

ON THE BALL

Issue 63



Hi Everyone

'Both Sides Now' was definitely another fabulous tour with a change to the usual format and it was great to hear Michael sing the songs from the album live. It was great to see so many old friends and to make some new ones. Many thanks to those of you who supplied reviews and photos which you will see in this issue.

We were just reading our letter from the last issue and we listed Michael's schedule for the first half of the year and said, "Guess we'll have to wait and see what's planned for the second half!" Well, we've got Audley End in August and Kenwood House in September to look forward to at the moment.

Here's some important information for you:

On The Ball Issue 64 will be available in December and it will be the first of our new full colour editions that you will be able to purchase.

Just to explain how it will work in future, as part of your membership you will receive a digital copy in a PDF format that you can read online or download. You will also be able to buy a printed copy which will cost £3.50 per issue. The printed version will be full colour throughout and with a thicker gloss cover, greatly improving the quality of the magazine.

You can pre-order the December edition right now by either going to the website **www.mbfc.biz/store** or by sending payment through the post by cheque, postal order or payment card. Postage details, utilising Royal Mail prices, are:

UK - £3.50 + £1.50 postage **Europe** - £3.50 + £2.50 postage **Elsewhere** - £3.50 + £3.50 postage

Payment should be sent to MBFC, PO Box 2073, Colchester CO4 3WS.

Love
Maureen and Gill

PS These delicious cakes were given to us by Barbara Mills, who made the one we gave Michael at last year's Event. She promised she'd have one for us in Southampton and when we saw them we were overwhelmed. Not only had she made us one each, the decorations celebrated the Fan Club's 21st birthday!



Layout by James Gaden - www.solitaryvision.co.uk. Front and back photos by Alastair Godfrey

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Dear Everyone,

Well, my lordies, I don't know about you but for me, that had to be one of the best, most enjoyable and seemingly quickest tours I have ever done. It simply flew by and all of us involved had the happiest of times. I wish we could do it all over again.

I'm so glad that everyone seemed to enjoy the format of the show so much and I think the two very different halves was a winning combination. I was so pleased (and relieved) that the album has been so well received and that the crowds seemed to enjoy hearing those songs in concert and I know that the musicals

always go down well so it was a lovely show to perform..... bloody hard to sing though!!!

..... And I got an Olivier award in the middle of it all. What an amazing time it has been and to have been able to share it with so many of you on the road has been a total joy.

I know I should be used to all the amazing kindness, support and loyalty and love that you show me but it really does take my breath away at times. I don't need to tell you how special it makes me feel and how lucky I know I am. You are Amazing. Thank you as always for continuing to be there for me and I hope we all have many more fantastic times to share.

I'm sure you have heard on the "grapevine" that I have decided not to pursue another theatre project this year but I'm sure it won't be long before I find the right vehicle to return to the West End in but meantime I am looking to do a few summer gigs, maybe some Christmas special concerts, the radio show and some T.V. events will continue to keep us in touch and life is as busy as ever.

Hopefully we'll get together soon and I send you masses of love and, as always, I can't wait to see you somewhere soon.

Take care and Good Bless

Mike
X



WITH LOVE AND AFFECTION

by Jen Garner



From Ipswich – North, South, East, West and finally Portsmouth, Mr. Ball—‘You Took Me Dancing’!

The 2013 tour was special in so many ways. The fun, friendships, love and laughter, the travelling, wining and dining were part and parcel of it all. Each day culminated in Michael’s ‘Both Sides Now’ concert, which has got to be one of the best ever.

I absolutely adored the album the first time I heard it and couldn’t wait to hear Michael singing it live on stage, when I really believe he is at his very best.

I was sure ‘Closest Thing To Crazy’ and his simplistic interpretation of ‘I Will Always Love You’ would prove to be my favourites but it turned out that wasn’t the case because from the moment Michael burst onto the stage singing Lady Gaga’s ‘On The Edge of Glory’ and Bruno Mars ‘Marry You’ every song that followed blew me away! From ‘I Won’t Let You Go’, ‘Songbird’ and ‘When I Loved You’ – both beautiful, to Joni Mitchell’s ‘Both Sides Now’. The upbeat and catchy ‘Fight The Fight’ from the new Tim Rice musical *From Here To Eternity* and the fabulous ‘Run’ completed the first Act. By this time I had been transported to another place.

In the second Act Michael, together with his backing singers, entertained us magnificently with songs exclusively from Musical Theatre - *Les Mis*, *The Lion King*, *Sweeney Todd*, *Joseph*, *Song and Dance*, *Cats*, *Phantom*, *Evita*, *Company* and ‘Anthem’ from *Chess* which I thought he sang fabulously and richly deserved the standing ovation at each performance.

The backing singers Soophia, Adrian and Alice were individually and collectively outstanding.

Michael included ‘Suddenly’ which was written especially for the latest *Les Mis* film and Andrew Lloyd Webber’s ‘The Perfect Song’ – the only one he has ever written without a musical in mind!

