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**A Kind of Magic:
Identifying and Analysing Queen's Idiolect, 1973-1980**

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

at

The University of Waikato

by

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THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

2016

Abstract

‘A Kind of Magic’ is a musicological study of the British band Queen’s output between 1973 and 1980. The research analyses 90 songs across eight studio albums, and covers the era during which Queen emerged as one of the most successful acts in popular music. The analysis identifies the ‘idiolect’ of Queen—the musical traits that characterised and distinguished the group’s songs. I also contextualise Queen’s idiolect within wider stylistic contexts of the 1970s, and examine the changes in Queen’s music through these years.

The dissertation divides into seven chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the scope of the analysis, and my contribution to the analytical literature. Chapter 2 outlines trends in popular music analysis over the past two decades, accounts for Queen’s minimal presence in this discipline, and discusses prior studies of the group. The final sections of Chapter 2 address the key analytical concepts of style, idiolect, sonic patterns, and compositional strategies. Chapter 3 outlines the analytical methods employed on each of the 90 songs. The methodology covers nine elements of Queen’s songs. The individual methods are drawn from traditional musicology and contemporary popular music analysis.

Chapter 4 presents the analytical findings concerning the structural components of Queen’s songs. Chapter 5 presents the analytical findings concerning the performance, arrangement, and production components of the group’s output. These chapters thus document all the individual musical ingredients of Queen’s idiolect. Chapter 6 synthesises these findings into three analytical contexts: the nature of Queen’s idiolect, the relationship between Queen’s idiolect and wider stylistic trends, and the changes in Queen’s idiolect and style between 1973-80. Chapter 7 closes the thesis with a practical application of the findings, a summary of the findings, and suggestions for future research on Queen.

The research makes three important contributions to the literature on popular music analysis and Queen. Firstly, the thesis expands upon the notion of an idiolect, by drawing a distinction between ‘compositional strategies’ and ‘sonic patterns’, both of

which contribute to an artist's idiolect but in different ways. The former refers to common musical traits articulated differently across songs; the latter refers to common musical traits articulated in the same way across songs. In the context of Queen, the structural elements of the group's songs are best understood in terms of compositional strategies, whereas the instrumental, arrangement, and production techniques are best understood in terms of sonic patterns.

Secondly, the analysis highlights in rich detail the stylistic influences on Queen's output. It is demonstrated that the group's songs were infused with features from various contemporary styles, including hard rock, progressive rock, and glam rock, as well as pre-1970s popular styles such as cabaret, 1960s pop, and 1930s American popular music. Thirdly, this thesis develops a new model for understanding changes in Queen's music over time. Through the 1970s, Queen traversed many musical styles. At each point, however, the group retained its idiolect. Queen's career can thus be understood in terms of an 'expedition' narrative, whereby each step into new stylistic territory was marked by the group's idiolect.

Acknowledgements

Without much help, this thesis would not have been possible. I am very grateful to the following people.

The University of Waikato, for granting ethics approval, and for providing financial support through the University of Waikato Doctoral Scholarship.

Andrea Gray, Richard Braae, Emma Bevege, Fiona Bevege, and Richard Bevege, for general support over the past four years, and for the many informal conversations on the topic.

Jadey O'Regan and fellow members of her online Musicology Club (especially, Tim Byron, Michael Carpenter, and John Encarnacao), for sharing many thoughts on rock performance and recording techniques, and for suggesting fruitful avenues of Queen-related enquiry.

Marie Berginiat, for her enthusiasm, interest, and insights, and for providing the spark and inspiration for further writing on Queen.

Allan Moore, Mark Spicer, Brad Osborn, Justin Williams, Walter Everett, Philippe Gonin, François Ribac, Chris Endrinal, Robin Attas, Nicole Biamonte, David Metzger, and William Dart, for the enlightening conversations on segments of this thesis, and for sharing their expertise in popular music analysis.

The staff in the University of Waikato Conservatorium of Music, for their outstanding professional support over the past six years. I am extremely grateful not only for their encouragement through the entire postgraduate process, but also for providing me with many other opportunities to expand my musical horizons and knowledge into areas often unrelated to my research. I have little doubt that whatever transpires post-thesis, my experiences from the University of Waikato will leave me well-equipped for any challenges that await.

Jeff Wragg and Teresa Connors, fellow PhD students at the University of Waikato, for general help with teaching and research, and also much light relief. I am particularly appreciative of Jeff's assistance in producing the musical application of this research, as well as for reading most, if not all, of this work in various guises. Without his insightful and forthright advice, many of the ideas presented below would be substantially weaker; I am very thankful for the time that he has given to this thesis. I wish both of them all the best as they complete their own doctorates in the coming years.

There are two remaining acknowledgements. Firstly, I would like to extend my sincerest thanks to Brian May for supporting this project from its earliest stages, and for generously donating his time for a pre-concert interview in 2014. His comments and thoughts added an extra layer of insight to the analysis, and were invaluable in refining some of the arguments presented below.

Secondly, and finally, I am exceedingly grateful to Martin Lodge and Ian Whalley, for supervising this project, and all that entailed—reading thesis chapters and research proposals, organising markers, writing references, and so forth. I am very fortunate also that both encouraged me to take this work to an international audience, and to not be disheartened by any failures or stumbles along that path. All that being said, the main thing I remember, with the utmost clarity, from the past four years is that my most productive times for thinking about the thesis were late afternoon on a Monday, and around midday on a Wednesday, both of which, not coincidentally, directly followed our meetings. What I have appreciated the most from Martin and Ian is their complete willingness (and enthusiasm, I'm sure) to ponder, question, critique, and discuss ideas about the music of Queen. That, without a doubt, is the best one can hope to get from an arts education.

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1. Introduction

1.1 A Brief Introduction to Queen

Queen sits in rock music's pantheon. At the heart of the group's success lay Freddie Mercury's flamboyant and virtuosic vocals and Brian May's innovative and meticulous guitar work. Courtesy of songwriting contributions from all four members, the band etched itself into popular music history with a string of anthemic hits such as 'Bohemian Rhapsody', 'Killer Queen', 'Somebody To Love', 'We Will Rock You', and 'Another One Bites The Dust', to name a few. Queen's studio prowess was matched on the stage. The band's twenty-minute performance at the 1985 Live Aid event is considered one of popular music's finest;¹ even after Freddie Mercury's death in 1991, the remaining group members have performed under the 'Queen' moniker in other iconic concerts such as the Freddie Mercury Tribute Concert (1991), Party at the Palace to mark Queen Elizabeth II's Golden Jubilee (2002), and the closing ceremony of the 2012 London Olympics.

Queen's music is notable for crossing many stylistic boundaries across albums, within albums, and within songs. Its early records mixed elements of progressive rock, hard rock and glam rock. In the second half of 1970s, the group developed its own distinct style with ingredients from many musical sources, including hard rock, 1960s pop, cabaret, and 1930s American popular music. In the 1980s, from *Hot Space* (1982) to *The Miracle* (1989), the band's reputation suffered several setbacks as Mercury, much like his contemporaries Mick Jagger and David Bowie, followed the disco, funk, and pop trends *du jour*. In 1991, Queen released *Innuendo*, just months before Freddie Mercury passed away. The album offered a summary of the band's career with a *mélange* of contemplative ballads and up-tempo rock tracks, all stamped with the group's musical imprint of experimental song structures and rich instrumental arrangements.

Throughout its career, Queen had a strained relationship with rock critics, particularly those writing for American publications. Reviewing the group's 1975-magnum opus

¹ See Susan Fast, 'Popular music performance and cultural memory. Queen: Live Aid, Wembley

A Night at the Opera, Kris Nicholson concluded, ‘the group’s willingness to experiment, even when they fail, makes them interesting’, hardly a ringing endorsement.² Robert Christgau gave the same album a ‘B-minus’ grade, the highest for any of his Queen album reviews.³ In 1979, Dave Marsh was the most vitriolic when reviewing *Jazz*. He infamously labelled Queen ‘the world’s first truly fascist rock band’ and wondered ‘why anyone would indulge these creeps and their polluting ideas’.⁴ Yet over the years, plenty of people did ‘indulge these creeps’, and Queen amassed seven number one studio albums in Britain, and number one singles on both sides of the Atlantic. Further, the group’s 1981 *Greatest Hits* and 1991 *Greatest Hits II* are the highest and tenth-highest selling albums in Britain of all time, respectively.⁵ And by 2011, the writers at *Rolling Stone* had mellowed sufficiently to place Queen between the Allman Brothers Band and Pink Floyd at number fifty-two on the list of the ‘100 Greatest Artists of All Time’.⁶

One of the remarkable aspects of Queen was the longevity of its core musicians. Although others such as Spike Edney, Michael Kamen and David Bowie contributed in various ways in the 1980s and 1990s, Freddie Mercury, Brian May, John Deacon (bassist) and Roger Taylor (drummer) comprised Queen throughout the band’s recording career until Mercury’s death. In terms of the individuals’ upbringings, there is little that is overly remarkable. May, Taylor and Deacon were raised in London, Truro (Cornwall), and Leicester, respectively; by all accounts, they took to music from an early age, enamoured with the ‘new’ sounds of rock ‘n’ roll and skiffle in the 1950s. Mercury, on the other hand, lived a slightly more exotic childhood. Born in Zanzibar, he went to boarding school in India, before moving to London as a teenager. As well as forming a rock ‘n’ roll band at school, The Hectics, it is well known that the young Mercury had classical piano lessons. Unfortunately, due to the

² Kris Nicholson, ‘A Night at the Opera: Album Reviews’, *Rolling Stone* 210 (1976), <<http://www.rollingstone.com/music/albumreviews/a-night-at-the-opera-19760408>> (accessed 12 March 2012).

³ See Robert Christgau, ‘CG: Queen’, <http://www.robertchristgau.com/get_artist.php?name=Queen> (accessed 27 February 2014).

⁴ Dave Marsh, ‘Jazz: Album Reviews’, *Rolling Stone* 284 (1979), <<http://www.rollingstone.com/music/albumreviews/jazz-19790208>> (accessed 7 March 2014).

⁵ See ‘Queen’, *Official Charts Company*, <http://www.officialcharts.com/artist/_/queen/> (accessed 21 April 2012).

⁶ Rolling Stone, ‘100 Greatest Artists’, *Rolling Stone* (2011), <<http://www.rollingstone.com/music/lists/100-greatest-artists-of-all-time-19691231>> (accessed 5 March 2014).

lack of authorised biographies, we cannot be sure as to the extent of these lessons, though it seems likely he reached around Grade 5 in his formal training. It also seems likely that these lessons were important in fostering his understanding of formal and harmonic space, the exploration of which would become a key element of Queen's songs.⁷

Queen not only had a consistent lineup through its years, but also four musicians who made important contributions to the songs. As is explored throughout this thesis, each instrumentalist and singer had his own idiosyncratic performance techniques. Like the Beatles, each band member was also an accomplished songwriter; although Mercury wrote a majority of the songs in this corpus, the others wrote material that was commercially successful or went on to become part of the Queen 'canon' (that is, the *Greatest Hits* collections). This theme of the individual versus the group is not explored to a significant extent below; what is worth noting, however, is that despite the lack of evidence regarding creative processes, the individuals of Queen had a degree of creative control over their own work. As Mercury explained in the 1970s, 'in the end...the writer is the boss...he can say, "look, this is the way I want the song"'.⁸ It would appear that the songwriters probably came to the studio with the harmonic, melodic and formal structures of their songs worked out;⁹ it was once the band realised the songs in musical form that the identity of the group, as a singular entity, came to the fore, and it was at this point that one can hear the emergence of the distinct musical vision and sound of Queen.

1.2 Research Overview

1.2.1 Research Questions, Key Concepts, and Thesis Outline

This thesis is a musical analysis of ninety Queen songs released on eight studio albums, *Queen* (1973) to *The Game* (1980); this corpus represents the era of greatest

⁷ For more on the early years of Queen, see Phil Sutcliffe, *Queen: The Ultimate Illustrated History of the Crown Kings of Rock* (Minneapolis: Voyageur Press, 2011), 15-29.

⁸ Matthew Longfellow, *Classic Albums: Queen - A Night at the Opera* (Eagle Vision, 2005).

⁹ This argument stems from the observation that the songwriters' distinct fingerprints are best identified with respect to these elements.

musical consistency within the band's output. The primary research questions concern Queen's musical idiolect. They are as follows:

- 1) What musical characteristics comprised Queen's idiolect from 1973-80?
- 2) How did Queen's idiolect, or elements of its idiolect, relate to other rock and pop styles in the 1970s?
- 3) How did Queen's idiolect, and other elements of its music, change during this period?

The secondary research questions similarly aim for an understanding of Queen's musical practices, in terms of the group's idiolect, but from a wider range of perspectives. These questions are as follows:

- 1) How can one understand the musical relationships between the group members of Queen?
- 2) How did 'Bohemian Rhapsody' relate to the musical characteristics of Queen's idiolect?
- 3) How can the analytical findings be applied in a musical context?

The thesis is underpinned by several key concepts, each of which is discussed in Chapter 2. The primary concept is 'idiolect', which is closely related to the notion of musical 'style'. The concept of an idiolect derives from linguistics. Pride and Holmes define a linguistic idiolect as the 'speech patterns of an individual'.¹⁰ A wide range of traits contributes to an idiolect, including speaking pitch and inflections, syntax, vocabulary, and discursive organisation. An idiolect differs from a dialect, which refers to the speech patterns of a particular group, as defined by, for example, region or class.¹¹ Both idiolects and dialects are linguistically subordinate to languages, although the divisions between each are ambiguous.

Middleton, Meyer, and others invoke similar principles when using the term in a musical context. Middleton defines an idiolect as the characteristic musical practices

¹⁰ J. B. Pride and Janet Holmes, 'Introduction', in *Sociolinguistics*, eds. J. B. Pride and Janet Holmes (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Education, 1972), 8.

¹¹ E. Haugen, 'Dialect, Language, Nation', in *Sociolinguistics*, eds. J. B. Pride and Janet Holmes (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Education, 1972), 97-102.

and patterns of an individual artist's work;¹² referring to classical music, Meyer uses the term 'individual idiom' but makes the same point.¹³ For both authors, the term 'style' refers to the common musical patterns of a wider group of artists. Accordingly, the primary research questions can be construed as seeking to identify the musical features common to Queen's output through the years 1973-80. This analytical task is made more complex, however, because one can observe different types of patterning across Queen's songs. Thus, in Chapter 2, I establish a distinction between 'sonic patterns' and 'compositional strategies'. Both labels can be viewed as subsets of an idiolect, insofar as each contributes to the complete understanding of what is common, musically, to an artist's output. The difference between the categories lies in the nature of the musical consistency across songs. In theory, 'sonic patterns' refer to common musical features or techniques articulated in the same way across different songs; 'compositional strategies' refer to common musical features articulated in different ways across different songs. One may be inclined to regard the former category as musical details that 'sound like Queen', and the latter category as musical details that are the 'type of thing Queen might do'. My novel methodological distinction allows for a greater understanding of the different points of continuity and divergence across Queen's songs.

With these research questions and concepts in mind, the thesis is structured as follows. The remainder of Chapter 1 further establishes the basic scope of this study, the reasons for studying the music of Queen, and how this research contributes to existing literature on popular music. Chapter 2 introduces segments of the literature that inform the fundamental ideas of this thesis. I will assess four broad areas of literature. The first section is an overview of the field of popular music analysis with respect to its history and broad aims. This helps to position the current research within the discipline, as well as provide further insight into why Queen has not been prominent in the field of popular music studies. The second section examines the existing academic and general literature on Queen in order to identify the analytical gaps in this area. It is evident that musical analyses of Queen are scarce. Several studies have provided some insight into the group's music as a whole, while others

¹² Richard Middleton, *Studying Popular Music* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1990), 174.

¹³ Leonard B. Meyer, *Style and Music: Theory, History, and Ideology* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1989), 24.

have focused on a single song (mostly ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’).¹⁴ One thesis has considered the idea of Queen’s idiolect, but lacks the analytical depth to identify and explain the group’s defining musical characteristics. Within this area of the literature, then, there is space for sustained and rich analysis of Queen’s wider output.

The third and fourth sections of Chapter 2 tackle the concepts of style and idiolect, from both theoretical and practical perspectives. The third section establishes definitions for these key concepts and assesses a number of prior idiolect and style case studies. The fourth section introduces in full the new concepts of sonic patterns and compositional strategies, with a three-part discussion of why the new terms are needed, how they relate to the existing terminology, and how these concepts can be applied in an analytical context. The ideas from the third and fourth sections of Chapter 2 inform Chapter 3, which outlines the analytical methods used in this study. The primary starting point for the analysis was that Queen’s idiolect resulted from the distinct combination of a variety of musical characteristics. The methodological outcome from this hypothesis was to break down Queen’s songs into their constituent elements, and consider each in isolation. Chapter 3 thus offers robust methods for analysing the individual components of Queen’s musical texts.

Chapters 4 and 5 present the initial analytical findings of the thesis. The findings are presented across two chapters, the first on the ‘Structures’ of Queen’s songs, the second on the ‘Sound-Worlds’ of Queen’s songs. This division follows, to some extent, Moore’s distinction between ‘Form’ and ‘Shape’ in his interpretative methodology, as well as Gracyk’s distinction between the ‘sound structures’ and the ‘sound’ of popular music texts.¹⁵ Another way of conceiving this distinction is whether the elements are conducive or resistant to traditional notation. In general, the findings from Chapter 4 could be used to produce a ‘lead sheet’ (form, melody, chords, rhythm) that typifies Queen’s output; the findings from Chapter 5 would then explain how that ‘score’ could be realised in a typical manner by this particular group of musicians. In the context of Queen, an important reason for this division is that the

¹⁴ These studies are listed in Section 2.2.2. The section numbers work according to the following formula: Chapter.Section.Sub-Section.

¹⁵ Allan F. Moore, *Song Means: Analysing and Interpreting Recorded Popular Song* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2012), 19-90; Theodore Gracyk, *Rhythm and Noise* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 19ff.

structures of its songs tend to be understood best in terms of compositional strategies, while the arrangements and production techniques tend to be understood best in terms of sonic patterns.

It is useful to note two further points on the setup and content of Chapters 4 and 5. Firstly, each is divided into sections pertaining to individual musical elements. The primary focus through these sections is the consistent traits of Queen's songs, as it is these details that define the group's overall idiolect. Within each section, however, there are often subsets of common musical features; thus, each set of findings is further divided along relevant lines. For example, with respect to melodic construction, common approaches are observed most readily within the output of individual songwriters, but, with respect to form, it is more useful to group songs according to the degree of their adherence to conventional formal templates. Secondly, these chapters aim to consider the individual traits of Queen's output more or less in isolation from other features of Queen's songs and wider stylistic trends. Although not always possible to consider only one element at a time (textural changes, for instance, are often made along formal boundaries), these chapters seek to document the raw ingredients of Queen's idiolect.

If Chapters 4 and 5 focus on the individual pieces of Queen's songs, then Chapter 6 seeks to put the musical puzzle back together. The complete findings form the basis of three large sections, each of which subdivides into several short essays that address aspects of Queen's idiolect and the relationships to wider stylistic and analytical issues. The first major section of Chapter 6 is concerned with Queen's idiolect as a whole, and begins with a summary of the song types that are prevalent in the group's output. Section 6.1.2 then looks at how the strands of Queen's idiolect may be understood in relation to a single song, 'Bohemian Rhapsody'. It is demonstrated that the group's compositional strategies account for the experimental aspects of the legendary track, while the group's sonic patterns, in terms of arrangement details and harmonic gestures, are continually present throughout the song's six minutes. Section 6.1.3 approaches Queen's idiolect from an alternative perspective. Rather than focusing on the individual traits of an idiolect, this section considers an idiolect as the distinct musical combination that arises from the contributions of the band members.

It is demonstrated, in particular, how Brian May's guitar melodies and Freddie Mercury's lead vocal parts often presented similar musical gestures in the same song.

Section 6.2 places Queen in the context of 1970s popular music. The group is often considered to straddle the boundaries between hard, progressive, and glam rock, yet few writers have explicated the connections to each label. One of the issues with these observations is that the labels themselves have contested definitions; accordingly, the primary approach is to consider how Queen relates to these wider trends, if the categories are constructed in particular ways. Thus, in Section 6.2.3, I argue that the presence of classical music traits in Queen's songs bring the group into the sphere of progressive rock; however, upon closer examination of these traits and the progressive rock discourse, it is suggested the group relates well to this label in style terms, but much less so in terms of genre. This kind of argument—where Queen relates in some ways, but not others to a broader label—holds with respect to hard rock and glam rock also. In the final segment of Section 6.2, I suggest, via Covach's concept of 'musical worlding', that this fusion of wider stylistic traits in the group's idiolect distinguished the 'Queen sound' from other artists in the world of 1970s rock.

Section 6.3 considers the Queen corpus from a diachronic perspective. It begins by discussing the notion of stylistic development. It is argued that a fruitful approach is to identify aspects of musical change, before assessing whether these changes present some kind of overarching narrative. Four short case studies highlight the different narratives that can be identified in Queen's output. I argue that the overarching development for Queen lies at the intersection of the stylistic and idiolect narratives—through this corpus, the group expanded its stylistic repertoire, but retained the traits of its idiolect. I label this process an 'expedition' narrative, given the group forged new ground while consistently marking the musical territory into which it ventured.

Chapter 7 begins by corroborating the analytical findings of Queen's idiolect in a practical context. This involves a self-made musical imitation of Queen, which thus demonstrates an understanding of the features that defined the group's output. This section presents an overview (and subsequent recording) of a Christmas medley 'in the style of Queen'. The thesis concludes by summarising the key findings and offering avenues for future research on Queen.

1.2.2 Analytical Scope

This study focuses on the ninety songs from Queen's eight studio albums, *Queen* (1973) through to *The Game* (1980), which accounted for approximately half of Queen's career.¹⁶ This particular end point was chosen for two main reasons.¹⁷ Firstly, a corpus of ninety songs provided a substantive quantity of musical data, from which meaningful conclusions could be drawn. Secondly, *The Game* marked the point in Queen's career after which rock music was challenged as the primary stylistic voice for the band. As is explored in greater detail below, what marked Queen's output before *Hot Space* (1982) was a relatively stable 'sound-world' in terms of the basic instrumental and textural setup of a song.¹⁸ Throughout the 1970s, Queen explored a range of musical styles. This experimentation, however, was tempered by the consistent use of rock instruments (piano, guitars, drums, etc.). Put another way, 'Dragon Attack', recorded in 1980, sounds like a funk song as played by a rock band; 'Staying Power', recorded in 1982, sounds like a disco-funk song as played by a disco-funk band due to the change in instrumentation.¹⁹

This is not to suggest that Queen's music changed wholesale from one album (*The Game*) to the next (*Hot Space*)—the group foreshadowed the style of *Hot Space* in tracks from the late 1970s; they also returned frequently to rock in the 1980s. But after *The Game*, there were greater variations in terms of Queen's sound-worlds. Further, as the rock-based sound-world declined in prominence, Queen's idiolect also became less well-defined. While this raises interesting issues about the nature of an idiolect itself, the important point to make at this stage is that Queen's idiolect was defined most clearly on the albums released prior to *Hot Space*. Accordingly, this particular corpus was chosen primarily for analytical consistency. Further research

¹⁶ The songs of this corpus, along with other Queen albums and important singles/albums from other artists, are listed in the Discography section.

¹⁷ Other potential cutoff points included: *A Day at the Races* (1976), which marked the end of Queen's progressive rock tendencies; *Jazz* (1978), which marked the end of Queen's aversion to synthesizers; or, *Innuendo* (1991), which was the final album recorded entirely before Freddie Mercury's death.

