

ON THE BALL

Issue 74



Hello Everyone

What is it they say about variety being the spice of life? Well, we've certainly seen a variety of content from Michael this year. Chess seems like a long time ago now, but what a lovely surprise it was to see Michael performing the role of Anatoly at the London Coliseum earlier in the year. It just proved that whatever Michael turns his hand to, he brings his own special uniqueness to it.

The summer brought us the Il Divo shows along with Carfest and Proms In The Park, and then The Stages Musicals Festival cruise. Having decided not to go as neither of us really liked the idea of cruising and the cost was high, we found an offer we couldn't refuse just 5 days before it started! It took us less than half an hour to decide on going and we are so pleased we did! Apart from Michael we were entertained by artists such as John Owen Jones, Cassidy Janson, Collabro, Lee Mead, Kelly Ellis and many more. Michael, of course, was the highlight and he didn't disappoint us. He performed a wonderful show and then took part in a Q and A session the following morning. It was definitely one of those special times and it was good to see so many Fan Club members enjoying themselves.



Apart from all that we have enjoyed listening to Michael's Radio 2 programme on Sunday mornings, he really has made that spot his own, and the Children In Need special at the Savoy Theatre really proved that point.

Our thanks as always go to James Gaden for this amazing edition of On The Ball and for his work throughout the year, to Pat Webb, Live Nation and Michael for being the inspiring person he always is.

Now we have 2019 to look forward to with a new album due for release at the end of March, which is followed by a nationwide tour in April and May. What more could we wish for? We definitely wish you all a healthy and happy Christmas and holiday season and can't wait to see everyone in the Spring!

Love

Maureen and Gill

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Dear Everyone,

They always told me as I was growing up that as you get older the years seem to fly by more and more quickly... and they weren't lying, were they? Where has this year gone? I can't believe I'm sitting down and writing another Christmas/New Year letter to you.... This year has just flown by and our plans are starting to come together for 2019.

The new album, 'Coming Home to You', is being released at the end of March and I'm beaming with pride..... four songs are co-written by me and the other tracks are really close to my heart. You'll recognise some of them and others will, I'm sure, be new to you but together they represent one of the most personal and intimate records I've made. I can't wait to hear what you think!

And then we are on the road again and I'm so bloody excited!!! My first solo tour since 2015 and I'm going to do

my very best to make it the very best we've ever done... and a big part of that is down to you. Having you in the audience, listening, laughing, cheering and joining in is what makes our concerts so special... and you never let me down. I cannot wait to see you there.

2018 has been a difficult year for a lot of people I know. All of us have experienced losing someone or something very special to us, the world continues to look unsettled and changing at a pace that can sometimes take our breath away and quite often we find ourselves being overwhelmed and a bit lost.

That's the time to hold on to and remember all the good things that we do have, the friends, the family and the familiarity of the things we know and love and the people we can share those experiences with. We can all make a positive difference in this world and there is no doubt in my mind that the more good and joy we give, the

more our lives are enhanced and the better we feel.

So my loves, I send you the biggest of hugs and I hope you have a beautiful and joy filled Christmas and the best of New Years. Hopefully we will get to see each other somewhere and sometime so until then stay safe.

God Bless
and

All my love

Mike



CARFEST 2018

After two successful albums and tours together, Michael and Alfie reunited at Carfest in August to perform on an eclectic bill that also included Razorlight, Jools Holland, Status Quo, Paloma Faith, The Proclaimers, Texas and Reef. However Ball and Boe put on a show with something for everyone and went down a storm.

Introduced by Chris Evans, Michael and Alfie took to the stage with 'Tonight' and delivered a series of selections from their two smash hit albums, including 'For Once In My Life', 'You'll Be Back', 'He Lives In You' and 'You're The Voice' – which saw Alfie invite Chris Evans and various others from the side of the stage to join in.

The crowd also enjoyed Ball and Boe's Queen medley as they ran through 'A Kind Of Magic', 'Radio Ga Ga', 'We Will Rock You' and 'We Are The Champions'. Equally well received was the superb *Les Misérables* medley which was so popular on tour. 'Bring Him Home', 'Empty Chairs at Empty Tables' and 'I Dreamed A Dream' were all warmly received with the crowd joining in with 'One Day More'.

As always, the boys chose to end the show in an upbeat manner by performing a third medley, a collection of Wham! material, as an encore. Chris Evans returned to the stage with several members of the crew to sing and dance along, bringing the event to a fantastic conclusion.





