

ON THE BALL

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Hi Everyone

This summer has really flown by - must be something to do with how busy Michael has been!

As you can tell by the front cover photo of this edition of On The Ball - we think Michael must be jumping for joy at the success of everything he touches at the moment. The Michael Ball Show on ITV has been well received, his radio show continues to enjoy high listening figures and the Hairspray tour has been a sell-out at most venues.

The TV recordings were wonderful and those fans that were lucky enough to be involved in a Ballette Challenge all had a brilliant time courtesy of Spun Gold TV. Despite lots of nerves from nearly all of the contestants they went home feeling pleased that they had taken part in the show. We have included Susan and Isla's article about their day in the studio in this issue, and if you took part please send us your report so we can include more of them in OTB 56.

The Shooting Star charity concert is just around the corner and we have a feeling it is going to be another one of those memorable nights. We've included a note from the charity about the funds that were raised in lieu of birthday presents for Michael and let's hope they raise lots more money from the concert.

Amongst the articles in this issue our longest running fan club member Julia Atkinson takes us through her 25 years of following Michael. There are some great photos from the early days included with her report. We also have part two of Kerstin and Julia's (JustBall.com) 10th anniversary celebrations.

Enjoy!

Lots of love

Gill and Maureen

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

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Dear Everyone,

Well I'm sat writing this in the "Doughnut" at B.B.C. T.V. studios where we are filming The Michael Ball Show and I have just finished a plate of Clarissa Dickson-Wright's Stuffed Marrow. Wonderful!

I hope you are enjoying watching the show as much as I am making it. It's really hard work and long hours but I have enjoyed every minute of it.

Everyone in the production here said how wonderful the studio audiences have been and they have never known an atmosphere like it in a Daytime show. All of you who have made the effort to come to the filming have brought such a fantastic amount of energy with you and I can't thank you enough. All of us in the studio are feeding off this excitement that you generate and the show wouldn't have the same impact without you.

It's so nice for me to see all the familiar faces out there and those of you who have taken part in the Ballette challenge!! Well, what can I say other than brilliant. I really think the M.B.F.C. know how to have a good time and it shows.

So it's into the studio now to start work on the album provisionally called "Heroes". So many singers and songs to choose from and if you fancy sending in some suggestions or putting them on the website that would be very much appreciated.

We will be putting the tour on sale by the end of September and I can't wait to start putting a new show together for you all. So all is busy and thank you for being such an integral part of it all. You are, without question, the best and I am a lucky man.

God bless and all my love
Mike

MICHAEL LIGHTS UP OUR LIVES AT KILLRUDDERY

by Chris Tietjen



Ergh...what's that noise? Oh, the radio alarm...What day is it? Sunday! Oh, let me sleep, please!! Oh no... it's Killruddery day, Michael day!! Sort of awake by now, I try to keep my eyes open, as the radio kicks into action. And the first song I hear, that inspires me to get out of bed? 'You Light Up My Life'. It seemed to be an omen for a great weekend ahead, so I leapt (well, almost!) out of bed, to get myself together for the two days ahead. I will also think of this trip as the Hot Chocolate trip – you'll soon see why!

Okay, collect daughter-in-law Tina, then off to Stansted. Through check in, then the long wait. Are we thirsty? Yes, you bet. So, shall we have a drink? Two hot chocolates, please. Mr Ryanair is obliging today, and on time, so we are soon arriving at a wet Dublin airport. Are we thirsty again? Of course. Hot chocolate? Don't mind if I do! We have around 45 minutes to kill before the bus arrives, so it seemed like a good idea. Once outside again, an Irish guy asked where we were heading to – we must have looked a little lost and/or confused. So we told him - "Oh aye, to be sure, that Michael Bolton is a good fellow!" Hmmm... but Mr Helpful started to tell us all about Dublin and where else Mr B might appear (not sure if it was Bolton or Ball he was talking about!). The bus arrives, and on we hop, asking to be dropped off at the hotel. Mr Helpful then proceeds to sit behind us, and all the way through Dublin prods me on the shoulder to point out the landmarks. Bless, he really was being Mr Helpful!

An hour later, we arrive at the hotel.

Rain had stopped ages ago, and it's now a lovely day. Find our room - the Irish have a strange idea of a twin room – we have a single and a double bed! Oh well, more room for me in bed! A quick sandwich, and I'd taken along a few sachets of hot chocolate, so... No one around to chat with, I guess they had all taken advantage of the weather to explore, so we decided to go and "find" Killruddery House - and guess what? As it said, it's right opposite the hotel! We thought we'd then go to Bray beach. We asked the hotel how long to walk – "Well, around 25 minutes downhill going, but double that coming back up the hill!". Needless to say, we got a taxi! A lovely hour or so wandering along the beautiful coast line, and stopping for... hot chocolate - with marshmallows this time! Back to the hotel where lots of fans were now milling around, so some hellos and chats for a while. A bit of a rest and some... hot chocolate. Then changed, and down for dinner. By this time, lots had arrived back at the hotel – too many to mention by name, but you know who you are! Dinner over, and everyone started to make a move to the House. An interesting walk, to say the least. Once in the grounds, we were directed off the gravel paths, into a wooded area – between trees, along narrow paths, then we passed through a farmyard-type area, complete with barns. A few more twists and turns, and we arrive in Earl & Countess Meath's back garden. And what a garden - absolutely beautiful! A gorgeous setting, with the usual outdoor staging in a dip. The evening before had seen far more people there than had booked to see Michael, so some seating had been removed. Who

knows if we ended up closer than we may otherwise have done? But then, finally, what we had been waiting for - the man himself bounces on stage to entertain us. As has become usual lately, the gorgeous Ben and Adrian were in attendance, along with Louise, Shona and...? Oh yes, it's Emma with dark hair. Almost didn't recognise her! A very similar programme of songs to the last tour, with some new favourites, old favourites, and just favourites! After 'One Step' a cheeky Michael said "Good evening and welcome to Killruddery House! I did that last song in 1992 for Eurovision and you know who beat me - the Irish!" Always tactful, our lad! There was a gorgeous version of 'The Rose', 'Empty Chairs' was as evocative as ever, 'Seasons of Love' with its wonderful harmony work, and ending the first half with the Jesus Christ Superstar "set", and of course 'Gethsemane'. By the end of the first half, the mainly Irish audience had definitely warmed to Michael and Co. and gave him a great send off. Not sure how Earl and Countess Meath felt when Michael asked if we liked his country pad, and thought he may "improve" it with a bit of pebble-dashing when he had a moment! The House was lit up wonderfully, as were the gardens.