Michael gave us an insight into the recording of these new songs and he also made us laugh with his impressions of both Claude-Michel Schönberg and Dolly Parton! With tongue in cheek he talked about how it was not about winning at The Olivier Awards but the taking part that mattered. He said that he’d been practising facial expressions in case *Sweeney* was unsuccessful. I don’t think he need have worried do you?

Many, many congratulations Team Todd on picking

up no less than three awards - fantastic!

Of course the classic 'Love Changes Everything' brought the house down at the end of the second Act before we all put on our dancing shoes for 'Party Time' (otherwise known as The Ball Run!) Hundreds of fans went to the front of the stage and bopped away with Michael to 'One Step', 'Help Yourself'. 'You Can't Stop The Beat' finally swaying away to 'The Wonder of You'.

Last, but certainly not least, I must mention the amazing band, the strings, the tasteful lighting and the brilliant staging.

What a show. What a tour - I loved every second - THANK YOU!

Just a small personal footnote - my York trip will not be easily forgotten. 'Trip' being the operative word! My dancing shoes that night were posh, red and very high heeled. They got caught in the pavement and brought me down to earth with a bump.

I have to say that at all times I kept my composure, smiling and waving 'Good Night' gracefully. 'Pride cometh before a fall' - wouldn't you say? Didn't spoil the fun though!



Michael Returns To Hammersmith

By Mark Witchell



Here I was heading to Hammersmith for the all important DVD recording of Michael's latest tour. Having already been to sell out concerts on the tour in Birmingham & Plymouth I knew that this one could also be very special. Hammersmith always has a very special atmosphere. I have never been able to understand why. Michael hasn't played here on the last two tours - choosing to perform at the luxurious and spectacular Royal Albert Hall instead (which has a unique atmosphere of it's own I may add!) As soon as you enter into the Hammersmith Apollo you are immersed in the incredible musical history that this venue has enjoyed in the past. Acts such as The Beatles,

Cliff Richard, Michael Jackson, Tom Jones, The Temptations and The Rolling Stones have all played here since the hall first opened back in 1932. It is a legendary venue, and I think that the 'spirit' of the past here takes over during any concert.

I was lucky enough to be going to the Meet & Greet session at Hammersmith, kindly put on by the concert promoters Live Nation. We all gathered outside the venue at around 4.45pm. I saw some familiar faces in the crowd who were eagerly anticipating their meeting with Michael. We were let in to the venue and given our Merchandise (which included a beautiful wrist watch - perfect for men too!) After going

through the protocol of meeting Michael, we made our way in to the main auditorium where they were completing the final lighting test for the DVD recording. Michael arrived in very jovial spirits as he appeared via one of the side doors. I'm not going to dwell on this too much, but nobody had known at this point that Michael had his house burgled the night before. Not once during the Meet & Greet or the main concert did he give any sign that this has happened and this shows Michael's professionalism and class as a performer. Obviously our thoughts go out to Michael, Cathy & the family regarding this devastating intrusion in to their home. Everyone had a great time at the Meet & Greet,

and it's always a great feeling when Michael recognises me! It must be that I'm one of the few male fans. At times it can be very daunting, but hearing Michael's music really makes up for that experience.

The concert itself was eagerly anticipated by everyone, especially as there were quite a few cameras for the recording. Michael had said in the Meet & Greet he was very nervous for the filming. As you all know, this tour is slightly different to previous tours with the first Act solely dedicated to Michael's brand new album 'Both Sides Now'. The lighting is more subdued and personal in this half. The overture started up, with the sound of 'Both Sides Now' quickly moving in to the fast beat of 'The Edge of Glory'. 'Marry You' really got the crowd going before moving in to the fast paced 'Fight The Fight'- Michael's brand new single from the new Musical *From Here to Eternity*. Michael also at this point mentioned that Sir Tim Rice was in the audience! Two beautiful renditions followed - 'Closest Thing To Crazy' originally sung by the beautiful Katie Melua, and 'Songbird' which I will always remember by Eva Cassidy. As Michael said "Some songs will always stay the same". The title song of the tour, Joni Mitchell's 'Both Sides Now' is perfect for Michael to sing at this point of his career, as he looks back at the past and into the future. We then blasted into 'Love and Affection' followed by 'I Won't Let You Go'. 'When She Loved Me' from *Toy Story 2* is certainly poignant when it is transferred from animation into reality. What can you say about 'I Will Always Love You'? Apart from Michael's fantastic Dolly Parton impression, his version is so amazing! However my favourite song from the first half comes right at the end. 'Run' is truly powerful, and this is the best version I have ever heard recorded. Sorry Leona & Snow Patrol! The crowd were on their feet at the end of this half and rightly so! Would the second act get any better?

