Queen

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Reasons Why We Chose Queen:

There are a lot of reasons that we, as a group, decided to do our project on Queen. Queen is an extremely well-known band across multiple generations, so it is an artist that we can talk to almost anyone anywhere about. Additionally, they were an influence to many artists after them. Finally, they released over 15 albums that showed a very impressive musical range and an awe-inspiring amount of talent.
Queen: Overview

Queen was one of the most popular and successful rock groups during the 1970s and 80s, with a very unique, experimental style and sound, Queen has remained one of the best selling artists of all time.

The band began its formation in 1967, when the guitarist Brian May and the drummer Roger Taylor joined with Tim Staffell to form a rock group named Smile. When Tim Staffell left the group, May and Taylor joined forces with Freddie Mercury and a bass player named John Deacon, resulting in the core version of the band in 1970.

Queen was famous for bright, glam, “pomp-rock” and put on energetic shows. Freddie Mercury in particular was known for his flamboyant style.

Their sound was a very produced and incorporated elements of glam rock, heavy metal, hard rock, and harmony.

After the tragic death of Freddie Mercury the band added new members and continued performing.

Even today their songs remain popular, for example, “We Are the Champions,” “Another One Bites the Dust,” “Bohemian Rhapsody,” and “We Will Rock You” are still played often.

The band consisted of Freddie Mercury, Brian May, Roger Taylor, and John Deacon
Queen Timeline

1971 - Queen is formed
1973 - Queen signed with EMI
1973 - Queen released their first album Queen
1974 - Queen II is released
1974 - Sheer Heart Attack was released
1975 - “Bohemian Rhapsody” is released and spends 9 weeks as No. 1
1975 - A Night at the Opera is released
1976 - Queen had their first US tour
1976 - A Day at the Races was released
1977 - Queen released News of the World
1978 - Queen released Jazz
1980 - Queen released The Game which went 5 times platinum in Canada
1980 - Queen did the soundtrack for Flash Gordon
1981 - Queen was the first band to make a stadium tour of South America
1982 - Hot Space was released
1984 - The Works was released
1986 - A Kind of Magic was released
1989 - The Miracle was released
1991 - Freddie Mercury died
1995 - Made in Heaven was released
2001 - Queen was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame
Freddie Mercury

Freddie Mercury (born Farrokh Bulsara) 5 September 1946 – 24 November 1991 was the lead vocalist of Queen - he was also one of their main songwriters and producers.

Mercury was Parsi and spent his childhood in Zanzibar and India until his mid-teens, before moving with his family to Middlesex, England.

As a child he studied piano and he attended the Ealing College of Art in London.

He was one of the founding members of Queen.

Mercury was known for his flamboyant performances and energetic over-the-top stage style.

He had an impressive four-octave vocal range, and the band would often layer his voice to create harmony.

He wrote and composed numerous hits for Queen including, "Bohemian Rhapsody," and "Killer Queen”

Mercury died in 1991 at the age of 45 due to complications from AIDS, which he had previously kept hidden from the public.
Brian May

Brian Harold May, 19 July 1947, is an English musician, vocalist, and songwriter.

He was the lead guitarist in Queen, which he cofounded after creating the band Smile.

He famously used a homemade guitar called “The Red Special”

His most famous songwriting contributions include: "We Will Rock You," "I Want It All," "Fat Bottomed Girls," "The Prophet's Song," "Who Wants to Live Forever," and "The Show Must Go On".

May used his background in astrophysics to create a new sound for Queen by modifying soundwaves to create an intense arena-effect, which makes it sound like a crowd is singing.
Roger Taylor

Roger Meddows Taylor born 26 July 1949 is an English musician, singer and songwriter. He was the drummer of Queen, as well as one of their songwriters and occasional lead vocalist.

Taylor contributed at least one track on every album, often singing lead vocals on his own compositions.

He wrote or co-wrote three UK number 1 hits: “These Are the Days of Our Lives,” "Under Pressure," and "Innuendo."

Taylor played multiple instruments for the band, contributing his talents on the keyboard, guitar, and bass.

He was the first Queen member to go solo in 1977 - and he has continued to form and work with other bands.
**John Deacon**

John Richard Deacon, born 19 August 1951, is a retired English musician and was the bass guitarist for Queen, as well as a composer and financial manager.

Deacon grew up in **Oadby, Leicestershire**, playing local band called The Opposition, before moving to study electronics in **Chelsea College, London**. He became Queen's bass player in 1971 at the age of 19.

Deacon had a passion and skills for electronics, and he designed his own custom-adapted amp, now known as the legendary “Deacy Amp.”

He had more of a quiet demeanor than his band mates.

He composed several of Queen's hit singles: "You're My Best Friend", "Another One Bites The Dust" and "I Want To Break Free.”
Musical Analysis - “Bohemian Rhapsody” (1975)

Form: Intro, Ballad, Guitar, Opera, Rock, Outro

1. Intro: chordal homophony created by a capella consisting entirely of multitrack recording of Freddie Mercury until the piano entered to create melody and homophony, quadruple meter except, and duple subdivision on the piano.