¹⁸ Moore, *Song Means*, 19.

¹⁹ Specifically, the bass guitar and live drums of 'Dragon Attack' became the bass synthesizer and drum machine of 'Staying Power'. The latter song occupies a similar sound-world to songs by Rick James, Carl Carlton, or Skyy, all of whom scored hits on the Billboard R & B singles chart in 1981 and 1982.

could be conducted into Queen's idiolect during the 1980s and after, in order to identify points of musical continuity and divergence.

It is necessary to add that this particular analytical approach, focusing on Queen's idiolect, has the effect of pushing to the side other angles and perspectives that would produce equally as fascinating insights. It would have been possible to conduct the analysis with the individual songwriters at the forefront of the discussion; or in terms of an album-by-album progression; or with the aim of elucidating in a more explicit manner the stylistic influences on the songwriters, and how these shaped the musical products. Needless to say, each of these alternate approaches could form the basis of a complete study. If such ideas are only explored in partial form below, then it is primarily for reasons of space. At the conclusion of this thesis, I present several specific ideas for engaging in greater detail these perspectives through further work on Queen.

1.2.3 Why Queen?

Several factors prompted this study of Queen. One important reason is that the group has received little academic attention. Desler argues that Queen has not sat comfortably in the broader ideological climate of popular music studies, in which practitioners have tended to ascribe value to artists according to their socio-cultural importance and commitment to particular notions of authenticity. By comparison, Queen never made overt socio-cultural or political statements in its songs, and was also associated with the excess commercialism of 1970s rock.²⁰ Desler's arguments echo Krims' view that the 'mainstream' has often been neglected in popular music studies in favour of 'alternative' voices, which are heard as challenging the dominant values of Western culture.²¹ In Chapter 2, further suggestions are provided as to why Queen's music has resided outside the analytical strands of the field during the last two decades.

²⁰ See Anne Desler, 'History without royalty? Queen and the strata of the popular music canon', *Popular Music* 32/3 (2013), 397-401.

²¹ Adam Krims, 'Marxist music analysis without Adorno: popular music and urban geography', in *Analyzing Popular Music*, ed. Allan F. Moore (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 139-140.

Generally, then, this thesis was a means of bringing Queen and its songs into the sphere of popular music analysis. While this reasoning has its merits, it is not unique to the British rock band. Over ten years ago, Moore noted that a number of pop-rock artists had not been the subjects of musical analyses. He cited Elton John, the Rolling Stones, Dire Straits, and Queen; one could easily add other major acts to this list (from the 1970s alone, the Carpenters, Fleetwood Mac, and Meat Loaf).²² To some extent, these exclusions reflect the youthfulness of popular music analysis as an academic discipline—there remain a number of analytical blanks to fill in. Desler’s arguments concerning inauthenticity and commercialism would equally be attributable, in some way, to most of these artists.

These observations raise the question of why, on a more specific level, a study of Queen was necessary? There were two main answers to this question. Firstly, Queen offers benefits to popular music analysts, insofar as the group’s output acts as a lens through which many analytical issues come into focus. As is implied in Chapter 3, tools for analysing vocal nuances, instrumental colour, and other performance-based traits are less developed than those for analysing structural elements, such as harmony, form, phrase rhythm, or melodic contour. That said, there remain debates over the appropriate methodology for understanding the structural features of popular songs. Queen’s music forces the analyst to confront both analytical issues: performance and non-notated musical parameters (Mercury’s singing techniques, manipulation of the sound-box) are crucial components of Queen’s idiolect, as are the variety of structural details across its output. Further to these methodological issues, Queen’s music offers insights into wider analytical matters such as understanding stylistic labels, the notion of musical development, and the very nature of an idiolect. Queen’s songs, therefore, provided an opportunity to further develop ideas on popular music analysis, which in turn may provide future analysts with the means to better explain and investigate their subject matter.

Secondly, there was the matter of what analysis could reveal about Queen. In his stylistic history of popular music, Moore places Queen in the proximity of the glitter and glam rock bands; he also suggests Queen could be marked as ‘Classic Rock’. His

²² Allan F. Moore, *Rock: The Primary Text*, 2nd ed. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), 218.

use of capital letters deliberately denotes the problematic nature of such a category. The fact that Moore groups Queen with the Eagles suggests commercial success, rather than musical traits, is what defines this group of artists.²³ The *Rolling Stone* biography on the band describes Queen as the ‘epitome of pomp rock’, whose sound fused ‘glam rock, hard rock and intricate vocal harmonies’.²⁴ One finds another variation in, *Yeah Yeah Yeah*, Bob Stanley’s history of pop music. He includes Queen in the chapter on ‘Metal’, describes them as ‘flamboyant rock...with a penchant for both Beatles’ experimentalism and melodicism’, before musing that ‘somehow they remained hard to pin down...they seemed genuinely detached from pop’.²⁵ Other writers adopt a stance in line with Stanley’s final comment. De Boer talks of Queen’s ‘unique sonic fingerprint’;²⁶ while Purvis states, ‘Queen was Freddie Mercury, Brian May, Roger Taylor and John Deacon. It was a once-in-a-lifetime joining of forces, never to be repeated...the combination...turned Queen into a legendary phenomenon’.²⁷

While these appraisals come from different contexts, there is a common thread of uncertainty over where Queen belongs in popular music history. The latter authors avoid this issue by placing Queen in its own category. This is problematic because of the implication that the group was divorced from its surrounding musical contexts—Queen may have been a ‘once-in-a-lifetime’ and ‘unique’ band, but it was not free from the influence of other artists, contemporary and past. This analytical thesis is important because it investigates and solves the problems of Queen—where the group was positioned in the world of 1970s popular music, and how, if it all, it stood out from the musical crowd. The contributions to the academic literature are thus threefold: the thesis brings Queen into the world of popular music analysis; it expands the notion of a musical idiolect, as well as intervening in other methodological and analytical debates; and, it aims to provide readers and listeners with a richer understanding of Queen’s music.

²³ Moore, *Song Means*, 145-147.

²⁴ Evan Serpick, ‘Queen Biography’, *Rolling Stone*, <<http://www.rollingstone.com/music/artists/queen/biography>> (accessed 12 February 2014).

²⁵ Bob Stanley, *Yeah Yeah Yeah: The Story of Modern Pop* (London: Faber and Faber, 2013), 506.

²⁶ Jennifer de Boer, ‘On the Margins of the Mainstream: Queen, the Rock Press, and Gender’ (MA thesis, McMaster University, 1999), 87.

²⁷ Georg Purvis, *Queen: Complete Works* (London: Titan Books, 2011), 11.

2. Literature Review

The first section of this chapter traces the development of popular music analysis as an academic discipline. While popular music analysis is now accepted as a worthwhile pursuit, it is necessary to work through several ideas, as they provide greater insight into why Queen has been neglected in academia. Throughout this section, ‘analysis’ is understood as per Bent and Drabkin’s definition—‘to identify the constituent elements [of the work] and explain how they operate’.²⁸ Thus, all the sources listed below engage, in some way, in music analysis. The differences between the groups of authors lie in the ends towards which the analyses are directed.

The second section of this chapter considers previous work on Queen, with a particular focus on theses by de Boer and Promane. Both authors document aspects of Queen’s music, but do not successfully capture the essence of the group’s style. This section investigates how the authors fall short in this regard. The third section discusses the key concepts of style and idiolect, addressing both the theoretical foundations of these ideas, as well as their application in previous case studies. The fourth section introduces the two new concepts of sonic patterns and compositional strategies as a means of overcoming several methodological issues relating to Queen and the notion of an idiolect.

2.1 Analysing Popular Music

2.1.1 Analysing Popular Music, ca. 1980-2000

Several dates mark the formal origins of studying popular music in an academic context. In 1971, the journal *Popular Music and Society* was first published. A decade later, in 1981, the first International Conference on Popular Music Research was held, with the first edition of the scholarly journal *Popular Music* published the same year.²⁹ Up to this point, academic interest in popular music had been minimal, which,

²⁸ Ian Bent and William Drabkin, *Analysis* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1987), 2.

²⁹ See R. Serge Denisoff, ‘An introduction’, *Popular Music and Society* 1/1 (1971), 3-5; Philip Tagg, ‘Analysing Popular Music: Theory, Method and Practice’, *Popular Music* 2 (1982), 38; Richard Middleton and David Horn, ‘Preface’, *Popular Music* 1 (1981), 1-2.

above all, can be attributed to the high-low cultural divide between classical and popular music, or between ‘music that functions as art, as opposed to entertainment or some other ancillary or background function’.³⁰ The most notable early publications on the subject were Adorno’s indictment of popular music, Mellers’ book on the Beatles, and Middleton’s study of the blues’ influence on popular music.³¹

The emergence of popular music studies coincided with other disciplinary changes, notably the growth of cultural studies and the reorientation of musicology.³² The study of popular music, in general, suited the ideas being put forth by the practitioners from cultural studies and the ‘New Musicology’.³³ The analysis of popular music also presented fertile ground for the development of new methodological approaches that were informed by various disciplinary ideas. From cultural studies, there was a general emphasis on connecting the text with its social context whether in terms of people, institutions, or cultures—the fundamental question for Tagg was, ‘why and how does who communicate what to whom and with what effect?’³⁴ Or, in McClary and Walser’s blunter terms, how and why does rock music ‘kick butt’?³⁵ Walser later summed up these views, arguing that ‘we should be historicizing all music and accounting in each case for the particular pleasures that are offered and thus for the values on which they depend and to which they appeal’.³⁶ Similarly, popular music provided a platform for moving beyond the analytical methods of traditional musicology. Tagg noted

³⁰ Julian Johnson, *Who Needs Classical Music? Cultural Choice and Musical Value* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 6.

³¹ Theodor W. Adorno (With the assistance of George Simpson), ‘On Popular Music’, in *Essays on Music: Theodor W. Adorno*, ed. Richard Leppert (Los Angeles: California University Press, 2002); Wilfrid Mellers, *Twilight of the Gods: The Beatles in Retrospect* (London: Faber and Faber, 1976); Richard Middleton, *Pop Music and the Blues: A Study of the Relationship and Its Significance* (London: Gollancz, 1972).

³² Joseph Kerman’s texts are often considered to have provided the impetus for such changes; see Joseph Kerman, ‘How We Got into Analysis, and How to Get out’, *Critical Inquiry* 7/2 (1980); Joseph Kerman, *Contemplating Music* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1985). For an excellent account of the disciplinary impact of the so-called ‘New Musicology’, see Nicholas Cook and Mark Everist, ‘Preface’, in *Rethinking Music*, eds. Nicholas Cook and Mark Everist (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

³³ For a brief outline of the congruous relationship between popular music and cultural studies, see John Storey, *Cultural Studies and the Study of Popular Culture* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), 2-4.

³⁴ Tagg, ‘Analysing Popular Music’, 41.

³⁵ Susan McClary and Robert Walser, ‘Start Making Sense! Musicology Wrestles with Rock’, in *On Record: Rock, Pop, and the Written Word*, eds. Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin (London: Routledge, 1990), 244.

³⁶ Robert Walser, ‘Popular music analysis: ten apothegms and four examples’, in *Analyzing Popular Music*, ed. Allan F. Moore (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 20.

[A] culture-centric fixation on certain ‘notatable’ parameters of musical expression (mostly processual aspects such as ‘form’, thematic construction, etc.), which are particularly important to the Western art music tradition...other parameters not easily expressed in traditional notation (mostly ‘immediate’ aspects such as sound, timbre, electromusical treatment, ornamentation, etc.) [are] extremely important in popular music.³⁷

And from McClary and Walser again, ‘the musicologist interested in popular music has to invent critical techniques, codes, and paradigms from scratch’.³⁸ Middleton usefully grouped authors working from this perspective under the banner of ‘cultural musicology’.³⁹ For the cultural musicologists, the new ‘critical techniques’ and methods formed only one segment of the analytical process. To answer questions of communication and meaning, it was necessary to combine music analysis with tools and ideas from sociology and cultural theory.

The work of Tagg, Middleton, McClary, Walser, *et al.* was assessed by Covach in his contribution to Cook and Everist’s *Rethinking Music*. Titled ‘Popular Music, Unpopular Musicology’, Covach questioned why, near the turn of the millennium, the study of popular music was still marginalised in music departments, despite the efforts of the aforementioned authors. For Covach, the major problem was that cultural musicology was overly focused on audiences and ideology, with not enough concern for musical details. The aims of the discipline were thus aligned with the aims of cultural studies, rather than with the aims of traditional musicology.⁴⁰ Expanding on earlier work, Covach argued that it was necessary to bring the analysis of popular music into contact with traditional music theory and analysis, as tools from these latter disciplines would produce a much richer understanding of the music in question.⁴¹

³⁷ Tagg, ‘Analysing Popular Music’, 42-43.

³⁸ McClary and Walser, ‘Start Making Sense’, 280-281.

³⁹ Richard Middleton, ‘Introduction: Locating the Popular Music Text’, in *Reading Pop: Approaches to Textual Analysis in Popular Music*, ed. Richard Middleton (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 6.

⁴⁰ John Covach, ‘Popular Music, Unpopular Musicology’, in *Rethinking Music*, eds. Nicholas Cook and Mark Everist (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 452-455.

⁴¹ For his earlier arguments, see John Covach, ‘We Won’t Get Fooled Again: Rock Music and Musical Analysis’, in *Keeping Score: Music, Disciplinarity, Culture*, eds. David Schwarz, Anahid Kassabian, and Lawrence Siegel (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1997).

This viewpoint informed the work of American music theorists who applied traditional analytical methods to popular music. Within this segment of the literature, analyses pertaining to structure, voice-leading, and harmony were prominent, with tools and ideas often borrowed and adapted from classical music theory.⁴² Analyses emanating from music theorists were marked by their level of musical detail; as Neal relates, there was consistently ‘a profound interest from music theorists and their readership in the close examination and analysis of the musical substance’.⁴³ Early studies of this kind often focused on 1970s progressive rock,⁴⁴ but perhaps epitomising this spirit were Everett’s two-volume analyses of the Beatles, which explored the compositional procedures and musical techniques of the complete Beatles repertoire.⁴⁵ Everett’s books also summed up the general distinction between music theorists and cultural musicologists. While noting the potential value of other disciplinary perspectives on the Beatles, Everett argued that a rich understanding of the songs in musical terms is a necessity for the ‘well-read, well-balanced listener’.⁴⁶

Between these broadly opposing poles of music theory and cultural musicology, there was an analytical middleground, which Moore staked out most effectively. By focusing on matters of interpretation—authenticity, intertextuality, and song personae—Moore conducted his work with the listener at the forefront. At the same time, he argued strongly that interpretation was dependent on what listeners heard in the musical text. To understand the process of interpretation, it was thus necessary to investigate the nuances and details of songs. Furthermore, following Tagg, Moore

⁴² See, for example, Walter Everett, ‘Text Painting in the Foreground and Middleground Paul McCartney’s Song, ‘She’s Leaving Home’: A Musical Study of Psychological Conflict’, *In Theory Only* 9 (1987); Robert Gauldin, ‘Beethoven, Tristan, and the Beatles’, *College Music Symposium* 30 (1990); Walter Everett, ‘Swallowed by a Song: Paul Simon’s Crisis of Chromaticism’, in *Understanding Rock: Essays in Musical Analysis*, eds. John Covach and Graeme M. Boone (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Daniel Harrison, ‘After Sundown: The Beach Boys’ Experimental Music’, in *Understanding Rock: Essays in Musical Analysis*, eds. John Covach and Graeme M. Boone (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

⁴³ Jocelyn R. Neal, ‘Popular Music Analysis in American Music Theory’, *Zeitschrift der Gesellschaft für Musiktheorie* 2/2-3 (2005), 176.

⁴⁴ Nors S. Josephson, ‘Bach Meets Liszt: Traditional Formal Structures and Performance Practices in Progressive Rock’, *The Musical Quarterly* 76/1 (1992); John Covach, ‘Progressive Rock, ‘Close to the Edge,’ and the Boundaries of Style’, in *Understanding Rock: Essays in Musical Analysis*, eds. John Covach and Graeme M. Boone (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Mark Spicer, ‘Large Scale Strategy and Compositional Design in the Early Music of Genesis’, in *Expression in Pop-Rock Music: A Collection of Critical and Analytical Essays*, ed. Walter Everett (New York: Routledge, 2000).

⁴⁵ Walter Everett, *The Beatles as Musicians: Revolver through the Anthology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Walter Everett, *The Beatles as Musicians: The Quarry Men through Rubber Soul* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

⁴⁶ Everett, *The Beatles as Musicians: Revolver*, x-xi.

sought to develop clearer methods for studying elements such as texture and timbre. Finally, following Green,⁴⁷ Moore argued that the interpretative process rested on implicit comparisons between a given track and the norms of its musical context, such as a wider style.⁴⁸ Accordingly, a major aim of his early work was to detail the norms and stylistic traits of rock music.⁴⁹

By the late 1990s, then, one could perhaps observe (in theory, at least) a three-part division of the popular music analytical field according to the grand aims of the analysts: cultural meaning, song interpretation, and music theory. That said, one should note that all perspectives were present in the 2003-collection *Analyzing Popular Music*,⁵⁰ indicating a field comfortable with a plurality of methods and approaches. I will return to this tripartite structure shortly. Suffice to say, much popular music analysis of the past fifteen years has followed the paths established in the previous decades, although the scope of each path has widened considerably. Moore has developed richer ideas on the act of interpretation, culminating in *Song Means*;⁵¹ his work has been complemented by other studies that address issues such as authenticity and musical personae.⁵² Along similar lines, one can find many culturally-informed analyses of popular music, on subjects ranging from the Gorillaz to Korn to power ballads.⁵³

⁴⁷ In particular, Lucy Green, *Music on Deaf Ears: Musical Meaning, Ideology and Education* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), 26-51.

⁴⁸ This idea is outlined most forcefully in Moore, *Song Means*, 165ff. This view is also articulated in several of Moore's reviews; see, for instance, his critique of Everett in Allan F. Moore, 'Review of *Expression in Pop-Rock: A Collection of Critical and Analytical Essays*. Edited by Walter Everett', *Music & Letters* 82/1 (2001), 148.

⁴⁹ See Moore, *Rock*. This book offers a clear introduction to many of the ideas that would recur and be developed in Moore's writings over the next fifteen or so years. Specific elements of Moore's work appear below. For his work concerning specific norms of rock music, see Allan F. Moore, 'Patterns of Harmony', *Popular Music* 11/1 (1992); Allan F. Moore, 'The So-Called 'Flattened Seventh' in Rock', *Popular Music* 14/2 (1995).

⁵⁰ Allan F. Moore, ed. *Analyzing Popular Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

⁵¹ Moore, *Song Means*.

⁵² See, for example, Elizabeth Eva Leach, 'Vicars of 'Wannabe': Authenticity and the Spice Girls', *Popular Music* 20/2 (2001); Mark Butler, 'Taking it seriously: intertextuality and authenticity in two covers by the Pet Shop Boys', *Popular Music* 22/1 (2003); Matthew Gelbart, 'Persona and Voice in the Kinks' Songs of the Late 1960s', *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 128/2 (2003); K. Negus, 'Authorship and the Popular Song', *Music and Letters* 92/4 (2011).

⁵³ Jonathan Pieslak, 'Sound, text and identity in Korn's 'Hey Daddy'', *Popular Music* 27/1 (2008); Lars Eckstein, 'Torpedoing the authorship of popular music: a reading of Gorillaz' 'Feel Good Inc.', *Popular Music* 28/2 (2009); David Metzger, 'The power ballad', *Popular Music* 31/3 (2012).

The scope of theory-based analyses has also expanded greatly in recent times. In 1995, Bowman lamented the fact that few academics had ‘attempted to ferret out the component parts of a given genre through an analysis of a sizable body of repertoire’.⁵⁴ Although music theorists have not directly responded to Bowman, recent work can be viewed as meeting his academic challenge by engaging large bodies of popular music and identifying musical trends within those corpuses. A number of studies have addressed issues pertaining to harmonic language and structures across genre and style boundaries. Several authors have identified harmonic norms (in terms of chord function and chord progressions) of the broad popular music repertoire. The notable examples of this work are Everett’s categorisation of ‘tonal systems’ in popular music,⁵⁵ and de Clercq and Temperley’s harmonic analysis of the *Rolling Stone* ‘Top 500’ songs list.⁵⁶ Other authors have narrowed their focus to a particular element of harmony. This approach is exemplified by Capuzzo on the notion of sectional tonality and centrality,⁵⁷ Biamonte on rock’s pentatonic and modal harmonic patterns,⁵⁸ and Temperley’s articles on melodic-harmonic relationships and cadential figures in popular music.⁵⁹ Other authors still have documented the occurrences of interesting harmonic phenomena in popular music. Instances of this work have addressed, for example, modulation types,⁶⁰ and the use of particular scales and modes in songs.⁶¹

The study of form in popular music has also been fruitful for music theorists. As with harmony, the notable studies have addressed formal strategies across historical eras

⁵⁴ Rob Bowman, ‘The Stax Sound: A Musicological Analysis’, *Popular Music* 14/3 (1995), 285.

⁵⁵ Walter Everett, ‘Making Sense of Rock’s Tonal Systems’, *Music Theory Online* 10.4 (2004), <http://www.mtosmt.org/issues/mto.04.10.4/mto.04.10.4.w_everett.html> (accessed 11 March 2014).

⁵⁶ Trevor de Clercq and David Temperley, ‘A corpus analysis of rock harmony’, *Popular Music* 30/1 (2011).

⁵⁷ Guy Capuzzo, ‘Sectional Tonality and Sectional Centrality in Rock Music’, *Music Theory Spectrum* 31/1 (2009).

⁵⁸ Nicole Biamonte, ‘Triadic Modal and Pentatonic Patterns in Rock Music’, *Music Theory Spectrum* 32/2 (2010).

⁵⁹ David Temperley, ‘The Melodic-Harmonic ‘Divorce’ in Rock’, *Popular Music* 26/2 (2007); David Temperley, ‘The Cadential IV in Rock’, *Music Theory Online* 17.1 (2011), <<http://www.mtosmt.org/issues/mto.11.17.1/mto.11.17.1.temperley.html>> (accessed 24 March 2014).

⁶⁰ Christopher Doll, ‘Rockin’ Out: Expressive Modulation in Verse-Chorus Form’, *Music Theory Online* 17.3 (2011), <<http://www.mtosmt.org/issues/mto.11.17.3/mto.11.17.3.doll.php>> (accessed 13 February 2014).

⁶¹ David Temperley, ‘Scalar Shift in Popular Music’, *Music Theory Online* 17.4 (2011), <<http://www.mtosmt.org/issues/mto.11.17.4/mto.11.17.4.temperley.html>> (accessed 1 April 2014); Brett Clement, ‘Modal Tonicization in Rock: The Special Case of the Lydian Scale’, *Gamut* 6/1 (2013).

and genre boundaries. Spicer's analysis of accumulative form was an early instance of this kind of investigation;⁶² Summach's study of the pre-chorus in popular music treads a similar methodological path by documenting the traits of a specific formal element in popular music across an extended period of time (his corpus is the *Billboard* Annual Top 20 hits from 1955 to 1989).⁶³ Others have documented a range of other formal strategies, but with respect to specific corpuses. Osborn has identified what he terms 'terminally-climactic' forms in post-millennial rock music. He has also addressed approaches to through-composed structures within the same repertoire.⁶⁴ Covach and Endrinal have investigated even narrower corpuses, identifying distinct formal patterns in songs by Leiber and Stoller, and U2, respectively.⁶⁵

In addition to studies of harmony and form, a handful of music theorists have taken the same investigative approach to other musical elements, with findings often presented in textbook form. Stephenson's *What to Listen for in Rock* was one of the first such texts.⁶⁶ It covered some of the norms of popular music, particularly with respect to form and harmony, but was lacking in its discussion of texture and timbre. Everett's essay 'Pitch Down the Middle' was similarly concerned with the range of melodic and harmonic traits of popular music, while still drawing connections between these elements and aspects of vocal colour and instrumentation.⁶⁷ His subsequent book *The Foundations of Rock* comprehensively documents the myriad musical and songwriting techniques to be found in early popular music (1955-1969), with respect to the complete popular music text (melody, harmony, form, production techniques, texture, and so forth).⁶⁸ Other textbooks have foregrounded the historical

⁶² Mark Spicer, '(Ac)cumulative Form in Pop-Rock Music', *twentieth-century music* 1/1 (2004).

