcast to people who may be only vaguely aware of Michael so it needs to be interesting and relevant to them as well.

## Sunday 29 November 2009

Listened to Michael on Radio 2 to try and get some ideas of how to tackle the recording tomorrow. He really is gifted in the easy way he gets his guests to talk. He sounds as though he is having a chat over coffee rather than interviewing them. Hope I can do the same. I am still going round and round trying to think of what to ask...

## Monday 30th November 2009

Only a couple of hours now 'til I have to be at Radio York to talk to Michael and I am getting very nervous. I'll forget for a moment or two then I start trying to imagine what he will say and how I will reply which is crazy but I



# BBC RADIO YORK INTERVIEW BY LOCAL "SUPERFAN" by June Scatchard

cannot help it. At least I have got my questions written down so I won't get tongue tied when the big moment finally arrives.

## A few hours later...

I was high as a kite waiting to go into the studio. Russell is really good to work with and put me at ease by explaining that he would talk to Michael first then hand over to me. I knew that we had a fixed time slot of about 7 minutes and began to worry that Russ had forgotten me as the minutes ticked away and he didn't even look at me let alone introduce me. At last he told Michael he had a surprise guest, a "superfan" in the studio who would like to ask him a couple of questions. He formally introduced us to each other (a shame it was down a phone line and not face to face). My first question was about the "Past and Present" concert. I complimented him on the way he showcased the talents of new young performers (especially our local boy Ben James-Ellis) and asked if he was thinking of building on the success of that format in future concerts. As part of the discussion I suggested that Dalby Forest would make an amazing venue if he does do any outdoor concerts in 2010. My second question was what does he do in his spare time and he answered that he watches lots of telly - shows like X-Factor and "Strictly Come doo dar" (his words not mine)! In answer to the obvious supplementary question - no, he does not intend to

take part in S.C.D.! The interview came to an end with Russ telling Michael that last time he was in Scarborough I had spent most of the day outside the Futurist Theatre waiting for him to sign my baseball hat. Michael said something which I didn't quite hear so I probably gave a rubbish answer.

All too soon it was over and I was back in the car desperately trying to remember exactly what had been said.

## Tuesday 1st December 2009

Keep worrying about the interview. Until I can hear it I will not be reassured. I wish Russell had forewarned Michael about the presence of a local "superfan". Hopefully I will feel better once I have listened to it. Wish I could listen to it live and that I hadn't arranged to meet friends in town this morning!

## 3.55 pm.

I have just listened to Michael on the BBCi player. All my doubts and worries were completely unfounded - it sounded fine. I didn't talk rubbish and managed to bring in a couple of local references re Ben James-Ellis and Dalby Forest which always goes down well on local radio. I feel really good now and cannot wait to get the CD so I can relive and enjoy the experience whenever I want!

*Pictured: June Scatchard and Russell Walker in the studio at BBC Radio York*



# Having a Ball at the BBC!

by Emily North

When Gill asked if I minded her putting mum's and my name forward to guest on *The Michael Ball Show*, I thought, well, what harm can it do to be at least put forward?

Fast forward a few days, several conversations with Richard at SpunGold TV and emails back and forth and mum and I find ourselves on the 3.30pm to Euston. Oh boy!!

Rewind a bit - after the initial "yeah sure Gill, I don't mind"... came the "Oh no! what if we are chosen!" - given my track record of talking utter pap when faced with "the Ball" I dreaded to think what nugget of genius might come out in a pressurised television situation! Still after chatting to Richard over the phone and telling him how much mum and I were fans of Michael and how we travel all over to see him - he emailed me on the Friday morning confirming they would like to use us for a "generation-game style piece"... panic stations! Day off work booked - check! New outfits bought - check! Euston beckons! Richard assured us there would be a car waiting at the station to deliver us to the stage door of the BBC Centre and one waiting to deliver us back to Euston in time for our train home - a blacked out Toyota with rather dishy chauffeur and complimentary drinks, ready and waiting to take us to the BBC? Why, yes please!

We arrive at the BBC centre in a blizzard - We were introduced at the gatehouse as "Emily North for the Alan Titchmarsh Show!" What? Who? Me? Alan



Titchmarsh? I don't know anything about plants! ARGH! - turns out our Michael was sharing the studio - panic over!

