

THE EVENT AND THE DEMON BARBER OF FLEET STREET

by Alana Wadkin



The 25th June was a day of firsts – my first Fan Club Event, the first time I have taken my computer so far and I had the opportunity to talk to Michael with my computer for the very first time! The event was held at the Ibis Hotel, Earls Court, London. We didn't know what to expect but I was eager to find out so Mum and Dad booked the tickets as soon as they went on sale. When we arrived, the event had already started; Maureen, Gill and family greeted us and we were shown to our table – table 9. I only knew James on the table and felt strange as Dad set-up my computer while Mum organised things, in front

of people we didn't know trying to be quiet. Once we introduced ourselves, it was fine.

Keith the compère introduced himself to us, he let me know he was aware of the situation, telling me "Your computer will be connected soon." I assumed he meant the power supply and never gave it another thought. There were quizzes and video footage leading to the interval. It was lovely to see old friends throughout the day and meet new fans. In the interval Mum and I went for a look around while Dad minded our things. When we got back, Dad

told us the technician had connected my computer to the PA system so I could talk to Michael – I was delighted!

Shortly after the interval Michael arrived, looking really well. Keith chatted to Michael on stage, asking him about *Sweeney Todd*, older projects and future plans. I was fascinated by Michael's in-depth answers; some were really funny and witty. I think everybody was thrilled to hear about the new album, a tour next year and another musical which Michael already has the rights for. No celebration is complete without

a cake and Barbara made a beautiful Sweeney related cake which she presented to Michael on stage. It was time for the fans to ask Michael questions, my turn soon came. Everybody could hear me, it was fantastic to actually talk to Michael, I always wanted to but unfortunately the equipment is too bulky to carry around all the time. It's probably a good thing because I wouldn't shut up asking questions such as what is it like stepping on stage and being in a recording studio? Good job I pre-programmed the talk, it would have taken ages otherwise; it's so time-consuming using my computer using a chinswitch via a scanning method!

That is why talking to Michael was a dream come true and I hope everybody understands why I was so emotional; plus watching that heartbreaking Shooting Star video just before made me even worse. I understand a little of what the children and their families must be going through. Being able to speak to somebody I respect and admire was an experience I will never forget; plus Michael coming off the stage to me made it more special. Michael was genuinely touched by what I said and very interested in how I used the computer asking me questions; I showed him how the software worked. Even though the computer beep sounded like gun shots through the PA system, which Michael kindly pointed out by saying "I like the way it sounds as you are shooting me with it!" - I felt everybody was shown my character more. Plus I got to say thank you to Michael and the opportunity to give him his birthday card and present.

Then the raffle was drawn, nobody on our table won. It raised some money for Shooting Stars, which was all that mattered. The event finished with Michael thanking everybody for coming and singing two songs - 'Misty' and 'Weekend In New England' which is my favourite song from the 'Heroes' album. Michael really

belted them out with such ease...

Fast forward two months, I finally went to see *Sweeney Todd* in London after three attempts of going. We nearly didn't get to see it this time because we were already at the train station when we realised we had forgotten the theatre tickets so Dad had to go back home to collect them. Anyway, we were in plenty of time for the London train and the stage door to my delight. We only waited minutes before Michael arrived, he had already spotted me in the car; the door slid open and Michael just looked at me with the cheekiest smile that I have ever seen, before he got out of the car. Michael came over to me, saying "You are looking well!" and chatted away while he signed my autograph book. I expected the next comment: "Do you watch 'Celebrity Big Brother'? You just look like Bette Lynch!" because I was wearing all leopard print! I gave Michael a look to kill, which made him laugh... Good job we have the same sense of humour but Michael definitely knows I will get him back for that. Then we had a cuddle while posing for a photo. After Michael went into the theatre, Peter Polycarpou came out and straight over to us. He is a



lovely man - very friendly, we chatted away and Peter was happy to have his photo taken with me.

Sweeney Todd was amazing; it is a very dark, clever and humorous musical. Michael is terrifying as Sweeney especially when he performs Epiphany, going from a skilled barber nursing a private grievance, who turns into a demonic serial killer. Imelda Staunton plays Mrs Lovett as a witty character whose moral sense is quickly overcome by her love of profit and lust for Sweeney. The rest of the cast are very good. I enjoyed the slitting throats scenes because some didn't go to plan - the victims got stuck in the chair and didn't slide down the chair. The audience loved it and gave the cast a standing ovation at the end.

