

ON THE BALL

Issue 67



Hi Everyone

Well, what an amazing 6 months it's been since our last On The Ball. After a quiet start to the year we were all eagerly waiting for the "If Everyone Was Listening" tour. We'd talked to Michael a bit about the set list and right up until the final rehearsal the contents kept changing. We came out after the first concert in Bournemouth and said to each other, just when you think Michael cannot possibly get any better, he does! Thanks to all of you that sent us your articles and photos, many of which are included in this issue.

Now it's time for Mack and Mabel at the Chichester Festival followed by the tour.

As you will see from Michael's letter he is so excited about this show and so are we. In a couple of recent TV interviews his beard has gone so guess it's wait and see if it comes back for Mack Sennett.

Last, but definitely not least, was the announcement that Michael has been awarded an OBE (Order of the British Empire) in recognition of his services to musical theatre. He will be invited to Buckingham Palace to receive his award very soon.



Love

Maureen and Gill



Here is a picture taken from the tour: Nikki Guttridge, Maureen, Cheryl Ballard, Gill and Janice Lazarus

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Dear Everyone,

Well how are you all? I'm great but a bit knackered at the moment. We are up to our necks in tap routines and custard pie fights with Muck + Mabel rehearsals and I'm loving it. I think it's going to be a really great production and hope you manage to come and see us either in Chichester or somewhere on the tour.

Talking of tours, a huge thank you for helping us all have the most brilliant time with the "if everyone was listening" show. I loved every second of it. It was thrilling to see your response to the new songs done live and revisiting some

of the older Material, I thought the band was amazing, the guest singers phenomenal, and the audiences the best in the world. It seemed to be over far too soon.

The radio show will of course keep going throughout the year so do keep getting in touch with me there. I love that you are such an important part of the show's family.

Finally, I received the extraordinary and frankly overwhelming news that Her Majesty, The Queen, was honouring me with the O.B.E. in her birthday honours list. I feel so proud and humbled and I know it is in no small part due to the efforts of friends, fans and family that this has happened.

It was completely unexpected and

I think one of my favorite memories
will always be when I gave my
lovely Dad the news. He burst into
tears and very nearly popped with
excitement and pride. I don't know
when I go to the Palace for the
investiture but what a day that
will be!!

Anyway, my ladies, I better get
back to the Custard Pies and God
willing, I'll see you very soon.

Take care of yourself and thank
you again for proving I have the
best fans in the world. Blimey am
I blessed.

all my love
Mike
x



A LONG JOURNEY, WORTH EVERY MILE!

By Nikki Guttridge

Usually I only go to the London date for Michael's tour or occasionally a Midlands venue. However, this year the opening night fell on my birthday. As I knew that friends I had already met (Joanna Diffey and Margaret Sampson) were going to be there, I would not be celebrating on my own! I managed to secure not only a Meet and Greet ticket but a seat on the front row in prime position for a night of entertainment with an unrestricted view.

I was in Cornwall over Easter and the morning of my birthday with my family. All that lay between me and my celebrations was a rather long journey. Travelling during holiday season is never easy, especially from Cornwall to Bournemouth which is around 300 miles. This wasn't going to stop me though as the opportunity may never arise again!

After a journey which took far longer than expected, I arrived at my hotel at 4:20pm for a 4:45pm Meet and Greet registration. After a quick change I headed for the venue which was thankfully three minutes away. On arrival I found Margaret & Alex and patiently awaited the Live Nation rep.

The Meet and Greet was as always lovely and Michael signed a birthday card for me. I got lots of birthday hugs and a kiss on the

cheek and he took all my teasing and daft comments in the spirit in which they were intended.

Joanna and I finally met in the interval and had a good gossip. The show was obviously phenomenal with something for everyone. Jo, Margaret, Alex and I headed to the stage door, along with Alison who I had never met until that night.

After getting another birthday hug from Adrian and taking lots of pictures of us all we noticed the coach was about to drive up. Michael was stood on the steps and waved at us all as he passed.

My birthday was most definitely a happy one with memories that will last a lifetime and the journey and all its jams and accidents was worth every mile!



THE FIRST & LAST!

By Eileen Miller

April 7th - a lovely sunny day in Bournemouth so here we come as the first night of the tour had arrived.

My husband and I arrived at our hotel and after booking in we had lunch. After lunch we took a walk through the gardens before I had to prepare for the Meet and Greet.

Around 4:45 I made my way to the BIC, excited to be meeting Michael again. After everyone had booked in we waited until about 5:30 when we made our way to where the meeting would take place. I suddenly felt a hand on my shoulder - it was Michael! After the photo session we all chatted with Michael who was in fine form, laughing and joking. Soon the meeting was over but we still had the show to come. What a fantastic night with many songs from the new album during the first hour and usual favourites after the interval. The evening ended but I had the last night to look forward to.

Sunday 3rd May - off to Southampton, my daughter accompanied me this time. It was a fabulous evening. As it was the last night it was very emotional especially when Michael, with a tear in his eye, finished with 'Love Changes Everything'.

See you in Chichester!!



MY AMAZING ANNIVERSARY

By Rachel Fowler

I just had to write to you and say that I had the most wonderful day at my Meet and Greet at Bristol.