⁶³ Jay Summach, 'The Structure, Function, and Genesis of the Prechorus', *Music Theory Online* 17.3 (2011), <<http://www.mtosmt.org/issues/mto.11.17.3/mto.11.17.3.summach.php>> (accessed 25 March 2014).

⁶⁴ Brad Osborn, 'Subverting the Verse-Chorus Paradigm: Terminally Climactic Forms in Recent Rock Music', *Music Theory Spectrum* 35/1 (2013); Brad Osborn, 'Understanding Through-Composition in Post-Rock, Math-Metal, and other Post-Millennial Rock Genres', *Music Theory Online* 17.3 (2011), <<http://www.mtosmt.org/issues/mto.11.17.3/mto.11.17.3.osborn.html>> (accessed 23 February 2014).

⁶⁵ John Covach, 'Leiber and Stoller, the Coasters, and the "Dramatic ABBA" Form', in *Sounding Out Pop: Analytical Essays in Popular Music*, eds. Mark Spicer and John Covach (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010); Christopher Endrinal, 'Burning Bridges: Defining the Interverse in the Music of U2', *Music Theory Online* 17.3 (2011), <<http://www.mtosmt.org/issues/mto.11.17.3/mto.11.17.3.endrinal.html>> (accessed 12 December 2013).

⁶⁶ Ken Stephenson, *What to Listen For in Rock: A Stylistic Analysis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).

⁶⁷ See, in particular, Walter Everett, 'Pitch Down the Middle', in *Expression in Pop-Rock Music: Critical and Analytical Essays*, ed. Walter Everett (New York: Routledge, 2008), 117-126.

⁶⁸ Walter Everett, *The Foundations of Rock* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

succession of styles in popular music. Covach and Flory's *What's That Sound?* is an outline of popular music styles from the 1920s to the present. While their work is geared towards less specialist audiences, the authors outline the common musical traits of the different styles and eras.⁶⁹ Neal's text on country music adopts a similar approach in outlining the major cultural and stylistic changes within the genre through the twentieth century.⁷⁰

This overview of theory-based analyses is by no means exhaustive, but it points to the fact that there has been a great deal of 'ferreting' in the last fifteen years, both in terms of identifying traits that are evident across genres, and in terms of highlighting traits that define particular genres and styles. In conjunction with the variety of interpretative and culturally-oriented analyses, there is a much greater understanding of how popular music texts work from a strictly musical perspective.

This understanding has been enhanced by the marked increase in analytical work on popular music production. In an early text on the aesthetics of rock music, Gracyk argued that the defining characteristic of rock was its 'ontological thickness'. His description referred to the fact that a rock music text is defined not only by its sound-structures (i.e. the 'notes'), but also by its sonic qualities as presented on the recording. Gracyk positioned rock music in opposition to the 'ontological thinness' of classical music, the texts of which were defined primarily by their sound-structures. He compares Springsteen's 1975-album *Born to Run* with Bach's *Goldberg Variations*—the latter can be 'grasped through performances on a wide variety of instruments', given that 'no specific *sound* belongs' to the work; the former can only be understood fully from the album, given that Springsteen's 'wall-of-sound' production is a key component of the work.⁷¹

The implication of Gracyk's argument was that analysts needed to address the sonic qualities of popular music texts, if they were to get to the heart of their subject matter. Scholars have met this challenge in a variety of ways. Moore was one of the first to

⁶⁹ John Covach and Andrew Flory, *What's That Sound? An Introduction to Rock and its History*, 3rd ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2012).

⁷⁰ Jocelyn R. Neal, *Country Music: A Cultural and Stylistic History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁷¹ See Gracyk, *Rhythm and Noise*, 13ff.

crystallise the notion of the ‘sound-box’; this concept refers to the three-dimensional virtual space that the sounds of a recording inhabit.⁷² Dockwray and Moore analysed the positions in which instruments and voices were placed in songs from 1965 to 1972. From this research they established the ‘diagonal mix’, a particular configuration of instruments that became the norm from the 1970s onwards.⁷³ Dockwray, Moore and Schmidt furthered this work by investigating how the treatment of sources in the sound-box might contribute to song meaning, thus adding a further layer to the interpretation apparatus.⁷⁴

This work on the sound-box complemented other investigations into the production of popular music in the recording studio. Zak’s *The Poetics of Rock* was one of the first analytical texts to take the reader behind-the-scenes, as it were, and demonstrate the range of technological decisions that occur in the recording process.⁷⁵ Although the importance of technology and producers was long noted in the field,⁷⁶ Zak systematically covered the various stages of record production, such as recording techniques, effects, mixing, and so forth. Importantly, he framed the choices made by producers, musicians, and engineers as fundamentally musical; that is, decisions are made on the basis of whether they satisfy particular aesthetic needs. Like Moore’s work, Zak analysed numerous songs and looked at how production decisions may impact on a listener’s understanding of the text. Although focused on the voice, Lacasse staked out similar ground with an extended analysis of the multiple ways vocal parts are treated in popular music (effects, ‘staging’, etc.) and how such treatment shapes interpretation.⁷⁷

Increasing academic enquiries in this area have helped to cement the new sub-discipline devoted to the ‘Art of Record Production’. This segment of the field is

⁷² Moore, *Rock*, 121.

⁷³ Ruth Dockwray and Allan F. Moore, ‘Configuring the sound-box 1965–1972’, *Popular Music* 29/2 (2010); Allan F. Moore and Ruth Dockwray, ‘The Establishment of the Virtual Performance Space in Rock’, *twentieth-century music* 5/2 (2008).

⁷⁴ Allan F. Moore, Patricia Schmidt, and Ruth Dockwray, ‘A Hermeneutics of Spatialization for Recorded Song A Hermeneutics of Spatialization for Recorded Song’, *twentieth-century music* 6/1 (2009).

⁷⁵ Albin Zak, *The Poetics of Rock: Cutting Tracks, Making Records* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001).

⁷⁶ See, for example, Antoine Hennion, ‘The Production of Success: An Anti-Musicology of the Pop Song’, *Popular Music* 3 (1983), 185-192.

⁷⁷ Serge Lacasse, ‘Listen to My Voice’: The Evocative Power of Vocal Staging in Recorded Rock Music’ (PhD diss., University of Liverpool, 2000).

concerned with the practices and aesthetics of record production, regardless of the genre, although a good deal of the work under this banner has addressed popular music.⁷⁸ One important facet of the new discipline is the multitude of perspectives being brought to the academic and analytical tables: one can find material on the physical attributes of studios and their impact on musical style,⁷⁹ compositional processes in the studio,⁸⁰ and very specific recording techniques.⁸¹ As per previous disciplinary developments, the work coming from this sector of the field is providing other analysts with new methods with which to engage music, as well as highlighting the need to account for a range of musical details and techniques when analysing a popular music text.

2.1.2 Locating Queen in Popular Music Analysis

In an early critique of cultural musicology, Covach noted a tendency for popular music scholars to study music that confirmed particular political or socio-cultural viewpoints.⁸² This type of criticism went both ways. Walser argued that music theorists sought out examples that worked well only with certain analytical tools.⁸³ In less pointed terms, Kaminsky noted that early analyses of popular music from music theorists focused on subject matter with ‘a degree of structural integrity that can withstand this sort of analytical scrutiny’.⁸⁴ And although Moore is explicit about the need to avoid creating canons, he acknowledges that his own work returns to a

⁷⁸ See Simon Frith and Simon Zagorski-Thomas, eds., *The Art of Record Production: An Introductory Reader for a New Academic Field* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2012).

⁷⁹ Simon Zagorski-Thomas, ‘The US vs the UK Sound: Meaning in Music Production in the 1970s’, in *The Art of Record Production: An Introductory Reader for a New Academic Field*, eds. Simon Frith and Simon Zagorski-Thomas (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2012); Toby Seay, ‘Capturing That Philadelphia Sound: A Technical Exploration of Sigma Sound Studios’, *Journal on the Art of Record Production* 6 (2012), <<http://arpjournal.com/1834/capturing-that-philadelphia-sound-a-technical-exploration-of-sigma-sound-studios/>> (accessed 19 March 2014).

⁸⁰ Jan Butler, ‘The Beach Boys’ *Pet Sounds* and the Musicology of Record Production’, in *The Art of Record Production: An Introductory Reader for a New Academic Field*, eds. Simon Frith and Simon Zagorski-Thomas (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2012).

⁸¹ Mark Mynett, ‘Sound At Source: The Creative Practice Of Re-Heading, Dampening And Drum Tuning For The Contemporary Metal Genre’, *Journal on the Art of Record Production* 5 (2011), <<http://arpjournal.com/839/sound-at-source-the-creative-practice-of-re-heading-dampening-and-drum-tuning-for-the-contemporary-metal-genre/>> (accessed 12 March 2014).

⁸² Covach, ‘We Won’t Get Fooled Again’.

⁸³ Robert Walser, ‘Review of *Understanding Rock: Essays in Musical Analysis*. Edited by John Covach and Graeme M. Boone’, *Notes* 57/2 (2000), 355-356.

⁸⁴ Peter M. Kaminsky, ‘Revenge of the Boomers: Notes on the Analysis of Rock’, *Music Theory Online* 6.3 (2000), <<http://www.mtosmt.org/issues/mto.00.6.3/mto.00.6.3.kaminsky.html>> (accessed 11 March 2014).

number of songs that ‘provide rich examples of the ways that tracks are involved in the creation of meaning...they exemplify the points I am making’.⁸⁵ The point to be made is not that one sector of the field is right or wrong, but that the music studied by academics will always reflect, to a certain extent, the overarching aims and concerns of the practitioners.⁸⁶ This observation is borne out in the rapid ascension of Radiohead into the analytical canon—the band’s music has offered structural complexities, interpretative ambiguities, and socio-political content, all of which have tempted analysts working from different perspectives.⁸⁷

It is with these ideas in mind that one can address Queen’s absence from popular music analyses. Above all, it would appear that the group’s music has not fitted into the main academic trends outlined above. Desler focuses on the socio-cultural angle of this issue. Her argument is neatly summed up thus: ‘Queen’s remaining aloof of the ideology of the very movement with which a majority of popular music scholars have sympathised and consequently regarded as the most politically and socially important of the period has greatly contributed to Queen’s virtual exclusion from academic popular music historiography’. The primary and, to some extent, only socio-cultural issue attached to the group was Freddie Mercury’s homosexuality. This issue informs the few academic investigations into Queen, as noted by Desler, and as outlined below.⁸⁸

In terms of the music theory approach, it is not unreasonable to suggest that the ‘structural integrity’ of Queen’s songs does not always require the same level of interrogation as Genesis, Yes, the Beatles or other bands that featured in early analyses. Indeed, as is explored in Chapter 4, Queen’s structural musical language (that is, form, harmony and melody) was rich and detailed, but also accessible and grounded in conventional techniques. The complexities, as it were, of Queen’s songs lay not in particular structural innovations, but in the way the group adopted and

⁸⁵ Moore, *Song Means*, 16.

⁸⁶ See Desler, ‘History without royalty?’, 397.

⁸⁷ See, for example, Nadine Hubbs, ‘The Imagination of Pop-Rock Criticism’, in *Expression in Pop-Rock Music: Critical and Analytical Essays*, ed. Walter Everett (New York: Routledge, 2008); Marianne Tatom Letts, ‘“I’m Not Here, This Isn’t Happening”: The Vanishing Subject in Radiohead’s *Kid A*’, in *Sounding Out Pop: Analytical Essays in Popular Music*, eds. Mark Spicer and John Covach (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010); Nathan Hesselink, ‘Rhythmic play, compositional intent and communication in rock music’, *Popular Music* 33/1 (2014).

⁸⁸ Desler, ‘History without royalty?’, 398, 400-401.

adapted these conventional techniques. On the other hand, as Desler observes, Queen's music and its techniques were rarely exemplary of particular styles. This makes the group's music less suitable for textbook authors, who have sought comparatively straightforward representations of specific styles and genres.⁸⁹ Accordingly, Queen is addressed either very briefly or not at all. This observation holds for historical textbooks,⁹⁰ as well as texts that address individual domains of popular music.⁹¹

Finally, 'Bohemian Rhapsody' has provided fertile interpretative ground, both with and without socio-cultural angles,⁹² and 'Bicycle Race' gets an interesting write-up by Moore.⁹³ However, the same author's words on 'Now I'm Here' are perhaps more revealing: 'The "here" of the title of Queen's "Now I'm Here" treats each side equally. It has little to do with the song proper, which is a standard glam-rock boogie with voices covering a wide arc in the centre of the stereo field'.⁹⁴ Moore's second sentence seems pertinent. Although interpretation involves more than simple consideration of the lyrics and the music, Queen's songs, perhaps, 'afford' a limited number of readings.⁹⁵ Accordingly, the songs may be viewed as posing fewer interpretative challenges. Given that the work of Moore, Gelbart, Butler, *et al.* has been as concerned with developing methodologies of interpretation as with the actual interpretative findings, it is easy to understand how Queen's music may have thus served fewer academic purposes for these scholars.

The points made above are intended neither to reduce the value of Queen's music, nor to suggest that previous scholars have sought to exclude Queen from their research agendas. Rather, it seems that for many years Queen's music floated outside of the three main analytical currents. Even if, as suggested above, these currents have not

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 400.

⁹⁰ As well as Covach and Flory's *What's That Sound?* Desler cites Auslander and Holm-Hudson, whose texts provided overviews of glam rock and progressive rock, respectively. See Philip Auslander, *Performing Glam Rock: Gender and Theatricality in Popular Music* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006); Kevin Holm-Hudson, ed. *Progressive Rock Reconsidered* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

⁹¹ For example, Queen would not have been particularly useful as an exemplar of basic formal designs in rock music. See John Covach, 'Form in Rock Music: A Primer', in *Engaging Music*, ed. Deborah Stein (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

⁹² These sources are covered in Section 2.3.

⁹³ Moore, *Song Means*, 235-236.

⁹⁴ Allan F. Moore, 'Where is Here? An Issue of Deictic Projection in Recorded Song', *Journal of the Royal Music Association* 135/1 (2010), 173.

⁹⁵ Moore, *Song Means*, 243ff.

changed direction greatly in the last fifteen years, the widening of the river has made a study of Queen more feasible. The increased attention paid to recording and production techniques, as well as the broad shift towards more ‘mainstream’ popular music analysis,⁹⁶ suggests that Queen may sit comfortably in this new academic climate. Thus, although Queen has not, to date, received the analytical attention that is perhaps warranted, it appears the time is now right to undertake such work.

The final point to clarify is where this study sits in relation to the aforementioned strands of popular music analysis. The primary focus is to understand Queen’s music in musical terms. This aim is achieved using an empirical approach of analysing each song in a set corpus. In this regard, the thesis occupies similar ground to that staked out by music theorists. There are no explicit interpretative or socio-cultural aims in this study. Nonetheless, some of the ideas introduced in Chapter 5 overlap with work from these other domains. In particular, interpretative steps are required when placing Queen within wider popular music styles, and appraising the group’s musical development; and, the introduction of genre into the discussion of progressive rock moves the work towards the cultural musicology sphere. Thus, even with its overt analytical focus, this thesis aims to draw in issues and approaches from across the popular music field.

2.2 Queen Literature

2.2.1 General Audience

Queen and Freddie Mercury have been the subject of a number of books, which have taken the form of biographies, either of the band or the artist, and most of which are unauthorised. Recent additions to this literature include Phil Sutcliffe’s *Queen: The Ultimate Illustrated History of the Crown Kings of Rock* and Harry Doherty’s *40 Years of Queen*.⁹⁷ Intended for a general audience, these books are immaculately designed, contain copious amounts of visual material, and provide reasonable details

⁹⁶ Essays were written on the Leiber and Stoller songwriting team, the Police, the Byrds, and Roy Orbison in Mark Spicer and John Covach, eds., *Sounding out Pop: Analytical Essays in Popular Music* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010). The most recent collection of essays on popular music has an explicit focus on ‘chart-toppers’ and commercially successful songs; see, Ralf von Appen et al., eds., *Song Interpretation in 21st-Century Pop Music* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2015).

⁹⁷ Sutcliffe, *Queen*; Harry Doherty, *40 Years of Queen* (New York: St Martin’s Press, 2011).

on the factual components of Queen's career. Sutcliffe's tome frames each chapter with a double-page review of the relevant album, each of which is written by a different music critic. The reviews are often insightful and draw connections between albums, but each critic seems determined to prove that his album is the best of Queen's output, which results in frequent lapses into hagiographical writing. Another recent addition to the general literature is Georg Purvis' *Queen: Complete Works*.⁹⁸ The book is an encyclopaedia of Queen's albums, songs, collaborations, side projects, and tours. The level of detail is mostly extraordinary. The album section outlines the historical background and recording process for each album. This is supplemented with a brief appraisal of the tracks and an overview of the critical reception. The song section is similarly structured, although the length of each entry varies widely. Again, the focus is on the songs' backgrounds and chart performances.

Sutcliffe, Doherty, and Purvis' books complement two documentaries on the group, a 'making of' film on *A Night at the Opera* and *Queen: Days of our Lives*.⁹⁹ The former documentary was made as part of the *Classic Album Series*; it appears that interview material for both films was recorded at the same time, and then shaped into the respective documentaries. The strength of the two documentaries is that the band members and Roy Thomas Baker, Queen's producer for much of the 1970s, shed light on the inspirations and influences on particular songs, as well as some of the production techniques used to create specific sounds and effects. Although most of these effects are one-off instances in Queen's output, and thus not always related to the group's idiolect, the insight into general studio practices is important and acts as a useful analytical guide. Overall, then, what the general sources lack in fine musical detail, they make up for with comprehensive background material that, in some cases, acts as a springboard for the analytical enquiries.

2.2.2 Academic Research

Only a handful of academics have conducted research on Queen. A number have considered Queen and, particularly, 'Bohemian Rhapsody' in relation to wider

⁹⁸ Purvis, *Queen*.

⁹⁹ Longfellow, *Classic Albums: Queen*; Matt O'Casey, *Queen: Days of our Lives* (Eagle Rock Entertainment, 2011).

musical contexts. McLeod's essay on the connection between opera and rock begins with 'Bohemian Rhapsody'.¹⁰⁰ He provides a succinct commentary of the song and connects the operatic themes and traits of the Queen hit with various 'classical' opera tropes such as arias, recitative, comic opera, and so forth. Zak includes a paragraph on 'Bohemian Rhapsody' in a chapter on 'epic' songs in the 1970s.¹⁰¹ 'Bohemian Rhapsody' is also the focal point for Whiteley. In particular, she is concerned with what Mercury reveals of his sexuality in his songs. At times, this leads to tenuous links such as ascribing real-life characters to the narrative of 'Bohemian Rhapsody'; other times, this leads to rather bland statements such as 'Somebody to Love' 'provides insight into Mercury's continuing search for true love', despite no real evidence being offered to support such ideas.¹⁰²

The same problems are evident in McLeod's analysis of music used in sporting contexts. McLeod questions why gay anthems are central to sporting events, and cites songs such as 'Go West' and 'YMCA' by the Village People and Queen's 'We are the Champions'. He suggests 'these anthems are often the products of gay icons and contain overt lyrical celebrations of homosexuality'.¹⁰³ Again, the problem is that McLeod reads Mercury's biography directly into the lyrics of 'We are the Champions'. There is a lack of specificity in the words that makes this assessment possible, but no evidence is offered to support the connection. And although Mercury could be vague regarding the inspiration for songs, he stated plainly that 'We are the Champions' was an imitation of a football anthem.¹⁰⁴ The most visible research on Queen has, therefore, tended to be descriptive and interpretative, and, in the case of Whiteley and McLeod, has fallen under the banner of cultural musicology. Overall, these authors' contributions to one's understanding of Queen have been moderate.

¹⁰⁰ Ken McLeod, 'Bohemian rhapsodies: operatic influences on rock music', *Popular Music* 20/2 (2001), 192-194.

¹⁰¹ Albin Zak, 'Rock and Roll Rhapsody: Pop Epics of the 1970s', in *Expression in Pop-Rock Music: A Collection of Critical and Analytical Essays*, ed. Walter Everett (New York: Routledge, 2008), 350-351.

¹⁰² Shelia Whiteley, 'Which Freddie? Constructions of Masculinity: the Killer Queen and Justin Hawkins', in *Oh Boy!: Popular Music and Masculinities*, ed. Freya Jarman-Ivens (New York: Routledge, 2007), 22-27.

¹⁰³ Ken McLeod, "'We are the Champions': Masculinities, Sports and Popular Music', *Popular Music and Society* 29/5 (2006), 541-544.

¹⁰⁴ Purvis, *Queen*, 288-290.

Three dissertations provide greater detail on the band's music. Dockwray's thesis addresses rock anthems, with songs by Queen forming an important segment of the genre. In this context, her most valuable contribution is the discussion of the musical characteristics of rock anthems. These traits include short melodic phrases, avoidance of melismatic melodies, use of riffs, strong sense of key, use of functional harmonies to reinforce the tonic chord, as well as a sense of a large sonic space.¹⁰⁵ Her analysis focuses on only a few of Queen's songs (mainly, 'We are the Champions', 'We Will Rock You', and 'Bohemian Rhapsody'), but her deconstructive approach is useful insofar as it provides an analytical benchmark against which other Queen songs could be assessed.

Promane's thesis has issues of genre at its heart, although his discussion of the concept is riddled with jargon—'I define genre paradigms as cultural constructs, woven together in negotiated networks and spaces of communication, identified through signifiers, signifieds and social conventions that bear degrees of similitude to one another categorically'.¹⁰⁶ What Promane appears to mean is that genre is an all-encompassing category comprising musical and extra-musical traits. This idea underpins his thesis. The four main chapters are dedicated to 'Bohemian Rhapsody', the album *Hot Space*, Mercury's collaboration with Montserrat Caballé, and the album *Made in Heaven*. Within each chapter, there are extended sections on the music, Mercury and Queen's biographies, visual aspects (such as music videos and album covers), and reception. Often, the work is descriptive and heavy on anecdotes from documentaries and interviews. The analysis of 'Bohemian Rhapsody', for example, is a straightforward outline of what happens musically. Furthermore, when discussing the possible antecedents for this work, Promane lists a range of concept albums (from the Kinks to the Mothers of Invention to the Beach Boys) without necessarily considering if such connections are warranted or important in the context of Queen. Promane's thesis often lacks an analytical edge, in favour of compiling as much information as possible on the group. That said, there is still value in this approach, and his thesis is a rich source of contextual material on Queen.

¹⁰⁵ See Ruth Dockwray, 'Deconstructing the Rock Anthem: Textual Form, Participation and Collectivity' (PhD diss., University of Liverpool, 2005), 32-81.

¹⁰⁶ Barry C. Promane, 'Freddie Mercury and Queen: Technologies of Genre and the Poetics of Innovation' (PhD diss., University of Western Ontario, 2009), 9.

