

ON THE BALL

Issue 58



Hi Everyone,

Isn't that a lovely photo of Michael and Freddie that he very kindly said we could use on our front cover? It was posted on Twitpic with the caption, "Michael Ball and Freddie - rehabilitation programme completed and a new life ahead for Freddie!"

Our last On The Ball was sent out just before the Heroes Tour was about to start and this one is full of stories about all the fun everyone had. The DVD was recorded in Birmingham and will be released on 14 November 2011. The packshot and full details of how to pre-order it can be found on the back cover of this issue.

So now it's almost time for Sweeney Todd in Chichester to start. Michael has been teasing us with his tweets about the first cut throat razor shave he had, his haircut which is being done in stages and how the rehearsals have been going. When we saw him at the Radio 2 Studio during Sunday Brunch we managed to get a couple of photos which are below. We can't wait to see this production!

LOVE
Maureen and Gill



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

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Dear Everyone,

Hope you're all well. Sitting here in the studio at Radio 2 having just finished the show (with Katherine Jenkins) at the end of a long but thrilling week.... and, it all starts again tomorrow morning. Yes, I'm up to my neck (or throat!) in rehearsals for Sweeney Todd and its hard work, and challenging and so exciting.

I can't actually believe that we will be in front of an audience (and I hope loads of you are able to come) in just a few weeks. I don't think I need to warn you again about how different this show is to anything I have done before. I have never been afraid of taking on new challenges and you, my amazing fans, have never worried about embracing these new projects. Bring it on!!

Just as Sweeney finishes in Chichester we will be releasing the D.V.D. of the

'Heroes' tour and I am delighted with how it has come out. The atmosphere has really been captured I think.

I loved this tour. I think it was the best yet and I'm so pleased we were able to film it. It seems so long ago now.

In other news, Freddie is recovering amazingly well and is now running around like a puppy. It's a miracle. Thank you for all your thoughts and prayers and warm wishes.

So I better go and try to learn all the lines now. There are lots of them and then of course there's the hair style to decide on!!!

Take care and stay safe and I hope we get to see each other at some point down in Chichester. It is beautiful there.

Good boys and lots of love, always.

Mike

x



HEROES TOUR 2011 – ROYAL ALBERT HALL

by Moira Smith. Photos: Marta Dobrowolska



Was I looking forward to the Heroes concert? Yes! Was I excited? No. Why? Because I was worrying about the journey, believe it or not! Anyway, we (that's husband Den and I) arrived at the Royal Albert Hall safely with half an hour to spare. We found the door we had to go in and waited outside for a little while, just enough time to phone home and say we had arrived safely. Time to go in, and that's when the butterflies in my stomach started, we were actually going to see Michael again, performing live - WOW!

We were shown to our seats and what a lovely surprise, we were eight rows from the front on the aisle side, fantastic! While we were waiting for the concert to begin, I was looking around to see if I could recognise any other fans. I saw Maureen and Gill and went to introduce myself to them. It was so lovely meeting them as this was the first time I had been to a concert when they were there too. I did see some other fans, but I didn't introduce myself to them as I felt a bit shy.

The band began their intro and the tingle began in my body. Then Michael was on stage, looking very fit and a lot slimmer (we hadn't seen him live since

Hairspray in the West End). Michael and the Royal Albert Hall were a perfect match. Michael's voice resonating around the theatre, every note perfect, he sung magnificently. His intro to each song was told with so much emotion. I sat totally enthralled hanging on every word and note. In no time at all the entire first half was over.

The second half began and Michael sung some of his old but much loved favourites. I love the way he sings 'Empty Chairs', it always moves me so much and the same with 'I Dreamed A Dream'. Soon it was nearing the end of the concert and Michael started singing 'Avenues and Alleyways' and fans started to move down to the front of the stage for "party time" - I went too! Oh wow, the atmosphere was electric as we all danced and clapped to the next few songs. 'One Step Out Of Time' got a big response from all of us. Then it was all over, or so we thought, but Michael, generous as always, came back on stage to sing three more songs including 'Love Changes Everything', which we were all singing along with. Michael ended with 'For Once In My Life', pure magic.

I was so pleased I had gone forward

for party time as this was something I had always wanted to do, but never had seats near the front before. So that was a dream fulfilled. So the end had come, I was sorry the show was over, it had been so fantastic and we had enjoyed every minute. As we were walking up the stairs to leave the theatre I noticed a familiar face going down the stairs opposite us. It was Sir Andrew Lloyd Webber, so what did I do without even thinking about it? I said, "Hi Andrew" and waved, and blow me down if he didn't wave back and say hello to me! I was absolutely thrilled. What a contradiction. I was too shy to say hello to fans, but spoke to Andrew Lloyd Webber! When I told our girls they were flabbergasted. They couldn't believe I would have so much gall!

