Freddie Mercury: The Man Behind The Showman

Ady, Endre

I want to be loved

I am no heir, no proud ancestor, I have no friend, no brother, sister, I have never belonged, I have never belonged.

I am, like every human: Highness, Iceberg, enigma, strange and timeless, Distant will-o'-the-wisp, Distant will-o'-the-wisp.

But, oh, I can't remain unspoken, I have to bare myself wide open, Behold me, everyone, Behold me, everyone.

In all self-torture, in every song, I want to be loved, to belong. Belong to somebody, Belong to somebody.

Translated from Hungarian: Zollman, Peter

(Kedves David, ugyan ezt nem kell fordítani, de nagy örömmel venném, ha elolvasná, hogy érthető-e a vers, jó-e a fordítás, az eredeti címe (Szeretném, ha szeretnének, és fent van az interneten).

[Kedves Mária, nem vagyok nagy versolvasó, de tetszik a fordítás, szerintem átadja az eredetinek a jelentését, és szépen is hangzik angolul.]

Introduction

Regarded by millions as the most colourful and attractive personality in the world of pop and rock music, he was one of the most remarkable musical geniuses of all time: singer, songwriter, musician and charismatic Queen frontman Freddie Mercury passed away at a tragically young age, at the peak of his career, in his Kensington (London) home on 24 November 1991. He had released a statement the day before he died announcing that he was suffering from an illness caused by AIDS.

In the years leading up to his death, his health had gradually deteriorated and - although he kept this fact secret from the public almost until the last moment - his close friends knew the inevitable was about to happen.

His death constituted an enormous loss to his family, band members and friends, as well as to the art world and his fans. The admiration and love his fans felt for him in their hearts can never be erased and he lives on as a legend who has become immortal, as he no doubt would have wished. His songs have stood the test of time.

His unique legacy meant he was ranked 58th in the “100 Greatest Britons” (BBC Poll, 2002) survey of public opinion compiled by the BBC, alongside personalities such as Sir Winston Churchill, Diana Princess of Wales, Queen Elizabeth I, John Lennon, Sir Isaac Newton, Oliver Cromwell, Admiral Nelson, Sir Paul McCartney, Queen Elizabeth II, David Bowie and Stephen Hawking.

There can’t be many people in the civilised world who haven’t heard of the names mentioned above, all of whom were world-famous historical figures, musicians or scientists and made a significant contribution to Great Britain’s cultural, scientific or political heritage.

Freddie Mercury fully deserves his position on this list.

His lifetime achievements are truly amazing, representing excellence in the world of rock and pop music. His masterpieces are still known, played and sung virtually all over the world today. Official videos of him and the band have been watched more than 7 billion times, with Bohemian Rhapsody alone generating more than 1 billion views.

Brian May, the band’s solo guitarist, thinks “Freddie was a miracle.” Brian is right; Freddie practised the art of excellence like a Zen master and gave life beauty and quality.

He started writing his songs in the spirit of eternal beginners, put his intellect to one side and allowed emotional regions of the brain to take control; most of his songs are like messages sent by a pacemaker and generate a whole range of emotional reactions.

The members of Queen announced the news of Freddie’s death as follows:

“We have lost the greatest and most beloved member of our family. We feel overwhelming grief that he has gone, sadness that he should be cut down at the height of his creativity, but above all great pride in the courageous way that he lived and died. It has been a privilege for us to have shared such magical times.”

One of God’s angels must have been holding the hand of whoever wrote this tribute; it perfectly conveys Brian, Roger and John’s devastating loss and the gratitude they felt to him. They were left stunned and unable to comprehend the news. Having worked together for so long to become successful, when they had achieved everything and should have been in a position to simply enjoy making music together, Freddie became incurably ill, and then this bright shining star faded away, leaving behind a vacuum that can never be filled, like some kind of terrible cosmic joke.

“In September 2010 (coincidentally, around Freddie’s 64th birthday) a poll carried out among rock fans saw him named the Greatest Rock Legend Of All Time, beating Elvis Presley to claim the title, and ahead of David Bowie, Jon Bon Jovi, Jimi Hendrix and Ozzy Osbourne.”

(queenonlince.com/freddie-mercury)

Freddie would have been very proud to have beaten his greatest role model Jimi Hendrix in terms of popularity, and not by accident. He really would have deserved to have experienced this for himself, but fate took no mercy on him, and his passions brought about his downfall.

One of his close friends, David Evans, wrote this tribute in his book *This Was The Real Life: The Tale of Freddie Mercury* (by David Evans and David Minns):

“so now he's gone ...It's hard to believe but we have to believe it as we are left behind without him and we shall never be touched by stardom like this again…………..He achieved just about everything he wanted and above all he went out on top of his world, not sinking, not sliding, not skidding and slithering but fixed firmly on top, exactly where he put himself and it is inconcievable to think of him as being anywhere else. His star will never become tawdry or tarnished or slurred by failure and odious comparison. It will always shine as brightly as he left it.”

Every fan is grateful to the 2018 Hollywood film *Bohemian Rhapsody*, which commemorated the legendary band, Queen, and Freddie, whose fans loved him and still love him not only for his art, but also for his magical personality, which sparkled in a thousand different colours.

As a result of the film, interest in CDs, DVDs and books about Freddie and Queen has increased many times over; the thousands of comments below the videos prove that a new fan base has been created. The film affected some viewers like an initiation rite or spiritual awakening; those who weren’t previously aware of Queen were shocked to discover the difference between the music of today and the music of Queen. A lot of people rave about the film as if they had caught a glimpse of heaven. That magical 20 minutes at the end of the film made quite an impression.

My book is intended for anyone who won’t settle for just knowing the story of Freddie and Queen, but would like to understand what the confusingly secretive songs were about, such as Seven Seas Of Rhye, Killer Queen or Bohemian Rhapsody, and all the other less secretive songs; what the background was to Freddie’s unavoidable tragedy, who this man really was, whose voice, music and exceptional performance style attracted crowds of hundreds of thousands to stadiums.

There are certain matters that are part of God’s will and this insight was quite painful to me, it can be quite scary to find out why Freddie was unable to step out of death’s path and yet untying a knot is still more worthwhile than just cutting it in half. Just watching or seeing Freddie, perceiving or sensing his presence is dramatically different; by understanding his songs we begin to see the world from a more exciting and beautiful perspective. I found understanding Bohemian Rhapsody was like I had been magically transported to Freddie’s inner world and was having a delightful discussion with him. The song came back to me in everyday life, lost its mystical nature and yet I appreciated it more than ever and now I don’t just listen to the song but also hear its hidden message.

A lot of authors have written the story of his tragically short life in some very good books, right down to the last little detail, largely without emotion, except for books by his friends and loved ones, who remember him with love and respect, especially Jim, David and Peter, on whom it seems Freddie had an almost supernatural effect. And this is understandable, Freddie was almost like a rainbow, he made the life of those around him more beautiful, when he shined he was captivating, and when he left their lives suddenly became dull and their souls frosty, anything that happened seemed pointless, remote and worthless, as if Freddie had taken the meaning of their lives with him.

Most of his songs are classic masterpieces, timeless and unique, both in terms of instrumentation and lyrics, full of extremely rich and vibrant content. His singing voice is remarkably beautiful, his ability to improvise and singing technique are awesome, his original style and glistening, often suggestive delivery is capable of evoking heaven and hell, and making hearts beat faster, he can lift you and shake you up, make you laugh or bring tears to your eyes, giving unreserved moments of joy.

He himself insisted he didn’t write songs for specific people, many of his song lyrics are just nice-sounding gibberish, while others are for everyone because they deal with universal subjects, such as love.

Personally, I graduated as a mental hygiene specialist from the University of Debrecen 30 years ago, but this fact alone wouldn’t be anything like enough to take on the writing of such an analysis. Even before university I was interested in psychological works, especially the psychology of personality, personality development and deep psychology. During my studies and after graduating from university I read the major works of the greatest psychoanalysts. I mainly understood the importance of symbols in mental processes from the works of Carl Gustav Jung. I learned about the psychological interpretation of drawings from the world-famous Hungarian professor, Dr Zoltán Vass.

Freddie and the other members of the band always said they didn’t like interpreting their songs; everyone should understand them as they want to and connect with them if they are willing or able to do so.

If only I had known about Queen earlier, but sadly I wasn’t aware of them, just superficially, though when I heard that nobody had managed to interpret Bohemian Rhapsody, my curiosity got the better of me and I really wanted to know what the song was about.

To begin with it was just a puzzle, but very soon I was shocked to realise there was another sentient being behind this song, who was suffering. And then events began to move faster, as if I had been carried along by a tornado and then all I remember is that I was buying all the books on the market, listening to all the songs, some of them for what seemed like millions of times. I deciphered each song in turn, in the order in which the albums arrived, and started writing the book even though that hadn’t been my intention originally, I just started and didn’t even notice that I’d finished. As far as I was concerned Freddie was born, grew up, became a musician and successful, fell ill and passed away in four months. It all happened so quickly, I felt I was just dreaming. I laughed a lot while reading the books and listening to him, but cried more than I laughed, and I think this will always be the way of things from now on whenever I think of him or hear him, I’m always smiling through my tears when I hear him sing. Like so many other people, Freddie captivated me too.

But even today a lot of people simply reject and condemn him – which he dreaded all his life – because they are unable or unwilling to accept the fact that he was bisexual, or in fact homosexual. Homophobia still persists today, especially among the older age group.

This attitude largely comes from Christian culture, but also from the general condemnation of diversity and lawful discrimination which still exists in some areas today.

In addition, the HIV virus and AIDS-related illnesses caused by HIV also represented a terrible stigma for gay men and lesbians in Freddie’s life.

The Titanic sank, even though its architect thought it was unsinkable, but he was wrong. The ship lies in the depths of the Atlantic Ocean and can no longer be brought to the surface, as was predestined. For the sake of the film, director James Cameron went down to a depth of five kilometres to study the ship that had broken into two, because he wanted to reflect the truth as far as possible. And he succeeded wonderfully.

The film inspired me to learn about the real story of the Titanic. The real people, how it was built, who made it, how many people died by the time it was launched and who they were, how and why exactly it sank, who died and who survived the tragedy. I got to know the reality behind the film. It was a tragic experience, but worth it, I learned that nobody should ever believe their ship is unsinkable. Freddie’s story is similar to that of the Titanic.

Getting to know the real Freddie Mercury was a tragic, shocking and unforgettable experience for me, just as tragic and unbelievable as the story of the Titanic. But there was one huge difference, the fate of the Titanic was in the hands of others, whereas it seems like Freddie drove his own ship into the iceberg. The question is whether this was true and if so, why. This is what this book is about.

In his song *The Golden Boy* Freddie clearly and understandably described how he saw himself when he wrote the song. The song is on Freddie’s *Barcelona* album (1988).

“The Golden Boy

The boy had a way with words, he sang, he moved with grace

He entertained so naturally, no gesture out of place

His road in life was clearly drawn, he didn’t hesitate

He played, they saw, he conquered as master of, as the master of his fate.”

……

“His rise was irresistible (yeah) – he grew into the part

His explanation simply that he suffered for his art

No base considerations of some glittering reward

The prize was knowing that his work was noticed and adored.”

**Part I**

**A kind of magic**

**1.**

The ultimate showman

Freddie didn’t like people discussing his private life and he especially hated the press because they twisted his words and harassed him with rude questions that usually had nothing to do with music, but rather with sensationalism. At the end of his life the paparazzi overran the area around his house, blatantly sniffing around and stealthily following him to take pictures of Freddie when he was ill and barely able to drag himself around.

During his lifetime, he and Queen were in general crudely and unfairly criticized, put down and ridiculed in the press, but all to no avail, the public loved them and still do.

Brian May, the band’s lead guitarist, said:

‘We have never been fashionable, we were popular.’

(YouTube: Days of Our Lives documentary)

Brian thought the music press were angry that it wasn’t their positive criticism that made them great. Brian was probably right, as we will see later.

Queen released 15 albums between 1973 and 1995, selling more than 150 million copies on the global market until 1991, and the growth in sales has by no means come to a standstill.

Freddie wanted to entertain, because he loved the stage, adored performing and always appreciated the audience. He craved recognition and to be loved, and this was what he got right from the start.

Fans worshipped his captivating performance style and the exciting and beautiful songs and still do so today, even though he left us nearly 30 years ago.

This world was magical to him; he himself was the sparkle, the scenery, the lighting and sound on stage. He was transfigured, becoming a kind of magician instead of just an ordinary man, he made us believe he was the centre of the world, and he was too as long as he was on stage, and this was how he felt or must have felt. Often crowds of hundreds of thousands of people filling the stadiums sang along with him, clapped, waved their arms around and screamed in rapture.

This transfiguration involved him turning inwards; he gave us the best he had inside, his real self, the epitome of his beautiful spirit, the free, happy, creative man who wanted to entertain with his art. This was what he showed on stage, what he had become - the ultimate showman. He was one of the biggest stars in the entertainment industry, creating a separate genre on his own, “mercurianism”. He was unique and inimitable, like everyone who has the courage and talent to show himself to the whole world without any disguise.

This was how he thought about it:

‘It becomes an out-of-body experience for me up there. It’s like I’m looking down on myself and thinking ‘F\*ck me…that’s hot.’

(Lesley-Ann Jones)

He enjoyed this freedom, enjoyed the fact that he was able to dress as he liked, to sparkle in sequined, very sexy clothes, to put on the most amazing stage costumes, and rehearse all kinds of roles. He could be a serious or cheerful rocker, and at other times a singer in love, he could dominate the stage, rampage, fool around and most importantly for him he could sing and make music. He could bathe in the unconditional love and devotion, which he craved in such heartfelt fashion.

“I am really a simple man, who is reserved and quiet, I’m not anything like how I appear on stage” - he said, and believed this.

He was right of course, as Shakespeare said, all the world’s a stage, and all the men and women merely players, and one man in his time plays many parts.

One of Freddie’s main roles was as singer and musician, and another was as a private individual.

He was honest in his private life too; at times he was gentle, full of love and desire, and at other times very rude and offensive. His emotions were intense and unbalanced, he went through a lot of pain and disappointment and throughout his life he just craved someone who really loved him for who he was. At the end of his life he found a true companion with whom he was finally happy. He deserved it and had suffered for it.

While on stage or in the studio, he was obsessively working, focussing and creating, consuming all his energy.

He acted in the same way at concerts, every minute was planned in detail, he knew which song was coming next, the moment when he would appear on stage, the moment when he would change clothes and so on, but when the music began to play – this rational man was replaced by an emotional artist.

You can’t sing and “dance” with abandon while your attention is elsewhere, you can’t fall out of character and he never did.

If something disrupted the interaction between the band and the audience, the lighting broke down or anything else wasn’t right, he was really annoyed and got frustrated and anxious, understandably so because he always aspired to perfection, and never wanted to settle for second best, and nor did he have to settle for second, as he had a perfect dream: “I am not going to be a star, I'm going to be a legend!”.

The perfect dream came true, he did become a legend, many people still haven’t come to terms with his heartbreakingly premature death, although if he were still alive he would be over 70 and would still be singing, just like Brian May or Roger Taylor.

His inspirational life’s work put him on top of the podium and those of us who believe in him, who know who Freddie Mercury was, will keep him at the top as long as our hearts are still beating. The name Freddie Mercury merged with that of Queen and I’m absolutely convinced they didn’t meet by chance. Only legendary musicians like lead guitarist and singer Brian May, drummer and singer Roger Taylor and not least bass guitarist John Deacon can facilitate a legendary career.

**2.**

**When I was a lad**

The smile that conquered the whole world

In his book Mark Hodkinson quotes Freddie’s old schoolmate, Derrick Branche:

‘Whenever I think of Freddie at school, I always remember him smiling. He seemed to be perpetually smiling, and thinking of that makes me smile too.’

**Farrokh Bulsara**, who later became Freddie Mercury, was born in Stone Town Public Hospital on the larger Unguja Island of the exotically named **Zanzibar** on 5 September 1946.

The photography studio is still there and is the same as it was when this photo was taken of little Farrokh. The photo was taken by the father of the current photographer. He was already a star back then, as the photo won the “Baby of the Year” award. And with that beautiful, happy smile, it’s no wonder is it?

Zanzibar now belongs to Tanzania, but at the time it was still a British colony, and so the long-awaited child was registered on his birth certificate as an Indian British citizen.

His father was Bomi Bulsara and his mother Jer Bulsara, who gave birth to him at the age of 18, on the day of the Parsi New Year. Bomi was very happy that he had a son, hoping there would be someone to carry on the Bulsara name. He himself was born in a small town called Bulsar and lived with his family to the north of Bombay (Mumbai today). The family took its name from this town.

Bomi and Jer lived in accordance with the ancient religion of Persians (Zoroastrianism), the roots of which date back to 2000 BC. The followers of the religion are called Parsees in India. They are also descendants of the ancient Persians.

They married for love and were happily looking forward to the blessed child, who they named Farrokh, which was quite common and fashionable among Persians.

Bomi couldn’t find the right kind of work in India and so moved to Zanzibar, where he got a job at the Supreme Court in Stone Town, as treasurer for the British government. There were regular shipping services between Zanzibar and Bombay (now Mumbai), the distance between the terminals was 3000 miles.

Persians escaped to India in the 7th and 8th centuries AD due to brutal Islamic religious persecution, but even centuries later they lived and continue to live according to ancient traditions, which they predominantly practised and continue to practise today through their religion, which therefore plays an important role in their lives. Their main prophet was Zoroaster and the holy book was the Avesta. This religion is not classified as an official religion anywhere today.

According to a Zoroastrian priest, the religion is about a celebration of life. The prophet Zoroaster taught us to “Seek your happiness in the happiness of all.”

The family belonged to the upper middle class, his father’s income meant they could afford to employ some staff, and so Freddie also had a nanny, a black African woman called Sabine. One of Freddie’s uncles on his father’s side had a house in Dar es Salaam (today’s Tanzania), just a few metres from the Indian Ocean, which Freddie often went to. Freddie’s family lived in a two-storey house on the busy Shangani Street, where the courtyard looked out on the ocean. These days if anyone visits the island, the residents of Stone Town will be happy to show you where the Bulsara family lived. The sea was just a stone’s throw from the house; Freddie spent a lot of time on the beach gazing into the distance, watching the boats go by.

And the island had an agreeable climate too, so back then their lives, in relative terms, were viewed as a paradise idyll.

This was how Freddie remembered it: “…in the morning I’d be woken by the servant. Clutching an orange juice, I’d literally step out onto the beach. In a way I’ve been very fortunate, even in the early days.”

(Freddie Mercury)

His mother explains that Farrokh started attending a missionary school on the island at the age of 5, where he was taught by nuns. The Parsees, and certainly Freddie’s family, were happy to lead a British lifestyle and paid great attention to their son’s intellectual development. His father was at home in the afternoons, spent a lot of time with the family, and told Freddie a lot of stories, for example the tales of the Arabian Nights and stories about legendary mythological heroes, which captured his childish imagination.

His love for music and desire to perform was already apparent. He loved listening to records and singing, no matter what kind of music, it could be folk, classical or Indian.

His parents often went to parties and took their son with them, where the young Farrokh entertained everyone with songs, and could hardly wait to perform. It gave him great pleasure and a sense of pride to bring joy to everyone through his performance.

Farrokh loved looking after his younger sister, who was born in 1952 and was called Kashmira. The two children were only able to spend a few years together before the family “banished” Freddie, or at least this was how Freddie saw it.

‘They thought boarding school would do me good.’

(Freddie Mercury).

Farrokh had only just turned 8 when his parents sent him to boarding school in February 1955 to get the best possible education at the time and to make sure their son had a predictable future.

The school was in **Panchgani**, India, where they followed traditional, strict disciplinary principles, with outstanding educational results.

St Peter’s School was founded by the Church of England in 1902. Its motto was “ut prosim”, which can be translated as “That I may serve”, or in other words if I do my best I can get a standard British education which will prepare me for university.

Freddie later talked about these years when he was an adult:

‘Of course there were feelings of being sent away from my parents and sister – feelings of loneliness, feelings of rejection – but you had to do what you were told...’ … ‘So the sensible thing was to make the most of it. One thing boarding school taught me was to fend for myself.’

(Freddie Mercury)

Freddie spent 8 years in this school. His parents didn’t visit, but during the summer break – though not every year – he was able to travel home for a month.

These 8 years really left their mark on Freddie’s life. School years are crucial for every child and the school really did its job, making sure Freddie could make the most of himself. Apparently they were famous for their genuine concern for children and tried to create a cheerful, family atmosphere.

There was a time to study and time for having fun.

The initial integration must have been very difficult for the young Farrokh, who had been brought up at home in a protected environment. He had been surrounded by care and attention at home.

On arriving he was no doubt homesick, and worried about his little sister’s well-being. He was anxious about the unknown and didn’t know what to expect, he was very sad and lonely as he didn’t have any real moral support in a completely alien environment, someone who could have helped him work through his everyday challenges. Freddie later paid a very high price for the high standard of education.

School can’t replace the absence of a family. Family is the most important platform for socialisation and school can only be a supplement. Whereas school prepares children for social interactions, it is mainly the family that helps to develop intimate relationships.

Freddie’s family was unable to completely fulfil this role, even in the early years that Freddie spent at home. As a result of their religious practices, physical contact, such as hugging, stroking or caressing, was not considered normal. His nanny looked after him continually, but I don’t know what her emotional relationship with him was like.