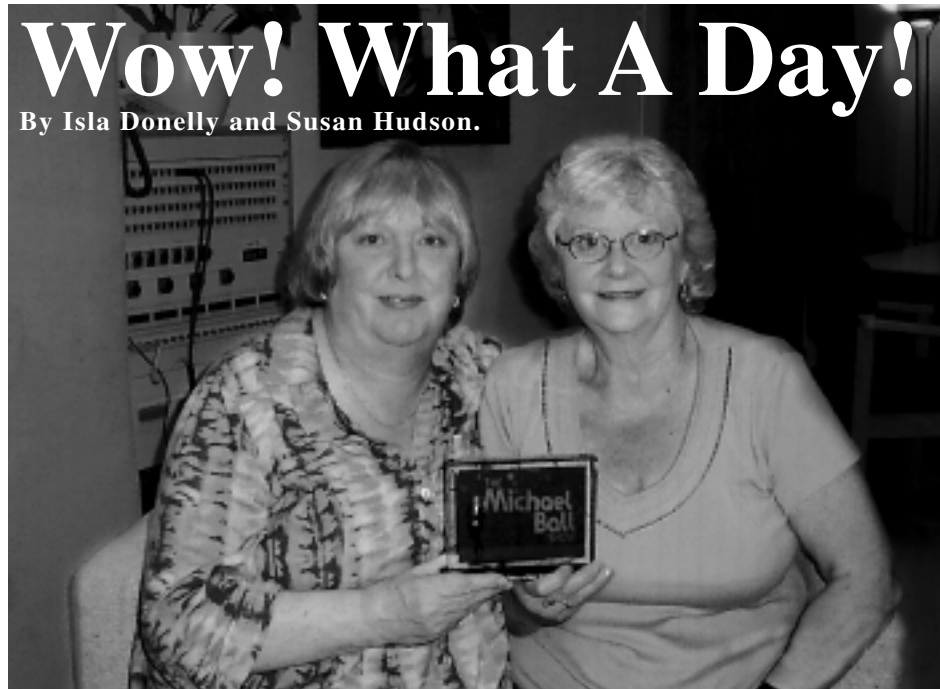
Part two opened with the Starlight Express song from the 3 "lads", followed by 'Love Changes Everything' – you know the one, written by "that bloke off the telly"! A beautiful version of 'This Is The Moment', and one of my new favourites, 'Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy' – just love that, and they all seem to enjoy it so much too. A stunning 'The Prayer' from Michael and Emma – boy, that man has a fine pair of lungs on him. The Dublin Gospel Choir came on to join the others, and they all sang 'I Know Where I've Been'. Michael really excelled himself on that one – time for the hairs on the back of necks to stand up – just magnificent! Then 'Mercy' and 'You Can't Stop the Beat' with the choir. And all the time, Michael encouraging fans to go to the front to dance, whilst security were fighting to keep them away! Well, for us, what Michael says, goes. Then we were treated to 'The Wonder Of You' and Michael managed to embarrass one of the choir ladies by singing to her! She came over all of a dither! Finally, as his encore, 'The Impossible Dream'. I think Ireland

was conquered. He did say, as he'd had such a fab time, "If it's all right with you, I'd like to start my tour next May here at the Canal Theatre". Didn't hear anyone argue with that! Now - when are Mr Ryanair's flights for May on-line?

Leaving the House was interesting. Everyone through a small pathway, with steps leading down, then through the tracks, pathways, farmyard and the woods – did you know woods are dark when they are not lit up? Eventually, a jeep arrived, and shone its headlights, so we could all see a bit better. Spooky! Although the evening was dry and bright, once it got dark, it turned chilly, so we returned to our room for... a hot chocolate!

A good nights' sleep, a hearty breakfast, chats to more folk, and comparing flight times before we left the hotel. We wandered down to Bray, to get the train to Dublin. First stop... for a hot chocolate! We ventured down to The Point (now the O2) on the tramway, and went on their version of the London Eye – the Dublin Wheel. It's about the same size but going much, much faster, but what great views on a cloudless day. Whilst there, a Beat The Street bus was making its way to the dock area – we, of course, wondered whether any of "our" concert stuff was on board! Back to the city centre for a snack for lunch, and can you guess? Yes, a hot chocolate! We wandered around the city, did some souvenir shopping, then went to M&S for afternoon tea – well, hot chocolate, actually. A bit more wandering and an early evening meal before heading to the airport a bit earlier than we needed to but by this time we were desperate for a sit down. Once through security, what did we find but a luxury hot chocolate shop! Well, couldn't walk past, could we now? Mr Ryanair got us home on time, too. Although, we did wonder if we were going to go overland, as we taxied for 15 minutes before we took off.

Michael certainly lit up our lives, and you see why I am now associating Michael with hot chocolate. Well, they are both VERY sweet! A brilliant trip – a fabulous and hospitable country, wonderful scenery, a wonderful concert with our man excelling himself in places... oh, and great hot chocolate!



Wow! What A Day!

By Isla Donnelly and Susan Hudson.

19th August 2010 - a day we won't forget! It started with two over excited girls Susan and Isla catching the 9.40 train from Leeds to London - we had been picked to compete in the daily challenge on *The Michael Ball Show*. Arriving in London at noon a car was waiting to whisk us to the TV studios. Our minds were working overtime wondering what they had in store for us... cake decorating, plastering or some sort of dance? We wouldn't know until later! We were told to wear trousers and flat shoes, and then asked what size we were. TV listings gave us a clue to guests that would appear on the show with Michael but we just had to wait. We are both ardent fans of musicals so it would be a dream to meet Sir Cameron Mackintosh - could we be that lucky?