I would just like to say a big thank you to our daughter Terri for giving us the tickets for the concert as a Christmas present. Thanks also to Maureen and Gill for all the hard work they do for us, and of course a big thank you to Michael for giving us all so much pleasure over and over again. I'm looking forward to the DVD to relive it all again!



MY MEMORABLE MICHAEL TOUR EXPERIENCE

by **Pauline Broughton**

After a few bad experiences last year I left Hull and saw Michael in Manchester on Wednesday 1st June. When I went to the stage door I had just missed him but was talking to some of the fans. I saw the concert and it was brilliant, despite the bouncers who were unbelievable.

The next day I left Manchester and went to Sheffield. Normally I go to Michael's concerts with my husband but I went on my own this time, owing this to Maureen and Gill for passing my details on to someone who had a spare ticket. So thank you to Alice for the ticket because I had the time of my life - especially when Michael sang 'I Can't Help Falling In Love With You', knelt down in front of me, took my hand while singing to me and then kissed me on the lips! Well, I just melted and when he let go I just slid down the front of the stage and I was shaking for days after. It's something I will never forget!

My next experience was when I did the Meet & Greet in Nottingham. I was so nervous on meeting him but Michael made us feel so relaxed. There were about nine people there and we all had our photos taken, but before the



photographer took mine I asked if I could have one with my glasses on and one without my glasses on. With that

Michael took my glasses off my face and put them on his just as the photo was taken! It was so funny!

WHEN MICHAEL MET JULIA

by **Marta Dobrowolska**

This photo was taken during the Meet & Greet in London. There is Michael with my daughter Julia. I think she was one of the youngest, or maybe the youngest fan during the whole tour.

Julia is a real fan. She is just five years old, but she knows many of Michael's songs, and she sings them everyday - especially 'Love Changes Everything'!



Liverpool Found Their Hero

By: Alana Wadkin



The 2011 'Heroes' Tour was highly anticipated, after all it has been two years since Michael last toured. There were rumours flying around saying this would be the best tour ever, I have only been to the last 3 tours but it was the best... I thought the 'Past and Present Tour' would be very hard to top; this 'Heroes' Tour surpassed that and was totally fabulous! The staging, lighting and vocal arrangements were amazing - the mixture of new and old songs was just right. The talent on stage was phenomenal! A great live band, five fantastic guest vocalists (Sandra Marvin, Adrian Hansel, Holly James, Laura Tebbutt and Gary Watson) and the sensational Michael Ball. Over two hours of pure joy, what more could you ask for! I never danced as much in my life... I went to Manchester, Liverpool and the first Birmingham concert: I thoroughly enjoyed every second and literally had an absolute ball but I thought Liverpool was the best as regards atmosphere and audience interaction by far!

Liverpool Empire is my local venue, so I persuaded Mum and Dad to take me early to go to see Michael arriving. That day was glorious and hot, there

was a large crowd building at the stage door. It was nice to see many of my friends again and meet new friends. When the tour bus arrived, all I could hear was screaming and I was trying to see over lots of heads. Somehow Andrew spotted me and told Michael where I was. "Alana, I will be with you in a mo, get your camera ready!" Michael shouted over, he knows what Mum is like with cameras! Michael made his way through the crowd to me, gave me a sly kiss and a lovely hug while posing for a photo. It was over in seconds, Michael went in to rehearse. Dad was supposed to record Michael on the video camera but it was on the wrong mode and recorded nothing, I thought 'oh great, he's doing Mum's trick again' and I hadn't got anything with Michael. To our surprise Mum had taken a beautiful photograph of Michael with me, I am delighted with it - the photo is in my room pride of place... I think this is the best one yet! It is a lovely photo of Michael and it doesn't look like there's anything wrong with me. I also managed to have some photos taken with Adrian and Gary; they are lovely lads - really chatty.

With any Michael concert, I get

really excited just before it starts but the Liverpool Empire brought a new excitement because the concert was an absolute sell-out and the atmosphere was electric from the beginning, we have never experienced anything like it before. Liverpool loves Michael... As the lights dimmed, the entire theatre erupted with cheers and applause. The band struck up and began playing the overture, which consisted of the theme tunes from Michael's favourite film heroes such as Indiana Jones, James Bond and Flash Gordon. All the guest vocalists came on stage then Michael appears at the top of the stairs (looking gorgeous as ever) and starts to sing 'Holding Out For A Hero' by Bonny Tyler, a very clever up-tempo show opener which got the audience going and set the theme of the concert really well. Michael's voice was so powerful; you could see Michael was on cracking form. Michael then gave 'Bad Things' from *True Blood*, the Ball magic; this cheeky/sexy rendition made the audience scream a lot. The next song Michael introduced by saying "you are filling me with Glee", then he launched into 'Don't Stop Believing' originally by Journey but recently became popular thanks to the US TV series Glee. I was very pleased Michael included it in this tour because I was one of the people who suggested the song to Michael, I knew it would be a lively number that Michael could make his own - it didn't disappoint... I loved the harmonies and the audience interaction during the song.