2. Ballad:
   a. Spacer is a one measure piano arpeggio that repeats for a 2 measure monophony of just the piano.
   b. Verse one - texture is melody and accompaniment homophony, accompanied by bass and piano, standard meter with some duple subdivision on the piano
   c. Spacer is the same as the first one.
   d. Verse two - texture is melody and accompaniment homophonic, texture is much thicker because drums, backup vocals and guitar have entered, still standard meter with duple subdivision on piano, but there is now also quadruple subdivision to provide an even thicker texture

3. Guitar Solo: Takes the melody from the vocalist at its peak creating a counter melody, the texture remains melody and accompaniment and accompaniment homophony. Homophony with vocal accompaniment that quickly vanishes into simple percussion accompaniment. Bridge from ballad to opera, composed and played by May.

1. Opera - elaborate vocal multi-tracking, piano accompaniment with duple subdivision giving it a double time feel- switches to some triple subdivision, multiple trade-offs between vocalists, dominant textures were chordal homophony, where it was just multiple vocalists harmonizing, and melody and accompaniment homophony.

2. Rock:
   
a. Riff - 4 measures (AA) containing triple beat subdivision which gives a 6/4 meter feel, but the drums provide a steady 4/4 meter with the backbeats emphasized

b. Vocals - texture is a melody and accompaniment homophony with chordal homophony within the vocalists,

c. Riff - 4 measures (AA) containing triple beat subdivision, very similar to first with the triple beat subdivision and the percussion accompaniment

d. Connector - fairly dissonant sections, half-time feel

3. Outro - doesn’t quite reach half time, the texture is melody and accompaniment homophony, duple subdivision in the piano, lyrics reappear
Further Analysis of “Bohemian Rhapsody”

Lyrical Analysis:

Queen never revealed to the public what the lyrics meant; Mercury went as far as to say, “It’s one of those songs which has such a fantasy feel about it. I think people should just listen to it, think about it, and then make up their own minds as to what it says to them.” As a result, there are many theories that have been presented:

1. Having to leave his homeland of Zanzibar at a young age
2. His struggle with his sexual orientation
3. A love story that touched on social issues
4. Freddy maintains that Queen are nothing more than, “Random rhyming nonsense”

Fun Facts:

• It was #1 on the charts for 9 weeks in 1975
• It rose back to #1 in 1991 after Freddie Mercury’s Death
• It was written solely by Freddie Mercury
• It was used in the film Wayne’s World
• The band referred to it as Freddie’s baby
More About “Bohemian Rhapsody”

The range shown in this song is fairly amazing, and it is impossible to put it into one genre because it has elements from pop, rock, opera, and even show tunes. The introduction opens with the chordal homophony with a lead as the second highest pitch - just like how most barbershop quartets perform. Then there is pop elements in the ballad because you have this very memorable - fairly slow melody - that is being sung very smoothly and professionally. Additionally, at this point in the song the dynamics definitely play to the melody being the strongest part. The ballad was the section of the song that most catered to the masses - similar to pop. Then there is the opera section that - somehow - blends very well with the rest of the song. Finally, there is the rock section that is characterized with a strong driving rhythm and an impressive guitar solo - an element that is very characteristic of rock and roll.
An Interesting Comparison

“We Will Rock You” (1977)
Straight up Verse and Chorus form
Form: Intro, verse, chorus(AA), verse, chorus(AA), verse, chorus(AAAA), solo

It was very interesting that “We Will Rock You” came so soon after Bohemian Rhapsody because it was so different. “Bohemian Rhapsody” was Queen’s most popular song and one of UK’s most popular songs ever. Additionally, there was such a draw due to the song’s complexity. There are pop, rock, opera, and acapella elements, and the range shown is amazing. On the flip side, “We Will Rock You” is arguably the simplest song that Queen produced. It showed a turning point for the band towards a minimalistic songwriting and composition style. These two songs showed just how versatile and talented Queen was as a group, and the black and white of the two pieces selected really highlights that.
Music that Influenced Queen

Mostly from British hard, progressive, psychedelic or pop rock bands.

- Beatles - psychedelic, pop rock
- Deep Purple - progressive, hard rock
- The Who - hard, pop rock
- Led Zeppelin - hard rock, instrumental influences
- David Bowie - glam, pop rock, stage presence
- Genesis - progressive, pop rock
- Cream - progressive, pop rock, guitar influences
Artists that Influenced Queen’s Members

Brian May influenced by the epic guitar solos of Jimi Hendrix

Freddie Mercury by the vocals of Robert Plant

Mercury’s range spans about 4 octaves

Roger Taylor also influenced by impressively high-pitch quality

John Deacon was inspired by John Lennon to buy a guitar and get into music

Robert Plant and
Freddie Mercury
Queen’s Influence

Bands took in Queen’s styles and infused them into their own creative works.

Panic! At the Disco takes the chorus driven and drive to make a dance party from Queen.

The Darkness follows in Queen’s footsteps by performing for giant arenas and making fantastic theatrical performances.

Daft Punk shows an influence by Queen’s “Radio Ga Ga” in their hit “Television Rules the Nation”
Artists Inspired by Freddie Mercury

The legacy that Freddie Mercury left behind is inspiring many artists, and is not bound to any particular genre.