Act Two started with the usual fanfare to 'Love Changes Everything'. The second act is all about the Musical Theatre, and for each song there is a computerised backdrop of different images to be associated with the Musical Michael is singing from. 'Circle of Life' is a delightful start to Act Two, and the amazing backdrop of Africa really puts this song into context. Adrian vocals to open it are quite brilliant! Michael paid tribute to Stephen Sondheim by singing three of his classics: 'Being Alive' from *Company* and two songs from *Sweeney Todd*; 'Pretty Women'

when it makes the musical!) & 'Do You Hear the People Sing'. It was time now to pay tribute to Andrew Lloyd Webber and what better way to start than with the new song Andrew has written for Michael: 'The Perfect Song'. In concert, Michael has decided to really blast this up and make it a powerful big number. Adrian then followed with the best performance I have heard of 'Close Every Door'. According to a tweet later by Adrian, Tim Rice felt exactly the same and personally congratulated Adrian.

Sophia was quite brilliant in singing 'Don't Cry For Me Argentina' from *Evita*. We were then treated to the haunting overture from *Phantom Of The Opera* before Michael & Alice sang a very moving and beautiful rendition of 'All I Ask Of You'. 'Tell Me On A Sunday' is a welcome addition to Michael's set list, as is the return of old favourite 'Oh What a Circus!' It is always great when Michael pulls something out of his back catalogue and it is a while since we have heard 'Memory' from *Cats*, but boy did he nail it! He followed it with a wonderful version of 'Sunset Boulevard'.

'Any Dream Will Do' has to be in any tribute Michael is paying to Andrew Lloyd Webber, before ending with the only perfect song I think Michael feels Andrew has written - 'Love Changes Everything'. What a perfect way to end the evening. Well, has it ended... ?!

Michael left the stage at this point to a standing ovation, but we all know what was coming next. Party time! Michael rocked out to 'One Step Out Of Time', 'You Can't Stop The Beat' and 'Help Yourself'. All too soon the evening was over but what better way to finish the concert than with Elvis Presley's 'The Wonder of You'. The atmosphere was electric, and really hope it is captured like this on the DVD. I certainly can't wait for it's release in November!

FACTS:

Michael Ball was the last artist to play the Hammersmith Odeon, and the first artist to play the Hammersmith Apollo!

Michael has appeared six times at Hammersmith (1993, 1994, 2003, 2005, 2007 and 2013)

Three of Michael's Concert DVD's have been filmed at Hammersmith ('Live in London', 'One Voice' and 'Both Sides Now')

Two of Michael's solo concerts at Hammersmith have been broadcast Live on BBC Radio 2 (1993 & 1994)

& 'Not While I'm Around'. Fantastic images of Michael & Imelda in *Sweeney* were displayed on the screens at the back during these songs.

Now came an absolutely stunning rendition from *Chess* with 'Anthem'. What a fantastic performance and what a way to pay tribute to Sir Tim Rice. It got a big standing ovation from everyone in the Apollo. The Barricade overture from *Les Miserables* fired up and we were treated to three beautiful classics: 'Empty Chairs at Empty Tables', 'Suddenly' (which will be a classic



Budding young writers all over the country busily submitted their entries for 500 WORDS, BBC Radio 2 Breakfast Show's Bronze Sony Award-winning Children's Writing Competition, now in its third year.

The entries were first marked by volunteer teachers and librarians from around the UK, before the Scottish Book Trust drew up a shortlist of 50 stories. CBBC and Top Gear presenter Richard Hammond,

award-winning author and screen writer Frank Cottrell-Boyce, along with top authors Dame Jacqueline Wilson, Charlie Higson and Malorie Blackman then picked their favourite six stories.

Winners were revealed on the Chris Evans Breakfast Show, where Chris Evans was joined by globe-trotting comic legend Michael Palin; Olympic cycling champion Victoria Pendleton; BBC Breakfast's Susanna Reid, the

Olivier Award-winning Radio 2 presenter Michael Ball (*top right*) plus Blue Peter and returning 500 WORDS favourite Helen Skelton.

Michael himself read the story 'Making Mum and Dad' which was written by Harry McMurray, aged 10. Harry was the Silver Medal Winner in the 10-13 years old category. You can watch a clip of Michael reading it at this link: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p019wml8>

Nottingham's' Big Red Seat Appeal

Michael is pictured here sitting on the Big Red Seat in the Nottingham Royal Centre to help with their refurbishing project.

The Big Red Seat Appeal was set up in order to aim to raise enough funds to replace all 2,500 seats in the Royal Concert Hall auditorium. Before performing his concert there, Michael was the latest in a long line of celebrities to sit in the chair. He joins other big names such as Bill Bailey, Leona Lewis, Alfie Boe, Mick Hucknall, Jimmy Carr and Harry Hill who have sat in the chair to support and help the cause.



A MAGICAL MESSAGE FROM MICHAEL

A group of young musical theatre students stepped out on stage with renewed confidence recently - after getting the thumbs up from one of the stars of the genre.

It came after Gill Lindsay, Backstage musical and creative director, went to see Michael Ball at the SECC and got talking to a friend who plays in Michael's band.