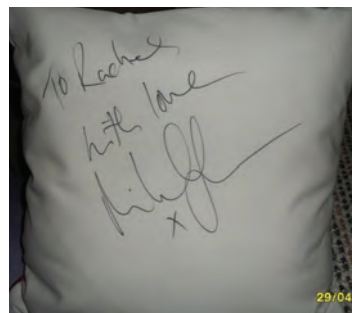
Michael was charming, cheeky and so down to earth. Nothing was too much trouble. He put the whole group at ease and was delightful to a lady called Mary, as she was 89 and

a bit unsteady. He held her and we all had a giggle as she didn't like his beard!

I had made him some cupcakes, and asked him to sign my cushion and wooden heart which he kindly did. It was topped off by a concert that was fantastic and the atmosphere was just electric,

many songs evoking wonderful memories - I even shed a tear at 'The Rose'.

My meet and greet was a fantastic early 25th wedding anniversary present from my husband Roy and we both enjoyed the show, even Roy commented what a great showman Michael was.



21 YEARS AND COUNTING!

by Helen and Annette Easton

Michael Ball's concert at Hammersmith was fantastic and we enjoyed the show and meeting up with friends we haven't seen for a while. The concert was special because it was my birthday that day and seeing Michael live that evening made a great end to it.

Thanks Michael for making my birthday that special!

Michael was wonderful as ever. Seeing him live again in

concert was great, especially after seeing him on stage in *Sweeney Todd* in the West End. He said he is celebrating 30 years in show business... we will be celebrating 21 years of being in Michael's Fan Club in August! Here are some photos of some of the tour programmes and show programmes we have been to over the years, along with some of the Fan Club Membership Cards.

We have lots of memories,

but our favourites have to be seeing Michael in *Chitty, Chitty, Bang, Bang* and meeting him afterwards as part of a Fan Club competition. Seeing him outside before *Hairspray* was special and also going to Australia to see him on tour. Then there was a New York holiday with the Fan Club Members I met on the Australia Holiday. There are lots more moments we could share but we would be here all day!

We are now looking forward to seeing Michael in *Mack and Mable* in August as part of a holiday there.



A RETURN TO HAMMERSMITH

by Mark Witchell



Well here we were again! We are so lucky and privileged that Michael continues to tour every two years. He loves touring so much, and all his shows sell out, so fingers crossed this is something he will continue to do for years and years! We had been to the opening tour concert in Bournemouth and thought we knew what to expect when we got to Hammersmith the following weekend, but boy, what we didn't expect was the truly amazing atmosphere in the Apollo that Saturday evening!

Over the years you have heard my story on how I became a fan, but I thought it was time to bring a new family generation into the Michael Ball clan! My twelve year old sister Beth joined me for the Hammersmith concert. I really didn't know how she would react to the concert, but was quietly confident that once she had been once she would be hooked! As a special treat for this being her first London concert, I bought her the Meet and Greet ticket package.

We arrived at the Apollo around 5pm for our Meet and Greet. Around 40 of us were there, which shows that these packages seem to be gaining more popularity every tour. We had a lovely discussion with Michael, and he was very keen to say to Beth "Once you have been, you will continue coming back for more!"

Onto the concert, and I really think this was the best set list Michael has ever put together. The tour was very much about songs that could be heard every week on his BBC Radio 2 show *Sunday Night with Michael Ball*. But the tour was so much more than this, we had songs from Musicals, songs from previous albums and some really exciting surprises!

The concert began with a short overture, before Michael bounded onto stage with Avicii's 'Wake Me Up'. What an upbeat and surprising opening to a concert but it worked so well! The concert swiftly then moved into a set from the new album. Lady Antebellum's 'Need You Now' kept the upbeat start to the concert. Two slightly quieter, but beautiful songs followed. Alison Krauss' 'Simple Love' and 'Jessie' by Joshua Kadison both have lyrics concerning love and they were both beautifully performed by Michael. As Michael says on stage, 'I Won't Give Up' by Jason Mraz is a song that will survive time and will be performed in 20-30 years time. A true classic and it suits Michael's voice so well. 'The Climb' is a song originally performed by Miley Cyrus for the film 'Hannah Montana' but Michael really uses the spiritual elements of the song to create a powerful performance. This first section of the show closed with a real party song. 'Stuck Like Glue' by Sugarland has a reggae element to the song, and Michael

really uses this well in a live environment!

The next section of the show was dedicated to the Musical Theatre and the theme of love within Musicals. What better way to start this section of the show off with than an old favourite from the 'Centre Stage' album 'Can You Feel the Love Tonight?' from *The Lion King*. Sandra Marvin and Adrian Hansel then treated us to a beautiful duet from Disney's *Aladdin* called 'A Whole New World'. Michael then sang 'All I Ask of You' from *Phantom of the Opera* and 'Last Night of the World' from *Miss Saigon*, which made a welcome return to the concerts. It was then time for Michael to introduce us to some music from his new Musical *Mack and Mabel* which launches at Chichester Festival Theatre in June. 'I Won't Send Roses' is a beautiful love song, and Michael gets to sing it every single night in his role as Mack Sennett. It is twenty years since Michael released his hit single 'The Rose' to raise money for Research into Ovarian Cancer, and what perfect way to mark this occasion by performing it again magnificently to close the first half of the show. What a poignant love song too.

Act Two opened with the famous beats of Labi Siffre's 'Something Inside So Strong' which was written about Apartheid in South Africa. Michael recorded it in 1995 and his single reached the Top 40. It is probably well over ten years since Michael has performed it live in concert, so it made a welcome return to the set list. 'Both Sides Now', Michael's 2013 album, was one of his most successful and one of the best songs he recorded was James Morrison's 'I Won't Let You Go'. This again, is a song with a great message and it was a popular song choice at Hammersmith.

