

# THE CITY OF CULTURE HAD A BALL!

by Alana Wadkin

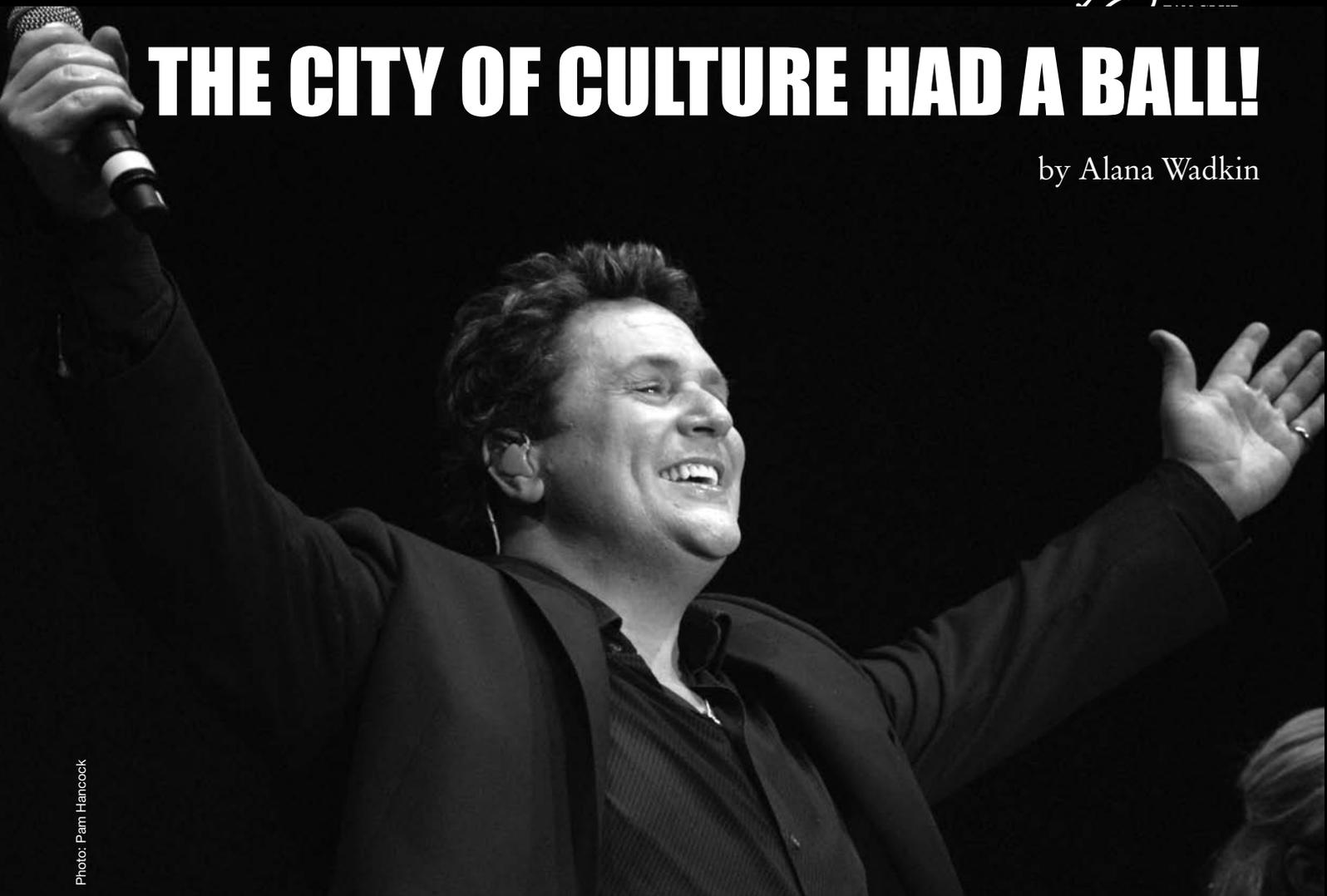


Photo: Pam Hancock

Saturday 19th July 2008 turned out to be a day I will never forget in a hurry - it was the first time this year that I have been fit enough to see Michael. I was so excited because the concert was in my home town of Liverpool at the new Echo Arena, which meant everything because I didn't have to travel far. My mum, dad, cousin Adele and myself decided to go on the train and get there in plenty of time because we knew Liverpool would be busy with the Tall Ships, the Open Golf and of course Michael's concert. We had a look at the Tall Ships (what's the fascination?) and a walk through the Albert Dock before going to the Arena. It was lovely to see my friends again and Maureen and Gill, everybody looked really well!