"I do hope there is somewhere for us to get changed before hand" says mum. "There will be a toilet at least" says I....

"Hi, I'm Nadine, your runner, I will be looking after you today, I'll just take you down to your dressing room"...

Dressing room? They do know we are just lowly Ballettes don't they? Now, if life has taught me anything it is to keep schtum, so I did... Safely delivered to our dressing room - complete with plasma screen, comfy sofa, twin washbasins and mini bar - we go for a wander around - in the corridor outside we bumped into our dressing room neighbours- some Irish band called Westlife or something(!) - (10 out of 10 for acting cool and nonchalant Emily). We make it to the ladies and back without much hassle. Nadine calls on us to say we have a little while to chill before we go up for the sound check - we will be doing a pottery challenge we are informed - ah ha! So now the limited edition Michael Ball pinnies made sense!!!

Ma and I relax for a while before being taken up to Studio 4 - when we walk in it's in darkness and I hear a voice from the stage laughing away - I'd know that voice anywhere! There on the stage was Michael. He looked so handsome - and it was lovely to see him so totally unaware of any fan presence and in the "Michael the professional" mode. We were seated, signed disclaimers (what exactly are they planning on doing to us?) and mic'd up,

then came our slot - we headed on the set and were greeted by Andy the compare, shown where to stand and then the moment came - Michael turned to us... "Hello ladies"! and kissed us both, Mum the super fan was so cool and collected "Hello Michael," - I however wanted to squeal at him... I stayed pretty calm and just grinned, we ran through our bit a couple of times "Emily you sit here, Vivienne sit there, you do this, look there, Michael say this" and we were done - for now!

We were shepherded off and placed in some chairs whilst the BBC makeup department did their magic - before heading back to our dressing rooms to rest and change for the show - at 8.30pm we were collected and started the walk back to studio 4. Make up touch ups done and microphones in place, we took our seats ready for the show to begin! The audience came in and the recording began. Michael looked and sounded wonderful, really comfortable on the set and exuding warmth and humour. The advert break came and that was our



signal to take our places behind the set - arm in arm with Andy we heard Michael announce they were recreating the pottery scene from *Ghost* - which may I add - mum has never seen - "Bring out the Ballettes" says Michael and out we go, pause for smiles and waving, we head over to where the lovely Michael is waiting. We have a quick chat about how we spend our summers sitting in fields listening to Michael and I say how I'm dragged along kicking and screaming, but he can sing so it's not so bad (a tongue in cheek comment that Michael and the audience seemed to appreciate!)

We watched a demonstration of throwing a pot and take up our places... and then Michael hits us with it - this I may add was not mentioned at all at the run through - which is why we looked totally shocked... we were!!

"Now, I know what all good Ballettes need... ball boys!" Mum and I were completely clueless as to what he was going on about but on looking up we were greeted by two scantily dressed, rather muscular men heading our way...

Oh God... where do I look? I knew where I wanted to look but instead I just hid my face and roared with laughter - so THAT'S what the disclaimer was about - it was in case we had a heart attack! A rather lovely chap goes to my mum and the other even lovelier one comes over to me, introduced himself - I can't remember his name so I'll call him Dave for the sake of the report! He slid his oily hands down my arms and enveloped me in his manly, rugged arms... how on earth am I meant to concentrate now - a comment I made to Michael when he exclaimed "Concentrate, Emily!"

Challenge over - Mum won the Ballette of the Week award and we made a mad dash into the waiting car which whisked us back to Euston to get the last train home - we arrived home at ungodly o'clock - exhausted, excited and completely thrilled with our brush with fame!

We must say a massive thank you to Gill, Maureen and Chris for putting our names forward and Michael for making us feel so completely at ease, he was a true star and it's a day we will never forget!! We had a Ball!

# hairspray

Photo by Jason Bell

This was sent to us by Stage Entertainment Ltd., who are the *Hairspray* production company.....

Michael Ball is to reprise his Olivier award winning role as Edna Turnblad in Broadway & West End smash hit *Hairspray* as it embarks on its first ever tour of the UK and Ireland this year.