Dot's Birthday Surprise

Larry Wilkie decided to set up a great surprise for his wife Dot. It needed military precision, a trip to *Chess*, a visit to Wogan House, a booking for a cruise and the help of a certain Mr Ball. Larry takes up the story...



It was my wife Dot's Birthday weekend, and I bought tickets for us to go and watch Michael in *Chess* on the Saturday night.

As I'm sure you all know, Dot is a huge fan of Michael and she was very excited about the show and seeing Michael perform. The show was, of course, amazing, and there was no shortage of great reviews in the last issue, so I don't need to add anything more – my story is more about the following morning.

I had planned an extra surprise for Dot's birthday and was hoping that I would be able to pull it off on the Sunday morning (having tried unsuccessfully twice before). The idea was to go down to Wogan House early on the Sunday and ask Michael to wish Dot a Happy Birthday, and then deliver my main surprise!

I hadn't told Dot of my plan, so was just hoping that we would be up and about early enough to make the 30 minute drive from our hotel to Wogan House, in time to meet Michael before he went inside.

Well that's where the plan started to fall down. Dot had a nice lie in, despite me making as much noise as I could, then leisurely opened her birthday cards, before strolling down for a nice long breakfast, with me watching the clock all the while.

Needless to say, by the time we got out, it would have taken a miraculously quick and straight forward journey to the studio to get there with even half a chance of meeting Michael. This, of course, didn't happen and we got there far too late.

I knew Dot wouldn't approve, but having got this close, I suggested a quick hello after the show, then we would leave him alone. She was adamant this wasn't going to happen.

Somehow, after a shopping trip, I managed to get back towards the studio, and suggested we take a quick look, and if he isn't there, we would go. As luck would have it, Michael had just come out and was ready to go, so it was now or never!!

Dot started chatting to a couple of other

fans that were outside the studio, and I pounced (in the nicest possible way!). I went up to Michael and apologised for stopping him, but explained that it was Dot's birthday, and... (now the surprise) that it is our 30th Wedding Anniversary later in the year, and as a treat, I had booked us on to the Stages cruise that he is headlining in October. Only I wanted him to tell her about it, to make it extra special.

He was fantastic.

He asked which one was Dot, so I pointed her out, and he said "Dot, Happy Birthday my lovely, and I will see you on the boat in October."

Well, her reaction was priceless, and, having held on to this secret since last July, to finally have it all work out so perfectly was such a relief, and such a thrill!

Now I just needed some sea sickness



tablets for me and we would be all set!

Well, what a fantastic time we had on the Stages Cruise. Michael was absolutely amazing, not only during his fabulous concert, but also when he did an audience Q & A session the following morning.

This was our very first cruise, and it is easy to see how people get hooked. An amazing ship, a wonderful line up of stars,

with entertainment available for most of each day, fabulous food and also a nice stopover in Amsterdam. And it was great to meet up with so many fellow fans of MB and Musicals in general.

In preparation for the cruise, another of Michael's fans, Mandie Lee, had suggested that we all got badges so that we would recognise each other on the ship. Above are the badges that Dot and I wore.



Dot also had her nails painted with the Fan Club logo especially for the cruise as you can see!

A moment that Dot will remember for a very, very long time happened as we were walking thought the ship on the third day of the cruise. She was looking through the itinerary for the day when she heard me talking to somebody behind her. Wondering who I could possibly be talking to, she turned around to see the man himself on his way to rehearsal. I mentioned to him about our previous chat outside Wogan House, and he genuinely seemed to remember the occasion.

I asked if he would be kind enough to have a picture taken with Dot, and being the gentleman that he is, he agreed, and this was the result. It is fair to say, this put her on cloud nine!

That evening we were scheduled to watch the second of his concerts – with 3000 passengers on board, all main acts did two performances to enable everyone to watch in the fabulous main theatre. What a wonderful event it was. Michael was on great form and received several standing ovations from the audience, but the reaction at the end of 'Gethsemane' was spine tingling. The best ovation that any act received during the whole trip.

It really was an unforgettable day, and on top of this, we would get to see Michael again the following morning in a Q & A session that we didn't know about previously.

During the Q & A, Michael was asked a question by Alana, who was in a wheelchair at the back of the theatre. She had recorded her question on a voice recorder, and as she finished, he walked from the stage, all the way to the back of the theatre to chat to her up close and give her a hug. A very emotional moment.

