

ON THE BALL

Issue 79



Hi Everyone

Well, what another very strange year we are all having. Everyone has been battling through this pandemic trying to lead as normal a life as we can. We know so many of us have been missing being able to see Michael in person. However, there seems to have been plenty of opportunities to watch him on TV and listen to him on the radio. He seems to keep popping up everywhere!

It's been a bit longer than usual between editions of "On The Ball" due to the fact that so many things were put on hold. We wanted to wait until we at least had something good to report on. Thankfully "Hairspray" did open in June, and although they have had their problems with having to pause the show for a few weeks, it was a great achievement just to get it back on stage. We were lucky enough to attend the first public performance and the atmosphere in the theatre was spine-tingling. When Michael made a speech at the end saying what being there meant to everyone, there wasn't a dry eye in the house! Let us hope things continue in a positive way.

We had a fantastic response to our fundraiser for Michael's birthday to support Shooting Star Children's Hospice and The Royal Theatrical Fund, raising £3729 in donations which was tripled due to the generosity of Netflix via Donna Mulvey-Jones who nominated our charities to receive the extra amount.

Isn't Michael's "Wonderful Wales" TV series truly wonderful? Michael is just so good at presenting these types of shows, he always comes across as genuinely interested in the people and places he visits.

As you will see from his letter, Michael is teasing us by talking about a solo tour next year. No further details yet but we will keep you informed once we have more information.

Michael continues with his weekly Radio 2 show thank goodness, which helps us all to stay in touch with what is happening in his life and hear his lovely warm voice on the radio.

Here is a photo of one of our visits to see Michael in the original "Hairspray", and new ones where we are with Harriet (Maureen's granddaughter) and Colin in our socially distanced seats at the first performance of the current Hairspray:

Love

Maureen and Gill



Compiled and designed by James Gaden - www.halo-graphic.com. Email: james@halo-graphic.com

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Dear Everyone,

So I'm writing this during the 2 weeks isolation period enforced on the cast of Hairspray having been 'pinged' and it's a bit of a drag but I can't wait to get back in the frock!! What an amazing opening few weeks we have had.

The reaction from the audience is just incredible, the company are magnificent and the sheer joy of being back on stage in a role I love, in a theatre that is beautiful, is wonderful. Hopefully you will get the chance to come and see us over the summer if you haven't already and I don't think you will be disappointed. It's been a long, hard struggle to get it on but it has been so worth it.

So how are you doing? We knew it was going to be a strange year, to put it mildly, but the reality is challenging for so many of us, I know and there will be hiccups, and upsets and difficulties along the road to

Some kind of normality but we will get there so never lose faith and hope. Easy to say I know but you have done so brilliantly navigating this strange old time and the sacrifices everyone has had to make are starting to pay off.

I've got to say the past few months for me have been extraordinary with two major events, not including Hairspray, bringing so much excitement. The Album! What an incredible reaction from you and I'm so proud and relieved it has been received so well. It means the world to me that something so personal and special to me has resonated with you too.

So many people have asked if I'm going to tour with this album and the answer is YES!! (with my fingers and toes crossed of course, of course 😊)

Obviously the rest of this year is taken up with AJie and I on the road again after Hairspray and a few other exciting little projects but 'God willing and a fair wind' I really want

to be out with everyone doing my solo tour next year. I hope you can wait till then.... I'm not sure I can!

Now then, Wonderful Wales. I didn't see this coming but I couldn't be happier with it. A total and utter joy to make and such an overwhelmingly positive response to it.... and only one episode has aired so far at the time of writing this. I think they get better as they go on and I really hope I get the chance to make more of these kinds of shows. I love it.

Finally, thanks for all the fabulous birthday cards and messages I received and most importantly your wonderful generosity towards my two special charities. Thanks to Gill + Maureen for helping to coordinate this so well (as they do everything and it means so much to me.... As Do You!)

You are always there for me, supportive, positive, kind, generous and inspiring. I can't wait to see you somewhere, somehow very soon and I bloody love you. Till then. God Bless

M. Owen
X

WE ARE MORE THAN ONE - LIVE ONLINE

Living through a pandemic has greatly reduced any chance of seeing Michael for quite some time, with him being unable to tour or perform in theatre for the first few months. The good news was he released a stunning new album called *We Are More Than One*, containing mostly new songs he had co-written, alongside three excellent cover versions. The record was extremely well received by the Fan Club members, as you'll see further on in the magazine. While there has been no opportunity to hear these songs live on a stage as yet, a select few won chance to be part of an online show by pre-ordering the CD. Here are their accounts.

Michael Ball's *We Are More Than One* show was an online concert for a select audience, chosen at random from those who had pre-ordered the album directly from his online store – it was a lottery, not everyone who pre-ordered received an invite. I was one of the lucky many that won entry to this private event which took place on Thursday, May 13th at 6pm BST. Like many of his global fanbase these events create a few challenges mostly due to the time differences and occasional media region restrictions. I had heard of one fan getting up at 3am for the concert. On this particular date I had the added challenge of just having moved into a New York City apartment and not having any internet. Thankfully, knowing how important this was to me, my ever-resourceful teenage son found that by sitting in one corner of his bedroom we could borrow the internet connection of the retail store next door! So, on May 13th at 1pm US eastern time, that is where you found me - huddled on a stool in the corner next to a bunk bed enjoying Michael's show. But that's no more than any good Michael fan would do.



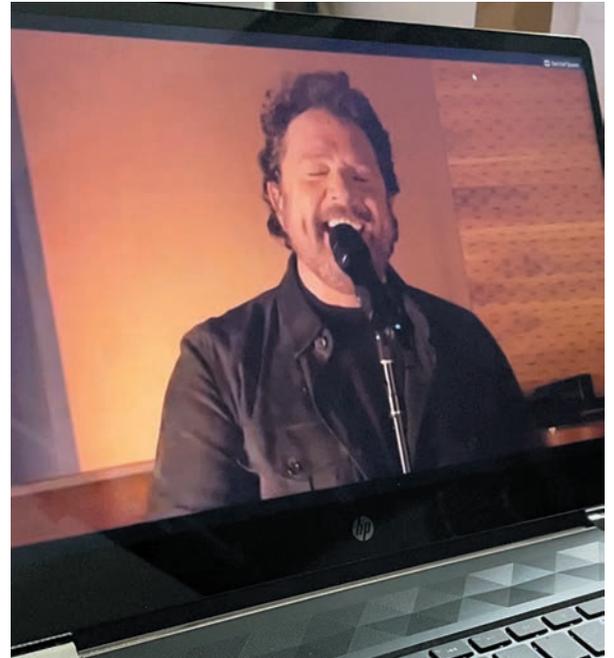
The show itself, while not the question and answer session that had originally been advertised, was a friendly and personal affair filmed in a pleasant studio space and lasting about 40 minutes. Wearing an outfit similar to that of his album photos, a very cheerful Michael looked like he was thrilled

to be singing for people again, even if remotely. While chatting happily to his Zoom audience, Michael went on to sing five songs from his new album: 'Be the One,' 'God Willing,' 'We Are More Than One,' 'Simple Complicated Man' as well as a duet with Amy Wadge. Due to COVID restrictions there were no musicians or back up singers in the studio so he sang along to a soundtrack, swaying and smiling while singing with his usual flair.

Between songs, Michael entertained us with the meaning and stories behind the new songs and how he came to write and produce them all from his studio on the top floor of his house in Barnes. In the last segment, Michael was excited to talk with Amy Wadge about how their relationship had come to pass and how much he had enjoyed working with her (Amy is credited on eight of the songs on the new album.) Michael tells the story better than I in his album introduction:

"I called the extraordinary singer/songwriter Amy Wadge, who I'd met on my radio show just before lockdown and who I'd had an instant rapport with and asked her if she would help me get started. It was the beginning of the most thrilling, hilarious, challenging and ultimately satisfying creative process I have ever known and the start of the most wonderful friendship."

After bantering about their blooming friendship and songwriting fun, they then went on to sing the lovely duet that they had recorded for the album,



a cover entitled 'We've Got Tonight.'

Some of the magic of Michael is his ability to make moments like these so personal and to transport you through song.

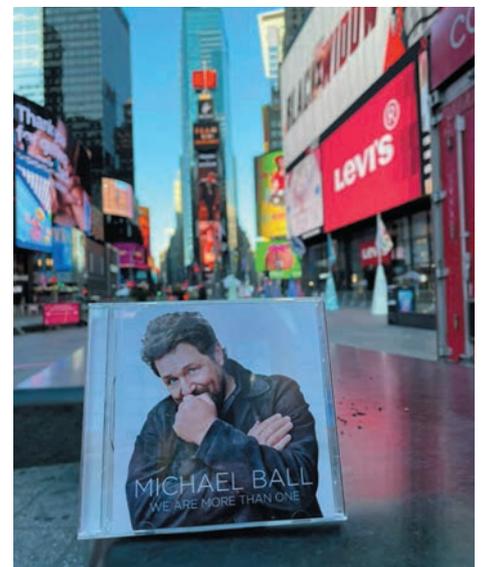
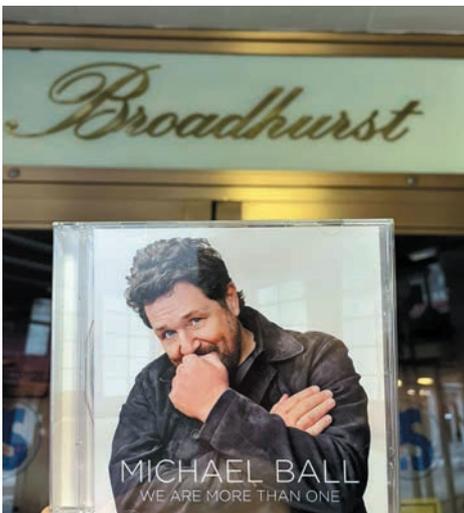




Every song felt like it was being sung just for you. Michael radiated joy like there was nowhere else he'd rather be than there singing for you. It felt incredibly personal. Even though he was singing to a camera in a studio, he was really singing to me. I felt like I was there curled up on a sofa in that pleasant warm toned room listening to a friend instead of being 3,400 miles away in an apartment full of boxes on my laptop, watching a man I've never actually met yet somehow think of as a friend. And a dear friend at that.

