ON THE BALL

Issue 56

Hi There

It's that time of the year again when the shops are full of decorations and everyone is running around making preparations for the holiday season, and here we are with Issue 56 of On The Ball. This issue has articles about the Shooting Star Children's Hospice fundraiser (and what a night that was!), Michael's TV show, Hairspray and much more.

As we move into the next year Michael seems to be one of the busiest people around, that's nothing new though! As things stand, Michael's Radio 2 show returns in January, hopefully his TV show in February, his new album will be released in the Spring, and then Michael will be taking off on tour around the UK before going into Sweeney Todd in September. Wow - we are exhausted just thinking about it but knowing Michael he will take it all in his stride, and what a brilliant variety of entertainment he has in store for us in 2011.

There's a lot of gloom in the world today, but we hope you will agree that being a fan of Michael's takes away some of the misery. Even if you can't get to any of the live shows, at least he is around on the radio and TV and we thank all of you for continuing to support the fan club during the past year.

We must also thank everyone for their contributions throughout the year. There are so many people we rely on as part of our family and special thanks go to Pat Webb, James Gaden and of course Chris for keeping our great forum running so smoothly. Same goes to everyone at Live Nation, Andrew, Simon and Alphaprint. Finally we wish all of you a Merry Christmas and a very Happy New Year. No doubt we will see many of you during the next year - all we can say is "bring it on!"

Love
Maureen and Gill

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

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Dear Everyone,

I am sat back stage at the fabulous Grand Canal Theatre in Dublin reflecting on what has been another amazing year and on just how lucky I am to be doing the job I love, with people I admire, for fans who are so loyal and kind.

I really do feel blessed and I am acutely aware that so many people face a time of great uncertainty and worry. I guess all I can do is try to continue to entertain and bring some happiness and continuity wherever I can.

The lead up to Christmas for most people is an exciting and exhausting time and I hope it is a wonderful holiday period for you with friends, family, warmth and happiness.

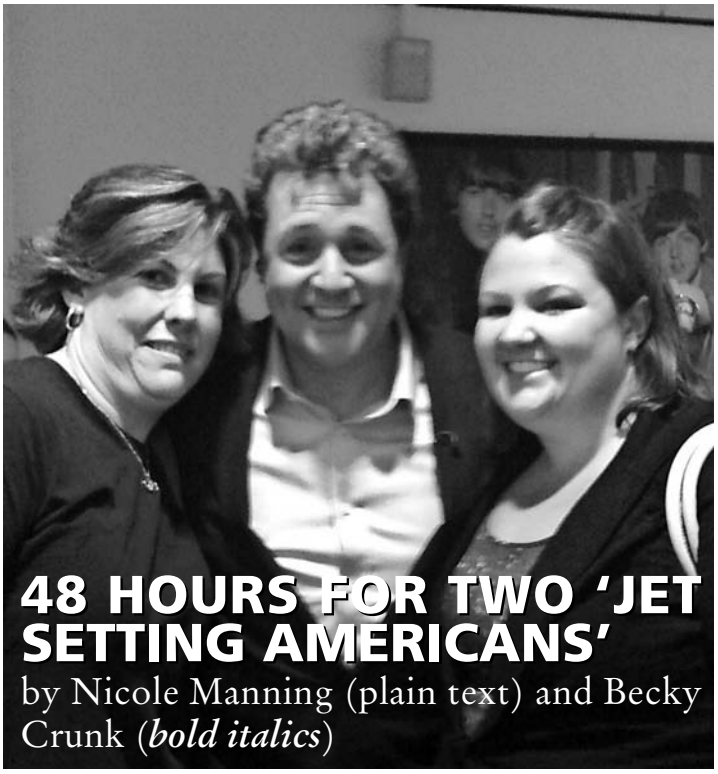
I'm sure you will know by now most of the plans for next year and if everything works out it will be, God willing, another full and memorable one. It may be the last time I get to play Edna and if that is the case let me shout it loud and clear: I BLOODY LOVE HER ... and will miss her so much. She has given so much joy to me and other people and I hope, one day, our paths will cross again but meanwhile my time will be taken up with getting to know a mad and murderous serial killer.... from the sublime to the ridiculous eh! Bring it on Mr. Sweeney Todd.

I hope you enjoy the new album when it comes out (in March I think) and then we get to party together on the road somewhere during the tour. I can't wait to see you.

So take good care of yourself, have a wonderful Christmas and May 2011 bring you all the health and happiness you deserve.

With all my love and
God Bless

Mike
X



48 HOURS FOR TWO 'JET SETTING AMERICANS'

by Nicole Manning (plain text) and Becky Crunk (***bold italics***)

When I first approached Becky about entering the Ballette challenge contest for *The Michael Ball Show*, she ***was excited*** and agreed, ***mainly*** because she didn't think we would be considered since we live in the US. Boy was she wrong!

After countless e-mails and phone calls with the show's producers, Becky and I had arranged to spend 48 hours in London, twelve of which would be spent in the BBC Studios taping and watching Michael's show. ***Though we put together our plans very fast, the wait for the two days to come was almost pure torture as we were so excited. I, unlike Nicole, had never met Michael in person and couldn't believe that this was truly about to happen.***

We arrived early on a Tuesday morning, landing at Heathrow and proceeded to our hotel in Notting Hill where we freshened up and took off sight-seeing for the day. We started with Big Ben then continued on to visit Westminster Abbey where we spent most of the day. We returned to our hotel in time to catch Michael's show on the telly, which was not on purpose, and then got ready for the evening. We had dinner in Soho and then went to see *Blood Brothers*. We both were blubbering at the end, which for me has not occurred since I last saw *Les Miserables*. After the show we went back to the hotel and attempted to squash our excitement and anticipation in favour of catching a few z's.