Michael, who originated the role of larger than life heroine 'Edna Turnblad' in the London production, will open the tour at the Wales Millennium Centre in Cardiff on Wednesday 7 April 2010 (previews from 30 March), before dates

at the Clyde Auditorium in Glasgow, the Mayflower Theatre in Southampton, the Manchester Palace, the Grand Canal Theatre in Dublin and Edinburgh Playhouse. Brian Conley and Michael Starke will be alternating the role at other venues. The tour also marks the first stage of a closer working relationship between the star and producers, Stage Entertainment. This will involve developing new work and roles both onstage and in a production capacity for Michael in the future. Plans include a major musical revival in 2011.

It's 1962, the 50s are out and change is in the air. Baltimore's 'Tracy Turnblad', a big girl with big hair and an even bigger heart, has only one passion - dancing. She wins a spot on the local TV dance programme, *The Corny Collins Show* and, overnight, is transformed from outsider to irrepressible teen celebrity. But can a trendsetting hair-hopper like Tracy get her massively shy Mom out of the apartment, beat evil Amber to be crowned Miss Hairspray, integrate Corny's show for good AND win the heart of local heartthrob Link Larkin, all without denting her 'do? If anyone can, Tracy can!

Commenting on the *Hairspray* tour Michael said: "I'm so thrilled to be donning back on the heels, the wig and the fabulous frock again when we launch the mammoth tour of *Hairspray* this spring. I have been so chuffed to have seen so many of my fans night after night cheering Edna and being so excited by *Hairspray* in London. I can't wait to head up and down the country with this fantastic cast, so that even more of you can experience this wonderful show! See you there! Michael x"





# 10 YEARS OF MICHAEL MADNESS

by Kerstin Wohlgemuth and Julia Sedat



It's 1999 and Christmas is just around the corner. Imagine a 19-year-old girl in Berlin, Germany, who is a new fan of Michael Ball. Great voice, great looks and virtually unknown in Germany. She joined the fan club after a memorable concert at the Royal Albert Hall and since then has read request upon request for copies of "The Famous Michael and Cathy Interview" on the MBFC forum. What was all the fuss about? How can one interview intrigue so many fans? Okay, she simply has to find out and risk to be laughed at. She posts yet another request to see this for herself.

Cut to: Münster, Germany. A 23-year-old fan regularly reads the Michael Ball Fan Club forum, when this question pops up. She hesitates a while, as surely others will reply. But what the heck. She might as well be kind to this German newbie.

As you will have guessed by now those two girls were young Julia and Kerstin and ten years later you could say the rest is history and mystery. But will we leave it there? Rest assured we won't. Brace yourselves, for we will tell you now about all the mad, fantastic and fun stuff that this one e-mail exchange has brought into our lives. Okay, maybe not

ALL of the above or we'd be writing a seven-novel-series! But in celebration of our "Decade of Michael Madness" we hope to give you a tiny glimpse into our little world and how being a fan has influenced and enriched our lives on more levels than we would have deemed possible.

## THE FIRST CONCERT

We experienced our first ever "Live Ball" separately for we simply hadn't met yet. Julia went to the RAH in April 1999 and Kerstin went to his "first concert in Europe" in Amsterdam in May 1999.

## OUR FIRST MEETING (FROM KERSTIN)

Imagine you meet someone on the internet. You write several e-mails a day, but you never phone. Merely a couple of days into the new friendship, we found ourselves planning our first meeting. It was decided that Julia would be visiting me and stay for three days. And then, there I was, standing at the station, realising just how stupid this has been. She could be weird, she could have strange habits, she could talk in a weird dialect or she could be an axe murderer. Eek! What have I done? And she'd be

around for three long days. What if we hate each other?! By now I was prepared to meet Freddie Krüger himself!

But I could not have been more wrong. Julia was just what I had expected (well, obviously apart from those two minutes prior to her arrival). We hit it off from the second she stepped out of the train. No weird dialect, no weird habits and definitely no axe in her bag. Phew.

By the way, already at this early stage we formed the plan of starting a fansite with as many Michael pictures as was humanly possible (for that was exactly what we wanted to find when we searched the net for him). It did not take long until we had the first pages done and a rather playful name (Ballios's Place). Altogether it was a bit immature and really did not look anything like professional. Such a crying shame we never did screenshots of our first few incarnations. But maybe some of you will remember the bright blue background and dark blue writing.... Some impressions from later versions to give you an idea.



