**FDA MUSIC FOR THE CREATIVE INDUSTRIES**

**Songwriting Techniques**

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**Analysing Key Songwriters – Queen**

The band Queen was formed in 1971, in London. They were an extremely influential rock band and were popular especially due to their flamboyant lead singer Freddie Mercury (also known as Frederick Bulsara). According to Helander, the other band members included Brian May, Roger Taylor, and John Deacon. May and Taylor had originally been a part of the band ‘Smile’ and met Freddie, who was also formerly in a band named ‘Wreckage’, when their lead singer quit the band. John Deacon was later recruited through advertisements. In the following essay, I will discuss the band’s songwriting processes and their legacy following that.

When the band were writing, they liked to take a lot of risks. Brian May stated in an interview for Classic Albums that “our sound was deep, broad and wide.” It was also referred to as ‘ambitious. This is due to their use of complex riffs. Many of these would be written on piano by Freddie and then translated to the guitar by Brian. This was something that occurred a lot, each member was encouraged to contribute to the writing process so that the sharing of royalties was fair. They also tended to write in 6/8 a lot, as Roger describes it as having a “rolling quality and is great to play in”. This is interesting as many pop or rock songs are written in 4/4 (common time) and are simple yet Queen dared to go beyond and a lot of their writing became complicated whilst in the studio. They were influenced by the way The Beatles and Hendrix used the studio as instruments (Longfellow, 2006) and the band were greatly inspired by The Beatles especially in their later albums such as Abbey Road for this reason and like The Beatles album Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band, they used a lot of overdubbing and multi-tracking to create their unique sound with ‘layered guitars and intricate vocal harmonies’ (Craddock, 2014). I believe that this makes them key songwriters because their willingness to be different and try new things enabled them to become successful and write songs loved by audiences around the world.

The aforementioned vocal harmonies were very important factors of Queen songs. The best example of this is the bridge of ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’, where May, Taylor, and Mercury each record vocals to create the iconic “Galileo” harmony. On every record they sang unitedly because of the way their voices blended. Taylor said that this is because his voice was better at the high end, Freddie held the power and Brian was able to keep the lower end strong. That alone would already create a big sound but using layering by overdubbing was extremely effective and helped towards their success of standing out from other bands at that time. They would also use this just on Freddie’s voice in many of their songs to create the perfect sounding backing vocals by using multi-tracking (Longfellow, 2006). This makes them key songwriters because many artists today use these same methods to create harmonies, backing vocals and even adlibs within their songs.

Every vocal harmony could not be possible without the lyrics. Each member had their own approach to these based on their own lives and backgrounds. For example, a lot of Freddie’s songs were written about Mary Austin, who Freddie believed to be the love of his life. He believed that songs came quickly to him, and he did not need to have much thought. Their song ‘You’re My Best Friend’ was written by John Deacon, who was often shy about his ideas and was hesitant to share them, about his wife on a fender Rhodes. He would write a riff or groove and the whole band would expand on it together. Whereas Brian would draw from his up-bringing where he listened to a lot of folk music and originally learned how to play guitar. He learned chord shapes on a George Formby ukulele-banjo and was inspired by the idea of songs about sailors written on acoustic guitars. He decided to take this idea and make it about the sci-fi movies of his youth, writing about a spaceship and how time is different when you’re in space in his song ’39 (Longfellow, 2006). Their lyrics are influential because they were not afraid to play with the ideas of wide concepts, as stated in the documentary Freddie Mercury: The King of Queen “he obviously had some strand of eccentricity… the lyrics were so bizarre”. But they would also make a lot of their songs very personal, which helped them to feel continuously authentic even if the music was nonsensical to the listeners.

The band remained authentic in the way they reacted with their audiences. During their concerts, particularly Live Aid, Freddie would communicate with his fans in a kind way and the band always helped them to feel included. For example, the ‘Radio Ga Ga’ overhead claps or stomping and clapping of ‘We Will Rock You’. The fans were made to feel part of the band (Freddie Mercury: The King of Queen, 2018). After Freddie’s death, the band stayed together to honour his memory, putting on a tribute to him in 1992 and further partnering with Adam Lambert.

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