We were met at the studio by a lovely girl Bella who took us to our very own dressing room - we never expected this! Bella told us she would take care of us for the day. We were left to take it all in, we were so excited! After a short time Cassie arrived to see us. Cassie was the voice at the end of the phone so it was lovely to put a face to the voice, she was so friendly and made us very welcome and helped us feel more at ease. Without revealing our challenge, she gave us a run through of what would happen, she then told us the guest list: Michael Aspel, Gareth Gates and... how lucky are we, then came the words Sir Cameron Mackintosh, can it get any

better! Well of course it can, the man we really came to see, Michael himself. We were left to gather our thoughts before Kath came to see us; we had spoken to Kath on the phone earlier. she explained we would go to the Green Room, then wardrobe and make up.

As we sat in our dressing room we could hear Gareth rehearsing - it sounded great, at this time we didn't realise he was in the next dressing room. Maureen and Gill were in the Green Room when we got there, it was nice to see faces we knew. Also there was husband and wife Neville and Jan. Two more fans came but we didn't know them, so that was all the challenges covered for the day. Paul Rankin the chef came right across, perched on the back of a chair and spoke to us as if we were old friends, it was lovely of him. While waiting to go to make up Cameron came followed by Eve Pollard. They both greeted us with a friendly hello, we then went back to the Green Room to await our fate. In there Cameron and Michael were having a good old chat before Michael turned our way and said "You look nice girls!" He then told us with a laugh the previous nights challenge had been gravy wrestling, it sounds as if we had a narrow escape!

The recording started, it came to the adverts we were taken into the studio - there our challenge was revealed. The Bar Wizards were

throwing bottles and shakers to each other before making a cocktail. As Michael announced our names, we were on, after a few words and a few laughs with Michael, there was a quick demo for us from the boys and then it was our turn, the boys were shouting instructions - round your head, throw the bottle then roll it up your arm and wiggle while you do it, then pour the drink... Michael then sampled them and said they both tasted very nice but gave me, Isla, the trophy as I had done a good wiggle! We had a really good laugh, hope everyone else did. We left the stage after a big hug and kisses from Michael, and went back to wardrobe to get changed, then to the Green Room. We were definitely on a high!

While in there we had a really good chat with Cameron, he was telling us about his new show *Pretty Blue Eyes* plus lots of other snippets, finishing with a photo. Gareth came in prior to his song he looked very nervous but was only too happy to have a photo taken with us. To our surprise Whoopie Goldberg came in, to get ready for an interview with Michael, it

had to be pre-recorded as she couldn't make it later. When recording had finished Michael came to the Green Room to see if we were okay. We told him how much we had enjoyed ourselves, after a few words and a couple of photos we said our goodbyes and went back to our dressing room where we relaxed, and had some food before watching the early evening recording as one of the audience. We were then taken by car to get our train, arriving in Leeds at midnight. What an amazing day. We were looked after like celebrities by all the girls - Cassie, Kath and Bella and all the staff at the studio, and for the stars of the show to treat us as one of them. A big thanks to everyone, with a special thanks to Michael who made two girls from Leeds feel so important and special for a day, these sort of days rarely happen for people like us.

We are writing this after being at another recording, including Sir Andrew Lloyd Webber, Ramin Karimloo from *Love Never Dies* and Jackie Collins, and of course our favourite - Michael! We think we're the luckiest girls going!



Here is a lovely message that we received from the Shooting Star Children's Hospice which they asked us to pass on after we sent them just over £1,000 in donations for Michael's birthday.

Regarding the wonderful birthday money donations that we received in lieu of gifts for Michael, I would like to confirm that with the fans generous donations, we were able to purchase a Candy Floss machine for the children.

Lots of our children at Shooting Star are unable to eat or in some cases swallow effectively, leading to be fed by tube. So it is really important that they are able to have tiny tasters and Candy Floss is ideal. Candy Floss can melt on the tongue and is not known to cause allergies, making it nice and safe, as well as fun. We will now be able to offer a sweet treat, whilst giving the children a sensory experience of a fizzing sensation.

The machine has been a great success and the children have been having such fun with it. The fans kind donation also ensured we also had enough money for ingredients to keep us going for quite a while.

So we would like to say the hugest thank you everyone for their kind donation, enabling us to purchase something really nice for the children and families.

Thank you so much from us all here at Shooting Star.

Warmest wishes, Karen

The photo was taken at The Great Conservatory at Syon House where Michael and Cathy joined Karen and a host of celebrity guests to celebrate the fifth birthday of The Shooting Star Children's Hospice.



Dream of a Lifetime!

By Ria Fauci

In April of this year my friend Nancy and I embarked on a wonderful adventure. Being devoted Michael Ball fans we had visited the UK several times in recent years to enjoy his performances in various concerts as well as in *Hairspray* at the Shaftesbury Theatre. Since we both share an interest in exploring the UK we would make this trip a little different and decided to tour the country this time while enjoying Michael's performances in *Hairspray* at Cardiff and Glasgow. We had a ball experiencing so many different places and had a chance to talk with a lot of very friendly people along the way.

Venturing into Wales we came across beautiful landscapes and interesting little towns. In the quaint villages of the Cotswolds in England it felt like we had stepped back in time. Nancy and I thoroughly enjoyed exploring the gorgeous lakes and all the pretty little villages in the Lake District. We loved touring quite a few beautiful towns and

cities all throughout the UK which included Edinburgh. We even had a chance to appreciate the wild and isolated beauty of the Highlands of Scotland. The VERY narrow roads around the numerous lochs didn't thrill us so much though!

We had a lovely time visiting our friend Di in Gloucestershire and appreciated Di and David's hospitality very much. We would have loved seeing Ruth as well but we were delayed with traffic on the infamous M4! We enjoyed chatting with Sharon, Steve, Joan, two lovely Glasgow "Lassies" Brenda and Shirley and other Michael fans.

