



Super BALL & Super BOE

By Alana Wadkin

When I heard Michael was going on tour with Alfie Boe – I was ecstatic! Being a fan of both of them, I booked my tickets as soon as they went on pre-sale. I got excellent wheelchair tickets for Liverpool and Manchester; both venues have so many memories of when I first ever met Michael. To my delight my Mum and Dad bought me a VIP Meet and Greet at the Liverpool Echo Arena as an early birthday/Christmas present. In the months leading up to the Meet and Greet, I never stopped talking to my Personal Assistants about Michael and all our special moments shared – I thought they would not believe me so I decided to bring them along with me to see for themselves how wonderful Michael is and the special bond that we share. Jen and Sara, my Personal Assistants were so excited to be accompanying me at the Meet and Greet as well as seeing the concert.

I heard that Michael had been looking on Twitter and came across a tweet that I had sent to the Overtones regarding a T-shirt I was making for Lachie – apparently Michael was a bit jealous and wanted one making for himself. So I decided to make Michael a T-shirt, because what's good enough for the Overtones is good enough for Michael! Plus he had seen my own Michael T-shirts and said he loved the designs. I designed and made him a unique 'Super Ball' T-shirt – it took a lot of patience and countless hours to complete.

On the actual day of the concert I couldn't contain my excitement; we arrived early at the Echo Arena for the VIP registration. I was surprised to see the Representative of Live Nation was the same person from Michael's previous tour, who recognized me and told us to wait until everybody else had signed in. Once we were

escorted to the Meet and Greet room, we waited for Michael and Alfie to arrive – the atmosphere was apprehensive and silent apart from me laughing and organising my Personal Assistants to prepare a couple of things, get Michael's present ready and clarify what questions I wanted to ask. As soon as Michael and Alfie walked in, Michael spotted me and gave a cheeky smile "Alright Alana! Wait there – I'll be with you soon..." Jen and Sara looked astonished and seemed taken aback at this. It was so lovely to see Andrew again too. As we waited for our turn, I watched the other fans meet Michael and Alfie and found their reactions and Michael's responses highly amusing – to the point where I burst out laughing. Michael heard me laughing and turned around with this comment "You are loving this! Your turn will be soon." I thought Michael was in a mischievous mood – this will be good. I was the last person to meet Michael and Alfie – as I got pushed up; Michael said "Come on Alana, lets introduce Alfie to you!" I got lots of hugs and kisses from Alfie and Michael, which I absolutely loved. I then asked Jen to hand over the present to Michael – he looked really surprised, I asked him to open it.

Michael's face was a picture, when he saw his t-shirt, he said "WOW THAT'S FANTASTIC ALANA!" over and over then Michael showed everybody his T-shirt (I got a round of applause, I was delighted). The next thing I knew Michael threw his jacket off and put the T-shirt on – "I don't know about Captain America but SUPER BALL will do just fine! Don't worry, I'm not going to show you any flesh" then Michael whispered "hope it's extra large..." I just nodded, to my relief the T-shirt fitted and it looked really good on Michael. To my and Alfie's amusement, Michael started posing and trying to act macho,

as my superhero. I gave him a look that he knew all too well, he knew exactly what I meant, and then I went into hysterics. It made everybody else giggle. It was time for the photographs to be taken, Alfie and Michael positioned my wheelchair in the middle of them both, knelt down either side of me and we posed for our pictures. I enjoyed chatting with them both, Alfie was so lovely, it was an absolute pleasure meeting him for the first time and I hope to meet him again in the future. As for Michael, it was like seeing a dear friend – he is still as cheeky and charming as ever! The time went by too quickly and before we knew it we were heading to the main arena ready for the concert.

I was lucky enough to go to Liverpool as well as the Manchester concert. Both venues had amazing atmospheres but the Manchester concert was phenomenal with Michael and Alfie at their very best. The concert was based on Michael and Alfie's new album 'Together' with a few surprises thrown in. At Manchester, the wheelchair section was at the front to my delight, the wheelchair users could actually see everything. We were sat next to Wendy and Celia; it was nice to catch up with them. As the lights dimmed, the musicians and backing singers (Izzy, Tor and Lauren) walked on stage they played the overture which led on to 'Somewhere' from *West Side Story* with only hearing Michael's and Alfie's voices off stage. They sung this unaccompanied and *a capella*, which showed the quality of their vocals. I focused on the stairs at the back of the stage as Michael and Alfie appeared (with beaming smiles) at the top of the stairs to enormous applause, cheers and screams. They continued with a stunning version of 'Tonight', I liked how the song was arranged to compliment Alfie's and Michael's harmonies.