This leaves de Boer's thesis on Queen, which addresses a number of issues, such as gender theory, the history of music hall, and Queen's musical style. The latter issue is pertinent in this context. De Boer does not succeed in identifying Queen's 'unique sonic-fingerprint',¹⁰⁷ primarily because she misreads the musical details of the group's output. Despite the insightful discussions in other parts of the thesis, it is necessary to focus on these failures because they raise important methodological points. De Boer begins her analysis with the statement,

“Bohemian Rhapsody”...was not only the band's biggest hit, but also one of their most theatrical and innovative singles. As such, this song is a particularly appropriate snapshot of Queen's repertoire, a fitting example to analyze the diverse *musical* attributes that come together in many of Queen's songs to produce their unique sonic-fingerprint.¹⁰⁸

Her analysis thus focuses primarily on elements of 'Bohemian Rhapsody', with the implication that such details appear elsewhere in the Queen corpus; in other words, de Boer implicitly contends that 'Bohemian Rhapsody' is reflective of Queen's idiolect. With respect to the song's vocals, de Boer argues that they are built in an SATB arrangement, and she notes the wide pitch range of the 'Queen chorus' in the opera section; the author compares the 'dramatic' nature of the chorus with Verdi's *Messa da Requiem* and Handel's *Messiah*; and, she argues that there is a blurred division between the lead and backing vocal parts, particularly in the opening section. De Boer further discusses the extensive overdubbing of voices during the recording process, and claims that 'stylistic eclecticism' was an 'attribute' of the group's overall sound.¹⁰⁹

There are some minor inaccuracies in the analysis—'Bohemian Rhapsody' does not really employ an SATB arrangement (see Section 4.5)—but the underlying problems are fourfold. Firstly, de Boer's claim regarding Queen's stylistic eclecticism is paradoxical, as the variations in style are antithetical to the notion of a defined 'sonic fingerprint'. The former idea connotes difference, while the latter idea connotes similarity and consistency. Secondly, de Boer overstates the prevalence of some traits within Queen's output; the range of the vocalists and the extent of the overdubbing

¹⁰⁷ De Boer, 'On the Margins', 87.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 83-119.

are extreme in 'Bohemian Rhapsody'. Thirdly, de Boer pinpoints details that are not representative of Queen's overall output. The group employed the same type of vocal arrangement in three other songs during the 1970s ('Death on Two Legs', 'Somebody to Love', 'Bicycle Race'), and only for small segments of these songs. Further, there was often a very clear distinction between lead and backing parts, as manifest through rhythmic differences or separation in the sound-box. Fourthly, explicit references to classical music are rare in Queen's output. What de Boer fails to distinguish between are those features that specifically reference classical music, and those features that reference other popular styles, but may still evoke classical music procedures and techniques. This final issue is taken up in Section 6.2.3.

To summarise the work above, none of the studies provides a nuanced and comprehensive analytical treatment of Queen's music. This thesis therefore addresses this gap in the literature. At the same time, de Boer's work reveals the need for a stronger analytical framework when addressing the idiolect of Queen. In many respects, there is little that is wrong with de Boer's findings. Rather, the findings do not quite answer her research questions as may have been anticipated. Put another way, Queen *did* move between musical styles, but it is not necessarily this movement that reflects the group's 'sonic fingerprint'. Furthermore, what, for some, made Queen an interesting band were the unusual and innovative production, vocal, formal, and harmonic techniques through its tracks. Yet, all of these variations would appear to run counter to the notion of an idiolect, which, by definition, is concerned with the normative, ordinary, and common features of Queen's output. The challenge, therefore, is to develop an analytical method that can account for this experimentation in relation to common musical elements. This challenge is taken up in the following two sections on style and idiolect, and then sonic patterns and compositional strategies.

2.3 Style and Idiolect

2.3.1 Definitions

The concepts of style and idiolect, as well as genre, have provided much consternation for scholars, primarily because the terms themselves have been understood in different ways by different writers. Because genre is often considered to have a wider frame of reference than style (that is, encompassing musical and extra-musical traits),¹¹⁰ I will not seek to discuss the term in any depth at the present time; instead, issues and definitions of genre will be discussed in Section 6.2.3 in the case study on Queen's relationship with progressive rock. Of greater concern, at present, are the concepts of style and idiolect and the relationship between the pair.

Meyer's definition is a good starting point. He argues: '*Style is a replication of patterning, whether in human behavior or in the artifacts produced by human behavior, that results from a series of choices made within some set of constraints*'.¹¹¹ Moore's definition is similar: 'style refers to the manner of articulation of gestures'.¹¹² Thus, the basic understanding of style is that it pertains to common musical traits across a corpus of music. There is no necessary limitation to the scope of this corpus. Style may refer to musical patterns replicated across one or two albums (e.g. 'Queen's mid-1970s style') or to musical patterns replicated across a longer timeframe (e.g. '1980s pop'). As Moore notes, 'style itself operates at various hierarchical levels, from the global to the most local'.¹¹³ Some scholars have adopted different terminology to reflect the scope of the replication. Meyer distinguishes between a 'dialect' (patterns replicated within a geographical region), 'idiom' (patterns replicated within a composer's output) and 'intraopus' levels, with the latter pertaining to patterns replicated within a single work.¹¹⁴ Middleton creates eight basic levels from the fundamental 'langue' (taken to mean functional tonality since 1600),

¹¹⁰ See Stuart Borthwick and Ron Moy, *Popular Music Genres: An Introduction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004).

¹¹¹ Meyer, *Style and Music*, 1. Italics are original.

¹¹² Allan F. Moore, 'Categorical Conventions in Musical Discourse: Style and Genre', *Music and Letters* 82/3 (2001), 441.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 442.

¹¹⁴ Meyer, *Style and Music*, 23-30.

‘norms’, ‘sub-norms’, down to the patterns replicated within a single ‘performance’.¹¹⁵

In theory, these hierarchies are useful, as they encourage the analyst to consider how particular traits in a song relate to wider musical contexts. In practice, however, distinctions between the various levels can be hard to maintain. On the one hand, there is the issue of who occupies a particular level—which other composers or artists, for example, belong to a ‘dialect’? On the other hand, there is the issue of where one level turns into another—when does one stop describing ‘sub-norms’ and start identifying ‘idiolect’ traits? It is likely for this reason that some authors choose to adopt ‘style’ regardless of the analytical scope, with the term simply meaning the musical conventions of that particular corpus. Zak, for instance, refers to the ‘West Texas’ style of Roy Orbison. His analysis identifies the traits of Orbison’s songs that developed while he was based in West Texas.¹¹⁶ In Middleton’s terms, this might constitute a sub-dialect of Orbison’s idiolect; Zak’s approach, in this context, seems preferable.

To provide some clarity to the matter, this thesis has distinguished between several strands of style, each of which receives its own term. ‘Style’ itself is used in the broadest sense, referring to musical patterns employed across a corpus wider than a single artist. Where possible, particular style labels have been employed in conjunction with the same genre label. That is, references to the ‘hard rock style’ in Chapter 6 pertain to the musical characteristics of songs by artists considered to belong to the ‘hard rock genre’.¹¹⁷ Of course, raises the circular question of what constitutes the genre in question? There is no easy resolution to this problem. Just as genre definitions are constantly in flux, one must heed Moore’s advice that ‘one

¹¹⁵ Middleton, *Studying Popular Music*, 174.

¹¹⁶ Albin Zak, ‘“Only the Lonely”: Roy Orbison’s Sweet West Texas Style’, in *Sounding Out Pop: Analytical Essays in Popular Music*, eds. Mark Spicer and John Covach (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009).

¹¹⁷ It is for this reason, it seems, that a number of popular music scholars regard musical style as being subservient to, and a subset of musical genre. From this example, the hard rock style is one facet of the hard rock genre, along with performance practices, distribution methods, modes of dress, and so forth. For approaches of this kind, see Franco Fabbri, ‘A Theory of Musical Genres: Two Applications’, in *Popular Music Perspectives*, eds. David Horn and Philip Tagg (Göteborg and Exeter: International Association for the Study of Popular Music, 1981); Franco Fabbri, ‘What kind of music?’, *Popular Music 2* (1982); Robert Walser, *Running with the Devil: Power, Gender, and Madness in Heavy Metal Music* (Hanover, NH.: University Press of New England, 1993).

cannot devise an exhaustive list of features that all examples of a style have... what we tend to have are “typical” members of a style’.¹¹⁸ What constitutes these ‘typical’ members will, therefore, depend on one’s perspective of that label. Furthermore, styles do not ‘arise out of nothing’ and go through phases of change.¹¹⁹ Thus, as with genres, one’s understanding of a particular style is dependent on the contextual aspects (e.g. genre definition, timeframe) of one’s analytical investigations. In any case, musical examples will help to elucidate the specific labels as they are employed throughout the thesis. The remaining categories are easier to circumscribe. ‘Idiolect’ refers to musical patterns employed within the corpus of a single artist. Further distinctions may be made between ‘intraopus style’, referring to the musical patterns of a single song, and ‘individual fingerprints’, which refers to the patterns replicated by the individual musicians of Queen.

2.3.2 Style and Idiolect Case Studies

So, how does one understand these concepts in practice? Section 2.4 considers further issues of labelling and identification. For now, a useful step is to consider several examples from the popular music repertoire, as well as previous studies of style and idiolect. One can begin with a straightforward comparison between Jerry Lee Lewis’ ‘Great Balls of Fire’, Little Richard’s ‘Long Tall Sally’, and Bill Haley’s ‘Rock Around the Clock’. Each song begins with a stop-time textural pattern; each song has a harmonic language limited to the primary triads; each song has a repeating formal unit based on a twelve-bar blues pattern; and, the vocal melodies of each song are built from short phrases. These common factors allow one to group the three artists within the rock ‘n’ roll style. Each performer also brings his own traits to the songs. Jerry Lee Lewis plays frequent piano glissandi and sings with a twang; Little Richard sings in a strained voice; Bill Haley’s voice has a warm and comforting tone. These individual differences constitute the respective idiolects of the three artists. In these instances, one can observe a clear hierarchy between style and idiolect. The former is a broad framework, and the latter provides differentiation within that framework. This observation works on the assumptions that there exist more-or-less uniform stylistic traits, and that the individual artist remains tied to that style across his or her output.

¹¹⁸ Moore, *Song Means*, 119-120.

¹¹⁹ See *ibid.*, 149, 120-122.

In some musical contexts, such as early rock 'n' roll, these assumptions may stand up to scrutiny; in other musical contexts, these assumptions are not tenable.

Moore points to the 1960s as the period in popular music history during which one observes the most significant challenge to these ideas. With the music industry booming, bands had relative economic freedom from their labels and thus could explore different musical avenues.¹²⁰ Above all, the Beatles epitomised this narrative. What was important about this historical period, according to Moore, was that it marked the point at which idiolect ceased to be subservient to style.¹²¹ That is, artists shifted between styles, either across their career, within albums, or even within songs, all the while retaining elements of their idiolect.

The conception of an idiolect, therefore, changes from being an embellishing quality within a style to something of a fingerprint that an artist stamps on any given style to create a personal flavour. This idea underpins Endrinal's overview of U2's idiolect. He lists a number of musical techniques that are common to the band's output, such as constant quavers in the bass guitar part, syncopated drum grooves, the use of stereo echoes, and arpeggiated guitar lines.¹²² The implication from Endrinal's analysis is that using such techniques or patterns would make a song in any given style sound like U2. Applied to the current analysis, the aim would be to pinpoint the techniques and patterns that would add a Queen flavour to a song. One might consider this the absolute perspective on an idiolect, insofar as one is concerned with the consistent musical features of an artist's output, in and of themselves.

A number of other studies approach the notion of an idiolect from what may be termed a relative perspective, insofar as the authors identify the common musical features of the artist in question, but relate these features to wider stylistic trends. Spicer's work on the Police is exemplary in this regard.¹²³ The author draws on

¹²⁰ Moore, *Rock*, 64-65.

¹²¹ Allan F. Moore, 'Gentle Giant's "Octopus"', *Philomusica On-line: Composition and Experimentation in British Rock: 1966-1976* (2007), <<http://www-3.unipv.it/britishrock1966-1976/pdf/mooreeng.pdf>> (accessed 3 May 2013).

¹²² Christopher Endrinal, 'Form and Style in the Music of U2' (PhD diss., Florida State University, 2008), 28-60.

¹²³ Mark Spicer, "'Reggatta de Blanc': Analyzing Style in the Music of the Police', in *Sounding Out Pop: Analytical Essays in Popular Music*, eds. Mark Spicer and John Covach (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 124ff.

Agawu, who identified a ‘Universe of Topics’, or range of musical devices, present in the works of Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven. Spicer creates a ‘Universe of Style’—a collection of style ‘planets’ from which the Police band members sourced particular patterns. Spicer identifies reggae as the predominant stylistic reference point; one of the defining features of the Police’s idiolect, though, is the band members’ subversive approach to the basic reggae patterns. Thus, in ‘The Bed’s Too Big Without You’, the ‘normalized’ bass and drum groove is flipped upside down so that the snare semiquavers land on the ‘and’ of beat two instead of the ‘and’ of beat one. In ‘Roxanne’, Andy Summers displaces the reggae ‘skank’ pattern by one quaver, so each guitar chord in the verse lands on, rather than off, the beat. Further to the ‘upside-down’ reggae style, Summers’ guitar parts were often voiced in open fourths, with the third of the chord missing; this gave the reggae-based harmonies a jazz-fusion flavour. This approach is evident in ‘Message in a Bottle’, ‘Bring on the Night’, and ‘Walking on the Moon’. In addition to reggae and jazz-fusion, Spicer notes the Police’s occasional recourse to punk and blue-eyed soul ‘planets’, the latter style having considerable influence on Sting’s vocal traits. The Police’s idiolect, therefore, lies at the intersection of these various style planets. Moore reaches a similar type of conclusion with respect to Oasis. He notes that a key element of the group’s songs is the direct references to the Beatles; thus, Oasis’ idiolect is defined, in part, by the traits that also comprise the Beatles’ idiolect.¹²⁴

Although not explicitly concerned with the idea of an idiolect, Covach’s studies of Spinal Tap and the Rutles, two parody bands, are also relevant in this context. His two articles demonstrate how the musical relationships between each group and various wider contexts (the intertextual references) are drawn out for humorous purpose. In the case of Spinal Tap, the humour often derives from parodies and caricatures of previous styles, as evident from the 1960s British pop imitation ‘Cups and Cakes’ or the ‘summer of love’ hit ‘(Listen to) The Flower People’. In these instances, Covach picks out specific songs from the respective eras (particularly by the Beatles) on which Spinal Tap models its parodies.¹²⁵ With respect to the Rutles, Covach takes the

¹²⁴ Allan F. Moore, ‘Issues of Style, Genre, and Idiolect in Rock’, (1998), <<http://allanfmoore.org.uk/questionstyle.pdf>> (accessed 2 April 2012).

¹²⁵ John Covach, ‘Stylistic Competencies, Musical Humor and ‘This Is Spinal Tap’’, in *Concert Music, Rock, and Jazz Since 1945: Essays and Analytic Studies*, eds. Elizabeth West Marvin and Richard Hermann (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 1995), 399ff.

same approach, working out both the direct and subtle Beatles references within its parody songs.¹²⁶

Above all, Covach's work demonstrates how one may assess and understand the different levels of style in a song. Discussing the Rutles 'Ouch!', Covach points out that the chorus progression mimics the Beatles' 'Help!' with one exception—the progression of the latter song starts on the submediant, while the progression of the former song starts on the supertonic. 'Ouch!' maintains the same pattern as 'Help!' of descending harmonies towards the cadence point. But because of its starting point, the tail end of the progression is an unusual $II^7-bVI-bVII-I$.¹²⁷ This 'awkward' progression (from II^7 to bVI) thus enacts the title of the Rutles' parody. Covach concludes that 'Ouch!' and, by extension, 'Help!' are consistent with the 1960s pop style by virtue of the general instrumental lineup; and, the Beatles' idiolect by virtue of the characteristic harmonic progressions. 'Ouch!' is also consistent with the intraopus style of 'Help!' by virtue of the specific harmonic patterns (namely, the descending chorus hook). But, it differs at the level of 'intraopus structure' insofar as the particular stylistic patterns unfold in slightly different ways from 'Ouch!' to 'Help!'. This example thus offers a useful precursor to the analysis below, which similarly notes the value of making these fine methodological distinctions between different levels of style.

A number of other studies have taken comparable methodological approaches to those listed above, in terms of identifying the common characteristics of an artist's output and placing these details in a wider context. Winkler's study of Randy Newman investigates the range of American popular styles that filter into the songwriter's work;¹²⁸ Everett pinpoints the varied popular and classical 'voices' in Billy Joel's songs, and the modern jazz influences on Steely Dan;¹²⁹ Whitesell details the different

¹²⁶ John Covach, 'The Rutles and the Use of Specific Models in Musical Satire', *Indiana Theory Review* 11 (1991), 133-141.

¹²⁷ Covach, "The Rutles," pp. 133-141. The unusual aspect is the shift from the major supertonic to the flattened submediant.

¹²⁸ Peter Winkler, 'Randy Newman's Americana', *Popular Music* 7/1 (1988).

¹²⁹ Walter Everett, 'The learned vs. the vernacular in the songs of Billy Joel', *Contemporary Music Review* 18/4 (2000); Walter Everett, 'A Royal Scam: The Abstruse and Ironic Bob-Rock Harmony of Steely Dan', *Music Theory Spectrum* 26/2 (2004).

approaches to harmonic language in Joni Mitchell's early work;¹³⁰ and, Moore examines Jethro Tull's blending of traits from folk and progressive styles.¹³¹ Finally, in a paper similar to Covach's studies of parody bands, Spicer documents instances of 'strategic' intertextuality in several John Lennon-penned songs, arguing that the specific references to other tracks (including some of Lennon's earlier work) have a direct impact on musical meaning.¹³²

There is much common ground between this segment of the literature and the present work on Queen, in that many of the artists under consideration fuse musical traits from a range of styles and sources. Accordingly, there are a number of ideas and analytical lessons that can be gleaned from the work above. Firstly, secondary sources, such as interviews with band members, can be crucial for identifying the traits of an idiolect.¹³³ One must be wary of the media through which these ideas are communicated, but comments from artists, musicians and producers may guide the analyst towards certain features of the music. Everett's work provides a good model: he begins with quotes from Billy Joel regarding his musical influences, and then interrogates and develops the ideas behind such statements using analytical techniques. Secondly, the most profitable and insightful conclusions stem from isolating the individual musical components of a band's output. Spicer's analysis of the Police, in particular, demonstrates precisely how the group's overall idiolect resulted from the combination of particular traits. This approach also encourages one to consider all facets of an artist's output, because each detail may contribute meaningfully to the whole. The third point is that an idiolect, as with Moore's appraisal of style, exists 'prototypically', with some songs being better representations than others of the particular idiolect. In the case of U2, for example, it is not to say that each of the band's idiolect traits appears in every song. Rather, these traits represent the most commonly recurring details of its songs. The better examples of U2's idiolect thus feature a greater number of these details (e.g. 'Where the Streets Have No Name'). To borrow from Meyer, style and idiolect analysis are similar to

¹³⁰ Lloyd Whitesell, 'Harmonic palette in early Joni Mitchell', *Popular Music* 21/2 (2002).

¹³¹ Allan F. Moore, 'Jethro Tull and the case for modernism in mass music', in *Analyzing Popular Music*, ed. Allan F. Moore (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

¹³² Mark Spicer, 'Strategic Intertextuality in Three of John Lennon's Late Beatles Songs', *Gamut* 2/1 (2009).

¹³³ Gracyk makes a similar point with respect to understanding the aesthetics of rock musicians. See Gracyk, *Rhythm and Noise*, 73.

statistical sampling insofar as one is concerned with ‘observed correlations and repeated concatenations of traits’.¹³⁴

The fourth and most important point concerns the relationship between style and idiolect, and how this shapes one’s analytical approach. It is evident that the dividing line between idiolect and style is often blurred: an idiolect may vary a stylistic trait (the Police), may be contained within a style (Jerry Lee Lewis), may appear to exist independently of a given style (U2), or may be the combination of patterns from a range of styles (The Police, Oasis, Randy Newman, Billy Joel, etc.). The crucial analytical point is that an idiolect can be considered both an absolute and a relative concept, as noted above. In Moore and Ibrahim’s words, an idiolect ‘must be as preoccupied with derivation and idiosyncratic patterns of influence as it is with individuality’; the authors express this idea more succinctly as, ‘what does an artist sound like?’¹³⁵ This question encourages one to document every trait of an artist’s output, akin to describing a person’s appearance (e.g. eye colour, hair colour, facial dimensions, etc.). At the same time, the preposition ‘like’ invites comparisons with other artists. This dual approach is what marks the studies cited above. The authors note the specific patterns that mark the output of individual artists (absolute), but relate those patterns to past and contemporaneous music, thereby placing their subject matter in the web of popular music styles and sounds (relative). This is the approach adopted below. The analytical methods of Chapter 3 aim to uncover the absolute details with as much precision as is possible. These findings are presented in Chapters 4 and 5. In Chapter 6, the findings are placed in a variety of wider contexts in order to understand Queen’s place in the world of popular music.

There are two other idiolect studies that have gone unmentioned until now, for the reason that they lead into the methodological issue of the following section. Moore and Ibrahim’s study of Radiohead presents an idiolect that exists in a complex musical context.¹³⁶ The authors note that Radiohead frequently employed AAB and related forms; this structural element defines, in part, its idiolect. Further, they suggest

¹³⁴ Meyer, *Style and Music*, 57.

¹³⁵ Allan F. Moore and Anwar Ibrahim, ‘Sounds like Teen Spirit; identifying Radiohead’s idiolect’, in *Strobe-Lights and Blown Speakers: Essays on the Music and Art of Radiohead*, ed. Joseph Tate (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009), 140-141.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 139ff.

that the 2003 song ‘Wolf at the Door’, the ‘least original track’ from *Hail to the Thief*, offers the greatest insight into the group’s idiolect. It is one of the few songs written by Jonny Greenwood, not Thom Yorke, Radiohead’s principal songwriter. Moore and Ibrahim outline a number of the song’s characteristics, before concluding, ‘Greenwood has effectively written a song template imitating the songwriting style of Thom Yorke, indicating that even if the precise details of Radiohead’s idiolect are hard to quantify, the band members themselves clearly recognize that there is a Radiohead idiolect in existence’.¹³⁷

Despite these observations, it is difficult to escape the most striking part of the authors’ concluding section: ‘it is the unpredictability of the band’s recordings that is arguably the only real constant...it is in this respect that Radiohead problematizes the specification of idiolect’.¹³⁸ This echoes Moore’s comments on progressive rock band Gentle Giant. Having surveyed the material from the 1972-album *Octopus*, he concludes: ‘This album then forms part of a changing Gentle Giant idiolect, an idiolect which I suspect retains few constant features across its lifespan’.¹³⁹ There is a clear difference between the artists listed above (U2, the Police, Oasis, etc.), the idiolects of whom could all be defined by certain musical traits, and the artists listed here (Radiohead and Gentle Giant), the idiolects of whom are defined most of all by consistent transformation. In the case of Queen, both sides of this issue come to the fore, thus raising the question of how to assess the group’s idiolect when some elements constantly change, and some elements stay the same.

2.4 Sonic Patterns and Compositional Strategies

In order to resolve this issue, I propose a distinction between the different types of traits that comprise an artist’s idiolect. The analysis below suggests that a richer understanding of Queen’s idiolect (and, indeed, that of other artists) may be possible if one distinguishes between what I have termed *sonic patterns* and *compositional strategies*. Both categories encompass common elements of a group’s output, and thus may be considered subservient to the overarching idiolect of a group. That is, Queen’s

¹³⁷ Ibid., 152-153.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 152.