Nancy and I also experienced some really great "Michael moments", which of course was the icing on the cake for us!! Arriving at the Millennium Center on our first day in Cardiff the place was empty of fans and we knew we had missed him going in. We then decided to sit at the

cafe for a bit before taking a walk by the water front when he came strolling down the corridor followed by a photographer and Andrew. He saw us and waved. We assumed that would be the only "Michael moment" we would have that evening. We watched his photo shoot from a distance and Nancy was able to take some great shots with her zoom lens. Afterwards, to our surprise, Michael came over to us and we had a chance to chat with him for a while. Well, Nancy had a chance! For some reason whenever I'm near the man I lose the ability to speak coherently! For instance last year when I joined Nancy and Lila to see Michael in the last four concerts of his tour we had a "meet and greet" in Plymouth where Michael gave us an opportunity to ask questions. I WANTED to ask if there was any hope for us to see him in concert in N.Y.C. in the foreseeable future. All I got out was "is there any hope" before faltering. He just laughed and said "there is always hope" and probably thought I was a complete fool! This time I didn't say much but managed to look ridiculous anyway by trying to take a photo of Nancy with him and being unable to work the camera. Andrew had to come to the rescue! Michael was very sweet to us and spent quite some time chatting before going back inside.

At the stage door of the SECC in Glasgow we had some more lovely "Michael moments". He was very friendly to us and asked about all the places we visited and then promptly made fun of our pronunciation of them!!

All in all it was a fabulous trip, and I will cherish the memories forever! Thank you Nancy for being such a fun and simply perfect travel companion, for all the shared adventures, for all the laughs and not least for being such a brave and competent driver despite all those narrow roads and the "crazy" drivers who travelled said roads like speed demons from hell!!! And we will never forget the moon over Oxford (private joke).

It was truly a trip of a lifetime for me. Ever since I was a child I had this fascination with everything British. It came from my love of reading I think. I developed a very romantic notion about the country from reading all those books by my favorite British authors. Growing

up in Europe I had opportunities to visit many beautiful cities and countries there. Unfortunately the chance to see the British Isles never presented itself before I moved to the States as a young girl. Much later my husband and I were always going to travel to the UK to fulfil my dream of touring the entire country. Raising three sons and dealing with financial responsibilities meant putting the dream on hold. Sadly it never happened. On my own, after retirement, I resigned myself that it would never come true.

Enter Michael Ball and the fan club!!

I've been a HUGE fan of Michael's ever since I first saw him on PBS so many years ago but didn't join the fan club until I saw him for the first time live performing on Broadway in 2005. Through the fan club I became first pen pals then in time good friends with quite a few British fans. I also met two American fans from New Jersey, Nancy and Lila who became good friends over time. The distance between us is short enough (approximately two hours by car) to allow for visits on a regular basis which we really enjoy. Being a Michael Ball fan has enriched my life in many ways. It gave me like-minded friends and travel companions. My desire to see Michael perform gives me the incentive I need to travel to the UK as often as my wallet allows (which is sadly not often enough!!).

I am extremely grateful to Michael



and the fan club for the connection we fans all have, for all the friendships formed, for all the fun and laughs, for the excitement and joy we experience watching THE best singer and performer on the planet with the loveliest personality and THE most infectious giggle! Without Michael Ball and the fan

club I, for one, would not have had my dream to travel the UK realised.

A big "THANK YOU" to Michael and all my fellow "Ballettes" (especially Nancy) from Ria in New York's beautiful Hudson Valley.

THE FIVE O'CLOCK SHOW

By Christine Godfrey. Photo by Nikki Louise Blackstone.

Having not seen Michael since October I then saw him twice in a month because I was lucky enough to get tickets to be in the audience of 'The Five O'Clock Show' that Michael was a guest on which was recorded on Monday 12th July.

I got up really early that day so Alastair could take me to the station on the outskirts of London so that I could get to the studio in time. I actually arrived at the studios just after 10:00 am and there were three people there already. As usual with Michael fans they were friendly and we were chatting while we were waiting for the doors to open around midday.

When we were all seated the warm up guy chatted to us - he looked very much like Dale Winton. It was a very interesting experience to see behind the scenes of a TV programme. Fern Britten, the presenter, was really lovely. She was very nervous as it was her first time on TV since leaving 'This Morning' a year ago. Fern came and spoke to the audience before the show and thanked us for being good afterwards.

Michael was the last guest on the programme, they always leave the best until last! Fern spoke to him for 13 minutes about the tour of *Hairspray* and asked if he was going into *Sweeney Todd* next year. She also spoke about him

having his own show on TV starting in August. There was also an item about homeless dogs when Michael brought one on he said "her indoors" told him it was more than his life was worth to bring one home! After the show had finished a few of us went round to the front of the studio to see Michael drive away. He thanked us for being there and hoped we would all come to his chat show. Once again, another happy Michael experience!



10 YEARS OF MICHAEL MADNESS

PART II - by Kerstin Wohlgemuth and Julia Sedat



Yes, we're back. You have to endure a bit more of our ramblings in wonky English... or simply turn a couple of pages and be spared.

Looking back on the last ten years and with the help of our Bunny Balance (a page where we keep stock of our trips to see the Ball) we have worked out that in one third of all stage performances we have seen of Michael he was wearing a dress! (Roughly 50 out of 150.) Who would have thought this back in 2000 when we did our first tour?? (Apologies for that mistake in the first instalment, it indeed was the millennium and not 2001.)

On this note we thought we would concentrate on presenting you with...

THE MOST ADVENTUROUS FAN MOMENTS OF OUR TEN YEARS OF MADNESS

As most of you will agree, life as a Michael Ball fan can be many things, but certainly will never ever be boring or predictable. This became clear to us many moons ago in beautiful Harrogate.

It was a warm summer evening in the famous little town up north. We had joined the gang around Pat to experience a joyous night out in the presence of a

certain singer we all know. The venue was directly connected to a hotel (very convenient!) and seeing that it was almost concert time, the lifts were very popular with what felt like half the hotel's guests.