Our final, bonus Michael appearance, was during a show called 'In Conversation With Don Black' the legendary lyricist. As the lights went down for the start of this show, Michael appeared a couple



of rows in front of us to watch amongst the audience, and towards the end, he was called up on stage to perform 'Love Changes Everything', which drew yet another ovation.

For both of us, this was one of the most memorable holidays we have ever had. For many of the reasons above, it couldn't have gone better, and I will always be grateful to Michael for all he did to make it so special.

I bought a canvas print of Dot's photo with Michael from onboard the ship, and hopefully one day we will get him to sign it for her. A lovely memento of a truly memorable experience.



MORE MICHAEL MEETINGS



Elaine Biller says she doesn't get chance to see Michael very often but was lucky enough to have a front row ticket to see him when he performed in Chess, but what made it even better is she got a lovely picture with him before the show!

Meanwhile, Joan Riddle paid her first visit to Wogan House to catch Michael after his radio show and managed to get this great photo before she saw him again on the Stages Cruise.



MICHAEL'S FURRY FRIENDS

In September, Michael posted a very sad Tweet on his Twitter page, when he revealed *"Yesterday we said goodbye to my handsome, noble, soppy, daft, loyal, loving and most beloved best friend. RIP Ollie"* (pictured opposite).

The Fan Club and fans all over social media sent condolences to him and he responded with a further Tweet stating: *"Your kindness and thoughtfulness is overwhelming and such a comfort. Thank you so much. I send love to all of you, especially those who are going through the same sadness. It sucks but it's worth it for all the joy we get in return xxx"*

Michael had lost his dog Freddie just over a year earlier, in March 2017. Freddie's legs were tragically crushed in a car accident in 2013, and Michael took him to Noel Fitzpatrick, who came up with an amazing solution. Michael said at the time: *"We thought we were going to lose Freddie. We took him to the brilliant vet Noel Fitzpatrick, who makes artificial limbs for animals. Now Freddie's running around like a pup again. I think he might be up for winning Bionic Dog of the year!"*

Later that year Michael introduced Dylan, a rescue dog and now he has another member of the household, pictured below:

"So, I'd like to introduce you to the new member of the Ball family. This is Danny. The most gorgeous, funny, naughty, pooh and wee making machine!!!"

Bottom right is a picture of Michael with Noel and Tim Howar, who starred opposite Michael in *Chess*.





JANUARY 2019

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Photo: Gill Oakley

FEBRUARY 2019

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Photo: Claire Stockil

MARCH 2019

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Photo: Maureen Wilkinson-Rouse

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Photo: Gill Oakley

JUNE 2019

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Photo: Vehbiye Vönchu

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Photo: Vebbiye Vonchu

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Photo: Claire Stockil

NOVEMBER 2019

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DECEMBER 2019

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Lena Marsh, Live and Shticking!



Michael has taken part in the recording of *Lena Marsh, Live and Shticking!*, a BBC Radio 4 comedy drama about a Broadway star recording a new Christmas album with the help of her showbiz chums.

The show stars Rebecca Front as Lena, known for her work on *The Day Today* and *Knowing Me Knowing You With Alan Partridge* and Kevin Whatley, who is remembered for his roles in *Auf Wiedersehen, Pet*, long running drama *Inspector Morse* and the spinoff *Lewis*. Michael will be playing himself.

The programme is scheduled to be broadcast on Boxing Day on BBC Radio 4 at 2.15pm.

THANK YOU FROM CHRISTINE JUDGE

Over the past 18 months I have made a lot of friends on Facebook through either Michael or Alfie's groups. My big thank you is for all the fans that have supported me this year. Unfortunately I had a serious fall back in April, shattered my hip and femur and over a 5 month period had to spend loads of time in hospital through the injury and hip dislocating. If it wasn't for those people who talked me to daily via phone, text or Messenger, I don't know how I would have gotten to where I am today.

A huge thank you goes to Anne Smith for coming down to visit me in hospital and spent some time so dad could have a break and also to Janice Lazarus for a flying visit. As for me now – 7 months on the bones have healed, just the muscles to mend and strength to get back. Hope to see some of you on tour next year!

Thank you also to James for letting me put this note in.

(No problem Christine, this is what the Fan Club is all about!)



RAFFLE WINNERS

The Fan Club raffle advertised last issue for the Lifesize figures of Michael and Alfie Boe was drawn with and the lucky winner is Sylvia Ellis. The second prize of a framed picture of Michael was won by Susan Rogers, pictured above.