¹³⁹ Moore, ‘Gentle Giant’s “Octopus”’.

idiolect—what allows us to ‘recognize their [Queen’s] work as their work individually’¹⁴⁰—may be construed as comprising the sum total of the group’s sonic patterns and compositional strategies.

What, then, do the terms mean? Moore’s definition of style was given above: ‘style refers to the manner of articulation of gestures’.¹⁴¹ To adopt his terminology, there are gestures or musical details across Queen’s corpus that are ‘articulated’ in the same ‘manner’ from song to song. These traits constitute Queen’s *sonic patterns*. There are also gestures or musical details that are ‘articulated’ in a different ‘manner’ from song to song, but one can understand the corresponding gestures as sharing a common musical kinship or identity. These constitute Queen’s *compositional strategies*. To draw on Meyer’s terminology,¹⁴² sonic patterns comprise musical details that are replicated across an artist’s output, and are realised in the same way at the individual levels of intraopus style. Compositional strategies are musical features replicated across an artist’s output, but realised in different ways at the individual levels of intraopus style. Ultimately, the naming of the particular labels is arbitrary. However, I have used such terminology because of the connotations of the two concepts. ‘Sonic patterns’ have been designated thus because the musical gestures sound the same across songs; ‘compositional strategy’ suggests a general plan on the songwriters and musicians’ behalves that may result in numerous musical outcomes.¹⁴³

Although the analysis of Queen will provide further clarification of this methodological distinction, several examples from the wider popular music repertoire may be useful in the first instance. It is important to note that the following paragraphs are based on *ad hoc* analytical sketches of the artists in question; they should, however, suffice to illuminate several initial points. Again, one of the features of Jerry Lee Lewis’ output was the long glissando across the piano. This appears as part of the accompaniment and as part of his piano solos in early career tracks, such as ‘Great Balls of Fire’, ‘Whole Lotta Shakin’ Going On’, ‘Boogie Woogie Country Boy’, ‘Wild One’, as well as in ‘Rock and Roll’, ‘I Saw Her Standing There’, and

¹⁴⁰ Moore and Ibrahim, ‘Sounds like Teen Spirit’, 140.

¹⁴¹ Moore, ‘Categorical Conventions’, 441.

¹⁴² From Meyer, *Style and Music*, 24ff.

¹⁴³ Moore uses the phrase ‘compositional strategy’ in his analysis of Gentle Giant with roughly similar connotations; my use of the phrase draws on this example but, perhaps, offers a slightly more rigid definition of the category. See Moore, ‘Gentle Giant’s “Octopus”’.

‘Trouble in Mind’ from *Last Man Standing* (2006). The piano glissando may be considered a sonic pattern given that, as a musical gesture, it appears in much the same form across all of these examples. Thus, Jerry Lee Lewis’ idiolect, or what distinguishes his output, is defined, in part, by this particular sonic pattern.

The Beatles’ output provides a good example of a compositional strategy. Particularly in the latter half of the 1960s, one can note the following features in their records: artificial double-tracking of the lead vocal (‘Love You To’), running the lead vocal through a rotating Leslie speaker (‘Tomorrow Never Knows’), recording the bass guitar through Direct Input (‘Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band’), close ‘miking’ of instruments (‘Eleanor Rigby’), and playing back the tapes in reverse (‘Rain’).¹⁴⁴ These examples clearly showcase a range of gestures arising from different production techniques. Yet, it is possible to understand these varying sounds as deriving from the group’s overarching aim of experimenting and innovating in the studio, which is often regarded as a key feature of the Beatles’ output or idiolect. Everett, for instance, talks of the ‘tape manipulations and studio effects that were to become de rigeur for them [...] in the coming years [post-1965]’.¹⁴⁵ Compared with the case of Jerry Lee Lewis’ glissandi, however, this component of the Beatles’ idiolect may be regarded as a compositional strategy insofar as the feature identified from the group’s output (i.e. experimentation in the studio) was realised differently in individual songs.

The above comparison between sonic patterns and compositional strategies draws attention to the level of analysis for each category. Jerry Lee Lewis’ glissandi are essentially decorative gestures, while the Beatles’ production techniques could shape the overall sound of a track. Indeed, the analysis of Queen draws a similar distinction between the sonic patterns, which tend to play out on the musical surface, and the compositional strategies, which tend to operate at the structural levels of the musical texts. It is not imperative, however, that sonic patterns and compositional strategies align with pre-determined levels of a musical text. To elucidate this and several other

¹⁴⁴ See, for instance, Kari McDonald and Sarah Hudson Kaufman, ‘“Tomorrow never knows”: the contribution of George Martin and his production team to the Beatles’ new sound’, in *Every Sound There Is: The Beatles’ Revolver and the Transformation of Rock and Roll*, ed. Russell Reising (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 140-143, 150-155.

¹⁴⁵ Everett, *The Beatles as Musicians: Revolver*, 20.

points, I will provide a comparative example between aspects of the songs by AC/DC and the Rolling Stones; the choice of these artists stems mostly from personal familiarity with the songs, and because they serve the purpose of highlighting the current methodological ideas.

In hard rock band AC/DC's output post-1980, many of its songs have a verse-chorus foundation with the verses underpinned by a repeating rhythm guitar riff. Lead guitar solos tend to be played over the same riff patterns, although in a number of songs, one hears an instrumental bridge section, which begins with either a power chord on, or a new rhythm guitar riff based around the subdominant (e.g. 'Shoot to Thrill' 'What Do You Do For Money Honey?', 'Givin' the Dog a Bone', 'Shake a Leg', 'Heatseeker', 'Thunderstruck', 'Wheels'). With respect to the riffs themselves, there is considerable variety in construction (chords vs. scalar passages vs. arpeggiated figuration), rhythmic design, and harmonic patterns. Nonetheless, they tend to be built around notes of the pentatonic minor scale, which, arguably, provides the riffs with a common musical identity. AC/DC's idiolect can thus be defined in part by sonic patterns that create a sense of structural regularity (consistent verse-chorus forms and bridges starting on IV), and in part by a compositional strategy (guitar riffs built on the pentatonic minor scale) that produces a range of surface gestures across songs.

The examples thus far have suggested that the musical gestures of an artist's idiolect fall easily into the categories of sonic patterns and compositional strategies. In practice, this is not the case, as one can often identify gestures that reside in a grey area relative to the definitions of the categories set out above—not identical from one instance to the next, and yet not completely dissimilar. A good example of this in relation to AC/DC is the song 'Have a Drink on Me', which is also built around a verse-chorus pair and has an instrumental bridge, this time opening on the dominant chord. In terms of a structural gesture, the starting point of the bridge of 'Have a Drink on Me' is different to 'Shake a Leg'—the former example does not start on IV—but clearly the pair is related by virtue of the respective bridge sections beginning off-tonic. This raises the question of whether one is hearing a subtle variation on the sonic pattern evident from the other songs, or whether all of these songs are bound by the compositional strategy of beginning the bridge section on a non-tonic chord?

Keith Richards' approach to riff construction for the Rolling Stones presents another blurry distinction between sonic patterns and compositional strategies. Listening to Richards' guitar riffs across the group's career, it is clear that, like AC/DC, they are bound by a shared identity of deriving from rhythm and blues music in terms of the harmonic language ('Brown Sugar'), the licks between chords ('Honky Tonk Women'), and the boogie patterns ('Rip This Joint'). This suggests that Richards' guitar riffs are best understood in terms of this compositional strategy, allowing one to understand how the different rhythm guitar parts are related, despite their obvious variations. At the same time, many of Richards' riffs were played using open-G tuning on the electric guitar, which gives them a distinct sonic quality—it is not implausible to suggest they 'sound the same'. Thus, are Richards' riffs the result of a sonic pattern or a compositional strategy?

It is necessary to remember, as Moore notes, that any category (style, idiolect, sonic pattern, compositional strategy, etc.) simply 'tells us something different about how we organize the sequence of sounds issuing from instruments or speakers'. Listeners and analysts develop such categories as an 'aid to our organizing that sequence of sounds'.¹⁴⁶ These ideas are important when it comes to idiolect analysis and distinguishing between sonic patterns and compositional strategies. Neither is a *pre facto* category that shapes and determines how the sounds unfold through time. Instead, they are concepts 'imposed' on the music by the listener or analyst, when one listens to specific elements of a song (and other songs) in a certain way.¹⁴⁷ That is, in identifying sonic patterns across an artist's output, the analyst *chooses* to hear and highlight the similarities of gestures across different songs; in identifying compositional strategies across an artist's output, the analyst *chooses* to hear the differences between songs, while still recognising a shared musical relationship across these examples. Indeed, as can be seen from the case of Keith Richards' guitar work, the richness of this method stems from identifying different types of continuity and difference within the same temporal span—that is, if one focuses on his tuning, then a sonic pattern emerges; if one focuses on the riff construction, then a compositional strategy emerges. Neither is a better way of explaining the music. Rather, each angle

¹⁴⁶ Moore, 'Categorical Conventions', 441.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

‘tells us something different’ about how Keith Richards played the guitar on the Rolling Stones’ records.

To provide a summary of this method, it is best to conceive of sonic patterns and compositional strategies as idealised categories that sit at opposite ends of a continuum of relative musical similarity between songs of an artist’s output. What is important in this kind of analysis is recognising and understanding the different types of similarity between songs, and then being able to illuminate these ideas through close attention to the musical texts. Maintaining a distinction between sonic patterns and compositional strategies provides the requisite framework for undertaking this kind of analysis. As will become evident through Chapters 4-6, these distinctions allow one to reach richer and more nuanced conclusions regarding an artist’s idiolect.

3. Analytical Methodology

3.1 Introduction

It has long been accepted that music analysis is not a scientific pursuit.¹⁴⁸ Instead, as Moore points out, ‘it is the mode adopted by the listener [or analyst] that determines what the music will yield’.¹⁴⁹ Nonetheless, I could still approach the task at hand with a degree of scientific objectivity. My primary aim was to establish an analytical apparatus, through which different elements of Queen’s songs could be parsed. The apparatus thus ensured a degree of analytical consistency; each parameter of each song was assessed in roughly the same way.

Arguably the most pressing concern at the outset was the scope of the analysis. In the idiolect analyses discussed in Chapter 2, the authors mostly focus on a selection of specific musical traits that most define or mark the idiolect in question. From a presentation perspective, this is understandable, but this practice then requires an initial hypothesis as to what traits are the most definitive or pertinent. In some cases, secondary materials can play an important role in terms of guiding the analyst towards particular features; in other cases, the importance of details becomes evident through extensive listening to and familiarity with the music. Any idiolect analysis of Queen, for example, would have to account for the backing vocal arrangements, Brian May’s guitar orchestrations, and the unusual song structures. But what of the harmonic language or John Deacon’s bass guitar techniques?

I decided to work from the *a priori* assumption that each musical parameter of Queen’s songs was potentially an important component of the group’s idiolect. Whether a detail was relatively more or less important could be ascertained after the analysis was conducted. Accordingly, the apparatus was designed not to identify a handful of details, but to investigate each part of each song in isolation. It became evident that a number of the parameters overlap and inform one another—harmonic rhythm has a temporal aspect; phrase analysis is shaped by harmonic structure; and,

¹⁴⁸ See Nicholas Cook, *A Guide to Musical Analysis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 57; Moore, ‘Introduction’, 9.

¹⁴⁹ Moore, *Rock*, 25.

textural and sound-box details are closely related. The methodological divisions thus served analytical purposes only, in order to investigate Queen's songs in as much detail as possible.

3.2 Analysis in Practice: Transcriptions, Computer Programmes and Listening

A key difference between popular music and classical music is that the former exists almost exclusively as an aural recording, while the latter exists in both aural and written form.¹⁵⁰ In short, classical music analysts usually have access to a fully notated score; popular music analysts usually do not. Scores of popular music exist, but often in reduced and simplified form. Rarely do they accurately reflect the variety of instrumental parts on a recording. Chord charts or lead sheets are accessible on the internet, but their accuracy is often questionable given the lack of editorial scrutiny. Hal Leonard's 'Note-for-Note' keyboard books, as well as other guitar, bass and drum books present accurate transcriptions of the respective instruments within tracks, but these examples are exceptions to the norm.

There is an implication in the previous paragraph that having a musical score is preferable or even vital for analysts. As becomes evident through this chapter, notation in its traditional form is of little use for some musical parameters. But, as Winkler points out, 'notation can function as an efficient way of isolating and referring to specific passages or individual elements in the musical stream'; notation acts as a 'blueprint' and offers a 'sketchy notion of what [the music] might sound like'.¹⁵¹ To give the example of Queen's backing vocals, notation cannot explain fully the arrangements—it does not, for example, capture the sound of the voices—but it can provide a significant amount of information regarding their structure—how many

¹⁵⁰ Even in the growing area of classical music performance analysis, the underlying focus is on how a given performer interprets (broadly speaking) the musical score; see, for example, Daniel Barolsky and Peter Martens, 'Rendering the Prosaic Persuasive: Gould and the Performance of Bach's C-minor Prelude (WTC I)', *Music Theory Online* 18.1 (2012), <http://mtosmt.org/issues/mto.12.18.1/mto.12.18.1.barolsky_martens.php> (accessed 23 March 2014); Daniel Leech-Wilkinson, 'Compositions, Scores, Performances, Meanings', *Music Theory Online* 18.1 (2012), <<http://mtosmt.org/issues/mto.12.18.1/mto.12.18.1.leech-wilkinson.php>> (accessed 23 March 2014).

¹⁵¹ Peter Winkler, 'Writing Ghost Notes: The Poetics and Politics of Transcription', in *Keeping Score: Music, Disciplinary, Culture*, eds. David Schwarz, Anahid Kassabian, and Lawrence Siegel (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1997), 193.

parts are present and what notes are being sung. Thus, transcription was considered a necessary phase in the analytical process.

There are a number of difficulties attached to the practice of transcription.¹⁵² As per Winkler's experiences, I transcribed a number of the parts, such as lead vocal and guitar melodies, through careful and repetitive listening, singing, playing on the piano, and so forth.¹⁵³ Transcribing other details, such as backing vocals, drums and bass guitar, proved more challenging, especially when a dense instrumental texture obscured particular parts. I used a range of techniques to overcome these difficulties. Frequently, transcription was akin to a process of elimination. In the case of vocal arrangements, for example, the actual notes were limited by the chords played on the piano or guitar; further, it was straightforward to identify the specific register. It was also often possible to hear a particular line or part within the arrangement. 'Save Me' is a good example. In the second and third choruses, I could hear the highest backing vocal line as well as the part below and, towards the end of the phrase, a sustained tonic note. Through some deductive logic, I produced the transcription given in Example 3.1.



Example 3.1 'Save Me,' Backing Vocals, Chorus II

The program *Sonic Visualiser* provided much aid when the transcription process was not as simple. *Sonic Visualiser* was developed at the Centre for Digital Music, Queen Mary, University of London for the purpose of analysing recordings.¹⁵⁴ One feature of *Sonic Visualiser* is the high quality spectrograms that display recordings' sound waves. Furthermore, when the user hovers the mouse over the spectrogram, *Sonic Visualiser* will approximate the pitch of the sound waves (i.e. where the mouse is sitting) in terms of frequency and note name. The spectrograms do not differentiate

¹⁵² These difficulties are covered fully in Winkler's chapter, which guides the reader through his own attempts to transcribe Aretha Franklin's 'I Never Loved a Man (The Way I Love You)'. See *ibid.*, 174-192.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 193.

¹⁵⁴ See C. Cannam, C. Landone, and M. Sandler, 'Sonic Visualiser: An Open Source Application for Viewing, Analysing, and Annotating Music Audio Files', *Proceedings of the ACM Multimedia 2010 International Conference* (Firenze, Italy, 2010); Nicholas Cook and Daniel Leech-Wilkinson, 'A Musicologist's Guide to Sonic Visualiser', King's College London, <http://www.charm.kcl.ac.uk/analysing/p9_0_1.html> (accessed 19 October 2012).

between fundamental pitches and overtones, but identification of most parts was straightforward when considering both the range and the shape of the sound wave—that is, bass guitar sound waves were thick with a sharp attack (from plucking the string); backing vocal sections were evident as a block of parallel sound waves; the various parts of the kit were always positioned at the same pitch within a song (kick at the bottom, snare a little higher, toms in between), and so forth. Thus, having identified the part within the spectrogram, it was possible to follow that part through the song and transcribe it accordingly.

Finally, two other technological tools were helpful. The open-source software *Audacity* was useful for altering equalization levels of recordings. This enabled some frequency ranges of the mix to be diminished in volume, while increasing the audibility of other frequency ranges. Given that the vocals tend to sit around or above middle C, boosting the frequencies from 500 Hz. to 880 Hz. potentially brought these parts into greater aural focus. Further to this technique, it was possible in some instances to remove the lead vocals from the recording, thus leaving only the backing vocals audible.¹⁵⁵ Any adjusted recordings were then returned to *Sonic Visualiser* to resume the transcription process. In a similar vein, *YouTube* has a repository of Queen tracks with certain parts isolated.¹⁵⁶ Although one must be wary of the validity of these user-added tracks, it was possible to consult them in conjunction with the original recording as a means of checking the details of a transcription. Overall, I cannot guarantee that every transcription below is a perfect representation of the music; but, courtesy of the various computer programmes, I undertook the task with confidence in the accuracy and validity of the ensuing transcriptions.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ The user specifies a frequency range; *Audacity* then removes all centrally-panned material within that frequency range. Given that backing vocals tend to be panned left and right in the stereo image, and given that lead vocals tend to sit in the centre, this effect can remove the lead part from the mix while leaving the backing vocals unaltered.

¹⁵⁶ For instance, one *YouTube* ‘video’ has all the vocals from ‘Somebody to Love’ isolated; <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VqrpSH-7E2Q> (accessed 24 March 2014).

¹⁵⁷ I would add that many years of aural training and playing music also contributed to the accuracy of the transcriptions.

3.3 Analytical Methods

3.3.1 Form

An initial word is necessary on how sections were delineated. Temperley cites cadential figures as often indicative of sectional boundaries.¹⁵⁸ Summach lists a number of musical parameters, changes in which delineate pre-choruses in popular music: groove, dynamic level, register, instrumentation, timbre, harmonic progression, and harmonic rhythm.¹⁵⁹ Similarly, Stephenson argues that changes of patterning usually occur in multiple domains concurrently, and thus sectional divisions are often straightforward to identify.¹⁶⁰ When this was not the case in Queen's songs, sections were divided according to changes in texture, harmonic progressions, and with respect to any lyric repetition.

In terms of labelling these sections, two methods were employed. Firstly, letters were assigned according to the different musical content; prime symbols were used to indicate variations on previously heard material (e.g. an abridged or extended verse). This process involved, at times, judgments as to what constituted similar or different thematic material. Above all, harmonic patterns were treated as the primary markers of thematic consistency. While this method was robust, it could preclude nuanced examinations of form in terms of the functions of sections within the song. The second approach, therefore, was to use formal terminology to label sections, such as verse, chorus, bridge, and so forth.

Despite the numerous sources that provide definitions for such labels,¹⁶¹ their application in individual songs was not always simple. The main problem was that sectional labels not only imply certain musical functions or features, but also certain positions and roles within an overarching temporal framework of the song. For

¹⁵⁸ Temperley, 'The Cadential IV', [1].

¹⁵⁹ Summach, 'The Structure, Function, and Genesis of the Prechorus', [3].

¹⁶⁰ Stephenson, *What to Listen For in Rock*, 122.

¹⁶¹ See, for example, Jimmy Webb, *Tunesmith: Inside the Art of Songwriting* (New York: Hyperion, 1998), 107-135; Everett, *The Beatles as Musicians: Revolver*, 315-319; Covach, 'Form in Rock', 69-76; Jocelyn R. Neal, 'Narrative Paradigms, Musical Signifiers, and Form as Function in Country Music', *Music Theory Spectrum* 29/1 (2007), 45; Summach, 'The Structure, Function, and Genesis of the Prechorus', [2-3].

example, the term ‘bridge’ connotes an increase of harmonic tension (through a departure from, and return to the tonic) roughly two-thirds of the way through a song. There is a further assumption that a song with a bridge will unfold a particular overall form, namely, verse-chorus-bridge form; or, the equivalent of a bridge section will sit alongside a single verse section (i.e. AABA form).¹⁶² The labels in their traditional guises, therefore, can be infused with quite specific analytical meanings. In the case of Queen, this is precisely the problem because one often finds sections of songs that conform to one but not another of these meanings—a bridge-functioning section in the ‘wrong’ temporal location, or a verse-like section in the temporal location of a bridge, or a conventional overall form with ‘extra’ sections.

Endrinal’s response to these types of observations in the context of U2 has been to offer new terminology, such as ‘interverse’ as an alternative to ‘bridge’.¹⁶³ He further subdivides interverses according to the nature of the musical content contained within them. Further to the interverse, Endrinal provides new definitions for the terms ‘interlude’ (essentially an instrumental interverse) and ‘transition’ (essentially replacing ‘pre-chorus’). This approach was not adopted because it demands too many subjective choices on the analyst’s behalf, compared with the relatively few options available using traditional terminology. The strength of the traditional models, as set out by Covach, is that they provide strong benchmarks against which individual examples can be assessed. Put another way, the analytical interest lies not in forcing songs into a specific framework, but understanding how they conform to, or depart from a particular structural model.

Accordingly, I employed the following terminology:

- 1) *Introduction*—instrumental material presented before the first verse or first chorus.
- 2) *Verse*—section that is defined by particular harmonic, textural and melodic patterns; different lyrics are sung for each repetition of the section.
- 3) *Pre-chorus*—section that is defined by increasing musical intensity with respect to any combination of texture, harmonic rhythm, melodic contour,

¹⁶² All of these ideas are plain to observe in Covach, ‘Form in Rock’.

¹⁶³ Endrinal, ‘Burning Bridges’, [1-2, 28-38]. Osborn has also developed new formal terminology in response to the potential limitations of the traditional approach; see, Osborn, ‘Subverting the Verse-Chorus Paradigm’.

groove, and dynamics; different lyrics may be sung for each repetition; the section is succeeded immediately by the chorus.

- 4) *Chorus*—section that is defined by particular harmonic, textural and melodic patterns; the patterns may or may not be distinct from the verse; the same lyrics are sung for each repetition of the section.
- 5) *Refrain*—single line or phrase of text that is repeated through the song.
- 6) *Bridge*—section that presents contrasting harmonic material to the verse and/or chorus sections, and moves away from, before returning to the tonic.
- 7) *Instrumental*—section that foregrounds one or more instruments without the presence of a lead vocalist; backing vocalists may contribute non-verbal material (e.g. ‘oohs’); the section is qualified according to the harmonic material (e.g. an instrumental verse employs the verse harmonies).
- 8) *Coda*—section that concludes a song; the coda may or may not present distinct musical material, and may or may not feature lyrics.

These labels in combination with letters and prime symbols led to the most comprehensive understanding of the formal plan of a song. ‘Love of My Life’ and ‘Good Old Fashioned Lover Boy’ demonstrate how each method could be of use in explaining a song’s structure.

| Terminology | Letters | Length in Bars |
|--------------------|----------------|-----------------------|
| Instrumental | A | 6 |
| Verse | B | 2 |
| Instrumental | A' | 9 |
| Verse | B | 3 |
| Instrumental | A" | 9 |
| Bridge | C | 2 |
| Instrumental | A" | 8 |
| Verse | B' | 9 |
| Verse | B" | 9 |

Table 3.1 Formal Plan of ‘Love of My Life’

From Table 3.1, the lettering system may be the most revealing with respect to ‘Love of My Life’. One can observe that the non-instrumental sections of the song essentially unfold a conventional AABA structure, with variations in the final vocal

sections (BBCB'B"). But, the terminology is useful in telling us that there is recurring instrumental material interpolated between the various vocal sections. By way of comparison, 'Good Old Fashioned Lover Boy' unfolds an apparently unconventional structure as seen through the letter approach—ABCA'BDBAB. Using formal terminology, though, one can identify a verse-chorus structure with two sections that exhibit the harmonic characteristics of bridges. Thus, 'Good Old Fashioned Lover Boy' can be described as in verse-chorus-bridge form with an extra bridge section. The dual method, therefore, served an important role in identifying the formal characteristics of Queen's songs, as well as placing them, implicitly, in relation to the conventions of the wider popular music repertoire.