As Michael couldn't tour the album, I took the album out for a tour of New York!

Catherine Noland



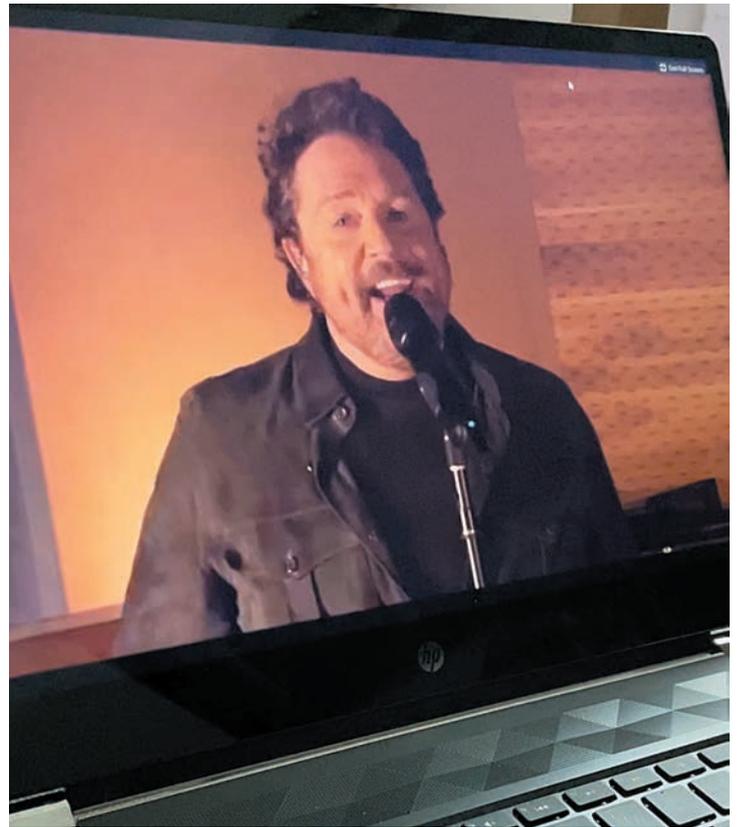
I was lucky enough to watch the online show with Michael and Amy Wadge. To say I was excited was an understatement, I have never seen Michael live and it was a great experience - even though I wasn't in the same room. I found myself laughing out loud and even joining in some of the songs. I really enjoyed listening to them both talking about the songs and the connection they had with each other was obvious. It has only made me more excited to see Michael in Hairspray in September and at the 02 in December.

Sarah Cooper

I was one of the lucky ones to see the Online Show which was amazing. The CD is also very good and having lost my husband (not from Covid) last October I find some of the songs really moving and uplifting. "God willing and a fair wind" is now one of my expressions!

Hope next year Michael has a concert in Norfolk or Suffolk as I find travelling to London too much.

Jane Harding



From the moment it was announced that those who had pre-ordered Michael's new album would be entered for a chance to attend a virtual concert with Michael and Amy Wadge, I had my fingers crossed. Now, as my mom would say, I couldn't win yesterday's newspaper, I didn't hold out much hope. But... there it was!! The invitation popped up in my email and I was over the moon.

Since I live in the States (California), travel to England is not really advisable at this time, so a chance to see Michael live in this format was the best that could be hoped for. I couldn't sleep the night before and was up early to be ready. Even though the concert would be conducted on a Zoom platform, I had to be dressed nicely - right down to the earrings - for Michael.

Zero hour approached and my excitement built. To see Michael has been a dream of mine for a long time and here was my chance. And there he was - casual, at ease, but looking pleased as punch to be presenting his new baby.

The way the concert was presented was fabulous. Since we couldn't see any other attendees, it was as though Michael were singing directly to me. And since he couldn't hear me, I got the chance to sing along with him - another dream.

The songs he chose were some of my favorites - well, the entire album is full of favorites. His duet with Amy was lovely. It was two friends in complete harmony with one another and their friendship was palpable.

It was the fastest 40 minutes, but 40 minutes of Michael is better than none at all. I'm so glad I was able to be present at the unveiling!

Cathy Borchelt



I absolutely adore his new album and was one of the people picked for the online show. Unfortunately I had a fall and sustained a dislocated fractured elbow so missed it. Never mind, better luck next time. I can't go to see Hairspray but, I have tickets to see Michael and Alfie on tour!

Christine Muir

Michael's new album is absolutely brilliant and totally in keeping with what we have all endured over the last eighteen months with the Covid pandemic. Truly remarkable and so passionately delivered. I have always enjoyed all his albums and DVDs that have been produced, but this one is so uplifting in as much it gives us all, hope for the future.

I have been a devotee of Michael's career, having a large collection of his albums, on all formats, vinyl, cassettes, CD's and DVDs, since he came on the music scene, may it continue. An absolute professional in everything he does.

Jan Bennett

My stomach was in knots as I nervously sat in front of the computer waiting for my Zoom meeting with Michael to begin.

A few days earlier, I had received an email from HMV congratulating me for being one of the lucky 10 winners who would be attending a Q&A session with Michael over Zoom.

I couldn't believe it! I never, ever win anything! After over 30 years of being a huge fan, I would actually meet and have a chance to ask our lovely Michael a question, (something I had only ever dreamed of).

"Michael is now in the waiting area", Natasha, the HMV representative announced. "And here he is", she continued, smiling! Oh my goodness, my heart was racing, my stomach in knots and I was shaking, Michael had joined the Zoom meeting. Well, I have to say that he was just so lovely and down-to-earth that any nerves I had soon melted away. He welcomed each one of us, asking our names and happily chatted about his new album *We Are More Than One*. Then we moved on to our questions and he chose me to ask the first question! My nerves had returned but I managed to ask him about the production side of the album and, if he would ever consider producing for other artists. He was so enthusiastic, interesting and excited as he answered my question, and very funny too!

Other competition winners asked about inspiration for the new album, favourite tracks, favourite shows, how to learn lines, things learnt about oneself during lockdown, swapping roles in a production and... Alex the gardener... what was that story he mentions on the inside cover of the album?!

The Q&A session lasted around 40 minutes and I can't believe how quickly the time passed. I felt so incredibly honoured and so lucky to be a part of this, I was on cloud nine! The memories of chatting with Michael will stay with me always.

I would like to give huge thanks to HMV for organising the competition and, massive thanks to our lovely Michael for giving his time to attend.

Patricia Moscattini



MY FAVORITE 'MICHAEL' MOMENTS

by Carol Cox

Over the years, there have been quite a few "Michael moments" for me but I've chosen some of my personal favorites. It really all started for me in 2003 when Michael was appearing in *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*. Even though I had heard his wonderful voice earlier, that is when I really started following his career. Then, in 2004, Michael was coming to the USA to sing with the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. That is the first time I saw him in person. What a wonderful four days of seeing Michael! One of my favorite moments was the CD signing at Borders book store when we had a laugh about the photo I asked him to sign.



There were so many memories from 2004, from seeing Michael at my first outdoor concert at Penshurst Place, the 2004 Fan Club Event and seeing him being absolutely remarkable at Singular Sensations at the Theater Royal Haymarket.



Then, there was one of Michael's finest 'character' roles as Count Fosco in *Woman in White*. That was one of the first times I had 'stage doored' at a theater to see him. Such precious memories!

If I had to choose one moment from seeing Michael live as my very favorite, it would be from 'The Night of 1000 Voices' charity



concert at the Royal Albert Hall. I will never forget him singing 'Anthem' from *Chess* with the choir and the orchestra with that huge pipe organ! It was the most magical sound I had ever heard! It clearly is one of Michael's favorite songs and is my all time favorite (even more than 'Love Changes Everything'!).



And then there was *Patience* in New York City – another one of my favorite character roles that Michael has brought to life. I remember the nice older couple sitting next to me at one performance. They had season tickets for entire New York City Opera season and did not know who Michael was. I gave them a short explanation before the show started and by the end, they were both standing, clapping and cheering and yelling "Bravo!", much to my amusement. Michael had two new fans.

Another favorite moment was at the Fan Club 2006 Event, when Michael caught the first glimpse of my winning hat in the Fan Club hat contest and roared with laughter (pictured opposite). It was hysterical. When I approached



the stage to collect my prize, he asked “how the hell did you get that through security?” It was a moment to cherish. Thank you to whoever took the photo.

Another very personal favorite moment was meeting Michael backstage before his outdoor concert at Repton School. I had seen him the night before in *Kismet* and how he could have enough energy to do an outdoor concert the next day was amazing. Ah, the memories!

And finally, there was *Hairspray* at the Shaftsbury Theater in London. Oh, what a wonderful time that was! I remember the tense moment when a bunch of us were online waiting for the announcement of the winner of the ‘Best Actor In A Musical’ award. Barbara Windsor read out Michael's name and wow, everyone went wild! A very special moment for Michael and his fans!

I still think *Hairspray* is probably the best musical Michael has ever appeared in and after seeing it seventeen times (not bragging!), I could easily see him as Edna quite a few more times. One of my favorite photos from 2007 was when Lila Lindemann and I met Michael at the stage door before one of his performances. It was one of the last times I saw him in person but the future I'm sure, holds many more favorite memories.

Rest in peace, Lila.





We've all been starved of Musical Theatre during lockdown, but it was fantastic to see *Hairspray* finally get the go-ahead for performances to start. While the theatre capacity may have been limited due to restrictions, the audiences made more than enough noise to compensate, with standing ovations and roars of approval after each performance. Here, some fans share their *Hairspray* memories, both old and new, recollecting a show that has brought such joy to so many.