Look at that! 50,000 hits... that was in 2001. Now we are getting closer to be big One-Oh and are nearing 700,000 visitors. Incredible! We hope we will be able to celebrate Justy's 10th birthday in style at an open air concert and many of you will join the party!

How far we have come...

## THE "BUNNIES"

Why do these two keep calling each other bunnies?! We know this is a question many people want to ask.

A) It's ironic, of course. We are aware that we are no Playboy bunnies, don't worry.

B) It's a popular term of endearment in German ("Hase") and we used it as everyone kept telling us we act like a married couple (even only a few weeks into the friendship).

## FIRST JOINT ENGLAND TRIP

Our first joint journey to beautiful England happened to be our first joint concert experience as well. We were extremely lucky and did win tickets for the intimate concert at the Café de Paris on 12 September 2000. This was done for the recording of the DVD "This Time... It's Personal" and only 150 people were in the audience. What a mad dash that was. Short notice tickets, short notice flights and Kerstin's first ever trip to beautiful London, no hotel... this story alone would fill a volume or two. Poor Kerstin was at work until noon (lucky Julia was a student back then), dashed to the airport, and when we got to London queued at the club's doors. The most amazing city in the world (you can tell we are fans) and here we were standing at some nondescript back door. (This seems to have turned into the story of our lives, ten years on we spend even MORE time staring at nondescript back doors in windy back streets while family and friends keep asking what amazing sights we had visited...).

Then there was the concert recording: 3 hours of bliss...

We were seated at the side of the low stage. No words can describe the excitement we felt when Michael got on stage, so incredibly close, looking adorable, sounding fantastic. By then, we were truly and completely star struck. It was brilliant, all the



excitement, all the adrenalin, and all the laughs. We will always remember how Michael kept getting the lines of "No Matter What" wrong and had to repeat it several times without either him or us cracking up; also it was so intriguing to see the crew fight with the very small and plush club interior to get the technology going, virtually no song had to be repeated as everyone was so professional and yet it took ages to get it absolutely right. We really felt for Michael when he had to come back on stage after the very tiring rock'n'roll medley and up-tempo ending, because "Losing My Mind" hadn't worked properly and needed to be repeated. Such a difficult and quiet song and naturally he mastered it with utter perfection. We were amazed, especially bearing in mind that he was actually quite ill and it wasn't 100% sure the concert could go ahead as planned. It was a fantastic experience and we left the café at Leicester Square on an enormous high, as you can imagine. He had been so incredibly close! At our respective first live concerts we had seen him from as far away as you could possibly be and now he was there, not exactly at arm's reach, but almost.

He managed to top it all by exchanging the first (three or four) words with us! We were beyond ecstatic. MICHAEL BALL JUST SPOKE TO US!

The last tiny shred of dignity we had left was gone at that point. We were hooked.

There was no point denying it.

When he had left we were stranded in London as we hadn't booked a hotel room. Our flights back home left at some wee small hour in the morning so we thought "why bother?" Yeah, right, in retrospect we knew exactly why we should have bothered! Have you tried walking through a city all night after a long and hectic day with no bed to look forward to? We wouldn't recommend it. Please always DO book a room. The train back to the airport nearly killed us, we were sooo tired. And poor Kerstin actually had to get back to work a few hours after landing!

But all this tiredness was so well worth it. We wouldn't have missed this for the world.

## OUR FIRST TOUR....

This came in 2001 and consisted of four days in London, followed by a mini roundtrip. We were so new on the scene and very naïve. There was so much to learn. Just one example: It's not the best







idea in the world to rent a car at Marble Arch (i.e. the middle of London) when you are not used to manual cars and have never driven on the “wrong” side of the road and don’t know the surroundings much. Surprisingly little honking and swearing of patient London drivers and four near-death experiences later we had managed to get the car safe and sound to our B&B. Well, apart from hitting the sidewalk really hard and praying that the hissing sound from outside was not what we feared it was... but, of course, it was: a flat tyre. Incredibly enough we had lasted a whole fifteen minutes without damaging the car (those who know us a little will tell you that the bunnies and rental cars have developed a very rocky relationship during the past few years).