By the time we reached the top level we were sure not one person more could enter, but then this gorgeous woman pleaded with us all to be let in as she was really, really late (her dinner had arrived too late, she later explained). We recognised her immediately: It was one of Michaels backing singers, Shena! And as she seemed so desperate everyone moved a bit closer together so that she could squeeze in. After all, she is so thin that her weight can hardly matter, right? The figures on maximum passenger count are surely only rough guidelines we convinced ourselves silently. So we were standing there smiling at her every now and then and were generally quite happy to be in one lift with someone who would be on one stage with him in a few minutes (yes, we were at that stage of fandom then) when suddenly there was a weird sound and the lift stopped between floors. The doors would not open. We were stuck! In a lift! With a concert about to begin! With our friends waiting in the foyer thinking we have run out on them... and with Michael Ball's backing singer. You can tell by now we

are not to be trusted to use ANY means of transportation in the UK (by the way, until now, no special incidents during our London Eye trips).

No one was thrilled about this, naturally. It was really crowded and extremely hot and surely we were not the only ones wondering how long the oxygen would last (too many bad movies), but it was Shena who was in complete state and almost panicked as she realised her mobile was not working in the lift and none of ours were either. You could tell Michael would not be chuffed with people turning up late for a concert (this must come naturally with being a perfectionist). For us it was a big comfort to know the concert would not, COULD not possibly start without Shena. But she seemed to take no comfort out of this whatsoever...

Luckily our plight was soon discovered as Pat and gang had waited downstairs and realised something must be wrong. Also we were all shouting like mad things to get someone to fix it (as mobiles would not work this was all we "stuckees" could do, back to the roots of communication etc, etc). Mercifully it only took a couple of minutes for the technicians to move the lift a bit further down and open the doors so we could climb out and start a mad dash to the venue and finally take our seats. Phew! We actually do not remember many particulars about the concert following



this little adventure (we never, ever got stuck in a lift back home... so many firsts in the UK!) except that it was great, of course, because, let's be honest: they always are. But this lift-ride-with-a-twist will remain unforgettable (and quite a good tale at dinner parties!).

GETTING RIPER WITH AGE... OR NOT!

Especially during the early days we were really very attached to our vehicles... or you could say we were madder than we are today... or - the scariest of all possible interpretations: We are simply getting older!

We have already told you about the Café de Paris concert, our mad timetable and the absence of a hotel room. You would think we have learned from past errors, but you know better by now, don't you? Yes, exactly.

For our very first open air concert in 2001 (Chelmsford, with Lesley Garrett, unseated, £16, those were the days!) we flew over on Saturday and decided to spend the day in good old London. During the night we planned to drive over to Chelmsford and rest in the car for a bit. No hotel booked. Yup, we thought sleeping in a car cannot be as bad as everybody says. Foooooo! We were allowed onto the concert car park once we arrived, so far so good, but we had no blankets, no pillows, and nothing to make lying in a small car even remotely comfortable. Also even though it was a really hot, boiling summer night in central London, the temperatures on a field in the middle of nowhere at 3:00am are nowhere near as pleasant as we had anticipated. But we survived the night and saw sheep grazing in the early morning mist, which was actually quite romantic. We tried very hard not to remember the torrential rain which lasted all of the next day until the minute Michael got onto the stage. Good thing we had been sitting in this field since 8:00am. We were soooo tired and freezing and drenched (thanks to Pat for the life-saving jumper!) but this time we DO remember the concert and it was wonderful. Was this our last night in a car? Nope, we thought we'd give it another go in 2002 for Blickling Hall. Not nice, but we survived and there was no rain.



The most traumatic night in a car by far came two and a half years later. We were on tour with Mr. Ball (yeah, in our dreams). Okay, so we were on our tour following Mr. Ball on his tour. We did that for a week, planned on travelling home and then to get back for the last three concerts of the tour. Our first week's itinerary listed Newcastle, Blackpool and York (twice), and then we were supposed to fly home on the Friday... while there was still the Glasgow concert on Saturday. Can you guess who didn't catch their flights home? Spot on! We changed plans in the last minute and we stayed with Pat until Saturday, got tickets (row X, but hey, we were to be in the SAME ROOM with him!), extended the car hire for a bit and after the concert we would simply drive down to Stansted and enjoy the countryside while doing so. Easy peasy!

Stupidity # 1: Why did we never ever think of getting a flight from Glasgow or Edinburgh to Germany?

Stupidity # 2: If you hated sleeping in the car in the middle of the summer, why not book a hotel room but plan on doing so again in November?!

The only answer to both questions can be: Fandom-induced Moments of Madness (or FiMoMs).

We had the best concert ever (up until then at least!) and we never regretted the decision to go, especially not as we got Row C tickets days before

the concert, which turned out to be second row on the aisle. It was fabulous!

So the concert was brilliant and well worth the efforts but the night that followed it... Friends of ours even offered that we could sleep in their room on the floor, they had spare blankets, but we were high as kites, full of post-concert adrenaline, queens of the world and felt really hot from the party time, so we refused their kind offer and were convinced this would be a walk in the park, well, a drive in the park anyway. It was - until we got out of Glasgow and realised not even the highest high would get us to Stansted without sleep. We had to give in eventually and parked at some dodgy car park in the middle of nowhere trying to sleep. Did we mention you couldn't lock the car from inside? Or at least we didn't figure out how to. Ignoring a slight panic (again we blame too many bad movies) we closed our eyes. The seats would have been okay to sleep on actually, but the cold, oh the cold! It was a bitter cold November night and we were out in the countryside already. To make sure that we did not end up as two bunny-icicles we turned the engine on, got warm for a minute, switched it off again, got freezing cold, switched it on again...

After 2 or 3 hours of no sleep whatsoever we drove on. Tiredness caught up with us though and we had to stop again somewhere in the middle of nowhere (by now in the north of

England). This time we were parked on a small strip of lane high up on some hillside, wintry mist all around us. You could not see a thing, only hear the lorries speed past and then see them disappear into the cold white morning haze. Everything was covered in white frost. It would have been idyllic had we not been so knackered and scared. How we made it back to Stansted without accident once the sun was out remains a mystery! We certainly do not remember a thing from the “morning after”, we must have found our way like frozen fan zombies.