The following few songs were from Michael's new album *Heroes* and included Long John Baldry's 'Let The Heartaches Begin', Neil Diamond's 'Play Me', Johnny Mathis' 'Misty', Tom Jones' 'I'll Never Fall In Love Again' and Billy Joel's 'New York State Of Mind'. I enjoyed Michael's stories and introductions leading to each song, especially when he compared himself to the radio presenter in the film *Play Misty For Me* with the obsessive fan - which made me burst out laughing! All the songs showed off Michael's vocal range and ability superbly and made me realise why I first admired Michael so much. I found myself singing along to them, much to the amusement of the people around me. If there could be a city classed as a "hero", New York

would be Michael's so the next section of the concert paid tribute to New York. This was a highlight because it showed the guests' vocal skills individually as well as enabling various group harmonies and a bit of choreography. First Michael performed 'On Broadway' brilliantly with Adrian and Gary, I liked the step routine. Laura did a lovely version of Alicia Keyes' 'Empire State Of Mind', I was swaying in time with the music. Gary sang 'Englishman In New York' with Michael, far better than Sting in my opinion. Then Holly did a wonderful rendition of 'Fame' and the choreography was very good – I was in my element dancing away. Sandra belted out 'Broadway Baby' with an incredible long end note, which received a standing ovation. What better way to end the tribute other than with Michael singing Frank Sinatra's classic 'New York New York', which was amazing. Michael went into the interval with Barry Manilow's 'Weekend In New England' by saying "Do you know what's the best thing about New York? The fact you can't wait to get out of it and visit New England at the weekends!" I absolutely loved how Michael sang the song; it suits his voice perfectly. I couldn't help singing along to this, it happens every time I hear Michael's version.

The second half began with songs from musical theatre – the *Sunset Boulevard* overture played, Michael stepped on to the stage to rapturous applause then he sang 'As If We Never Said Goodbye' and 'Sunset Boulevard', which were amazing. Michael lead up to singing 'Empty Chairs, Empty Tables' and 'I Dreamed A Dream' by referring to *Les Misérables*' 25th anniversary last year and said how he hopes he'll be performing these songs for another 25 years, which received a massive audience response. Michael sung these with such emotion and passion. As he mentioned the *Hairspray* tour, Michael said how sorry he was that he never came to Liverpool with Edna (my sentiments exactly) and how he's going from an overweight agoraphobic mother of one from Baltimore to a serial killer in *Sweeney Todd* who eats all the pies! Michael charmed all the ladies in the audience when he said "looking at the audience here tonight, the next song is very appropriate" and began singing

'Pretty Women' from *Sweeney*, which blended into 'Not While I'm Around' – just beautiful. Then it came to one of my favourite musical theatre songs – 'This Is The Moment' from *Jekyll and Hyde*; a very popular choice with the audience, you could hear a pin drop as Michael performed this fantastic song and he got a well deserved standing ovation. Many people have attempted to sing that song but haven't come near Michael and as far as I am concerned it will always be Michael's song no matter what... I was delighted when Michael launched into Queen's classic 'Somebody To Love' because I originally suggested it to Michael when we first met in 2007 and he said he would definitely look at it in the future. I thought Michael could make it his own and identify with the lyrics; I could imagine Michael singing it. Michael sang the song amazingly with the guest vocalists backing him; it was far better than I ever imagined! The audience joined in too and gave the biggest reaction I have ever heard once Michael belted out the last note. Phenomenal from start to finish! Michael is an exceptional showman (just like the great Freddie Mercury was), who does this brilliant song justice. I loved this performance – definitely a special highlight of the tour.

Party time kicked off with Tony Christie's 'Avenues And Alleyways' which really suits Michael's voice and he performed it fantastically. The entire theatre really enjoyed every second and got up to dance and remained standing until the end of the concert. A surprising choice, 'Pencil Full Of Lead' by Paolo Nutini, was next to be given the Ball treatment. It was better than the original because you could hear what the lyrics were, plus Michael did some unique dance movements and the guest vocalists were having fun too creating a party atmosphere. An old favourite 'One Step Out Of Time' returned, I love the rocky version – there were lots of people punching the air including me! Michael calmed things down by singing a breathtaking version of the Elvis Presley classic 'I Can't Help Falling In Love With You'; there was a lot of arm waving/swaying in time with the music and screaming especially when Michael kissed a lady in the audience. Michael said his thanks and

goodbyes then walked off the stage to deafening cheering and applause (cue the encore). We definitely wanted more of the Ball! Michael returned to sing a very lively and cheeky version of Tom Jones' 'Help Yourself', the pelvic thrusts were back to my delight! Michael encouraged the audience to sing along with him to his signature song 'Love Changes Everything', Michael sang this with such power – the best I have ever heard him sing it and he held the 'money' note for a lot longer. The final song Michael performed was Tony Bennett's 'For Once In My Life'. It was sung beautifully – the perfect way to end a fabulous concert. Michael is just a phenomenally talented performer who keeps getting better and better!