Love should come pouring out of parents’ warm words, looks, touches and hugs. The unconditional love of a mother and father assures the child that he deserves to be loved. The parents’ constant presence and emotional support convince him that he can always rely on them and can trust people. He doesn’t have to worry about being abandoned. The message from parental love is I love you and I’m there for you, you can trust me. At the same time parents should teach their children there are limits and conditions, which the child gradually has to accept as he develops.

I have seen his mother in several different videos talking with pride about Freddie in her old age, they obviously loved him very much and that was why they sent him to a good school. However, they took that decision with a cool head, it seemed logical and they were focussed on what would become of Freddie when he grew up. They would have liked him to be a lawyer or accountant, like some of his cousins.

No doubt it wasn’t an easy decision, the separation and absence must have been hard for them too, but they didn’t think about the fact that Freddie, who was sensitive, would need the emotional security of a warm, loving home most.

This means Freddie was an emotionally neglected child and was the reason he turned out to be a shy, insecure and love-starved adult with low self-esteem.

In pre-school years the constant presence and care and attention of his parents gave him a sense of security, but they were unable to properly take care of his emotional upbringing, I would like to stress this was not because they didn’t love Freddie, but because they weren’t used to showing emotions. Kind thoughts, the right words and good actions were the most important parts of their religion. In contrast to Jesus’ teaching, this does not include positive emotions and non-judgmental love.

Freddie was a sensible, intelligent child, with a well-developed sense of fairness.

One day he wrote this letter to his parents:

Panchgani, 15 March 1962.

Dear Mom, and Dad!

As I write this letter to you I am so angry because a terrible injustice happened to me.

Let me tell you. We were all in the dormitory, Victory, Farang, Derrick and all the other boys. Suddenly Bruce started to hit me:

- Let's box Bucky - he said. Although I said no, he just started.

Within just a few more moments against my will, a boxing match was going on, and I was in the middle of it.

The boys were all screaming and shouting and throwing pillows at us.

Because of the noise Mr Davis suddenly entered the dormitory and stopped the fight.

Bruce lied and said I was the one who started the fight and he was just defending himself. All the boys backed him up. So Mr Davis the principal decided I had to be punished and what a terrible punishment they did to me. I had to go to the barbershop and have my hair cut very short. I hated Bruce for that.

You know how much I love my hair, it will never be the same again. I am so sad and angry.

Farrokh”

Freddie wrote this letter in distress. He was 16 at the time and yet still felt the need to complain to someone about being wronged. We can only imagine how he felt about similar ordeals when he was younger.

Another of Freddie’s letters radiates concern, courtesy and respect, which can partly be attributed to his school upbringing and partly to parental influence.

Children who grow up with a lack of affection believe their feelings don’t matter, as nobody pays attention to them. Children’s main confidants when they are young are their mother and father. Later, adolescents turn away from their parents and open up to their contemporaries and the world. Freddie was at a disadvantage from the start, it might have seemed to him that he wasn’t important to anyone and so his self-esteem and emotional life were on shaky ground, he must have felt lonely and abandoned. In any case adolescence is one of the most critical periods in a child’s life, which is why he would have needed the continual emotional support of his parents more than ever, and no doubt Freddie really missed this.

Emotional neglect in childhood - in this case physical absence - leads to emotional immaturity, which causes excessive emotional intensity, excessive love, aggression, inability to delay satisfaction and shyness in adulthood. The feeling that “I’m not good enough” causes a tendency to overcompensate and a desire to stand out. Emotions in children who grow up in this way are generally extreme and they don’t recognise compromise. These personality traits stayed with Freddie to the end of his life and often made his life hell. The instability of his emotional life and his talent brought him to the stage, where he could forget about himself, where he could step into a dream world that he had constructed, where he was the star, where he deserved and received everybody’s attention and admiration. But the admiration of fans was not enough; he was unable to fill the void, the sense of lonely emptiness.

Concerts and recordings made him happy and satisfied, though only as long as he was on stage or in the studio, but with the exception of a few, short or slightly longer periods his private life wasn’t really dream-like.

Freddie himself thought the lack of affection he experienced in his childhood might have caused the excessive need for love he felt in adulthood. A desperate feeling of loss led to trivial, transient sexual relationships, which didn’t bring emotional satisfaction, but even more misery and even more physical desire for contact.

Throughout his life Freddie behaved very respectfully towards his parents and cared about them, but secretly resented them for “leaving him to his fate”.

Freddie sings about his most serious childhood trauma in his song *My Fairy King* on Queen’s first album. I will soon be interpreting the content of the song.

The school fulfilled its role. Freddie was taught that demands would be made on him during his life, which he had to comply with; he would have to take responsibility, share things with others and cooperate with his partners. His self-confidence was enhanced to a certain extent.

His performance was recognised and praised; he was awarded prizes for his outstanding learning and sporting achievements, which gave him great pleasure and pride.

Freddie’s later friend David Evans wrote as follows about Freddie’s school years:

“At St. Peter's, Freddie had the benefit of caring teachers, specifically Mr David and Mr Rowe, his housemaster, the sort of teachers that hopefully we have all had at one time or the other, who introduced him to the joys of Shakespeare, recordings read by English actors such as Olivier and of classical music, neither of which would have been likely to come his way in Zanzibar because he continued to learn to play, mostly self-taught, at St Peters.

However, most subjects on the curriculum eluded him. His maths was always decidedly dodgy. In later life, when paying restaurant bills, he would always get someone else to check the total. As far as other lessons [are concerned???], the journeying of his own life was the only geography lesson he needed, history touched him only insofar as he always thought of himself as British and English language and literature came naturally, insofar as he ever read a book.

Interestingly, he had the attention span of a hummingbird. He had the hardest time concentrating on anything which didn't interest him immediately. Anything that wasn't to do with his own creativity, he had little interest in and he must have exasperated his teachers who would have seen this behaviour in such an able and intelligent pupil as almost wilful. Like a butterfly, he couldn’t wait to be off to the next source of nectar.”

The above description is indicative of attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

Hyperactivity can be attributed to several causes. In Freddie’s case we can rule out brain damage, but both a poorly functioning family and high stress (separation from parents, alien envionment, high requirements and strictness) were potential factors.

Based on his friend’s description, Freddie’s adult behavioural problems, temper tantrums, impulsiveness, outbursts of anger and underperforming in educational terms - compared to his abilities - are more understandable.

In light of the above, we can appreciate Freddie’s amazing efforts to acquire friends and integrate all the more, because the vast majority of children with attention deficit are incapable of doing so, and are therefore rejected by other kids.

Freddie was popular with his classmates at every school because he was kind, attentive, generous and gentle. These attributes helped him integrate despite his problems and he was always capable of making people love him to such an extent that not many could resist his attractive personality.

This is another letter he wrote to his parents at the age of 11 about winning the annual school sports trophy:

“Dear Mum and Dad, I hope you are all well and Kashmira’s cold is better. Don’t worry I am fine. Me and my friends at the Ashlin House are like a second family. The teachers are very strict and discipline is most important here at St. Peter’s. I am very happy to tell you that I was awarded the big trophy, Best All Rounder Junior. I received a big trophy and they even took a photograph which will appear in the annual school magazine. I’m very proud and I hope you are too. Send my love to Kash. I love my little sister as I love you all. Farrokh.”

Leslie- Ann Jones

In other words he managed to find some good friends who he looked on as his second family.

He was a talented, diligent child, and his character was developing positively. He was outstanding in all sports, but best at boxing and table tennis and was unbeatable in both. Sport gave Freddie self-discipline, perseverance, fighting ability and the intoxicating pleasure of victory. This sense of achievement proved to him that he was capable of achieving anything he really wanted.

On one occasion in the ring he had blood pouring from his mouth, all over his face, and his friend in the corner urged him to give up. However, there was a steely light shining in Freddie’s eyes and he fought on with even greater determination. He never gave up and won every bout by knockout. Even back then he was a resolute and persistent personality with an ability to fight. He literally had to fight for success and defend himself from violent attacks.

Fortunately his aunts on both his Mum’s and Dad’s side lived in Bombay and so Freddie was able to spend holidays with them in those years when he couldn’t make it home. His aunt on his mother’s side noticed his musical talent and persuaded Freddie’s mother to pay for him to have private piano lessons at school. His teacher was an elderly Irishman, who liked Freddie very much; at first Freddie just practised from a sense of duty, but later the piano became his inseparable partner.

During adolescence he and is mates spent an increasing amount of time listening to the radio and really enjoyed rock and pop music. Freddie’s favourites were Little Richard, Fats Domino, Cliff Richard and Elvis Presley. Freddie was capable of playing any song flawlessly on the piano on first listening. Although he studied music theory, he never learned to read sheet music, and nor did he need to.

At the initative of one of his friends, they formed a band called Hectic. Their musical style meant they soon became very popular both at school and in the city.

Freddie modestly stayed in the background behind the piano, sang vocals and was also a member of the school choir.

Hectic was considered a star turn at every school event and so Freddie received further confirmation of his musical talent.

Some of his old schoolmates say there were times when he was teased about his protruding front teeth. As he was given an associated nickname, this was probably regular rather than occasional.

Although he wore a brace, accompanied by constant pain, the fault couldn’t be corrected. He had four extra incisors, which probably caused the failure.

His protruding teeth always bothered Freddie and he tried to cover them with his hand, often drawing in his bottom lip and tightly closing his mouth.

In respect of his homosexuality many of his contemporaries thought it was obvious he was gay, whereas others disagreed.

In Freddie’s words:

“All the things they say about boarding schools are more or less true, about all the bullying and everything else. I had the odd schoolmaster chasing me, but it didn’t shock me because somehow at boarding school you’re not confronted by it, you are just slowly aware of it. There were times when I was young and naive. I had a crush on a Master, and would have done anything for him. It’s a thing that schoolboys go through, and I had my share of schoolboy pranks, but I’m not going to elaborate any further!”

(Freddie Mercury)

He also said he was looked on as gay at school. He was the pretty boy everyone wanted to go to bed with.

This implies that it was usual to go to bed with pretty boys.

The daughter of the art teacher recalls that on one occasion Freddie completely spontaneously started calling his male friends “darling”. She didn’t find this strange at all, but the adults were really shocked because at the time it was unusual even to call a girl darling. (Evidently he must have learned this from someone else, who called him or someone else by this name, so there was no way it just happened “completely spontaneously”. Children generally imitate those adults or older children who they like, and this is why they want to resemble them.)

Early adolescence is accompanied by confused identity; children are searching for their place in the world and want to learn how to integrate and where to start off in life. Childhood sexual games were only possible among boys and could define their sexual orientation, especially if they had been abused.

We can be certain of one thing: sexual orientation is not a disease, it’s not some kind of imperfection or mental disorder and for the time being there is no scientific proof that specific genes are responsible for its development.

In their book, Matt Richards and Mark Langthorne cite a quotation from the article ‘Boarding school: The trauma of the “Privileged child” by Joy Schaverein’ (Journal of Analytical Psychology, 49, 2004, pp 683-705):

“Naturally, a boarding school environment can sometimes be associated with bullying and sexual abuse, and such actions can often shape the individual in their adult life. Jungian analyst, psychotherapist and supervisor Joy Schaverien PhD suggests that the psychological damage suffered particularly by boys at boarding school, primarily as a result of loss when family is replaced by many same-sex strangers, can have a dramatic effect on sexual development too. She writes: “Warmth may be sought with the available other, as a new form of sibling group emerges. Sexual experiments may offer solace but may also lead to abuse. This may lead to confusion in development of sexual identity and some boys become uncertain of their primary sexual orientation. Whilst initiating the child into the pleasures of homosexuality the institution proclaims its dangers. This may set a person on a path of covert homosexuality or of proclaimed heterosexuality and emphatic disavowal of homosexuality.”

A song written for Queen’s first album shows in heartbreaking fashion what happened to Freddie during his school years. The song’s title is *My Fairy King*.

In the first two verses Freddie describes what the world was like before he went to school:

Aah, aah  
In the land where horses born with eagle wings  
And honey bees have lost their stings  
There's singing forever, ooh yeah  
Lion's den with fallow deer  
And rivers made from wine so clear  
Flow on and on forever  
Dragons fly like sparrows thru' the air  
And baby lambs where Samson dares  
To go on on on on on on

My fairy king can see things  
He rules the air and turns the tides  
That are not there for you and me  
Ooh yeah he guides the winds  
My fairy king can do right and nothing wrong

The young Freddie built himself a dream world, where anything could happen.

However, there was an unexpected, radical twist when everything was suddenly destroyed one “night”:

Ah, then came man to savage in the night  
To run like thieves and to kill like knives  
To take away the power from the magic hand  
To bring about the ruin to the promised land, aah, aah

They turn the milk into sour  
Like the blue in the blood of my veins  
Why can't you see it  
Fire burning in hell with the cry of screaming pain  
Son of heaven set me free and let me go  
Sea turn dry, no salt from sand  
Seasons fly no helping hand  
Teeth don't shine like pearls for poor man's eyes, aah

Someone, someone has drained the colour from my wings  
Broken my fairy circle ring  
And shamed the king in all his pride  
Changed the winds and wronged the tides  
Oh, Mother Mercury   
Look what they've done to me  
I cannot run, I cannot hide  
La la la la la la la la la la la la

These lyrics are among the most beautiful and painful symbolic descriptions ever written of how an innocent, daydreaming child, who believed in fairies and trusted in goodness, was shaken out of his childhood world and how dramatically he felt this drastic change. A cruel person, or persons, suddenly came on the scene, and didn’t even shrink away from killing to take power away from Freddie - the Fairy King -, suddenly everything was destroyed, ruining the Promised Land.

Freddie needed strength to feel safe and feel he could defend himself. As a child he imagined he could do anything with the help of his fairy ring, he was strong and could control anyone and anything, he was the king among the fairies.

The Promised Land symbolizes Freddie’s trust, which was founded on the faith he had in his parents and in adults, and was reinforced in Freddie by a safe home and school environment.

The phrase “Fire burning in hell with the cry of screaming pain” is about a severe trauma that had afflicted him, as indicated by the words “someone, someone has drained the colour from my wings”. In the song the colour of his wings symbolizes a beautiful childhood world, which has suddenly disappeared and the world has become colourless. He has endured the torments of hell and would scream and shout in pain, but doesn’t even dare to shout, as he is gripped by fear.

Sexual abuse cannot be ruled out completely, but this possibility is contradicted by his later school behaviour, he is shy, but not overly so, he is capable of mixing in company, and in fact is happy to play the piano, do sports and integrate; he reports on how satisfied he is in the letter to his parents.

If someone had beaten him up, he would certainly have complained about it, he wouldn’t have been ashamed to tell his parents, as he had about other matters, for example when he wrote to his parents telling them about being forced to have his hair cut.

In any case, what reason would anyone have had to beat up an innocent, good-natured child?

He turns to the son of heaven for help in setting him free and letting him go. Everything has fallen apart, even the sea has run dry (his favourite childhood place disappears), as time goes by and nobody offers him a helping hand.

It’s not enough that the dreamworld he built up had been destroyed, the proud king had even been shamed, this pain is as deep as the pain he complained to his mother about, and at least he could do this in a song.

Freddie starts to sing the part describing childhood dreams in a child’s voice, his voice is distorted, as the dreamworld becomes twisted, and then gets tougher when the “attack” takes place, and then after the “attack” the sound of his broken heart is childish again, frightfully soft and distressing.

The whole song, the lyrics and music, the changes in tone and overlapping voices generate a sense of confusion, sadness and dramatic unrest, Freddie sings at a rapid tempo, almost hurriedly, as if he wanted to get it over with as soon as possible, as if he were compelled to tell the story, but slows down when singing about the consequences, starting from: “Someone, someone has drained the color from my wings”. The slowdown signals that you should listen here; this is the essential part of the story, pay attention! Roger’s astonishing scream at the start of the song indicates that they will be presenting some kind of unusual, strange and shocking story.

The musical composition is ingenious, the introductory scream is almost breathtaking, while the powerful drums make the heart beat faster, you can only finally draw breath at the start of the section accompanied by the piano, but the brain definitely wants to know what happens after the attack, and at the end the heart is broken and tears are flowing, while in the final quarter, where the singing has stopped, we can only hear the music at an ever faster tempo, the sound of the piano, guitar and drum in harmony, and yet a raging tension is created, only the last few notes allow us to relax, signalling the end of the song, when the tension finally comes to an end.

The contents and musical background are in perfect harmony. The degree to which the lyrics and music have been worked on indicates that the story played an extremely important role in Freddie’s life, as did Bohemian Rhapsody, which he wrote two years later.

The lyrics of this song constitute one of the finest verses in world literature, he describes a child’s world so beautifully and the tragic event so terribly that it would break anyone’s heart to know this little boy felt he had lost his magic power, and no longer knew what was right and wrong, and didn’t even have his mum close by to complain to about his anguish and offer him some comfort.

‘Someone, someone has drained the colours from my wings’. Freddie sings this part in such a painfully beautiful way that anyone who knows what the song is about will reach for their heart. It sounds like an innocent angel is singing in church, the vocals are beautiful.

This song convinced me that Freddie had suffered unspeakably and yet still found the strength to keep going without any compriomise, in order to please his parents and somehow survive this period. He was forced to tolerate this spiritual torment until he got tougher and grew armour plating, but the wounds never healed to the end of his life. He was forced to act like this because he was unable to run away or hide from the expectations on him, or from the sharp, intimidating gaze of his strict, authoritarian teachers. So it’s hardly surprising that Freddie didn’t want to remember his childhood years, even if he was more relaxed later. On the other hand, if he had thought about it, he must have considered the possibility that his parents had “betrayed” him and exposed him to the torments of hell, which would have filled him with sadness again and again. He couldn’t change the past and so he believed it was better not to think about it all, but the fact that he had to talk about it in the song after all means the trauma was raw and had an impact on his everyday life.

But in the end, if he wasn’t the victim of sexual abuse, what kind of trauma could have afflicted Freddie, resulting in him enduring agonies? One of the phrases in the song is “Seasons fly no helping hand”, meaning seasons had gone by after the incident without any help.

That’s why I think this song is about the time in school when Freddie realised there was no way back to his family, when he realised that he was completely alone and unprotected against ridicule and his fears, which just made him more homesick. The first few years must have been a tough ordeal for him. Children can be very cruel, psychological abuse can be just as painful as going through the torments of hell.

The anxiety of separation as a young child leads to a lifelong trauma; the fact that Freddie was so afraid of being alone as an adult is no accident. I assume that from time to time he went through this spiritual torment again and again, at least his irrational fear of being alone and panic attacks would suggest this is the case.

In actual fact he must have felt he had lost his parents, and what greater trauma could there be for an 8-year old child, to whom nobody offers a helping hand or any comfort? He was dropped into a completely alien world, where he couldn’t trust anyone because everyone was alien to him.

“That background (the boarding school) helped me a lot, because it taught me to fend for myself from a very early age, and to be responsible. It was an upheaval of an upbringing, which seems to have worked, I guess.”

(Freddie Mercury)

In the above statement Freddie looks back on his school years very rationally, in adult fashion, but he did believe it was beneficial for him to know he could only ever rely on himself. In fact this proved to be a very big disadvantage when he didn’t listen to friendly warnings or exposed himself to the risk of bars at night-time.

The meaning of the word upheaval is a violent and sudden change or disruption to something. So, as an adult, this was how he evaluated this change to his life, a violent and sudden change, this was what he was dealing with in the song, along with a sense of rejection, which also made him afraid.

As a sensitive child, this is completely understandable.

Throughout his life Freddie seriously hated anyone staring at him, or a stranger speaking to him, he was shy in the company of strangers.

Freddie addresses his mother in this song and would now like her to ask: tell me son, what happened to you? It would have been a good opportunity to get closer to each other but this was impossible because Freddie no longer trusted her, or hardly anyone else. However, the appeal to her reveals that he still resented her and how important genuine maternal care and love would have been to him. How important it would have been back then for his mother to say she wouldn’t let her son go and that he needed them more than an elite education. This is what she should have done. She cried when they left Freddie, knowing deep in her soul that they were exposing him to torment. Maybe the ordinary Indian children who had been less pampered at home responded less sensitively to the change of environment, and then they hadn’t come from 3000 miles away and so probably suffered less than Freddie.

**3.**

**Back to Zanzibar**

Freddie left school at the age of 16 in February 1963 without a school-leaving certificate, because he had failed despite achieving good results in his studies the previous year.

After Freddie’s death one of his teachers said that he had been discovered in the course of a homosexual act and that was why he had to leave. This fact was confirmed by Freddie’s close friend (David Evans), who learned about it from Freddie himself, as well as the fact that at the time Freddie was already aware he was attracted to men.

There was a girl who he walked with holding hands during his time at school, but she said this was normal back then. They didn’t have an intimate relationship.

I assume that the above story was true, or else his parents couldn’t have known that Freddie had been involved in a relationship with someone, which they considered unacceptable because their religion strictly condemned homosexuality, as did Christianity. This was the final reason for his parents taking him out of school. Later on the parents only mentioned homosexuality to Freddie as that other business.

His parents were incapable of handling this matter properly, which made Freddie resistant. He craved acceptance, but probably got rigid rejection and a lack of understanding instead. This added to the emotional distance between Freddie and his parents, making Freddie even more lonely, reserved and shy. Freddie must have felt ashamed and rejected by his family and the school, and yet he still adapted to the family traditions and continued to behave respectfully and affectionately, which could be attributed to his strict, authoritarian father, who had high expectations, and to the school, and he never stopped loving his family. However, after what had happened, he probably thought he had to be even better to meet his parents’ expectations. His desire to conform came from his natural desire to be loved, and his upbringing probably made him believe that homosexuality was a sin. When he went back out into the big wide world again he couldn’t really see any gay couples on the streets or elsewhere, which must have made him think.