MICHAEL HOSTS THIS MORNING

On 27th July fans had an unexpected chance to see Michael when he and Sara Cox guest presented ITV's *This Morning*, filling in for the usual Friday hosts Eamonn Holmes and Ruth Langsford. Michael and Sara followed on from the previous week's guest hosts Dr Ranj Singh and Vanessa Feltz.



PROMS IN THE PARK

Words And Pictures By Julie Vidler

The day had finally arrived, *Proms In The Park 2018* was here. The day I had been eagerly waiting for! It was way back in April when I had first booked my ticket and although I had previously been to *Proms In The Park* before, I was still very excited to know I would be going joining thousands of other Prom goers.

This year's Prom was going to be my third time going, having been the previous two years. I first went in 2016 when I heard that Michael was going to be the new presenter taking over from the late Terry Wogan. Having never seen *Last Night Of The Proms* on TV, I didn't really know what to expect. Obviously I was aware of the traditional Prom anthems, but that was about all I knew. I have to say I was so glad I went that first year



as I am now hooked. There is an amazing party atmosphere and I just love seeing the line up of stars. I also love it when everyone sings all the anthems at the end, it's very emotive. The sight of all the flags in the crowd is a sight to behold.

This year's line up included Lisa Stansfield, Matt Goss and Joseph Calleja but the highlights for me had to be the Rock Choir, Josh Groban and of course, the man himself, Mr Ball. There were also a couple of surprises including Michael's co-star in *Chess*, Cassidy Janson, who came on stage to talk about when she had appeared at a previous Proms with *Beautiful – The Carole King Musical*. It was lovely to see her an Michael reunited.

The real icing on the cake for me though was hearing Michael sing 'You Can't Stop The Beat' from *Hairspray* and 'This Is Me' from *The Greatest Showman*. To hear him sing these live was amazing. I'm keeping my fingers crossed 'This Is Me' appears on new album!

Another really memorable moment of the night was when Michael announced it was conductor Richard Balcombe's birthday and everyone, including Michael, sang 'Happy Birthday' to him. There was a couple of entertaining moments off stage in the wings, when, I spotted Michael taking photos of the audience. I also watched him secretly dancing when Gladys Knight was on stage. He thought no one was looking and suddenly a spotlight accidentally shone on him. (I have a video of him dancing, a moment I will treasure)!

The finale to the evening was amazing firework display

and then it was back to the hotel for me. It was a brilliant evening, – thanks to the great company of Helen Grenville – which I didn't want to end. Michael was so good as always (well he never disappoints, does he?) and did an incredible job again. Here's to *Proms In The Park 2019*...





Photo: Gill Riddle

HAVING A BALL AT SEA

Many fans decided to book themselves onto the Stages Cruise when it was announced Michael would be performing. Mandie Lee describes the experience...

I had been looking forward to seeing Michael on the Stages Cruise ever since we had booked it when it was announced. I couldn't get on board the ship fast enough!

As we took our seats for the long awaited show, the excitement totally filled the air. The atmosphere was electric! Christina Bianco did her short set, which seemed like forever because all I wanted was Michael on the stage – after all that's why I booked the cruise! I must add though, even if Michael wasn't on board, the cruise was worth every penny. Having Mr Ball there was just such an added bonus !

The intro started and we all held our breath with

anticipation as to what the first song would be and a few seconds later Michael walked on to the stage with a huge electrifying applause to his first song 'He Lives In You'.

Michael sang his heart out as usual, leaving us more in love with that voice and those gorgeous good looks.

Michael finished his song



Photo: Claire Stockill

and chatted a little bit about the size of the boat as he put it... to be told it was a ship! The next song on his set list was 'You'll Be Back Again'. He lit the room up with his tones and talent.

Next came 'This Is Me', this was a slightly different version, or should I say different take on the song. Michael had really put his mark on such a legendary tune and the room fell silent. When he finished the audience gave him a well deserved standing ovation.

Next came 'I Won't Send Roses' followed by 'Tell Me It's Not True', a personal favorite of mine, which again ended with a massive round of applause.

Next to hit the eardrums was 'Not While I'm Around' before the intro to one of Michael's real show-stoppers... 'Gethsemane'! Well Michael did not disappoint at all and blew the roof off the theatre. After a minute or so sitting down, and lord knows he needed it, he followed on by singing 'Empty Chairs At Empty Tables' and leading on to another *Les Misérables* stunner, 'Stars'.