We weren't going to the stage door afterwards but I changed my mind and went, I was so glad I did. We literally bumped into Adrian, Gary, Laura and Holly trying to cross the road in between the tour buses. They said "Alana, we could see you from the stage; the spotlight was on you most of the time – boy, you were going to town, weren't you?" I was made up by this and we said it was a fantastic show. The stage door was absolutely chocker with fans so we decided to wait opposite the tour bus for Michael. We saw Michael coming out of another door by his bus (not the stage door) so we went over, Michael saw me and said "Oh Alana, I saw you dancing away, you were like a lunatic!" – touched my hand then give a wink and a gorgeous smile. All you could hear were several intakes of breaths and 'awwwwww' sounds. Michael then turned around to the massive crowd and said "Thank you for a truly special night, Liverpool has been the best by far!" Everybody cheered and Michael finally got on the bus after saying goodbye – "Alana, I'll see ya again."

Liverpool was just electric and the best atmosphere – we scousers know how to party! I just want to thank Andrew for pointing me out to Michael in the crowd and of course Michael for always acknowledging me and going out of his way to come over. That says a lot and means the world! So that's another fantastic memory which I will treasure forever, it's great to be a BALLETTTE!



PLYMOUTH by Cherry Parish

The story starts quite a few months ago when I bought two tickets for me and Jemma, a young friend of mine. I have been a fan club member for nearly 20 years (not sure how long but I am sure Gill and Maureen would be able to tell me) and this was the first time ever I had got front row seats. Believe me over the months I have continually looked at the tickets and the seat planner to make sure they were front row as I couldn't believe my luck!

I had booked the tickets on the first day possible and by the time the show came around Jemma was 7 months pregnant. She hadn't had a very good pregnancy and I was concerned that when party time started she might get pushed and shoved so she decided not to go. So Hayley, another young friend of mine, stepped in. It wasn't

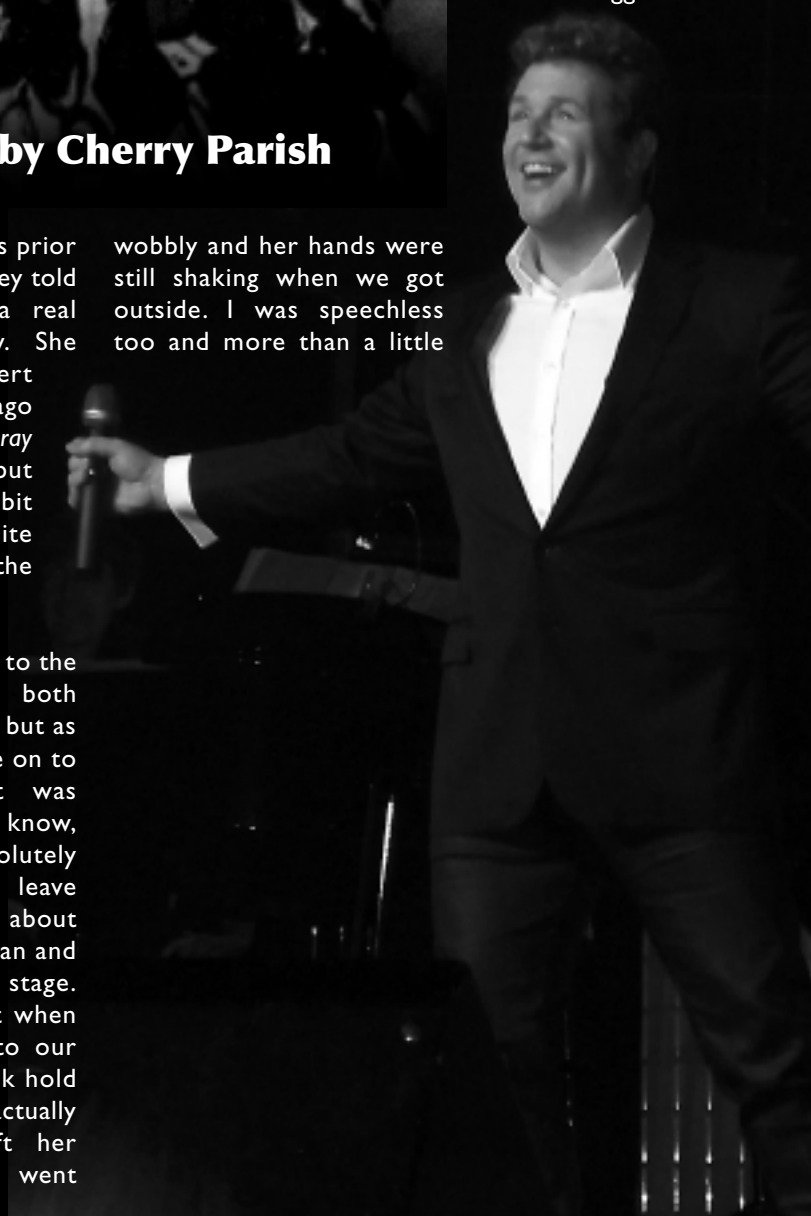
until about two weeks prior to the show that Hayley told me that she was a real Michael Ball fan now. She had come to a concert with me a few years ago and also to see *Hairspray* and she liked him, but now she liked him a bit more! So she was quite happy to be going to the concert with me.