After what can only be described as the perfect tour (little did we know that every future tour would become “the best yet”) the last concert was over and we wanted to be at the stage door, to join our fellow fans in giving him the farewell he deserves. A sound mixture of happiness, sadness and then wetness... or to be more specific: pouring rain. Would you leave and find somewhere warm and dry? Yes, we bet you would, as you are sane, grown-up and women of substance. No, not us. We stayed. While we were waiting in the teeming rain (Portsmouth, a wet legend for those who were there) our cameras went on strike due to dampness in their cases. And yet, did we leave then? No, because he said he would come out BEFORE the party and wave good-bye to us all. He must be there any moment now. That’s all we want: closure. The minutes were swept away with rain and actually turned into more than an hour. At some point we had decided to stand there out of sheer scientific curiosity: How much water from outside can the human body endure before it starts developing gills? Will the cameras (video and photo) ever be working again? Will we have to swim back to the car? Will it ever stop? Will

he ever leave the building? Will... oooh the door opens and there he is. In the best of possible moods, smiling, waving... and gone in less than 30 seconds.

Was it worth it? Well... yes. For we have seen him. Sad but true, it may have been the cold wetness but when we waded to our car we were on a hysteric high. And what’s this bit of rain when the hot shower is only a ten minute car drive away? Exactly. Easy, peasy.

All we had to do now was insert our parking ticket – check – pay for the parking – check – take your parking ticket back from the machine – oh.... hang on, where’s the ticket? The \*\*\*\*\* machine just ate the ticket!! PANIC! It flatly refused to return it no matter how frantic we pressed the buttons and how much we shouted at the machine... we even begged it really



politely at one point. But to no avail. A phone call later (thank God for mobile phones) and another hour of waiting in the freezing cold, but this time not for gorgeous Mr Ball but grumpy Mr Parking Deck Employee. Really, why was he in such a bad mood? He was nice and dry AND did have a free car. When he asked whether we had paid at all we were very close to screaming blue murder. In the end he did believe us though and we were free to drive to our hotel and get the best ever hot shower anyone can ever have had in the whole universe.

Our car being locked in a parking area, does this ring a bell? If you have read our reviews from the current tour you may nod now and sigh: Will they ever learn?! But you see Manchester in 2009 was something different altogether! Firstly, it didn’t rain! Secondly... secondly there was... secondly... okay, okay, we admit it, TECHNICALLY there might be one or two parallels in

those two stories.

This is what happened...

We arrived at the Manchester Apollo for the stage door in a mad rush. The official car park had not opened yet and there was no space to park our car. Luckily there are two “Do it yourself”-stores with huge car parks just opposite the stage door. Admittedly we did have a bad feeling about parking there as you never know whether they close the car park when the store closes or not and no time to check the closing times, but hey, we were late and surely that means that he was due to arrive at any minute. So what now? Take the risk or trust your inner voice? Yes, you guessed right again. What counts in our favour is that we were clever enough to move the car from one car park to another when the first one began closing one of its gates.

But then he arrived, Mr. Ball, very gorgeous and a bit hoarse, and of course the second he stepped out of the bus we had forgotten all about watching our car with mixed feelings. Imagine our relief, when he was in and the car park was still open! Phew. Did we rush to the car then to move it? Of course... not! And while we chatted away with our friends Helge and Petra and joked about all of us having been panicky about the car park closing just when Michael arrives and having to dash away from the crowd and how that would earn us some stares, fleeing from the tour bus ha ha ha! We all turned laughingly and then froze: The gates were closed and a security company car leaving the premises. Eeeeeeeeeek!

Even our mad dash with us waving and calling out to the security guy did not help. He was off. The gates were closed and two cars were securely locked in, ours and Helge and Petra’s. After many calls (even the non-emergency police) and the kind support of many very patient friends (thanks Joan and gang!) we had to face it: There was nothing we could do about it, we simply had to wait until they opened again the next morning. Thank Heavens though that the store DID open at all, for the next day was a Sunday and mercifully there was no concert that day, so it could have been worse – we thought.