On Wednesday, we woke bright and early to get ready. Can't go see our favorite man looking like jet lagged tourists! The studio sent a car to pick us up and by 12:15 we were on our way. When we got to the studio we checked in at the reception desk and a production assistant, Liza, came to collect us. She took us to one of the many dressing rooms in the studio where we waited to be briefed about what our day would entail. Thank goodness for *Top Gear* on the telly at that point - I may have lost my mind waiting. ***I can still tell from my shaky pictures that I was a nervous wreck!***

When we finally met Cassie, the show's assistant producer, we found out what we would be on the first show of the day. Of course, what we really wanted to know was what our challenge was. Drum roll please… We would be part of a Morris Dancing Group for the Ballette challenge, ***which we had no idea how to do or what Morris Dancing entailed*** but okay, we thought! We can do this! We both do musical theatre as a hobby, how bad can it be? It wasn't bad at all. The gentlemen who made up the dance group were very welcoming and quite funny. They taught us the steps quickly in their dressing room and then it was off to wardrobe.

In wardrobe, Becky and I found out our costumes were to be unflattering white pants and white shirts, bedecked with bells. Oh how we wished for costumes like the ones Sue and Nikki had at this point! Nonetheless, we changed and as we were attaching our bells a sweet, sweet sound came from just across the hall in make-up. Yup! Michael was just a few feet away from us! Cue the anxiety and increased adrenaline. Do we go over and peak in? Do we stay put and try to be "normal?" We didn't have to decide. Michael had finished and was leaving to go back to his dressing room. So, I peered around the wall in our dressing room for a glimpse and was successful. Becky, unfortunately missed this sighting ***due to a slight costuming difficulty which the lovely ladies in wardrobe helped her resolve***, but she would get her's soon enough.

We finished in wardrobe, went over to make-up and then were escorted to the green room to wait. While waiting we talked with the Morris Dancers, Maureen, Gill and some of the other guests that were there for the show. Then it finally happened. Michael entered the room! When we finally got his attention it was like the parting of the Red Sea. He bellowed "Hello ladies!" and the rest of the room between him and Becky and I just stepped to one side or the other and he sauntered through. Now for my favorite part of the day:

Becky: Oh My God! Hi!
Michael: That's right, we haven't met yet.

Michael gives Becky a hug and poses for the first ever picture with her. The smile still has not left her face. ***In all fairness, all of my efforts to play it cool totally failed but I have to admit I'm glad I let my honest reaction be what it was. It made the memory that much more fun. Plus Nicole got a kick out of telling me about it.*** We had a moment to chat and then Michael was off to the sound stage to start the taping.

When it came time for the challenge we were escorted to the side stage and waited for our intro. As the Morris Dancers were getting set, Michael looks over at the two of us with an impromptu "I can hear the bells." He started to introduce us and after several tries at getting Becky's last name out correctly, we greeted Michael and the cameras for our 15 seconds of fame. ***I was very glad that the few moments of needing to re-record our intros occurred as it calmed the last remnants of nerves before doing our dance in front of Michael, the audience and the guests from the segment before ours. Nicole and I smiled a lot during the performance and just tried our best to have fun, hoping our brief moments of practice and performance***

experience would help us through. I distinctly remember talking to myself inside my head saying "Just don't trip and make an idiot of yourself!" After the performance was over, Michael was a bit disappointed that he did not get to humiliate the foreigners and awarded the trophy to Becky. *In the green room, we made a pact to share custody of the trophy regardless of the winner but I'm pretty sure I didn't set it down for the first thirty minutes after receiving it.*

The rest of the day was a fog. Oh sure, we hung out with Maureen and Gill in the green room between shows, shopped at the BBC store where I acquired as much *Top Gear* paraphernalia as I could, and watched the additional tapings that evening but I can't tell you much more then that. *I truly agree. I remember even when we got into the car to be driven back to the hotel it already felt like something from a fairytale. Even now when I watch the DVD of the show or look at our pictures from the day it seems like it was all a daydream.* As most of you who have had more then three seconds with Michael can attest to, once it's over your feet don't quite hit the ground for a few hours, or days, maybe even months. *But without a doubt, it was two of the best days these Americans have seen for quite some time and ones that we'll never forget!*

A Tribute To Amanda Wood

This is a tribute to my beloved sister Amanda (Mandy) Wood, who sadly passed away very suddenly on October 13th 2010.

Mandy was born on the 14th of December 1962 and was my much loved younger sister. As children we fought like cats and dogs but as we grew we became, and have remained, the best of friends. Although younger than me Mandy was always the more responsible one and was often mistaken for being the elder with her no nonsense approach. It is only now that she has passed away do I fully appreciate her and miss her very much every day. If anyone was to say what do I miss most about her, it would be the fact that she was always there for me, always dependable and constant throughout my life. I am sure if you are or have a sister who you love, you will know what I mean.

Mandy had a deep compassion for others, thinking of their feelings even at times when it would have been easier to think of her own, I remember once when she cycled down to the local shop at the age of 10 or 11, just to bring me an umbrella and got it caught in the spokes of her bike which resulted in her having three stitches in her lip, just to protect me from the rain.