That was the one night we finally decided we are too old to sleep in a car. We will get a hotel, a B&B, a youth hostel, ANYTHING that has a room and a bed for us. No more car nights. Never ever again! Unless something really spontaneous comes up of course...

Not long ago a certain someone mentioned in an interview that he hates everything that is connected with travelling itself and he said he is close to becoming a grumpy old man. We were intrigued. We hate getting to the airport in time, we hate the boring flights (only an hour and a half, how the Australians manage we have no idea) and we hate to get from airport to our hotel. It's all sooooo stressful, takes ages, is exhausting and we are also a bit apprehensive considering the things that have happened to us on British roads in the past. But once we are there, all is fabulous of course. We wouldn't miss it for the world and we always have good stories to tell when we get back home plus we know we are really lucky to be living so close to England. (We would still prefer to live IN England though. Anyone got a job for two mad bunnies?? Yes, well worth a try.) But this interview made us think. Will this get worse? Will we hate it more and more as we get older? Will we end up being grumpy old bunnies? We asked our expert and he confirmed it, yes it will! He even had the cheek to add, “And there is so much coming up this year!” EEEK!

So, no more sleeping in cars for us. Fair enough, it's safer as well. But our find-an-appropriate-hotel attitude has also changed drastically from the early days to now. Back then we searched the internet for the cheapest deal (usually

some B&B in Victoria or Bayswater) and then moaned all day (because we are Germans) about having to carry our evening outfits (yes, complete with shoes, trousers, tops and make up) with us all day to then get changed in some shop or restaurant after the stage door (oh, the glamour!). Things got worse when photo and video equipment were added to the list and later on a laptop as well. All this was changed due to one night at the Regent Palace hotel which was only 3 minutes away from the venue and sat directly at Piccadilly Circus. Aah, pure luxury! Nothing unnecessary to carry, no more gigantic backpacks in theatres, everything was perfect. We vowed to stay there whenever we were in London, always and forever. Then it was closed down because of a massive asbestos problem. Huh. Thanks for that, now we were spoilt. These days we are quite willing to pay more to stay closer to whatever venue (unless there is a Travelodge sale on and we get into a booking frenzy and start booking rooms for £9 all over the place and then end up moving hotels for every night of our stay, but this is something COMPLETELY different).

Next big travel nightmare happened during our trip to see “Stars in Barnes”. Michael and other stars, who live in Barnes performed doing what they were best at. It was early November, Julia had a massive cold and high fever, but what did we do? Exactly, get there in the early afternoon to queue for good seats in the evening to see Michael perform

three songs.

That part was great, we saw Michael, we had fun and the other acts were great as well, but our travelling back that day was horrible. We had a good hotel, but unfortunately the heating would not work and the sheets were extremely thin. In other words: not helping with the cold at all. Then Kerstin set the alarm clock on German time, which meant it went one hour too early. Not the best start to the day. After having paid for the car park we spent the day in London to pick up the car in the late afternoon. We finally took the bus to get back and when we got out at Bayswater Road stop Kerstin realised her purse was gone! Panic! What to do? Passport, credit card, all was in there and we were bound to leave the country in a few hours. There was no hope to catch the bus we had just left but at least we managed to find out where lost properties would be stored... if they were found (Shepherd's Bush station, should anyone ever get into the same situation). But we had to rush to the car first, otherwise it would be clamped! And we had no idea where the German embassy is and how, oh how, to get back on a plane without a passport? So there we were: one with high fever, one a nervous wreck, running back to our car. Kerstin managed to get her credit card blocked whilst running (it felt a bit like *Mission: Impossible* to be honest) and both contemplated whether being stranded in England really was all that bad. But seeing that back then Kerstin was the only one with a credit card and this was now gone and blocked,

yes, it probably was! If we felt snobbish about sleeping in a B&B which smelt a bit mouldy then a night on a park bench certainly would have cured us from travelling altogether. We reached our car exactly the minute the ticket ended (and just before the traffic warden had made it up to our parking bay). Fortunately the purse was in Shepherd's Bush, but of course the €50 and £100 were gone. Never mind, at least we'd be able to get back home four hours later. All's well that ends well....or not. Did you know you cannot unblock your credit card? We had to learn that the hard way, when tour tickets went into sale the next day and we had no credit card to use, but that's a completely different story.

And these are just highlights!

To sum it up: we have been stuck in a lift, involved in two car crashes (not a single one at home so far), had our car locked in a parking lot (with tickets and all), spent many a cold night in cars, had flights re-directed to different airports or been so delayed that half the journey was spent at airports, missed various flights due to traffic jams, spent more hours in pouring rain in the middle of muddy fields than we ever thought possible and still thought it was a brilliant holiday, flew to New York one week only to find

out he was too ill to perform, got massively lost (countless times), sat through a concert that was so wet it felt like taking a shower for a solid 8 hours (the legendary Dyffryn Gardens), spent hours on end at dodgy back doors in wind tunnels for three minutes of bliss, lost years of our lives during ticket frenzies, lost sleep over website work, despaired over ticket policies and have been stuck on the M 25 longer than any tourist we know.

And yet we wouldn't want miss out on all this for the world! Being fans, or rather, being Ballettes has changed our lives utterly and completely. A very wise woman once wrote “It is our choices that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities.” (Guess the quote anyone?) We chose to be fans every day and we would not be who we are today has it not been for Mr Ball and his talents. We have learned so much, laughed so much, cried so much... it's been a hell of a journey. We still lose all ability to form a coherent sentence when he turns around and looks at us, we still cannot sleep with excitement when the next tour is announced, we still cannot wait to get back online after a stage door and tell you all about it. We still cannot breathe through a money note, we still cannot believe how many wonderful people we



have met, and we still are counting the days until our next adventure. We still travel! We have found a place we love and feel at home at.

We have met almost all our friends because of Michael and are proud to have so many of them all around the globe. We are proud to be part of the family. Thank you. All of you.

Beards, frocks, serial killer? Bring it on, we cannot wait.

Talk again in 2020!

