

## Freddy Mercury, Nietzsche and the British monarchy

by Zandy Alexander

Did anyone ever question how a musical group could assume a royal name?

Traditionally in history a monarch could not be parodied, mocked or scorned in any way. Yet the rock group of Freddy Mercury appear to have done just that when naming themselves 'Queen'.

A few hundred years ago you would be executed for such an act. It has never been a casual issue. Just imagine what would have happened if Mercury had taken this parody further? What if he had fed the public a diet of royal propaganda such as photos of existing royalty, perhaps manipulated in a derisive way? What if he had featured royal paraphernalia such as banknotes on album covers or within promotional press releases? Such acts would have resulted in him being instantly closed down for business.

But even without this hallucinogenic scenario, there surely must have been some acknowledgment from the Royal family.

Also perhaps a common thread or mutual interest may have been established. It is well known that the Royals are always precarious and need support. So are gay pop stars. Suddenly here was a chance for both sides to promote the idea of the ecstatic adulation of power itself, of royalty, and also of the nation, all morphed together within one bizarre basket of notions. This was all the more astonishing since Mercury and Queen broke through in late 1975, just when pomp rock was going out of fashion exactly as anti-royalist punk music exploded upwards from the underground. Even if no actual understanding existed between Mercury and the palace, possibly merely only a silent, strategic tolerance, yet surely the mutual reward was now huge, namely a newly reinforced admiration and pride in monarchic authority. (How paradoxical that all of this was taking place in Britain, which had been historically the first European nation to crucially limit the power of the king by means of the civil war and parliamentary democracy.)

Returning to the brilliantly provocative caprice of the rock band Queen, the surreal, absurd, pot-pourri of their subliminal suggestions now included the idea of a gay demi-god, an acceptance of gay royal authority, and also, tellingly, the macho side of gay imperium, represented by a newly invented Mercury with rippling biceps and a black leather motorcycle cap. This released a universally enormous pent-up frustration, namely

the hitherto frustrated need for British youths to idealize a truly macho, hero figure, since in the post war era we were still allergic to the Germanic, Aryan, warrior dream with its appropriate lust for domination, (Britain had been in this anti-Aryan phase for thirty years at least.) With Mercury's newly short hair, moustache, enormous jaw, and all his strutting and preening of the cock of the roost, he personified the immortal *she/he-man*, a precarious vision which was at that moment under attack and actually being crushed by the mid-seventies onslaught of womens' lib, also the twin politically correct worlds of feminism and multi-culturalism.

Yet around the world, Mercury glorified and cemented the union of particular ideas regarding power, *he-man-she-man*, monarchy, homosexuality, freedom within authority, national fervour, populism and the British empire. Mercury's special courage and genius was to cement polar opposites into one contradictory, yet orgiastic union.

It is not hard to discover opposing themes which Mercury has bound together. Not only freedom and authority, or *he-man* and *she-man*, but also the killer queen who represents a mother who creates life yet also kills. Perhaps this was the kharmic reason that Mercury's own life contained two distinct phases which were opposites, the first stage being fame and success where he exuded passion and strength, and love for

life, followed, all too soon, by the second stage, his own swift yet terrible battle with and death by AIDS.

Today his legend remains pregnant with mystical interpretation. Neither rock music, nor gender politics, has ever fully digested the iconic significance of Mercury's character or presence.

He was not only Freddy Mercury of London, England, of the twentieth century, the Iranian, the Parsee, the British rock singer. He was also channelling phenomena such as Mercury the God of the ancient Greeks, and also mercury the metal which is beautiful, eternally fluid, yet poisonous. For to love the ways and styles of this *she-man* is to commit hari-kiri by sex, drugs and rock n roll. He is unique and cannot be copied.

Mercury himself once described his own lyrics as 'meaningless.' He made this statement very seriously. There is a continual veneer of superficial gloss which envelops and surrounds his words in song, 'Radio Ga Ga' being the obvious one to quote. The love affair with the idea of nonsense continues. He would wear a Mickey Mouse tee-shirt on stage sometimes. And yet as we listen to his music we are moved by indescribable emotions, lofty feelings of joy, power and reincarnation. Something important is happening and yet we are not allowed to describe it as being a thing of worth.

Pop music, being, arguably, an extension of pop art of the

late twentieth century, has a peculiar, contradictory stance in this way. The artist must appear casual, unemotional, even disconnected. This is the silent working class mantra, in reaction to the caring, sincere, artistic style which inevitably bears the hallmark of privilege.

In 'Bohemian Rhapsody', Mercury sings 'Nothing really matters to me'. In this way the music of Queen is protected by a wall of apparent insincerity. Here we touch on a wider issue, the crisis of art and meaning in the modern age. 'Search casually, and you will receive. Search too hard, and you will be deflected', the modern manifesto commands.

The jigsaw puzzle fits together. Codified and concealed within all of these peculiar, opposing ideas, Freddy Mercury is Zoroaster, Nietzsche's Zarathustra, returned to earth after 3000 years, the immortal *she-man*, binding together the monarchy, the aristocracy and the divine, a concoction so dangerous that it must be eternally shrouded in a web of superficiality and nonsense words.