Now it was time to return to the new album, and as Michael explains on stage, 'You Needed Me' by Anne Murray was a surprise Number One in 1978 during the big punk era that existed then. Michael performs this so beautifully. Michael was then joined on stage by Alice Fearn to sing a truly beautiful version of 'Falling Slowly' from the Musical *Once* - Michael's latest single from the new album. Next came a beautiful version of the Sarah McLachlan song 'Angel' which can be seen to have a truly spiritual meaning. Michael closes his

set from the new album with the title song 'If Everyone was Listening' by Supertramp. This song had a big significance in Michael's early career as he opened and closed a series of two plays with it during his time at the Surrey Youth Theatre. This version is so much better than when he first performed it on tour in 2009 and the message is delivered in a rockier fashion.

Next, it was time to celebrate two of the longest Musicals which have ran in the West End. 'Empty Chairs at Empty Tables' from *Les Misérables* (the longest running Musical in the West End) was beautifully performed with an electric guitar, and 'Tell Me It's Not True' from *Blood Brothers* was powerfully sung as always.

We then moved on to "Party Time" and this is where my sister Beth's eyes lit up with two modern classic party songs. Katy Perry's 'Roar' and Pharrell Williams 'Happy' were pleasant surprises that really got the crowd going! As Michael said, it was nearly time for Eurovision, so what better way to celebrate than punching the air to his 1992 hit 'One Step Out of Time'. Michael then closed the show with 'The Wonder of You' by the King himself, Elvis Presley.

So just as we thought the show had finished, the party continued as Michael bounded back on to stage to sing 'You Can't Stop the Beat' from 'Hairspray'. The middle part of the song had changed slightly, but gave Michael the perfect chance to thank his guest singers, his brilliant band and the wonderful Callum McLeod - his personal Musical Director and friend. Michael's final joke at the end of the show was extremely funny. "Is there something I've forgotten to do? Are my flies done up?" Well, he knew what he had forgotten, but was beautifully sung as always. What a perfect way to close the concert, with his all time classic - 'Love Changes Everything' from *Aspects of Love*.

Well that was another evening over at Hammersmith. Michael has now performed at the Apollo seven times during his career, and this was probably the loudest atmosphere ever. Michael is celebrating 31 years in the industry this year and I'm sure we have loved every one of those years. Good luck in *Mack and Mabel* and here's to the next 30 years!



OUR MINI TOUR

Pauline from Hull and Shirley from Bridlington

The tour started for us in Hammersmith which we had never been to before. We saw the boat race which was brilliant, then we went to the concert. The theatre was a bit of a let down as we had waited four years to get there but Michael was on top form – he was brilliant.

Then we were off to Nottingham and Michael was getting better and better. From there we went to Manchester, met some more fans and said hello to the ones we saw in Nottingham. The atmosphere in the theatres was getting more and more electric.

Then we went to York where we had

a Meet and Greet. There were about 20 people and everybody had their photo taken with Michael and asked him questions. We had our photo taken with our cowboy hats on. Why cowboy hats, you may ask? Because we thought it might be fun as it's a country album. Michael was fantastic!

Sheffield was our last concert where we had front row. We were so thrilled because we had never had front row seats before. Michael just got better with every concert we went to. Then we had to come back down to earth and go home.

What a fantastic mini tour we had and cannot wait for *Mack and Mabel*.



NINE YEARS LATER...

by Maureen

This photo was taken at the 2006 Event which was the first time that my granddaughter Megan and grandson Mackenzie met Michael. When Michael



asked Megan if he could be her boyfriend, she shook her head and said, "No, I've already got one!"

Nine years later here we are in Ipswich which is the first time all 3 of my grandchildren have been to a Michael concert together. Harriet was thrilled when Michael remembered that he'd met her in Ipswich two years ago!

MICHAEL'S SELFIE STICK!

Michael made good use of the 'Selfie Stick' he was given by Fran and Audrey in Glasgow, allowing him to take a selfie from the stage to remember the concerts. The Southampton photo captured Michael doing just that, taken by his guitar player Dave Holmes.



ON TOUR WITH MICHAEL

Throughout the 'If Everyone Was Listening' tour, Michael offered VIP Meet and Greet tickets, as well as being his usual accommodating self at the stage doors. Here are some pictures of lucky fans who managed to get a photo with him.





BALL FEVER TOOK OVER THE NATION

By Alana Wadkin. Live picture by Sharon Scarrott.

It has been two years since I saw Michael, so much has changed except my love for music and my thoughts towards Michael. This tour has enhanced my feelings for the West End star and the loveliest person that you would wish to meet. Michael is a true entertainer with an exceptional singing voice – he just gets better and better with each concert. I went to the Northern concerts of the tour; Manchester, Liverpool and York with my mum and dad – they enjoy all Michael's tours, but not the way I do! This tour has been one of the most memorable because I danced and sang along to every song without being in so much pain. We had amazing seats for the three concerts – the best views we have ever had! It was so nice to see many of my friends again and meet new friends.