"The next thing I know a large envelope arrived with a signed photo and a wonderful message from Michael wishing our students good luck," Gill said. "To take time out from his hectic schedule for our students is incredibly kind and generous."

Shortly before their end of term show they received a signed photo from *Hairspray* star Michael Ball, with the message: "To the kids at Backstage. 'Knock 'em dead!' With love, Michael Ball."

A spokesperson for the musical theatre school said: "The kids were absolutely thrilled when we showed them the signed picture shortly before the show and there was a real buzz in the theatre during the performance."



THE WEDDING SINGER

Miranda Hart was faced with the task of organising a wedding as part of a hectic week of challenges to support Comic Relief.

Miranda, with the help of a host of celebrity friends, successfully pulled off the wedding of all weddings as newlyweds, Ben and Claire Springett, officially tied the knot at 6.07pm in Marylebone Town Hall among a throng of friends, family and famous faces. The challenge was sponsored by BT, a long term supporter of Comic Relief.

Miranda played a key role across the whole wedding ceremony - reading the Spice Girls' '2 become 1' with the legendary Simon Callow, playing 'Is This The Way To Amarillo' on the piano with Jonathan Cohen and performing a special rendition of 'Proud' with Heather Small and the London Gospel Choir. The newlyweds were also treated to two other musical performances; a heart-warming version of 'It's All About You' by Tom from McFly and a performance of 'All I Ask Of You' from *Phantom Of The Opera*, by the West End star, Michael Ball.



BLACKPOOL, BARBARA & BALL!

Tracey Booth tells a story about an incredible coincidence...

The first date of this tour I went to was Newcastle, as I live in County Durham. My friend Kirsty came with us this time with my mother, brother and daughter and she thoroughly enjoyed it - she now wants to join the rest of the "Ballettes" and go to many more! As usual Michael was fabulous.

My mother, daughter and I were also going to the Blackpool date as well and this is where my story really begins... On the last tour, we went to Liverpool to see the 'Heroes' concert, with my mother Helen and my daughter Lauren travelling with me. We met a lovely lady named Barbara from Arizona, she was sat in front of us, and a lot of you will know her! Anyway we had a lovely chat and she kindly gave me her email address so we could keep in touch. Unfortunately I lost it!

On the way to Blackpool this year, my mother and I were talking about Barbara and wondering whether she would be going to any concerts on this tour - hopefully we would catch up with her again. Anyway that was that, we checked into our hotel, had a lovely day in Blackpool and made our way to the Opera House. We bought our merchandise and went to our seats. We had fabulous seats and would have a perfect view of Michael. There was one seat in front of my mother which was empty. We wondered who would be by themselves, and I said "Well Barbara would be" and as I turned, there she was walking down the aisle!

We couldn't believe it, sure enough it was her seat, I had goose bumps all over. How unbelievable we thought, exactly the same seat as Liverpool! She was surprised to see us as well. It was wonderful to see her again, she asked if we would be waiting around after as she would like some photographs with us, as this may well be her last visit. Of course we said we would.

At the interval Barbara wanted to see if she could find Michael's father as she has



met him a few times. She knew he was going to be in Blackpool so off she went looking. Unfortunately she couldn't find him. The second half started and the atmosphere was electric but it was soon party time and the end was near. My concerts were over for this year!

We followed Barbara out of the venue and then she just stopped in her tracks. She had spotted Michael's father, we were so pleased for her as we knew how much she wanted to see him. We stayed back as she went to see him and they exchanged

hugs and had a chat. The next thing made our night...

Michael's father came towards us and introduced himself to us, gave my mother a big kiss and cuddle and we had such a lovely chat! He knew our city County Durham and knew all about the wonderful cathedral it has. We told him that my mother and I had been following Michael for 18 years and that my daughter is only 14 and has been coming with us since she was 9. He thought that this was wonderful, 3 generations