A farewell letter to one of his friends convinced me that Freddie’s intellect was already outstanding and he was mature for his age. The letter read: ‘Modern paintings are like women, you can’t enjoy them if you try to understand them. ’

I should point out that I don’t think Freddie made these words up, I believe he got them from someone, an older, mature-minded artist for example, but his choice revealed a few things about himself.

At this time he knew very little about women, and was only close to a very few women, he didn’t have any sexual relationships with them, and yet his opinion was that they can’t be understood? The writing is surreal and rather cynical. I think he was aware of that too. In any case the content is witty.

However there was a huge gulf between his intellectual and emotional maturity. His schoolmates also reported that when he felt rejected, he began to scream indiscriminately, showing that he was incapable of controlling his emotions.

His close friends from school also provided further valuable information with regard to Freddie’s character. One of them believes there was some kind of problem in Freddie’s shyness. Despite his timidity, he participated very actively in events at school and with friends; he tried his best to be accepted and to integrate, partly to alleviate his loneliness and in part to allow him to study even more. He was happy to study but was only interested in his favourite subjects, music and the arts.

According to another friend’s statement, his first impression was that he seemed quite shy, but he liked him because he was sensitive and caring. You could tell he had arrived from a different cultural climate, he was well-mannered, intelligent and highly respectful, continually aspired to be better and to do more, and really wanted to conform to expectations.

Since he had grown up in a different cultural climate to that of his schoolmates, he didn’t know about Indian norms. This might have made him clumsy and awkward, and was enhanced by his shyness and lack of self-confidence, not to mention that in any case adolescents are often clumsy and awkward, even under normal circumstances.

His schoolmates also said he didn’t just play any songs that he had heard flawlessly, but also immediately started improvising with them.

His close friends called him Freddie because they found the name Farrokh, which sounded alien to them, difficult to pronounce. Freddie was pleased about his new name because he was attracted to western culture.

He also acted in school plays and got very nervous before the shows, but really enjoyed performing. The nerves before the performance were a sign that he took his duties seriously and gave everything he had to perform well. He was good at playing and happy to play female characters too and usually enjoyed performing and the attention.

**4.**

**Moving to London**

**I’m going to die at the age of 45**

The British gave Zanzibar its independence back in 1963. At the subsequent elections black people won a majority, though they were still underrepresented by comparison with Arabs, and the annual harvest was poor, which added to people’s dissatisfaction. In 1964 the new Arab Sultan was stripped of the throne in a violent political coup and the leader of the black Africans’ party was elected President in his place. There was great political tension and general chaos. The leaders of the rebellion occupied government buildings for 9 hours. Several thousands were killed during the bloody uprising. Intimidated civilians escaped from the island in their thousands.

One day during this period Freddie was having his customary walk on the street with his friend when his friend unexpectedly asked him about the deaths: ­­­- What do you think, how long are you going to live? Freddie replied: - for some reason the number 45 comes to mind. It was probably not a coincidence that Freddie actually passed away at the age of 45, although there is never just one cause of an incident, it does sound like a self-fulfilling prophecy.

A “self-fulfilling prophecy” is the result of hypnosis or self-hypnosis. A hypnotic state, contrary to popular belief, is not an unusual experience, but a completely natural condition that we often experience without noticing. Freddie was probably startled by the unexpected question. The word death itself induces fear in the human mind, especially given that the young Freddie had been compelled to face up to the proximity of death because of the massacres.

Fear and panic produce an emotional state, which allows words to directly enter the subsconscious and start functioning there as hypnotic commands. In fact, if asked something that doesn’t have an obvious answer we all turn “inwards” for a while, strongly focussing our attention on the question. This faraway condition is also a kind of hypnotic state.

Hypnosis can be traced back several thousand years to the Lama monasteries in Tibet and the Aryan Hindus, and constitutes the study of the art of suggestion and telepathy. Today this therapy is also recognised in western medical science, and is employed along with positive suggestions to treat various diseases, but negative emotions and thoughts that create fear can destroy us just as effectively, triggering illnesses, accidents and discomfort.

And it was no coincidence that the number 45 came to Freddie’s mind. In truth whatever happens in our lives is always a consequence of our conscious or subconscious thoughts, attitudes or words. We are affected by a lot of things during our lives, which find their way into our subconscious without us realising it. Childhood experiences are especially defining from this perspective because children are more receptive to external stimulus than adults.

Naturally, clearly proving the above is impossible, but nor can the possibility be dismissed because its effect later appeared in Freddie’s behaviour, and I will deal with this when the opportunity arises, but for the time being let’s stay on the subject of the fate of Freddie’s family.

The Bulsara family was forced to leave Zanzibar because of the riots; they escaped to Britain holding a few suitcases, and settled in Feltham, near Heathrow Airport, to the west of London, in March 1964.

It was quite a big ordeal for the family to adapt to the modest circumstances, the bleak environment and unusual cold. (Freddie later enjoyed sitting around in his own home wrapped in blankets, while making plans.)

Later he usually refused to talk about his birthplace and once told a confidant that it was a filthy place.

He must have been quite frightened when the insurgents made a serious threat on his father’s life, saying they would cut his head off if they didn’t leave the island.

Presumably his sin was that he had worked for the British and they had an above-average lifestyle compared to families who made a living from manual work.

Freddie’s parents, Bomi and Jer, found work in London, and so the family’s livelihood was assured, though modestly.

Freddie was on a high, he was pleased his family had move to Britain and tried to keep their spirits up, he kept saying that they had moved to the best possible place.

As he had been unable to finish his studies in Zanzibar due to the uprising, Freddie had to study for another two years to complete secondary school. In order to enrol for the art college that he aspired to, he first had to complete 2 years’ preparatory training at Isleworth Polytechnic. He was already 18 when he enrolled here.

His friends here considered him slightly awkward and shy, but liked him because he was sensitive, kind and friendly, and blessed with good humour.

During breaks he played the piano for his classmates and was happy to play his favourite songs, bringing them closer to each other.

One of his schoolmates said you didn’t have to be a very good student in this school; it was enough for someone to show interest in the subjects. Freddie was only interested in music and was happy to act in plays.

One of his classmates mentioned in an interview that when Freddie appeared in a play called *The Kitchen*, he was rather nervous and uncertain before the performance, but behaved quite extravagantly on stage and enjoyed the attention that he attracted. (*The Kitchen* was a BBC TV series.)

Freddie’s parents objected to him going out in the evenings, not just because they were worried about him, but they would have liked him to continue his studies and become a lawyer or accountant. Freddie felt he wasn’t clever enough for that, or at least that’s what he told his parents.

At home too Freddie kept saying he would be a musician, but they hoped it was just an adolescent daydream, which he would grow out of, and they never encouraged him; his father was explicitly opposed to the idea.

In the evenings, despite the fact that his parents didn’t like it, he continually went out socializing, even at the expense of an argument or being told off by his parents. Freddie hadn’t yet started working and was therefore forced to stay at home, but his inner turmoil increased because he wanted to get to know more about life in Britain, the culture and especially the music scene.

He took a job in school holidays to earn some pocket money and his colleagues ridiculed him because he wasn’t a typical worker: his hands were delicate and well-groomed, but he put a stop to people mocking him by telling them he would be a musician and was only working out of necessity.

It took weeks or months for a magazine to arrive in Zanzibar, but everything in London was close and accessible, and Freddie only needed a bit of money and independence to start living his own life.

After finishing polytechnic he was finally able to enrol and continue his studies at Ealing Technical College and School of Art, where it was quite difficult to gain admission at the time. Freddie knew that a lot of musicians had come out of these art schools and so he wasn’t interested in any other schools. This was where Pete Townshend studied, the multiple award-winning British rock guitarist, singer, songwriter, composer and writer, who was guitarist and main songwriter for the popular band The Who in the 1960s.

Isleworth Polytechnic was involved in music, drama, films and fashion, and in fact it proved to be an introductory course for his further studies.

During these two years he had the opportunity to listen live to emerging young musicians, such as The Rolling Stones or guitarist Jeff Beck, who Freddie really liked.

He liked going out and enjoying himself with his friends on Saturday evenings, but went home sober and on time because he wanted to play the piano or to conform to his parents’ wishes.

One of his friends remembered Freddie as someone who absorbed new experiences, films and exhibitions that he had seen like a sponge and he really enjoyed this new cultural climate, which he aspired to become part of, and yet he didn’t really like attention at this time and didn’t want to be in the spotlight.

At the end of his time at school he decided to form his own band and interviewed around 40 applicants, but his friends didn’t know any more details about the result of the interviews.

By the time Freddie obtained the desired qualifications, he was able to breathe easily because he had come one step closer to a career that he yearned for.

His sister Kashmira remembers Freddie as follows:

“Freddie was very fastidious about his appearance. Whereas he looked neat and tidy, and his hair swept back, everyone else wore their hair long and looked scruffy. I used to walk behind him because I didn’t want people to think I was with him.

But he changed his appearance very quickly…. He always used to take hours in front of the mirror looking after his locks.”

(Lesley-Ann Jones)

Freddie was always very vain. Regardless of how different people saw him, he began to identify with the popstar he wanted to become. He was already consciously preparing for the role, but for the time being was searching for his own style and for what would make him attractive, special and interesting.

He tried to imitate Jimi Hendrix in every way. He wore a bright, flowery jacket over black or multi-coloured shirts, tight, colourful drainpipe trousers with Chelsea boots, and a chiffon scarf tied to his Adam’s apple, with large silver rings on his fingers as accessories.

“Art school teaches you to be more fashion–conscious….Always that one step ahead.”

(Freddie Mercury)

His friends at college liked him as well; he was seen as a guy with a good sense of humour, kind, friendly, polite, attentive and well-mannered.

They thought it was funny when during breaks he sat on a bench with Tim Staffell, who later went on to be singer in the band Smile, and sang vocals.

Tim Staffellremembered Freddie as follows:

“I guess if I hadn’t stepped aside, the world might have been a very different place.”

(YouTube: Freddie Mercury Untold Story, film by Rudi Dolezal and Hannes Rossacher)

I’m sure this statement has made him very popular with Freddie’s fans. And deservedly so, it’s not as if he wasn’t a good singer, but just that Freddie turned out to be better than anyone.

He and Freddie were very good friends in school, they sang vocals together in the men’s toilets, and later Freddie accompanied him to wherever Smile were performing and even went so far as to help packing the equipment.

Freddie remembered the period when he finished college as follows:

“When I had finished with the illustrating course, I was sick of it. I’d had it up to here. I thought, I don’t think I can make a career of this, because my mind just wasn’t on that kind of thing. So I thought I would just play around with the music side of it for a while. Everybody wants to be a star, so I just thought that if I could make a go of it, why not?” – Freddie said about himself.

(Freddie Mercury)

He studied graphic design and illustration at art college but was only interested in music and, despite the fact that he was very talented at drawing, preferred to seize every opportunity to listen live to the best musicians.

He often drew portraits of his classmates or his favourite people at college. I saw a few of his drawings in the film mentioned earlier. Most of them were very good, but the best one depicted Jimi Hendrix. I have no doubt that he took great care with this drawing, as Jimi was his role model. His visual talent largely helped him design stage sets and his own costumes in the early days, not to mention the ingenious videos that he later created.

John Taylor was one of his best friends in college, and later became bass guitarist in a band called Ibex, in which Freddie sang for the first time. John said in an interview that Freddie was an excellent artist. He drew a lot of brilliant pictures of Hendrix and other pop musicians.

Brian May, who was later to become the Queen guitarist, already knew Freddie at the time and this was his view:

“He behaved like a star, he was always dressed immaculately, rather outrageously, sort of being a local character. …His core was very shy but using these devices he cloaked this persona being rather larger than life and everyone treated him as a star. He wasn’t the leader of the gang, his nature was very kind and gentle.

….Because everyone wanted to be a musician they didn’t take too seriously Freddie’s ambitions. In the beginning I didn’t realize how serious he was, he was a rather flamboyant character, he was obviously a very good artist, but I thought music was a hobby for him and he would become an artist.”

(FM Untold Story DoRo)

I should add that Brian May and Roger Taylor knew Freddie, but didn’t hear him sing for a long time. Roger and Freddie were also good friends.

Freddie first heard Eric Clapton and Jimi Hendrix in December 1966. His virtuoso guitar playing, laid-back, completely original style and energy impressed the audience. Freddie was so taken by Hendrix that he would have gone anywhere to see his favourite musician.

I found this quote about Jimi Hendrix in the book written about Freddie’s own life in his own words:

‘Jimi Hendrix was just a beautiful man, a master showman and a dedicated musician.’

“I would scour the country to see him whenever he played because he really had everything any rock’n’roll star should have: all the style and the presence. He didn’t have to force anything. He’d just make an entrance and the whole place would be on fire. He was living out everything I wanted to be.”

(Freddie Mercury)

Freddie needed inspiration. Jimi Hendrix was even capable of playing guitar with his teeth, or holding the guitar the wrong way round. Freddie was taken by his mastery of the instrument and the fact that he had perfected his art. Given that Freddie was also a perfectionist, he dreamed of being like him, perfect and inimitable.

“So captivated was he by Hendrix that Freddie went to see him perform 14 times, including nine nights in a row at pubs all around London.”

(Matt Richards & Mark Langthorne)

I have watched Jimi Hendrix’s live performances on YouTube. In my opinion Freddie learned three essential things from him: firstly, be original and be yourself, don’t try to imitate anyone, either with your performance style or dress sense. Secondly, be the best at what you do, and if you’re a star, you control the stage, the spotlight is on you.

Jimi played with the guitar, as Freddie did later with the piano and his voice. Freddie’s clothes on stage couldn’t be compared to anyone else’s, his movements were never choreographed, he was original and never content to settle for second best, he aspired to be the best possible in his field. He demanded absolute attention and wanted to be first at everything.

I had a look at Freddie’s other favourites too. I watched Elvis Presley to see whether Freddie had taken anything from him. I found some recordings from a Las Vegas concert in 1970. He was singing the final number, it was a real struggle, hardly any sound would come out of his mouth, but he pulled himself together and sang the vocals, as expected. He was continually improvising. He was 42 at the time. His clothes were pure white, embellished with silver, the upper part of his chest is open and a hand-sized section of his bare torso is visible. His movements are theatrical, similarly to Freddie later, beckoning the musicians like a conductor in the final bars, signalling the end of the song with perfect timing, and then spinning around, getting down on one knee and finally taking a bow. The curtain finally drops and the crowd applauds, Elvis crouched down behind the curtain, lifted it up and peeked out underneath.

(YouTube: Elvis Presley – Can’t Help Falling In Love, Live in Las Vegas 1970.)

In another performance in 1968, he is singing dressed from head to toe in black, shiny, tight-fitting, imitation-leather clothes, part of his hairy chest is visible, deliberately getting the lyrics wrong at times, clowning around, laughing, and the audience laughs with him, enjoying the playfulness, they are completely mesmorised by the slim, handsome man in good shape and dressed in black. He was 40 years’ old on this recording.

(YouTube: Elvis Presley – Love Me Tender (’68 Comeback Special 50th Anniversary HD Remaster)

There is no sign of the influence of Elvis Presley in Freddie’s songs, except in Crazy Little Thing Called Love, which is a rock and roll track. Freddie said he never tried to imitate Elvis. In any case Freddie was often dressed completely in black, tight-fitting clothes and imitation leather trousers. (However, as we will see later, the reason for this was quite different, he wasn’t imitating Elvis.)

Whatever clothes he wore on stage, his chest was almost always outside his clothes, or he only covered his upper body with a tie. Elvis Presley is and was seen as the King, but nobody can or could compete with Freddie’s versatility, and, as I wrote earlier, Freddie even overtook Elvis on the popularity list compiled after he had died.

Little Richard was one of Freddie’s childhood favourites, on one video he gives a spectacular performance of the rock and roll track Good Golly Miss Molly on Muhammad Ali’s 50th birthday. His voice is gravelly and powerful; he communicates really well with the audience and plays the piano like a virtuoso. He can play with his voice, screaming and improvising, he’s very energetic and the music is vibrant too, he is smiling broadly all the time. His entrance is surprising, his movement feminine, he greets Muhammad Ali in a whining, girly voice, kisses him on the cheek and says “Happy birthday, baby”. His behaviour is typical of gay men. His dress sense is masculine, apart from the shiny sequins on his black clothes.

His singing style is sensational. Watching his behaviour, he doesn’t remind you of Freddie in any way; he even talks to Muhammad Ali in a slightly patronising, stilted style after the show.

(YouTube: Little Richard – Good Golly Miss Molly (Muhammad Ali’s 51st Birthday)

Little Richard again, in 1957. Playing the piano standing up (as Freddie did in college), he and the band play the track *Lucille*. His singing style is energetic; he has a powerful voice, improvises and screams at times while singing.

(YouTube: Little Richard – Lucille (1957) Long Version, High Quality Sound)

Rock and roll compositions were introduced into Queen’s concerts. At the end of 1975 they played the Hammersmith Odeon, and someone has edited a short excerpt from this concert, where they played old rock ‘n’ roll songs. Freddie’s singing and performance style is completely unique, he doesn’t have to or need to imitate anyone. The music is phenomenal and so is Freddie’s rock and roll voice. His stage entrance is amazing: he arrives in a Japanese kimono, but soon starts a striptease, to the delight of the young girls – I guess – he sings in a silk shirt and shorts. The message of silk is touch me, my skin is silky. The young audience is really excited; Freddie gets them to sing with him.

I have always been bored by this version of rock and roll music, but the amazing stunts performed by Queen’s musicians and Freddie, his rock voice and energy made the songs exciting. They were able to add something even to the best artists (Elvis Presley, Little Richard), the kind of originality to spice up these great, old hits. “I’m sexy and want a conquest” is the characteristic performance style. The conquest was successful and this was no coincidence.

(YouTube: Queen – Rock’n’Roll Medley (Live at Hammersmith Odeon, London)

Freddie became a defining figure of rock music in the second half of the 20th century, he died 30 years ago, but still has no match.

Freddie was already good at playing the piano as a child, he captivated everyone and later his playing style was simply frenetic, just like Jimi on the guitar, he played easily and impressively and yet he himself never felt he played the piano particularly well.

His close friends from art college didn’t notice any signs that Freddie was gay during his school years. He went out on dates with a few girls and showed interest in them.

During his college years he was involved in a 20-month relationship with Rosemary Pearson, who was his schoolmate, they were very good friends and had an intimate relationship. Rosemary wote a book entitled “Life, Art and Freddie Mercury”.

Rosemary claims that during their relationship Freddie often fantasised about what it would be like to have intimate relations with a man.

In one section she writes:

“Freddie was instantly fraught and uncontainable: 'I can't ...I'm just strung out in the middle of it.. you're the only one who really knows about this side of me and what I go through all the time..It's such an agony...everyone thinks my needs are a joke, a fiction.' He had criedand cried.”

Rosemary loved Freddie, but was incapable of accepting a man, who daydreamed about other men while having intimate relations with her.

Freddie tried to make her understand that he wouldn’t be able to decide what was right for him until he had tried out what having sex with a same-sex partner was like. Eventually, Rosemary broke up with Freddie, really upsetting him; he just cried and was inconsolable.

Rosemary was the only friend he had who was a trusted confidante. Their intimate relationship brought warmth to his life, but the relationship inevitably awoke his sexual desires and fantasies about men and possibly also a sense of loss.

Freddie was at the stage of life when young people make their own choices and start to have romantic relationships and searching for a partner. This process was delayed, precisely because of the grinding internal conflict. He didn’t yet have the courage to try and find out who and what it was that could make him really happy.

At the time Freddie still wasn’t 100% certain about his own sexual identity, he only knew one thing for certain: homosexuality was condemned by his parents, his religion and most people, who considered it a sin and repulsive. And I wouldn’t rule out the possibility that he knew for certain he was attracted to men, but believed he had to choose between a career and a gay partner. His parents’ expectations also put great pressure on him and his future was totally insecure, so he was really torn. It was quite a mess for a young adult, there were just too many problems to be solved, all alone and emotionally unstable, at the time he had nothing to cling onto.

Rosemary erased Freddie from her life, they never met again. She gave an interview to The Times Magazine in 2004, from where this short quote is taken, which reveals an awful lot about what Freddie was like:

“He was a terrific clown, a great laugh and very caring. He’d sit next to me in the canteen and be terribly attentive and brotherly. I was an only child, I could trust him. We confided in each other for ages, though nobody dwelt on the past. I did find him attractive.”

**5.**

**Freddie arrived in London at exactly the right time**

Freddie was part of the baby boom generation, becoming an adult in the second half of the 1960s.

A seismic revolution was underway in British popular culture in the 1960s, in the world of music, theatre and politics, as well as more generally in people’s everyday lives. Young people defied conventional social, political and economic principles. Their views were fundamentally opposed to the established political system, reflecting their growing demands for a freer, more permissive society.

As a result of the general prosperity almost every household had a radio, the number of televisions increased explosively and newspapers reached more families.

The Beatles defined music in the 1960s both in Britain and America. By 1964 the Beatles had sold approx. 80 million records worldwide. The band was formed in 1960 and made music together until 1970.