The first time Michael did *Hairspray*, I went with my friend to see the show. It was wonderful and my friend didn't believe it was Michael until he started to sing! The trip was also memorable because we went for a meal before the show and decided to treat ourselves to a meal at Rules. We found out that Michael had recently been there for his birthday. When we told the Maitre D' where we were going and that I love Michael, he put us at the same table Michael had been on. Such fabulous memories of a brilliant show and wonderful meal. The highlight was of course meeting Michael at the stage door. He is so genuine and lovely to all the fans waiting for him, he gives them all his time and is very patient.

Christine Muir

Many, many years ago, with my sister and partner, we saw Michael's first stint as Edna, which of course we thoroughly enjoyed and waited at the stage door. This picture was taken then and I had it printed onto a mug to remember it by.

Jean Nichols





I went to see Michael in Hairspray on Wednesday, he was his usual amazing self. It's the third time we have seen it and I think it's gets better every time. It was very well socially distanced and everyone had a fabulous time!

Veronica Rocker



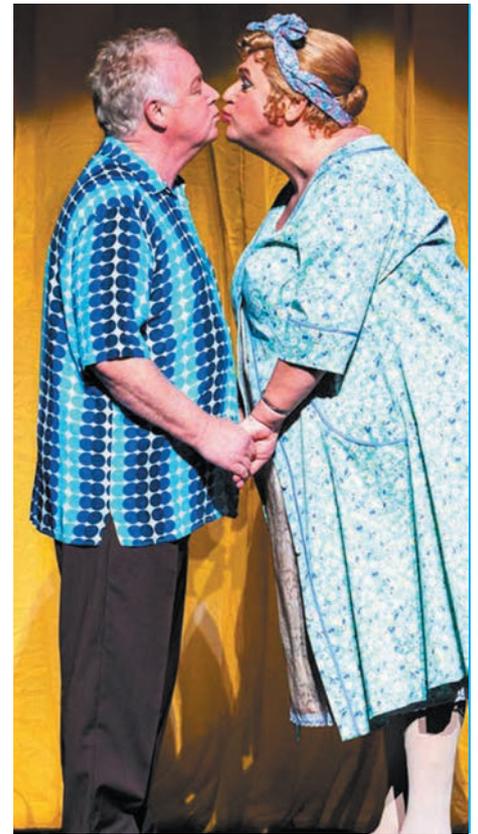
Unfortunately, I won't be able to see Michael in Hairspray this time, but I have this photo, taken after a performance of the original Hairspray at the Shaftsbury Theatre. It was my first visit to a London theatre and after watching a brilliant and uplifting performance, I was lucky enough to have this picture taken with Michael at the stage door (he doesn't look a day older!). I have since met him after Hairspray (touring), Sweeney Todd, Mack and Mabel and Chess - with hopefully many more to come.



Sandra Marshall

I was very privileged to attend the first night of Hairspray on 21st June with three friends. I had already purchased tickets for three performances later in the run but decided to browse and managed a ticket in Row B in the stalls. How could I refuse? It was a night of pure magic and fun, with an amazing talented cast and the atmosphere was electrifying. Of course seeing Michael, in the role that he was born to play and does to perfection each and every time, was the best part. Our dear friend Gill Tee had designed our Hairspray themed masks and they were made by Marshall Marks Interiors.

Janice Lazarus



When I saw the film of Hairspray I was over the moon! It was fantastic and I saw it several times. Then I was able to see the stage version on Broadway in October 2007. When I came back to England, I booked seats for the original London production on 17 December 2007. It was absolutely great and I loved every minute of it!

On the spur of the moment I got tickets for the last night on 25 July 2009! Here are photos taken outside the theatre just before the last performance. Needless to say it was an amazing experience and a fantastic show.

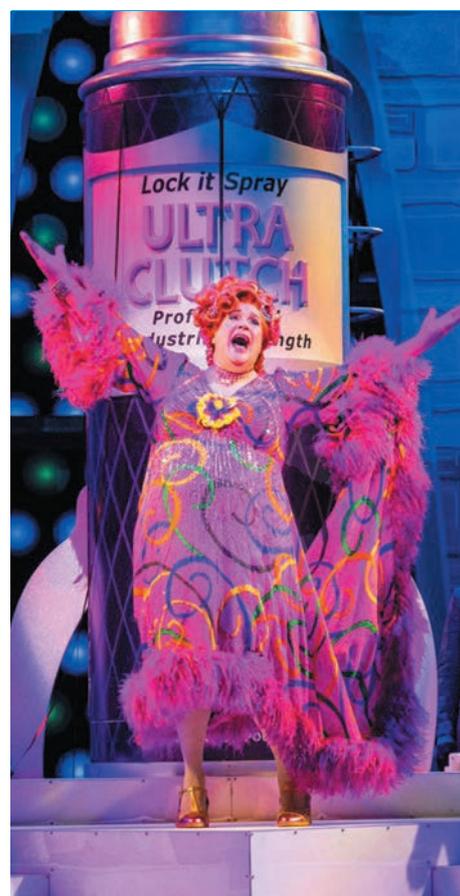
I'm looking forward to seeing it again on 21st July.

Angela Buckler



I was so happy and thrilled that I had the chance to get up to London to see Michael reprise his wacky 'Edna' again in Hairspray at the London Coliseum. I have seen it dozens of times now but I will hold this up as the best production - Lizzy Beal is truly a star, she is so Tracy Turnblad for me. If you are still deciding to go to London then I have no doubt you won't regret a second of it. Michael gave a little speech at the end to the limited capacity audience and he was truly overwhelmed and thrilled with the reaction. I felt so grateful to be among the people helping to bring the West End back to life - theatre is back! I'm so glad I went, the arts and hospitality have been hit the hardest in the past year but you can't stop the beat!

Jill Clark



I have just returned from seeing Hairspray. What an absolute treat. After three re-schedules for a birthday gift bought in 2019, it's just so wonderful to be back in live theatre. For a venue half full, I thought the audience was going to bring the roof down with the standing ovations, noise, whistles, whoops, etc. Great cast, fabulous show, thank you for giving us all such a wonderful night, one we have missed for so long!

Evie B

I was lucky enough to be able to get a ticket for Hairspray opening night. It was on a whim really as I'm going with friends and family in July, but I really felt that I wanted to be part of this amazing occasion.

I was a little apprehensive as I'd not been to a theatre on my own before - but no need to worry there. Everyone in the queue and in the theatre was so friendly, and the staff were so welcoming - I think we couldn't wait to be part of what was such a memorable - and actually quite emotional - occasion.

Once in the theatre I met up with a fellow Michael fan, Brenda - we'd both arranged to wear the same face masks which was lovely. We had seen on Facebook that we were both going on our own and coincidentally our seats were only a couple of rows apart.

Then the curtain went up. Wow! Lizzie Bea opened the show with 'Good Morning Baltimore' - she was so, so good as Tracy Turnblad. Shortly afterwards on came Michael and from the moment he stepped onto the stage he wasn't Michael Ball playing Edna. He was Edna.

The whole cast were so professional, enthusiastic and joyful and although Michael led the cast, he didn't dominate the show, which is a great credit to him. Before long we were all clapping and dancing in our seats and when Marisha Wallace sang, she had a standing ovation before she finished her big song.

And then the finale - all of us in the theatre were up and dancing & clapping till it hurt - & I've never seen a standing ovation like it. It may have been a socially distanced performance but if you were a fly on the wall you would think that the theatre was packed full to capacity.

At the end Michael gave a lovely speech welcoming us all back to the West End. After the show I met some other Michael fans - all lovely ladies - (again - recognised by the masks) and especially thanks to Janice for our lovely chat on the tube on the way home.

Hairspray is wonderful to watch - such a feelgood show and so relevant to our times. I felt really privileged to be able to share in the opening night with the cast, staff and fellow audience. An amazing experience that I'll never forget.

And I will now always spell gorgeous - Gawjus!

Val Self





I was fortunate enough to see Hairspray on opening night with my mum. It was a 6 hour journey down from Scotland, however, 100% worth it. This was also my first trip to London and the West End, both of which had been massive dreams of mine since I was little. I was lucky enough to meet up with my good friend Brenda Falcus for dinner, who I met through MBFC and have become very close to, which made the trip even more special. By far one of the best nights of my life. Being a massive fan of Michael's, Marisha's and theatre-mad in general I can't think of a better experience. It had been a long 472 days since I had stepped foot in a theatre and the minute the lights went down I was overwhelmed with emotion. I can't wait to go back for the final two performances (it's addictive!).

Michael Watt



I decided to book a visit to the theatre on the 3rd July 2021 to see Michael Ball and cast in Hairspray. I have recently become a single person as now going through a painful divorce, which is another story in itself. It was coming up to my 24th wedding anniversary, so I decided to bring the visit to London forward as I knew it would be an unhappy event. So I booked the Double Tree hotel at Tower Hill and a ticket to see Hairspray. I asked my family and friends to see if they could come with me in July, but no one was willing to make the journey. Therefore, I arrived in London on my own and everything that could go wrong went wrong. I went to the taxi rank at Euston as I thought that was where UBER will pick me up. Unfortunately I was at the incorrect pickup point. So I walked to where the taxi driver was meant to be. But guess what - he wasn't there! So I tried to book again and each and every time it failed. So I then walked back to the taxi rank at Euston Station and got a taxi to my hotel. The taxi driver said he will wait for me. So I showered and changed and when I returned to the hotel entrance the taxi driver was nowhere to be seen. Well what could I do? Luckily I saw a couple coming out of my hotel and they told me Tower Hill Tube Station was only a stones throw away.

Well I ran to the tube station. Then I asked which station to get off and they told me Leicester Square, however, as I had a walk about the quickest was the Embankment. Anyway, I arrived at the Coliseum Theatre and I was approx 10 minutes late. Luckily I had an e-ticket on my phone and was told I will be shown to seats for late comers. I should have been in row B. Unfortunately I missed the curtain go up. That is my favourite part when the lights dim and the curtain rises. But it didn't matter. The seat I had was amazing and everyone treated me with respect and kindness. I was so blessed and lucky. Tracy was brilliant and when Michael came on I laughed so much. Hairspray is amazing! I went again once more and I saw it in an different light as I couldn't remember everything from the first performance. I danced, I laughed and England won 4 - 0. Everyone was laughing and it made my weekend complete.