Things got better still with another big favourite of mine, 'Anthem'. Yet again everyone was on their feet, applauding this amazing song choice and it's perfect delivery which left me breathless.

As the concert was coming to a close, Michael was told to wind it up bit. He said no, he had a set to do and he was doing it and we all applauded. So, of course, 'Love Changes Everything' was the final

number and we all held up our camera torches to light up the room. He sang his heart out and we would expect no less.

Michael then left the stage with all of us screaming for more – of course there was no disappointment as Michael came out to 'You Can't Stop The Beat' where soon the audience were up on their feet dancing along with Michael. He did apologise for



Photo: Janice Lazarus



Photo: Janice Lazarus

all prepared to dance all night!

The final song arrived and it was the Elvis Presley classic 'The Wonder Of You'. That calmed the audience down as most of us were still stuck in the middle of 'You Can't Stop The Beat' but we all paid attention as Michael raised the roof one last time.

It was all over and it passed so quickly, but it was worth everything to have been a part of it. To be sat in the third row was a dream come true. We left the theatre all light hearted and in a dream world that the past hour and a half had actually finished. Was it worth it? By gosh, yes it was a million times over!

not wearing his heels for this song, as they killed his feet in the first show!

As we were on our feet, we continued to out dance for what seemed like eternity, but in a good way! Finally the song came to an end, much to our disapproval, as I think we were



Photo: Janice Lazarus



A FOND FAREWELL

by Donna Mulvey-Jones

I was lucky enough to sit in on Michael's radio show in April. I had just been approached about a dream job and told him all about it. Then I dropped the clanger that it would be in Los Angeles and there were people I didn't want to move away from, him included, and that I hated flying! Michael was so lovely – insisting I go for it, that it doesn't have to be forever and everyone would still be here for me. He also reassured me he had now cured me of my fear of flying since being ushered into the cockpit mid-panic attack (*as reported last issue*) on the way back from seeing him in Tokyo!

I got offered the job of Director of Post Production at Netflix, based in Hollywood. I basically only work in television production because I was besotted with Michael from the age of 12

and needed a strategy where I'd get to meet him one day! Ha! He has been my inspiration from the get go. And I've somehow ended up with this amazing job - I feel totally blessed.

My lovely fan friends ensured I got sent off in style. Claire Shorter suggested we meet up one Sunday at the Wogan House and then Nikki Louise Goodchild spearheaded one of the best days ever. It was all a bit of a surprise until the last minute - thank God I bought myself a new dress!

A week before, Nikki broke the news that I'd be doing 'On The Ball' on Michael's show. Are you kidding me?! I'm terrible at quizzes! Jen Garner and I were at CarFest and literally started swotting up on every subject and celebrity birthday in September!



Then came the baseball caps we would wear for the occasion. We decided to go for "Netflix and chill with Ball".... Michael got a "Netflix and Chill with my Ballettes"! All week Nikki and Claire filled our Whatsapp group with the funniest pictures of themselves wearing them pretty much everywhere.

The evening before I'd stayed over with Lisa Kleinman Bark who cooked the most gorgeous gnocchi, and we were able to get ready together like over excited teenagers, choosing what to wear,

if I should have my hair straight or curly, and what colour lipstick. Hilarious really, but one of those precious girly days – and we were lucky with lovely summer weather.

Eventually the nine of us met at All Bar One in London. What do you mean you can't serve us Prosecco until 12? We were relying on that to get through the nerves! Claire Zucma demonstrated her master negotiation skills in convincing the management to turn the music off at least!



Then Nikki and Emma Smith gave me a video message that Michael had recorded for me to say goodbye. As if my emotions weren't already through the roof, I listened as he told me I now can't stalk him across the Atlantic Ocean, and he's going to miss me stalking him!

We lost the quiz, but had so much fun it really didn't matter. We had a previous winner Clare Lloyd as part of our gang and so we didn't embarrass ourselves with a score of 19.

We all went for Prosecco brunch and the girls got me the most beautiful book with pictures of Michael and all our friendships.

Then the most exciting part was knowing Michael has invited us all into the studio after the show to say goodbye. It was like a bunch of cackling 10 year olds standing in reception, all nerves and excitement and taking hundreds of selfies. The security team must have wondered if Michael had taken a leave of his senses inviting us lot in! The lift in the building was so small we all opted for the stairs - half of us needed oxygen tanks by the time we got to the 4th floor and we were already flushed and half dying with nerves before we'd even started the climb!