Joanna Gordon Meets Michael

by Alison Rennie



Michael Ball superfan syndrome, has been a fan of Joanna Gordon was over the moon when she met her idol backstage after one of his shows.

She and a crowd of seven Joanna, 32, who has Down's

perform as Edna Turnblad in *Hairspray* at Glasgow's Clyde Auditorium.

All of them - mum Annabel, her Aunt Pat, sister-in-law Jen, her mum Sheila, special sisters Alison and Susan and their Aunt Jackie - were in on the big secret that Alison had managed to arrange a very special meeting with Michael afterwards.

And she took it in her stride when she was told to wait in her seat after the show as she was getting an exclusive audience!

After giving him a big hug, Joanna and Michael chatted about her favourite songs and characters from *Hairspray*, how many Michael Ball concerts she'd been to – and

even about her walking stick! Joanna had a stroke in December 2007 and has slowly learned to walk again with the help of her family - Annabel, special dad Alan, brother and sister-in-law, Alistair and Jen, and Alison and Susan.

Annabel and Aunt Pat - who are both also massive Michael Ball fans - came up with the idea to call her walking stick after Michael to help keep her motivated.

And it sits pride of place beside her chair in her living room in Blantyre, Glasgow, decorated with a large blue ribbon.

Now she has added the photographs of her meeting Michael for the first time to her prized possessions!

WHEN CARL MET MICHAEL BALL!

By Sandy Stratta



Our son Carl is 25 years of age and for years has been one of Michael's number one fan. He knows all the songs, word for word, move for move, has all his DVD's and CD's. So what is so different you ask from the many thousands of you that support and love Michael? Carl has a genetic disorder called Fragile X Syndrome, which is a learning, speech and behaviour disorder.

We have not had the opportunity to see Michael in all of his shows, as Carl is not comfortable in crowds and different environments, but we have taken him to see Michael on two different concerts at the Bournemouth International Centre, which we all thoroughly enjoyed.

Carl very rarely asks for specific things, in fact he has only asked for two main things in his life – to learn to drive and to meet Michael Ball. The first he has achieved to a point as he has

been taking lessons for several years now, is a competent driver but may never be able to pass the theory (probably like many of us "old drivers" now). The second was more difficult.

We unfortunately missed out on the opportunity to meet him at Bournemouth last year. When we heard that Hairspray was coming to Southampton we were one of the first in line for tickets. Carl couldn't wait even though it was months away and we had to run through the months, dates, family events for him to try and understand when we were going to actually see the show. Our aim was to try and see if we could arrange a meeting when Michael was in town. We tried to contact the fan club on occasions, but perhaps we were trying the wrong email address, as we never received any replies. We contacted the theatre direct, but all they could say was

that they would put our request to the production company when they were in Southampton, but again we never heard anything.

It was when we had just come back from holiday that we were catching up on news in the Southampton Evening Echo when we saw that a local charity the Red and White Appeal (which is an excellent charity that is raising funds for a transplant treatment centre of patients with leukaemia and other blood disorders) were holding an event where you could meet Michael after the show! We immediately telephoned, left messages on the voice mail, sent an email and sat back and waited.

The next day we received a telephone call that tickets were still available and we could have the three that we asked for! I could have cried I was so happy for Carl and couldn't wait to tell him – as you can imagine he was

absolutely over the moon.

We saw the show for the first time on the original tickets we purchased and couldn't believe how good and enjoyable it was – we were buzzing when we came out. Carl has been practising the dance moves and even putting me through the paces. We had seen the film, knew the basis of the story and played DVD's of Michael's previous shows over and over so we had the dance off to a "T"!

When the night came for the charity evening Carl was beside himself. We even managed to get him to wear a shirt (he has difficulty coping with buttons). Seeing the show the second time around was even more enjoyable and we all agreed that we would never get fed up with seeing it again and again. Once the show was over we went into the reception bar. The girls that had organised the charity event were brilliant and we think they were as excited for Carl as we were. We had a few nervous moments before Michael came and we did think for one minute that Carl was going to have a "funny five minutes" and that we would have to leave before he arrived, but once Michael appeared all nerves disappeared.

Michael came over early on to speak to Carl. What a lovely man – for someone so popular and famous. Carl had a lovely chat with him, had his photo taken and for the rest of the time couldn't take his eyes off Michael as he visited everyone else in the room. He couldn't believe, and still can't, that he has met his hero!

Roll on the tour next year!!

HAIRSPRAY – SOUTHAMPTON

by Gill Tee



Having seen Hairspray many times at the Shaftesbury, this was to be my very last time of seeing this wonderful show, and in fact the only chance I had of seeing the tour. Originally I only bought a ticket for the matinee knowing that I could get to Southampton and back on a day trip from Sussex where I live. However when I told my husband this was going to be my very last time ever of seeing Hairspray, he said "well why don't you make a weekend of it and go to both shows and stay over." Great idea, but it was too late, all the decent seats for Saturday evening were taken. Then by chance a ticket became available for sale on the forum (thank you Teresa) for the evening show. So I quickly snapped that up and found myself a hotel nearby and my weekend was arranged.

I arrived at the Mayflower Theatre, and found the stage door just 10 minutes before Michael and some of the cast arrived. There were only a few people there which meant we all had time to have a nice chat with Michael. He came over to me saying "hello lovely, how are you".

Boy does he make you feel special when he says that to you. I asked him if he would sign a photo for me, and I told him this was my only chance of seeing the tour. We had a nice chat



for a few minutes and of course I had to ask for a photo with him, (well, how else is a girl supposed to get a cuddle).

Both shows were totally fantastic, despite a technical hitch during the matinee which held up the show for a short while. The new cast were very good. Les Dennis was the best Wilbur I had seen, (sorry Ian Talbot) he was so funny, and he and Michael had such a great rapport together. The rest of the cast were good, but I have to say there will only ever be one Tracy in Leanne and one Link in Ben for me. Sandra Marvin as always was amazing and brought tears to my eyes as she sang "You know where I've been".

I would like to say a huge thank you to the lady who took the photo's for me, I don't know your name, but I remember she came from the Isle of Wight.