3.3.2 Harmony

Harmonies were labelled using the Roman numeral system. With origins in classical music analysis, this system assigns each chord a numeral according to the scale degree on which the chord is built. It is widely accepted there is sufficient common ground between the harmonic languages of classical and popular music that such a tool is appropriate,¹⁶⁴ although as Moore argues, one cannot assume that the harmonies of popular music behave in the same way, or have the same function, as in classical music.¹⁶⁵ In this context, however, the key issue concerned not function, but presentation of the Roman numerals.

Moore's approach is to label major chords with upper case Roman numerals and minor chords with lower case Roman numerals.¹⁶⁶ Moore adds the mode at the front of his Roman numeral progressions, a detail that prompts any modifications to the Roman numerals. The modal qualifier is identified from the harmonic roots of the progression. Thus, songs with respective patterns Am-F-G, A-F-G, and A-F-Gm would all be designated 'Aeolian' based on the common root notes of the varying chord progressions. The first example would be represented as an Aeolian i-VI-VII progression; the second as I'-VII-VI; the third as I'-VII-vi'. The modifications in the

¹⁶⁴ Everett, 'Making Sense', [74]; de Clercq and Temperley, 'A corpus analysis'.

¹⁶⁵ See, for instance, Moore, 'Patterns of Harmony'.

¹⁶⁶ Moore, *Song Means*, 69-76.

second and third examples indicate divergences from the diatonic chords of that particular mode.

Moore's system is easily understood and robust, although in some instances I would disagree with his identification of modes; the A section of the Beatles' 'Lady Madonna' has harmonic roots of A, D, F, and G, with major chords on each note (excluding the chromatic passing notes of the left hand bass line). Moore's system would render this section Aeolian in A with altered tonic and subdominant chords (e.g. I'-IV'-I'_c-VI-VII-I'). I alternatively hear the verse as Ionian with altered submediant and leading note chords (e.g. I-IV-I_c-^bVI-^bVII-I). My hearing identifies the overarching mode from a combination of the chords, as well as the melodic notes. Queen's 'Tie Your Mother Down' raises similar problems, with its mixture of Aeolian-derived harmonic roots, a major tonic triad (as outlined by the backing vocalists), and guitar power chords, which have an implicit major quality from the overtones. As Moore notes, his modal theory does have its limits, and in a number of cases one can reasonably argue in favour of different modal descriptions. Ultimately, the particular choice of labels comes down to individual preferences.

To this end, I maintained Moore's use of upper and lower case numerals for major and minor chords, but dispensed with the specific modal qualifications. For each song, a tonic chord was identified; subsequent chords were then labelled in relation to the notes of a local Ionian or Aeolian mode. The choice of mode depended on the major or minor quality of the tonic chord. Thus, the tag of 'Tie Your Mother Down' was labelled ^bVII-IV_b-^bIII-^bVII_b-I (G-D/F[#]-C-G/B-A); the modifications reflect the fact that the chords are built on the flattened third and seventh scale degrees of A major. This method is not intended to give primacy to the tonal system and diminish the importance of different modes in popular music. Rather, it facilitates the straightforward presentation of harmonic progressions. Indeed, by avoiding chord modifications, there is no implication that modal-based progressions are 'aberrant' compared with tonal norms.¹⁶⁷ Put another way, in writing a progression as I-v (as is the case with the A-Em pattern of Queen's 'Leaving Home Ain't Easy'), one captures the Mixolydian flavour of the progression, without suggesting that the progression is,

¹⁶⁷ Moore, 'The So-Called 'Flattened Seventh'', 186.

in and of itself, unusual or abnormal. This method of presentation allows both tonal and modal harmonic qualities to be considered equally important within the contexts of individual songs.

In addition to upper and lower case numerals, I used other symbols—the superscript ⁺, [°], and ^º—for augmented, diminished, and half-diminished chords respectively. Seventh chords were labelled according to the distance between the root note and the seventh, with ⁷ indicating a minor seventh distance (e.g. G⁷ and Am⁷), and ^{maj7} indicating a major seventh distance. The exception was the case of a diminished seventh chord, labelled ^{º7}, with three minor thirds stacked on one another. Sevenths and other added notes were labelled only when their omission would have misrepresented the identity of the harmony as it was heard. This practice is similar to classical music analysis in which passing and neighbour notes are not included in the harmonic description. In ‘Save Me,’ the seventh bar of the verse presents the tonic harmony, G, which is embellished in Mercury’s vocal by a descending figure E to D. The E, harmonised a third lower on the piano, could have been considered part of a IV_c harmony, or a I^{sus} chord. Given the notes’ brevity, however, this seemed an unnecessary label. By comparison, ‘All Dead, All Dead,’ opens with an F^{maj7} chord in which the seventh is not an embellishment, but part of the chord proper.

The full list of chord symbols is summarised in Table 3.2. The system is straightforward and similar to that used by Harte *et al.*¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁸ See Christopher Harte et al., ‘Symbolic Representation of Musical Chords: A Proposed Syntax for Text Annotations’, *Proceedings of the 6th International Conference on Music Information Retrieval* (London, 2005), 69.

| Type of Chord | Symbol | Notes |
|----------------------------------|---|--|
| Seventh | $C^7 (Cm^7) / I^7 (i^7)$ | C, E (E ^b), G, B ^b |
| Major Seventh | C^{maj7} / I^{maj7} | C, E, G, B |
| Diminished Seventh | C^{o7} / I^{o7} | C, E ^b , G ^b , B ^{bb} |
| Half-Diminished Seventh | C° / I° | C, E ^b , G ^b , B ^b |
| Added Ninth, Added Eleventh etc. | $C^{add9}, C^{add11} / I^{add9}, I^{add11}$ | C, E, G, D; C, E, G, F |
| Ninth, Eleventh, etc. | $C^9 / I^9, C^{11} / I^{11}$ | C, E, G, B ^b , D; C, E, G, B ^b , D, F |
| Suspended Fourth | C^{sus4} / I^{sus4} | C, F, G |

Table 3.2 Chord Symbols for Harmonic Analysis

Inversions were indicated using the subscript letters _b, _c and _d for first, second, and third inversions, respectively. In some instances, the bass note did not ‘belong’ to the harmony. There were three common examples of this harmonic feature—firstly, harmonies over a tonic pedal (e.g. A major with D in the bass of ‘Doin’ All Right’); and secondly, subdominant harmonies over a dominant bass (e.g. the *a capella* introduction of ‘Somebody to Love’). In these instances, the harmonies were conveyed in lead sheet style with the figuration, Roman numeral chord/bass note (e.g. IV/G in C major). The third problematic scenario occurred with descending chromatic bass lines, such as in the verse of ‘White Queen (As It Began)’. One reading of the progression is Am-C⁶/G-F^{maj7}-F^{aug6}-E (or i-III_c⁶-VI^{maj7}-VI^{aug6}-V); the other reading is Am-Am/G-Am/F-F^{aug6}-E (or i-i/G-i/F-VI^{aug6}-V). The second approach seemed to capture better the nature of the harmonic progression (i.e. consistent upper voices set against a descending bass line), although, again, this was a personal preference that is probably informed by my background as a pianist. These kinds of examples were assessed and labelled on a case-by-case basis with my ears serving as the primary arbiter. At points of modulation, harmonies were labelled in relation to both the mode from which the song was departing, and the mode towards which the song was moving. Thus, in the verse of ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’, the C minor chord that precedes the chromatic bass lines was labelled both ii (in relation to the initial tonic, B^b major) and vi (in relation to the subsequent tonic, E^b major). Finally, the harmonic progressions were recorded in terms of each section of the song; and, the lengths of

individual chords were measured to the nearest quaver beat, thus giving a reasonably precise indication of harmonic rhythm.

3.3.3 Vocal and Guitar Melodies

The melodic analysis was concerned with the lead vocal parts as sung by Freddie Mercury, Brian May and Roger Taylor, and the lead guitar melodies of Brian May. Melodies were transcribed using conventional notation, accounting for as fine pitch and rhythmic details as was possible. Pitch and rhythm inflections were covered under the banner of ‘Vocal and Instrumental Techniques’ (Section 3.3.6). The melodic content was analysed in terms of its contours and underlying structural features, an approach that relied on reductive techniques.

The use of such techniques on popular music has been a controversial issue within the field. The method implies certain harmonic and voice-leading practices, and different parties have disagreed over whether those practices are, in fact, norms of popular music.¹⁶⁹ This thesis does not participate directly in this debate. Rather, the current method drew from the work in this area by Burns and Middleton. Burns aims for a kind of Schenkerian middleground—she argues that songs may have different melodic and harmonic patterns from one section to the next. Thus, the analytical aim should be to uncover structures at relatively local levels, as opposed to identifying a fundamental *Urlinie*.¹⁷⁰

Middleton also highlights the benefits of small-scale reductions. Discussing Gershwin’s ‘A Foggy Day’, Middleton argues that identifying a Schenkerian *Urlinie* would be an arbitrary process, and would reveal little of the music at hand. However, in stripping away the melodic embellishments, he notes that much of the melody, against a backdrop of chromatic harmonies, revolves around the tonic triad. Middleton argues that piece of information should not be rendered ‘anti-historical’—that is, any other piece with tonic triads as the basis of the melody is ‘*essentially* the same’—but, rather, one could explore how such a melodic trait is articulated

¹⁶⁹ For one side of the argument, see Everett, ‘Pitch Down the Middle’, 138-144. For another, see Moore, ‘The So-Called ‘Flattened Seventh’’, 185-187.

¹⁷⁰ Lori Burns, ‘Analytic Methodologies for Rock Music’, in *Expression in Pop-Rock: A Collection of Critical and Analytical Essays*, ed. Walter Everett (New York: Routledge, 2008), 66-70.

differently across or within stylistic and historical boundaries.¹⁷¹ This view is similar to Covach, who argued that one view of Schenker's work is that it did not validate the greatness of the German canon, but highlighted the internal consistencies within that body of works.¹⁷²

With these ideas in mind, my reductive analysis here sought to identify the underlying shapes and structures of sections of the vocal and guitar melodies. These features included 3-2-1 descents, 5-1 descents, arpeggios, ascending leaps, arched contours, and points of melodic stasis. These features were identified initially at the level of the phrase—a common device, for example, was for the vocal melody to leap a major sixth from 5 to 3 before stepping down to the tonic within a two-bar segment (e.g. the verse of 'Save Me'). This type of observation is useful in terms of idiolect as it indicates the specific melodic gestures needed to 'sound like' Queen. It also demonstrates a stylistic link back to American pop songwriting (this figure appears in the Beach Boys' output, for instance). Having identified these smaller melodic features, the next step was to consider any shapes, contours or construction techniques across a section, such as the use of sequences, overall ascending or descending contours, or whether the entire section unfolded a particular scale pattern, such as a 5-1 descent. May's guitar solos were analysed using the same techniques. The guitarist described his philosophy towards solos thus: 'the best solos are something which you can sing as well as the melody line'.¹⁷³ Because it made sense to consider the melodic structure in conjunction with the performance characteristics of his guitar playing, these findings are presented together in Section 5.1.3.

3.3.4 Tempo, Time and Rhythm

The tempo of each song was detected using a purpose-built tool in *Sonic Visualiser*. Having opened an audio file in the programme, I would input the number of beats per bar and then mark the bar lines by tapping the keyboard in time with the music. *Sonic Visualiser* calculates the time between each bar line, which is then converted into the

¹⁷¹ Middleton, *Studying Popular Music*, 193-194.

¹⁷² Covach, 'We Won't Get Fooled Again', 77.

¹⁷³ Jas Obrecht, 'Interview with Brian May', *Guitar Player*, January (1993),

<http://queenarchives.com/index.php?title=Brian_May_-_01-XX-1983_-_Guitar_Player> (accessed 12 April 2012).

standard beats per minute (bpm) format and shown as a line-graph through time. Because of an inability to beat every bar line in precisely the correct place, the tempo varies slightly from bar to bar. To this end, the tempo was taken when the line-graph remained at a relatively constant level, within a range of about two bpm.

Previous analyses of rhythm have had divergent points of focus. Some authors have documented the creation of ‘grooves’ whereby disparate rhythmic traits coalesce into a larger, repeating rhythmic unit;¹⁷⁴ other authors have identified irregular rhythmic groupings, in terms of surface and hypermetrical patterns and ambiguities;¹⁷⁵ others still have detailed micro-rhythmic practices of artists.¹⁷⁶ Elements of these approaches appear throughout the analysis. ‘Vocal and Instrumental Techniques’ (Sections 3.3.6 and 5.1) covers rhythmic inflections and surface patterns of the guitar and drum parts. Such ideas receive further treatment in Sections 6.1.3 and 6.2.1. Section 3.3.2 also addresses the pacing of the music in terms of harmonic rhythm.

The rhythm analysis here began by documenting the time signature, the predominant division of beats (straight or triplet), and any changes in these domains within songs, such as a shift to half-time. The subsequent analysis followed Everett in examining phrase rhythm.¹⁷⁷ With his focus on the Beatles, Everett starts from the observation that foursquare phrasing (sections made up of multiples of four bar phrases) was a norm within the group’s output. He then examines the different ways in which this norm was interrupted, whether through phrase extensions, elisions, irregular overall phrase lengths, or successions of different phrase lengths. The same approach was adopted here. The sections of each song, as delineated in the form analysis, were divided into phrase units. The analysis thus aimed to reveal whether the sections of

¹⁷⁴ See, for example, Timothy Hughes, ‘Groove and Flow: Six Analytical Essays on the Music of Stevie Wonder’ (PhD diss., University of Washington, 2003), 60ff; John Brackett, ‘Examining rhythmic and metric practices in Led Zeppelin’s musical style’, *Popular Music* 27/1 (2007), 53-61.

¹⁷⁵ See, for instance, Roy Brewer, ‘The Use of Habanera Rhythm in Rockabilly’, *American Music* 17/3 (1999); Don Traut, ‘“Simply Irresistible”: recurring accent patterns as hooks in mainstream 1980s music’, *Popular Music* 24/1 (2005); Jonathan Pieslak, ‘Re-casting Metal: Rhythm and Meter in the Music of Meshuggah’, *Music Theory Spectrum* 29/2 (2007); Gregory R. McCandless, ‘Metal as a Gradual Process: Additive Rhythmic Structures in the Music of Dream Theater’, *Music Theory Online* 19.2 (2013), <<http://www.mtosmt.org/issues/mto.13.19.2.mccandless.php>> (accessed 26 March 2014); Hesselink, ‘Rhythmic play’.

¹⁷⁶ See Fernando Benadon and Ted Gioia, ‘How Hooker found his boogie: a rhythmic analysis of a classic groove’, *Popular Music* 28/1 (2009); Winkler, ‘Writing Ghost Notes’, 181-192.

¹⁷⁷ See Walter Everett, ‘Any time at all: the Beatles’ free phrase rhythms’, in *The Cambridge Companion to the Beatles*, ed. Kenneth Womack (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 183ff.

Queen's songs were built on foursquare (or related) phrasing, or whether sections were marked by hypermetrical irregularities. The definition of phrase followed Attas: 'a musical unit with goal-directed motion towards a clear conclusion, created through the manipulation of text, harmony, rhythm, and melodic contour'.¹⁷⁸ Although not all instances work according to these conditions, Attas' definition served as useful guide with which variations could be compared.

3.3.5 Backing Vocal Structures

The backing vocals were transcribed alongside the lead vocals. I analysed them firstly in terms of their construction, with reference to the number of parts present in a section, how the parts were voiced (open, closed, etc.), and the how the parts moved from chord to chord (stepwise voice-leading, arpeggios, etc.). The vocals were then analysed in terms of their movement within phrases and how great a range they spanned. This indicated whether the backing vocals functioned as harmonic filler or whether they took on a counter-melodic role. The final segment considered the relationship between the backing vocals and the lead vocals. The aim was to determine the degree of separation between the parts. Call-and-response techniques marked the fullest point of separation; complete textual unison marked the fullest point of integration. This latter investigation was complemented by analyses of the sound-box, as outlined below.

3.3.6 Vocal and Instrumental Techniques

'Vocal and Instrumental Techniques' operated as a catch-all category that responded to the questions: what is each member of Queen doing in a given song, how are they doing it, and how do the parts relate to one another? Purvis' opening gambit on Queen, cited in Section 1.2.4, suggested that the group operated according to emergence theory: they were greater than the sum of their parts. Other journalists have made the same point—'Queen managed to take four very individual identities

¹⁷⁸ Robin Attas, 'Sarah Setting the Terms: Defining Phrase in Popular Music', *Music Theory Online* 17.3 (2011), [6], <<http://www.mtosmt.org/issues/mto.11.17.3/mto.11.17.3.attas.html>> (accessed 27 March 2014).

and merge them into a single unstoppable force’;¹⁷⁹ and, ‘Each [band member] was an essential ingredient...the band could function only as a result of their joint contributions’.¹⁸⁰ The implication from these statements is that if Brian May had been replaced by Jimmy Page, for example, the resulting musical combination would have been quite different because the former brought unique qualities and playing techniques to the group. Whether or not such implications are accurate is another matter,¹⁸¹ but I began this section of the analysis from the assumption that it was necessary to understand in detail the musical techniques of each band member.

Scholars have advanced various methodological options to capture such details. Walser is an exponent of using descriptive language. He argues, ‘we already have tools that we’re not using as skillfully as we might. We have language, which is, like music, an incredibly powerful and nuanced system for making sense of things and communicating our understandings’.¹⁸² His subsequent analysis of Kenny G’s saxophone playing is representative of his approach: ‘He plays ornaments on his ornaments, with nuances on his nuances...he swells and fades and throbs with no trace of force, no pushiness’.¹⁸³ By the same token, one could find a number of adjectives to describe Mercury’s singing (powerful, delicate, smooth) or May’s guitar playing (melodic, rich, emotive). The problems with this approach are threefold. Firstly, some descriptions appear meaningless—what constitutes a ‘nuance on a nuance’? Does ‘pushiness’ refer to breath techniques, or to anticipating the beat? Secondly, it is difficult to employ adjectives consistently across a corpus. And thirdly, it is difficult to relate adjectives to one each other—how does Mercury’s ‘powerful’ voice relate to May’s ‘melodic’ guitar playing? Thus, while language is a useful tool, it needs to be deployed in such a way to capture performance nuances in a systematic manner.

¹⁷⁹ Doherty, *40 Years of Queen*, 28.

¹⁸⁰ Rick Sky, *The Show Must Go On: The Life of Freddie Mercury* (New York: Citadel Press, 1992), 26.

¹⁸¹ In saying that, the range of performers at the Freddie Mercury Tribute Concert in 1991 gave an indication of what Queen may have sounded like with a different lead singer. Robert Plant’s performance of ‘Crazy Little Thing Called Love’ is interesting because it sounds like ‘Robert Plant singing as Robert Plant’, rather than doing a Freddie Mercury (or rockabilly) impersonation.

¹⁸² Walser, ‘Popular music analysis’, 22-23.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 34-35.

On the other hand, Daley's analysis of Patti Smith's cover of 'Gloria' utilises an extended notation system. The extra visual components document the relative brightness of Smith's vowel sounds and the changes in Smith's vocal tone. Thus, from the first line of his transcription, the reader can see that Smith's vocal tone is predominantly breathy with a turn towards a 'hard/nasal' sound at the end of the phrase.¹⁸⁴ Daley's approach is similar to Pfeiderer's, who does not use notation, per se, but rather spectrograms to highlight the timbral differences between Ray Charles' vocal tones.¹⁸⁵ It is not clear whether Daley and Pfeiderer's specific methods are widely applicable beyond the voice, but the empiricism of their approaches is a quality to be emulated.

My overall method in this area was influenced primarily by Moore, Burns and Legg. Discussing vocal timbre, Moore argues that an individual singer's timbre is dependent on four broad factors: the register, the position of the note in the vocal cavity, the singer's attitude to pitch, and the singer's attitude to rhythm.¹⁸⁶ Moore also adopts a categorical approach for the functional roles of each instrument within a song's texture.¹⁸⁷ Instruments are aligned to melodic, harmonic filler, functional bass, and rhythmic layers. Although instruments may readily straddle multiple layers (e.g. the guitar may be rhythmic, harmonic and melodic), Moore's approach provides a straightforward model of how the parts of a song may come together.

Burns analyses vocal gestures and expression in relation to three interrelated categories: vocal quality (vibrato, dynamics, vowel presentation), vocal space (range), and vocal articulation ("enunciation" of the text). These categories provide a technical framework within which Burns compares Bessie Smith, Louis Armstrong and Ella Fitzgerald's vocal styles.¹⁸⁸ Finally, Legg's analysis of gospel singing techniques identifies thirteen common gestures; these include blues inflections, elongated

¹⁸⁴ Mike Daley, 'Patti Smith's 'Gloria': intertextual play in a rock vocal performance', *Popular Music* 16/3 (1997), 237, 241ff.

¹⁸⁵ Martin Pfeiderer, 'Vocal pop pleasures. Theoretical, analytical and empirical approaches to voice and singing in popular music', *IASPM@Journal* 1/1 (2010), 5-8.

¹⁸⁶ Moore, *Song Means*, 102-103.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 20ff.

¹⁸⁸ Lori Burns, 'Feeling the Style: Vocal Gesture and Musical Expression in Billie Holiday, Bessie Smith, and Louis Armstrong', *Music Theory Online* 11.3 (2005), <<http://www.mtosmt.org/issues/mto.05.11.3/mto.05.11.3.burns.html>> (accessed 19 August 2013).

consonants and grunts.¹⁸⁹ The common thread through this work is the authors' approach of taking an overarching concept and breaking it into constituent parts. That is, one can account for a timbre or the textural construction of a song by combining the isolated details. With these ideas in mind, I developed a set of questions that can be asked of each vocal and instrumental part in Queen's songs. The questions addressed the technical aspects and role of each part within a song, and are listed below.

For Mercury (and the other lead vocalists), the questions are:

1. Is he singing in a head, chest, or falsetto voice?
2. Does he use vibrato on held notes?
3. Does he approach notes directly or scoop upwards/bend downwards; does the pitch remain constant through the note; are notes ended with pitch inflections?
4. Are there consistent rhythmic inflections, such as hitting notes before or after the beat?
5. Are the melodies punctuated by accents, staccato or other articulation gestures?
6. Are the vocal parts sung, spoken or a combination? Are there non-lyrical utterances?

For Brian May, as a guitarist, the questions are:

1. Are the guitar parts based on single notes or chords?
2. Are the guitar parts melodic or harmonic?
3. Are there rhythmic inflections, as per the vocals?
4. Are there consistent types of articulation, such as bending the string, or tapping?
5. How are the guitar parts phrased?

For the piano parts, mostly played by Freddie Mercury, the questions are:

1. What is the right-hand playing, such as broken chords, full chords, single notes, etc.?
2. What is the left-hand playing?

¹⁸⁹ Andrew Legg, 'A taxonomy of musical gesture in African American gospel music', *Popular Music* 29/1 (2010).

3. Is either hand marked by specific articulation, such as staccato or accents?
4. Is the piano part melodic or harmonic?