This is why we all love Michael... he came out and made every single one of us feel like a million dollars. Even when he accidentally elbowed Rose Hall in the face he gave her a massive cuddle - and to be honest we'd have all taken an elbow in the face for that!

He got us sitting on Elton John's piano and invited me to stand between his legs. Then he started giving me a shoulder massage - I told him my life had just peaked and it really will never get better than that!

Michael felt left out without sunglasses so he borrowed some to join us in group pics - pulling faces and having such a giggle. He chatted about some recordings he was doing, and his time at CarFest. We all felt we were just sitting and chatting to a friend - natural conversation and tonnes of laughter and stories.

He wrote me the most beautiful card and said "you can cry when you read that later" and I can confirm that I most definitely sobbed!

The girls took me for lunch after. It was pretty hilarious though as we all sat in silence for quite a while. We were shell shocked, speechless and all texting each other the mass of photos. We must have looked like the most boring, anti-social group of friends ever for the first 20 mins we were in the restaurant!

I can't thank all of the girls enough for making this day happen for me - Nikki in particular deserves a medal for her organisation skills!

The whole day made me so proud and happy to be a fan of Michael. He is the one of the most charming and incredible people, who genuinely cares about his fans. And he's brought me together with some of the loveliest friends. So off I go to Hollywood but with my heart very much remaining here ... I'll be back to share in the good times soon. "Coming Home To You" is a very apt 2019 tour title!

ODDBALLS



Here's a "small world" story from Maureen and Gill:

Alana, who you can see with us in the wheelchair, was with her mum, dad and two assistants on The Stages Cruise. We bumped into her when she was side by side with another sufferer of cerebral palsy. Her mum said, "You're not going to believe this. Alana and this young man went to school together and they haven't seen each other or had any contact for 20 years!" How amazing that they should meet again on the cruise!

It was well worth the trip for Alana, as during Michael's Q & A, she wanted to "speak" to him with her new communication aid. It worked a treat and Michael came off the stage and went to the back of the stalls to answer her personally and give her a hug.



Also on the cruise was a lady who was about to celebrate her 85th birthday - her question for Michael was could she have a photo with him? Of course he said yes and invited her to the stage. Definitely made her dream come true!



Finally, this amusing photo was taken by Pauline Broughton on the cruise of Michael being frisked. It's not known what the security team were searching for but Michael has been known to carry a tune from time to time...!

CHILDREN IN NEED AT THE SAVOY

Photos by Alastair Godfrey

Michael presented a very special edition of his radio show from the Savoy Theatre in aid of Children in Need, with a star studded collection of guests and performances from himself and his mate Alfie Boe. Julie Vidler was in the audience for the show, while Christine Godfrey and her husband Alastair were fortunate enough to attend the Champagne Reception and lunch afterwards.

Michael's Radio 2 Children in Need special at Savoy Hotel didn't disappoint. It was certainly worth the wait from booking the ticket. Not only the event itself but, also meeting up with some great friends who I've made through the Fan Club.

When Michael first announced he was going to be performing his show live from the Savoy I knew it was going to be special. I am so lucky to have had the opportunity to attend, as I missed the announcement due to prior commitments. I needn't have worried because my friends excitedly messaged me to ask if I was going (thanks Helen Grenville and Vehbiye Yoncu). There was no doubt in my mind of the decision, the answer was a big YES!

I immediately went online and booked tickets for Helen and myself. When the tickets arrived a few days later my countdown to the day started. I was SO excited to know that I would be going to the Savoy Theatre, a place I had never been to before. It goes without

saying that the main reason for my excitement was to know I was going to be seeing a certain person (I wonder who that could be?) perform his radio show live with special guests.

The show was listed on the Radio 2 website as an "extravaganza" and they weren't wrong. The line up was going to be amazing; Boyzone, Sir Tom Jones, Sheridan Smith and in the words of Michael "a new young actor/singer who's trying to make his mark, Alfie Boe".

The show started with Michael coming onto the stage with Pudsey Bear who he proceeded to give a big hug. It was so lovely. This was followed by performances from Sheridan Smith who reminisced on her return to the Savoy where she had previously starred in *Legally Blonde*. She performed two songs, 'Priceless' and 'Are You Just Sleeping?'. I don't think there was a dry eye in the house after the second song as, it was so beautiful and emotional. She said it was in memory of her late dad.