You could see that there's a mutual respect between them and they share a close friendship. Throughout the concert there was cheeky/humorous banter which had the audience laughing, especially when they spotted a man in the audience leave his seat to go to the toilet mid concert – they jumped off stage and sat in his seat but they couldn't get back on stage again; it was absolutely hysterical. The Stevie Wonder classic 'For Once In My Life' was next to be given the Ball and Boe treatment – they performed this with great energy and made me dance from the start. An old favourite of mine 'Music Of The Night' from the *Phantom Of The Opera* left me stunned by Alfie's powerful voice and Michael's theatrical presence and vocal range. A fairly new song to me is 'Speak Softly Love' from *The Godfather* – this was sung next full of intent and beautiful notes. I absolutely loved Michael's and Alfie's rendition of 'A Thousand Years' from *Twilight*, it was definitely a highlight – just breathtaking and it gave me goose bumps, it was sung with such emotion and feeling. At both concerts, 'Tell Me It's Not True' from *Blood Brothers* was a firm favourite – just fantastic and was very powerful! I liked their pairing of 'What A Wonderful World/Somewhere Over The Rainbow' – a different interpretation but it really suited both voices. 'Incurably Romantic' was sung next, they delivered a great performance - I personally think the song is far better live than listening to it on the album.

Michael and Alfie then performed a wonderful Elvis Presley section that included solo versions of 'That's Alright Mama' and 'I Just Can't Help Believing', both songs showed off each of their vocal ability and range superbly. They finished the first half with a lively performance of 'Suspicious Minds', which had the audience clapping along. Of course I was dancing and singing along, much to the amusement of my Personal Assistants and everyone else around me! Both Michael and Alfie kept acknowledging me and smiling throughout the concert, which made me feel so special.

In the interval, it was nice to catch up with many other fans and friends. My Personal Assistants kept saying that they haven't seen me absolutely enjoying a concert as much – my whole persona changes. I become alive when I watch Michael

perform and my face lights up... They now know why I love Michael's concerts so much – the best medicine that you could have! I think Michael and Alfie will both have some new fans now.

The second half began with a comical duet of 'Me and My Shadow, which Michael and Alfie seem to enjoy. Move over Morecambe and Wise, forget about Ant and Dec – Ball and Boe are here to stay! Michael with a twinkle his eye said "Alfie and I have something in common, we both love to swing, are there any more swingers in here?" I shouted out, which made them both giggle. Alfie had to compose himself for 'Ain't That A Kick In The Head', Michael didn't help matters - he was still laughing. Michael then belted out 'Mack The Knife', a firm favourite with the audience. I thoroughly enjoyed their rendition of 'Stairway to Paradise', complete with some choreography – it's one of my favourite songs from their album.



Up next was the biggest surprise of the concert, a James Bond medley – both Michael and Alfie gave stunning performances, which left me completely dumbfounded. The medley consisted of 'On Her Majesty's Secret Service' (overture), 'Live And Let Die' (duet), 'Goldfinger' (Michael), 'From Russia With Love' (Alfie), 'Skyfall' (Michael), 'Diamonds are Forever' (Michael), 'Thunderball' (Alfie) and 'Nobody Does It Better' (Michael). They should definitely record these songs – their voices were absolutely incredible. It was time for Alfie to take centre stage as he asked for lots of audience participation to join in on the chorus of 'Keep Me In Your Heart' from his album 'Trust'. Alfie delivered a powerful performance of 'Love Reign O'er Me' from *Classic Quadrophenia* and received a well-deserved standing ovation. Then it was Michael's turn to wow the audience – another

highlight of the concert was watching him sing a breathtaking version of 'Gethsemane', it was completely outstanding, I had goose bumps throughout! The atmosphere was that intense, you could have heard a pin drop. Michael sung it with so much emotion and passion using all of his acting skills; it got another well-deserved standing ovation.

Michael encouraged the audience to sway and sing along with him to his signature song 'Love Changes Everything', I absolutely adore this song – Michael noticed that Jen and I were the first to join in at Manchester; he winked and smiled at us. Alfie returned to the stage to sing with Michael a very moving *Les Misérables* medley, consisting of 'Bring Him Home', 'Empty Chairs at Empty Tables' and 'I Dreamed A Dream' – I never experienced anything like it before, the lyrics really resonated with me. The audience went to rapturous applause, which touched Michael and Alfie so much and made them quite emotional, as you could see it across their faces. They took their bows, said their thank yous and goodbyes (Michael gave me the most gorgeous smile ever and waved) then walked off the stage. The applause and screams were deafening, we definitely wanted more!

Michael and Alfie returned to the stage for the encore, a stunning version of 'You'll Never Walk Alone' from *Carousel*, both of them sung it with such emotion and power. I was pushed near 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 crowd of people came rushing to the front blocking everybody's view. Jen and I held our arms up and started swaying in time with the music. Michael again kept looking over and smiling. Alfie then came over and grabbed our hands, which totally shocked us – I was delighted! At Liverpool Michael and Alfie paid tribute to the Hillsborough 96 with this song – a perfect way to end the concert! As Michael and Alfie took their final bows, they both waved and smiled over at me before they left the stage.

It was the best concert I have been to for a very long time – I will treasure many wonderful moments of this phenomenal experience forever!