For the bass guitar parts, mostly played by John Deacon, the questions are:

1. Does the bassist primarily play single notes or a riff-type pattern (‘Save Me’ cf. ‘Crazy Little Thing Called Love’)?
2. Is the bass line embellished?
3. Does the bass line have melodic qualities?
4. Are the bass line’s rhythmic traits related to other parts?

For the drum parts, played by Roger Taylor, the questions are:

1. Do the styles of beat change within a song?
2. How do the drum parts compare with the normative kick-snare-hi-hat patterns of rock music?
3. Are fills and embellishments consistently played on particular parts of the kit?

Several qualifying remarks are needed. Firstly, the answers to these questions were drawn from either the transcriptions, *Sonic Visualiser* spectrograms, or from close listening. Generally speaking, the transcriptions provided answers pertaining to pitch-based details, such as drum grooves or guitar patterns; the spectrograms provided answers pertaining to pitch and rhythm inflections; and, close listening provided answers pertaining to instrumental and vocal techniques such as chest/head voice or the use of pedal on the piano parts.

Secondly, there was no intention of answering questions objectively or with ‘yes/no’ responses. It is difficult to identify, for example, the exact point at which John Deacon’s bass guitar playing might move from a harmonic-rhythmic to counter-melodic role. But, in being aware of that musical possibility, one can understand the change, for instance, in Deacon’s bass line in ‘Crazy Little Thing Called Love’—in the bridge, he moves from an arpeggiated walking bass pattern to a descending scale pattern. When one observes a descending scale pattern in ‘Liar’ as well, it raises the possibility that this otherwise innocuous gesture may in fact be a common ingredient in Queen’s songs. Thus, the intention of this section of the analysis was to document systematically what is going on in every Queen song. By capturing these details with

respect to individual musicians, it was possible to gain not only greater insight into their respective playing idiosyncrasies, but a fuller understanding of how Queen blended as a rock band.

3.3.7 Instrumentation and Texture

Instrumentation was ascertained through close listening. In some cases, this task was straightforward — ‘Don’t Stop Me Now’ contains lead vocals, backing vocals, piano, bass guitar, drums and lead guitar. Other songs were more difficult given the presence of multiple voices and guitars. I often began, then, by identifying block instrumental parts, such as ‘Backing Vocals’ or ‘Guitar Choir’; further investigations then accounted for the nature of these parts. Where possible, I specified instrumentation precisely, such as distinguishing between a ‘honky-tonk’ and a grand piano. Lead guitars were distinguished according to their position in the sound-box and sonic nature. That said, with frequent changes in guitar tone and placement within songs, it was not always possible to track specific parts from the beginning to the end of the song.

The complete instrumentation for each song was mapped on the vertical axis of a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, with bar numbers and sectional divisions running along the upper horizontal axis. Cells were then marked for every bar in which a particular instrument or part sounded; instances of stop-time and ‘sustained hits’¹⁹⁰ were added over the relevant bars. Some of the instruments were divided into categories according to the playing style. Drums, for example, were split into groove (e.g. using the full kit), tom drum patterns (explored in Section 5.1.4), isolated cymbal hits, and fills. Guitars were split according to differences in timbre, such as clean versus overdriven. Although this method does not account for textural changes within bars, it provides an excellent overview of the large-scale textural changes. Furthermore, the distinctions within sets of instruments provided some indication as to overall changes in relative textural density.

¹⁹⁰ I have used the term ‘sustained hits’ for instances in which explicit articulation of the metre stops (as per stop-time), leaving space primarily for a solo vocal line or drum fill, but components of the song’s harmonic layer, usually the electric guitar or backing vocalists, continue to sound. The end of the chorus of ‘We are the Champions’ is a good example of a ‘sustained hit’. I have used the term ‘stop-time’ in a broader manner than its original definition, referring to instances in which the accompanimental texture cuts completely, regardless if this occurs once or across an entire passage.

3.3.8 Production Techniques, Mixing, and Effects

As has been made clear in a number of texts,¹⁹¹ analysis of production and mixing techniques alone can form the basis of an entire study. The current analysis aimed to cover only a portion of that ground. Where possible, information on production and mixing techniques, as pertaining to, for example, microphone use and recording strategies, was identified from articles, interviews, and documentaries. Other techniques, such as the use of reverb and broad equalization techniques, were identified while mapping the sound-box. I also identified some techniques by experimenting with personal recordings on computer programs such as *GarageBand* and *Ableton Live*. This practice was evidently divorced from any of the actual studio settings Queen and Roy Thomas Baker may have encountered. However, in attempting to reproduce the individual sounds of Queen's songs (e.g. the sound of the drums or guitar), I was able to gain greater insight into the sonic characteristics of Queen's songs.

The other section of this analysis looked at notable effects on individual tracks. Lacasse's thesis served as a useful guide. He documents the effects that have been applied to popular music vocal tracks, from double-tracking, to echoes, to flanging, to distortion.¹⁹² The analysis, therefore, identified the occurrences and degree of these effects on both vocal and instrumental tracks. This provided insight into the components of Queen's idiolect, as well as pointing towards stylistic influences, given that specific effects may connote a particular style or era.¹⁹³

3.3.9 The Sound-box

As outlined in Chapter 2, the sound-box is Moore's term for the virtual, three-dimensional space that a stereo recording inhabits. The dimensions of the sound-box pertain to left-right panning, high-low frequency range, and front-back (foreground-

¹⁹¹ For example, Virgil Moorefield, *The Producer as Composer: Shaping the Sounds of Popular Music* (Cambridge, MA.: MIT Press, 2005); Zak, *The Poetics of Rock*.

¹⁹² See, in particular, Lacasse, 'Listen to My Voice', 167ff.

¹⁹³ Moore, *Song Means*, 44-45.

background) distance.¹⁹⁴ The sound-box is conceptually similar to Gibson's model, which is used as a guide to mixing.¹⁹⁵ Individual sounds occupy places within the bounds of the sound-box; the scope of the dimensions (the width of the panning, the span of frequencies, the depth of the sound-box) create what Moylan calls the 'sound stage dimensions'. The combination of the sound stage dimensions and the sonic qualities of the sound stage create the 'perceived performance environment'—an 'overall space within which one "hears" or "conceives" the piece of music as existing'.¹⁹⁶

This segment of the analysis involved mapping the sound-box of Queen's songs, by placing each instrument or voice on a grid with fifteen segments: the vertical axis conveyed low, mid-range, and high pitches; the horizontal axis was divided into three large segments for left, centre, and right positions. The central section was further sub-divided into three components, given the common practice of placing parts just to the left or right of the centre. Relative foreground and background sources were marked by varying font sizes and types—sounds at the front of the mix, for example, were marked in bold typeface; sounds at the back of the mix were marked in italic typeface. Static visual representation does not account for sources moving within the sound-box. Accordingly, instances of movement were noted for each song. I also took notes on the general performance environment, in terms of its size, shape, and sonic qualities.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 31.

¹⁹⁵ David Gibson, *The Art of Mixing: A Visual Guide to Recording, Engineering, and Production*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Cengage Learning, 2005).

¹⁹⁶ William Moylan, 'Considering Space in Recorded Music', in *The Art of Record Production: An Introductory Reader for a New Academic Field*, eds. Simon Frith and Simon Zagorski-Thomas (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 163-167.

4. The Structures of Queen's Songs

This and the subsequent chapter present the analytical findings pertaining to the individual parameters laid out in Chapter 3. Further subdivisions within each section have been made according to the nature of the musical parameter (e.g. 'Harmony' into 'Modulations', 'Phrase Harmonic Structure', and so forth), and according to the nature of the analytical findings (e.g. the section on form). In each section, the primary focus is the main trends identified from the individual analyses. The intention of any musical examples is not to showcase differences between songs, but rather to highlight the points of musical consistency across the corpus, even if the former would be an interesting exercise. A further aim of each section is to consider whether the trends are best understood as compositional strategies or sonic patterns, as per the definitions laid out in Section 2.4. Throughout this chapter (and Chapter 5), references to wider stylistic traits will be made only occasionally; more thorough discussions of Queen in these broader stylistic contexts take place in Chapter 6. Finally, because it is not possible to discuss every song in detail (if at all), I have provided an Appendix at the conclusion of this thesis that lists the year and songwriter, as well as the basic formal, harmonic, and textural setup for each track. It is strongly recommended that readers have recordings of the Queen songs on hand while following the analytical discussions below.

4.1 Form

Queen's approach to form is best understood in terms of three compositional strategies, which reflect varying degrees of adherence to the structural norms of popular music. These strategies can be summarised thus: the use of conventional forms, variations on a conventional template, and episodic formal structures. As outlined below, these descriptions may be considered compositional strategies because within each category, one finds a variety of structures across songs.

4.1.1 Conventional Forms

Just under one third of the songs in the corpus follow one of the conventional structures of popular songs, as outlined by Covach,¹⁹⁷ although there are several variations in terms of the exact structure. Three songs are strophic, in terms of repeating (for the most part) the musical content of a single verse-like section with differences in the lyrical content, and slight variations in the harmonic progressions. ‘Dear Friends’ and ‘Nevermore’ feature lyrics in both their respective verses, while in ‘My Melancholy Blues’, the repeat verse starts as an instrumental before Mercury returns to sing the final six bars. A further six songs are in verse-chorus form. Again, some instances play through the respective sections as instrumentals (e.g. ‘Tie Your Mother Down’ or ‘Save Me’), but retain the same harmonic content as the vocal sections. ‘Another One Bites the Dust’ occupies a middleground between these two formal types: the lyrical content divides into clear verses and choruses, but the musical material is essentially constant throughout. The primary difference between the sections is the condensed nature of the chorus—eight bars of the bass riff instead of the verse’s twelve bars.

AABA and verse-chorus-bridge structures are also prevalent, particularly in songs that reference older popular music styles, such as the vaudeville-inspired ‘Seaside Rendezvous’ (AABA) and the 1940s jazz-inspired ‘Bring Back That Leroy Brown’ (verse-chorus-bridge). The important formal feature in these cases is the contrasting ‘B’ or bridge section that starts on a non-tonic chord and ends on the dominant, which then leads back to the tonic of the subsequent section. ‘Crazy Little Thing Called Love’ (which references the rockabilly style) exemplifies this idea: the ‘B’ section starts on IV, and concludes with a II-V tag. ‘Lazing on a Sunday Afternoon’ is structurally similar, as are ‘Teo Torriatte’ and ‘Sleeping on a Sidewalk’. ‘Sweet Lady’ and ‘The Loser in the End’ differ slightly insofar as the bridge sections end on IV, but the musical effect of departing from and returning to the original material remains consistent with other songs in verse-chorus-bridge and AABA form. To this latter sub-category of songs, one may add ‘Play the Game’, ‘Drowse’, and ‘Funny How Love Is’.

¹⁹⁷ Covach, ‘Form in Rock’.

4.1.2 Conventional Forms with Variations

One of Queen's favoured approaches to form is to vary or embellish a conventional template, either in a subtle or obvious manner. 'Jesus' has alternating verse and chorus sections, followed by new and lengthy instrumental section, before returning to the verse and chorus pair. On the other hand, the AABA template of 'Love of My Life' (heard in the vocal parts) is carefully disguised by the thematic development of the introductory instrumental material. As per the group's use of conventional structures, there is no set approach to variations, nor is there a particular formal archetype that is more susceptible to embellishments. Instead, one may observe several compositional strategies regarding the nature of these variations.

'Love of My Life' highlights one strategy whereby a contrasting instrumental section is presented initially as the song's introduction before being interpolated into the conventional structure thereafter. This contrast between the 'standard' and 'extra' material is rather explicit in 'Love of My Life'—Freddie Mercury switches between two different styles of piano playing, a feature that is addressed further in Section 6.2.3. In 'Love of My Life', the instrumental material recurs after each A section, as well as after the B section, although the content and length varies with each appearance. '39' and 'Leaving Home Ain't Easy' are much simpler in their design. In these two songs, the harmonically adventurous introductions recur after the first verse-chorus pair of the songs and do not reappear thereafter. 'All Dead All Dead' likewise only recapitulates the introductory material once, but in a much more expansive manner and with denser instrumentation than heard at the beginning of the song.

A second compositional strategy is to play with the temporal and harmonic expectations of a bridge section. 'Good Old Fashioned Lover Boy' exemplifies this approach. After one verse-chorus pair, the subsequent section opens on the minor subdominant, which, leads, via $bIII^7$, to the flattened submediant. No sooner has this new key area been established than Mercury's piano chords slip down a semitone to B^b7 , which heralds a V^7-I return to the original key of E^b major. The harmonic

processes of this section are exactly as one may expect from a bridge. The section is unusual, however, for its early placement in the song, and because another new section, with similar harmonic features (i.e. winding its way to V), appears after the second chorus. Thus, as suggested in Section 3.3.1, the form of ‘Good Old-Fashioned Lover Boy’ is best understood as verse-chorus with two bridge sections.

What is interesting about this compositional strategy is that Queen placed the bridge-like sections in different places across the songs. In ‘Need Your Loving Tonight’, the bridge-like section seems to be placed in the middle of the first verse. After two twelve-bar phrases, there is a sudden textural and harmonic change; a harmonic sequence follows and returns the song to V, for a repeat of the initial material. ‘Spread Your Wings’ is similar to ‘Good Old Fashioned Lover Boy’ in that the bridge-like section comes after the first chorus. Here, the first phrase of this new section builds upon the pre-chorus material, but with a stronger emphasis on the relative minor key. A brief instrumental section follows, which also features strong harmonic movement through stepwise bass lines towards the dominant. In this case, it is possible to hear one large section, which is distinct to the verse and chorus material, or two adjacent bridge-like sections (one vocal, one instrumental). More important, perhaps, is the section’s early appearance in the song. An alternative approach to this compositional strategy can be found in ‘Seven Seas of Rhye’. Here, the guitar instrumental takes place over a static bVI chord after the second A section; the subsequent vocal section is contrasting again and unfolds in the subdominant key, before returning for the final verse in the tonic key. In this case, the temporal placements of the bridge-like sections are consistent with conventional templates, but the harmonic processes are relatively static.

The group’s third compositional strategy in this regard is to add extra material to a conventional template, but to a much a greater degree than in previous examples. ‘It’s Late’ typifies this idea. It has a clear verse-chorus section in the outer segments of the song; added to this template are a third vocal section, and a long instrumental section, which itself contains several thematic ideas. This strategy also covers songs with compound-type forms. Covach’s term refers to a formal plan in which one template is

inserted into another.¹⁹⁸ ‘Great King Rat’ offers a loose version of compound AABA. As shown in Table 4.1, the repeated verse material at the beginning and end of the song can be heard as the ‘A’ component of this form; the middle segment (Section Groups II-I-III) represents an extended ‘B’ section, while also unfolding an AABC plan between 2’35” and 5’00”. Other songs to use a compound-type approach include ‘Ogre Battle’, ‘The Prophet’s Song’, and ‘Father to Son’; key to each example is the presence of an identifiable outer structure and repeated inner sections, although the quantity of ideas and nature of the repetition vary considerably across songs.

| Section Group | Section | Tonal Centre | Time | Description |
|---------------|---------|--------------|-------|------------------------------------|
| I | A | E Aeolian | 0’00 | Instrumental Introduction |
| | B | A Aeolian | 0’31” | Verse I + Refrain |
| | B | A Aeolian | 1’04” | Verse II + Refrain |
| | B | A Aeolian | 1’34” | Instrumental Verse + Refrain |
| | B | A Aeolian | 2’03” | Instrumental Verse + Vocal Refrain |
| II | C | D | 2’35” | March Verse |
| | C' | D | 3’13” | March Verse II |
| I | B' | A Aeolian | 3’55” | Verse III |
| III | D | C | 4’17” | Instrumental |
| I | B | A Aeolian | 5’00” | Instrumental Verse + Vocal Refrain |

Table 4.1. ‘Great King Rat’, Formal Plan

4.1.3 Episodic Forms

With these latter examples, it is still easy to note the conventional formal plans of the song, such as a repeating verse-chorus pair. In other instances, one reaches the point where such sections are best heard not as the building blocks of the structure, but simply components of a much larger formal puzzle. Thus, in ‘Liar’, there is a verse-chorus pair that repeats once in succession. Before this point, though, one hears an instrumental section with two related thematic ideas; after this point, one hears a string of instrumental and vocal sections, all of which are harmonically related to, but texturally and rhythmically different from the verse-chorus pair and each other. It would be an overstatement to describe ‘Liar’ as unfolding a verse-chorus form with

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 74-75; Covach and Flory, *What’s That Sound?*, 305.

additional material. More accurately, a verse-chorus pair is one part of a larger episodic structure.

Of Queen's songs that do not conform to an existing formal template, most can be described as episodic, with a succession of short and distinct thematic ideas. The unfolding of these episodes changes from song to song. 'In the Lap of the Gods', for instance, may be regarded as through-composed, although individual segments repeat once or twice within a larger section, before moving to the next idea.¹⁹⁹ 'My Fairy King' offers a different take on the episodic approach. Its form can be mapped out thus: ABCB'CB"BB'DB"'E, where B represents a harmonic riff, i-iv or I-IV, and C represents a verse-like section. Like 'In the Lap of the Gods', there is the continual introduction of new material as the song progresses, such that the instrumental coda offers a new harmonic progression and guitar melody. However, there is also recapitulation of material throughout, albeit in a seemingly random manner. By comparison again, 'Now I'm Here', 'Mustapha', and 'More of That Jazz' all present multiple thematic ideas within the song, some of which appear as verse- or chorus-like sections, but in a comparatively regular manner: in the latter song, for instance, the five episodes follow each other, and then the cycle repeats.

The formal variations listed in the previous paragraphs speak to the idea that most songs in Queen's output have a distinct structural identity in terms of the scope and order of thematic ideas. Accordingly, it is difficult to point to a standard song structure for the group. Instead, the compositional strategies outlined above mean that most song structures are distinct from, but can be related to a selection of other songs in the corpus. Two strategies are the most prominent: the use of conventional song forms and sections, and the tendency to expand upon or contravene the formal conventions of popular music. Although both appear diametrically opposed to one another, they have their meeting point in the songs of Section 4.1.2—songs that add to and vary the conventional structural templates of popular music represent Queen's most typical approach to form. The group neither follows strictly nor abandons the structural conventions of their era, instead finding a middle position that draws on both approaches.

¹⁹⁹ This corresponds with Osborn's notion of 'Multi-part Monothematic' through-composed form; see Osborn, 'Understanding Through Composition', [13].


4.2 Harmony

4.2.1 Modulations, Mode Changes, and Large-Scale Harmonic Structure

In 54 songs, Queen explores multiple tonal centres, multiple modes, or a combination of both. Examples of these harmonic traits are consistent across the corpus: roughly half the songs on each album contain some type of structural harmonic change, or present structural harmonic ambiguities. In spite of the rich variety of harmonic explorations, there are five main characteristics of Queen's structural harmonic language: concurrent exploration of two modes or tonal centres; modulations between related keys; direct modulations; intra-sectional modulations; and, the creation of a large-scale harmonic structure via multiple modulations. From these five characteristics, I will suggest below that it is possible to draw out three main compositional strategies that govern Queen's approach to tonal structures. I will also argue, however, that it is the range of structural harmonic language that marks this era of Queen's output, as opposed to the group's adherence to a strict set of practices.

One of Roger Taylor's prominent songwriting traits is to intimate two modes through the local harmonic progressions. 'Coming Soon', 'I'm in Love With My Car', 'Fight From the Inside', and 'Rock It (Prime Jive)' are representative examples. From the latter song, its harmonic language is sparse, with only four major chords appearing—B, C#, E, F#. The sense of a local tonic note at various points in the song is dependent on the harmonic stress: the opening 26 bars of the verse alternate between B and F#, which suggests I and V in B major. As shown in Example 4.1, the next 26 bars progress C#-F#-E-B-F#-B, which can conceivably be heard as related to F# major with a Mixolydian twist (V-I-^bVII-IV-I-IV), or related to B major with a secondary dominant (II-V-IV-I-V-I). The ambiguity is fostered also by the constant guitar-bass-drum texture, which diminishes one's awareness of formal boundaries, and the slow harmonic rhythm (two or four bars per chord), which reduces the sense of harmonic directionality.

| | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------|----|---|----|---|----|---|----|---|------|----|---|----|
| B major: | I | V | I | V | I | V | II | V | IV | I | V | I |
| F# major: | IV | I | IV | I | IV | I | V | I | bVII | IV | I | IV |



Verse Bars: 1 7 11 15 19 23 27 31 35 37 43 47

Example 4.1. ‘Rock It (Prime Jive)’, Harmonic Outline, Verse

The idea of dual tonal centres and modes is evident in other songs from the early phases of Queen’s career. ‘Ogre Battle’ is the most straightforward case. The verse is squarely in G major, while the chorus reprises A minor scale passages from the introduction. The chorus ends on a D major chord, which intimates the Dorian mode, given the local i-IV movement of this section. From a structural perspective, however, the Am-D movement can be heard as part of a structural ii-V progression, which duly leads back to G major for the subsequent verse. ‘Great King Rat’ is not as clear. The verse sets off, seemingly, in A Aeolian, with a four-bar loop of i-VII-v-i. The chorus section turns towards the relative major, with alternating C and G chords, heard either as III-VII in A Aeolian or I-V in C major. After four bars, a D major chord enters, lasting two bars and returning as the concluding chord of the phrase (Example 4.2). This harmony forces a change in the modal or tonal appraisal—either one hears a shift from A Aeolian to G major (thus producing a IV-I-IV-I-V-IV-I-ii-V progression for the chorus), or one hears A Dorian being confirmed as the overall mode of the section.



Example 4.2. ‘Great King Rat’, Harmonic Outline, Verse and Chorus

In a greater number of examples, the contrast between tonal centres and/or modes is stronger, such that one would likely hear a departure from one key to another, as opposed to hearing two competing keys/modes simultaneously. The most common type of modulation in Queen’s corpus is between relative keys. In ‘Sail Away Sweet Sister’, the verse is in the B Aeolian mode, with the A major VII chord doubling as V for the shift into D major for the chorus. In many other examples— ‘You Take My Breath Away’, ‘Death on Two Legs’, ‘Millionaire Waltz’, ‘All Dead All Dead’, ‘Spread Your Wings’, and ‘You and I’—the relative minor keys are emphasised

through the respective dominant chords. Thus, in both ‘You Take My Breath Away’ and ‘Millionaire Waltz’, one finds the progression $i-V^7_b-i-VII-III$ underpinning the transition from minor to relative major. This pattern is effectively reversed in ‘You and I’, in which the relative minor is preceded by its dominant, or III in relation to the local major tonic.

These modulations are united by their preparatory nature—shifts in tonal centre are founded on common harmonic ground between the departure and destination points. Direct and unprepared modulations are also frequent throughout the corpus. ‘Keep Yourself Alive’ has verses in F major and choruses in D major, while the repeated choruses at the end of the song move between keys related by minor thirds—D to F to D to B. Each modulation simply occurs over the sectional bar line. Other songs to feature direct modulations include ‘Doin’ All Right’, ‘Stone Cold Crazy’, ‘Seven Seas of Rhye’, ‘Who Needs You’, ‘If You Can’t Beat Them’, ‘Teo Torriatte’, and ‘Save Me’. Deacon’s ‘Misfire’ is similar to ‘Keep Yourself Alive’ (and Stevie Wonder’s ‘Golden Lady’) in that final chorus changes key with each repeat.