Mandy married her husband Alan in 1986 and shared twenty four caring, loving and supportive years of marriage. She has three great boys, Adam (22) and the twins Jason and Wayne, aged 19.

Mandy centred her life on the people she loved and befriended. She also loved music, particularly musicals and especially Michael Ball. Sunday mornings were spent listening to the Michael Ball show on the radio, which she loved. Mandy has spent a fortune over the years, following Michael around the country to see him in concert, invariably accompanied by me. Both of us nervously waiting at the back stage door for a chance of an autograph or photograph with our hero of music.

Her other love was animals and she looked after them with care and compassion. On leaving school Mandy worked with horses and with dogs working in a kennels where she trained as a dog groomer. Mandy worked at the National Environment Research Council in a welfare role, this was perfect for her as she was a great listener, trusted and trustworthy.

I have so many happy memories of Mandy, she had a real zest for life and loved fun, music and laughter, family and social gatherings and her crafts. We hope the void that is left with her passing will eventually be filled with the happy memories we have of her.

The photo was taken in Bristol just outside the Hippodrome in July which proved to be our last trip together to see Les Miserables with Gareth Gates and John Owen Jones.

Zoe Grimwood

Michael's Shooting Stars Concert

By Gill and Maureen. Main Photo by Alistair Godfrey. Other photos by Pam Hancock

8.00 pm at the Prince of Wales Theatre on Sunday 10 October and the atmosphere was buzzing with anticipation. Yes, the time had finally arrived for the Shooting Star Children's Hospice fund raising concert. Michael had said that he would put on a show in the West End following his smaller concert at Feltonfleet School and he was true to his word.

Whenever Michael decides to host a show in order to raise funds for any of his chosen charities, you just know that it's going to be one of those extraordinary nights in the theatre. This time around he didn't disappoint, in fact it seems that it would be impossible to top this one – although knowing Michael he will manage it at some time in the future.

The evening opened with Philip Glenister in true Gene Hunt style welcoming everyone to the theatre and introducing Karen Sugarman from Shooting Star Children's Hospice who explained a bit about the charity. They were quickly followed by Michael bouncing on stage to 'I Was Made For Loving You/Hot Stuff' – this was definitely going to be a night to remember. It was good to see Louise Marshall, Adrian Hansel and Emma Williams joining him on stage, although disappointing that Ben James Ellis had been unable to join them due to illness.

The first of the evening's guests was Jason Donovan. Michael was chatting in between songs about when he recorded 'Love Changes Everything' and how he appeared on *Top Of The Pops* and nearly made it to number one. He said he couldn't quite remember who it was that pipped him to the post, when a voice from the audience reminded him – of course it was Jason Donovan himself! He walked through the audience and up on stage to sing 'Too Many Broken Hearts', followed by a duet of 'Let It Be Me' with Michael. The night was well under way now.

Next up were the entire touring *Hairspray* cast who sang a medley of songs including 'I Know Where I've Been'. The next part of the show was one of the funniest moments ever seen at a Michael Ball concert – the appearance of "The Turnblad Sisters". Michael had mentioned during his TV series that there would be an appearance by three Ednas, but he didn't tell us just how amusing it would be. The three Ednas (Michael Starke, Brian Conley and Michael) strutted on stage for a hilarious routine of 'I Will Survive' which was full of gags and went on to round off the first half with 'You Can't Stop The Beat'.

The second half of the show started with Michael singing 'Let The Rivers Run' and 'Feeling Good', followed by 'The Prayer' sung with Emma Williams, and then 'This Is The Moment'. Michael was then joined on stage by Les Dennis, who of course was one of Michael's "Wilbur's" in *Hairspray*, to sing 'Me And My Shadow'.

Tony Hadley was the next guest up, who sang 'That's Life'. Michael then fulfilled an ambition by singing the Spandau Ballet hit 'Gold' with Tony, who is also a very strong supporter of Shooting Star Children's Hospice.

A few more songs and then the final guest of the evening came on stage, this time it was Tony Christie, and him and Michael duetted on 'Avenues and Alleyways'. We were now heading towards the finale of this brilliant evening as they sang '(Is This The Way To) Amarillo'. To round off the evening there was a rousing version of 'Do You Hear The People Sing' from *Les Miserables*, 'Love Changes Everything' and 'Impossible Dream'. It was 10:45 and what an amazing evening it had been. Everyone in the Prince of Wales Theatre was exhausted just from watching the show so Michael must have been shattered by the end – but what a fabulous way to raise some money for such a good cause!

This a message we received from Karen Sugarman:

"I am so thrilled to let you know that the concert raised £105,748.43. We are absolutely over the moon as you can imagine. We are of course truly indebted to Michael, his wonderful guests and of course everyone who bought tickets to the concert. It really is truly amazing."

LES MISERABLES CELEBRATES 25 YEARS!

by Kathy Chelsen

I was a bit of a latecomer to the wonders of Les Miserables – I had, somehow, missed it when it opened on Broadway in 1987. It wasn't until I became a fan of Michael and started to look into his previous works that the musical came to my attention – and I've been totally hooked ever since.

The announcement about the O2 concert came as I was trying to figure out timing for my next trip to London – and thus my travel dates were set. I was very excited by the fact that Alfie Boe was going to play Valjean. I've been a fan of his since he and Michael did Kismet together. Given the scope of the celebration, I was sure Michael would be involved in some way.