Boyzone performed 'Because' and 'Baby Can I Hold You Tonight'. Michael congratulated Shane on winning *Strictly Come Dancing Children In Need Special*. He then spoke about them ending after 25 years and talked about their new album and tour. The funniest bit was when Michael told them that he went to Festival In A Day and sneaked himself with Rev. Kate Bottley to the side of the stage, where did every move and every gesture like Boyzone!

The Kingdom Choir gave two incredible performances and unsurprisingly got a rousing reception. Sir Tom Jones didn't sing, however he gave a moving interview explaining about his return to the UK following the loss of his wife after 56 years.

Apart from the performances there were the usual radio show features including Sunday Boasts and of course On The Ball. Before the show had started Michael had got everyone rehearsing the On The Ball signature tune in readiness. Two contestants had been picked

from the audience, one of who had previously seen Alfie Boe in concert. He explained that when Alfie had asked the audience at his concert to join in with 'Keep Me In Your Heart', he had been picked to do a solo. One of the funny moments of On The Ball was when a contestant was asked "Who plays Doctor Who?" and his response was "Jodie Foster". Everyone was in stitches, including Michael!

Whilst the music was being played on the radio, Michael was having a great time singing along to the tracks and showing off some nifty dance moves.

The finale of the show was Alfie singing 'As Time Goes By' from his album of the same name. This was hilarious as Alfie asked Michael to dance during the duet and they did a waltz together. Alfie and Michael then sang 'You're The Voice'. They were amazing. Michael then thanked everyone for coming. It was an amazing time in aid of such a fantastic cause. It was an experience I will never forget.

Julie Vidler



Michael's Charity Day for Children in Need was absolutely fantastic, everything was perfect – even the weather was sunny and warm.

Alastair and I arrived at the Savoy Theatre just after 9:30am and went inside to wait for the main doors to open at 10am. The usherettes were selling Pudsey Bears and headbands instead of ice creams! There was an atmosphere of happy anticipation as we were shown to our seats we were about to spend a few hours with Michael Ball but had no idea what was going to happen.

Shortly after 10:30am Michael came onto the stage, which was set up for the radio programme, to welcome us and explain what was going to hopefully happen. Once we were "on air" we could take as many photos as we liked, make a lot of noise cheering and clapping when the various guests came on, but our mobile phones must be on silent. Michael was really excited about the whole event and at the end of his chat said we would have a great time and make it up as we went along!

The programme started just after the 11am news with The Kingdom Choir singing live on stage. Michael then played music while the stage was altered for his next guests Boyzone. He talked to them about their farewell tour next year and their new album 'Thank You & Goodnight' that had been released the previous Friday. Boyzone then sang two songs from the new album and Michael's favourite Boyzone song, 'No Matter What'.

Sheridan Smith was Michael's next guest, once again having a chat and performing two songs. The Kingdom Choir sang again and this time Michael talked to them about singing at the Royal Wedding in May.



One of the highlights of the day was Sir Tom Jones – unfortunately he didn't sing but he did sit down for a talk with Michael. Then near the end of the show Alfie Boe came on he sang. Alfie then asked Michael to duet with him – they had quite a laugh as if they hadn't worked together before!

While the music was playing, whether it was a live performance or a recording being played for the show, Michael was dancing about and silently singing along, he really was having the time of his life.

All too soon the programme finished just before 1pm. Michael then thanked us all for being there and supporting Children in Need.

We all left the theatre – most people to go home but some of us really lucky ones walked down to The Savoy Hotel for a Champagne Reception and Children in Need lunch.

During the afternoon, apart from the lunch, both Michael and Alfie performed and Christopher Biggins did the Live Auction and persuaded people to bid thousands of pounds for the experiences. There were a few hundred people for the lunch, most of who hadn't been in the theatre. Every table had someone to do with BBC Radio – we had Anneka Rice.

Once again Michael was the host for the afternoon and one of the first things he said was we could take as many selfies with people as we liked... providing we paid for them! Our truly wonderful and memorable day finished at 5pm.

Christine Godfrey



SUNDAY SURPRISE

by Gill Tee

I had bought my tickets months ago for a lunchtime gig at Ronnie Scott's Jazz Club. It was to be Cassidy Janson's first solo concert at the iconic jazz venue, and it sold out almost as soon as it was announced. I was thrilled to have tickets – I am very lucky to know Cassidy as my brother works with the Jive Aces and Cassidy regularly sings with them. And of course I saw her play Carole King in *Beautiful* and Florence in *Chess*. Both roles she completely owned with outstanding performances night after night. It was during *Chess* she formed a magical working relationship with Michael. Those who went on the cruise were lucky to have her as a last minute stand in and many of you have fallen in love with her (no surprise there).