By the time we got to the Pavilions we were both soaking wet and cold, but as soon as Michael came on to the stage all that was forgotten. As we all know, the shows were absolutely fantastic and I will leave others to tell you all about them. Party time began and we all went to the stage. Then came the point when Michael came over to our side of the stage, took hold of Hayley's hand and actually kissed her! He left her speechless. Her legs went

wobbly and her hands were still shaking when we got outside. I was speechless too and more than a little

jealous, as after all I was the longer serving fan! However, he was hardly likely to kiss someone who was old enough to be his granny when there was a young, pretty girl to pick was he? Although a little peck on the cheek wouldn't have gone amiss!

What a truly awesome evening we had and as Hayley was driving us back home to Torquay we had to wait for her to stop shaking and to text her friends and write up what had happened on Facebook. Guess who asked when can we go see him again? I wonder who is Michael's biggest fan now!



OUR ENGLISH EXCURSION



*Attended a wedding...
(Congratulations again, Petra and Helga)*

So June saw us traveling to England once again to catch Michael on tour. Part of our travel plan was to get a group picture with Michael at the stage door... but for some unforeseen reason, we kept missing him as we....



Just had to do the 'Abbey Road' thing...



Climbed Primrose Heath to see London below...



...but it turned out to be a typical rainy day in London (what a surprise) so we had to point out which way London was located in the picture!



Acted really smart and sophisticated at Oxford University...



Yes, Bosham is still flooding!



There was one everywhere we stopped - we felt like we were back in New York!



All is ready for Michael's next gig - and we even picked up our tickets too!



Guildford was as beautiful as everyone said it was...and we came across some students busking in an underpass... déjà vu? Think we heard Michael talk about doing the same some years back.



When in Rome.... (or England for that matter)

So after missing him due to our little adventures, we decided to catch him on the last day of the tour at Brighton. We wore our "Power Ball" T-shirts and... we missed him again!!! So we did the next best thing. We took a picture with the tour bus (thanks to Gill and Maureen).

Thanks again Michael for making your concert tour a great touristic adventure for us!!

Nancy, Ana, Ria, and Cira



A LUCKY PROGRAMME AT THE SHOOTING STAR CONCERT

By Sissel Nyheim & Marie Östlund



It's October 2010 and we have agreed that a weekend in London is just what we need to recharge our batteries and to get a break from our busy everyday lives. Michael has announced that he will be doing a Shooting Star Charity Concert and at Donmar Warehouse they are playing *Passion* so it did not take long to make up our minds and book our trip.

It was great to be back at the Donmar – the last visit was in 2001 for *Alone Together* so it became a trip down memory lane. We really enjoyed *Passion*, it's a great venue of course and Elena Rogers (as Fosca) made an impression on us.

The Shooting Star concert was fantastic and great in every way with lots of surprises - not only musically but with the guest artists that joined Michael on stage this evening.

So... back to what became a magic Sunday in London in more than one way... We have just found our seats in the Prince of Wales Theatre and are looking in our programs. When Sissel is looking in her program she notices that there is a flyer inserted, but just thinks it is some kind of advertisement and she nearly loses it when it falls on the floor

on the way out to the foyer in the interval, but Sissel hesitantly picks it up, still without looking at it. They only thing she has noticed is that on one side it has a photo of Michael.

From the stage Michael tells the audience that there are four "lucky programs" in the house tonight and asks if someone has got them?? And it is then that Sissel starts thinking - is it not just an advertisement? Sissel takes out the flyer, reads it and the expression on her face is something to be seen! Sissel has won two tickets to a concert during the Heroes Tour, meet & greet with Michael and "the best seats in the house". What a surprise! And Sissel kept saying "I never win anything!" Marie and our English friends were of course also surprised, a bit jealous maybe, but happy for Sissel. What a great prize and what a wonderful ending to a weekend in London!

Back home again Sissel wrote to Sarah at Live Nation and we found out that we could choose any concert we wanted during the Heroes Tour for our prize tickets and meet & greet. After a little discussion we agreed on the Royal Albert Hall. It is a great venue and it will be a great finale to the trip we'd already planned and booked for Michael's

upcoming tour. The only thing we could do now was wait!

It was a long and cold winter but finally summer was here! The tickets arrived by special delivery together with a nice and informative letter. Now it was real! When in the UK we always try to combine the concerts with catching up with friends and to be tourists and see more of the country.