Tracy Savage





Here's me with my friends Gill Tee, Anne Smith, Janice Lakey, Janice Lazarus, Gill Riddle, Angela Taylor and Helen Grenville, wearing our Hairspray masks which were designed by Gill Tee. We wore them last week when we went to Wogan House - Helen captured some photos of Michael coming out of the building. He said "I see you're all masked up" and then exclaimed "Oh my God!" when he realised what we were wearing and asked where we got them.

Julie Vidler



WHAT A NIGHT!

by Brenda Falcus



I was sitting here in Newcastle reading all the hype about *Hairspray* opening in the West End and wishing I could go, when suddenly, I was inspired!! So, as scary as it was going alone, I booked opening night! It was the best decision I have ever made.

I have never seen a big London show before and I had never seen Michael live before either. A few days later my close friend Mike Watt from Scotland, whom I met on MBFC, messaged me to say he had booked too, so we met up for the very first time before the show.

We walked into the Coliseum together (socially distanced of course ha ha!) both for our very first time. What an experience, the atmosphere was electric, we couldn't believe after all our excited conversations that we were actually there at last.

My seat was next to Marc Shaiman, the guy who actually wrote the songs, and wow, that was a bit of a thrill, what a lovely man. Next to him was Jerry Mitchell, the choreographer, and Alan Williams, the music supervisor. I felt like I was sitting next to theatre royalty!

The show opened to deafening applause. It was the most fabulous show I have ever seen, every single member of the cast was brilliant, so many fantastic West End debuts. Edna and Wilbur were hilarious, as they struggled to keep it together, I laughed till the tears streamed down my face. I have renamed them Mr and Mrs Giggles! I loved every song and every dance, and Marisha (Motormouth) singing 'I Know Where I've Been' was just breathtaking. I laughed, I cried, and I danced enthusiastically badly along at the finale.

The applause at the end just erupted, and I mean erupted, it was ear splitting. Never have I heard anything like it, and it went on and on, and on again. It was made even more special due to the lack of numbers, I don't think any audience could ever match that night. I clapped so much my hands were actually bruised and my voice was hoarse. Then to see the joy on Michael and the entire cast's faces just brought a lump to my throat, it was so emotional and a pure privilege to be there. We left absolutely elated and then we saw Callum Mcleod and Cathy McGowan, that just put the icing on the cake. Truly a night never to be forgotten.

I was lucky enough to go to the second night's performance too, it was just as fabulous and I enjoyed every second of it. I could watch this show every single day and never tire of it, but nothing will ever match the thrill and atmosphere of the opening night.

It didn't take long after we got home for Mike and I to decide to book the two final shows of *Hairspray*, after seeing the very first it seemed only apt that we see the final show, how special is that?

Michael is just such a good actor that I didn't feel like I had actually seen Michael Ball, I only saw Edna, his alter ego. I really don't mind because when I see him and Alfie on tour in December it will be like the first time I am seeing him. So that is another first to look forward to

The Michael Ball Fan Club is really something special, where else can you make friends with people from all over the country and indeed the world, then get to actually meet them when you get to somewhere that we all share the love of? I met Val Self, a lovely lady who so kindly offered to meet me for a coffee as I was originally going on my own, now I have another friend, we chat on the phone and I am sure I will run into her on another Michael occasion. I have read so many stories of members who are going to meet up at the show. Kindness is a pretty big theme in our club and it's basically Michael's motto, so I am certain he will be very proud of his Fan Club.



FIRST TIME ROUND!

By Ruth Price

Let me take you back 14 years to the October half term of 2007. I had decided to take my twins (then 11) on a few days visit to London. Although they had previously seen a West End show (Michael in *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* of course!) they were very excited for the trip especially as I let them choose a show each to see. Tuesday was *Lord Of The Rings*, the choice of Matthew, Louise chose *Wicked* for Wednesday and obviously Mum's choice was easy, it had to be *Hairspray*. They helped plan our itinerary – the only thing I insisted we did was stage door *Hairspray*. Louise had an introduction to it when we had a "girlie trip" to *Chitty* but for Matthew it was a new experience.

My husband dropped us at the local station and the excitement was high. Days were spent seeing all the sights and evenings at the theatre. They were both full of musicals and with programmes in hand I decided to let them get a pre-taste of stage door. After *Wicked* we waited... not very long and they both met the lovely Kerry Ellis and Nigel Planer (later to play Wilbur). I think they were a bit star struck and we went back to the hotel on a high.

I had resisted going to the theatre before Thursday which was my day. I was not only

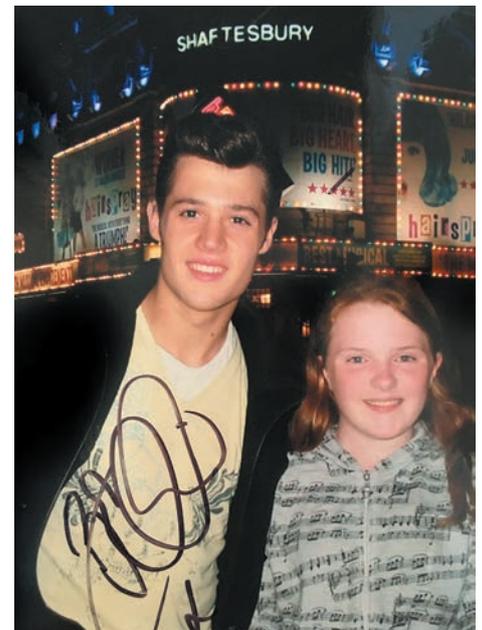


excited to be hopefully seeing Michael again but for the new musical. We had front row centre circle seats so the kids could see the entire stage with no heads in front of them. We ate mid afternoon before heading up to the Shaftsbury for around 5pm. For anyone who remembers the Shaftsbury stage door it wasn't one of the nicest places to loiter but we took up position on Grape Street. There were only a couple of other people there as it was midweek an evening show and still in previews. Although I had explained this was my day and we would be doing this Matthew started.... "What are we waiting here for?" "Why are we here so early?" and so on and on and on.

We saw various members of the cast and crew arriving and finally the main man. Michael came strolling down Grape Street to greet us with his lovely smile and hello. He was very relaxed and appeared not to be in a rush. Having primed Louise with the camera I moved in for the photo. He was happily chatting and Louise was in full flow telling him about all we had been doing and embarrassing me my saying how much I loved him!! Meanwhile Matthew had been skulking in the background, curious about this guy Michael Ball who he had heard me talk about from the day he was born, and who's music he had been brought up on. Michael, being Michael, suddenly saw him and went over to him asking "are you looking forward to seeing the show?" I was mortified when Matthew's reply was "Well I have got to come as my Mum wanted to see you. I enjoyed *Lord Of The Rings* which was my choice". Michael gave a laugh and replied "Well I want to know what you think of this show" as he walked away and went into the theatre.

We took our seats in plenty time, reading the programmes when suddenly Louise nearly jumped into the stalls. "Mum! Mum! It's Ben!"

Ben? I thought she had seen someone she knew. No, it turned out that Ben James Ellis was playing Link Larkin. Now some of you may remember Andrew Lloyd Webber doing a search for Joseph on TV.



Louise's favourite had always been Ben so she was ecstatic to see him in the company. The orchestra struck up the now familiar "Oh Oh Oh woke up today" and we were hooked. Like everyone at the end we were up dancing.

I had decided against waiting at the stage door but suddenly found myself in a minority. Louise was wanting to try and see Ben, and Matthew with his practice the day before wanted to get his programme signed. Who was I to say no! We joined the group of people waiting and Louise had soon wriggled her way to the front of the queue. I was left holding the camera with the instructions to get a photo of her and Ben. Praying he didn't come out the same time as Michael, it wasn't long before the cast started to emerge. Matthew seemed quite happy getting his programme signed. I saw Michael's car pull up so I knew we wouldn't be waiting much longer and sure enough he emerged at the door. Louise was first in getting her programme signed. Matthew was hanging back when suddenly Michael spotted him. He shouted "Well, what did you think of the show, better than *Lord Of The Rings*?" Matthew was tongue tied, replying "Yes I loved it!" Michael then went on to single him out saying "Well do you want me to sign that?" pointing at the programme. As he went forward for it signing, I asked could I take a photo so we have a memento of Matthew's first encounter with Michael, who then got into the waiting car and left with a wave to everyone. It was only then in the mayhem that we realised we had



missed Ben but not all was lost. As we were walking to the hotel Louise spotted him, and in her youthful way ran up to him to ask him to sign her programme, which he did and also posed for a photo.

This was to be the start of our *Hairspray* journey. After all the excitement we had another trip planned this time at February half term. However, it was not to be as my husband died quite

suddenly that month. Once we were over the initial shock, I asked the children what they would like to do at Easter...



Go see *Hairspray* came the reply. This wonderful uplifting show helped us all through this difficult time. We went to see it

finale. Matthew also liked that side for the get up bit!! Those who saw the original show at the Shaftsbury will know what I mean! We were always lucky the early starts paid off. Over the run we had so many happy times meeting and chatting with others at the stage door, getting to know the cast, seeing the cast changes, attending West End Live when *Hairspray* opened the show and making friends who we are still in contact with today. We have our own *Hairspray* memory board of photos. The show helped us in our dark days and both my children love and adore any kind of theatre but especially musical theatre. Louise last came to not one but three of Michael's solo concerts, and Matthew joined me in Glasgow on the last Ball and Boe tour.