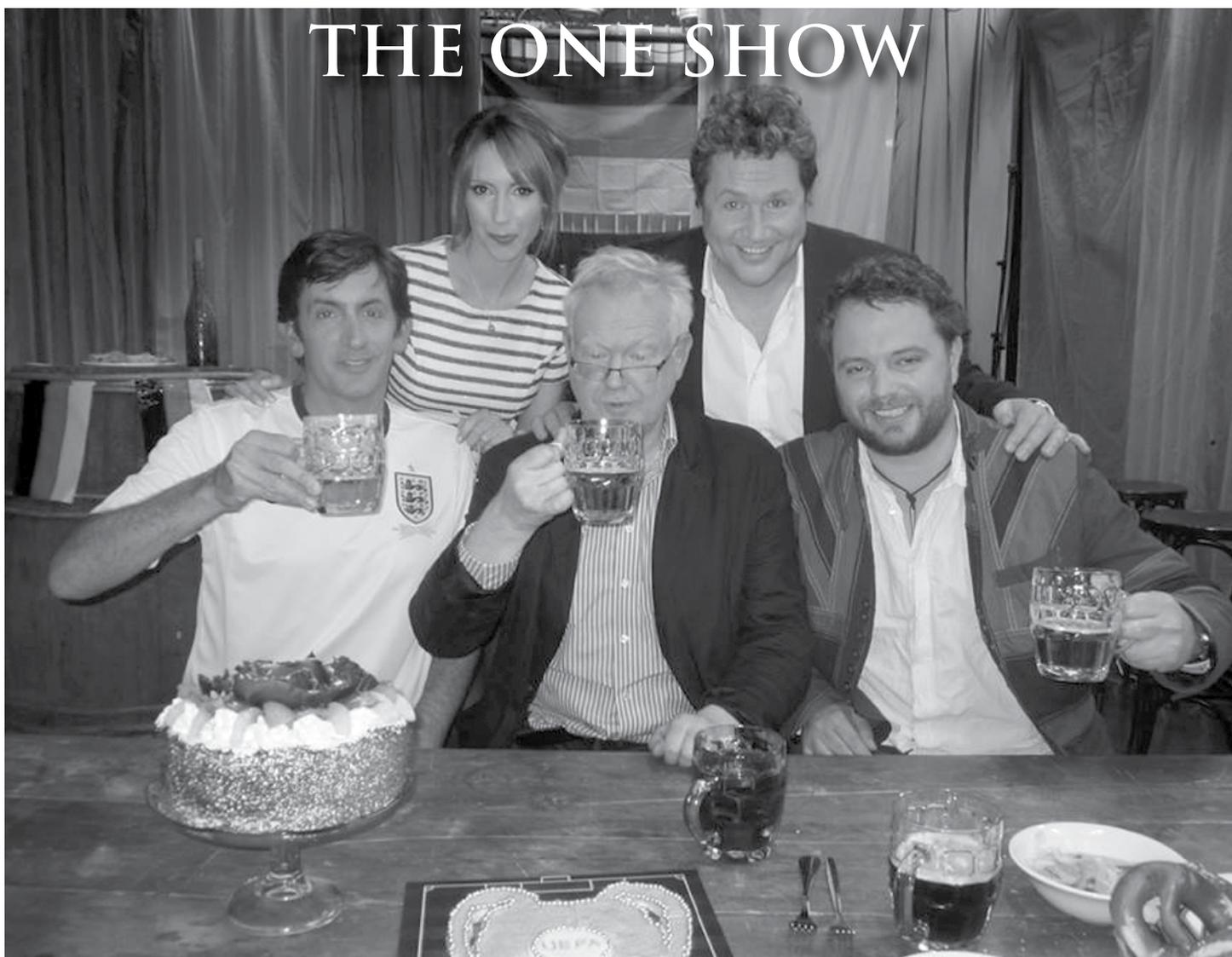
of one family. He really is such a lovely gentleman, I now know where Michael gets it from!

We said our goodbyes to him and went to wave Michael off. It was the the perfect night. We went to Barbara's hotel for a night cap and she told us some lovely stories of all her meetings with Michael. We took some photographs and this time I got Barbara's home address and it is now in a safe place and I won't be losing it again! She truly is an amazing lady travelling to the UK alone, not knowing anybody at first then making lots of friends through following Michael. We still can't believe it, it was just so surreal!

I hope you enjoyed this story as much as we enjoyed being part of it. I've included a photo of us with Barbara and one of Barbara and Michael's father.



THE ONE SHOW



Here's a photo of Michael enjoying a well deserved pint and some cake after hosting The One Show

UPCOMING OUTDOOR CONCERTS

Michael is doing an outdoor concert at **Audley End, Saffron Walden on Sunday 4 August 2013**. Tickets are priced at £35 (£32 if you are an English Heritage member) plus a service charge. Follow this link to book tickets <http://www.audleyendconcerts.com/tickets/> or telephone See Tickets – 0844 995 0995. More information can be found at <http://www.audleyendconcerts.com/lineup/michael-ball/>

MICHAEL TO HEADLINE GERSHWIN GREATS AT KENWOOD HOUSE - 1 SEPTEMBER 2013

“Summertime - An Evening of Gershwin” will take place in the majestic setting of Kenwood House on Sunday 1st September. Michael is joined by a host of exceptional talent who will really bring the magic of Gershwin’s repertoire to life. The rest of the line up includes:

Kerry Ellis who has fast become recognized as the First Lady of West End musicals from her starring roles in London and on Broadway.

David Shannon who has played the leading roles in some of London’s most famous West End Musicals including Valjean (*Les Misérables*) Sweeney Todd (*Sweeney Todd*) Jesus and Judas (*Jesus Christ Superstar*) Chris (*Miss Saigon*) and most recently The Phantom in *The Phantom of the Opera* at her Majesty’s Theatre London.