Having seen John Owen Jones and the excellent touring cast at the Barbican the day before, I was well primed for a fantastic day on Sunday. I got to the O2 early, as I was going to both performances. The afternoon performance served pretty much as a public "dress rehearsal." There seemed to be problems with the screens now and again, but the concert performances were stellar.

The atmosphere at the evening performance was electric; the anticipation was very high throughout the arena. There were cheers as we got the five minute warning courtesy of a video that gave a little background on the show's history, and then the spine-chills began with the overture.

What a magnificent concert! There were so many wonderful performances – Earl Carpenter as the Bishop, Lea Salonga as Fantine, and Ramin Karimloo as Enjolras. I was especially taken by Matt Lucas' Thenardier. I'm not a big fan of his comedy work, but I thought he was excellent as the innkeeper. Samantha Barks was another stand out as Eponine. Everyone meshed together for a solid performance.

I knew that there had been some "discussion" about Alfie's "eligibility" to play Valjean, so I was curious as to how he would be received by the audiences. From the moment he sang the last lines of the Soliloquy at both performances it was clear the audiences were embracing him – each time he sang the response was loud and enthusiastic. I was moved to tears by his performance. At the evening performance, after he finished "Bring Him Home" the applause went on and on, culminating in a very rare mid-performance standing ovation, which forced Alfie to break character to acknowledge the ovation. It was a wonderful moment to witness.

As the performance came to an end the love in the arena for this show was overflowing. Everyone was on their feet cheering madly. The touring cast and the London cast were on stage at that point and acknowledgement for each was greeted by even more cheers. Then, out they came, to even more thunderous applause – the original 1985 cast, Colm Wilkinson, Michael, Rebecca Caine, Frances Ruffelle and more. It was a moment for the ages, with all that wonderful talent on the same stage.

The encore began with a special rendition of Bring Him Home, sung by the four actors on that stage that played Valjean –Colm Wilkinson, John Owen Jones, Simon Bowman and Alfie Boe. Utter perfection! Mr. Wilkinson started the song, and as he was followed by each in turn he smiled broadly. Alfie came in last, with a key change, and as he did so the arena erupted. In the background I could see Michael with a big grin on his face at first, and then he looked visibly moved as the four men sang together. It ended as it began with Colm Wilkinson singing the final note alone. This was followed by "One Day More," sung by the 1985 cast alone first, and then joined by the Concert cast. Michael got the biggest round of applause for his entrances – and oh, he was in magnificent voice! The evening came to a close with speeches by Cameron Mackintosh, Alain Boubill and Claude-Michel Schoenberg, and a large group of school children who have performed the school edition of Les Miserables marching to the stage to "Do You Hear The People Sing?" It was a truly magnificent, historical evening.

A few days after I returned home, I read an interview Alfie did in which he talked about the O2 concert. Alfie credited Michael with "putting him forward" for the Valjean role by bringing him to Cameron Mackintosh's attention. It was a lovely testament to a friendship begun three years ago during Kismet.

It was a magical weekend, and an event that I will long remember.

This photo was taken when Pam Hancock took Martha up to meet Michael as he was leaving the BBC after his Sunday Brunch programme.