I was lucky enough to go to the Manchester Meet and Greet, it made the tour even more special. Whilst waiting for the Meet and Greet, Adrian Hansel came to say hi, he gave me a huge hug and a kiss. He's a lovely guy – I have such a soft spot for him. As the Meet and Greet got closer, I made myself known to the VIP representative and I explained that taking digital photos with the flash on aren't suitable due to the fact I automatically closed my eyes as the camera flashes. The representative was really nice about it and said he would accommodate me. The representative first explained what would be happening and the things we

were allowed to do once Michael arrived. The door opened and Michael popped his head around the door "Hello there!" with a cheeky look on his face then walked in with Andrew. Everybody screamed which I found really funny. Michael apologised to everybody "Sorry, there's someone I must see and something I need to do first" then ran over to me. "Alana, I'm so glad to see you again, it has been ages since I have seen you!" Michael hugged and kissed me, much to the surprise of the representative (who told us minutes before we couldn't kiss Michael) and the rest of the room – all you could hear were oohs and ahhs. I was absolutely delighted, Michael is getting more mischievous, lovelier and caring each time I see him – he made me feel so special. We chatted briefly - he said I looked so well and that I had some colour on my face. Then the Meet and Greet continued – there was a Q&A session, reminiscing about filming *That Day We Sang* and Michael talked about his forthcoming musical *Mack and Mabel*. Everybody went up individually to have their photos taken with Michael and to have their things signed. It was great to see other people's reactions as they met Michael.

It was lovely to speak to Andrew while I waited for my turn, Andrew told Michael that I was the last and we are waiting for the camera to be adjusted then set without the flash. Michael just looked at me and said

"Trust you to be awkward Alana – come on then, any excuse to have another love!" Then he turned to the representative and said "Take a few photos here and let Andrew see them as you go" – as we posed for the photos I took the opportunity to give Michael a kiss to say thank you. Michael just giggled and kissed me back "My pleasure!". The photos turned out great to my joy. We chatted again as he signed some things for me then Michael thanked everybody for coming.

The tour was based around Michael's latest album 'If Everyone Was Listening' – from the moment Michael stepped onto the stage, the audience was captivated, transported off on the melodic rhythm of his voice, and there were a few musical songs and other surprises included in the set list to spice things up. Michael was joined by three amazing guest vocalists – Adrian, Sandra Marvin and Alice Fearn. The concert began in a very upbeat fashion with an energetic version of Avicii's 'Wake Me Up', which had the audience on their feet within seconds. Then Michael performed 'Need You Now', which is a catchy song by Lady Antebellum that has great lyrics – it suits Michael's voice perfectly. I suggested this song to Michael years ago and I was so pleased that he recorded it for the latest album.

This was followed by Michael singing a collection of more sedate songs from the new album including 'Simple Love' by Alison Krauss, Joshua Kadison's hit 'Jessie' and Jason Mraz's 'I Won't Give Up', where he used his acting skills to bring these songs to life. As we were reminded throughout the evening it was all about the lyrics. Michael said "I love music with powerful lyrics. Lyrics that sell a story, makes us dream, make us wish, make us love." Michael treated the audience to a magical version of 'The Climb' originally sung by Miley Cyrus, some people think this song is cheesy but I love the lyrics – it is one song which I can fully relate to and identify with. It was a showstopper and Michael always received a well-deserved standing ovation at each concert, he sang it stunningly with such power and passion. The belter ball was back to my absolute delight – this song is perfect for Michael showcasing his incredible vocal ability and the guest vocalists' harmonies beautifully. I always wanted Michael to sing 'The Climb', I did recommend it to Michael a few times since I heard Joe McElderry's version.

It was time to have some fun when Michael launched into a lively interpretation of Sugerland's 'Stuck Like Glue' complete with some rapping, a firm favourite with the audience. I love the way Michael performs the song and the fact he doesn't take himself too seriously singing it. I enjoyed watching his cheeky personality shine through, I found it very funny. Michael finished off the first half with a collection of musical theatre love songs, starting with a beautiful version of 'Can You Feel The Love Tonight?' from *The Lion King* followed by heartfelt performances of 'Last Night Of The World' from *Miss Saigon* and 'All I Ask Of You' from *Phantom Of The Opera*. Adrian and Sandra were next to sing a duet. They blew everybody away with their amazing rendition of 'A Whole New World' from *Aladdin*. Michael explained about his new project he's starting after the tour – *Mack and Mabel* the musical and the character he's playing. This led to Michael to sing 'I Won't Send Roses' from the musical. There was only one song that Michael could perform to take the audience to the interval 'The Rose' – it was delivered with such emotion and tenderness, leaving everybody wanting more.

After the interval, Michael sang 'Something Inside So Strong' to kick the second half off – the audience clapped along, I have always preferred the way Michael performs it to the original – the meaning and the message comes across stronger in his version. Michael definitely made James Morrison's hit 'I Won't Let You Go' his own, there was audience participation which I always enjoy. Although Michael did it on the last tour, there was a different feeling about it this tour, I liked it far better this time. Through the concert there were the usual Michael chats and cheeky banter with the crowd in between songs, which I loved – there was one particular story about the punk era that made me burst out laughing. He said "I tried to fit in, I had an earring, a razor blade around my neck on a chain which wasn't sharp and bondage trousers with safety pins down the sides – they chafed! I tried to get my hair spikey but with my curls - it wasn't going to happen... I understood the movement, the rebellion from kids, I did understand it but the problem was – I hated the music! Ironically, we are going to do three songs by the Sex Pistols now!"