Marie left Sweden in time for the concerts in Cardiff and Oxford and also spent a few lovely, but cold, days on the Isle of Wight before Sissel joined in time for the concert in Portsmouth.

Portsmouth welcomed us with heavy rain but the concert was fabulous! Michael had put together a balanced mix of familiar songs and new material. We both now have many new favorite songs after this tour but to mention a few "The New York Tribute" and Queen's 'Somebody To Love' has a special place in our hearts. Can we please have 'Bohemian Rhapsody' next time?

We met Michael at the stagedoor in Bristol and told him we were looking forward to the concert at Royal Albert Hall and that we were one of the winners from the Shooting Star concert. After the

concert in Bristol it was time for London and Royal Albert Hall.

By the time we got to London it had at last stopped raining. You should have seen us in Portsmouth, the Dyffryn Garden concert comes to mind, it was the last time we were that wet!

It was a nice and pleasant day so we went for a walk through Kensington Gardens and the Conservatory, Notting Hill and Holland Park before the concert and our meet & greet. We also had time to have some afternoon tea at the Orangery at Kensington Palace that has now opened again after the renovations.

In the information we got from Michaels management we should be at Albert Hall at 5.30 pm. Once there we called and said that we'd arrived. Outside we met Sue and her husband who also had won tickets at the Shooting Star concert and we joined up with them. We were let in through the stage door and had to wait a while at reception/security for someone to come and get us. It was really interesting to see how many people were passing by here and how many staff it takes to organize a concert at Royal Albert Hall.

A kind woman came and escorted us the back way through corridors and a lift to a big meeting room that had chairs lined up around the walls. It was a strange feeling to sit here and wait. We were all a bit tense as we did not really know what was happening next. We were joined by the people who had bought tickets for the Meet & Greet.

Michael was now on his way! We were informed that we should stay seated and that we would all have our own moment with Michael and could get a program or other item signed. There was also going to be a photo opportunity with Michael and time for questions. I guess most people in the room felt a bit nervous but as soon as Michael entered the room that feeling disappeared.

Andrew, Michael's PA, made sure everything went smoothly and we all got our photo taken with Michael and we all had a chance to talk to him. After that it was question time and Michael answered all of them and was very professional throughout the whole event. All of a sudden it was time for him to go and prepare for the concert and he left the room. Happy, we went out to our friends who were now waiting for us in the foyer and we celebrated with a glass of wine.

The concert tickets that we won were the best in the house! The best seats in the house are not in the first row in front of the stage but further back in section J. Disappointing that it was not in the front row? Not at all! The sound here was great and the best thing was that we could actually see the whole stage show and all the lighting effects (and they were many).

Now we only had one more day and one concert left before it was time for us to fly home and take part in the Midsummer Eve celebrations - an important day both in Sweden and Norway. A visit to and a guided tour of the Globe Theatre during the day where we could watch some of the "Dr Faust" rehearsals, and then yet another fantastic concert at night. Could life be any better?

We have many great memories with us back home! The concerts that got better and better every time, catching up and meeting old and new friends from all over the world and then of course stage door moments. Michael, we would never ever wait over an hour in pouring rain for anybody else than you!

See you all in Chichester!

EGGSTRAVAGANZA!

By Debbie Thompson

I'm thrilled to have won this egg on eBay, it's especially good knowing that the money is going to The Royal Blind Charity. I live in New Zealand and am, of course, a huge fan of Michael. My family is amused at the growing pile of CDs and DVDs (I have them all)!

I wish to say a big THANK YOU to the fan club for always keeping me up to date with the gossip. I haven't got to see one of Michael's shows in person yet, but don't worry, that day will come.

The very precious jewellery was the watch Edna wore for the duration of *Hairspray* and the lovely Daisy earrings, which I haven't seen in any photos, but he (she) must have worn them at some time. I LOVE, LOVE, LOVE them!! Thank you Michael and thank you MBFC!



I Have To Set Priorities In My Life!

By **Andreo Kohler**



I've booked three concerts, the one in Edinburgh and - as we call them "the golden ones" at the RAH in London! (although, you can call every concert of Michael's golden!) High stress levels, booking pre-order tickets online, will my computer work with me? Took a day off from work... I mean, you have to set priorities in your life, right?! A mistake happened since I typed at a world-record speed: I booked insurance, which is only available for people who live in the United Kingdom... unfortunately me and my sister are not citizens of this beautiful country... but why on earth does the programme put it together with the ticket selling for non UK-citizens?

Medium stress level, as our employer - we both work for a health insurance company in Switzerland - got the strict order not to book any vacations before April 2011, due to some merger planning with another big

company. Finally at the end of April we knew for sure, that the concerts were safe to us! Of course we had already pre-booked hotels and flights (!!!) since we knew that WE WANTED TO SEE MICHAEL, no matter what may come! I mean, you have to set priorities in your life, right? But still, there are worries in our job - the company could not get a good deal to merge so they had to let people go... a few of them worked for more than twenty years for the company. This time we were the lucky ones!