The Shooting Star Children's Hospice

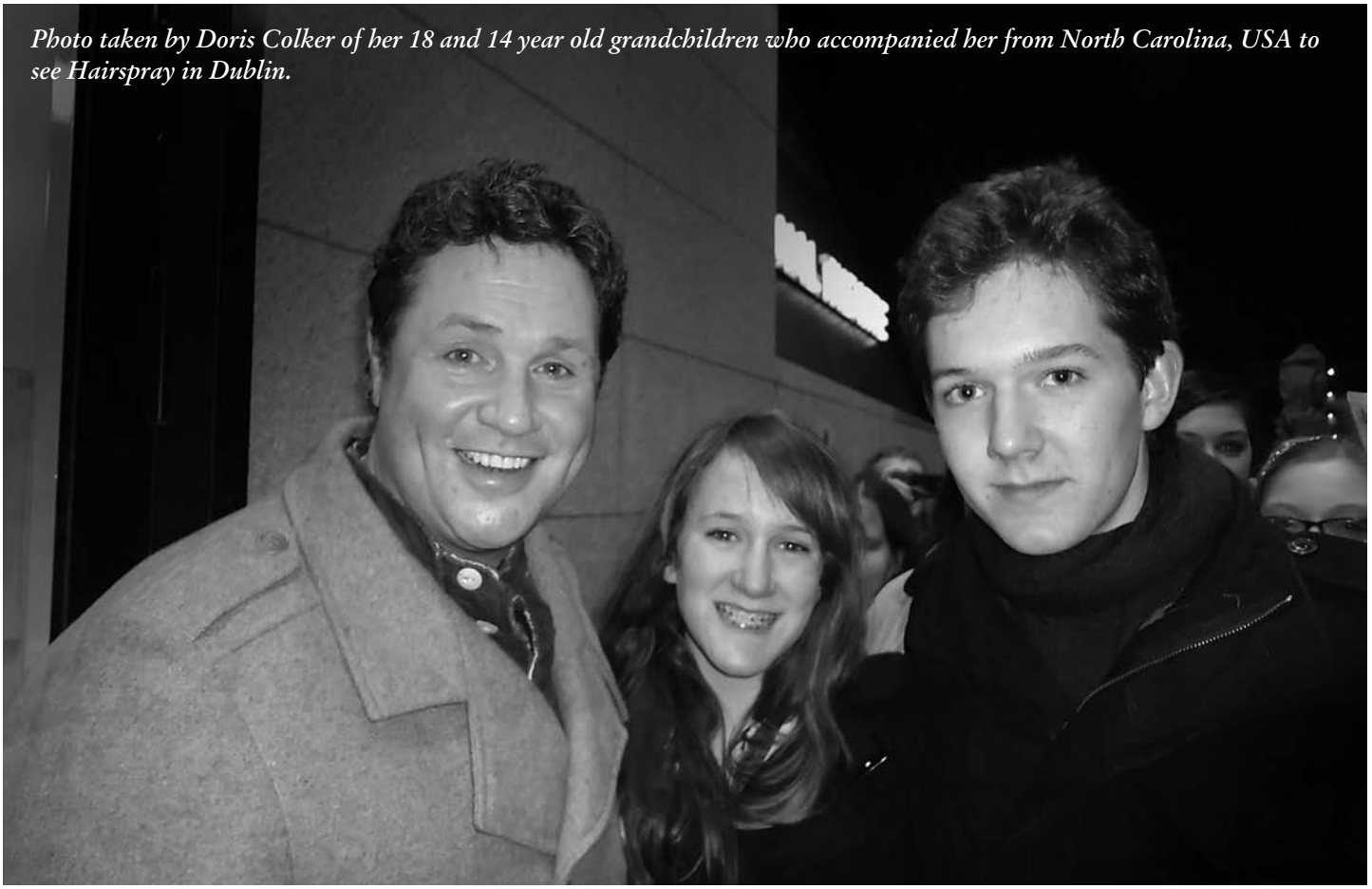
Shine Magazine Article

Children at Shooting Star House are now enjoying the delights of candy floss, thanks to fans of Michael Ball.

Candy floss is an ideal treat for children who are unable to swallow effectively because it melts in the mouth and provides a sensory experience of fizzing on the tongue. A candy floss machine was placed on the Shooting Star wish list and was purchased by the Michael Ball Fan Club in lieu of gifts for Michael's birthday.

Gill Oakley, from Michael Ball's Fan Club said: 'Michael's fans are known for their generosity and as a result of donations in lieu of birthday presents for him, we were thrilled to have bought the candy floss machine, which we hope will bring a lot of fun to the hospice.'

Photo taken by Doris Colker of her 18 and 14 year old grandchildren who accompanied her from North Carolina, USA to see Hairspray in Dublin.



I CAN HEAR THE (WEDDING) BELLS!

By Steve and Emma Lunt

Friday October 2nd 2009 and Michael Ball takes to the stage in Newcastle for a concert as part of his 'Past and Present' tour.

Time to fast forward a year.

Saturday October 2nd 2010 and another momentous event takes place in Newcastle with the wedding of Steven Lunt and Emma Dixon.

Regular readers of *On The Ball* will already know the connection between these two events but for those who aren't aware the concert is where we (Steve and Emma), both lifelong Michael Ball fans, met and fell in love.

We chose October 2nd as that date will always be special to us. However that's getting a bit ahead of ourselves now!! Rewind back a few months and we were both delighted to be invited onto Michael's TV show for a wedding themed challenge. Obviously as Michael fans, this was a dream come true for us both and so we excitedly made our way down to London for the filming. I think it's fair to say that there were a few nerves flying about that day in the studio, but hey, good preparation for the wedding to come!! To make matters worse the producers wouldn't tell us what our challenge was going to be, so until Michael introduced us and we walked onto the set we really had no idea!

Our challenge was to decorate a wedding cake and despite Michael helping Steve, he said "the boys must stick together", Emma won and walked away with the coveted Ballette Of The Day trophy. To be honest I think it was fixed and Steve was clearly the real winner!! It was a great day and lovely to see behind the scenes of the show and it's certainly a day that will never be forgotten! Just a pity we weren't allowed to keep the cake for our wedding but having said that it did taste delicious in the green room after!!

Which brings us nicely to another never to be forgotten day and our wedding. Leading up to the wedding it had rained constantly everyday so it was with certain trepidation that morning when we looked outside only to be met with glorious sunshine. Someone was certainly looking out for us that day and nothing was going to rain on our parade!!

The wedding took place in a lovely little church in a village just outside of Newcastle, for those who know Steve they will know he has a fantastic sense of humour! Well with this in mind I did have a few jokes I was going to throw into the service, however when I was stood at the alter and the bridal march started

playing I stole a quick look behind me. That look changed everything as I witnessed the most beautiful bride and I can honestly say I've never felt as proud or as happy as I was at that point. All thoughts of jokes went out the window and I just wanted to be married!!