At York, Michael went onto doing a Frank Spencer/Michael Crawford impression, it was just hysterical – it came from nowhere, judging by how Adrian, Sandra and Alice reacted, it wasn't rehearsed as they were shocked at first then they went into hysterics and so did I, which started Michael off giggling... Once everybody composed themselves, Michael then explained the next song was like a beacon of light for him around that time and went on to give the most gorgeous rendition of Anne Murray's classic 'You Needed Me' that I have ever heard - I absolutely loved it. From one



spine-tingling performance to another - Sarah McLachlan's 'Angel' was next to be given the Ball magic, it was sung so touchingly with real feeling and emotion – I had goosebumps.

It was Alice's turn to duet with Michael, they sang 'Falling Slowly' from the musical *Once* – both voices blended beautifully together. Supertramp's 'If Everyone Was Listening' really showed how versatile Michael can be as he harmonised with the guest vocalists seamlessly. Michael then delivered a breathtaking version of 'Empty Chairs, Empty

Tables' from *Les Misérables* followed by 'Tell Me It Isn't True' from *Blood Brothers*. Both songs were firm favourites and got rapturous applause – just fantastic!

It was time to liven things up... "Party Time" began with Michael bouncing across the stage singing 'Roar' by Katy Perry. I was surprised by this song choice – I didn't particularly like the original but Michael performed it much better and now I can't get Michael's version out of my head. By the end of the song, everybody was up dancing and joining in – I was lucky enough to get to the front of the stage as the "Ball run" started and at York the wheelchair users were the first to the front and start dancing, it made a nice change for once! Even Michael commented "The wheelchair ladies did it – they were the first up dancing... good on you!" and pointed in my direction. Then Michael burst into an energetic rendition of Pharrell Williams' hit 'Happy', I loved every second. Adrian, Sandra and Alice seemed to be really enjoying themselves as they sang and danced along.

Michael sung an old favourite "One Step Out Of Time", I love the rocky version – there were lots of people punching the air, including me. Another much-loved song returned, the Elvis Presley's classic 'Wonder Of You', Michael always does this justice - 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. We definitely wanted more of the Ballster! The guest vocalists returned to the stage dancing followed by Michael to sing a crowd pleaser 'You Can't Stop The Beat' from *Hairspray* – it was just amazing, Michael even did all the dance moves. For the final song 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 last 'money' note for a lot longer than usual.

What a fabulous tour! I have got some wonderful memories to treasure...



A CONSTANT SOURCE OF JOY

By Trudy Bradburne

I've been to seventy nine Michael performances since my first concert, which was the ROC concert in September 1993, and have never missed a tour since then, as well as seeing every UK musical he has been in, and have every single CD and DVD. However, forking out for a Meet and Greet is something I've never considered.

Having said that, it was different this time. My sister Gloria was diagnosed with terminal lung cancer in May 2013 and the Meet and Greet was something she wanted to do. When we booked in October, to be honest, we didn't know if she would be around or not but in these circumstances you just book and hope for the best. Due to successful chemotherapy, Gloria is still here, but tires very easily and was not well enough to travel to Sheffield after all.

So her place was taken by my friend Anne. Anne has been to a few concerts and, while not being a fan on my scale, likes Michael very much and loves his shows. Also in the party was my husband, Hugh.

The photographer who would be taking the photos put us at our ease and told us that there was no need to be nervous, Michael was a lovely man and "What you see is what you get". One of the fans present was a very nice young lady called Heather who was very excited and squealed loudly when Michael made his entrance, making us all jump! Michael is an old hand at dealing with all this and was amused, saying "Are you excited?" This broke the ice and we all relaxed. Michael is so very comfortable with people and in no time we were all having

our photos taken, chatting and having things signed. It was a small group and he was so very obliging with everyone. I told Michael that Anne and I had been friends since we were 11 years old and had been in the same class at school and he seemed interested in that. I also told him that Hugh and I were celebrating our 40th wedding anniversary next January. He said he wouldn't come out with the obvious, but then he did, i.e. "You get less for murder!"

Then it was time for Michael to pull up a chair while we were invited to ask questions. That didn't really happen – it just turned out to be a group of people chatting to each other. I decided it was a chance to tell Michael that I had been to every tour and he asked me what my favourite one had been. That was hard to say because I have enjoyed them all but there are certain things that stick in the mind and one of them has always been the Bedford Park concert in 1997 when Maria Friedman was a guest and they sang all the songs from *Grease*.

He must have thought "Blimey, she's having to go back a bit to find a favourite!" but there are magical moments you always remember and that just happens to be one of them. There are so many more – and more recent ones too!

Michael talked easily about Dusty Springfield, his dogs, his fans, his voice, his radio show and well, just engaging in conversation like a group of old friends. It was an unnatural situation but Michael made it all seem so normal.

Heather had been fairly quiet but then started talking to him, saying she thought she might faint when she met him and started stuttering a bit. Michael just said "And here I am, a REAL PERSON"!

He was asked if he ever got stuck for something to say during his two hours' radio show. Michael said "Hello, have you met me?" I don't think Michael can ever be accused of not having something to say! At this point I told Michael that Anne and her husband have a little ritual which they follow before his show every Sunday evening. They pour the wine and wait until he says "Hello my lovelies" and then they start to have a drink! I think Michael liked that – he says he likes to think of people at home enjoying the music. And, no, we won't ever hear him playing his own stuff because he thinks it would be "a bit weird" to do that. (I did tell him though that Hugh and I often remark that Michael's versions are a lot better.)