Gina Beck is a rising star of the musical theatre, who is currently playing the role of Glinda in the musical *Wicked* at the Apollo Victoria Theatre and has received a host of critical acclaim for playing major roles in leading West End theatre productions.

Viv Mclean has been a celebrated pianist for a number of years. Recent highlights include performances with the English Chamber Orchestra, the London Philharmonic and a USA tour with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra performing Gershwin’s Rhapsody in Blue.

Tickets can be purchased following this link:

<http://kenwood.seetickets.com/event/summertime-an-evening-with-gershwin/kenwood-house-london/710079> or from the ticket hotline on 0871 230 5569.



Audley End



Kenwood House

WAS IT ALL WORTH IT?

By Nancy Garcia



My trip to England this time around was without the excitement I had felt on previous trips. So much was going on both with my work and at home that I almost found the trip an inconvenience. I could only go for a very limited time period, I would have to travel from city to city almost daily, plus the fact that my usual "Team Michael USA" fans could not make the trip with me didn't help. Why was I making a trip across the Atlantic to see Michael in concert? Was it really worth it? Why was I going through all this again? He is just a singer. I could easily attend any concert here in the New York City area and not have to deal with the hassles of traveling. After a delayed flight, I arrived at Manchester Airport and made my way to Passport Control where a young man sat at a desk...and I was ready

for the Q&A ... Him: 'Why are you visiting?' Me: 'Just meeting up with friends and attending a concert.' Him: 'How do you know these friends?' Me: 'Through a fan club.' Him: 'What fan club?' Me: 'Michael Ball.' And then he threw his hands up in the air and slammed his head onto the desk. In total shock, I decide to play along. "Oh come on, he's not that bad!" He then laughs and explains. One of his first jobs was at a venue in Manchester and he worked Michael's concerts. He then said "All those women running up to the stage! Unbelievable! But yes, he does put on a good show." Long story short, I get to Liverpool, meet up with fans and get ready for the concert. I asked myself the same question. Was it really worth it?

YES!

As soon as I got near the theatre and see all the familiar faces of fans that I have met throughout the years, I feel like I am back home, even if it is a different theater in a different city every time. And then, I hear Michael sing just the first few lines of the opening number... "There ain't no reason you and I should be alone..." and it all comes back to me. The reason I make these trips is to hear the man sing LIVE! Michael can put on a live show like no other. CDs cannot take the place of this experience. I am so glad that I can make the trips to witness it!

Next stop was Sheffield. Fire alarms went off in the hotel but I say to myself that these things happen. Maybe someone was smoking in the building? The following day off to York I go. And fire alarms go off in the hotel yet again! Just a coincidence, I say. I find my way to the venue for my Meet and Greet with Michael. I meet up with two fellow Americans there, Laura Murray from Virginia and Barbara from Arizona. Although Laura states she has the passport to prove she is American, the British accent gives her away as an ex-patriot. Michael gladly takes a picture with the American contingent. And then there was Dorothy! Dorothy was there with her granddaughter. The Meet and Greet was a birthday

present given to her by her family. You see, Dorothy is turning 100-YEARS-OLD this month and she had never met Michael! And just as she was about to have her picture taken with Michael, the fire alarms go off! (Now it's just plain creepy!) Uncertain as to whether we had to evacuate or not Michael, being the gentlemen that he is, takes Dorothy by the arm and escorts her towards the front doors, taking his time with her and talking with her. As we were about to leave the venue, we were told that there was no need to evacuate and Michael escorts her back into the Meet and Greet area. And the rest of the evening was perfect (without any further fire alarms going off).

In total I attended four Michael concerts, visited five different cities, and made it back home in six days! And I ask myself again, was it worth it? Definitely! The concert reviews speak for themselves. Touring England is always a pleasure, especially seeing a 100-year-old fan take a casual walk with Michael and have her picture taken with him for the first time.

Happy 100th Birthday Dorothy from York!!!!

(Are the dates out for the next concert tour yet?)



A SUPERB SHOW IN SHEFFIELD

by James Gaden

As much as I've enjoyed Michael in *Hairspray* and *Sweeney Todd*, it's his live concerts I really enjoy. I discovered Michael as a recording artist first and while my appreciation for musical theatre has increased ten-fold thanks to songs Michael has performed and amazing shows like *Hairspray* and *Sweeney Todd*, I gravitate to him as a singer of songs, a recording artist.

With that in mind, I was delighted to hear there was a new album called 'Both Sides Now' in the works and there was going to be a tour to support it. I, like the majority of the readers of this marvellous magazine, was there on Fan Club pre-sale day, credit card at the ready. What I was really thrilled about regarding this tour was Michael was playing a show in Sheffield again.

