



## BALL BOWLED ME OVER!!!

**Michael FEVER hit the North West!** By Alana Wadkin

It all started in July last year... my mum bought me tickets to see Michael's open air concert at Victoria Park, Southport as a graduation present. She knew how I always wanted to see him live. I was delighted as I have been a huge fan for many years but couldn't go to any concerts while I was studying for my degree. I loved my first open air concert and became completely hooked on Michael ever since. He is extremely talented and has a magnificent voice! Michael doesn't just sing the songs, he uses his acting skills to give each phrase and note extra meaning. A few days later, I contacted the fan club to say that I was a fan and how much I enjoyed the concert as well as asking if Michael was touring the following year. I received a lovely reply back, so I decided to become an official fan club member. I am so glad I did, everybody is really kind and friendly especially Maureen and Gill. They are absolutely lovely and so helpful.

When I saw Michael was touring the UK, I booked my tickets and wrote a

letter to Michael's management asking if there was any chance of meeting Michael at one of his concerts – never expecting anything from it. A couple of weeks went by, I received an email saying that Michael himself had read my letter and how he was touched by it and he would love to meet me at his Manchester concert.

The week before felt like an eternity; I did everything to pass the time – regularly checking the fan club forum for any news and reviews. When I read that Michael was having some throat problems; my heart sank and I was very anxious. My cousin Adele came over during that week to see how I was and to make concert arrangements. The day of the Manchester concert finally came, I was still a bit worried but *really* excited. The worry soon went after I received a nice reassuring email from Maureen at the fan club. It felt very surreal, I was in a daydream. As the day went on, the reality set in - I was actually meeting Michael Ball in a few hours! We picked my cousin up and drove to Manchester. Along the way I

received a phone call from Michael's tour manager Barry saying the meeting time had changed. We eventually arrived at the theatre after getting slightly lost! We went for a drink in the nearby pub while we were waiting until the 'meet and greet'. I met a few other fans, which was nice. We went to the stage door to make ourselves known and we talked to the security guards until Barry arrived and took us backstage. Barry was so nice and friendly, he even helped my dad to lift my wheelchair up the stairs. While Michael was just getting dressed – we had a good nose around backstage.

Then Michael came running down the corridor shouting "Alana!" and straight over to me. Imagine my face; I was completely shocked but absolutely delighted! He gave me this huge hug and several kisses. Michael said "I have seen your pictures on the forum but they don't do you justice, you are far more beautiful in person." I was stunned and was taken a back for a second; then the rest of my family finally met Michael. My cousin totally lost it - very star struck! He looked very handsome – far better in the flesh! The sparkling blue eyes, his gorgeous smile and the curly hair did it for me... We asked if we could take a video and some photos – "yeah sure, you can do whatever!" I am not just saying this; Michael is the *most* lovely, charming, down to earth, genuine person I have ever met! Michael even noticed I was wearing his necklace, which was designed by Michael himself. He made me feel so *special* and totally at ease with his adorable way and gorgeous smile with those dimples, how can anybody resist that smile! Michael was so caring, which completely surprised me! From the first moment we met, I realised we both had the same cheeky way and sense of humour as well as a passion for music. We just instantly clicked and had a fantastic laugh! Michael thought it was very funny when my mum tried to record with the lens cap still on the video recorder – he said "taking the lens cap off might help! Shall I video while you answer Alana's questions?" I was amused watching my mum's reaction – sheer panic and embarrassment; everybody found this hysterical!

My cousin bottled out reading my pre-typed questions, so my dad had to read them out to Michael as I can't talk. Michael answered every question in-depth and laughed at certain comments I

wrote especially when I said “you are a pretty good dancer especially when you do the pelvic thrust! Hehe!” Michael actually did the pelvic thrust for me, which I thoroughly enjoyed and he said “you don’t miss a trick, do you?” Michael certainly knows how to treat his disabled fans, he spoke directly to me not to my family, I was delighted and my face lit up – not many people actually speak to the disabled person, they tend to talk to the carer. Michael looked directly into my eyes when he spoke, this way I could hold a conversation with him using my eyes and facial expressions. My family and I were really impressed at this. As my dad read out what my favourite songs/albums were, all that you heard was “ahhhh, you certainly have good taste in music.” Michael seemed really surprised about ‘Someone Else’s Dream’ being one of my favourite songs. Michael launched into a short burst of the Blues Brothers’ ‘Shake Your Tail Feather’ which is another song I love.