Two weeks prior to the Ronnie's gig I saw Cassidy with the Jives at another venue. I was told that she was going to have a special guest at Ronnie's but it was top secret (wink wink)! I tried to block it out of my head because I didn't want to be disappointed if it didn't happen.

Sunday came, I had stayed with my good friend Anne on the Saturday night in London as I didn't want to risk any train delays on Sunday morning. Anne talked about her excitement of going to Ronnie Scott's (bucket list tick) and of seeing Cassidy. Little did she know who else she would be seeing!

The gig started at 1pm with Cassidy singing a few songs from *Beautiful*. From 1:20 onwards (the time it would take Michael to get from Wogan House) I started glancing over my shoulder to see if he had arrived, still not really believing it. Whilst Cassidy was singing she blew a kiss to someone behind me. I knew Michael was in the room.

Cassidy then announced that Michael Ball had arrived. I don't think anyone in the room believed her because we all laughed and she had to say "Yes, he really has!" and pointed to him now sitting right

behind us. Anne's face was a picture of utter shock and disbelief!

The interval came. I had to admit to Anne that I kind of knew and how the hell had I kept that secret. The hardest of my life!

Of course during the interval I had to go to the toilet and walk past Michael.





I said a quick hello and a little chat and when he said “hello my lovely” and held my hand, my heart just melted.

Back to the second half of the concert. Cassidy called Michael to join her up on stage to a massive cheer. They sang ‘You Don’t Bring Me Flowers’ by Neil Diamond. The chemistry between the two of them was purely magical. You could see how they work so well together. At the end of the song, Cassidy presented Michael with a bunch of flowers which got a huge laugh from everyone. I took a few photos but I wanted to savour the moment – one which I will never forget. Seeing two of my favourite singers performing in such perfect harmony. My brother Graham and friend Catalina had strict instructions to capture it all which they duly did. Anne and I are truly grateful to them for complying to my demands!

A standing ovation led by Anne and myself followed as Michael went back to his seat. Cassidy finished off the excellent set with a collection of songs she has written herself.

For the rest of the day Anne and I kept pinching ourselves, just to make sure we hadn’t dreamt what had just happened. We had the opportunity to have a chat with Cassidy afterwards, with me telling her she had “made my life” seeing Michael and her sing together again and Anne told her she had nicknamed her “a little pocket rocket” since seeing her in *Chess*.

We know Michael has plans for a new album soon and I would love to see him do a duet with Cassidy. Let’s hope it happens soon. Thank you to Cassidy for making mine and Anne’s dreams come true.

Thanks to Graham and Catalina for the photos and video which is being played on constant repeat. And the biggest thank you to Michael for giving up his precious Sunday afternoon to make two very happy bunnies lives!

Are we still dreaming?





MICHAEL BALL

COMING HOME TO YOU

2019 UK TOUR DATES

SAT 20 APR NOTTINGHAM - ROYAL CONCERT HALL

SUN 21 APR YORK - BARBICAN

TUE 23 APR GLASGOW - ROYAL CONCERT HALL

WED 24 APR HULL - BONUS ARENA

THU 25 APR GATESHEAD - SAGE

SAT 27 APR BRISTOL - HIPPODROME

SUN 28 APR LIVERPOOL - EMPIRE THEATRE

TUE 30 APR LONDON - PALLADIUM

WED 1 MAY LONDON - PALLADIUM

FRI 03 MAY SHEFFIELD - CITY HALL

SAT 04 MAY MANCHESTER - BRIDGEWATER HALL

MON 06 MAY IPSWICH - REGENT THEATRE

WED 08 MAY BRIGHTON - BRIGHTON CENTRE

FRI 10 MAY SOUTHAMPTON - GUILDHALL

SAT 11 MAY OXFORD - NEW THEATRE

SUN 12 MAY BIRMINGHAM - SYMPHONY HALL

WED 15 MAY BOURNEMOUTH - BIC WINDSOR HALL

FRI 17 MAY PORTSMOUTH - GUILDHALL

SAT 18 MAY PLYMOUTH - PAVILIONS

SUN 19 MAY CARDIFF - ST DAVID'S HALL

TUE 21 MAY BLACKPOOL - OPERA HOUSE

WED 22 MAY LEICESTER - DE MONTFORT HALL

THE NEW ALBUM OUT MARCH 22ND 2019