The next thing I knew, I was given a VIP backstage pass and we were escorted to the Green Room. I didn't know what was happening - Adele had been in touch with Andrew and Michael to ask if Michael would meet me because I haven't been well and had to cancel seeing *Hairspray* several times. Michael kindly agreed and wanted to meet me again. I was com-

pletely surprised and shocked, we were actually in the Green Room and I was about to meet Michael! The reality hit as Michael walked in; talk about totally overwhelmed - I couldn't smile or do anything. Michael was so LOVELY and CARING - we had a talk and a good laugh! His cuddle was the best; Michael looked and smelt gorgeous - all ready to go on stage! Michael asked how I was and if I heard him reading my name out on the radio. We had some photographs taken and my dad made a video; good job he did as mum never took any photographs of Michael and me apart from one of our legs! Michael, we were right about the photographs! At least, I can take some stills from the video... Michael noticed that I was wearing his necklace and my t-shirt, which I designed and said how much he liked it and "you're so clever." I was so delighted; I couldn't resist smacking Michael's bum... He was a bit surprised by this and said "she has just smacked my bum!" Everybody fell about laughing... I wanted my t-shirt signing; my mum came out with "Michael would you sign her boobs?" (mum had been thinking of Michael in *Hairspray* and Edna's boobs) -

Michael laughed and made a very funny comment and was happy to sign my t-shirt; I was made up!!! We said our good-byes; Michael went to his dressing room then came back with two different ties. He wanted advice on which to wear, Michael asked "which one do you like Alana?" I chose a purple/mauve coloured tie and Michael said "OK, that is what I'll wear..."

I am still in shock now and I can't believe Michael wanted to meet me again. Once was a lifetime's dream but TWICE is just incredible!! I would like to thank everybody involved, especially you Michael, from the bottom of my heart! Words can't express how I felt and how very grateful I am! It has made me feel so much better and I am the LUCKIEST person in the world. Meeting Michael was the best medicine that I could ever have... Nobody knows how much Michael and his music have helped me cope over the past 18 months. I would have given up a long time ago, only for Michael and my friends at the fan club. I appreciate all that everybody has done for me.

The concert was fantastic, we really enjoyed it and had a ball - I danced for the first time in 10 months. The lights dimmed, the band started to play the overture. Michael appeared (with that gorgeous smile) at the top of the stairs to rapturous applause, cheers and screams. He was wearing a pin-striped suit, pink shirt and that purple/mauve tie I chose. The first song was a sensational version of 'This Is The Moment', I will never get tired of Michael singing this fantastic song as I can identify with the lyrics. Michael then sang 'Reach Out For Me' from his latest album *Back to Bacharach*, which I loved because it was lively. Michael said how great it was to be back in Liverpool and explained how he was feeling by singing 'I'm Feeling Good' by Anthony Newley, followed by 'Do You Mind?' Both my cousin and I really enjoyed these songs. There was the usual cheeky banter with the audience which always makes me laugh! Another song from the *Back to Bacharach* album Michael did was 'Arthur's Theme', which was beautifully performed.

One of my highlights was seeing Michael sing 'With One Look', a very special song to me because it is my signature song (with not being able to talk, I communicate using my eyes) - the first few lines say it all... The best highlight was when Michael sang a breathtaking version of 'Prepare Ye The Way Of The Lord' and 'Gethsemane' - it was completely outstanding! I was completely spell bound at this performance and judging by the audience's response, they loved it. On to the *Les Misérables* medley, one of my highlights; it was brilliant and included all of the special guests - they all have outstanding voices. Michael's special guests were Rachel Wooding, Michael McCarthy and Michael Sterling. All of the songs were sung with passion but mine and Adele's favourite was 'Empty Chairs, Empty Tables' and everybody loved 'One Day More' judging by the audience's enormous applause and cheers.

After the interval, Michael walked back on to the stage wearing a dark blue suit, purple/blue shirt and a similar tie. 'Oh What A Circus' was the first song, Michael performed it superbly- and seemed at ease. Michael then sang 'High Flying Adored', which was lovely. Michael sang wonderful versions of 'Stranger In Paradise' along with 'And This Is My



Beloved'. Everybody seemed to enjoy it.

I enjoyed Michael's beautiful duet with Rachel Wooding 'The Prayer', she has a lovely voice and I can see why Michael loves this song. Then Michael mentioned that Liverpool was "The City Of Culture" and that he has happy tour memories from Liverpool, which led on to Michael singing 'Easy Terms/Tell Me It's Not True' from *Blood Brothers*. Both songs were performed brilliantly.

Another favourite was 'I Know Where I Have Been' from *Hairspray*; the song really does suit Michael's voice. Michael sung it with so much power and passion - you could tell that he is really loving being in *Hairspray*. Michael then did an excellent rendition of 'The Show Must Go On' -

another one of my personal favourites. My final highlight was the 'Party Time' section; it started with 'Don't Stop Me Now'. It was sung superbly and made everybody start dancing!! After that came a crowd pleaser 'You Can't Stop The Beat' - just amazing, Michael even did all the dance moves. I got completely carried away and started dancing as well as screaming..!

My family certainly were having a good time for the first time in ages, I am so glad they did. Michael said his thanks and goodbyes then walked off the stage to deafening cheering and clapping (cue the encore). We definitely wanted more; everybody made this known by clapping and stamping! Michael returned to sing a special song especially for Liverpool - 'You'll Never Walk Alone' - everybody joined in and started swaying. Michael sung his signature song 'Love Changes Everything' and told everybody to sing along. The special guests sang the last part with Michael. After another encore - they sang 'Do you Hear The People Sing?', which was just amazing. What a wonderful concert! This special night will always stay with me for as long as I live...



Photo: Pam Hancock