(and other musicals) as often as we could during the run. It always amazed me how the children were happy to get up at the crack of dawn to get the 5:35 train from Doncaster. Why so early you ask.... well, it was all part of the deal. We got the silly o'clock train so we could walk from Kings Cross station and join the day seat queue for the show. Day seats were the best. They went on sale at 10am on the day and the added bonus was they were front row and only £20. There was never any moaning from the children, so we were in the first ten people in the queue as I had instructions that we needed to be sitting on the right looking at the stage! This according to Louise was the best spot to see Ben (Link) and Adrian (Seaweed) in the

We had originally planned to see the new production together from the centre of the dress circle but with the postponements, that is not going to be possible as they are now grown up and doing their own thing. However I shall be there, cheering Michael on like I have done for the last 36 years when he had me hooked in *Les Mis*. Where has the time gone?! But oh what a wonderful journey it has been. I for one are hoping for many more!

THE MICHAEL BALL ALBUM GUIDE

With the release of 'We Are More Than One', Michael added yet another excellent album to his resumé. The Fan Club members universally agree that Michael hasn't made a bad record, which is no mean feat when you consider his latest effort was 18th solo studio album. Add to that he has issued a live album and there are no less than 15 compilations out there, it can be quite daunting for new fans to know where to start – and that's without including the 'Together' albums with Alfie Boe and cast recordings!

So, the Fan Club's resident music journalist James Gaden conducted a poll on the Facebook Group and has constructed a reference guide for newcomers and collectors alike. This guide sticks strictly to Michael's output as a solo artist.

ESSENTIAL



We Are More Than One (2021)

The most recent effort from Michael was the most popular according to the Facebook poll, but while that may be due it being new and fresh for fans, it's more likely down to the collection of excellent material. After previously

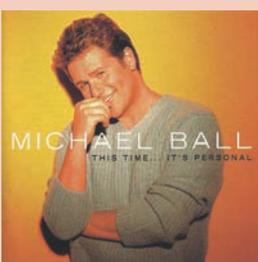
trying his hand at writing some originals with well chosen collaborators, *We Are More Than One* sees Michael putting out an album of almost entirely new songs. The optimism of 'Be The One' and 'God Willing' juxtapose wonderfully alongside the gut-wrenching 'Never Let You Go' and 'Is That All Folks', the latter being a heartfelt tribute to his friend Victoria Wood. There's also reflective fare in the form of 'Simple Complicated Man' and sheer unadulterated fun via the disco-flavoured 'Home With You' and infectious 'Let's Just Dance'. Michael shows off some excellent wordplay in 'The Song We Will Remember' and offers wise words with 'Be Gentle'. There are just three cover versions here, spanning the Bee Gees penned classic 'Heartbreaker', a superb take on Beverley Craven's 'Promise Me' and an inspired duet with one of the album's co-writers, Amy Wadge, who joins Michael for a delightful rendition of the Bob Seger standout 'We've Got Tonight'.



Coming Home To You (2019)

A close second on the Facebook poll, *Coming Home To You* was, as Michael himself described, his first real attempt as songwriting. *Coming Home To You* is a great record that offers real variety while never lacking

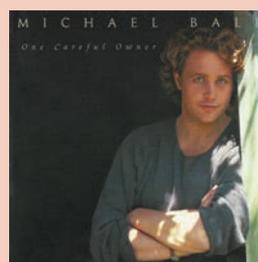
cohesion. On the covers side, Michael takes on songs made famous by heavyweight artists, like Elvis Presley's 'I Just Can't Help Believin'', Cliff Richard's 'Miss You Nights', Carole King's 'Goin' Back', Lionel Richie's 'Sail On', the legendary Bee Gee's number 'To Love Somebody' and Dolly Parton's 'Love Is Like A Butterfly'. What makes the originals so notable is that they sit comfortably alongside such tunes, with 'Tennessee Dreams' showing some real lyrical dexterity from Michael. 'All Dance Together' was built for the live stage, 'Blood Red Moon' is great fun and 'Home To You' is a top drawer opening track. Add in a beautiful version of 'Bright Eyes', a great take on Jim Croce's 'I Have To Say I Love You In A Song' and a stunning rendition of Freya Ridings' haunting 'Lost Without You' and you won't need a skip button. Its popularity also demonstrates that the fans not only enjoyed the original material, but they actually feel that Michael's most recent albums rank among his best.



This Time It's Personal (2000)

It's fascinating to note that despite the fact the majority of fans discovered Michael via his array of Musical Theatre roles, when it comes to his albums, the ones that frequently get mentioned are the ones comprised

of music almost entirely from outside the theatre world. One of his most enduring releases is *This Time It's Personal*, where Michael selected songs that meant a lot to him. This was really the first album where Michael was able to properly display his fondness for Country songs, where he tackles Garth Brook's 'If Tomorrow Never Comes' and Shania Twain's 'Still The One' with spectacular results. The more heartfelt numbers arrive in the form of 'The Greatest Man I Never Knew' and especially 'The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face' which is stunning. There's upbeat fare with the likes of 'Walking In Memphis' and a great version of the Texas hit 'I Don't Want A Lover'. On top of that, we saw the first real glimpse of what was to come, with 'Just When' and 'Never Coming Back', a pair of songs Michael wrote with his friend Brian Kennedy. While he may play down his earlier songwriting efforts, these two tracks have aged very well and remain popular with the fans.



One Careful Owner (1994)

It's shocking to think Michael's third album is over a quarter of a century old, but that hasn't stopped it continuing to rank highly in fans thoughts. The formula for the album is a simple one – have writers bring in

a selection of well crafted Pop-Rock songs and ballads, and have Michael's world class vocals deliver them. It works like a charm, whether it's the pleasing opener 'Wherever You Are' and the excellent 'From Here To Eternity' to the emotion filled 'The Lovers We Were', there's nothing here to dislike. 'My Arms Are Strong' is a particular highlight, but that doesn't mean the likes of 'Leave A Light On', the catchy 'Where We Began' or the wonderful 'Give Me Love' should be glossed over. There are three covers as well, albeit not particularly well known ones. The excellent 'In This Life' was originally recorded by Country artist Collin Raye, 'I Wouldn't Know' by Andy Childs and 'Take My Breath Away' by Claire Hamill – although Michael makes a firm case for making these songs his own. It's worth noting that none of Michael's first three albums are on streaming or digital platforms, but you can still pick up a CD of *One Careful Owner* cheaply – and I heartily recommend you do.

EXQUISITE

If Everyone Was Listening (2014)



If you're looking for a lovely way to spend just shy of an hour, you could do a lot worse than put on *If Everyone Was Listening*. It

has more of the Country influence via Jace Everett's 'Bad Things', Jake Owen's 'What We Ain't Got' and Lady Antebellum's classic 'Need You Now'. There is a contemporary upbeat effort in Sugarland's 'Stuck Like Glue' juxtaposed with 70s Rock such as the Supertramp penned title track and Bob Seger's 'Still The Same'. John Martyn's 'May You Never' is another real standout cut, as is Alison Krauss' 'Simple Love', while the superb arrangement on 'Jessie' sees Michael overlaying his own harmony vocals to great effect. On paper, including a Miley Cyrus song shouldn't work but 'The Climb' sounds right at home here. The mix of old and new material works wonderfully, all held together by Michael's flawless singing.

Music (2005)



Opening with a prelude of the inimitable John Miles track after which the album is named, and closing with a full length rendition,

Music ranks as one of Michael's most accomplished records. It's brimming with excellent song selections, ranging from Queen's anthemic 'The Show Must Go On' to the Simon and Garfunkel standard 'Bridge Over Troubled Water'. David Bowie's 'Life On Mars' is a real powerhouse here and Michael nails the versions of The Eagle's 'Desperado' and Sting's 'Fields Of Gold'. Fans also made suggestions regarding what they'd like to hear, so while 'You Raise Me Up' fits Michael to a tee and is hardly left field, 'Everlasting Love' was a track Michael had never previously considered and it works an absolute treat. There's even an original penned by Michael and Nick Battle called 'And I Love You So' which fits snugly amongst the covers.

Both Sides Now (2013)



A more laid back affair, *Both Sides Now* nevertheless boasts a wealth of wonderful songs, not to mentioned sonically sounding

superb. Named after the Joni Mitchell song which opens the album, the track fits Michael like a glove. The material collected on here spans both old and new songs from a wide array of artists, such as Fleetwood Mac's 'Songbird', Snow Patrol's 'Run', Bob Dylan's 'Make You Feel My Love' and Dolly Parton's immortal 'I Will Always Love You'. Alongside the *Les Misérables* song 'Suddenly' there are some brave choices such as Rose Royce's 'Love Don't Live Here Anymore' and the decision to re-record 'Love Changes Everything', now featuring Il Divo. However both choices pay off, as does the inclusion of the uplifting 'Fight The Fight', a song taken from the, at the time, new musical *From Here To Eternity*.

EXCELLENT

Heroes (2011)



As you'd expect from the title, *Heroes* is, as Michael explained in the sleeve notes, "the album I've wanted to make for some time – it salutes/

honours some of my all-time musical heroes". As a result there are so many fine choices to enjoy here, spanning favourites like the Tom Jones anthem 'I'll Never Fall In Love Again', Elvis Presley's 'I Can't Help Falling In Love With You', Billy Joel's 'New York State Of Mind', Frank Sinatra's 'Summer Wind' and Neil Diamond's 'Play Me'. These sit alongside marvellous renditions of Long John Baldry's 'Let The Heartaches Begin' and Scott Walker's 'Joanna'. Arrangement wise, Michael doesn't stray too obviously from what went before, but the production and work the musicians put in still make this sound very much like a Michael Ball album. Also, the closing duet of 'Avenues And Alleyways' with Tony Christie is absolutely superb.

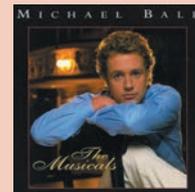
First Love (1995)



Any album that opens with Michael's take on 'The Rose' should make you take notice, and *First Love* does just that. Despite being made

in the mid-nineties, time has stood still for this album, with tracks like 'Let The River Run' and the rousing version of '(Something Inside) So Strong' sounding as good now as when they were first sent to the mastering plant. The strings and Michael's vocal on Gordon Lightfoot's 'If You Could Read My Mind' make this arguably the definitive version and fans of Musical Theatre will no doubt adore Michael's rendition of 'Somewhere' from *West Side Story*. There is also a tip of the hat to the great Matt Munro with the inclusion of 'Walk Away', and the inclusion of 'How Can I Be Sure' by The Young Rascals is inspired. Frankie Laine's 'I'm Gonna Be Strong' is yet another superb selection from days gone by that gets a new lease of life here.