Alongside the Beatles, the most popular bands, which also conquered America, were The Rolling Stones, The Kinks, The Who and The Animals.

BBC radio also adapted to this demand, with Radio 1 playing pop music only.

Almost every British household in the 60s had a radio and the new music was therefore accessible to everyone, along with the news.

The fashion world also changed. Freddie was a regular visitor to the popular Biba fashion house, where young people with similar tastes and cool musicians could find items that followed the new fashion.

Freddie wanted everything at once. He avidly threw himself into fashion boutiques, record and book shops, and was a regular visitor to venues where musicians met.

In spring 1969 Freddie graduated from college and began to prepare for his new life. Even in his college years he often slept on the floor at friends, because he was disturbed by his parents’ constant rebukes, and wanted to be around others who were preparing for a musical career, or were already playing in a band.

**Part II**

**Miracles do exist and can be seen**

**6.**

**Friends – Freddie, Tim, Brian and Roger**

The first band formed by Brian May - later lead guitarist in Queen - and some of his friends’ was called *1984*. Brian heard Freddie’s friend and schoolmate Tim Staffell singing harmonies at one of their concerts. As they were looking for a new singer at the time, they asked him to join the band.

They played their first gig in October 1964. Freddie arrived in London at the start of the year and began studying at Isleworth Polytechnic in September.

Brian was a young man with an outstanding mind, whose greatest interest was in astronomy. In 1965 he won a scholarship to the prestigious Imperial College of Science and Technology, where he went through university-level training in physics, then earned a postgraduate degree in astronomy, and later obtained a PhD in the subject. At the same time Tim enrolled at The School of Art at Ealing Technical College, to study graphic design, as did Freddie.

The band continued to play concerts, one of their most important gigs was in 1967 when they appeared as a warm-up act for Jimi Hendrix in Imperial College.   
Brian was just as fascinated by Jimi as Freddie had been.

Brian began playing guitar at the age of 6 and lived just a few streets away from Freddie, but the two of them didn’t know each other at the time.

The band 1984 broke up because Brian was too busy with his studies.

Tim and Brian kept in touch, and both of them really missed music, so they decided to form a new band. Brian wasn’t satisfied with the previous band because they hadn’t written their own songs, but just played songs written by other popular groups.

There was a third guy in Freddie’s school, Chris Smith, who was good at playing keyboard instruments and he was happy to join them, so they were only missing a drummer. Brian was the lead guitarist, while Tim was the lead singer and bass guitarist.

Roger Taylor, a young drummer from Cornwall who played in two bands, came to London the same year. The bands were quite successful, but Roger was training to be a dentist and so enrolled at London Hospital Medical School, although by this time he had already decided to be a rock musician. He kept going back to his old band for an occasional concert, but really wanted to play in London.

One of the friends he shared a flat with found an advert on the Imperial College notice board, saying that a band was looking for a Ginger Baker/Mitch Mitchell style drummer. Roger didn’t hesitate to call the person named on the advert: Brian May.

They met within a few days and Tim and Brian both listened in surprise to Roger, who was an extraordinarily good drummer, so they immediately reached an agreement. Brian even enjoyed the drums being tuned up and thought Roger was special by comparison with the other applicants.

The time for miracles had begun in Freddie, Brian and Roger’s lives.

The new band was called Smile, and in the days after Brian’s degree ceremony they appeared ahead of Pink Floyd at Imperial College. This was the first time Roger and Brian had performed together and, without them realising it, launched their fabulous career. In February 1969 Chris left the band and just the three of them played gigs. Their first appearance was a charity gala in the Royal Albert Hall.

That was when Tim took Freddie to a Smile rehearsal for the first time.

Freddie often met Brian, Roger and Tim in theKensington Pub that year. Freddie attended Smile’s concerts and gave them very honest and enthusiastic advice, without being asked, on their dress sense, movement and style.

The band didn’t take offence at the advice but nor did they take Freddie seriously.

Brian recalled this:

“He offered suggestions in a way that couldn’t be refused. At that time, he hadn’t really done any singing, and we didn’t know he could. We thought he was just a theatrical rock musician.”

(FM Untold Story DoRo)

Freddie said:

“I was saying to Brian and Roger ‘Why are you wasting your time doing this? You should do more original material. You should be more demonstrative in the way you put the music across. If I was your singer, that’s what I’d be doing!”

(Freddie Mercury)

By being more demonstrative, he meant original songs, improving the way the emotions came across, more passion, appropriate style of dress and stage presence. Freddie knew what he was talking about, but the others didn’t follow up on this at the time.

Tim later said he was never really a star like Freddie; he loved to sing, but that kind of movement and style of dress, and the theatrical performance wasn’t his world and never became his world. This meant Freddie’s suggestions fell on deaf ears as far as Tim was concerned.

**7.**

**Freddie and Roger on Death Row**

Freddie graduated from college in the summer of 1969, but had no intention of working as a graphic designer. He wanted to focus on his future career as a musician with every fibre of his body.

Roger didn’t manage to complete his medical training because he too just wanted to build his career as a musician, but later did graduate as a biologist, though he could never imagine working in a lab.

Freddie and Roger ended up working as fashion traders on a stand at Kensington Market. This part of the market was jokingly called Death Row, and a lot of artists sold their products here. The name might have come from the fact that the stuff they sold here was dead good, at least according to the vendors.

To begin with Freddie and his schoolmates traded in works of art, but later changed their profile. They began selling dandy clothes and dressed in the same kind of clothes themselves to advertise the “business”.

They really enjoyed selling things and having fun; they unloaded junk on their customers as highly-priced “fashion items”. The joke was that they had created this fashion themselves, if at all, by hanging around wearing these often ridiculous goods. Roger - with his pretty, girlish face - and Freddie, with his striking appearance, were soon given the name queens by their friends and acquaintances by virtue of their extravagant dress sense. At the time they couldn’t have had had any idea what this word meant to Freddie.

When Roger returned to his studies, Freddie closed the stand and began to help another trader. He started using a nearby public phonebox as his office.

Ken Testi, voluntary manager of Ibex - Freddie’s first band - told how:

“You could call Freddie on that phone and he’d answer.”

Freddie was pretty smart; he always noticed opportunities and exploited them. Don’t forget he was a survivor, who was always able to cope.

Irrespective of this market stall, Freddie changed his style, this was the period when his first girlfriend Rosemary was doing some writing, when he began to dress in the style of Jimi Hendrix and started playing the role of a star.

His change of style must have started out something like this:

One day Chris Smith found Freddie lost in thought in their favourite pub.

“Come on Fred, you’re miles away!” – he said to him.

“I am going to be mega! You have no idea how mega I am going to be!”

Chris didn’t take him seriously for a moment. He even teased Freddie because he had no idea how determined he was.

“Oh, yeah, as mega as Hendrix?”

“Oh, yes!” – answered Freddie.

(Mark Blake)

I found an interesting article by psychiatrist Nick Duffel in the magazine Therapy Today (April 2011), explaining Freddie’s grandiose desires.

‘The dissociative, defensively organised personality structure typical of the ex-boarder, which I have named the “strategic survival personality”, is developed as a protective mantle, under duress, often in the very first moments of the child having to survive alone at boarding school. Over time it tends to crystallise into masochism, pathological rebellion or grandiosity – or a combination of all three – as well as intimacy avoidance. It is very hard to shed. Many boarders grow up feeling their parents are strangers, unable to rely on anyone but themselves. They want desperately to be loved but cannot surrender to trust and perversely end up embodying the self-reliance that public schools promote above all things.

Game set and match to the boarding habit, and hence why it seems so indestructible. But bad news for relationships and families. Even those who know they were hurt by it may unconsciously become players of the game of one, threatened rather than made safe by the beckoning of intimacy, save only in the arms of the strategic survival personality.’

Unfortunately the above description was perfect for Freddie.

Grandiose desires really did materialise in Freddie’s life, not because he wanted to be a star, as around that time a lot of people wanted to be musicians and stars, but rather because he wanted to be a megastar, a legend. When he announced to Chris Smith that he would be a star, Chris had found Freddie lost in thought on a bench in the pub like someone who was miles away. This condition – given that Freddie was concentrating deeply on his desire and wasn’t thinking of anything else – was a hypnotic state. From then on Freddie always talked only about the fact that he would be a star, to other people as well, whenever he looked in the mirror and adjusted his clothes or his hair he looked in the mirror with this thought: do I look like a star? If the answer was no, he kept fiddling with his appearance until he thought he looked like a star. His friends were shocked by how often Freddie completed this “practice”. They didn’t want to believe their eyes and listen to their ears when Freddie was continuously talking about it.

He regularly drove some of his friends mad with this “mania”. It was at this time that Freddie was building his star image, continually practising self-hypnosis without realising it. He knew he wanted to be a star and that’s what happened; he believed in it so much that nobody could have stopped him.

(Freddie said you just have to believe in yourself and must never give up and then you’ll get where you want to go to.)

Freddie had two quite contradictory character traits: tenderness, friendliness and compassion and rock-hard inflexibility and agressiveness. There was no middle ground.

The tender features had characterized Freddie since childhood, whereas the toughness was part of a defence strategy. His pathological need for love was well suited to this soft, gentle, caring part of his personality, which everyone found attractive, whereas if he felt under attack, he hit back really hard like in the boxing ring in his childhood.

As he was unable to control his emotions, he fell in love easily and often and therefore suffered a lot of painful disappointments, which usually ended in a rough break-up. He went from one extreme to the other.

His first long-term intimate relationship was the one with Mary, the next was David Minns, and then Joe Fanelli, Tony Bastin, Winnie Kirschberger and finally Jim Hutton. He got on relatively easily with Mary, because they were both in a similar situation, both were survivors and soulmates, so they looked after each other. While others had to fight to win trust, sooner or later the relationship always ended with a break-up, except for Jim Hutton, but this wasn’t down to Freddie.

Freddie was incapable of developing long-term intimate relationships. His relationship with Jim Hutton was special in many respects, but we’ll deal with this later.

He was alienated from his parents and incapable of building any trusting relationship with them, and this wasn’t just his fault. It wasn’t that Freddie didn’t love his parents; on the contrary he would have done anything for them, just as he would for anyone else he loved.

He took on the style and attitude of a star, walked the streets in stage costumes, acted out roles, sang and practised the role. The idea of legendary stardom is like the fairy kingdom. As far as he was concerned, stardom was a symbol of strength, worship, power, control and wealth, with all that comes with it. These factors were missing from his life.

His stage persona – as he said he was a monster – was the embodiment of abnormal self-confidence. Given that he thought of himself as a star, he was capable of behaving like one on stage, but when he came off stage, he was often in despair and felt defenceless; he constantly needed company and couldn’t cope with being alone. Having company gave him protection and at the same time diverted his attention from being abandoned and from his pathological fear of being alone.

When he became rich, he could afford to keep an army of friends and staff around him, who were constantly buzzing around and fulfilled his every wish right away. If he said cigarette, five boxes landed in his fingertips at once. If he said wee-wee, they escorted him to the toilet, and so on. Did he need any more than this? He definitely did.

The purpose was to replace the absence of a sense of control. I’m the boss, everything depends on me, I’m in control, I’m not exposed or at anyone’s mercy. In contrast, when he’s alone, he can’t control himself and panics, and that’s why he surrenders to risky adventures, which are still better than being alone. When he became a true star, the star persona provided security in his private life too, the army of friends and employees prevented strangers from making contact unexpectedly. Firstly he was afraid of strangers, and secondly wanted to decide when to spend his time, with whom and on what.

He was able to relax in the company of friends and acquaintances, was happy to make friends and looked for the opportunity to play music and sing.

Back to Chris and Freddie. According to Chris, Freddie was practising a lot on the school piano and even began to sing – although not very well he says – he began to tease Freddie saying he can’t write his own songs, so this was when he decided to try doing so.

Freddie made a start and one day showed part of a song he had written, called Cowboy Song, to Chris. This was how it began:

“Mama I just killed the man…”.

Seven years later when Chris heard Bohemian Rhapsody on the radio he thought “seems like Freddie has finished the song.”

(Mark Blake)

Freddie’s change of style is also confirmed by Rosemary’s quote from the interview she gave to *The Times*:

“Freddie spent most of his time rehearsing with his rock band, then called Smile. To Rosemary’s embarrassment he would burst into song in the street, and he wore theatrical clothes, often bought by her at a theatrical costumier who had a second-hand stall on Portobello Road market. She remembers a pirate’s outfit, and a fur coat Freddie wore over a bare chest and jeans. “He’d strut around in an open top — there wasn’t much difference between on stage and off, he was always practising, everywhere, lots of big movements and gestures. I just thought he was obsessed with what he wanted to do. It was theatre, a visual expression.”

Prior to his change of style his schoolmates couldn’t see any sign of Freddie’s homosexual tendencies.

This kind of strange, immature behaviour, and his uncertain sexual identity and appearance made Freddie’s friends feel something wasn’t right with him, so they didn’t take him seriously. Obsession in a good sense is a positive resource, which helps the artist express himself. Freddie seems to have been in a perfect hypnotic trance by then and so didn’t want to behave normally on the street either; he completely took on the role of a star, associated with the style and attitude, and a need to show off.

Freddie had arrived at a turning point in his life when he had to decide whether to behave in accordance with others’ expectations or to be what he wanted to be.

This period is usually completed in an ordinary adolescent’s life between the ages of 13 and 19, but it appeared later in Freddie’s life. He lived at home until the age of 18 and was therefore forced inside his shell and to behave as was expected. The school environment also forced him to conform.

This star-like behaviour and showing off was Freddie’s way of announcing his decision: I’m not interested in how others see me, I’ll decide who and what I’m going to be, whatever the cost. Given that Freddie’s parents and childhood school had been too strict, they didn’t allow him any room to develop his personality, so the genie escaped from the bottle and took control. When he decided to become a star he resolved that nothing could stop him.

As a mature man, looking at photos from his youth, even Freddie was astonished at how he looked in this period.

The style and behaviour of a star, when he was still far from being one, was one of the main reasons for this otherness, while the other main reason was repression of his homosexual desires and emotional instability. The outlet for his repressed desires could be found in Freddie’s dress sense, behaviour, and some of the songs he wrote.

Endre Ady’s painfully beautiful poem, “I want to be loved” is perfectly suited to Freddie’s whole life; the point had come when he wanted to show himself and be seen. This was a kind of silent prayer, love me, love me even like this, maybe I’m strange but I am who I am, love me like this too, if you really love me, love me like this too. This was what his whole life was about.

His transition was some kind of miracle, a transfiguration, the start of a transformation, the first stage in maturing as an artist, which later led to him writing the song Killer Queen and to the killer queen itself, the essence of Freddie.

Two other precocious talents also came on the scene and were soon joined by a third, and together they piled up one miracle after another, achieving unprecedented global success in the next 20 years.

They were all blessed, damn talented, determined and strong enough to keep going even in difficult times; they kept going because their great talent gave them strength, a desire for success and later unmatched success itself, and after a while a sense of belonging.

**8.**

**“Smile. Makes sense for a dental student.”**

The phrase in the heading is taken from the film Bohemian Rhapsody, and is the only reference to the fact that Freddie gave advice to the band.

At the start of the Smile era Tim and Brian began writing potential hits, the outstanding guitar playing and fantastic drum accompaniment foretold a promising future for the trio.

Freddie liked the style, the harmony and the strong lyrics, and that’s why he stood by them, for the time being as a fan, but he wanted to go on stage too. His first attempt was in the band Ibex.

John Taylor was the band’s bass guitarist and recalls their first gig together as follows:

“It was clear to John that Freddie was desperate to get into a band. He wanted to sing. And Smile was a great band, and had three singers: Tim, Brian and Roger could both sing, so there wasn’t a spot for Freddie. Having befriended Ibex, Freddie recognised an opportunity, and told Ibex’s members they needed a singer, proposing himself for the role. He started attending Ibex rehearsals, offering advice as he had with Smile, and assumed the position of lead vocalist without any argument….The first gig he did, he got on stage and everything was there, apart from the singing, he wasn’t so good. It took him a little while to get the craft of the voice…but he certainly got that together. The show was all there from minute one, second one. There wasn’t any doubt. Never any doubt. It was always gonna be.”

Ken Testi, the young volunteer manager of Ibex, remembers Freddie’s first gig as follows:

“Freddie was shy off-stage but he knew how to front a show………….He brought dynamics, freshness, and presentation to the band that had been completely lacking previously.”

(Matt Richards & Mark Langthorne)

Around this time Freddie moved away from home to Barnes, another district of London. The members of Smile and Ibex also had rooms in this flat. They scraped enough money together to pay the rent. Freddie was the worst off financially, he hardly had any clothes and his shoes had holes in them, so he took on occasional jobs as an illustrator.

Even in this desperate financial situation he thought of himself as a global star and most people would have found behaving like that on stage inconceivable, but by then Freddie had talked himself into being a star to such an extent that he couldn’t have behaved differently, though of course it wouldn’t have worked without his talent.

Freddie kept telling himself with such intensity and belief that he would be a star, and not just simply a star but more of a legend until this idea worked its way into his subconscious, and stardom began to emerge in reality as a result. The subconscious idea becomes a deep belief, which begins to control our behaviour.

Neville wrote the following words in his book *The Power of Awareness* (1952):

“The power of our belief is an infinite power against which no earthly force is the slightest significance.”

Watching recordings of Queen’s first concerts, I think we could all agree that suggestive power radiates from Freddie’s eyes and facial features, his gaze is delightfully charming, with eyes and nails highlighted in black, the well-proportioned, well-formed body, the explicitly erotic and secretive clothing, conveying femininity and masculinity at the same time, makes an exciting impression. Exotic features in any case lend a certain mystery to western eyes; with his repeated, resolute, stiff and seductive dynamic walking up, down and below, perfectly adjusted to the rhythm, Freddie attracts and holds people’s attention. Likewise, the unusual sound of the music enhances his accentuated, erotic vibe, making an impression on both genders. Most of the song lyrics are verses written in surreal style, taking us into a dream, fairytale world and leaving a mark on all our souls in the collective world of the unconscious.

Roger has some shaman drums behind Freddie, the exotic sound of Brian and Joe’s guitar playing is capable of evoking heaven and hell. Freddie is the magician captivating the audience, his changes of tone and rhythmic movements add to the rapture and magic.

Freddie plans this impression deliberately, as he knows what people crave: they want to relax, to step out of the monotony of everyday life, they want to be given a boost, and so he designs the spectacle and sound to be entertaining and transcending at every moment. Of course deliberate planning doesn’t mean they are not controlling the fantasies and thoughts trying to emerge from the subconscious. Human beings are emotional; their choices are defined by impulses from the subconscious. Our dominant thoughts, whether or not we are aware of them, always determine our decisions and behaviour.

Freddie himself once declared:

“Of course I’m outrageous, camp, theatrical and dramatic, but I haven’t chosen that image. I am myself, and in fact half the time I let the wind take me.”

(Freddie Mercury)

The self-hypnosis was good for gathering his courage, and going on stage like a star despite his fear and nervousness, the rest, the natural talent was already in place, the rhythm and music was in his blood. With his voice and performance style, Freddie was capable of putting all his emotions into the songs, so the audience inevitably fell under their influence.

Freddie’s first gigs coincided with his relationship with Rosemary when the question of his sexual identity was increasingly occupying his thoughts and his performance style and choice of clothes was defined by an internal tension, which Freddie or the audience were not necessarily aware of, but it certainly created dramatic tension.

It was no accident that the band members gave him the nickname “old queen” behind his back, which is slang for: “a beautiful girl, who doesn't take [disrespect](https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=disrespect) from [nobody](https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=nobody)! She's smart and does what she wants when she wants. She doesn't let nobody [bully](https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=bully) her and kicks-ass!” (Urban Dictionary)

In other words she is beautiful, clever and knows what she wants, and carries it through at any cost. The word queen also has another meaning: gay. Of course the mockers were only thinking of this meaning, they must have been flabberghasted to realise that Freddie was also the embodiment of the other slang version of the word queen, except he wasn’t a woman.

Freddie didn’t like this nickname. And of course everyone finds it painful to be ridiculed, especially for something we can’t do anything about.

Rosemary was attracted by Freddie’s otherness and it attracted everyone else because people are essentially damned curious and like mysticism.

Since he hadn’t learned to sing, he had to develop his singing technique at rehearsals and on stage, which was no small achievement, he dived in at the deep end almost immediately, and it was no coincidence that Rosemary said:

“Freddie was the only truly fearless person I ever met”.

(Matt Richards & Mark Langthorne)

Rosemary reached this conclusion from the fact that he bravely accepted himself and his otherness; I’m thinking of the theatrical costumes he wore on the streets, or of when he began singing on the street as if it were the most natural thing in the world.

This absence of fear really covered a very deep anxiety, which Freddie was overcompensating for.

It was this same anxiety that caused him to talk to Rosemary about his sexual fantasies and desires. He had to escape the tension somehow and often started crying as a result.

Overcompensating meant he was very brave and decisive on stage, but remained uncertain and shy for quite a long time in his private life.

On one occasion he kept pestering Rosemary until she arranged for him to meet one of her openly gay friends. The girl didn’t want to agree to his request, but Freddie wouldn’t leave her alone until she had organised the meeting, but when she was about to introduce them, he panicked and ran away.

At the time he craved the touch of someone of the same sex, but was also afraid because the man was a stranger, so he didn’t know what to expect.