Living in Hull, I have to travel to any gig I want to see (we've had plenty of big acts in Hull before, but they tend to play once and never come back!) so I've seen several shows at Sheffield City Hall or the Arena. When Sara and I go there, we have a particular hotel we love, so we're always looking for an excuse to come to the Steel City to stay there. Our last trip was a fantastic Christmas themed one where we went to see the *other* Michael B. (Mr. Bolton). It was December, there was snow, the hotel had a lovely courtyard all lit up at night with carols playing, the gig was great... it was perfect. Sara and I decided then and there as soon as another show

came up in Sheffield that we wanted to see, we were coming back.

Well, that was two years ago - everybody else who we like that have played Sheffield *dozens* of times before suddenly stopped! We were



waiting and waiting... then Michael announced he was playing there on the 'Both Sides Now' tour. He'll do...!

Thanks to the pre-sale, I was offered fantastic seats right near the front - a done deal! So, with my credit card already whimpering at the thought of tickets, trains and hotel in Sheffield, it promptly called the Samaritans when I

decided to do Hammersmith as well.

I love London and it's always a chance to see Maureen and Gill (I'm obligated to say nice things about them as they check this magazine and made me pay dearly for my previous

they were coming to Sheffield as well! Those vixens. Now I had to sit through *two* Michael Ball concerts on a tour. Again. Like all the previous ones!

I bought the album when it came out and I thought it was pure class. The song choices were great, Michael's voice was exquisite and I thought it was the best produced album he's ever released. What did make me wonder was the laid back nature of it. It's a personal, almost introspective record with few moments of pace. I was curious how Michael would put those songs into a concert and maintain a good balance.

Next came talk that there would be a show of two halves, with one half all musical material and the other half pop and rock stuff. Again, it was an intriguing prospect, but I couldn't figure out how Michael was going to work it. Would the musicals start the show? I doubted it, but then I tried to figure out how a second half of musical numbers would work - I couldn't see 'Party Time' getting axed. Ah well, that was Michael's problem! Lots of things he's said about regarding concert format or song choices have made me wonder, and every single time he's nailed it and I've come away impressed. I was sure this tour would be no different - in Michael I trust!

gags about them.) I couldn't get anywhere near the front but having great seats at Sheffield, I didn't mind. I settled for front row of the balcony.

I contacted Maureen and Gill to tell them I was going to Sheffield and I had also booked Hammersmith, so I'd see them in London. Imagine my surprise when they said

Time really flew by and before Sara or I knew it, it was time to get ready for Sheffield. Both of us had avoided any sort of setlist or show spoilers and went into the concert

with no idea what was coming. I was thrilled with our seats – if we'd have been much closer, I'd have been sat on the drum stool. Maureen and Gill were sat a few rows away and they gave me the bird while I threw insults their way. Next thing I know the lights dimmed and the overture struck up.

Michael came out to Lady Gaga's 'Edge Of Glory'. I'm not a fan of most contemporary pop, but when Michael takes a song and has it arranged to suit him, they take on a totally different dimension. 'Marry You' followed before 'Fight The Fight', my favourite from 'Both Sides Now' was given an airing. From that point on Michael said there would be no more songs from musicals until the second half. He proceeded to perform 'Closest Thing To Crazy', 'Songbird', 'Both Sides Now', 'Love And Affection', 'I Won't Let You Go', 'When She Loved Me' and a brilliant 'I Will Always Love You', all taken from the new record. I'm not sure Michael has ever played as much from one album in a concert before. He commented that 'Both Sides Now' had done really well and he closed the act with yet another track from it, a superb (and in my opinion definitive) version of 'Run' by Snow Patrol, which Leona Lewis covered. This was a perfect example of a song being rearranged to suit Michael and he owned it, lock stock and barrel.

I went to speak with Maureen and Gill during the interval in the hope I could avoid them at the stage door but they weren't having it. We discussed the show... or rather, they talked, I listened. Fortunately I was saved by the

band returning, resplendent in white dinner jackets, for the second half.

Adrian introduced 'Circle Of Life' from *The Lion King* with some great vocals before Michael returned, tuxed up, to take us on a journey of musical theatre classics. The excellent lighting and relaxed mood of the first half was replaced by a real sense of occasion, with



Michael and the band's smart attire being offset by L.E.D. screens behind him showing effective imagery from the musical in question. Michael paid tribute to Stephen Sondheim with 'Being Alive' before performing 'Pretty Women' and 'Not While I'm Around' from *Sweeney Todd*. The screens showed images of Michael and Imedla Staunton and we were all reminded why

Sweeney had cleaned up at the Olivier Awards and added another well deserved award to Michael's growing collection.

Naturally *Les Misérables* featured, with Michael performing the new track 'Suddenly' superbly, alongside the ubiquitous 'Empty Chairs At Empty Tables' and 'Do You Hear The People Sing'. Each of the guest singers

dedicated to Andrew Lloyd Webber, which also included 'Any Dream Will Do', much to Sara's delight. Naturally the half closed with 'Love Changes Everything'.

Michael came back for a four song encore, which was Party Time, ensuring everyone went home happy. 'You Can't Stop The Beat', 'One Step Out Of Time' and 'Help Yourself' had everyone on their feet before Michael finished off with a storming 'Wonder Of You'.