The Musicals (1996)



In a rare example where Michael has released an album of nothing but songs from the theatre, *The Musicals* offers plenty for those

who like Michael best in that setting. There's several tracks from Andrew Lloyd Webber shows here, such as 'All I Ask Of You', 'Memory' and 'With One Look', as well as 'Something's Coming', 'Loving You' and 'Losing My Mind' from the pen of Stephen Sondheim. Surrounding these efforts are inclusions like 'Easy Terms' from Willy Russell's *Blood Brothers*, 'The Last Night Of The World' from *Miss Saigon*, 'Don't Rain On My Parade' from *Funny Girl* and 'I Dreamed A Dream' from *Les Misérables*. Rodgers And Hammerstein's 'You'll Never Walk Alone' is excellent, but while the inclusion of 'Love Changes Everything' is understandable, it was available elsewhere, unlike the masterful delivery of 'Anthem' from *Chess*.

ENTERTAINING

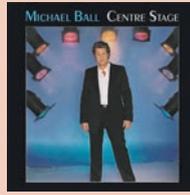
In Concert At The Royal Albert Hall (1999)



Any fan knows Michael is at his best when he's live, and this is to date his first and only live album (however there are a plethora

of live DVDs that have been released). Touring in support of *The Movies*, here you get songs such as 'Hot Stuff', 'Love On The Rocks' and the fun 'Blues Brothers Medley', but there is also plenty from the world of Musical Theatre too. 'Oh! What A Circus' is superb and naturally the version of 'Empty Chairs, Empty Tables' brings the house down, but both are eclipsed by the astonishing delivery of 'Gethsemane' from *Jesus Christ Superstar*. Michael even performs the theme from the hit show *Friends*. However it's the inclusion of the self penned 'Someone Else's Dream', unavailable on any studio album, and the Musical numbers like the show-stopping 'Love Changes Everything', that are the real draw here.

Centre Stage (2001)



Centre Stage ticks a lot of boxes for those who enjoy the theatre as every selection here comes from a popular stage show. What Michael

cleverly did though, was weave in some songs from popular recording artists, that also have transitioned over into Musical form. Therefore in amongst 'Bring Him Home' from *Les Misérables*, 'Tell Me It's Not True' from *Blood Brothers* and 'Not While I'm Around' from *Sweeney Todd*, you will also find the Bee Gees penned Celine Dion hit 'Immortality' from *Saturday Night Fever* and ABBA's 'The Winner Takes It All' from *Mamma Mia*. Of particular note is Michael's awesome rendition of 'The Boy From Nowhere' which is best known as a Tom Jones hit single, despite being from the show *Matador*. Few things will top the amazing duet of 'The Phantom Of the Opera' with Lesley Garrett though, which is absolutely phenomenal.

One Voice (2006)



When the song list was first revealed for *One Voice* it gave the impression that this could be one of Michael's most daring records, featuring

material from Hard Rock bands like Rainbow and Aerosmith, contemporary Pop via Daniel Bedingfield and songs from well established acts like REM and The Eagles. However, Michael's knack is understanding how to interpret a song and he does it brilliantly here. The layered vocals of Barry Manilow's title track give goosebumps, and he sounds right at home singing a song as well known as 'Lyn' Eyes'. 'I Don't Wanna Miss A Thing' arguably suits Michael more than it did Aerosmith and his take on REM's 'Everybody Hurts' has much more feeling than REM's original. The Michael Bublé penned 'Home' is lovely, 'If You're Not The One' features some rare falsetto and 'Since You've Been Gone' retains the overdriven guitars, all to great effect.

ENJOYABLE

A Love Story (2003)



A Love Story saw Michael try his hand at a concept record approach, choosing cover songs to tell the story of a love affair from start to

finish. The idea is excellent and you can see how it maps out, starting with 'You Had Me From Hello', to 'This Guy's In Love With You'. Halfway through the album the mood alters with 'You've Changed', 'What Makes You Stay' and the powerhouse 'God Give Me Strength', ending with the downbeat vibe of 'I Wish You Love' and 'I Wish I Were In Love Again'. The finale 'Me And My Shadow' with Antonio Banderas is a great pick-me-up however. While a good record, Michael felt his voice hadn't fully recovered from the previous tour when it came to recording – he performed a curtailed version of this "love affair" on the *Live In London* DVD, where you can make the case that the condensed, live version is superior to the album.

Michael Ball (1992)



Fondly remembered as the No 1 album that really started it all for Michael moving out of theatre into being a recording artist, there's much

to enjoy here. Not only does it boast 'Love Changes Everything' and 'One Step Out Of Time', there are some really good tracks here like the impassioned 'It's Still You', the breezy 'Holland Park' and 'No One Cries Anymore' which is another excellent example of how well Michael can deliver a ballad. Another album you can't find available to stream or download, you can still find the CD but do note that the studio version of 'One Step Out Of Time' can't live with the more Rock orientated version Michael does live. Also, the other Eurovision contenders 'As Dreams Go By' and 'Who Needs To Know' are typically lightweight and very much of their time, and the album's production is a far cry from the more lavish sound on later records.

The Movies (1998)

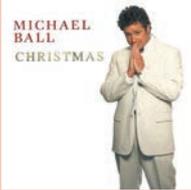


Initially one of Michael's biggest selling albums, *The Movies*, as you might expect, takes well known songs from feature films. Some

choices make perfect sense, like 'Love On The Rocks' or a strong take on Celine Dion's 'My Heart Will Go On' from *Titanic*. Others were less obvious, like taking on 'People Are Strange', originally by The Doors and later done by Echo & The Bunnymen for *The Lost Boys*, but Michael nails it. Using *The Full Monty* as an excuse to include Donna Summer's 'Hot Stuff' was a great idea as it became a concert favourite. *The Blues Brothers* medley is fun but not even Michael can come close to Aretha Franklin's original delivery on 'Think', and while covering 'We Have All The Time In The World' from the world of 007 suited Michael, it isn't a patch on the awesome Bond theme medley he did with Alfie Boe on tour years later.

EXPENDABLE

Christmas (1999)



Christmas albums are difficult to pull off, it's a crowded market with a limited amount of songs to choose from. To Michael's credit, he

made some excellent selections to set this album apart from being "another Christmas album". While it includes obvious cuts like 'O Holy Night', 'Have Yourself A Merry Little Christmas' and 'Silent Night', choosing Chris Rea's 'Driving Home For Christmas' and David Essex's 'A Winters Tale' adds a nice change of pace and Michael sings them better than both of the original artists. 'As Long As There's Christmas' is a fine duet with Elaine Paige and Michael's vocal on 'Ave Maria' is spine-tingling. There's even an original thrown in, penned by Michael and Brian Kennedy, called 'Light A Candle'. The downside to this lovely album is you can only really play it for a few weeks a year otherwise it just seems a bit weird!

Always (1993)



Michael's sophomore effort was *Always*, an album built around a collection of much more familiar songs. There are classics

tunes everywhere you turn, from 'Cry Me A River' to 'A House Is Not A Home' and 'Stormy Weather'. Michael does a great job on 'Someone To Watch Over Me' and he is clearly having fun with 'On Broadway', but while his vocal on 'Always On My Mind' and 'You Don't Have To Say You Love Me' is flawless, here the production lets the side down, with the then trendy thin guitar tones, artificial drums and synthesized keyboards coming across as very dated compared to the superb instrumentation on later records. Again not available on streaming or digital, you can buy the CD (there are two versions, identical in content but with different covers). However, the best stuff from this album can also be found on compilations - see overleaf!

Back To Bacharach (2007)



Consisting of songs from composer Burt Bacharach, Michael's 14th album was probably his most polished. From the collection of material,

to the album photos, to the CD being housed in a super jewel box instead of a standard jewel case, everything about it oozed class. Naturally there's plenty of great songs on offer, such as 'The Look Of Love', 'Anyone Who Had A Heart' and 'What The World Needs Now', all of which Michael sings beautifully. Despite appearing on 'A Love Story' Michael includes a new version of 'This Guys In Love With You' here. While the album didn't garner many votes in the Fan poll, the reason for that could be because it's very much a "mood" album, a sort of late night, sat with a glass of wine affair, as there is really only 'Reach Out For Me' that adds any energy. But if you've had a hard day and need a soothing record to unwind to, then this is hard to beat.

What was quite eye opening about conducting the poll on Facebook, where fans were asked to imagine they were on a desert island and could only have five of Michael's eighteen albums with them, is there was a clear winner. The album with the most votes was the newest one, *We Are More Than One*, which is almost entirely original, and in second place was *Coming Home To You* which is half originals. The other surprise was that *The Movies*, while a big seller upon it's release, received the second lowest amount of votes, with only *Back To Bacharach* below it.

While some fans have discovered Michael as a recording artist first and a theatre star second, lots of people came in the other way around, yet the albums that are made up of predominantly Musical songs lagged far behind the albums made up of Pop, Rock and Country tracks. That said, the quality of Michael's recorded output is extraordinarily consistent, because there wasn't a single album that didn't get a vote in someone's top five.

It's also worth noting that while Michael's sole live album *Live At The Royal Albert Hall* is superb, his later DVDs are even better, with longer running times and more songs on offer, not to mention boasting a visual aspect of making it feel like you're back in the venue. A double live album would be most appreciated sometime in the future, and due to the enduring popularity of *One Careful Owner*, it would be lovely if that was remastered and then introduced onto streaming and digital download platforms - however that will be a record label decision, not Michael's.

Now we come to the wealth of compilations that are out there. Some offer brilliant value for money, some offer tracks you can't get anywhere else, and some are pretty much pointless unless you are a collector who has to have absolutely everything. Overleaf is a guide to which is which!