In the meantime, on Freddie’s recommendation, the band Ibex changed its name to “Wreckage”, hoping the new name would provide more opportunities to play gigs, but they only stayed together for around 10 more gigs because the band broke up before Christmas 1969. Freddie probably chose the name combining wreck and breakage unconsciously because this was how he felt at the time, a nervous wreck on the verge of a breakdown.

And around this time Rosemary split up with him. The fact is Freddie and his friends, with a few exceptions, barely mention her; it’s as if she had never existed. In Freddie’s case this makes sense, if he had talked about her the question would have been why did they break up and Freddie only talked about his private life with a few very close friends, this subject was taboo as far as he was concerned throughout his life.

Freddie was still waiting for an opportunity to make music, and so after some searching he joined the band Sour Milk Sea. Freddie could be compared to a lot of things, but not sour milk. The words sour milk in his later song My Fairy King might well have come from this name, as one of the symbols of decay.

One of the band’s members, Jeremy Gallop, remembered Freddie like this:

“He was so impressive. There was an immediate vibe. He had a great vocal range. He sang falsetto; nobody else had the bottle to do that.”

(*The Times*, 20th August 2004)

John Stuart and Andy Davis also quote him in their book Queen before Queen:

“On-stage Freddie became a different personality – he was as electric as he was in later life. Otherwise he was quite calm. I’ll always remember him being strangely quiet and very well-mannered. Extremely well-mannered, in fact. My mum liked him.”

This band also broke up in spring 1970, and surprise, surprise, at the same time Tim Staffell, Freddie’s friend, also left Smile, so Brian and Roger didn’t have a singer.

**9.**

**Queen’s time has finally come**

“To be honest, I don’t think any of us realized it would take a full three years to get anywhere. It was certainly no fairy tale.” (Brian May)

“You’ve got to learn to push yourself, be there at the right time and learn how to deal with the business. These days I think it’s got to be talent plus a very good business sense.”- said Freddie.

(Freddie Mercury)

The quotes below are from Mark Hodkinson’s book Queen The Early Years:

“Between March 1974 and December 1992 Queen had forty-one UK Top hits and amassed nearly seven years’ worth of Top 75 chart placings….Queen, of course, also sold albums, more than 80 million at the last count, and rising.”

“They were, on the surface at least, an unlikely force to acquire such widespread adoration. Fronted by a vainglorious bisexual, their music was schizophrenic: at different times absurd, choral, linear, funky, far-out inane, rocking, mawkish or pulsating. Critics, and few had much regard for Queen save for a grudging acknowledgement of Freddie’s stagecraft, claimed Brian May knew just one guitar solo, while Roger Taylor and John Deacon were supposedly nothing more, and nothing less, than rock journeymen. And yet few groups, if any, have honed so many styles of music into gilded hit singles.”

The above quotation summarizes how the critics viewed Queen. Behind the expressions of criticism there are always individuals, who, like all individuals, were only able to write their criticisms through subjective filters, i.e. with their own perceptions arising from their own personalities. A less diverse personality, a conservative person let’s say, will obviously like conservative-style music and reject anything outside this category without further reflection. This is the most comfortable position, probably followed by conformism and condemnation of otherness.

British society was rather conservative and conformed to traditional norms dictated by religion, the royal family and aristocracy, this was exactly what the cultural revolution of the 1960s was about, which led to extremes, such as torn clothes, unkempt appearance, long hair for boys, miniskirts for girls, excessive smoking, drinking, use of drugs and sex orgies. It was precisely these excesses that made the protests conspicuous and effective; they couldn’t be ignored.

As a result, various progressive laws were adopted, such as allowing abortions and contraceptives, and a certain acceptance of homosexuality (you can do what you want at home, it’s not a crime, but if you do it on the street you’ll still go to prison), post-war immigrants enjoyed more rights than before.

The global success of the Beatles perfectly conveyed the mass demand for change.

Back to the criticisms above. It was the songs and Freddie’s otherness, their performance style, diversity and special nature that made Queen the favourite band of millions of people. The variety of the songs came from the four diverse personalities, and diverse requirements. The band’s style was not only defined by Freddie, but just as much by the others. As far as Brian May and John Deacon’s guitar playing and Roger Taylor’s drum solos are concerned, all I can say is that without them the wonderful and inimitable sound of Queen would never have materialised, and as for the special and fascinating nature of this sound, we need no clearer evidence than the sensational success. No doubt it needed all four of them to make this sound; Freddie’s magical singing was just one element in the formula. When I listen to Freddie’s solo records I like them, but they don’t sound like Queen.

The sound of Queen filled stadiums all around the world and made it possible for the band to have unparalleled success at the Live Aid concert held at Wembley Stadium in 1995.

Freddie commented as follows:

“I’ve never considered myself the leader of Queen. It’s the four of us that makes the whole thing work. It’s 25 per cent down the line. I’m the one out front, that’s all.”

But let’s just go back to the beginnings and ignore the crude, unfair criticism; it’s not worth wasting any more space on it.

Brian and Roger attended one of Wreckage’s gigs and were shocked to notice that Freddie really had something as the band’s frontman. They weren’t especially impressed by the band, but noticed that Freddie attracted looks like a magnet, though they could have had no idea that even decades after his death fans would talk about him as the most fascinating and adorable singer ever. If anyone fails to use superlatives when mentioning him in the comments section, they will immediately be admonished. Fans protect Freddie like their own brother or sister. There can be no better proof that they love the man in Freddie and not just the star, and with good reason.

Brian recalls how the band was formed:

“Freddie was always there, you know, Freddie was always saying:

Well, I’ll sing, we can do this, you know, put the band together like this, etcetera, etcetera, and we can do this, this, this and this” and we gradually went, well, okay.”

(Matt Richards & Mark Langthorne)

This decision was probably based on the principle of “it’s easier to give in than to resist”, but of course they didn’t have the faintist idea of how well it would work out.

Freddie remembered things slightly differently:

“The idea of Queen was conceived by me whilst studying at college. Brian, who was also at college, liked the idea and we joined forces…….

One day their singer decided to leave, so Smile split up. I remember at the time we were actually sharing a flat together, and Roger and Brian were auditioning singers while I was right under their nose. It was so funny, it never actually occurred to them to ask me……

Eventually we decided we’d form a band together. It’s as simple as that. We thought our musical ideas would blend. Because I’m such a forceful character, I feel that everything’s got to be new.”

(Freddie Mercury)

I don’t doubt for a minute that the idea of the band he finally joined being called Queen had been conceived in Freddie’s mind much earlier. He noticed that the singer Tim Staffell wasn’t a showman, so started trying to convince them: “If I were your singer, I would do this and this…..”. Of course Tim didn’t leave the band because of him, but because he felt they were going nowhere.

I can imagine Brian and Roger hesitating, I guess primarily because of Freddie’s queen-like character and to begin with they weren’t even convinced that Freddie was a good singer, like many others who shared the same opinion, having heard his first gigs. Fortunately they and others were tactful enough not to give a negative opinion and didn’t destroy Freddie’s self-confidence as a result, although I don’t think anyone would have been capable of doing so.

They also had to digest Freddie’s theatrical concept, which was completely new to them, but in the end both of them were extremely smart and probably understood they had to stand out from the proliferation of new bands and bring something new and sensational for anyone to notice them. They learned in Smile that good music was no guarantee of success; they also had to sell themselves. As this became clear, in April 1970, having given up their academic careers, they decided there was no other path, just keep straight on, persevere at any cost and create something unique and special. None of them were willing to settle for second best, their talent, experience and determination constituted a solid foundation, while Freddie’s shocking and effective innovations gradually persuaded them they were on the right path.

Given that it wasn’t just Freddie who was a strong character, but Brian and Roger too, fierce disputes broke out even at the start, but Freddie’s dominant personality, his amazing sense of diplomacy and solid conviction about the right direction steered them in the best possible direction. As they were old friends, their relationship was able to cope with disputes, and so they survived the storms and eventually found that the battle was worthwhile, they always managed to make sure everyone was satisfied with the outcome.

Jonathan Morris, who was Michael Jackson’s publicist and confidant for 28 years, said of Freddie:

“Freddie was this flamboyant showman at a time when bands went on stage dressed in whatever they’d been wearing all day.”…………..

What Freddie knew intuitively, was the golden rule of showbiz: you make a show. It was what Epstein did with the Beatles.”

“Freddie’s genius was understanding not just the song he had written, the words and melody too, and how it all sounded, but how you deliver it in a contemporary fashion which the audience will comprehend and absorb.”

(Lesley-Ann Jones)

Freddie didn’t just know instinctively, he also observed and studied the world of theatre, the world of Jimi Hendrix and other successful stars, and noticed how they were different. The difference was the show. The appearance was not just focussed on the music, but also on the show.

When naming the band, there were a lot of suggestions, but “Queen” was Freddie’s idea. He kept insisting until he broke the others’ resistance. He managed to convince them the name should be short, effective and majestic-sounding, he believed this was the only name that matched the band’s glorious march towards global success. Freddie’s choice of name was brilliant, like his music.

Freddie commented:

“I was certainly aware of the gay connotations, but that was just one facet of it. Anyway, we always preferred to think of Queen in the regal sense rather than in the queer one.”

(Freddie Mercury)

Freddie in fact named the band after himself, I think deliberately; he was already working on the song “The March Of The Black Queen” at the time in which Freddie himself is the black queen. Obviously he favoured both meanings: queen-like, i.e. especially high-level, the best band, and the possibility of a homosexual queen was also there. Freddie always knew what he was doing and why and the reasons he didn’t share his ideas were understandable.

One member of Freddie’s previous band John Taylor claimed that he indirectly named the band Queen.

“The name was my name. We called him the old queen quite a lot, me and Mike Bersin. He didn’t like it, but he bore with it. I said ‘If you have a band, it should be called Queen’”.

(Phil Chapman)

During this period Freddie still didn’t know which gender he was more attracted to or just didn’t want to accept his homosexual tendencies.

His gentle, delicate, caring nature was indicative of feminine traits, whereas his persistent, career-centred, determined, smart-planning, realistic mentality was more typical of men. A formula for success even for the greatest artists: don’t just work by instinct, but also with your mind, or in other words use both sides of your brain, if possible in harmony. Only very few people are able or willing to do so.

I believe he subconsciously identified with one of his female relatives or acquaintances in a sexual role (perhaps with his aunt with whom he often stayed in Bombay), because he needed a defence tactic. He constantly dreaded being humiliated or ridiculed and somehow sensed that he could make use of this unusual, feminine behaviour, tenderness, attentiveness and kindness to make his colleagues like him and not hurt him. And this was generally how it worked out, both at boarding school and his later schools, and among the guys he made music with. In the same way, his boxing and other sporting achievements formed part of a defence strategy, obtaining and demonstrating power, apart from the fact that he loved to compete and win – I guess – because he later had a very strong competitive spirit.

He tried to keep his private life as secret as possible and didn’t even speak to friends about it.

The reason for the secrecy was clearly his homosexual orientation, which he was ashamed of, and which also put his whole career at risk.

Many of his close acquaintances suspected that his unusually stylish, clean-cut, hipster image also concealed a man with a sharp mind and a good business sense.

Freddie learned to keep both feet firmly on the ground at boarding school; he could only rely on himself and therefore became mature for his age. He was willing to take on responsibility and learned how to achieve his goals; if he couldn’t do it nicely then he would use force. His fighting ability and willpower were apparent in every situation.

Later, when he knew that he wanted to be a musician, he consciously prepared for the role and didn’t leave anything to chance.

Changing his name was part of his plan. Partly because he wanted to forget everything about Farrokh Bulsara, who was a very inconvenient part of his personality, as a lonely, shy boy, timid and reserved, and also an immigrant.

Freddie the future star was already proud of himself because he had anticipated his global success and couldn’t allow himself to have a name that evoked his immigrant status and humiliations, and as he was emotionally detached from his family, this wasn’t something that stopped him changing his name either.

He changed his name from Bulsara to Mercury. Brian and Roger couldn’t believe it because they thought he had gone too far. In Roman mythology, Mercurius was the nymph child of Zeus and Maia, and messenger of the gods.

This was Mercurius’ most important role, but he was also the protector of shepherds, travellers, traders, and of eloquence, literature, athletics and thieves. In addition he was well-known among Olympians for his cunning and astuteness. Freddie was not lacking in these qualities.

Mercurius the messenger of the gods carries his Caduceus wand, with two entwined snakes, ending in an angel’s wing.

“As a symbolic object, it represents Hermes (or the Roman Mercury), and by extension trades, occupations, or undertakings associated with the god.”

Wikipedia

During his life Mercurius performed a lot of heroic deeds and was treated with deference in both Greek and Roman mythology.

In his childhood Freddie’s father told him a lot of mythological stories, filling him with admiration.

Freddie tells the story of his childhood fantasy world in his song My Fairy King.

When he was left on his own at the age of 8 - or perhaps even earlier - he built a fantasy world for himself in the alien environment, where he was the just, all-knowing Fairy King.

Freddie was able to overcome his fears more easily if he identified with one of the heroes he knew about, such as Mercurius, who was not just the envoy of the gods, but was a god himself, i.e. all-powerful. This feeling of omnipotence must have helped Freddie through the difficulties of everyday life. The wand, on which the two snakes are entwined and which is adorned by the angel’s wing, also appeared symbolically when Freddie was a young adult. He wore snake-like rings and bracelets, fairies appear in his songs and are also on the Queen logo. The sawn-off microphone reminds us of his wand, his magic wand, and of a phallic symbol.

Freddie talked to Ken Testi about the sawn-off mic, saying: “It’s my gimmick, dear. You must have a gimmick!” (Mark Blake)

A gimmick is a cunning trick or propaganda item.

The accidentally torn-off microphone holder gave Freddie something to hold onto. He realised this cane was perfect for continually holding the viewer’s attention as he moved it around incessantly. It’s a bit like a pen in the hands of a hypnotist, when he says “focus your attention on this pen, just concentrate on this!”

A good communicator comes up with something new every 45 seconds during a performance, gesticulates, moves around, or amplifies his voice, etc., because he knows that otherwise he won’t be able to continually hold people’s attention.

Freddie realised this himself. On the subject of the phallic symbol I noticed that Freddie often put the rod or the mic itself in front of his groin area. It’s worth watching the Live Aid concert from this perspective. You get an ideal view of how well Freddie uses this device, using it like a pole dancer.

In astrological symbolism the phallus is the “arm” of the sun god, his phallus is Mercury, equivalent to the “magic tool” (ultimate weapon, divining rod, magic fire tool) in folk tales.

(Hoppál, Jankovics, Nagy, Szemadám)

I later read a witty description in Peter Hince’s book of how he viewed the “stage prop”:

“Fred’s trademark silver Shure 565 SD microphone, as he wandered the stage with the famous ‘wand’: a custom-made chrome-plated tube, like a section of microphone stand, which Fred used together with the mic as his stage prop. It could be a sword, guitar, machine gun, golf club, baseball bat or whatever Fred wanted to convey with it. Most commonly it was ‘My c\*ck, darling’.”

A phoenix bird, which is a symbol of the sun, is the central figure on Queen’s insignia; its return symbolises renewal, resurgence, transformation and getting stronger.

The phoenix burns obstacles, destroys outdated views and replaces them with new ideas.

This bird symbolises both Freddie’s and the band’s renaissance, the breakthrough from being unsuccessful to successful and Freddie’s transformation from unknown to known, from a potential star to a legend.

The two lions on the insignia symbolise John and Roger, who were born under the sign of Leo, Cancer is Brian’s star sign, while Freddie’s is Virgo, represented by the two fairies. A royal crown can be seen in the middle of the insignia, referring to Queen’s royal rank, as a quality classification.

The choice of name was deliberate, he wanted to dominate the world of rock and roll as the king (or queen), and craved recognition and respect. Freddie claims he chose the name Queen because it was unconventional and attention-grabbing, the kingdom or queendom was the symbol of rule, i.e. ruling the musical world. Rule or dominance is also a symbol of power.

Subconsiously this also symbolises Freddie’s desire for control, as clearly shown by his later songs (The March of the Black Queen) and relates to his homosexual fantasies (like Seven Seas of Rye or Killer Queen).

1970 was an especially significant year for Freddie. In April he finally became the singer in Queen, and then, through Brian May, he got to know Mary Austin.

**10.**

**Mary is my best friend in the world**

Brian invited Mary Austin out on a date because he liked her, but since they didn’t fall in love, at Freddie’s insistence Brian introduced him to Mary and he liked her too. Brian says Mary was very reserved, which is confirmed by everyone else who was close to her.

Mary was a 19-year-old, beautiful, fragile young woman, who worked at the branch of Biba where Freddie bought his clothes.

Many of their friends say the two young people were very attracted to each other and genuinely loved one another.

Freddie visited the boutique to see Mary for months, but usually took Roger along because he way shy and needed support. He just smiled and said hello to Mary.

After Brian had introduced them, it appears the attraction was immediate and yet Mary didn’t go out on a date with Freddie for 5 or 6 months. She was finally willing to meet up with him in September and 5 months later they moved in together. I assume that her unwillingness to go out with him was due to Mary’s nature and it’s possible that Freddie also made an ambivalent impression on her. Subconciously she must have sensed there was some kind of inexplicable, perplexing reason for Freddie’s otherness, and yet must have liked this otherness, as Rosemary had done too.

We know that Freddie could be very friendly, kind, persuasive and persistent, and sooner or later he swept her off her feet.

Mary was also shy, just like Freddie, and she too wanted to move away from home and live her own life.

Both Freddie and Mary were very reserved and didn’t really speak about their private lives to anyone.

A lot of people believe Mary was the love of Freddie’s life. I don’t doubt for a moment that Freddie’s emotions were honest, but in the long-term the relationship was clearly based on different foundations: deep affection, friendship and absolute trust. Most people can rely on their own family for these factors, and Freddie was very capable of loving from his heart, and was very caring and tender.

This was what he said about Mary:

“All my lovers asked me why they couldn’t replace Mary, but it’s simply impossible. For me she was my common-law wife. For me, it was a marriage. We believe in each other, and that’s enough for me.

I couldn’t fall in love with a man the same way as I did with Mary.”

When Freddie was with Rosemary, he confided in her and spoke to her openly about his homosexual desires. They shared warmth, trust and friendship. After Freddie’s death Rosemary spoke about him under the name Dr. Rose Rose:

“I think I was Freddie’s first girlfriend. We had a physical relationship, he was an ardent lover. He was different. Freddie did see himself as an outsider and it gave him a kind of freedom, he didn’t have to toe the line like other people, because he was from a different culture although he was as English or more English than most people. That was a contradiction about him.”

(YouTube: 13 Moments That Made Freddie Mercury and Queen 2019)

When Rosemary left him, Freddie cried out of sadness.

Both of Mary’s parents were deaf and dumb. The family was quite poor, as both her mother and father could only do simple jobs. Nevertheless, Mary was probably loved as a child, because she was caring, motherly, kind and gentle; and everyone considered her very likable.

Freddie had been very close to Rosemary, he was gentle, kind and protective towards her, as if he were her older brother.

After Rosemary left, Freddie missed the gentleness, warmth, love, trust and intimacy.

Mary believes Freddie had a certain degree of paranoia and thought people were laughing at him behind his back. This was probably caused by the school nickname and ridicule, and his London friends were also continually teasing him. Freddie only bought into this because he wanted to fit in at all costs. We are all social beings and can be terribly lonely in the absence of a warm family background and friends.

Freddie got tender loving care and physical love from Mary and they even managed to develop a deep and trusting relationship, which Freddie must have really missed.

When Freddie said we believe in each other, as far as he was concerned this must have meant he didn’t have to worry about Mary leaving him or about her trying to hurt him intentionally.

Mary replaced the lack of family warmth, he had found a trusting relationship, and what’s more it was a heterosexual relationship. This was very important to Freddie, as it wasn’t possible to openly come out as gay. This would have put his career at risk. Apart from Mary, nobody could have doubted that Freddie was heterosexual.

In his relationship with Rosemary Freddie learned it wasn’t possible to talk to his sweetheart about his homosexual fantasies without the risk of her leaving him, so he said nothing to Mary about such thoughts.

Ostensibly everything was fine, especially in the early years, while the hormones feeding love were still working, but when this period had finished, Freddie became restless again and was overtaken by a desire for same-sex relationships.

He bought a ring for Mary and even asked her to marry him, but they never got married because Freddie changed his mind. It took him a long time to introduce her to his family.

Their relationship broke down after 6 years. In an an interview recorded in 2000 Mary told Mark Blake that their relationship began to cool after the first Queen album was released in 1973. When Mary came home from work, Freddie wasn’t at home and only came back late in the evenings. They were no longer as close as before. Freddie made up various excuses for coming home late.

In another statement she claims that initially she wasn’t in love with Freddie:

“It took a long while for me to really fall in love with this man but once there I would never turn away from him. His pain became my pain, his joy became my joy.” (FM: The Untold Story, DoRo Prod. 2000.)

It seems rather strange to think that she would have moved in with Freddie without being in love after going out together for five months. And if this is true, then why? All their friends who frequently saw them together, including Brian, say they were obviously in love.

It is especially surprising that she simply refers to Freddie as a “man”. At the very least we would expect her to mention the name of her late friend, whom she loved very much, who left her a house worth millions, especially in a public interview. She was clearly very embarrassed when she talked about Freddie confessing to her that he was bisexual and claimed she was delighted about the confession because she could see Freddie was suffering. After the confession Freddie was his old self again, happy and contented. She stressed that Freddie couldn’t have been sure how she would react to the news. However, it seems that she had time to prepare and think about how to respond because she had suspected for quite some time that Freddie had someone else. But what could she have said in the interview? She probably had mixed emotions, as she loved Freddie and didn’t want him to suffer, that was why she let him go, but no doubt she suffered too and understandably found it difficult to forgive him.

