

Liverpool Found Their Hero

By: Alana Wadkin



The 2011 'Heroes' Tour was highly anticipated, after all it has been two years since Michael last toured. There were rumours flying around saying this would be the best tour ever, I have only been to the last 3 tours but it was the best... I thought the 'Past and Present Tour' would be very hard to top; this 'Heroes' Tour surpassed that and was totally fabulous! The staging, lighting and vocal arrangements were amazing - the mixture of new and old songs was just right. The talent on stage was phenomenal! A great live band, five fantastic guest vocalists (Sandra Marvin, Adrian Hansel, Holly James, Laura Tebbutt and Gary Watson) and the sensational Michael Ball. Over two hours of pure joy, what more could you ask for! I never danced as much in my life... I went to Manchester, Liverpool and the first Birmingham concert: I thoroughly enjoyed every second and literally had an absolute ball but I thought Liverpool was the best as regards atmosphere and audience interaction by far!

Liverpool Empire is my local venue, so I persuaded Mum and Dad to take me early to go to see Michael arriving. That day was glorious and hot, there

was a large crowd building at the stage door. It was nice to see many of my friends again and meet new friends. When the tour bus arrived, all I could hear was screaming and I was trying to see over lots of heads. Somehow Andrew spotted me and told Michael where I was. "Alana, I will be with you in a mo, get your camera ready!" Michael shouted over, he knows what Mum is like with cameras! Michael made his way through the crowd to me, gave me a sly kiss and a lovely hug while posing for a photo. It was over in seconds, Michael went in to rehearse. Dad was supposed to record Michael on the video camera but it was on the wrong mode and recorded nothing, I thought 'oh great, he's doing Mum's trick again' and I hadn't got anything with Michael. To our surprise Mum had taken a beautiful photograph of Michael with me, I am delighted with it - the photo is in my room pride of place... I think this is the best one yet! It is a lovely photo of Michael and it doesn't look like there's anything wrong with me. I also managed to have some photos taken with Adrian and Gary; they are lovely lads - really chatty.

With any Michael concert, I get

really excited just before it starts but the Liverpool Empire brought a new excitement because the concert was an absolute sell-out and the atmosphere was electric from the beginning, we have never experienced anything like it before. Liverpool loves Michael... As the lights dimmed, the entire theatre erupted with cheers and applause. The band struck up and began playing the overture, which consisted of the theme tunes from Michael's favourite film heroes such as Indiana Jones, James Bond and Flash Gordon. All the guest vocalists came on stage then Michael appears at the top of the stairs (looking gorgeous as ever) and starts to sing 'Holding Out For A Hero' by Bonny Tyler, a very clever up-tempo show opener which got the audience going and set the theme of the concert really well. Michael's voice was so powerful; you could see Michael was on cracking form. Michael then gave 'Bad Things' from *True Blood*, the Ball magic; this cheeky/sexy rendition made the audience scream a lot. The next song Michael introduced by saying "you are filling me with Glee", then he launched into 'Don't Stop Believing' originally by Journey but recently became popular thanks to the US TV series Glee. I was very pleased Michael included it in this tour because I was one of the people who suggested the song to Michael, I knew it would be a lively number that Michael could make his own - it didn't disappoint... I loved the harmonies and the audience interaction during the song.

The following few songs were from Michael's new album *Heroes* and included Long John Baldry's 'Let The Heartaches Begin', Neil Diamond's 'Play Me', Johnny Mathis' 'Misty', Tom Jones' 'I'll Never Fall In Love Again' and Billy Joel's 'New York State Of Mind'. I enjoyed Michael's stories and introductions leading to each song, especially when he compared himself to the radio presenter in the film *Play Misty For Me* with the obsessive fan - which made me burst out laughing! All the songs showed off Michael's vocal range and ability superbly and made me realise why I first admired Michael so much. I found myself singing along to them, much to the amusement of the people around me. If there could be a city classed as a "hero", New York

would be Michael's so the next section of the concert paid tribute to New York. This was a highlight because it showed the guests' vocal skills individually as well as enabling various group harmonies and a bit of choreography. First Michael performed 'On Broadway' brilliantly with Adrian and Gary, I liked the step routine. Laura did a lovely version of Alicia Keyes' 'Empire State Of Mind', I was swaying in time with the music. Gary sang 'Englishman In New York' with Michael, far better than Sting in my opinion. Then Holly did a wonderful rendition of 'Fame' and the choreography was very good – I was in my element dancing away. Sandra belted out 'Broadway Baby' with an incredible long end note, which received a standing ovation. What better way to end the tribute other than with Michael singing Frank Sinatra's classic 'New York New York', which was amazing. Michael went into the interval with Barry Manilow's 'Weekend In New England' by saying "Do you know what's the best thing about New York? The fact you can't wait to get out of it and visit New England at the weekends!" I absolutely loved how Michael sang the song; it suits his voice perfectly. I couldn't help singing along to this, it happens every time I hear Michael's version.