I then asked “why haven’t you written anymore songs? ‘Someone Else’s Dream’ and ‘Just When’ are beautiful songs with fantastic lyrics, you should definitely write more.” His response was “I haven’t had \*\*\*\*\* time – I have been too busy to write any more” with a cheeky grin, this made me laugh. I got to ask some questions that I was dying to ask Michael, especially “was there any specific reason why you did ‘Alone Together - Live at Donmar?’” He looked at me and answered “I wanted to do something completely different from the tours – the audience could interpret it as they want, it was something which surprised and scared some people.” I named a few songs I would love Michael to sing; he seemed to like my choices and said he would consider performing them, which I was very pleased about. Michael was very interested in how I accessed the computer with not being able to use my hands, I explained that I used a neckswitch, this led to a conversation of our own. After more photos and several lovely hugs and kisses, Michael had to get ready for the concert... The time just flew by, I forgot to ask Michael for his autograph (I was that overwhelmed) but I felt so lucky and privileged to have the pleasure of meeting Michael. I would like to thank everybody that was involved in making my lifetime dream come true, especially you Michael. I hope you liked your special card made from the heart. Words can’t express how I felt and how

very grateful I am! This special memory will always stay with me for as long as I live.....

I was lucky enough to go to Liverpool as well as the Manchester concert. Both venues had amazing atmospheres. At Manchester, the wheelchair section was at the front to my delight, I could actually see everything. We were sat next to Liz, another fan club member and her family, they were so nice. I absolutely loved each concert; I never stopped singing, dancing and screaming!! Michael was absolutely amazing; what an outstanding voice! I thought Annie, Dean (Andy at Manchester) and Hazel were fantastic on backing vocals. There is nothing better than a live band to enhance the quality of the songs; Callum did a brilliant job with the music arrangements. The concerts had so many memorable moments that I will never forget... With this section of the article, I intend to give an insight into the entire concert from the two venues. The song list was the same at both concerts except for three songs that weren’t performed (I think it was due to Michael had some throat problems) and Michael’s duet with Hayley Tameddon (Delilah Dingle in Emmerdale) at Manchester, which I will talk about later.

Both evenings began with Michael’s voice over the sound system introducing his support act Tara Blaise. She is an Irish folk singer with a nice voice. Tara performed mostly her own songs and a couple of covers. She only had an acoustic guitar accompaniment, I liked her performance.

After the interval, the lights dimmed,



the band started to play the overture which was a medley of tunes, mainly ‘One Voice’. I focused on the stairs at the back of the stage and Michael appeared (with that gorgeous smile) at the top of the stairs to enormous applause, cheers and screams. He was wearing a pin-striped suit, black shirt and a striped tie, he looked absolutely gorgeous! Michael opened with a lively version of ‘One Night Only’ from the movie Dreamgirls, which I really enjoyed – an excellent opening song. Following more applause, Michael mentioned that the ‘One Voice’ album was his 14th solo album, which nicely led on to the Rainbow classic ‘Since You’ve Been Gone’ - a favourite of mine from the album. I loved the rock beat and how Michael sung it live. Judging the response at both concerts, the audience seemed to really like it too.

Michael explained how he was feeling by singing ‘I’m Feeling Good’ by Anthony Newley, I definitely got into the mood of this song and so did my cousin. He then



referred to the Anthony Newley Tribute Concert and said how he would "like to do a whole show of them" but was only going to do one more, then Michael launched into 'Do You Mind?' The audience seemed to really enjoy it because Michael encouraged everybody to participate throughout the song. During the song, Michael came over to where I was sat and gave me a smile, I was thrilled. My cousin kept nudging me and saying "did you see that?"

'The Living Years' (originally by Mike & the Mechanics) is another song I adore from the 'One Voice' album and Michael performed it brilliant live. It was certainly given the 'Ball Magic'. At Liverpool Michael told of his time away from home last year and how he felt very "alone and homesick" for family and friends as the introduction to a beautifully sung 'Home' (originally by Michael Bublé), which then lead into a song from one of Michael's very early albums - 'A House Is Not A Home'. Sadly, Michael didn't sing either of these songs at Manchester.

"Do you like musical theatre?" Michael asked the audience, was the lead up to the 'Musicals' section of the show. This was a special part and a highlight of both concerts for me. What a more appropriate song to open this section with than one of my favourites - 'This Is The Moment'; a very popular song with the audience, you could hear a pin drop

as Michael performed this fantastic song and got a well deserved standing ovation at both venues. At Manchester, my cousin and I noticed Michael kept looking over in our direction, we knew why, earlier I mentioned to Michael how I can relate to 'This Is The Moment' and how I absolutely love him singing it. At the Liverpool concert Michael then sang 'High Flying Adored', which I've never heard him sing before and I thought it was a lovely song. Unfortunately, this wasn't in the Manchester concert due to Michael having throat problems. I really enjoyed 'All I Ask Of You' and 'Loving You', they were performed with passion. Michael then told us of how he was "going up in the world", this was the introduction to informing the audience that he would be performing shortly in Kismet with the English National Opera in London. Michael chose to sing two songs, which he wouldn't be performing in Kismet, 'And This Is My Beloved' and 'Stranger In Paradise'. I was quite surprised I liked them because I thought they were operatic numbers, I was so pleased they weren't! Both songs were sung amazingly, the audience seemed to love them. Michael then delivered a breathtaking version of 'Empty Chairs, Empty Tables', which everybody loved at both concerts. At Liverpool, as Michael went to sit on his stool, he told us that his own stool had been "nicked!" when it had been left unattended outside the theatre that afternoon, much to the entire audience's

amusement. At both concerts, 'Tell Me It Isn't True' was a firm favourite - just fantastic!