Michael asked me if I was going to Chichester to see *Mack and Mabel*, after I had told him I had seen *Sweeney Todd* there. I told him that I wouldn't be going – I had been with my sister and she wasn't well enough to go but that Hugh and I would be seeing it in Manchester instead. He said he hoped that Gloria would be better soon and I certainly didn't want to bring the mood down by telling him that was not going to happen.

It's been a tricky couple of years – what with my beloved sister being diagnosed with a terminal illness and Hugh deteriorating with Parkinson's disease, but you can see by my face how happy that occasion was for me. By the way, Michael signed a photo to Gloria and she was thrilled with it.

Times can sometimes be hard but, you know what, since the day I dashed out to buy 'Always' after seeing him on the TV; to the time I got the 'First Love' CD and first listened to it while doing the ironing (and was so overcome by hearing him sing 'If You Go Away' in French that I managed to burn Hugh's best shirt), right through to his gorgeous new album 'If Everyone Was Listening', Michael has been a constant source of joy in my life. And now I can add to my memories that day in Sheffield when I finally met Michael and talked to him. It's a day I will never forget.

The Tour finished nearly two weeks ago and every day the songs and memories have been going round in my head. For one reason and another until now, I haven't had chance to reflect on what an amazing month it was.

The length and breadth of Britain from Bournemouth up as far as Glasgow and everywhere in between, everyone was listening to Michael and marvelling at his wonderful voice, choices of songs, his amazing band directed by Callum McLeod and his very talented and lovely backing singers Sandra, Adrian and Alice.

This was a tour full of surprises with a smaller band than Michael has had in the past, but every bit as good, maybe even better than ever! I say this because Michael's voice was as good as I've ever heard it and the country flavour of a lot of the songs, lent themselves to a softer sound, suiting Michael's interpretation perfectly. It was a concert full of variety with old favourites and some more recent hits.

Michael burst onto the stage singing Avicii's 'Wake Me Up' – which of course woke everyone up and got the audience clapping and joining in from the start! This was followed by several choices off his latest album 'If Everyone Was Listening'. These included 'Need You Now', 'Simple Love', and 'Jessie' (a song he said he related to, even though he was allergic to cats!) We were also treated to 'I Won't Give Up', 'The Climb' which often brought the audience to their feet. Sugarland's 'Stuck Like Glue' became a firm favourite with Michael's fans as he could interact with them and this was certainly a "fun" song.

A Michael Ball concert would not be complete without songs from Musical Theatre and we were not disappointed. He chose



to sing the lovely 'Can You Feel The Love Tonight', 'Last Night of The World', 'All I Ask of You' and Adrian and Sandra's rendition of 'A Whole New World' was just gorgeous.

One of my favourite parts of this concert was the end of the first half when Michael sang 'I Won't Send Roses' from his up and coming musical *Mack and Mabel*, leading into 'The Rose'. For me, this was simply beautiful and never failed to get a standing ovation.

Act Two began with an old favourite 'Something Inside So Strong' which Michael sang with such power and conviction. He

followed this by singing 'I Won't Let You Go' which he sang on his previous tour. Then we had more songs from the new album 'You Needed Me' and 'Angel'—these two songs I just love! Alice duetted with Michael for 'Falling Slowly', again, before the title song 'If Everyone Was Listening'. This particular song was never a favourite of mine but I have to say that the more I heard Michael singing it, the more I liked it.

Again Michael included 'Empty Chairs' which evokes such an emotional reaction from an audience. 'Tell Me It's Not True' also got an amazing response and to everyone's delight "Party Time" started with Katy Perry's

'Roar' - inevitably the cue for "The Ball Run"! We all partied along to 'Happy', 'One Step' Out Of Time, 'The Wonder of You', and 'You Can't Stop The Beat', finishing as always, with 'Love Changes Everything'.

The atmosphere at all the venues was electric, bringing people to their feet without exception. Southampton was the last concert of the tour and was 'fabulous' - as were all the shows. The only difference at Southampton was that Michael teased us with 'Bad Things'!

As always, Michael chatted between singing, varying his banter from us missing 'Poldark' on a Sunday night to how he couldn't believe that his career had begun thirty years ago and that he hoped he could continue for another thirty years. He did add with tongue in cheek that he may be on a zimmer frame (and I'm sure some of us will be too!) and I don't care as long as Michael is on the stage singing and performing! He had a great time at the end of each concert, taking photos with his new toy a "selfie stick" given to him in Glasgow by Fran and Audrey, good fan friends!

My tour was full of good fun, good friends, good food, of course brilliant concerts... and the occasional glass of wine! The trains ran on time apart from once and all went without a hitch. My highlights are difficult to pinpoint but at Nottingham we had a group photo, great banter and Michael signed my programme and CD sleeve. I got a great picture with Michael and Rose Heath, shown above. Sheffield was special too but then, they all were for different reasons.

This was definitely 'A Tour to Remember' - quite possibly the best ever!



From Mr Ball to Mr Whippy - Our Tour Diary

Daniela and Andrea from Switzerland

Day one: Getting up early in the morning, driving to the airport, entering Easy Jet Plane in Basel-Mulhouse, leaving Easy Jet Plane in Gatwick, taking a taxi to the hotel, checking in, short refreshing, enjoying impressive musical *Miss Saigon* in the evening, completely forgotten about the price we've paid for the tickets!