The second half began with songs from musical theatre – the *Sunset Boulevard* overture played, Michael stepped on to the stage to rapturous applause then he sang 'As If We Never Said Goodbye' and 'Sunset Boulevard', which were amazing. Michael lead up to singing 'Empty Chairs, Empty Tables' and 'I Dreamed A Dream' by referring to *Les Miserables*' 25th anniversary last year and said how he hopes he'll be performing these songs for another 25 years, which received a massive audience response. Michael sung these with such emotion and passion. As he mentioned the *Hairspray* tour, Michael said how sorry he was that he never came to Liverpool with Edna (my sentiments exactly) and how he's going from an overweight agoraphobic mother of one from Baltimore to a serial killer in *Sweeney Todd* who eats all the pies! Michael charmed all the ladies in the audience when he said "looking at the audience here tonight, the next song is very appropriate" and began singing

'Pretty Women' from *Sweeney*, which blended into 'Not While I'm Around' – just beautiful. Then it came to one of my favourite musical theatre songs – "This Is The Moment" from *Jeckyll and Hyde*; a very popular choice with the audience, you could hear a pin drop as Michael performed this fantastic song and he got a well deserved standing ovation. Many people have attempted to sing that song but haven't come near Michael and as far as I am concerned it will always be Michael's song no matter what... I was delighted when Michael launched into Queen's classic 'Somebody To Love' because I originally suggested it to Michael when we first met in 2007 and he said he would definitely look at it in the future. I thought Michael could make it his own and identify with the lyrics; I could imagine Michael singing it. Michael sang the song amazingly with the guest vocalists backing him; it was far better than I ever imagined! The audience joined in too and gave the biggest reaction I have ever heard once Michael belted out the last note. Phenomenal from start to finish! Michael is an exceptional showman (just like the great Freddie Mercury was), who does this brilliant song justice. I loved this performance – definitely a special highlight of the tour.

Party time kicked off with Tony Christie's 'Avenues And Alleyways' which really suits Michael's voice and he performed it fantastically. The entire theatre really enjoyed every second and got up to dance and remained standing until the end of the concert. A surprising choice, 'Pencil Full Of Lead' by Paolo Nutini, was next to be given the Ball treatment. It was better than the original because you could hear what the lyrics were, plus Michael did some unique dance movements and the guest vocalists were having fun too creating a party atmosphere. An old favourite 'One Step Out Of Time' returned, I love the rocky version – there were lots of people punching the air including me! Michael calmed things down by singing a breathtaking version of the Elvis Presley classic 'I Can't Help Falling In Love With You'; 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 (cue the encore). We definitely wanted more of the Ball! Michael returned to sing a very lively and cheeky version of Tom Jones' 'Help Yourself', the pelvic thrusts were back to my delight! 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 'money' note for a lot longer. The final song Michael performed was Tony Bennett's 'For Once In My Life'. It was sung beautifully – the perfect way to end a fabulous concert. Michael is just a phenomenally talented performer who keeps getting better and better!

We weren't going to the stage door afterwards but I changed my mind and went, I was so glad I did. We literally bumped into Adrian, Gary, Laura and Holly trying to cross the road in between the tour buses. They said "Alana, we could see you from the stage; the spotlight was on you most of the time – boy, you were going to town, weren't you?" I was made up by this and we said it was a fantastic show. The stage door was absolutely chocker with fans so we decided to wait opposite the tour bus for Michael. We saw Michael coming out of another door by his bus (not the stage door) so we went over, Michael saw me and said "Oh Alana, I saw you dancing away, you were like a lunatic!" - touched my hand then give a wink and a gorgeous smile. All you could hear were several intakes of breaths and 'awwwwww' sounds. Michael then turned around to the massive crowd and said "Thank you for a truly special night, Liverpool has been the best by far!" Everybody cheered and Michael finally got on the bus after saying goodbye – "Alana, I'll see ya again."

Liverpool was just electric and the best atmosphere - we scousers know how to party! I just want to thank Andrew for pointing me out to Michael in the crowd and of course Michael for always acknowledging me and going out of his way to come over. That says a lot and means the world! So that's another fantastic memory which I will treasure forever, it's great to be a BALLETTTE!