Then at Manchester Michael introduced Hayley Tameddon as "the person who should have won Soapstar Superstar", they sang this most beautiful duet of 'The Prayer'. Both voices were blended exceptionally well; this breathtaking performance got an outstanding response. Hayley is a fantastic singer; I was so pleased to have seen her singing live. In my opinion, the mood changed as Michael sung another one of my personal favourites - 'The Show Must Go On' (originally by Queen) from Michael's 13th album 'Music'. The great Freddie Mercury had something in common with Michael - he was a fantastic showman! Michael is an exceptional showman, who does this brilliant song justice. I loved this performance.

When I first read the song list, I wasn't sure about the next few songs. Michael sang 'Crazy' by Gnarls Barkley which surprised me, but by the middle of the song, I was into it - dancing away. At Manchester Michael walked over to where we sat and sung a couple of lines straight to me. He seemed to enjoy himself and have fun with this song. Then he went on to tell the memorable story of that night in the Savoy. This was another highlight of the concert, he was hysterical!! Everybody knows that Michael likes to tell stories. Apparently Michael was sitting with the Royal Family at the Southbank Awards - no it wasn't the real Royal Family... but Caroline Aherne and Ricky Tomlinson from the alternative Royle Family and he got absolutely rotten drunk! This got a brilliant reception at Liverpool because Ricky is a fellow Liverpoolian. Michael thinks he'd told "her indoors" that it was only a lunchtime do and he'd be home by 3pm, 4 o'clock at the latest. Just fast forward to 10.30! Nobody wanted the party to end, so they all decided to move the party to the American bar, which is one of the fanciest bars in London - "you have to wear a tie, and I was - around my head!" They gathered around the piano, Amy Winehouse played and they were all singing, all drunk! Then the manager came over to him and said (cue the campest, funniest impression of a French man that I have ever seen!!) "Excuse me sir, singing is not allowed in here" and Michael went





(he did a good impersonation of himself drunk!) "What? Do you know who you're talking to?" (I was hysterical, I couldn't move with laughing!). After Michael explained who they were, the manager still said "I'm sorry sir but I must ask you to leave." By this time, he'd finally worked out that it really was time he went home, so he says he practised his mantra all the way home "pay the taxi, unlock the door, get undressed, get into bed - pay the taxi, unlock the door, get undressed and get into bed!" but Michael got it slightly wrong. What he actually did was pay the taxi, get undressed, unlock the door... and walked straight into Cathy, who had her arms folded, tapping her foot, looking at her watch! So he threw his arms round her and slurred "I really, really love you", Cathy said "had a good time, have you?" and he went "I can't talk at the moment!" and went to bed. The next morning he got up, feeling dreadful, to find his clothes all over the driveway and Cathy had asked "who was there and was he proud of himself?" He said that among other people, Amy Winehouse had been there, so Cathy said "that's interesting, she does a song that I think maybe you ought to listen to and think about"... and then Michael went into Amy Winehouse's song

'Rehab'. I am not keen on the original but absolutely enjoyed Michael's version

My final highlight was Party Time - the rock/pop section of the concert; it started with another Queen classic 'Don't Stop Me Now'. It was sung fantastic and made everybody start dancing! My cousin had to move me closer to the stage because I couldn't see a thing (I felt so sorry for the rest in wheelchairs and very guilty that I eventually could see); a gang of people came rushing to the front blocking everybody's view. Michael then went into Bruce Springsteen's 'Dancing In The Dark', also a firm favourite with the audience. You could see that Michael was enjoying and loving every minute of it... The final pop song that Michael absolutely performed and sung excellent was the Scissors Sisters' massive hit 'I Don't Feel Like Dancing'. I thought the backing singers' and Michael's vocals were amazing throughout this song. I will always remember Michael's dance, some 'Saturday Night Fever' moves! I completely became carried away and did the 'Night Fever' moves as well, much to the amusement of the people near me.

Michael said his thanks and goodbyes then walked off the stage to deafening cheering and clapping (cue the encore). We definitely wanted more! Michael returned to sing Barry Manilow's 'One Voice', which was totally magnificent. He sang the first few lines un-companied, which showed the quality of his voice. Both my cousin and I held our arms up and started swaying in time with the music. Michael again kept looking over and smiling. Then after another encore and standing ovation, Michael encouraged the audience to sing along with him to his signature song 'Love Changes Everything', I absolutely adore this song. Michael took his final bows, came to the side of the stage, looked directly at me - blew a kiss and walked off stage to rapturous applause.

WHAT AN AMAZING CONCERT –  
WHAT A FANTASTIC, CHARISMATIC,  
GORGEOUS, CARING PERSON!

THANK YOU MICHAEL, KEEP THAT  
BEAUTIFUL SMILE!

I really didn't want the special night to end... We are now looking forward to the open air concert at Repton School, Roll on July!