According to David Minns’ book, Freddie kept searching for and finding casual male lovers from the time they first started dating.

I believe Freddie really loved Mary and wanted to live in a heterosexual relationship, so that his family and people in general wouldn’t hold him in contempt.

Later, when he realised that he preferred men and wanted to live with a man, he still kept Mary by his side, to keep up appearances. I don’t doubt that he still loved her, or that she was the person he could always rely on.

He fought with the same determination and persistence to stay in close contact with Mary as when he was determined to join Smile to build his career.

Everyone who was close to them says that Mary was some kind of maternal figure in Freddie’s life. And this was probably Mary’s later role, once Freddie had chained her to him; he wouldn’t let her go and was devoted to her, as the only certainty in his life at the time.

When the time came and Freddie found a deep love in the person of David Minns, he began suffering more alongside Mary. In Freddie’s eyes it was as if he had found the real thing in David. This meant he didn’t need Mary as much; he got warmth, love and affection from David, and started to drift away from Mary. This was also apparent in terms of physical distance, as he moved out. Later, when he had made it as an artist and had enough money, he bought a flat for Mary, from where she could see Freddie’s house and visit Freddie and the cats. (They had two cats; Freddie adored these warm, purring cats, who flattered him, and he even let them into his bed. They were like children to him, he could give them a hug when he wanted to and moved them further away when he had something to do.)

In the film Freddie bragged to Roger: “Mary just moved in next door and can visit me and the cats.”

Freddie looked after Mary, like she was his mother. He broke away from her, as young people getting married generally break away from their parents, but maintained contact with her, as if she were his mother. Ideally our spouse is our main confidante, but since Freddie didn’t really trust anyone else because of his emotional problems, he needed Mary and could always turn to her. Deep in his soul he longed to be close to Mary, even if there was no-one else he could always turn to Mary, as if she were his family.

Although unintentionally, it seems he made it completely impossible for Mary to live her own life. She gave birth to two children from another man, but he left her because of Freddie, who demanded Mary’s company.

Freddie invited Mary and her boyfriend to the dinners he gave. Mary sat on one side of him and Mary’s latest partner on the other side. The hidden message of this seating arrangement was I’m getting between you. No man would appreciate this message, and even the father of her two children got fed up with it.

(Freddie really loved the kids, and this is further proof of the extent to which he was able to care for and look after others, if needed. It was a very nice and likeable trait.)

He later gave Mary a job too, trusting her to look after his personal affairs, and she became an employee of his own record label.

When Mary had two kids to look after, she also became financially dependent on Freddie. It’s possible that Mary didn’t want to break away from Freddie because she also needed a friend she could trust and a father figure in her life, someone she could always rely on.

Mary seems like a victim in this relationship, but according to her statements she really loved Freddie and the better she got to know him the more she loved him, and so this bond was not a burden on her.

In another later statement, she said it seemed her fate was to take care of men, first her father, then her children and Freddie during his illness. (In fact she didn’t really take care of Freddie as he was only compelled and willing to spend a few weeks in bed; when he passed away, Mary was already 7 months’ pregnant. She ran over to look in on him every day, which is not the same as caring for him. She was thinking of his financial affairs, but then Freddie paid her a salary.)

We can also measure Freddie’s commitment to Mary by the fact he left her his adored Kensington house and half the rest of his fortune, despite the fact that money and property meant a lot to Freddie. He didn’t just want to soothe his troubled conscience and make sure nobody would disturb his ashes after his death, but also wanted to take care of her, as he looked after everyone else that he loved.

David Minns, who was Freddie’s first serious love, described in his book how Freddie constantly suffered from a sense of guilt and didn’t want to cause Mary any pain.

When Mary allegedly wanted a child from him, Freddie said he would like to have kids but would have a cat before a child, as for the moment the situation wasn’t right for him to bring up a child.

It’s not clear when Freddie said this, but I strongly doubt it was during their relationship. Freddie was intelligent and had no intention of hurting Mary.

I assume this cynical reply by Freddie was to a provocative question from the press:

“If I wanted children, I’d just go to Harrods and buy one. They sell anything there. Buy two, and you get a nanny thrown in!”

This was his way of telling us what had happened to him and his sister. Freddie resented his parents for hiring a nanny, and his mother not caring for them in person, and for having sent him and his sister to boarding school. This was how his long-held resentment towards his parents came out.



**At last a good bass guitarist**

The band tried out three bass guitarists before they found the real thing, John Deacon, on 2 July 1971. He was worth waiting for.

Chris Chesney recalled how at his audition: “Deacon didn’t drop a single beat.”

The great team had finally come together: Brian, Roger, John and not least Freddie. They worked in this line-up until Freddie tragically passed away.

John was an electrical engineer and also graduated with honours, while Freddie graduated from art college as a graphic designer. He wrote his thesis on Jimi Hendrix. As a graphic artist it wasn’t a bad choice, was it? True, he had drawn quite a few portraits of Jimi.

The company of scientists and artists, given that Brian, Roger and John were masters of their instruments by the time Queen was founded, just as Freddie was outstanding at playing the piano, was ready for the challenge.

Freddie’s friend Chris Smith said: “He had this staccato style. It was like Mozart gone mad.” (Mark Blake)

Brian and John were still committed to their studies and teaching work to some extent in the first year, but both of them tried to attend rehearsals so the group could get in sync as soon as possible.

As it turned out, the group was made up of four very strong personalities; all of them had mature taste and opinions on the direction the band should take, especially in terms of musical genre and style. Given that without exception they were all perfectionists, they aspired to excellence right from the start. The band was ruled by democracy, though arguments were settled by honest discussion rather than voting, but the quarrel continued until everyone was happy and satisfied. As in music, the main thing is harmony isn’t it?

These battles were not just about whose song should feature on the records, but rather aimed at making sure the best songs made it onto the album. Ultimately, battles were being fought to continually improve the songs, the performance style, instrumentation and everything. (Of course financial matters were also important, as none of them had any money.) Whoever had the idea for the song and wrote the lyrics received the royalties and this always caused tension in the band, until, starting from 1989, every song featured on the albums as a Queen song and therefore everyone had an equal share of the royalties. This solution was Freddie’s idea originally.

They were all exceptionally talented musicians, Brian and John sacrificed their careers on the altar of music – whereas Freddie and Roger intended to dedicate their lives to music from the outset. As they were all perfectionists, they weren’t satisfied with anything but an unprecedented sound and unprecedented success. This came at a cost, but it was worth it, resulting in a happy end as far as making music together was concerned.

Even 30 years after his death, Freddie still has a share in the success because whenever fans hear the word Queen, they don’t necessarily think of *the* queen, but rather of him or the band, even in Britain and definitely elsewhere in the world, not to mention that he earned more money after his death than before, though sadly he would never be able to spend it.

To begin with they had no idea how to get into the music industry, before realising they need some good and well-rehearsed songs and an album, through which they could introduce themselves to potential managers and record labels.

At the time the new De Lane Lea Studios had just been handed over in Wembley and they wanted to test them out. Through one of their friends, Terry Yeadon, they were chosen to try out the new studio, and Queen received professional-quality presentational materials in return.

They approached almost every management agency with the presentational materials, but only received one offer, a contract from Charisma worth 25,000 pounds. They didn’t accept the offer and thought the sum was too low, as they needed new equipment.

In the meantime John Anthony and Roy Thomas Baker of Trident Studios heard the Queen recording from De Lane Lea Studios. John Anthony already knew Brian and Roger because they had made a single for Smile in 1969. They liked what they saw and heard and so they took the demo recording along to tell Trident’s owners, Norman and Barry Sheffield, about Queen, though it took quite a while for the meeting to finally take place.

On the advice of John Anthony, they only gave free concerts to their friends in colleges, clubs or elsewhere in 1971; he believed the band needed some time to bond with each other.



**Trident and Queen**

Ken Testi also began to manage Queen on a voluntary basis. His efforts proved successful. The band played a concert at King’s College Medical School in Denmark Hill on 10 March 1972. A lot of managers attended this concert. Not long after the concert Trident contacted Queen, wanting to see them in concert. Two weeks later they played a gig at Forest Hill Hospital, London, where Berry Sheffield offered them a contract.

A few weeks later the guys from Queen got in touch with the Trident office to talk about the contract.

Freddie looked back on this event as follows:

“It’s not just having a recording contract and that’s it, it’s not all going to be peaches and cream. You have to keep in check all of the things that are going on. Talent isn’t just about being a good musician, these days. It’s being aware. It’s vital to do the whole thing properly. Talent is not just writing good songs and performing them, it’s having a business brain, because that’s a major part of it – to get the music across properly and profit from it. You use all the tricks of the trade and if you believe in yourself, you’ll go all the way.”

(Freddie Mercury)

Norman Sheffield remembered the first meeting with the band as follows:

“Roger Taylor was a really good-looking kid, with long blond hair and charm. Brian May was tall, with a mane of curls and a little introverted but clearly very intelligent. The bass player, John Deacon, was also quiet. I could tell right away that the fourth member was going to be high maintenance. He was charming, acted a bit shy and reserved at times and spoke in quite a posh, mannered voice. When he relaxed he had a very sharp sense of humour and spoke at a hundred miles an hour. Freddie apparently had a girlfriend but we were pretty certain he was gay. I agreed to offer the Queen?e?s, as we christened them, a loose kind of arrangement. There were times when the studio was dark, usually at 2 a.m. So we said: “We’ll give you this downtime in the studio to see what you can do.” (Matt Richards & Mark Langthorne)

Based on Trident’s offer, they must have begun studio recordings at night in March 1972. It took one year from the first studio recording for the first album to finally be released. At the time of the recordings they didn’t play any concerts, they spent their nights in the studio and racked their brains about the contract during the day. Brian and Freddie put pressure on the managers every day to make something happen after the recordings had been completed; they didn’t understand why the record hadn’t been released yet. They were really worried about the tracks “being obsolete”, or going out of fashion by the time they reached the shops.

These early days didn’t really add very much to their self-confidence, but they sensed something special was taking shape. They had worked really hard on the tracks and knew that it was quite an achievement, they just had to persevere. Brian says it was a very frustrating time for them.

They already had a few melodic tracks and some hard rock songs; it was Freddie’s idea to have melodic tracks as well as heavy rock elements, such as in the song *Liar*.

To begin with Freddie and Brian wrote the songs. As Brian recalls: “Freddie wrote in strange keys. Most guitar bands play in A or E, and probably D and G, but beyond that there’s not much. Most of our stuff, particularly Freddie’s songs, was in oddball keys that his fingers naturally seemed to [??] E-flat, F, A-flat. They’re the last things you want to be playing on a guitar, so as a guitarist you’re forced to find new chords. Freddie’s songs were so rich in chord structures.”

The Trident contract related to management of the band, studio recordings and the handling of copyrights. The contract was signed on 1 November 1972; Queen didn’t rush into signing and didn’t want to get carried away. Maybe this was why Trident didn’t release the record earlier, we just don’t know. The first album was recorded by the end of November, but the recordings were full of mixing errors and so the record was actually completed at the end of January 1973.

Brian and Roger fought a constant battle with the sound engineer Roy Thomas Baker, who initially didn’t understand Queen’s sound concept. They wanted the recording to sound as if you were listening to a live performance. At first they didn’t make much progress with Baker, the guys didn’t like the recordings that had been made. In the end they were able to remix the recordings with John Anthony to get the right sound. That was when they met Mike Stone, who Brian believes had the best ear in the studio, they got on well with him because he understood what they wanted to record and how.

The contract was highly disadvantageous to the band. It seemed Trident didn’t want to take on management tasks, though the company claims this was at the band’s insistence. Negotiating with the studio and representing the band in respect of the studio would have been the manager’s job and the company regarded this as a conflict of interest, which of course it was.

The band’s version is that Trident wanted everything, i.e. total control, which unsettled the members of Queen and was probably the reason the contract was only concluded in November.

After the contract had been signed, Trident bought new equipment and brought in Jack Nelson from America, who had worked in record publishing for a long time and was amazed at Queen’s talent. He did everything he could to find a record label for them.

Talking about Queen, he said:

“They were probably the smartest band in the industry, and totally diverse personalities….but it made a creative force…..Freddie was a very complex guy. Incredibly talented. Brian was a rock’n’roll guitarist and he brought that influence. Incredibly talented. John was the bass-player. He brought the solid bit. Grounded them. Roger, the drummer had a double degree.”

When the first album was complete, Trident found a publicist, Feldman & Co., but they also needed a record label, to make the records and deliver them to the stores.

In 1973 Feldman & Co. persuaded Roy Featherstone, one of the managers at EMI, to listen to Queen’s presentational materials. He liked what he heard and managed to convince EMI manager David Croker, so in March 1973 Queen entered into a contract with the company, which was involved in record distribution in the United Kingdom and Europe.

EMI organised a special show by Queen at the Marquee Club on 9 April of that year, where the guests included Jac Holzman, who was the founder and managing director of US company Elektra Records, he liked Queen, and agreed to distribute their records in America, Japan and Australia.

Jack Holtzman said: “I heard the first Queen album and I absolutely loved it. It was like a beautifully cut jewel, landing in your lap ready to go.”

When Jac Holtzman first heard Queen’s demo, Jac said:

“I was knocked out.”

“‘Keep Yourself Alive,’ ‘Liar' ‘The Night Comes Down’ - all great songs in a sumptuous production that feel like the purest ice-cream poured over a real rock and roll foundation.”

“I was a believer. I wrote an internal memo to staff saying, "I have seen the future of pop music, and it is a band called Queen." And the group took the comments in my memos about staging and performance, far beyond my expectations. By the time of their huge hit single, 'Bohemian Rhapsody' - another seven-and-a-half-minute wonder, by the way - their stage theatrics were phenomenal. Freddie was extraordinarily flamboyant, a great glam rocker. I have rarely seen a band work so hard, have such success, and remain so nice. They were very special people. And when they were in full flight they sold millions and millions of records. All by itself, my signing of Queen more than compensated Steve Ross what he had paid for Elektra.”

(Follow The Music

The Life and High Times of Elektra Records in The Great Years of American Pop Culture by Jac Holczman and Gavan Daws)

They worked obsessively on the albums day and night, driving their technicians mad with their perfectionist attitude, but it was worth it, the wonderful Queen sound came together, which changed from time to time because they didn’t want to repeat themselves and always wanted to create something new, a different sound, a different style, but the originality was always there. I think the main thing about the Queen sound is that it was original and couldn’t be confused with any other bands, and nobody could imitate it.

Just as Freddie’s performance style or voice can’t be compared to or mistaken for anyone else’s, the same goes for the music, despite the fact that every member of the band wrote songs, and this was due to the instrumentation and vocals.

The members of Queen talk about Freddie, Brian and Roger’s voices in the documentary film *These are the days of our lives*:

“‘Keep Yourself Alive,' 'Liar' 'The Night Comes Down' - all great songs in a sumptuous production that feel like the purest ice-cream poured over a real rock and roll foundation.”

“I was a believer. I wrote an internal memo to staff saying, "I have seen the future of pop music, and it is a band called Queen." And the group took the comments in my memos about staging and performance, far beyond my expectations. By the time of their huge hit single, 'Bohemian Rhapsody' - another seven-and-a-half-minute wonder, by the way-their stage theatrics were phenomenal. Freddie was extraordinarily flamboyant, a great glam rocker. I have rarely seen a band work so hard, have such success, and remain so nice. They were very special people. And when they were in full flight they sold millions and millions of records. All by itself, my signing of Queen more than compensated Steve Ross what he had paid for Elektra.

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[Mária: ez ismétlés az előző oldalról!]

Roger: “Naturally I have got the powerful high voice.”

Freddie: ‘He has got the dog whistle pitch, very high voice.’

Freddie jokingly mentions that Roger’s voice is of such high frequency that only animals (dogs and pet cats) are able to hear it.

(This is what Roger (Ben Hardy) was referring to in the film when Freddie (Rami Malek) makes him sing “Galilleo” in an ever higher voice while recording Bohemian Rhapsody, when he said: “If I go any higher, only dogs will hear me.”)

Brian: “I have got the warm sound - I suppose. If you put the 3 voices together it sounded like some kind of paravision.”

As far as I understand it, “paravision” means their three voices were magical together, making an incomparable sound. Of course, being an extremely modest man, Brian would never say anything like that. Brian’s voice is warm, as smooth as velvet and I should add crystal-clear, just like Freddie’s.

One of the technicians who was involved in the recordings pointed out, alluding to Freddie, that “Working with a born star was quite nerve-wracking.”



**The Queen album and Queen II, 1973 and 1974**

The band’s first two albums, Queen and Queen II, were released in 1973 and 1974.

Before the first album was released, Trident sent the single - “Keep Yourself Alive” - to Radio 1 and BBC TV. Radio 1 started playing the track, but people only really started taking notice when the BBC showed the single for the first time on 24 July 1973, with a video put together by the channel.

Queen couldn’t be ignored, their unique sound attracted attention, thanks to Freddie’s exuberant and sensual voice, Brian’s guitar playing that generated a special, synchronised sound, John’s perfect bass and Roger’s modern, powerful drum solos, all of which formed the basis for their sound. The most extraordinary part was the polyphonic singing technique recorded in many layers, produced by Freddie, Brian and Roger. This is most apparent in the song Bohemian Rhapsody on the fifth album, but already sounds wonderful on the first two albums.

It was typical of EMI management at the time that the single arrived in the studio without a label. Fortunately the producer Mike Appleton really liked the song, so it was included in the show with an invitation to phone the studio if you knew which band was on the album. The next day they got a phone call from EMI. Mike Appleton was very surprised at the huge numbers of listeners who had enquired about the band behind the track.

The first album, which included the song Keep Yourself Alive, reached number 24 and stayed in the charts for 17 weeks, meaning the band acquired their first gold disc! The song was written by Brian May, although he had written the original with Tim Staffell, but Brian had fundamentally reworked it. A little later it also went gold in America by virtue of the number of albums sold.

“This remarkable debut album stands out, in total, as a very bold move. ….here is a band with a very clear vision of what they wanted to say, and how they wanted to be heard. The confidence shines out. Queen was ridiculous, catchy and a whole lot of fun.” (Andrew Wild.)

The press really slated the album. They were called second-rate Led Zeppelin imitators.

According to Freddie, they resembled Liza Minnelli more than Led Zeppelin. Liza Minnelli was in any case one of Freddie’s great favourites.

The sound of the first album was explicitly heavy rock, whereas Queen II had both rock and melodic tracks on it, which was a nice innovation.

“When the album was finally released, it was a huge shock. There wasn’t much of a response. When the recordings are made, you tend to think this will be the 8th wonder of the world, but of course it wasn’t. I think we had too much self-confidence, we were even arrogant. I don’t know why?!”– Roger said in an interview. (Queen – From Rags to Rhapsody)

Roger made some pessimistic statements after the album was released, but couldn’t have known at the time there was no cause for concern because their later albums had almost immediate resonance in the form of gold and platinum records.

As far as this is concerned, it’s almost a miracle to think that even in 2021 we can still listen to albums from 1973-74 with devotion and enraptured.

The albums of successful bands at the time - Led Zeppelin, The Who and The Rolling Stones - and Queen’s albums were incomparable. Queen’s music was so special and new, it was so different from the trend, both in terms of musical and performance style, that it must have been quite shocking in a positive sense. As if a light had suddenly been turned on and Queen had dropped down from another planet. The difference is obvious, by comparison with successful contemporary bands. I’m not surprised that Roger was disappointed. I just had to browse YouTube for a few hours to see why the press was incapable of understanding where to place Queen. In fact they couldn’t really be pigeonholed. I understood why the managers quoted above and other music specialists raved about them and were astonished. I would advise anyone to listen to the albums of contemporary musicians when the first Queen albums were released. You don’t have to be a music specialist to notice the difference. I’m not criticising, just observing the factual differences, the extent to which the songs, rhythm, harmony, sound, lyrics and vocals have been worked on.

“The recording of the second album took about 3 and a half months, which in those days was epic.

That album was the first of a hystatic nervous breakdown to the producer???.

We worked around the clock for months.

We've realized the easiest way of getting a hit album is to have a hit single which has some musical validity. That is what we thought and that is what we set out to do.

And it happened very smoothly there. When Queen II came out and had Seven Seas of Rhye on it, which was a hit, and the album became a hit as well. That was great for us.” - Roger said in another interview in the documentary *From Rags To Rhapsody*. From that time they started bringing out the songs they thought were their best as singles, creating more attention for the latest album.

Ronnie Fowler, manager at EMI, took the record into the BBC Top of the Pops editorial team for them to listen to on Tuesday 19 February 1974 when the release date wasn’t yet known.

Fortunately the editorial team liked the song and needed some material at that moment because David Bowie’s publicity film was late. Queen were taken into a studio the same evening, where the recordings began and were completed on the Wednesday. The song was included in the broadcast on Thursday. This forced EMI to make sure the record was in the shops by Saturday. The song became their first hit, reaching a prominent position of number 10 in the British charts.

Tony Brainsby, Queen’s first publicist, recalled the event as follows:

“I remember Freddie running along Oxford Street to watch their appearance on a set in a shop window, because he didn’t own a telly.”

I can just imagine the situation. It’s painfully ridiculous. Freddie the star, if he wanted to see his own production, had to watch it in a shop window. They were difficult times, but it was worth it.