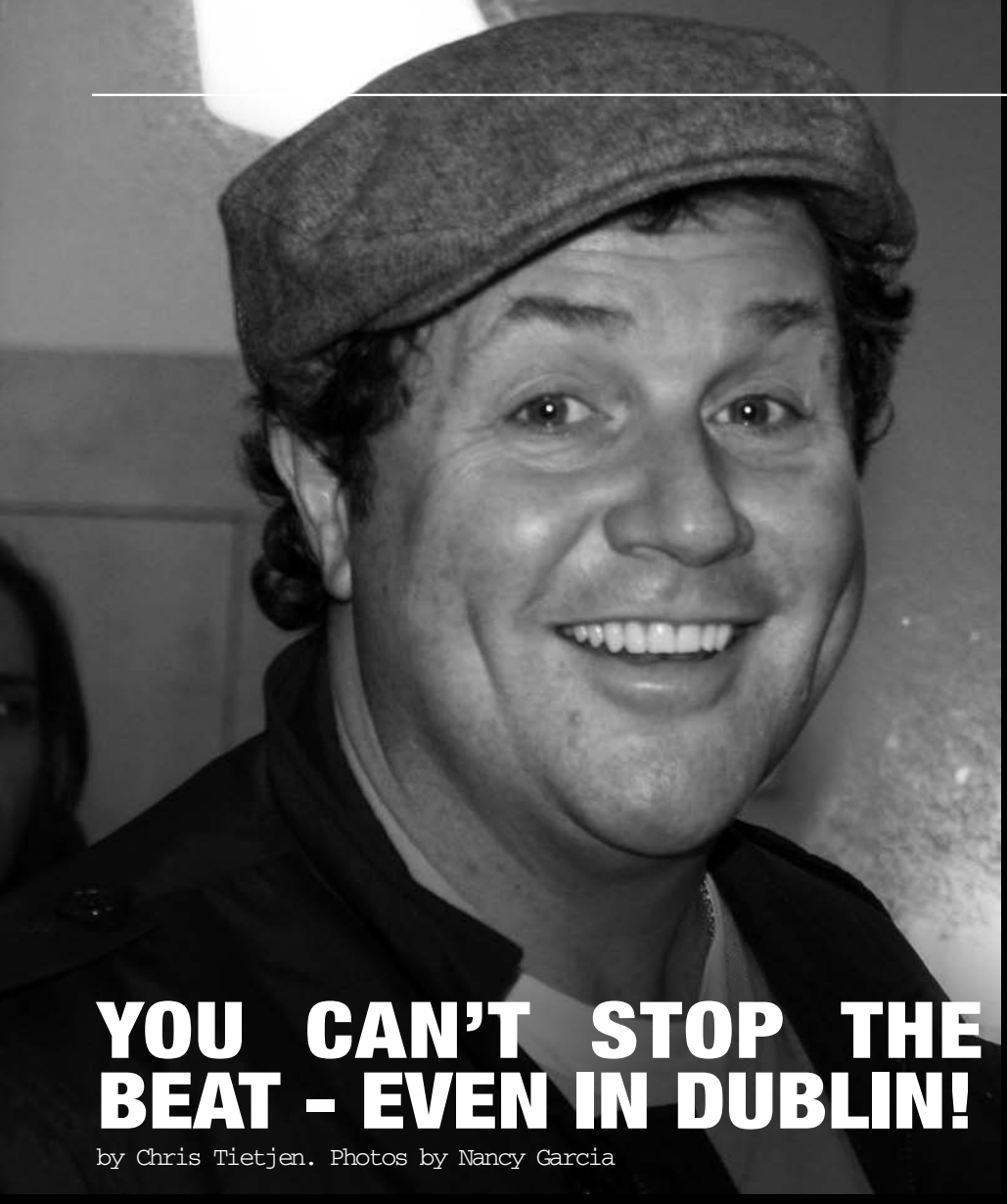
After the service we had a lovely reception in a top Newcastle hotel and Michael Ball even managed to get in on the act as the wedding tables were named after his albums, a nice touch. Soon it was time to cut the cake and despite not being decorated by Steve and Michael it was very nice! After the wedding speeches we opened the cards and were thrilled to receive a lovely card from Michael himself, which was very kind of him.

Onto the evening party and everyone had a fantastic time and soon it was time for our first dance. We are lucky that in the North East we have a wonderful singer called Jeffrey Dingle who originates from Los Angeles but currently lives here with his partner. Jeff was a semi-finalist on American Idol and is a very talented singer with a number of CD's to his name so it was wonderful that he agreed to sing at our wedding. We've seen him sing on numerous occasions and discussed what we wanted as our first dance song. We both picked 'The Rose', which means a lot to us and of course Michael also. A funny moment occurred a few weeks before the wedding when Jeff told us he'd been listening to Michael's version of 'The Rose', don't know how he picked up on the fact we liked him, and was worried he couldn't do it justice! Well nobody can match Michael but we can say that Jeff did a remarkable version of 'The Rose' and our first dance will never be forgotten. The rest of his set consisted of many more Michael numbers and he finished with a brilliant 'This Is The Moment'.

So a truly brilliant day and one that will live long in the memory. The following day and our first as a married couple so it seemed quite apt that we jumped on a train to go to London to see the brilliant *Les Miserables* 25th anniversary concert where of course a certain Mr Ball made an appearance. It was then time to jump on a plane and spend a lovely week in paradise also known as the Maldives!

As a footnote, we've just returned from a weekend in Dublin to see *Hairspray* and it was lovely when Michael spotted us and asked us how the wedding went. A great guy and of course the reason we met in the first place. It's lovely to be the first Michael Ball inspired wedding, lets hope not the last!!

We'd both like to thank everyone for their well wishes and hope you enjoyed reading about the best day of our lives. Michael Ball fans are remarkable and the best in the world and we look forward to seeing many of you on tour, from here to eternity!!