Another medium stress level, as FedEx did send an email to confirm, that they would deliver the tickets on day X, personal signature necessary! It's quite an amount you have to pay for but the tickets are insured! A friendly call to FedEx to ask, about what time the courier would deliver the tickets and we just got the strict answer right away: "Between 09.00 am and 04.00 pm, it's the closest

information we can give you"! Alright then, it means another day off from work since they needed a personal signature before handing out the tickets. I knew, on that upcoming (FedEx) day X the timetable at work was completely filled with important meetings, no chance to get a (honest) day off from my boss! What to do? Calling in sick, early enough in the morning so my voice was still a bit cracked: "Yes, a terrible migraine just hit me in the middle of the night, feeling still poorly! Sorry, can't come today". Well, I normally hate lies but you have to set priorities in your life, right? By the way, I did go back to work the next day, playing still a bit "dizzy" in the head (!) and asked the team about all the discussions at those meetings and no one could tell me exactly, what it was about... until today! I, on the other hand knew exactly, what I'd worked for!

Back to FedEx: during waiting time



Photo: Sharon Scarrott

for the relief sound of the door bell, I was cleaning the apartment... at 04.30pm still no signs from FedEx, another (still friendly) call to them: "Oh, we just tried to call you because nobody answered the door, so we just put your tickets into your mail-box, this morning around 09.30 am." What! Just like delivering by a common postman, without any signature! But I was so happy, that the right tickets arrived safely, I just swallowed my anger and thanked the call-centre employee... of course I was home the whole day, my phone was working perfectly and so did my door bell and my ears... but it does not matter, we've got the tickets! I mean, you have to set priorities in your life, right? And our apartment was cleaner than ever!

High stress level, since there is only one day left for leaving to get to Edinburgh and there is this Icelandic volcano, this time the Grimsvotn, that is responsible for cancelling flights to and closing airports in Scotland! Checked the same flight on Tuesday as we have it booked for Wednesday and here I must read the awful message "Cancelled due to some ash clouds from Icelandic volcano"! My heart almost stopped (and my work)... eyes filled with tears, running into the bathroom... taking a breath, cleaning up the face, looking into the mirror and say to myself: "Everything that has

to do with Michael will be okay, don't lose your hope, 'cause if you lose hope, you freeze..." I just remembered this perfect sentence from the movie 'England, My England' and it's so true, for every situation in your life!

At the very next day with hope in our luggage we drove to the airport, checked in and... finally sat in the airplane... tears of luck in our eyes this time! We were not sure until one hour before the flight if we could actually fly to Scotland but the ash cloud has moved further north.

It was the first time for us joining a concert at the Usher Hall and we just love this wonderful venue and the city of Edinburgh. It was so good seeing familiar faces at the stage door and the concert was breathtaking; Michael and "his kids" were brilliant and watching him performing in his Kilt was the peak of the evening! The Scottish audience was fantastic! Always a little worried about the view from our seats... we both are the size of a twelve year old kid - the sight could not have been better... two small children were in front of us!

Back home, our heads filled with lovely memories and positive spirits there comes another high stress level: Mister B. is sick, had to cancel the concert in Nottingham. Poor Michael! Since we have doctors who work for the company we asked one of them about the most effective treatment for the kind of infection Michael was suffering with. He said "our patient", male, 48 years young (almost 49), non-smoker and with no further health problems should be okay in a few days, IF he's able to rest! Does Michael give himself a rest? He seems a bit of a workaholic! Reading his Tweets every day to get more information about his health-situation, we were lucky to read, that he was on his way to get better, even strong enough to swim. We were sure, that he's got the best possible treatment and we truly hope that there will be enough time for him to rest and cure after the tour, pampering his body and his soul.

The last (but not least) cause of high stress levels was our Mum: I bought two tickets for her since in the

meantime she has become a big fan of Michael as well. Feeling perfectly healthy boarding the plane in Zurich she left it in London coughing, sneezing and shaking... the perfect flu! Knowing that she would not come to the concerts in this condition, because it would be disturbing for Michael and the audience, she swallowed a mixture of Boots medicine... and finally joined both concerts with a "High Flying Adored" feeling! (Back home, she started with the withdrawal symptoms but she's feeling "normal" by now!) It was nice talking to other friends and fans during the break and finally met Julia and Kerstin. We always wanted to tell them how great their website is!

It was amazing, being part of those two golden evenings at the RAH; the audience was great and what a treat to listen to Michael and the kids. Michael was in such a great shape, no (obvious) signs of illness! Again, at both evenings, very good seats, were even able to dance during party time close at the stage!

In such moments, Michael lets you forget all your fears, your anger, your different stress-levels and even your illness... you just FEEL RELAXED! I'll get the next refuelling of 'Michael's original Relaxing Mixture' in Chichester!