THE COMPILATIONS

The Best Of (1994)



It might seem rather odd to issue a *Best Of* compilation when there had only been two albums released at that point, but while it probably was motivated as a cash-in on the back of Michael's first album hitting number one and *Always* hitting number three, this compilation is not totally without merit. First

of all, the 'One Step Out Of Time' single came packaged with two non-album B-sides which were 'No More Steps To Climb' and 'We Break Our Own Hearts', both of which are included here. On top of that, 'Everyday Everynight', 'Call On Me' and 'Maria' were all unreleased prior to this compilation, and to sweeten the deal even more there are renditions of 'Empty Chairs, Empty Tables' and 'Sunset Boulevard' for good measure. Not essential by any means, but handy for those unreleased tracks and a good overview of his earliest recorded work.

Stages (1995)



A curious collection, the title and cover art of *Stages* suggests it would probably focus on Michael's theatre work. Instead, it does no such thing, taking half of *One Careful Owner* and half of *First Love* and presenting it as a compilation. The only thing in it's favour is the presence of a non-album B-side, 'She's

Not There' which backed the single of 'The Lovers We Were'. If you have the single, then you likely have the other track's parent albums too, making this compilation mostly redundant.

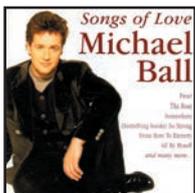
The Collection (1997)



Another compilation that offers little if you own Michael's first two records, which is where almost everything on this collection comes from, it's handy if you can't obtain them but otherwise not of any real worth. Aside from 'The First Man You Remember' which is a duet with Diana Morrison from

Aspects Of Love that was released as a single, the only novelty here is 'You'll Never Know (Just How Much I Love You)', which would also turn up on *Love Changes Everything: The Essential*, a far superior compilation.

Songs Of Love (1998/2009)



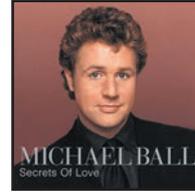
This release is virtually identical to *Stages* issued a few years prior, even down to the running order. The only noticeable differences are the addition of 'All By Myself' from the *First Love* album and the inclusion of 'Fever', which was previously only available as a B-side to the 'Something

Inside So Strong'

single. That makes this better than *Stages*, because it gives you access to 'Fever' and the less accessible 'She's Not There', which was *Stages* main source of appeal, all in one place. Despite that, neither one are essential if you have the *One Careful Owner* and *First Love* albums. It was reissued in 2009 with a new cover, but the exact same songs.



Secrets Of Love (2000)



This CD is a bit more interesting if you want representation of Michael's earlier work. It has the harder to find 'No More Steps To Climb', 'We Break Our Own Hearts', 'Everyday Everynight' and 'Call On Me' that were on the 1994 *Best Of*, and bolsters the selection by including Musical numbers such as 'Loving

You', 'With One Look' and 'All I Ask Of You'. Three songs from *The Movies* are also included, which are 'The Way We Were', 'Because You Loved Me' and 'Have I Told You Lately'. 'Light A Candle', the one original song from the *Christmas* album appears, along with the live version of 'Someone Else's Dream' from *Live At The Royal Albert Hall* rounding things out. A nice compilation that includes some rarities in favour of obvious choices.

I Dreamed A Dream (2003)



If you were looking for a condensed collection of material that sums up who Michael Ball is and where he came from, then *I Dreamed A Dream* would really do the trick. It's dirt cheap and packed with 18 musical numbers for theatre fans to enjoy. While there's no rarities or B-sides here, what it does comprise of is

a good selection of superb showtunes spanning many favourites such as 'Anthem', 'Tell Me It's Not True' and of course 'Love Changes Everything'.

A Song For You (2003)



Issued by budget label Crimson in 2003, *A Song For You* is a great starting point for exploring the career of Michael, as it contains a whopping 54 tracks spanning three discs. While there isn't anything difficult to obtain here, what the set does do is condense six albums worth of material down into three

CDs. All but one track of *Always* is on here, 10 of the 14 tracks from *Centre Stage* are represented, 8 songs from *This Time It's Personal*, 12 of the 14 songs from *The Movies* and two thirds of *The Musicals* album are all included. That makes this low priced set pretty much irresistible if you want a compact collection for the car or are pushed for space generally.

Love Changes Everything: The Essential (2004)



A popular 2CD compilation, it pretty much lives up to it's billing as being *The Essential*, containing all the obvious things a Michael Ball fan would want. The powerful Musical numbers like 'Love Changes Everything' and 'Empty Chairs, Empty Tables' are here, along with 'The Phantom Of The Opera', 'Music Of

The Night', 'Send In The Clowns' and 'Tell Me It's Not True'. These nestle alongside some of his best Pop covers like 'The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face' and 'Everybody's Talking'. A selection of live songs from *Live At The Royal Albert Hall* are also here (although the omission of 'Gethsemane' is criminal), plus 'One Step Out Of Time' and 'Always On My Mind' from the first two albums. Also, as mentioned previously, 'You'll Never Know (Just How Much I Love You)' is here which was previously only featured on

1997's *The Collection*. What makes this set have real value is the addition of exclusive material. The much requested recording of 'This Is The Moment' from *Jekyll & Hyde* first appeared here, plus a previously unreleased version of Van Morrison's 'When You Tell Me That You Love Me'. There's a brand new original called 'What Love Is For' as well as a *This Time It's Personal* out-take, the upbeat 'Why Haven't I Heard From You'. Even though Michael performed it live on the *This Time It's Personal – One Special Night Live DVD*, you won't find the studio version of it anywhere else.

Stage And Screen (2001)

Stage And Screen (2005)

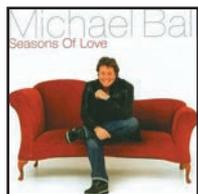


Buyer beware! There are two separate compilations entitled *Stage And Screen* and one is much more impressive than the other. The first one was issued in 2001 with a black and white portrait shot of Michael, via the label Music Club. This is a reasonable 18 track collection of songs, staying very much with selections from theatre shows or *The Movies*. It's nice enough but offers nothing special. To confuse matters, it was also released on the Crimson label, this time with the cover image flipped the opposite way and now in colour, but it's the exact same thing in terms of song content.

The 2005 version, with the picture of Michael clasping his hands, was released by Readers Digest four years later and dwarfs its namesake, this one being a 3CD set with a much more impressive 49 tracks. Everything on the 18 track version is featured here, as well as a plethora of popular songs

from Musical Theatre (including 'This Is The Moment') and a smattering of Pop tunes like 'Hot Stuff', 'On Broadway' and 'The Blues Brothers Medley'. As a result, it makes the previous *Stage And Screen* releases completely irrelevant.

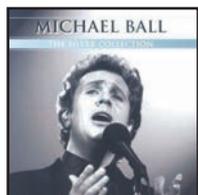
Seasons Of Love (2006)



A 2CD collection issued by Music Club Deluxe, *Seasons Of Love* is a nice collection of songs, but its only real draw is it packs 32 songs onto two discs for a decent price. Track repetition is rife with this set, with a large portion of the songs here also being on the 3CD *Stage And Screen* set mentioned

above. Therefore if you already have that, you're not gaining much from adding this too.

The Silver Collection (2007)



A front-runner for the most pointless compilation of all, *The Silver Collection* offers a paltry ten songs, meaning the majority of albums Michael has released contain more material. Yes, it has some classics like 'Love Changes Everything' and 'Music Of The Night', but if you asked a Michael fan to name

their top ten songs he'd released, I doubt many are voting for 'Light A Candle', 'Call On Me' or 'It's Still You' over some of his other recordings. Undeterred, the compilers ensured all three of those appear here – and without any kind of rarity or bonus tracks, there's no reason at all to own this.

The Essential Collection (2008)



Not to be confused with *Love Changes Everything: The Essential* which was issued by Universal Music, this is a budget compilation from the now defunct Woolworths Worthit range. As you might guess, the idea was a low priced collection of songs and that's exactly what this is. Pretty much everything here is

featured on other compilations and while the 17 tracks make pleasant listening, the selections, the dreadful cover art and lame inlay booklet all just scream cheap and cheerful and destined for the charity shop.

Past and Present: The Very Best Of (2009)



In complete contrast to the set mentioned above, *Past And Present* was a proper compilation put out by Universal to celebrate 25 years in the business, and Michael even did a memorable tour to promote it. It is just one disc but it really does include some of the absolute cream of the crop, with 'Love

Changes Everything', 'This Is The Moment' and 'Empty Chairs, Empty Tables', plus 'One Step Out Of Time' and the excellent version of 'The Show Must Go On' from *Music*. What makes this extra special though is the additional material – the inclusion of 'The Impossible Dream', 'Being Alive' and 'The Prayer' are welcomed with open arms. There's two *Kismet* tracks in the form of 'Stranger In Paradise/This Is My Beloved', plus a stunning orchestral recording of 'Gethsemane'. That should be enough to seal the deal, but if not, *Hairspray* fans will lap up the version of 'You Can't Stop The Beat' which includes the rest of the performers from the original run Michael starred in, making it the closest thing we have to a cast recording. Also, if you visit iTunes, the version of *Past And Present* on there has an exclusive bonus track, which gives fans a rare chance to another *Hairspray* number that Michael normally never goes near, the anthemic 'I Know Where I've Been'.

Encore (2010)



One of the most popular compilations among fans, *Encore* is another 3CD set which offers a mind-blowing 60 songs. It gives the best overview of Michael's career up until that point, covering nearly all the bases that the previous compilations attempted, but adding in material from albums like *Music*, *Back To*

Bacharach and *One Voice*. Having songs like 'Alfie', 'I Don't Wanna Miss A Thing', 'Life On Mars' and 'I Don't Wanna Talk About It' in the company of well worn favourites gives this compilation the edge over pretty much all the others and is an ideal starting point if you don't own anything of Michael's – or can't choose which album to listen to.