Day two: Sleeping a bit longer, having nice breakfast at Quotidien in Covent Garden, strolling around under the sun, do a bit of shopping, after light Italian dinner enjoying entertaining musical *The Commitments* in the evening.

Day three: Taking train to Bournemouth, taking a taxi to the hotel, checking in, quickly refreshing, searching BIC and asking for the tickets, hearing they are not ready until shortly before the show, disappointed and nervous, strolling along the beautiful beach, having two Mister Whippys (new to us and best in the world!), doing a bit of shopping, having world class dinner at the Restaurant Zizi, unfortunately no musical tonight. Bournemouth is the place to be when we are retired!

Day four: Having very nice breakfast at the sunny beach, waiter still laughing about my egg order "sunny side up"... just an impression for the Americans... sorry! Followed by a Mister Whippy, going back to the hotel, fortunately close to the beach, because we needed the toilet urgently (!), doing a bit of shopping, getting ready for the evening, fighting with sister about the space in front of the mirror, taking our tickets at BIC counter (uff!), enjoying Michael's first show of the tour... simply the best ever! Having delicious Mexican food, going to bed with very nice dreams... and soon getting up, searching for the moist toilet paper!

Day five: Taking train to Oxford, taking taxi to the hotel... sorry, to the "jail" also known as Malmaison, different checking in, searching for our cell, refreshing, strolling around, doing a bit of shopping, enjoying another Mister Whippy, searching the venue, our tickets ready this time, very happy, getting ready for the evening, no fight tonight, room has two mirrors, enjoying Michael's show... simply the best ever! Waiting outside in front of the stage



Photo: Sharon Searrott

door, getting the chance to take some nice pictures of Michael in the middle of the crowd, going back into our cell... pleased!

Day six: Taking train to Ipswich, long journey, buying delicious Granola and fresh fruits, can't open the Granola cup, really, those cups are hard to open, finally with help of another passenger enjoying nice breakfast in the train, taking a taxi to the hotel, checking in, counting cash instead of refreshing, having a bit of a shock, searching for the credit card to take it with us, doing just a little bit of shopping. Then searching for the venue, find the venue and Michael outside, giving autographs, get the chance to get two pictures, Michael as Adonis, us with terrible hair and our green raincoats, happy but not so much, finding our Australian friends Megan and Garry, having a very nice dinner together at the Pizza Express, lovely chat about almost everything, getting ready for the evening, enjoying Michael's show... simply the best ever! Only a small disappointment; instead of getting up and doing a bit of a dance during Michael's first song, the audience stayed in their seats... why?

Day seven: Taking train back to London, buying some goodies at Mr. Pumpkin,



Photo: Sharon Searrott



Photo: Sharon Searrott

taking the bus to the hotel, strolling up and down Oxford/Bond/Carnaby and Regent-Street with other millions of tourists, having a disappointing London Mister Whippy (very different taste and double the price!), getting ready for Hammersmith, meeting Swiss fans in the foyer – very rare! Enjoying Michael in his best show ever, meeting good friends outside the venue, taking lovely pictures with each other, waiting for Michael with his family, waving him goodbye as he passes by in the bus, see you in Birmingham! Going back to the hotel by bus, one and a half hours to drive, frozen to death, taking a 20 minute long hot shower, followed by 3 cups of very hot tea, going to sleep, still frozen!

Day eight: Taking train to Birmingham, getting confused about the directions to the hotel because of construction around the train station (and almost everywhere in the city), procedure as mentioned before, having best Italian dinner at the Fumo's Restaurant, checking out the venue, discover tour buses in front of the Hyatt Hotel, strolling around the very nice village, having a delicious cheese platter at the Café Rouge. Then waiting for Michael in front of the venue entrance, getting some lovely pictures even through the fence, doing a

bit of shopping, getting ready for another remarkable evening, stunned about the Symphony Hall, best show ever! Waiting for Michael after the show, walking back to the hotel, all alone in the dark night... no one else around! Checking timetable again, setting the alarm, sleeping soundly!

Day nine: Taking train to Brighton, filled with fear at the train station, trains won't go from London, major delays, luckily we get to Brighton later in the afternoon, procedure, visiting famous pier, being a nanny for two sweet dogs until their daddy comes back from an urgent toilet visit, strolling around the nice beach, finding Mister Whippy... great taste again! Discover BBC Shop, buying Michael's BBC Radio 2 cup, enjoying great meal at Ed's Easy Diner, seeing Michael, even have the chance to chat with him, followed by a personal autograph on the tour programme and finally... a great picture without raincoats! Meeting our new friend Anne from the USA again, shopping, but only some money left to spend in the One Pound Shop, getting ready for the evening, best show ever, ever, ever! Waiting for Michael, taking pictures of him with wet hair, waving the bus goodbye with a little tear in our eye, it was the last show for us

on the tour. Then visiting the Grand Hotel, enjoying two fantastic Pina Coladas and the luxury bathroom, meeting Anne again who showed us her very nice room, taking pictures, hugging each other, going back to the hotel and dreaming about all the six wonderful shows we were able to see!

Day ten: Taking train back to London, staying here for another three days before getting home, enjoying the flair of the city again, watching *Book of Mormon* again (laughing until we wet our pants) and *Cats* which brought back nice memories of our childhood, when we first saw this musical with our parents, years ago!

