



BALL FEVER TOOK OVER THE NATION

By Alana Wadkin. Live picture by Sharon Scarrott.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

Michael sang an old favourite "One Step Out Of Time", I love the rocky version - there were lots of people punching the air, including me. Another much-loved song returned, the Elvis Presley's classic 'Wonder Of You', Michael always does this justice - there was a lot of arm waving/swaying in time with the music and screaming especially when Michael kissed a lady in the audience. Michael said his thanks and goodbyes then walked off the stage to deafening cheering and applause. We definitely wanted more of the Ballster! The guest vocalists returned to the stage dancing followed by Michael to sing a crowd pleaser 'You Can't Stop The Beat' from *Hairspray* - it was just amazing, Michael even did all the dance moves. For the final song Michael encouraged the audience to sing along with him to his signature song 'Love Changes Everything', Michael sang this with such power - the best I have ever heard him sing it and he held the last 'money' note for a lot longer than usual.

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