Photo: Marta Dobrowolska

A TRIP TO THE ROYAL ALBERT HALL

by Jill Olefsky, Northbrook, Illinois



Maureen and Gill, after seeing all your pictures for the past thirteen years, it was an absolute pleasure and an honour to meet you at the Royal Albert Hall and stand with you during party time at both concerts!

I'm still so thrilled to have finally seen Michael in concert - especially to witness him sing 'Empty Chairs, Empty Tables' in person (I first found out about Michael from hearing him on the CD of the original cast of *Les Miserables*), to have the chance to punch my arm up during 'One Step Out Of Time' and to see him sing 'Love Changes Everything' with Sir Andrew Lloyd Webber in the Hall... what fantastic memories!

I can guarantee that they won't be my last concerts!



Maxine Storey was very lucky and had two VIP Meet and Greets during the tour, one in Birmingham and one in Oxford. Here is one of her photos taken in Birmingham.



"Shall we have some love? Love's nice!"

by Caroline

I guess this story starts one sunny April afternoon in 2005, in London. Mum and I had zipped down there on a flying visit to see *Woman in White* as it turned out that we were suddenly much more interested in a certain member of the cast than had originally been the case (sorry Mr Crawford)! Well Michael playing a "middle aged, evil, fat b*****d" (his words, not mine) and singing a love duet with a rat wasn't something we got to see every day! OK, these days he can throw overweight American women and serial killers at us and we don't bat an eyelid, but in those days this wasn't one to be missed! We went and hung around at the stage door and when Michael arrived Mum took some photos, some of which turned out particularly well. Excitement over until showtime so we went to a nearby café (to recover!)... enter Scary American Stranger! I was just quietly ogling Mum's photos, minding my own business when I was aware someone was calling to me and pointing at the camera. "Show me" this lady said (she knew what I was looking at),

so I showed her! Some of the photos were really good so 'Scary American Stranger' gave me her email address and asked me to send her them when we got home. We were quite happy to do that, always happy to share these moments with anyone who'll listen! The show was fab, Michael showed us an entirely new side to his talents and totally blew us away, and the rest is history.

So, fast forward to earlier this year. 'Scary American Stranger' turned out not to be the least bit scary and is no longer a stranger - she is still American though! She is in fact Deb Jacobi from Salt Lake City and she's well known to many people (particularly on the forum) as Oldtime54. She is also one of my best friends, she has supported me (across cyberspace) through some very dodgy times in my life, we spent a fortnight together a few years ago so that I could show her some of this lovely country of ours (fish and chips at every available chance - I'm surprised she didn't LOOK like fish and chips by the time she left) and we incorporated a few West End shows, including *Kismet* (that beard was worth the ticket price alone!). We are in touch pretty much every day by email and basically make each other laugh a lot while marvelling at Michael's talents and antics.

Deb one day told me she was wondering about designing an MB t-shirt with an American theme, it sounded like an interesting project to me so I volunteered to help (and when I say volunteered, I basically refused to take no for an answer!) Between us we came up with three designs (Deb did all the hard work and then seems to credit me with the glory), two American themed

and one other. We hadn't planned on three but I remembered a photo that I just love. It was of Michael in silhouette taken by Carol Bethwaite (thanks for permission to use it Carol). Needless to say I pushed for a third t-shirt! Designing t-shirts when you're at opposite sides of the world is not a speedy process, but luckily we're both perfectionists, especially when it's a subject so close to both our hearts! So after a lot of random suggestions, lots of mind-changing and even more laughing, we got three we were happy with. I knew which one I wanted from the start, it was the one with "Give my regards to Broadway" and the photos of him from when he's been performing there. And then we stumbled across the final design for "my" shirt I just had to have that one too! I'm sure you'll agree it's an eye catching design.

I proudly wore my new shirt to see Michael in Newcastle, and was lucky enough to get the chance to have my photo with him. I love the photo - it's not particularly good of me, but who's looking at me when Michael's looking like this?? I'm certainly not! And then he winked at me! I know I'm pathetic, but trust me, that's not something I'll forget in a hurry. I also asked him if he'd mind signing the sleeve of my t-shirt, and he kindly obliged. He was really sweet and wrote his name really slowly and carefully so that the pen didn't snag on the material. Then he started to step away, came back at me with the pen and said "shall we have some love? Love's nice" and added love above his signature! I was pretty much beside myself by this point and couldn't wait to let Deb know what had happened as a result of our transatlantic t-shirt design! Deb and I both agree that Michael is the best there is and to see him live in action thrills us to bits! I can't wait for *Sweeney Todd*.



THE MICHAEL BALL FAN CLUB ONLINE

You can find our website at
www.mbfcc.co.uk

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

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



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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!



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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.

**CHARLOTTE BIRD
10 GORDON ROAD
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Charlotte would love to hear from someone nearby who would like to meet up with/travel to concerts with her.

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