And Michael, that cuddle was lovely, thank you for some very special memories.

25 YEARS OF FUN!

BY JULIA ATKINSON



On Friday June 21st 1985 I was a grumpy teenager as I wasn't allowed to go to the school disco. My sister, Helena and I were being 'made' to go to Manchester to see a 'boring' musical called *The Pirates of Penzance*. An unknown actor called Michael Ball was playing the part of Frederic. He bounded on to the stage with a cheeky grin... and we were smitten. After the show we plucked up the courage to go to the stage door. Michael was so charming and friendly it was the start of many Saturday theatre and stage door trips to see him. At the end of the *Pirates* run I received a letter from Michael saying he'd got a part in a brand new musical called *Les Miserables*...

So in October 1985 *Les Mis* opened at the Barbican and I went with two other MB fans - my sister and my Mum.

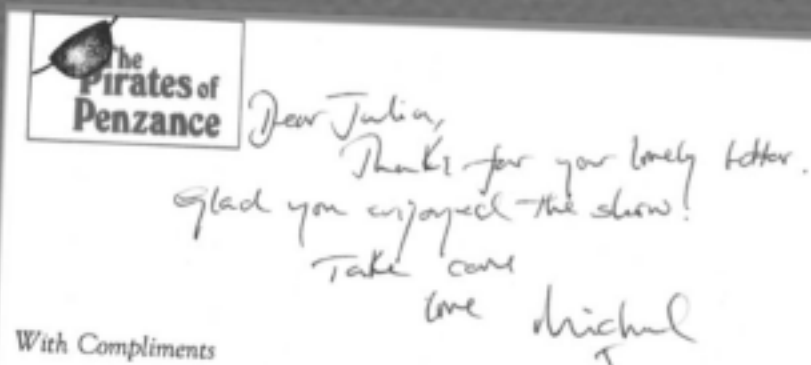
We were blown away by the show and saw Michael at the stage door - in his dressing gown! Not long after that the show transferred to the Palace Theatre.

Around the same time Michael appeared on TV singing 'Don't Want To Give Up On Love' on Miss England and on 3-2-1 (with Dusty Bin!) and we managed to video record these. We lost track of Michael for a while then found out about a concert at the Barbican. A day trip from Preston followed. It was a fantastic concert.

1988 saw Michael appearing as Raoul in *Phantom Of The Opera*. He used to whiz up to the stage door in his new red MR2 sports car. Hardly anyone knew who he was so the stage door was a great place. Around this time I met Gill and Maureen in the *Phantom* queue (I

can't believe how many years ago that was!). I also became great friends with Margaret Joy. She and I have shared many 'Michael Moments' right up to when she very sadly passed away in March 2009. We were not at all alike but thanks to our MB connection she'll always be remembered as one of my best friends.

In 1988 I moved from Lancashire to study at Oxford Polytechnic - superb timing as Michael was about to appear in *Aspects of Love*. What a great show. The night Michael met Cathy it was very exciting to be there and there was quite a buzz with the TV crew at the theatre. If ever I was in London with Margaret or another friend Martha and we were not going to the show we would still ensure that we were in the vicinity of the theatre when Michael was



singing 'Love Changes Everything'. Then we would brave the unsavory alleyway to listen at the fire escape door.

Martha and I discovered that Michael was to appear on *Top of The Pops* as 'Love Changes Everything' was heading up the charts. We brazenly managed to talk our way in to the BBC and ended up in the artistes canteen with Michael. We had a whale of a time watching the recording and were thrilled when Rick Astley held the door open for us! Around the same time Martha and I also talked our way in to the BT tower where Michael was helping answer the phones for Comic Relief.

1990 saw Michael on Broadway in *Aspects*. I went with Helena. It was our first trip to New York and we had a marvelous time. We were very lucky as Michael very kindly invited us to his birthday party. I clearly remember him saying that he couldn't believe that it was five years since *Pirates* - now its 25 years!! Michael's Mum was in New York the same time and we sat with her to watch Michael and the *Aspects* cast play in the Broadway Shows soft ball league in Central Park. What about those pink shorts!

In June 1991 Mum, Helena and I were very lucky to see Michael perform at a small charity concert introduced by Cathy at a church in Bidford-on-Avon. The dedicated few were there too including Gill, Maureen and Margaret.

1992 was another great year as I went to the studio recording of Michael's first album and there were loads of TV recordings for *Wogan* for *Eurovision* which were great fun. Other TV highlights over the next couple of years included Michael's two TV series with amazing guests.

During the 1993 tour Michael played at the Hammersmith Odeon. I was at the end of the row in the front stalls. Before I knew it Michael had swept me on to the stage and sang 'When You Wish Upon a Star' to me. I still haven't recovered!

In 1995 I got married to Barrie (very long-suffering husband he is too) and





Gill and Maureen organised a card from Michael which was read out at the reception - a lovely surprise. We just got back from our honeymoon in time for Mum and me to see Michael appear as Marius in the legendary *Les Miserable* 10th Anniversary concert at the Royal Albert Hall. Wonderful!

Over the next few years I enjoyed seeing Michael in *Passion*, several tours, outdoor concerts including two at Hampton Court (one dry, one very wet!), *Hey Mr Producer* and *Alone Together*. More recent and still wonderful Michael happenings are more widely known due to his increasing fan base. From *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* to

Hairspray, Michael never disappoints. My daughter Ruby was born in 2003 followed by son James in 2004 so they are now fans too. They've seen *Hairspray* several times and enjoy their stage door encounters almost as much as seeing the show.

Here's to the next 25 years!



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!



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.

PAULINE PREWETT

Pauline would love to hear from anyone in the Sheffield area with a view to travelling to concerts together.

Pauline Prewett
134 Hall Park Hill
Sheffield
S6 5RA

LAURA CRAIG

Laura would like to apologise for losing touch with the friends she has made over the years and if anyone new wants to get in touch she would love to hear from them. She would most like to hear from people through email.

Laura Craig
10 Glendernere Heights
Newtownabbey
Co. Antrim
BT36 6QZ
l.craig1@ntlworld.com

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