So let’s do the checklist:

- **Clothes:** locked securely in the car. Hum, okay, then we cannot get changed, not ideal, but looked nice anyways.
- **Luggage:** locked securely in the car, not much we need until tomorrow anyways. Phew.
- **Laptop:** locked securely in the car, but it will survive a cold night for sure.
- **Hotel:** we might just get a cab to the hotel and back here the next day. Surely they will not need booking confirmation. In this modern age of computers, all data should be with them anyways.
- **Tickets:** locked securely in the car, EEEEEEEK!! IN THE CAR!! BEHIND LOCKED GATES!! SUPERB SEATS! OH NO!! WHAT TO DO?!

No tickets, no confirmation number and no seat number, we just knew row E centre. Sheer and utter panic. A voice of reason told us to go to the box office and try to get reprints. And this is how the conversation between us and the box office clerk went:

Us: We have a little problem. \*slight



*hysterical smile*\*. We have accidentally parked our car in the car park at the store and they have closed it now. The tickets are in the car.

Guy (*bored*): Uhu, and where’s the problem?

Us: Well we don’t have the tickets with us! Can you do reprints?

Guy (*bored*): Why would I do that? Simply get them from the car.

Us (*panicky*): No, no, no, you see, the car is locked in the car park. We really do need reprints?

*\*This conversation was repeated several times until...\**

Guy (*bored*): And why don’t you just get them from the car?

Us (*frantic*): Because we are not fit enough to just climb the fence!!

Guy (*unimpressed*): And why don’t you just wait until 6:00pm when the car park is opened again for the concert? We use it all the time.

Us (*ecstatic*): You mean... (*not believing our luck*) they will open again - today?

Guy (*surprised at our delight as this apparently was truth universally acknowledged*): Yes, of course.

We were about to jump at him and kiss him madly. Good thing he was behind a glass window, poor thing. We probably scared him a bit with our drastic mood swing. Luckily Helge and Petra were still outside the Apollo, so we could share the good news.

Needless to say the concert was absolutely fabulous and afterwards we only waited for Michael to leave and then headed straight to the car park to move the cars and park on the street ... just to be on the safe side. Lesson learned!

To be continued in the next On The Ball...





# FROM HERE TO ETERNITY - LOVE CHANGED EVERYTHING! By Steve Lunt



The Michael Ball 25th Anniversary Tour certainly brought it's fair share of surprises but little did I realise that as I set out to Oxford on a beautiful sunny September afternoon that this particular tour was going to change my life forever in ways I'd never imagined!

As a Michael fan for many years the 25th Anniversary tour was always going to be special and with this in mind I decided that for this tour I was going to do something I'd never done before, but always wanted to, and travel the country following the tour. This would later prove to be just one of the many amazing elements that led to my big surprise!

Anyway that's getting ahead of myself so back to the start...The tour was proving to be better than could possibly have been expected, the new format was just perfect and Michael and guests kept audiences entertained and spellbound up and down the UK.

On a personal note it was a wonderful experience visiting different cities and meeting so many different Michael fans at these venues. To use an expression I

was most certainly "having a ball!"

Special memories of the tour include that great first concert at Oxford when I realised how much I was going to enjoy the tour. The Royal Albert Hall concert was amazing and the DVD perfectly captures the atmosphere of such an amazing evening. It was made extra special for me as I'd chosen that concert to do the Meet And Greet package; it was such a delight to meet Michael beforehand and to tell him how much I was enjoying the tour. As well as the concerts it was proving to be a particular pleasure travelling and meeting such many diverse Michael fans, it was also nice to keep bumping into familiar faces up and down the country. It was amazing how many times I'd bump into fans in hotels and it was a particular pleasure to share many train journeys with fans talking all things Michael. In Edinburgh I got to meet the MBFC royalty in Maureen and Gill, I've always thought of them as the Ant and Dec of the Michael Ball world in that everyone recognises them but isn't sure which is which! Seriously though it was an unbelievable experience meeting so many new

friends and if your reading this then a special thank you to all of you for helping making the tour even more memorable.