Love Changes Everything - The Collection (2012)



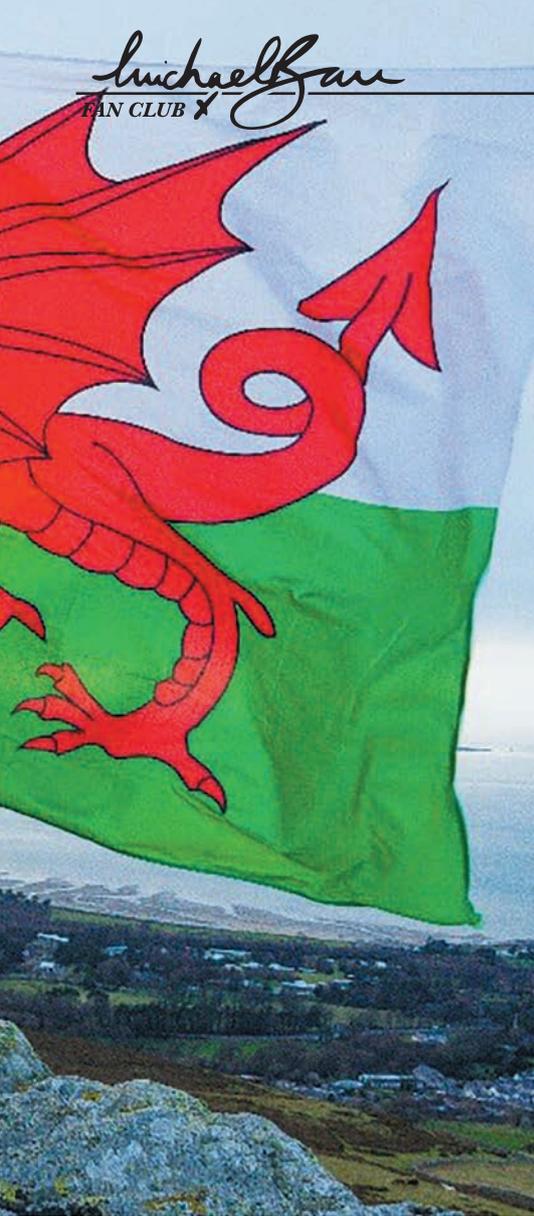
Be careful of this release, because if you bought the 2003 collection *I Dreamed A Dream*, this is simply a reissue of that, with the exact same selection of songs in the exact same order. The only thing that has changed is the title and the cover artwork. Therefore the only reason to purchase this is if you wanted a copy of *I Dreamed A Dream* and couldn't find one.



WONDERFUL WALES

Fans were thrilled to hear Michael had made a new TV series, called *Wonderful Wales*, where he visits the country where he has roots. Many fans know Michael's mother was born in the Rhondda valley, where his grandfather was a coal miner. The show, spanning four episodes, sees Michael visiting various places of interest around the country, marvelling at the spectacular scenery and singing with a choir to close out each hour long programme.





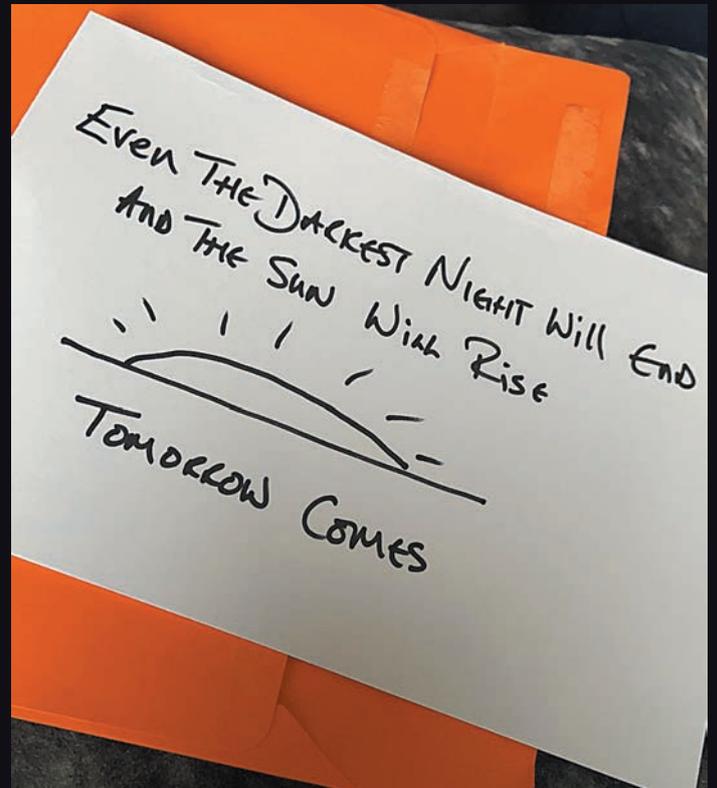
WISE WORDS TO KEEP FOREVER

by Michael Watt

A few months ago I wrote to Michael at the radio station and asked if he would write out a quote from *Les Misérables* for me to get tattooed. I was fortunate enough for him to respond and I was very excited to get it, as it means a tremendous amount to me. *Les Misérables* also means a lot to me and this lyric reminds me of the saying Michael always references, "this too shall pass". I expressed to Michael in my letter that this past year had been horrendous for me, with the pandemic on top of bad treatment from my university, terminal illness/death in the family, a change of career path and pre-existing mental health. But listening to Michael (and Alfie of course) as well as Musical Theatre really helped me through. Of course having the words in Michael's writing makes it even more special.

I also decided to get a small *Hairspray* tattoo since my left arm is now dedicated to theatre. Since *Hairspray* was my first (of many hopefully) shows to see in the West End, and I just loved it, I thought it was a fitting commemoration. It was an amazing experience to see the first preview and I'm sure it'll be just as special when I see the two final performances.

They're still pretty fresh and red since they were done a few hours ago but I couldn't be happier with them!



A TEENAGER'S LOVE OF CARS REKINDLES A LOVE OF MICHAEL

by Catherine Noland



The early days of the pandemic were challenging for so many reasons, including how to feed and keep sane the eight people now living in my house. We made sourdough and homemade pasta, we read books and watched movies, but eventually we started to run out of ideas. Like most families, finding a movie everyone wanted to watch became the great challenge. One weekend my youngest son, who is an expert on all things cars, somehow convinced everyone to binge watch all *The Grand Tour* episodes. To this day I seriously question this decision but that weekend changed my life, because on season 2 episode 4, in walked Alfie Boe and Michael Ball and I stopped dead in my tracks, stunned.

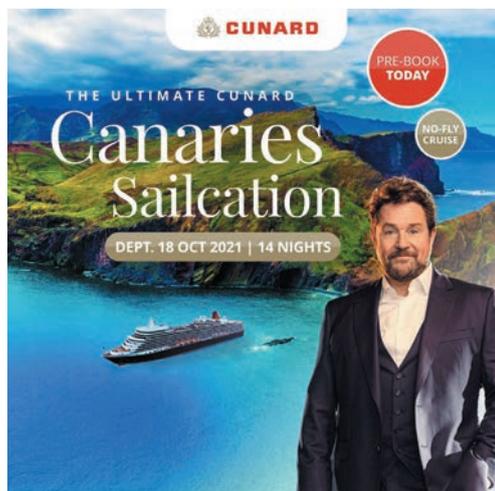
I hadn't thought of Michael Ball in decades, yet suddenly I was transported back to the very first time I had heard him. As a high schooler I was obsessed with *Les Misérables*. I bought the original CDs from

the Broadway cast as well as the London cast and I didn't even own a CD player! Borrowing a friend's CD player, I made cassette copies and I diligently analyzed the differences. I knew every voice on the cast. My graduation gift was tickets to see it in Washington, DC with the touring cast. When they came to my town years later, we saved money to take all the children to see it. Alas, no one would ever be Marius to me but Michael Ball. It was a wonderful performance but just not the same. Yet like most teenage obsessions, it passed as life got busy with marriage, five children and making ends meet. But I would never truly forget how much it meant to me.

Now, here on a car show, were Michael and Alfie talking about their music and bantering with each other. What was all this? How had I missed so much? And who was this Alfie Boe with Michael? Suddenly there were so many things to

watch during lockdown. Years of music and shows I hadn't heard. With the help of my internet savvy son, we found a treasure trove of videos, concerts, interviews, and music. Like a woman on a mission, I binged everything I could find. My sons and I spent many a night curled up together giggling over all the banter and silliness between Michael and Alfie. It brightened weeks of our lockdown.

Michael Ball became a thread that ran through our entire family like the seven degrees of Kevin Bacon. Some reread *Les Mis* because they heard a song playing, some studied maps to see where videos were filmed or where theaters were, everyone was arguing who was the Ball to someone's Boe, the boys were singing 'My Christmas Will Be Better Than Yours' at the top of their lungs just to irritate their sisters, my kids were connecting with their aunt who had been to musicals in London, a son was teaching a grandmother how to download Michael's new album and find his videos on YouTube, and then there was the great meme battle when Ball and Boe went up against BTS for the number one album spot (that will live in infamy in our family). When we moved into our new apartment, Michael's new album *We Are More Than One* echoed through the empty rooms as we hauled boxes and built furniture. Our next trip overseas is anchored around seeing the 'Together At Christmas' concert. In just over a year the seed that was planted years ago has bloomed fully grown into a beautiful family affair. Thank you, Michael, for the joy you've brought us.



Imagine Cruising are so excited to launch their first sailcation holiday that finally ventures overseas! Escape the short days of Autumn soaking up the all-year sun of the Canaries during this 14-night no-fly holiday on board Queen Elizabeth. Discover the luna-like volcanic landscapes of Gran Canaria, Tenerife and Lanzarote, alongside an overnight stay on board the ship in Funchal, the capital city of Portugal's Madeira archipelago. On board the glorious Queen Elizabeth you'll also have the chance to witness Michael perform a concert!

The cruise departs on the 18th October 2021, full details are available at the link below and booking is available now!

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