Mercury was not afraid to be over-the-top, bold and passionate on stage, and this is a characteristic that many artists across the board have repeated

Rock artists
   Kurt Cobain (Nirvana)
   Matt Bellamy (Muse)

Hip Hop/Rap artists
   Wiz Khalifa
   Lupe Fiasco

Pop artists
   Katy Perry
   Lady Gaga
Another - Unique - Musical Influence

*We Will Rock You* is a musical that was based on the songs of Queen along with a book by Ben Elton. This musical was made in 2002 to capture the essence of Queen and its frontman, Freddie Mercury. So, this musical focused in on Queen’s style of performance that was so iconic in its extravagance. Arguably, their performance style was what propelled them to their prowess in Rock and Roll History. This musical has been performed in 17 different countries for over 15 million viewers.
Queen’s Other Lasting Impacts

All members of Queen have at least a college degree, none of which had anything to do with music.

John Deacon (bass) had a degree in electronics which stimulated his interests in many gadgets and electronics. Queen’s use of videos with their music and the different electronic elements Queen used in recording (ie: overdubbing and multitracking) really paved the road for other groups.

Freddie Mercury had a degree in Illustration and Design, which helped him stand out as the band’s frontman. He also designed Queen’s logo, called the Queen crest.

Roger Taylor had a BS in Biology and Brian May had a BS in physics. Queen all helped to shatter the normal course that most previous artists took to success.
Queen’s Other Lasting Impacts cont.

Freddie Mercury battled AIDS for his final chapter in life, which eventually took his life.

His battle inspired the organization, Mercury Phoenix Trust, an AIDS awareness and education fund. This was created by the band to help others with the disease to hopefully prevent spreading and help fix the disease.

The organization has raised over $15 million and is now funding projects in 16 different countries.

Over the course of just the last year the group has raised over $330,000 which has allowed the funding of 57 projects.
Other Musical Styles of the Time

- Debut album, *Queen* (1973), was heavily influenced by the heavy metal and progressive rock of the early 70s.
- Called “so derivative it hurts” by Winnipeg Free Press (1974), citing influence by Led Zeppelin, Black Sabbath and Jimi Hendrix as influences, but with a fresh spin.
- In these movements, Rock musicians began to give greater artistic weight to the compositions and instrumentations associated with jazz or classical music.
- Jethro Thull, Pink Floyd, Yes etc. pioneered this new progressive style.
- The late 60s also saw a rise in the use of synthesizers as part of the new progressive style. As purists, Queen emphasized that “nobody played the synthesizer”, it was simply an effect of multi-tracking guitar and vocal sounds.
Other Musical Styles of the Time

Rock becomes more avant-garde and experimental (art rock, concept albums).

*Queen II* (1974) showcases these experimental styles, with a loose theme connecting the album.

Glam rock emerged from the psychedelic rock scene of the late 60s, and *Sheer Heart Attack* (1974) embodied this new style with outrageous clothes, hair, and makeup.

*A Night at the Opera* (1975) used more experimental elements such as an 8-minute song and harp instrumentation.
Other Musical Styles of the Time

In response to the perfection of rock pursued by Queen and other bands of the era, a genre call punk rock was created in order to get back to a more simple version of rock. The Sex Pistols and the Ramones were bands to lead this new form of music. Punk Rock celebrated the imperfections of rock, willing to sacrifice precision for high energy songs and performances.
Other Musical Styles of the Time

Punk rock was the typical four minute maximum, pop style song with simple music and a conservative harmonic vocabulary.

Songs did not utilize long instrumental solos.

Bands in this genre even used older style equipment, such as Gretsch and Rickenbacker guitars, and Vox amplifiers, to create the feeling of a 1960s rock band.
Career Accolades

Queen had eight gold and six platinum records.

In 1975 the band released a breakthrough LP, *A Night at the Opera*, which featured their song "Bohemian Rhapsody."

“Bohemian Rhapsody” stayed at Number One in England for nine weeks and was a top hit in the US.

Some of their songs from the U.S. Top Forty lists include:

- "Killer Queen" (Number 12, 1975)
- "Bohemian Rhapsody" (Number 9, 1976)
- "You're My Best Friend" (Number 16, 1975)
- "Somebody to Love" (Number 13, 1976),
- "We Will Rock You" (Number 4, 1977)

Their 1981 collaboration with David Bowie, "Under Pressure," reached number 1 on the UK Singles chart, and was featured on their platinum *Greatest Hits* album.

Queen eventually was awarded for their impressive Rock Career, in 2001 Queen was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. All four members were inducted into the Songwriters Hall of Fame in 2003, becoming the first band to have every member inducted.
Present Day Queen

Freddie Mercury - passed away in November 1991 from bronchial pneumonia, a complication of his AIDS.

John Deacon - retired from the band in 1997 after a tribute song to Mercury.

Brian May and Roger Taylor have been performing with guest artists and are now touring with American Idol Season 8 runner up, Adam Lambert.

May, Taylor, and Lambert (Left)
John Deacon out and about (Right)
Bibliography (* are indicative of non-internet sources)