YOU CAN'T STOP THE BEAT - EVEN IN DUBLIN!

by Chris Tietjen. Photos by Nancy Garcia

Oh, I hate early mornings! Celia and I are up at 5.30am, only to open the curtains and find fog and iced-up car windows. Not a great start, but the fog came and went patchily on the trip to Stansted. Obviously didn't bother Mr Ryanair, as we took off on time and after just 55 minutes, Dublin came in to view – a bright, sunny Dublin! Now to get the right bus to the town centre – couldn't book into our hotel until after lunch, and it was still only 9.15am! We decided to take an open-top bus tour around the city, to see the sights whilst the weather was good.

Dublin is a beautiful city, and the tour included all of the sights – Molly Malone and Oscar Wildes' statues included – just a shame Mr Wilde was covered by a blue tarpaulin! And doesn't Molly get a bit chilly in that very low cut top? An hour and a half later, having seen all of the city highlights, we jumped off the bus along the river side, and found we were right by a Chocolate Cafe! Well, who could resist? The very young and very charming owner chatted away to us while we drank our beverages – wasn't too busy on a chilly November morning - and we asked about the new theatre. Little did we know he was also an architectural student, and gave us the low down on the new place! Of course, I had to do a little Michael-promotion, and he said he'd bought tickets for his auntie's birthday the following week!

Deciding we needed more than liquid refreshments, we went off to the Temple Bar area across the river to find some lunch. That did nicely and still having some time to kill, we decided we might find the Leprechaun museum an amusing place to while away a bit of time. So, we set off, following the signs - and ended up in the place we had started off! Okay – try again – we must have missed a turn... and we ended up back at the beginning again! After asking a friendly Irish couple where we should be heading, we found the museum was way back over the river again, and decided that maybe Leprechauns weren't going to be that much fun after all! So, map in hand, we went off in search of our hotel. Part way there, we had a choice of roads to take, and whilst waiting at a crossing trying to decide which way to go, a young woman asked if we were lost. Well, not quite thank you, but she asked where we were heading, and then said, "You aren't going down that street, are you?"

Well, yes, it seemed like the slightly quicker way...

"I work at the Garda (Police) Station, and I'd say don't!" Our "Why?" was met with a very withering look, the lights changed and we were across the road. Our guardian angel had gone, but what on earth was she talking about? The street looked perfectly respectable to us! But the thought of seeing Michael later on made us err on the side of caution and take the "safe" route. A short while later, hotel found, and room entered, time for a quick feet-up and cuppa before we went off in search of the Grand Canal Theatre.

About a ten minute walk later, and we found the theatre in the newly developing canal / dockside area. Rather like London Docklands, lots of modern buildings and apartments. The theatre is a strange building, all on the skew-wiff! We kept wanting to shove it upright – it seemed to lean over at a strange angle! The stage door was easy to find - was it really on Misery Street? (Well, it was aptly named later on!)

Back to the hotel to have a wash and brush up, find some dinner, and back to the theatre for the show. Hey! Where did that cold wind suddenly come from? Oh well, we'll be inside for the show, and won't care! Much to my disappointment, I wasn't able to charm the seller of merchandise in to letting me have the life-size Michael / Edna cardboard cut out for a fiver! Spoil-sport! And Celia also pointed out it would need its own seat on the plane home! No fun, some people! Our row 5 stalls seats turned out to be row 3, as they had taken out rows 1 & 2! Result! Close up view!

Well, what can be said about the show that we haven't already said so many times? So familiar now, but just as endearing. The tour cast is full of life and gave a brilliant performance. We did think at first that the audience was going to be a little reserved, but we needn't have worried! We weren't the only ones making a lot of noise! And, you know

what... that guy who plays Edna isn't half bad! Wonder who it is? Whoever he is, he's certainly showing a lot more leg than in the early days – got several glimpses of legs, lacy knickers and garters!

Okay, stage door time... why was everyone standing around in the foyer looking dubious? Well, we soon found out why Misery Street is called that! The rain was coming down almost horizontally, it was freezing cold, and the wind was blowing up a storm. And why are stage doors always in some sort of wind tunnel? We met Barbara, Pauline and Pat who had come to the door after arriving in Dublin a little earlier that afternoon. Umbrellas? No chance! Rain? Plenty of chance! Wind? A veritable hurricane! Did get to apprehend Mickey Dolenz for an autograph on his way out, and managed to tell him I had seen the Monkees only UK show back in the '60s. Obviously didn't want to be reminded of how old he was – I just got "Oh!" as an answer!

Liam was a sweetie, but was keeping one eye on the weather! With the weather so bad, no one wanted to hang around for long – the slight overhang from the roof only served to make the rain drip down on us, and down our necks, all the more! Michael appeared, snuggled up in his grey overcoat and cap, accompanied by Andrew. He did seem surprised to see an English contingent there, and I got a nice "Oh, hello!" A sort of "What are you doing here?"! I did manage to hand him another album of Mayhem pictures from Doris and I, and got rewarded with a big smile and a "Thanks". Just a fleeting moment, as he and Andrew made a dive for the waiting taxi, waved and were gone.

We eventually paddled our way back to our hotel, by now frozen and wet. Now, why didn't someone tell us we would need a degree in engineering or similar in order to work the shower? The wind howled and the rain battered down all night, but next morning – blue skies! So, off we went to find some brunch in town. Spotted a bar down a side street that was advertising all-day breakfasts – sounded good to us! Once outside it, we realised it was one of the places, Bruxelles, Michael had spoken about in an earlier Irish radio interview as one of his favourites! Well, if it's good enough for our Michael... The barman said it was a popular place for "stars" as it is adjacent to a very posh hotel! Our breakfast was definitely good!