So by now September had passed into October and a date that is set to live with me forever, Friday October 2nd. Yes it was time for the Newcastle leg of the tour and what was to be my first ever front row ticket in my years following Michael. On a tour I usually go to around 7 of the concerts and Newcastle being so far away from my home in London isn't one that would even be considered for attending. But this was the special tour so I was looking forward very much to this, my original ticket wasn't great but Michael fan Lisa had a spare front row ticket which she agreed to let me have so thanks Lisa.

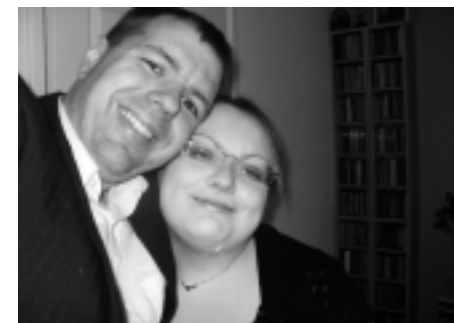
So was it the fact that it was my first front row ticket that made this concert so special? No! Was it due to the fact it was my first ever concert in the lovely city of Newcastle that made it so special? No! What was to make this concert so special actually had nothing to do with the show itself but a moment of destiny that occurred at 6.30pm in the venue bar before the concert when I met the lady I will spend the rest of my life with. Because I was due to meet Lisa to collect my ticket I arrived at the venue early, however she was delayed so I decided to wait in the bar. So fate had brought me to this particular place at this particular time when the lady who I was destined to meet approached me and asked me "Are you Steve?" Those 3 words were like electric and to use a Hairspray quote, I could hear the bells! Life would never be the same again.

So the tour continued and Emma and myself kept in touch and I enjoyed many journeys up the country, I think I must have spent more time on trains than a train driver! Plymouth came and the end of the tour but nothing could take away such an amazing experience.



As I said the tour was to change my life and a few weeks after the tour finished I found myself resigning from my job and moving from London to Newcastle. You've guessed the reason why, the beautiful Emma.

Flash forward a few months, and what lovely and delightful months they were, and we come to another date that will live with me forever. Sunday February 14th. I knew that I wanted to spend the rest of my life with Emma and Valentines Day seemed too good an opportunity to miss! So how to make it special? Well after all we only met due to our love of Michael so with thanks to Maureen and Gill I hi-jacked the fans forum and left several messages on there



for Emma to find which led her to another and finally to the one message that was so special to me. Yes you've guessed it, I asked her to marry me, the first ever forum proposal, and to my delight she said yes. It would be a pretty lousy story if at the end she'd said no!! At the bottom of my proposal I'd asked to put on our special song, which is that beautiful Michael Ball classic From Here To Eternity. With tears of joy, in her eyes she opened the CD case unaware that I'd already taken the cd out earlier and placed in it an engagement ring. I dropped to one knee, hey I'm old fashioned, and as they say, the rest is history.

So there we have it, what a tour and as



you can see I'm not exaggerating it really did change my life. It's remarkable to think that following a singer I have always admired led to me meeting my future wife; will we be the first Michael Ball marriage? Possibly! So many thanks to Michael for his unknowing but albeit massive part in our little story!

So there is now just the question of the wedding and the date? Well there can only be one date can't there! So Maureen and Gill (now to be known as the two Cilla Blacks!!) dust of your hats in preparation for Saturday October 2nd. The future happiest day of my life.

Love to you all, from here to eternity!

## MICHAEL MEETS EMILY by Clair Heward

I don't get to see Michael much with having a two year old daughter.

However, we did take her to London to see Michael when she was 9 months old. I've attached a photo of Michael holding her at the stage door for *Hairspray*.

On the photo is me - Clair Heward, my mum Christine Rouse and Emily Heward, with of course Michael.

It shows three generations of fans, whenever Michael is on TV Emily says "Michael Ball" - hopefully it won't be long before we can take her to see him again!





## Michael's Magic: From West New York to England *by Nancy Garcia*



It's been a few months since the tour ended. Yet whenever I think of this story, I can't help but smile. I went thousands of miles across the Atlantic Ocean to see Michael in concert and meet fans from around the world and never did I imagine running into neighbors. Literally speaking!!