Freddie wrote the lyrics for the song Seven Seas of Rhye and began working on it back in 1969, in the Wreckage era, it’s not known how far he got with it then, but it was first released on this single.

The song is a very important confession about Freddie’s dreams and desires. Freddie himself said it was an absolute fantasy and couldn’t be linked to reality in any way. I agree with the part about it being a fantasy, but the way in which it was linked to reality is another question.

**Interpretation of Seven Seas of Rhye**

Fear me you loathsome, lazy creatures [Mária: nem hallgattam a számot, de a neten így találtam a szöveget?]

I descend upon your earth from the skies  
I command your very souls you unbelievers  
Bring before me what is mine  
At the seven seas of Rhye

In the verse cited above Freddie appears almost like a god, who comes down from the skies, generating fear, because he has such power over people on Earth.

The preachers are those religious people who condemn homosexuality and homophobes who look on them with contempt and resentment.

The reference to unbelievers also indicates that we are almost dealing with gods, who demand to get what is theirs, the seven seas of Rhye. The unbelievers are people who don’t believe in what Freddie says that gay men and lesbians are normal people and have the right to live as they want.

Freddie’s fantasy world appears in this song in that he has enormous power. The seven seas of Rhye is simply his imagined world ruled by him, and in his fantasy he creates a fair and just world where homosexuality is no longer a sin. (The name he gave to this fantasy world is another matter. In his childhood his father often told him about the glorious history of the Persian people, which at its largest (Persian Empire, around 480 BC) could boast of at least seven seas. This is just an assumption on my part. It was no accident that Freddie emphasised he was not of Indian or Pakistani origin, but Persian. He was proud of his origins.)

In his imagination he can beat anyone and faces up to the most powerful forces to achieve the longed-for fair and just world, where everyone is equal.

The next verse continues:

Can you hear me you peers and privy councillors  
I stand before you naked to the eyes  
I will destroy any man who dares abuse my trust  
I swear that you'll be mine  
At the seven seas of Rhye

If necessary, he will destroy anyone who doesn’t help to make his dream come true, who cheats or deceives him. In his anger caused by a deep frustration he would gladly destroy anyone who stands in the way of him living his life freely and from whom he has to hide away and live a double life. The phrase “I swear” shows Freddie’s determination arising from his deep desire for change.

The phrase “You’ll be mine” suggests that everyone will obey him and he can satisfy his sexual desires on anyone, nobody can get in his way. The seven seas of Rhye are his because this is his fantasy world, which no one can take away from him.

The authorities are those who could do something about it, for example the legislators who could change his predicament.

The next verse makes it clear what the song is about, why the strength and power is needed:

Sister I live and lie for you  
Mister do or else die  
You are mine I possess you  
I belong to you forever

He would like to achieve freedom through possession and sexual relations with men and women. At the time he wrote the song he was still bisexual, though he already seems certain of his primary sexual identity, by that time, in addition to Mary, he had also had relationships with men and realised he preferred the company of men. The “sister” is probably Mary, who he lives and sleeps with, while asking a man to make love to him, because he’s almost dying for him. He declares that they belong to him forever. His strong sexual urges intensify his fantasies and he increasingly craves his sexual freedom, primarily because he had not yet broken the news to Mary and had to keep his homosexual relationships secret.

Last verse:

Storm the master marathon  
I’ll fly through  
By flash and thunder fire  
And I'll survive (I'll survive, I'll survive)  
Then I'll defy the laws of nature  
And come out alive, then I'll get you  
Begone with you  
You short and shady senators  
Give out the good  
Leave out the bad evil cries  
I challenge the mighty Titan  
And his troubadours

And with a smile  
I'll take you to the seven seas of Rhye

It was the senators’ job to give out the good, in other words to legally permit homosexual freedom.

He takes on any risks because in his imagination he can survive anything. (This phrase perfectly illustrates that he is stuck in the role of survivor.)

He even seduces the great Titans and their troubadours with a smile and takes them into his fantasy world, where he is capable of ruling over them and doing anything with them.

His determination reminds me of how determined he was when he announced he was going to be a legend rather than a star.

This song is about the same determination; he can beat anyone and cross any obstacle to reach his goal.

He sings the song with such suggestive force that we have to take every word seriously. We believe he will make his desires come true, as he did in his life.

He went to bed with whoever he wanted, he just had to point to the person and they jumped. (This happened a few years later in a gay bar in New York, where male prostitutes awaited the guests.)

The time came when the imaginary world of the Seven Seas of Rhye came true in his life, which he probably cruelly regretted.

Rosemary said Freddie was very angry that the legislature wasn’t on his side and failed to protect the interests of homosexuals, the enacted law only permitted homosexual relations in the bedroom for people over the age of 21, and didn’t yield any practical results, as everybody did what they wanted in private in any case, as did Freddie.

Freddie carried through on his intent and reached his longed-for world of sexual freedom in New York and Munich, where he could make all his fantasies come true in gay bars and other clubs. However, from time to time, his longer-term relationships made him happy or very sad, disappointed and desperately lonely.

The sad truth is that this great freedom cost him his life.

Tony Brainsby was Queen’s first publicist at Trident and was recruited at extravagant cost because he was so popular and successful in London. Tony was an eccentric figure and maybe that was exactly why Freddie also accepted him. This was what he said about Queen:

“What I thought was commendable was that at no time did they style themselves “Freddie Mercury and Queen”. It was always a group image. Freddie never tried to project himself as the leader. As far as I could tell, relationships within the band were mostly harmonious. They were unusual for rock musicians in that they were so intelligent. One could feel quite inadequate in their presence.” (Lesley-Ann Jones)

Even Tony Brainsby was very taken with Freddie:

“Obviously Freddie stuck out the most. He was such a raving poofter, I couldn’t believe my eyes at our first meeting. He was dressed in red velvet skin-tight trousers, had black varnish on his fingernails, long hair and of course all those teeth – he was extremely touchy about his teeth. He was strong-willed, nakedly ambitious but also very charming. In those days Freddie was an inwardly very aggressive and angry man in the sense that he knew he should be a star and wasn’t yet. It’s not a side of him that he allowed too many people to see, but it was definitely all the way through him. He felt that stardom was his by rights and he was extremely frustrated at the time it seemed to be taking for him to reach it. In my view he was very much the fight in the band.” (Matt Richards & Mark Langthorne)

“Later, as he got to know Freddie better, he described him as follows:

“He had many stylish little quirks that would stick in your mind. He’d paint the fingernails of just his right or just the left hand, with black nail polish. Or he’d just varnish one little finger. He’d say ‘Darling’ or ‘My dears’ in every other sentence, and his camp delivery was highly amusing and very endearing. He was great to have around. Never a dull moment. The girls all loved it when he came into the office. ….At the time, of course, he was living with Mary. To start with, his sex life was a complete mystery to us all: we could never quite fathom it. He certainly never spoke about it.” (Lesley-Ann Jones)

“I really admired him. Here was a man bursting with creative powers which were not simply in someone’s imagination. They existed. He knew he had it in him, however old he was at the time…twenty-seven, I believe. I mean, they were quite old for a band, weren’t they, to be starting out. He’d all this inside him forever. How frustrating it must have been, knowing that he had what it took, trying desperately to make it big-time, and not getting anywhere for so long.” (Lesley-Ann Jones)

Freddie’s creative resources were really low for quite a while, while the others were completing their studies he just had to wait, but it was worth waiting, he knew that Brian and Roger were musicians with whom he could make his dreams come true. He had to wait five years to start working on the first album with Queen, by that time including John as well, who was ideally suited to the band. He was more reserved than the others, but was a very stable resource all along and as an electrical engineer he understood all their devices, and even made his own amplifier, which became famous as the Deacy Amp. After the break with Trident it was John who mainly kept his eye on the finances.

There are 20 songs on the two albums, 11 of them were written by Freddie. This represents a great achievement. I should add that writing songs was primarily Freddie and Brian’s responsibility, but Roger and John also wrote some fantastically successful hits. For example Roger wrote Radio Ga Ga and Sheer Heart Attack, and we can thank John for the sensationally successful I Want To Break Free and Another One Bites The Dust.

At the time of writing the songs Freddie was already living with Mary, and they were still in the first three years, when the intoxication of love was or should still have been fresh. We know from David Minns’s book that Freddie regularly cheated on Mary and lied to her because he was afraid of losing her. The song *Liar* is about this constant remorse, sense of guilt and frustration. This is my interpretation in light of what is known:

The songs are poems in song form. Freddie claimed that generally the songs were not about anyone, but about the kind of feelings that could affect anyone.

The songs are poems, confessions and visions from the depths of the soul, and can be combined with fantasy, but always contain personal experiences and associated raw emotions. The timing of when a poet or songwriter writes something is never a coincidence. Whenever a problem emerges in our lives, music and singing can help to reduce tension. Music did a great service to Freddie, helped him work through his traumatic experiences and bring out his feelings of depression related to his sexuality and not least to reduce the tension generated as a result.

Sexuality plays a huge role in everyone’s life, we are all instinctively programmed to give birth to our offspring and conceive; any intensified functioning of our hormonal balance may potentially lead to enhanced sexual urges. He was partly able to suppress this strong sexual urge in the creative process, but only partly, because his private life wasn’t ideal from this point of view. He couldn’t tell Mary or anyone else about this secret. The conflict that Hungarian writer Frigyes Karinthy also addressed in his poem Előszó [“*Foreword*”]: “If I can’t tell anybody, then I’ll tell everyone” is ideally suited to Freddie’s situation. He couldn’t tell Mary, but he told everyone in the songs.

Freddie himself said he wrote some of his songs very quickly, and suffered with others, which took him a long time to come to fruition.

Deeply suppressed feelings and serious conflicts lie behind those songs that only materialised with difficulty, where the situation wasn’t yet ready to be dealt with, which was why they didn’t emerge so easily. Whereas other songs, like Killer Queen, were about his fantasy and linked to positive feelings that gave Freddie a boost, he was capable of dreaming up a song in the bathroom and putting it all together in one night.

**What is Liar about?**

The song Liar on Queen’s first album deals beautifully with an important, unresolved problem in Freddie’s life at the time.

The song lasts 6 minutes 25 seconds, making it longer than Bohemian Rhapsody and demonstrating that he intends to cover a highly-disturbing conflict, requiring a lot of time and effort to convey something that was weighing heavily on Freddie in music.

The serious nature of the topic is also indicated by the length of the introduction (1 minute 25 seconds). The drums and then the guitars create an almost insane tension together in the terribly exciting introduction, by the time Freddie starts to sing your hands are clenched, your legs are moving to the beat, your heart is pounding and you can hardly wait for something to happen. Freddie finally begins to sing.

In a soft, childish voice he confesses to his father, as if to a priest in the confessional, that he has committed a sin, and asks for help in the most fallible possible way, like an innocent child.

“- I have sinned dear Father, Father I have sinned - Freddie repeats and asks him: “- Try and help me Father”.

The father appears to the child as omnipotent, almost like a god, who is dear to Freddie, and is worth turning to for help. But this is just Freddie’s wishful thinking, the fact that he and his father don’t have the kind of trusting relationship that would allow him to ask for advice in person is saddening, in reality there is nobody he could call dear father, and so the conversation is taking place in Freddie’s mind and not in reality. He feels bad about having to lie to his loved ones. He sings about his agonising feelings and thoughts in this song and about what would happen if he were to come out as gay. He is talking to his parents, but in truth also addressing everybody.

He begins to raise his voice and says: “Won’t you let me in?” Freddie was hoping his father would open his heart, love and accept him, with his homosexuality, but even without having the conversation he knows the answer without asking. He knows his parents’ opinions as they already shamed him once during his childhood by taking him out of school. His parents thought what he had done was wrong, and with their disapproval they were declaring him guilty, even unintentionally, and thereby drove him away from them.

“Oh, nobody believes me” – he complains in pain, not even my parents believed me; neither my girlfriend nor anyone else believes that homosexual desire isn’t a joke, but involves considerable suffering and a painful sense of loss. If the desire is satisfied, then the price is contempt, being declared guilty, reprisals, and judgment.

Next, singing in chorus, they shout: “Liar”. The chorus is the voice of the “people”, the voice of everyone who looks on homosexuality as a sin. He himself is the “Liar” in the song, lying to Mary and the whole world: he is in a heterosexual relationship just to meet expectations.

Again he repeats the word in agony: “Liar!” – the criticism comes again and then he asks: “Why don’t you believe me?” – a painful question, but then apart from him who could understand what he was going through, obviously only a gay partner, who for the time being only came into the picture on an occasional basis.

The self-torment continues: he confesses another sin to a sire with higher social status, let’s say a king for example. Since Freddie addressed the queen in some of his other songs, I assume the rest of his confession was addressed to the king.

“Sire, I have stolen  
Stolen many times  
Raised my voice in anger  
When I know I never should”

The confession is in a quieter, child-like voice again when he says he has stolen many times, his voice is raised when he sings I raised my voice, and then he does in fact raise his voice in anger. Theft as a sin is about the fact that he stole, i.e. he was cheating on Mary, for the time being with casual relationships.

He is angry, disappointed and frustrated that he has to have such dialogues and explain himself as if he were in court.

He shouts out in pain: “Oh, everybody deceives me!” He feels cheated, nobody has empathy with him, nobody wants to suffer with him, or help him, he is asking in vain.

“Liar” – the accusation can be heard again. And then he asks: “Why don’t you leave me alone” - from the sound of his own conscience. Why does he have to dwell on this again and again? Why does he have to deal with this all the time? It would be good to finally escape these agonising thoughts and the sense of guilt.

By contrast, as Freddie is singing the verse, the music comes again, the guitars and drums, adding further to the hardly bearable tension. Oh, what else might come; wasn’t it enough already? When will the flood of self-torment end?

His heart is aching, the soul is anxious, but the voice won’t leave Freddie alone, and says again:

“-Liar!”

There then follows some high and mighty lecturing from the father or king, from those who judge in general, who always know better because:

“I have sailed the seas  
(Liar)  
From Mars to Mercury  
(Liar)  
I have drunk the wine  
(Liar)

Time after time

You are lying to me

You are lying to me”

This answer means there is no need for confessions, and I don’t even have to listen to you, I can do everything better because I’m more experienced than you, I’ve sailed the seas, in fact I’ve even been in space, and have drunk wine, I’m more grown up and smarter than you, so I know you’re a liar and of course guilty.

Freddie then asks for forgiveness in agony, he is humble, and again in a child’s voice continues:

“Father please forgive me  
You know you'll never leave me  
Please, will you direct me in the right way?”

But the apology, humiliation and remorse is of no use.

“-Liar, liar, liar!” - the judges shout.

“That is what they keep calling me!” – Freddie continues to sing ever louder and more angrily.

“- Liar, liar, liar!” – the judgmental chorus is singing now, almost yelling.

The singing fades out. The music can barely get more intense, but continues.

In the next section Freddie changes the tone of the song, mockingly asking and continuing to sing:

“-Listen, are you gonna listen?

“Mama I am gonna be your slave

All day long

Mama I am gonna try behave

All day long

Mama I am gonna be your slave

All day long

I am gonna serve you till your dying day

All day long

I am gonna keep you till your dying day

All day long

I am gonna kneel down by your side and pray

All day long

And pray

All day long

And pray

All day long

All day long”

Freddie doesn’t take this section seriously because he knows what the reaction would be. He would do anything, in humility, and would even pray all day, and still wouldn’t be able to reason with his parents or anybody else, and this is why the tone is cynical.

He stops singing again.

The next musical part increases the pressure even further, as if you could hear sobbing and begging, you can feel the tension of waiting for a judgment and then comes the cruel conclusion, shouting so everyone can hear:

“All day long, all day long, all day long  
Liar, liar, never ever let you win  
Liar, liar everything you do is sin  
Liar, nobody believes you  
Liar, they bring you down before you begin”

and in the end with vitriolic scorn in his voice:

“Ooh, let me tell you this

So now you know you could be dead before they let you”

Freddie’s inner struggle comes to an end, but doesn’t bring relief. The last line is the saddest of all, as now that he’s gone we know he was right.

A lot of people are still homophobic today, despising, mocking and abusing gay men and lesbians. In the summer of 2020 two young women were attacked on a bus one evening by young teenagers in London. They were beaten up for holding hands with each other.

Soon afterwards three gay men were stabbed by an assailant in a London park. It’s frightening. When will this come to an end, will it ever end? I don’t know.

However, I’m certain that fans of Freddie and Queen, even if they were once homophobic, will have definitely left this judgmental stance behind.

Brian told a nice story about one memorable performance of the song Liar in the documentary *From Rags To Rhapsody*:

“The Rainbow was almost like a pinnacle. Not long before we'd seen David Bowie rise from obscurity to be able to play in Rainbow and it seemed such a big deal. And I remember at that time how amazing it would be if we could do this. And I think it was only a year later when we actually did that gig.

And live of course we very quickly became aware of the fact you get one shot, so you gotta deliver, we wanted to capture people, we wanted to move them, engage them and we used to say deafen them and blind them and more.

And we have so many mishaps on the stage, powercuts were quite normal.”

Freddie: I tell you what, we just pose and you look at us.

Anyone who wants to pose with us is cordially invited. Come on.

Brian: It was nice really, because the audience was so friendly to us

It didn't matter, they were very patient. It is a great feeling when you realize that” - Brian finished.

When Freddie was finally able to start writing and singing his own songs in Queen, he had an opportunity to release the tension that had built up in him over many years, and which had been caused by waiting, inertia due to lack of money, a feeling of loneliness and hyperactivity.

He improved his singing voice beautifully in the first one or one and a half years, and in time it just got nicer, better and more special.

Given that Brian and John were preoccupied with their studies, Freddie and Roger carried a greater share of the burden and had to write more songs.

Freddie probably didn’t mind because he was full of musical ideas and melodies that had long been trying to get out, which he had heard perfectly in his mind, “all” he had to do was record them and make them successful. They had plenty of work and it required all their fighting ability.

**How to surpass Love Story in 1 minute 18 seconds**

Freddie wrote his first ever love song on the first album, and sings so heartbreakingly about his disappointment that anyone who listens to it knows this is not just any old love song, but founded on real-life experience. The title is *Nevermore* and it’s breathtaking. What an incredibly beautiful song, it’s a pity it’s not longer. I don’t know who the song was written for; I couldn’t work it out from the biographical data.

Love Story is a very fine song, but Freddie squeezed more emotion into this short song than is in Love Story, with the film and music together.

The lyrics say everything and are worth quoting:

Nevermore

There's no living in my life anymore  
The seas have gone dry  
And the rain's stopped falling  
Please don't you cry any more  
Can't you see  
Listen to the breeze  
Whisper to me please  
Don't send me to the path of nevermore

Even the valleys below  
Where the rays of the sun  
Were so warm and tender  
Now haven't anything to grow  
Can't you see?  
Why did you have to leave me? (nevermore)  
Why did you deceive me? (nevermore)  
You sent me to the path of nevermore  
When you say you didn't love me anymore  
Ah ah nevermore nevermore

When he sings the line: “When you said you didn’t love me anymore” sensitive hearts will start to bleed for Freddie.

These and his other love songs show that love is always the same, gay men and lesbians feel a deep love towards their partners in exactly the same way as heterosexuals. They crave each other’s company, presence and embraces in exactly the same way as anyone else.

Listening to this song, I started to wonder why he never wrote a love song for Mary. Freddie said he could never have fallen in love with a man in the same way as he did with Mary! Hmmmmm? This statement is definitely true, even though we fall in love in a different way with everyone, and the emotion and intensity are different; the difference lies in depth and passion. He loved David Minns with a deep passion, as witnessed by the letters he wrote to him and the songs he wrote for him. This love was genuine.

(YouTube: Queen – Nevermore – official video)

**Queen’s first tour**

The band’s first long-awaited tour took place in the UK in 1973. The main attraction was Mott The Hoople, a successful British rock band. It was customary for a support band to play before the headline act, giving an opportunity for new bands, such as Queen, to be introduced to an audience.

The tour was made up of 20 concerts, at first-rate venues. The last gig was at London’s Hammersmith Odeon, just before Christmas.

Queen’s popularity began to take off during and after the tour and people started buying their records.

Despite the fact that the music press continuously subjected the band to harsh criticism, readers ranked Queen 3rd in a public opinion survey about the best new bands.

**Queen’s second tour**

By the time they went on tour to publicise their second album, they were the lead act and no longer had to play second fiddle.

“When we had the opportunity of playing with Mott The Hoople (in 1973), that was great, but I knew damn well the moment we finished that tour, as far as Britain was concerned, we would soon be the ones headlining.”

(Freddie Mercury)

The tour consisted of 22 gigs in the UK, between March 1 and 29, 1974.

It was Freddie’s idea for Zandra Rhodes to design special outfits for this tour. The tunic-style white tops were made of silk and had bat wings, so Freddie was free to raise his arms up high; he looked like he had grown wings. The clothes remind me of a fairy’s tunic and of *My Fairy King*. He also dressed in white at his earlier gigs, but didn’t want to perform in the same clothes again and it was good for his developing image, which was about the Queen sound and songs being special and at least as exclusive as the most fashionable designer’s clothes. The others readily accepted the idea, though EMI was less happy when it received an invoice for 5,000 pounds, but it was certainly worth it for them too.

Zandra Rhodes didn’t come cheaply, as she designed clothes for the leading artists. Queen were sending a message to the others, we’re just as cool as you are. And they were absolutely right. By taking care of our appearance, we’re suggesting that we’re valuable and worthy of respect.