We decided to take a slow walk to the theatre for the matinee, via numerous shops! Part way along the river-side walkway, Celia realised that her purse was missing. Not sure what to do, and not knowing where it had been lost we carried on to the theatre, to gather thoughts. We were told where the Police station was, and meanwhile rang home to get a phone number for the last shop we'd been in. No luck with the shop, and it was almost time for the show. So, getting priorities right (!) in we went, to join Lila, Jaey, Barbara, Pauline, Pat, Nancy and Ria. And a very noisy school party! Another fabulous show, with a complete standing ovation at the end! Now what to do? Stage door won over the Police station for the time being, and we waited for a while until a nice chap came out to say that if we were waiting for Michael he was unlikely to be out, as he was feeling unwell. Shucks! Not sure if the school party, now standing on the steps of the building opposite, had any influence on this decision, as they were really hyperactive and so loud by now! Brave Liam had gone over to them with a security / bodyguard guy – wondered would we ever see him again?! (Turns out Michael was feeling poorly for a day or two, but you know Michael... the show must go on...)

So, for us, off to find the Police Station! A novel way to spend our last evening in Dublin! A very young, very cute, very sweet Irish policeman came out to help, however there was definitely a language barrier! But sorted as best we could until we got back home. A meal, then a ride of death on the bus back to the airport! A trip which usually takes around 30 minutes was only about half that at the most! Luggage from the racks flying everywhere, and we kept sliding out of our seats! Wonder if he was late for his dinner... or did he have a date at the Grand Canal Theatre later that evening?

Our flight was on time again, and two tired but happy people got back to Essex about midnight. And, after several phone calls, found out Celia's purse had been handed in to the police station, completely untouched, just a shame it wasn't while we were there! Must have been found almost as soon as we realised it had gone, as it was handed in so close by.

Was the trip worth it? Of course it was! Was the show great? Of course it was! Was it worth getting drenched just to see Michael for a few moments? Of course it was! Would we do it again? Of course we would!

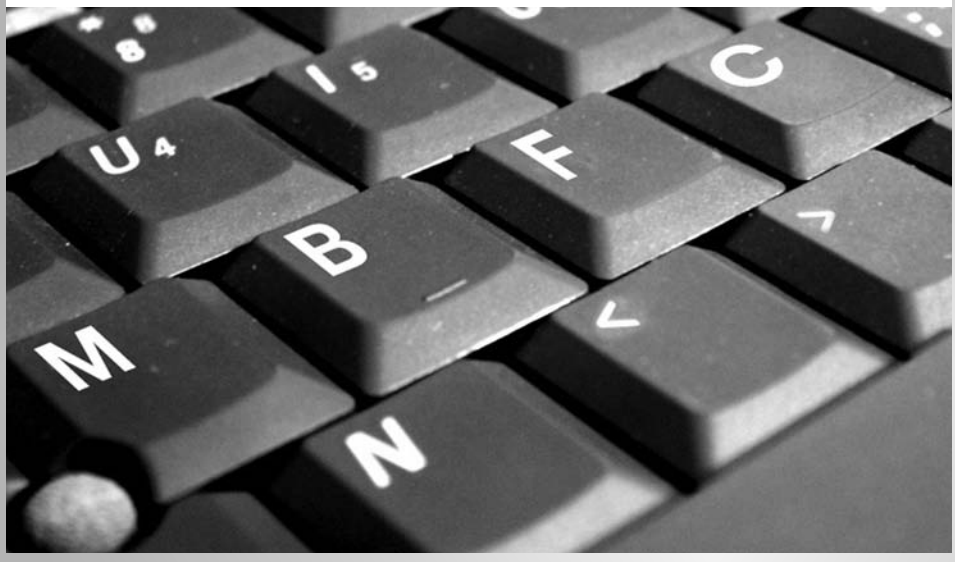
THE MICHAEL BALL FAN CLUB ONLINE

You can find our website at

www.mbfc.co.uk

Our site features a very active forum where many a debate has gone on between fans from all over the world. You can also find all the latest news and photos - why not check it out today?

There is also a Fan Club Members Forum for fan club members only. The password to access it is silver.



MOVING HOUSE?

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

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

IMPORTANT!

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

INFOLINE NUMBER

0871 221 7811

PEN PALS / TRAVEL TALK

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

ROSEMARY BROWN
5 HEDGEMERE
TAVERHAM
NORWICH
NR8 6GG

Rosemary would love to hear from anyone in the Norwich Area with a view to travelling to concerts together.

MERIEL KIRTON
41 MOOR LANE EAST
SOUTH SHIELDS
TYNE AND WEAR
NE34 6DE

Meriel says she feels a bit cut-off as she doesn't have a computer so hopes there is someone else out there who feels the same way and is still interested in writing letters!

hairspray

STARRING

MICHAEL BALL

AT THE FOLLOWING VENUES:

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15 Mar - 26 Mar
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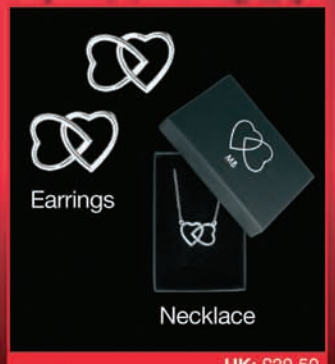

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