Day thirteen: Packing (well, stuffing!) Michael's autograph goes into cotton-covered hand baggage, taking train got Gatwick, boarding the plane... the rest is history.

Goodbye and thank you Michael! Thanks to you we got to know your beautiful country with its charming and helpful citizens better and better and during every trip we found new friends and discovered new exciting things... like Mister Whippy!

See you in Chichester!



Photo: Carolyn Bell



MY MEET AND GREET

by Michelle Stones

What can I say apart from wow, wow, WOW! My first Meet & Greet thanks to my best friend Tracey who paid for it for my 50th Birthday. I have stood at many a stage door but this was different. We started out travelling from Coventry on the train Thursday morning, we got to our hotel which was literally a 2 minute walk to the theatre and we went to TGIs for something to eat and a couple of cocktails!

It's now just gone 3pm and butterflies are starting to appear in my stomach, I'm nervous and excited at the same time, we get ourselves ready and make our way to

the theatre, we are met by VIP NATION who hands us our goodie bags and tells us what's going to happen! Now I'm smiling the time is near, we are taken to a room where chairs are set out in 2 rows. Tracey and I sit behind and we wait, the door suddenly opens and in bounds Michael larger than life and all my nerves disappear in an instant. They tell us that we will go up in couples or individuals and Michael will sign anything we have with us, have a chat and our photo taken.

Going down the row I realise we are going to be last! The couple next to us



go up and the butterflies start again, what am I going to say? Suddenly it's our time and I tell him I'm not keen on the beard and he needs a shave to which he replies, "So do you!" Cheeky so and so! But all the nerves have gone and I'm enjoying myself. Then Tracey tells him the story where he called her stupid outside the stage door in Chichester to which he replies, "Glad to see nothing changes!" Now we are laughing which is shown in one of my favourite pictures. There's no rushing and questions are now being asked but all too quickly it comes to an end and Michael has to leave and get ready.

It was all and more I had hoped for and it was a one off and I'm so glad I have done it. Our seats were row D and centre stage, the best seats ever and the concert I would say was the best yet!

THE ULTIMATE SCHOOL HOLIDAY

by Claire Kuczma

I had my meet and greet in Ipswich - April 9th which was bought as an amazing 4th Anniversary (April 10th) present from my husband. I am a teacher and the concert fell during my school holidays, so after spending my morning getting ready, I hopped on a bus and travelled the beautiful Suffolk countryside listening to the 'If Everyone Was Listening' album on my iPhone - I was in seventh heaven.

When I got there I swiftly made my way to the theatre and around to the stage door entrance - I got chatting to loads of the fans who were already there and it wasn't long before Adrian passed by - he said to expect Michael in about an hour! We were all looking pensively at the road when from behind, in the car park, Michael and Andrew appeared. He joked around, posed and went in to do a sound check. I made my way to Starbucks to calm my nerves, called my mum to tell her about the stage



door, gazed longingly at the pictures that I had taken on my phone not five minutes earlier and prepared for 4:45 where I had to check in.

This soon arrived and once checked in, we were all led upstairs to a waiting room above the front of the Regent - it has its own little mini stage and bar. We were given the rules of no asking for kisses, only

one picture and one signature. As I sat right near the door, the man himself burst in, frightening the living day lights out of me and instantly calming my nerves!

Our meet and greet pack was a lovely sparkly pen and notebooks (perfect for a teacher) - then the moment arrived. I took my notebook up to sign and Michael had very sweetly remembered that I was Welsh - he called me "Cariad" and to any Welsh person that is the ultimate word, meaning beloved. He thanked me and told me that I was welcome in Welsh and I rejoined everyone else and admired everyone else having their photos with their idol.

I met a lovely lady Amanda during that meet and greet and it's a true testament to the power of the Fan Club and the ladies that follow him - she was like every other lady I met that day, a wonderful, kind amazing person. I joined my husband downstairs afterwards and we made our way to our seats for the show... which was stunning! It was an amazing night, an amazing present and a fab way to end my school holidays.



TRIBUTE - ANN MALLEE

Elaine Marsden sent us this tribute to Ann:

I'm sorry to tell you that Ann Mallee who did live in Australia, but moved back to Leeds, has died. She used to fly over to see Michael's concerts and shows and I first met her in the London Palladium at a *Chitty, Chitty, Bang, Bang* performance. We have been friends ever since. She will be missed, she was a good friend.

TRIBUTE - MARGARET WEATHERLEY



After a 5 year battle with Alzheimer's Margaret sadly passed away at the age of 87.

Included with her will was a letter she wrote to her son Stuart around her 80th birthday in October 2007 (so before the Alzheimer's) to be opened in the event of her passing. This is an extract from that letter:

"Now onto Michael Ball - inevitably! Please let him know how much his beautiful singing and his various stage appearances all over the country have meant to me. He is such a kind and thoughtful man (as well as being rather gorgeous!) not at all like the normal entertainer, and I would be so happy to know that the drivel I've written to him over the years has amused him. The last seven years would not have been the same without his music. Please thank him."

This photo was taken at a Meet and Greet in Bristol in September 2009 just six months before her problems really started. In the hope that he might remember her, she gave him a tin of salmon as a joke as he'd recently revealed that he had a liking for it.

THE MICHAEL BALL FAN CLUB ONLINE

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 Area for fan club members only.
The password to access it is: **MICHAELMACK**



Call the **Infoline** number below to hear what Michael is doing, 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!

INFOLINE NUMBER

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