There were various scandals on the tour, students fought with each other, two people were stabbed and of course the press made a meal of it.

Nevertheless, at the next gig on the tour, the audience celebrated in dramatic style: while waiting for the band to appear, they sang the British national anthem -“God Save the Queen.”

There could have been no more worthy celebration of Freddie’s queenly and the others’ kingly nature. It then became customary for fans to greet the band at concerts by singing the national anthem. They must have found this dramatic and celebratory reception shocking and astonishing, but no doubt they deserved it. Nobody would have had any idea about the amount of effort required to put the albums together. Originally it was Brian’s idea to play a recorded version of the anthem at the end of concerts, but he couldn’t have anticipated that fans would not only sing the anthem to celebrate Queen Elizabeth, but also the band. The fans’ idea was astonishing, there was no better way they could have expressed their gratitude.

Whenever I hear the British national anthem, in my mind I always see the faces of the guys from Queen and of Elizabeth II. Nice faces, nice people.

**The March of The Black Queen**

Freddie wrote another beautiful, exciting song on the Queen II album, The March of The Black Queen, which was also about his sexual fantasies.

The first verse goes as follows:

“Do you mean it, do you mean it, do you mean it?  
Why don't you mean it?  
Why do I follow you and where do you go?”

These lines are indicative of Freddie’s inner doubts, is this what I really want? Why do I have to follow my desires and where will they lead? – he asks about himself.

He then talks to someone and tries to convince them what a wonderful experience they would have making love, but in reality he is conducting an internal dialogue with himself, replying to the question in the first section on why he follows his desires:

“You've never seen nothing like it, no, never in your life  
Like, going up to heaven and then coming back alive”

The four lines shown above refer to an orgasm, as if you were going up to heaven, you will lose yourself in pleasure as if you were dying and yet come back alive. (Has anyone ever read such an amazing comparison? I don’t think so. Freddie was at least as good a poet as he was a musician and singer.)

He continues convincing himself in the next section:

“Let me tell you all about it

And the world will so allow it  
Give me a little time to choose”

(Freddie was right, all we had to do was make a choice and the world would allow gay men and lesbians to choose a partner too, to live with them or get married, but sadly he didn’t live to see it and had to conceal his desires thoughout his life.)

In the next section he lists why it’s worth following his desires:

“Water babies singing in a lily pool delight  
Blue powder monkeys praying in the dead of night”

Water-loving bathers are singing in a pool overgrown with water lilies, generating excitement and an anticipation of pleasure. Freddie adored flowers and singing, and always took great pleasure in them. At the same time the praying of the guys procuring gunpowder (who delivered powder from the warehouse to the ship’s cannons) in the middle of the night is a startling, slightly scary image compared to the water lilies, preparing our mood for the pleasure and fear generated by the appearance of the mysterious Black Queen.

“Here comes the black queen, poking in the pile  
Fie-fo the black queen, marching single file  
Take this, take that, bring them down to size”

The Black Queen is Freddie himself, choosing between potential lovers at will (poking in the pile), these lovers will have their hunger satisfied, in other words their desires will be satisfied, he instructs his servant to put the chosen ones in their place, i.e. to let them know they’re not as important as they think, they should acknowledge that they are the queen’s property, and she can do what she wants with them.

He gives the servant further instructions on how the chosen ones should be prepared for the act in the next section:

Put them in the cellar with the naughty boys  
A little sugar then a rub-a-dub-a-baby oil  
  
The chosen ones must be locked up with the bad boys, or in other words with those who already know what good sex is like, they must be made delicious and desirable with sugar, baby oil, a sweet taste, scented skin, anything to enhance the sense of erotica.

And then confirmation that the Black Queen is Freddie himself:

“Black on, black on, every fingernail and toe”

The black varnished nails carry a certain weight, but if that weren’t enough, there is the black, enigmatic clothing on stage when performing the song, adorned with a few sequins, with a silver-coloured ornament on his right arm, resembling the glove that partly concealed his hand, meaning I’ll show you something of myself, but not everything. This is also the reason behind the songs with secretive lyrics.

The black clothes and sequins intensify the mystery under the sparkling lights on stage, and the playfully provocative stage presence creates an erotic impression.

The long, black hair and androgenous, sexy, indiscretely skin-tight clothes, which emphasise every part of his figure, are also aimed at arousing desire.

The demonic look (eyes highlighted in black) and the sexy clothing emphasise his own desirability, and the dark colours and stage symbolise that he is in darkness, i.e. conceal Freddie’s secret about his sexuality.

The sequins sparkle under the lights from time to time, meaning I’ll show you something, I’ll flash something of myself, but I can’t go out into the light (sadly). Freddie probably created this impression deliberately; he claims this wasn’t the case, though this is both believable and unbelievable.

(A famous surrealist artist once painted a woman’s face without any eyeballs and a mass of hair braided with snakes. The title of the painting is *In the gates of time*. During my analysis it turned out that the artist had a cataract and was afraid of going blind. He had no idea what the picture was about. He was convinced this was just a surrealist picture, which didn’t really tell us anything about him, and at most revealed the depths of his imagination, which in any case was true and the picture was wonderful. Irrespective of the picture, he really was afraid of the cateract but had no idea he had painted this fear in the picture.)

The lyrics continue:

“We've only begun, begun  
Make this, make that, keep making all that noise  
Ooh, march to the black queen

Now I've got a belly full  
You can be my sugar baby  
You can be my honey chile”

We have only just begun, we’re still at the foreplay stage, he gives instructions, letting them know what he desires, what kind of sounds he wants to hear, for example moaning and groaning, when his belly is full, i.e. he has been satisfied, he offers to be his long-term partner and love, and would treat him like his own dear child.

He gives the commands while making love, this is partly a sexual fantasy, which is about unconditional obedience, and partly because it’s better than being afraid of a partner, so at least in his fantasy he has control, he doesn’t have to worry about being abandoned and lonely.

And now the really touching part:

“A voice from behind me reminds me  
Spread out your wings, you are an angel  
Remember to deliver with the speed of light  
A little bit of love and joy  
Everything you do bears a will and a why and a wherefore  
A little bit of love and joy”

An inner voice warns him that the relationship is not just about sex and getting physical, but also about kindness, love and joy. The Black Queen symbolises Freddie’s physical desires. The dark colour also indicates that desire is the dark side, something you should keep secret and be ashamed of.

These lines suggest that he really is good, he wants to give love and pleasure, which is very true of Freddie - physicality is just the consummation of love, which is what a relationship should be about.

(Freddie is an angel who has been blessed, but only in part. Like many people, he has both angelic and devilish attributes. The question is whether or not he’s able to control the devil.)

But there is a problem, as the next section explains:

“In each and every soul lies a man  
And very soon he'll deceive and discover  
But even to the end of his life, he'll bring a little love”

Neither he nor his partner managed to stay faithful as a result of intense desire, but the love for his partner stayed with him. This was relevant to his longer-term relationships because his soul was full of love and gratitude, alongside a sense of guilt and remorse of course.

And this was what happened in his life, he literally gathered his loved ones around him until the end of his life, and still loved them even if he was in love with someone else. He held onto Mary till the end of his life, called David Minns on the phone years after they had broken up and as if nothing had happened started sweet-talking him again and so on, until he had created a small “famly” around him.

The Black Queen takes power back from the angel in the next section:

“I reign with my left hand, I rule with my right  
I'm lord of all darkness, I'm queen of the night  
I've got the power - now to do the march of the black queen”

Physical desire was stronger in Freddie than the desire to be faithful; desire controlled him and commanded him to behave like the Black Queen, to be sexy and a conqueror. His desires brought darkness into his life and defined what he would do and when. The angel was the light in Freddie, the kindness, love and faithfulness, whereas cheating and infidelity represented the dark side, resulting in a sense of shame, guilt, frustration and disgusting behaviour.

Since the Black Queen, i.e. intensive physical desires, dominates his life, she also determines his fate throughout his life.

The march of the Black Queen refers to Freddie’s “marching” up and down the stage, in fact he really does march; he is proud, self-confident and a conqueror. This is where the title comes from; the term black may refer to his hair colour.

The lyrics show the extent to which his own physicality makes him vulnerable. The lyrics continue:

“My life is in your hands, I'll fo and I'll fie  
I'll be what you make me, I'll do what you like  
I'll be a bad boy, I'll be your bad boy  
I'll do the march of the black queen

Walking true to style  
She's vulgar abuse and vile  
The black queen tattoos all her pies  
She boils and she bakes and she never dots her I's”

Because of his uncontrollable physical desires he even puts his life in the hands of the one he loves, gives him complete control and would be willing to do anything, he would be happy to play the bad boy, the sensual male or female role of someone who is highly erotic, vulgar, abusive and evil, and knows every trick. The reference to baking and boiling is indicative of the fervour of the relationship, effectively he has tattoos everywhere, and is insatiable, he never stops, this is what the phrase about not dotting i’s refers to.

From here on he is talking to himself:

“Forget your sing-a-longs and your lullabies  
Surrender to the city of the fireflies  
Dance to the devil in beat with the band  
To hell with all of you, hand in hand  
But now it's time to be gone  
La, la, la, la, forever, forever”

In other words, forget your childhood, grow up and give into sensual pleasures - the city of fireflies (a city of fireflies represents a huge sensual desire).

Dance to the devil, or in other words be a bad boy, according to the Zoroastrian religion homosexuality is an alliance with the devil. Everyone can go to hell, you don’t have to care about anyone else’s opinion; they can go to hell forever.

It seems like he has decided the fate of this relationship, he will take responsibility, he’s not interested in anyone’s opinion, not even Mary’s, at least this is what he would like to do, but in fact for the time being he really does care about others’ opinions, which is exactly what is causing the anguish, internal conflicts and struggles that the song is about.

Freddie knew exactly how to say what he wanted to say in euphemisms, so only those people would understand who listen carefully. He could easily say anything, nobody was stopping him??.

In any event his stage performance showed that he enjoyed singing. He enjoyed the witty lyrics, smiling to himself, he made sure we had our work cut out and would have to think for a while about we had actually heard.

In any case the content is reproduced brilliantly, cheerfully and playfully, all his fans have probably guessed or know what the song is about. It’s a very impressive performance style, a quite fantastic song.

Seven Seas Of Rhye reached number 35 in the charts during the tour, a few days later the Queen II album came out and achieved a prominent 7th place. Following the success of the 2nd album, the developing fan base also bought the first album in increasing numbers.

Freddie’s 28th birthday present was the Queen II album going silver, and the award was given to him at a press reception by Jeanette Charles, the best impersonator of the Queen, at Café Royal in London.

They didn’t have to wait much longer for the breakthrough hit…

Mott The Hoople invited them on their four-week American tour, on which they played six concerts in New York’s Uris Theatre on Broadway. After the last concert poor old Brian collapsed because he had contracted hepatitis. They were only able to play 20 of the 40 concerts that were originally planned. They abandoned the tour and flew home; Brian was taken to hospital and they began recording the Sheer Heart Attack album without him. In his despair Brian even thought they would drop him from the band. What an impossible idea, how could they have managed without him? They couldn’t.

**Sheer Heart Attack album, October 1974**

“The album is very varied, we took it to extremes I suppose, but we are very interested in studio techniques and wanted to use what was available. We learnt a lot about technique while we were making the first two albums. Of course there has been some criticism, and the constructive criticism has been very good for us. But to be frank I'm not that keen on the British music press, and they've been pretty unfair to us. I feel that up and coming journalists, by and large, put themselves above the artists. They've certainly been under a misconception about us. We've been called a supermarket hype. But if you see us up on a stage, that's what we're all about. We are basically a rock band.

(Queen interviews – Freddie Mercury Melody Maker 1974)

The single *Killer Queen* was released on 11 October 1974, and reached number 2 in the charts. This song introduced the Sheer Heart Attack album, the title track of which was written by Roger, although it didn’t make it onto the album in the end, we can only come across it on the 1977 album, News Of The World.

“Killer Queen is about a high-class call girl” – said Freddie at the time. “I was trying to say that classy people can be whores as well.”

Freddie was astonishingly smart at publicising the song and everything in general. However, by using the word “whores”, he reveals what he thought of himself and why he had a guilty conscience.

“It was a turning point,” – Brian later remarked. “It was the song that best summed up our kind of music, and a big hit, and we desperately needed it as a mark of something successful happening for us. We were penniless, you know, just like any other struggling rock’n’roll band. All sitting around in London bedsitters, just like the rest.”

**Killer Queen and Freddie**

Although the word killer can mean a murderer, we can also use it to say that something is great.

The song is connected to Freddie in many respects and can primarily be linked to his sexual fantasies, but we can also find some of his personality traits in this elegant courtesan.

We know the word Queen can also mean gay. The analysis of the song The March Of The Black Queen reveals it was about Freddie and he identified himself with the Black Queen in the song. The same thing happens in this song, he’s just playing the role of a courtesan. He too would like to have more sexual relationships.

[Mária: maybe the lyrics of Killer Queen should be inserted here??]

Freddie really enjoyed the relative luxury he experienced in Zanzibar; he said he liked the idea of affluence. Clearly this was why he worked so hard that he wouldn’t have to go without anything, just as this courtesan also had a very nice life, keeping French champagne, Moët and Chandon (which was also Freddie’s favourite) in a stylish cabinet, offering her guests cake as elegantly as Marie Antoinette had in her time. We know that all kinds of delicacies could be found in the French Royal Palace, not to mention luxury. (Freddie’s house Garden Lodge later measured up to these conditions in every way. Luxury, elegance and an extravagant lifestyle were part of his dreams and fantasies.)

She was so illustrious that her guests could have included Khrushchev or Kennedy. She was able to invite guests in a way that nobody could refuse, just like Freddie, she was irresistible and inimitable, just like Freddie; she had practised her etiquette well, just like Freddie among the nuns of the school in Zanzibar during his young childhood, and later at school in Britain too.

The girl was first-class at what she did, and used every resource to achieve what she wanted. Freddie’s humour is revealed by the varied resources he lists: gunpowder, gelatine, dynamite combined with a laser beam, guaranteed to blow your mind, anytime she wanted.

And this is true of Freddie too, partly the humour, and partly his attitude to success, which he sees as guaranteed in every moment.

To avoid complications, the girl uses several addresses and speaks like a baroness.

Freddie also liked to avoid complications - see his relationship with Mary Austin for example - and was the diplomat in the band. He was the one that used to smooth over the band’s arguments. He said this himself and Brian confirmed it several times.

Everyone was very impressed with Freddie’s politeness, even though English people tend to be quite polite as a rule, even the most ordinary people – of course there are exceptions as in everything – but Freddie even managed to surpass this. His friends’ parents praised his amazing politeness and he surprised his friends with this attribute too. It must have been very conspicuous among rebellious young people in the 1970s.

The lyrics add to the woman’s demanding nature: her perfume was French of course, her taste sophisticated, she was fastidious and precise.

Freddie really looked after himself too, even under the most difficult circumstances his appearance was always immaculate, his taste was “sophisticated”; he wore velvet, silk, belts, jewellery, jackets and blazers, while the others were in torn jeans, t-shirts and cardigans. When he became rich, he bought dozens of top-brand perfumes.

Moreover, the woman will go to bed in an instant, she’s as playful as a pussycat, and then is temporarily exhausted, out of action, temporarily “out of gas”, like a machine, she’s able to drive anyone wild and will go anywhere to get you, and has an insatiable appetite, she’ll go to China or Japan if that’s the price of getting what she wants. Finally she asks if you wanna try.

Freddie’s playful sexual fantasy is inexhaustible, the way the Black Queen put the chosen lovers among the bad boys and placed them in icing sugar and oiled them reveals everything. As playful as a pussycat. Freddie had two cats at the time and adored them. Freddie would go anywhere to get anyone. He used hundreds of different tricks to build his own and the band’s career, starting with a sexy, elegant appearance, a theatrical performance style, smoke bombs and a sawn-off microphone, and charming conversations with managers. His sexual energy was inexhaustible, just like his creativity.

And he sings on the song *Funny How Love Is* on the Queen II album that he will effectively notice opportunities for love anywhere and in anything, he always goes wherever he has to, revealing he is focussed on it and that’s why he notices anyone in the same boat.

Matt Richards and Mark Langthorne quote Eric Plugger [Mária, biztos ez a neve, nem Eric Hall?, nem találtam egy Plugger nevű valakit Freddievel kapcsolatosan egy gyors Google kereséssel?], one of EMI’s managers.

“He (Freddie) used to be infatuated with me, I don’t know why. Was I his type? I assume I must have been. He told me that song (Killer Queen) was about me. He said to me “I am the queen, Eric, and you’re killing me because I can’t have you.”

“I used to keep champagne in my little fancy cabinet. I had monster permed hair, like Marie Antoinette.”

This is an interesting addition compared to the meaning of the song as described above.

So there was someone who had set Freddie’s fantasy in motion, but the song is clearly about Freddie, Eric just provided the inspiration, as a potential lover. Freddie didn’t like rejection, and didn’t give up easily. We don’t know what the end game might have been here, as Eric keeps a discrete silence about that.

In any case, given that Freddie was very busy with rehearsals and recordings, I suspect he didn’t have much time left over for adventures in love, and so he was forced to live them in his imagination. Some nice little songs were created from this compulsion, but Freddie’s addiction to work was just as strong as his sexual fantasy, and so he was able to release his energy in his work.

He was also conscientious and wasn’t in the habit of letting the band or the audience down.

It’s interesting to observe that while the song is about a woman who is exhausted after sex, which for biological reasons tends to be more typical of men, this is just a minor thing and doesn’t mean much, but the fact that he compares the woman to a machine makes me think of a later song, *Don’t Stop Me Now*, in which he sings that he is a sex machine, which he soon made use of as well.

In the same way, the possibility of laser therapy also arose due to a regrettable situation. Nodules had grown on Freddie’s vocal cords because of the highly intensive series of gigs, and he fought with them throughout his life. He sought out almost every specialist, and without exception they urged him to stop singing, to rest for months, or else he could lose his voice completely. They were forced to cancel half of their first independent US tour. In his later career these nodules kept Freddie in constant fear. During the 20 years they spent together there was only one occasion when he marched off stage because he had gone completely dumb, but they often had to cancel concerts, while at other times he kept on singing to the end at any cost, with honey and lemonade. Interestingly and touchingly, Roger and Brian often helped Freddie out in concerts. When he had a problem with his voice Freddie just mimed the high notes, while Roger or Brian sang and nobody noticed. That’s what I call fantastic collaboration, and of course it was much more than that, they had become like a family.

In view of the song’s success they were invited back on the BBC’s Top Of The Pops show, further adding to their popularity.

The performance can be seen on YouTube. Freddie is singing in his favourite fox fur coat, his nails painted black, richly adorned with jewellery, just as seductively as a real Killer Queen. It’s an unmissable experience.

(YouTube: Queen – Killer Queen (Top Of The Tops, 1974).

Another of Freddie’s songs with beautiful lyrics, *Lily Of The Valley*, starts with the question of why he has no relative equilibrium in his life, why does he always have to be on a real high or very sad. Elsewhere he describes himself as someone who falls in love easily, and when the relationship has reached a nicely balanced level and things are going well, then he destroys it. If he breaks up, it means nobody can leave him, which is a painful and humiliating feeling and strikes at his vanity. His questions are rhetorical: why does everyone tell me not to do this? This question is about his own inner voices, he is aware he is ruining his relationships, but is unable to stop. He would give his kingdom for a horse to find out the answer. Maybe Freddie didn’t realise that his school years hadn’t just caused a lack of affection and a sense of security, but also resulted in emotional instability. This song represents a dialogue with himself and he is in a fantasy world again. A messenger came from the seven seas to tell the king he’d lost the throne. He is the king and the “messenger” is Mercury, which shows he is having an internal dialogue. The Serpent of the Nile provides a little relief, Freddie sings. He really loved old films; he was probably talking about a film from in the 1950s, which is a melodramatic story about Antony, Cleopatra and Ceasar. This calm doesn’t last long because wars never cease. This is the internal war. The lost throne probably refers to his ruined relationship with Mary, the fact that love had cooled down and so Freddie was looking for new adventures (as Mary and David Minns reported.)

The Sheer Heart Attack tour began with 19 venues in the United Kingdom and lasted for three weeks.

From then on they used pyrotechnics to make the show even more spectacular.

The last concert was at Rainbow Theatre in London, where they were so successful that that they played the same venue again the next evening, in front of a full house.

This concert was recorded and available on DVD, under the title Live at the Rainbow ’74. It reached the shops in 2014 and is only available on CD. However, the video is on YouTube, it’s worth searching for the “full” version. The show is very exciting and spectacular. Freddie and Brian start out in their angel’s tunic and Freddie is in full make-up. At the end of the show Freddie puts on the black queen “costume”, so we can witness everything that I’ve written about Freddie’s stage appearance in this one-hour show.

In total they perform 21 songs; the fourth is White Queen, written by Brian, a wonderful, lyrical song. Freddie sings emotionally and plays the piano fantastically, and Brian’s guitar playing is really impressive.

The main reason it’s worth watching this compilation is to see where they had come from and where they got to. After three albums we couldn’t have expected the albums to be full of hits, but then, as we know they came in clusters and of course they were always getting better, the music and Freddie’s singing voice could be heard in the heavens at the age of 40.

*In The Lap Of The Gods* is another of Freddie’s songs on the album. (The song starts at 27:53 on the video.)