I live in West New York, New Jersey USA. The name of the town gives you a geographical idea of where it is located: west of New York City. It is a densely populated town about 1 square mile in size that sits on the Palisades overlooking the Hudson River and New York City. If you have ever seen pictures of the New York City skyline, well, they've been taken from my hometown. I am proud to say that West New York embodies the American dream through its representation of immigrants from many countries; predominantly the Americas and the Caribbean. My parents met here and made it their home after both emigrating from Cuba in the late 1950's. They married and raised their family here and I am proud to still call West New York home today. I was also proud of being the self-proclaimed biggest (and I thought ONLY) Michael Ball fan in West New York....NOT!

It all started back in September as Lila

and I arrived into Portsmouth from Bournemouth. Another fan (sorry cannot recall her name) approached Lila and told her that she had run into a couple of girls from New Jersey at the train station and that she would introduce them to her later. How wonderful. It is always great meeting fans from America! The state of New Jersey is 150 miles long and 70 miles wide with everything from very large cities to rural farm areas so it was interesting trying to guess where these fans would be from. During the interval, Lila was introduced to one of these "Jersey girls." Lila came back and said "You won't believe this. But she is from West New York."

I was flabbergasted! Another Michael Ball fan in town!

After the concert, we met up with the Jersey fan at the stage door. We waved Michael off and then started talking. Her name was Ana and she was touring the country with her sister Cira. I learned that Ana had been a fan for years and recruited Cira into the Michael alliance. She told me where she lived in town and I laughed and said "Right by the bakery?" and then she laughed. WE LIVE 4 BLOCKS FROM EACH OTHER! But it gets even freakier. Ana and I both graduated from high school in 1982: rival

high schools St. Joe's vs. Weehawken, but still 1982! Both Ana and Cira work in Manhattan: Ana works in midtown where my office was located until 2005 and Cira works a few blocks from me at my new office location downtown. And additionally, they are of Cuban heritage too and share the casual use of the "Spanglish" language that our generation of Cuban-Americans has come to embrace. (Only those truly fluent in both Spanish and English would understand sentences spoken in "Spanglish")

As we continued to talk, in "Spanglish", Ana told me she had traveled to the West Wycombe concert last summer and was up near the stage when Michael threw the pair of boxer shorts into the audience. When I told her I had caught them, she again laughed. She said she had her hand on them but then let them go when she saw I had a grip on them. She was standing right behind me yet we never met.

Cira and Ana have lived 4 blocks from me for almost twenty years. We shop at the local shops and commute into New York City every day. Prior to this chapter of our lives, we went to local high schools that played football and basketball games against each other of which I attended many. I held my first job at a local supermarket 2 blocks from their high school. Yet, our paths never crossed. We went to West Wycombe and stood next to each other. Yet still we did not meet. It was our love for Michael and his music that drew us back to England until our paths finally crossed this past year.

Yet another coincidence, we happened to be on the same flight back to Newark Liberty Airport the day after the Royal Albert Hall concert. And it was just so fitting that Continental Airlines played a recording of "Love Changes Everything" as we took off from Heathrow. Okay, so it wasn't Michael's version, but it was still HIS song.

I have met many American fans through the fan club forum and the concerts and have nurtured some treasured friendships in the short time I have known about Michael Ball. But never in my wildest dreams did I ever imagine going to England to meet my neighbors! Leave it to the magic that is Michael!

## THE MICHAEL BALL FAN CLUB ONLINE

You can find our website at

[www.mbfcc.co.uk](http://www.mbfcc.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'.



## JANET STRAW



Janet Straw from Mapperley in Nottingham, passed away on 4th January 2010 in her early seventies, after fighting cancer twice. Her only son Kevin, and very close fan club friends would like her to be remembered.

## 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.

### SOUTHAMPTON GET TOGETHER

There is a "new" get-together for all Michael Ball fans in Southampton, starting on Saturday 17th April 2010 at 1:00pm. Meeting at "the encore" (right next door to the "Mayflower Theatre" in the city centre.) where *Hairspray* will be in May! If anyone is interested in joining us on that day or any others please get in touch with me for more details - Jill Clark, Tel: 023-80892154 or email: [lilaclondoncorgi@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:lilaclondoncorgi@yahoo.co.uk) or .

We will meet every other month, at the same pub-restaurant above, look forward to seeing both old and new fans of Michael's to get-together for a few hours of chat and fun!

## 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!