After the show we went to see if there was anyone we recognised. I chatted to the Lancashire lasses Pat and Marie, who told me Cathy had been sat just behind me and we talked about the show and the Fan Club. Their ears burning, Maureen and Gill came over to break up the chat. They asked where Sara and I were staying, and when it turned out to be better than their hotel, the atmosphere turned very sour and conversation very awkward, with no laughs at all. After a few moments, Maureen and Gill told a sullen looking Roy it was time he drove them to the next gig. With the sound of a whip cracking, they were gone.

Hammersmith naturally was superb and I'm glad it has been recorded for a DVD. Ironically I spotted Maureen and Gill from the balcony but never got to speak to them, despite booking the trip especially for that. Good job I enjoyed the show then! As Michael's letter states, there won't be a theatre show this year as was rumoured, which on one hand is disappointing. On the other hand Michael, my credit card can't thank you enough!

Michael gave a terrific performance for one of my favourites 'Oh What A Circus' in the section

OLIVIER AWARDS

MasterCard

Michael won another Olivier Award for his amazing performance as the demon barber in *Sweeney Todd*, as the musical won three of the six categories it was nominated for. He won his first for his portrayal of Edna Turnblad in *Hairspray*.

As well as Michael winning 'Best Actor In A Musical', Imelda Staunton triumphed in the 'Best Actress In A Musical' category for her portrayal of Sweeney's partner in crime, Mrs Lovett.

To cap off a perfect evening, *Sweeney Todd* also won 'Best Musical Revival'. Joking he was planning to use his award as a bookend alongside his award from 2008, Michael said the win was "awesome, absolutely awesome," describing his time in the show as "...the best time of my life. Without question. It was a thrill every night. Working with her [Imelda Staunton] was the greatest thing."

Congratulation to Michael, Imelda and everyone involved in the production of *Sweeney Todd*!



WEST END EUROVISION

Michael was on hand to present the West End Eurovision trophy to the cast member of the musical 'Once', a musical about an Irish busker and a young Czech girl who meet through a shared love of music. Michael tweeted that the show was a "funny, sad, honest, touching and a really original piece of musical theatre". He also tweeted that it delivered "one of the most genuinely beautiful nights in the theatre" with "pitch perfect performances" and a "sublime score".



BY ROYAL APPOINTMENT

The Queen enjoyed a performance of "People" from the musical *Funny Girl* when Michael sang it at the Royal Gala for Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) held in St James's Palace on the 3rd June 2013.

reception, "I have sung for the Queen on various occasions, including when we did a version of *Les Misérables* at Windsor Castle a few years ago to mark the centenary of the Entente Cordiale with France."

"I thought it appropriate for the event," he said before the

Here he is at the Gala pictured with Il Divo.

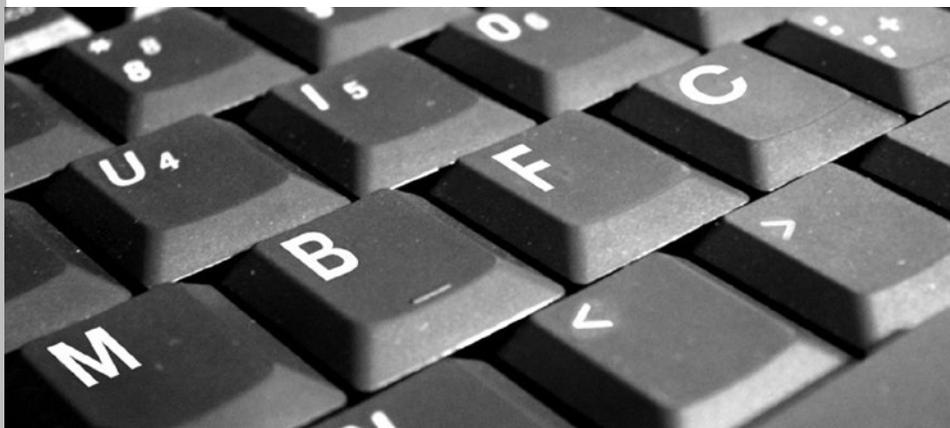


THE MICHAEL BALL FAN CLUB ONLINE

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 'FIFTYONE51'.



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!

NO MORE NEWS LEAFLETS? DON'T FORGET THE INFOLINE!

The Fan Club announced in April it was restructuring the membership system, no longer offering a service where news items are posted out. The news is often outdated by the time the news leaflets are typed, printed and dispatched, and with email updates available within hours of the news being announced, the cost of print and postage was an unnecessary expense.

Some fans expressed concern that they may not have email or internet access. You can register a relative's email address who can pass any news on to you. Alternatively, don't forget the Fan Club offers the **Infoline**!

Simply call the **Infoline** number to hear what Michael is up to, news about concerts or where you can see him. Every **Infoline** bulletin is dated, so it's easy to keep up to date with what's going on!