Other examples of modulations are distinct in two ways. Firstly, particularly in songs by Mercury, modulations occur within, rather than between, sections. Secondly, these songs often contain multiple changes in tonal centre and/or mode, which result in a larger-scale and progressive harmonic plan. In a group of mid-1970s songs (‘Killer Queen’, ‘Love of My Life’, ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’, and ‘Jealousy’), Mercury modulates within the verse and/or chorus along a circle-of-fifths line. In ‘Killer Queen’, the final phrase of the verse features a dominant-tonic sequence in E^b major, ascending by thirds, which produces the progression, $III-vi-V-I-VII^7-iii-II$. The final chord, F major, acts as a pivot into B^b major for the start of the chorus, thus continuing the sequence, while also effecting the modulation. A VII chord in B^b major also acts as a pivot in the first phrase of the chorus, launching the progression $III^7-vi-II^7-V$ into F major. Other intra-sectional modulations from this era move in the opposite direction along the circle-of-fifths: ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’ proceeds from B^b major to E^b major in the verse, but then from E^b major to F major at the end of the song; ‘Love of My Life’ modulates from C to F in the verse section (with the

occasional hint of B^b major in the instrumental sections); ‘Jealousy’ proceeds from F major to E^b major, with an instrumental passage in G minor.

These intra-sectional modulations point towards the common approach underpinning the large-scale modulation structures. Songs featuring multiple keys often explored significant harmonic ground, but steps between successive tonal and/or modal centres were often small. ‘Flick of the Wrist’ outlines this idea clearly. Each section of the song has a corresponding key or mode. The verse is split into two sub-sections, one with a B Phrygian flavour, one in E minor; the chorus starts on an A minor chord, and appears to hover between A Dorian and G major; the instrumental starts in G major and finishes in E Aeolian; the refrain-like material that concludes the instrumental (and other chorus sections) suggests either E Aeolian or E Dorian—there is both a C major chord and an A major. This tag ends on Em⁷, which leads back to Phrygian-like verse section. In this case, the overall pitch collection is confined almost exclusively to the notes of the G major scale. The apparent changes in mode and key thus arise from the emphasis on particular chords and/or notes within sections. The movement between modes and tonal centres, however, is predicated entirely on points of common harmonic ground.

‘Millionaire Waltz’ offers a more subtle and expansive example than ‘Flick of the Wrist’, but the modulation principles remain the same. The tonal scheme of the song is outlined in Table 4.2 below. Only the final modulation is between unrelated keys, but the transition is smooth through the use of common tones—the note C^b is harmonised by C^b major, E minor, and G major chords, the latter being V of the original tonic key. As can be seen from this outline, each key is only related closely to its preceding and subsequent key, an idea that underpins the modulations in ‘My Fairy King’, ‘Father to Son’, ‘The March of the Black Queen’, ‘It’s Late’, ‘Bicycle Race’, and ‘Don’t Try Suicide’, to varying degrees.

| Key | Relationship | Modulation Technique |
|----------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------|
| C major | | |
| F major | Subdominant | Direct |
| F minor | Parallel Minor | Direct |
| E ^b major | Dominant of Relative Major | Pivot Chord |
| A ^b major | Subdominant | Pivot Chord |
| E ^b major | Dominant | Pivot Chord |
| C ^b major | Relative of Parallel Minor | Common-tone |
| C major | Enharmonic Flattened Supertonic | Common-tone |

Table 4.2. 'Millionaire Waltz', Tonal Plan

It is thus possible to identify several fundamental aspects of Queen's structural harmonic language. First is the presence of chords that intimate a modal and/or tonal shift, either subtly (e.g. 'Great King Rat' or 'White Queen') or forcefully (e.g. 'Death on Two Legs' or 'You and I'). Secondly, most changes in tonal centre tend to occur across sectional boundaries, with key changes helping to articulate the overall structure of a song. Thirdly, changes in mode and/or tonal centre are often predicated on shared harmonic ground, regardless of whether there is one key change in a song (e.g. the relative keys of 'Sail Away Sweet Sister') or multiple modulations (e.g. 'Millionaire Waltz'). To this list of three strategies, it is necessary to add a fourth—that of intra-sectional modulations—that pertains only to Mercury's songs, and not to those of the other band members. Further, Mercury does not confine himself to this type of modulation; 'We are the Champions', for example, is a prime example of a sectional modulation.

It may be tempting to read some of these common features in terms of sonic patterns. Indeed, there is marked consistency with respect to several harmonic traits: modal infusions tend to come from the Dorian mode; modulations between the verse and chorus sections are frequent; shifts between D major and B minor, specifically, can be found in 'Death on Two Legs', 'You and I', 'Sail Away Sweet Sister', and 'Spread Your Wings'; while Mercury's intra-sectional modulations often work across the major keys, C, F, B^b, and E^b.

Yet, for all this consistency, there are also significant variations in the modulations. Modulations between D major and B minor unfold at different points in the song, and are effected with varying degrees of harmonic force. Modulations between verse and chorus sections are formally consistent, but cover varying distances. Mercury's intra-sectional modulations move in different directions along the circle-of-fifths, and are effected via a range of surface harmonic patterns. Large-scale tonal plans are built on successive shifts between related keys, but the nature of these relationships both within and across songs differ greatly. Accordingly, it is best to view these structural harmonic features in terms of compositional strategies, insofar as the common gestures are articulated in a number of ways from song to song.

One final example encapsulates this idea. In three songs, 'The March of the Black Queen', 'Lazing on a Sunday Afternoon' and 'Bohemian Rhapsody', one finds modulations by a tritone. Furthermore, in each instance, the song modulates between the tonal centres E^b and A. On one level, the consistency of these unusual modulations is extraordinary. Each unfolds, however, in a different manner. In the former example, the tritone distance is traversed via a G major chord that functions as V/vi in E^b major, and VII of A Aeolian of the subsequent section. 'Lazing on a Sunday Afternoon' features a direct modulation across sectional bar lines. In 'Bohemian Rhapsody', the modulation into the opera section is effected via a descending chromatic line that simply ends on the new tonic, but emphasises a D^b major chord along the way, which itself shares an enharmonic common-tone relationship with A major (Example 4.3). My point is that it is the sheer harmonic variety of each example that is the most striking; such variety ensured that the structural consistencies do not become formulaic or stale.

The image shows a musical score for the instrumental-opera transition of 'Bohemian Rhapsody'. It consists of three systems of music. The first system shows a guitar line with triplets and a piano accompaniment with block chords. The second system continues the piano accompaniment, highlighting a common-tone chord (D^b and C[#]) between the two systems. The third system shows the continuation of the chromatic bass line. The score is in 4/4 time with a key signature of three flats (B-flat major/C minor).

Example 4.3. 'Bohemian Rhapsody', Electric Guitar and Piano, Instrumental-Opera Transition

4.2.2 Phrase Harmonic Structure

Queen's approach to harmony at the phrase and sectional level is consistent across the corpus. Queen's phrasing is predominantly foursquare and within this framework, harmonies tend to move from the tonic to the dominant and back. That said, there are not necessarily set patterns of when each harmony is reached. In 'Keep Yourself Alive', the first verse phrase closes via a perfect cadence; the second verse phrase ends on the dominant, with the resolution occurring over the sectional bar line; the chorus closes within the four-bar phrase. By comparison, both the verse and chorus of 'Save Me' reach the dominant after the first phrase of each section and conclude on the tonic within the sectional boundaries. Queen thus explores different combinations of open and closed phrases within this harmonic framework. In spite of these variations, one may observe several strategies pertaining to specific sections of songs.

First, in terms of verses, the most common pattern is to conclude on the dominant, with a resolution to the tonic occurring across the sectional bar line. This trait is evident in 33 songs, as well as several others, such as 'The Night Comes Down', in

which the verse-ending tonic harmony functions as an applied dominant (i.e. I⁷-IV). Nearly as common are harmonically-closed verse sections. This trait appears in 29 songs, over half of which are written by May, such as 'Brighton Rock', 'Fat Bottomed Girls', 'It's Late' and 'Save Me'.

The numbers are slightly less even with respect to choruses or chorus-like sections. Sixteen songs conclude the chorus on the dominant chord, resolving to the tonic immediately; 28 songs close on the tonic within the chorus section. A common gesture in May's songs is to 'interrupt' the cadence of the penultimate or final chorus by ending on the subdominant, which either delays the appearance of the tonic chord (e.g. 'It's Late', 'Brighton Rock', 'Some Day One Day', 'Doin' All Right') or necessitates a repeat of the chorus section ('Leaving Home Ain't Easy'). Mercury uses the same general technique in 'Don't Stop Me Now' but with the striking chromatic chord, $\flat\text{III}^6/\text{B}^{\flat}$, which resolves to the tonic, F, across the bar line.

Queen thus ends verse and chorus sections using relatively conventional means. The band's approach to phrasing within these sections is also conventional but with greater variations. In a handful of songs by May, such as 'Brighton Rock', 'It's Late', and 'Tie Your Mother Down', the opening phrase of the chorus is closed, and is followed by a longer or more expansive second phrase, analogous to Moore's reading of 'Hey Jude'.²⁰⁰ The standard approach is for the intra-sectional phrases to remain open: 'You and I', 'Sail Away Sweet Sister', 'Save Me', and 'Fat Bottomed Girls' all reach the dominant by the middle of the verse and chorus sections. In Mercury's songs, one finds variations on this particular approach. Sometimes, the mid-section phrase ends on a non-dominant, but dominant-functioning chord, often leading to the supertonic. This occurs in 'We are the Champions' (vii^{o7}/ii), 'Don't Stop Me Now', and 'Lazing on a Sunday Afternoon' (both V/ii). Related to this is Mercury's strategy of ending phrases on a dominant-functioning harmony that pivots the song towards another key area. In 'My Fairy King', the verse phrases end on the chords, B and G^{#o}, which tonicise E minor and A minor, respectively. In 'Love of My Life', the mid-point of the verse features a V-I cadence in C, the latter chord of which then

²⁰⁰ Moore, *Song Means*, 86.

transforms (through the addition of a B^b) into V of F major. The verse section then concludes with a perfect cadence in the new key of F major.

In the bridge sections of Queen's songs, the phrases predominantly end on the dominant chord, as might be expected. Again, Mercury explores the use of alternative chords, but with the same function. For instance, the return verse or chorus sometimes restarts on the supertonic, and thus he concludes the bridge section on VI, as can be heard in 'Lazing on a Sunday Afternoon' and 'Good Old Fashioned Lover Boy'. In 'Seaside Rendezvous', the final chord of the bridge is II in F major, but because the key of the verse section is C major, this harmony acts as a re-transitioning dominant back to the original tonic. Elsewhere, May uses III as a re-transitioning chord in 'Good Company' and a #iv^{o7} chord in 'Sail Away Sweet Sister', both of which result in the semitone voice-leading into the tonic chord (7-8 with III; #2-3 and #4-5 with #iv^{o7}). Somewhat unexpectedly, one can find a handful of examples in which the bridge section ends on the tonic, thereby defeating the apparent structural purpose of this section. Deacon adopts this technique in three of his songs ('You're My Best Friend', 'In Only Seven Days', and the first bridge section of 'Spread Your Wings'). 'Millionaire Waltz' is similar, with perfect cadences sealing off most of the bridge-like sections in the song; and, although not concluding with a perfect cadence, the bridges of 'Sweet Lady' and 'White Man' end on the tonic chord.

Finally, there is the matter of larger-scale patterning of open/closed phrasing across a song. In a number of Deacon and May's songs, for instance, multiple sections are closed with one left open: 'In Only Seven Days' ends the verse on V, and closes the chorus and bridge sections; 'Spread Your Wings' closes the verse, chorus, the first bridge, but leaves the second bridge open on V; May's 'Sail Away Sweet Sister' follows much the same pattern as the previous example. Mercury, on the other hand, is more likely to leave multiple sections open. This is particularly the case in his songs with expansive formal structures (e.g. 'My Fairy King', 'The March of the Black Queen', 'In the Lap of the Gods', 'Bohemian Rhapsody', 'Jealousy', 'Bicycle Race'). There is a correlation here between the open-ended phrase structures and the expansive modulation schemes. On the one hand, the open phrases facilitate harmonic momentum, which encourages tonal diversions. On the other hand, the modulation

processes are predicated upon a degree of harmonic flexibility, which stems from the open phrases. On that note, it is interesting to observe that Mercury's rock ballads ('In The Lap of the Gods...Revisited', 'We are the Champions', and 'Play the Game') retain the open-ended phrase and sectional structures, despite the absence of progressive modulations.

The variations noted above mean it is difficult to identify specific sonic patterns that mark Queen's approach to phrase-level harmonic structure. Instead, one can identify a rather constrained and conservative compositional strategy of moving consistently between the tonic and dominant harmonies over some period of time within and across sections. The consistent appearances of phrase-ending tonic and/or dominant harmonies, however, form a strong common thread through the corpus. This observation also stands in counterpoint to the discussion of large-scale structure, where the group is rather adventurous in terms of harmonic movement. Indeed, one may argue that this approach to phrase structure provides a level of harmonic security, above which the songwriters move relatively freely between keys, and below which they explore rich surface harmonic progressions, which is the subject of the following section.

4.2.3 Surface Harmonic Progressions

There is no definitive Queen-like chord progression. Some song sections use the primary triads almost exclusively (e.g. the verses of 'Fat Bottomed Girls' or 'If You Can't Beat Them'); other sections employ a wider variety of diatonic chords, such as I, ii, IV, V, and vi (e.g. the verses of 'Save Me', 'Sail Away Sweet Sister', '39'); and, other sections still are highly chromatic but within a strong tonal framework (e.g. 'My Melancholy Blues'). Instead, one can identify a number of harmonic fragments or gestures that appear regularly across the corpus. Such gestures may be understood as sonic patterns in that they give any song a Queen-like flavour. At the risk of overlooking other harmonic details, this section focuses on four prominent harmonic fingerprints.

Firstly, the minor subdominant chord appears in a variety of songs, typically piano-based ballads. The iv-I progression concludes 'Love of My Life', as well as 'You're

My Best Friend’, and the verse and chorus sections of ‘Spread Your Wings’. In ‘Long Away’, May alters the chord slightly to produce a $\flat VI^{maj7}$ -I cadence. The minor subdominant chord also appears before I in the verse sections of ‘Jealousy’ and ‘Play the Game’. It further acts as a pre-dominant chord in the verses of ‘Killer Queen’ (iv-I_c-V), ‘Good Old Fashioned Lover Boy’, and ‘My Melancholy Blues’ (both iv-V-I). One further variation occurs at the climactic point of the chorus in ‘Play the Game’: the title line is punctuated by a v^9 chord; the section concludes with the progression $\flat VI$ - $\flat VII$ -I. There is consistency, then, in terms of the harmonic borrowing from the Aeolian mode.

Secondly, stepwise movement in the bass underpins a number of Queen’s chord progressions. The fragment I-V_b-vi is particularly common: this gesture opens the verses of ‘The Fairy Feller’s Master-Stroke’, ‘Ogre Battle’ ‘Nevermore’, ‘Lily of the Valley’, ‘Somebody to Love’, ‘Save Me’, ‘Ogre Battle’, ‘You’re My Best Friend’, and appears in ‘The March of the Black Queen’, ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’, and ‘Love of My Life’. The same bass line is used at the end of the chorus of ‘Keep Yourself Alive’, but is harmonised as I-III⁷_c-vi. One can also identify chromatic and extended variations on this approach in the second section of ‘Procession’ (I-I⁷_d-IV), the verses of ‘Killer Queen’ (I-iii_c-iii⁰_c-IV-iv-I_c) and ‘Play the Game’ (I-I^{maj7}- $\flat VII^{maj7}$ -vi-vi^{maj7}-iv⁶_b), and the bridge of ‘You’re My Best Friend’ (I-III^{add#5}_c-vi-I⁷_d-IV-iv⁶), amongst other examples. In each instance, the key point is that the descending bass line begins from a major tonic chord.

Queen also employs descending bass lines starting from a minor chord, built on either the tonic, submediant, or supertonic. The Aeolian progression, i-VII-VI-V, underpins the verses of ‘White Queen (As It Began)’ and ‘Great King Rat’ (without the VI chord). The Dorian-inflected version (i-III_c-IV_b-VI, from, say, ‘While My Guitar Gently Weeps’) appears in the bridge sections of Deacon’s ‘Spread Your Wings’, although the raised sixth degree is harmonised as a half-diminished chord. Much more frequent is the fully chromatic variant of the lament bass, à la ‘Stairway to Heaven’. The most famous example of this progression in the Queen corpus is the transitory passage in the verse of ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’—Deacon’s bass line, accompanied by Mercury’s left hand and, in the second verse, May’s electric guitar, steps down from

C, through B, B^b, A, A^b, G to E^b. For the first four chords in this progression, Mercury essentially plays a C minor triad in the right-hand of the piano, changing only the bottom note of the three-note chords. Mercury uses this progression on several occasions, descending a fourth under a B minor triad in ‘Death on Two Legs’; descending a minor third under an E minor triad in ‘In the Lap of the Gods...Revisited’; and, descending a minor third under an A minor chord in ‘The March of the Black Queen’.

The previous paragraphs also highlight instances of secondary dominants as part of a descending bass line, either III_c leading to vi, or I⁷_d leading to IV or IV_b. Secondary dominants are the third common trait of Queen’s surface harmonic language. As noted in the previous sections, Mercury frequently uses applied dominants as a means of effecting modulations at phrase junctures. He also employs a wide range of applied dominants within phrases. In major keys, I⁷, II and III, and VI are the most common, while an unusual chord VII is heard on occasion to emphasise iii (e.g. the bridge of ‘Lazing on a Sunday Afternoon’, the coda of ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’, and the chorus of ‘Jealousy’). The other songwriters, particularly May and Deacon in their ballads, employ secondary dominants only on I, II, III and VI.

While the use of secondary dominants may be considered a compositional strategy, one can point to more specific sonic patterns involving these chords. The II chord in root position is often employed as the precursor to a phrase- or section-ending dominant, as can be heard in the choruses of ‘Spread Your Wings’, ‘Save Me’, the pre-chorus of ‘We are the Champions’, and the verses of ‘Dear Friends’, ‘Nevermore’ and ‘Somebody to Love’. The chord also appears in first inversion, usually succeeding the subdominant chord, thus creating an ascending chromatic bass line between scale degrees 4 and 5. The chorus progression of ‘Sail Away Sweet Sister’ exemplifies this approach: the I-I_b-IV-II⁷_b-I_c-V progression gives the song a lift in D major after the morose verse in B Aeolian. This stepwise approach to the dominant appears at the end of the chorus and bridge sections of ‘Flick of the Wrist’ and ‘Seven Seas of Rhye’, respectively.

Elsewhere, such a progression is succeeded by a secondary dominant on III, usually in first inversion, thus extending the rising bass line towards the submediant. The bridge of ‘Teo Torriatte’ is, perhaps, the consummate example, in which the second phrase proceeds, in D major, V-II_b-V-III⁷_b-vi-vi/A-IV-V⁶; the harmonic momentum is emphasised by the textural growth and slowly rising vocal melody. Other textbook examples include the second verse of ‘Nevermore’ and the final chorus of ‘It’s Late’, in which the secondary dominants remain in root position. In ‘Leaving Home Ain’t Easy’, one finds a rather extraordinary chromatic variant on this progression, full of rich seventh chords in the following sequence in A major: I-v⁷_b-IV_c-VI⁷-ii-^bVI^{aug6}-I_c-V^{7sus4/add9}-^bVI^{aug6}-V⁷-IV⁶. The backing vocal parts highlight the stepwise chromatic voice-leading that underpins this progression in a similar manner to the progressions noted above (Example 4.4).

Example 4.4. ‘Leaving Home Ain’t Easy’, Backing Vocals, Final Chorus

A fourth and final harmonic gesture is common mostly (but not exclusively) in the songs of Freddie Mercury. He often inserts a diminished chord, with or without the seventh, composed of scale degrees 1, #2, #4, 6 (or their enharmonic equivalents). Often, this chord acts as a passing sonority between two other harmonies, such as descending from iii⁷ or I_b to ii⁷, via #ii^{o7} (or ^biii^{o7}); this particular gesture appears in ‘You Take My Breath Away’ and ‘My Melancholy Blues’ (Example 4.5) and produces a stepwise bass line between 3 and 2. The same bass line appears in descending form in the verse, opera section and coda of ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’ (harmonised as IV-I_b-#ii^{o7}-ii⁷) and ‘Flick of the Wrist’ (I_b-#ii^{o7}-ii⁷-I). The ascending bass line appears in the instrumental ‘Bring Back That Leroy Brown’, but with the same harmonisation as ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’ and ‘Flick of the Wrist’ (e.g. I-ii⁷-#ii^{o7}-

acknowledge the many variations that shape both these harmonic traits and other traits across Queen's songs.

It is worth concluding these three sections on harmony by discussing briefly two harmonic features that are both standard in popular music and reasonably common in Queen's output. Firstly, there is the relationship between the tonic and submediant. As noted above, this plays out on the surface of many Queen songs, particularly in the descent from the former to the latter via V_b . In 'We are the Champions', the first and second phrases of the verse are built structurally around vi and I , respectively. In 'Lily of the Valley', this structural relationship unfolds within the space of two bars, via a $vi-III_b^7-vi-III_b^7-V^7-I$ progression. The same progression takes eight bars in 'Millionaire Waltz' and three bars in 'You Take My Breath Away'. In 'Liar', segments of the instrumental section are demarcated by the different tonal centres. And in 'Sail Away Sweet Sister', there is a modulation from B Aeolian to D major, which correlates with the verse and chorus sections.

Secondly, the $I-vi-ii-V$ progression and its variations appear in a number of Queen songs. In its original form, it underpins the verse of 'Bohemian Rhapsody'. In the chorus of 'Spread Your Wings' and the pre-chorus of 'We are the Champions', the supertonic becomes an applied dominant. In the verse of 'Don't Stop Me Now', iii is inserted between I and vi . In the chorus of 'We are the Champions', the pattern is evident at a structural level, and is embellished on the surface by the use of iii , vii^{o7}/ii , V_c^7 and vii^{o7}/I . The pattern is also evident structurally in the verse of 'Lazing on a Sunday Afternoon', but with further surface embellishments, such as a $ii^{\emptyset}-V-i$ cadence onto the supertonic.

The point is that across all facets of Queen's harmonic language there was much continuity in terms of harmonic structures and sonorities. But that same continuity was often disguised by continuous variations in other domains: where a structural pattern is consistent (e.g. $I-vi$), surface harmonies change; where a surface feature is consistent (e.g. common-tone diminished chord), the context and function change. And thus, what defines Queen's harmonic language is a very strong harmonic framework—built, above all, around close key relationships, tonic to dominant

movement, and stepwise bass lines—within which the songwriters were continuously exploring and finding novel harmonic patterns.

4.2.4 Harmonic Rhythm

For all of Queen's rich harmonic language, the group's approach to harmonic rhythm is straightforward. In terms of assessing harmonic rhythm, there seems little difference between songs that unfold harmonies at consistent rates of either one or two harmonies per bar. Outliers to this norm stand out: in 'Jesus', 'Seven Seas of Rhye', 'Ogre Battle', 'The March of the Black Queen', and 'Flick of the Wrist', the instrumental or bridge sections are based on static harmonies, which thus reduce significantly the rate of harmonic change. In 'Liar', the eight-bar verse unfolds over a static harmony; in 'Great King Rat', the sixteen-bar phrases of the bridge unfold only I and V chords divided into 6+8+2 bar groupings (I-V-I). These examples of very slow harmonic rhythm point to the hard rock influences (e.g. Cream, Led Zeppelin) on the group through their early albums.

The main point of interest concerns changes in harmonic rhythm across and within sections of songs. The primary trait across the corpus is to increase the rate of harmonic rhythm as the music approaches a cadence or climax point—in other words, towards the end of sections. The four-bar chorus of 'Keep Yourself Alive' is a typical example. The first two bars move from I to V, the former chord lasts six crotchet beats, and the latter chord lasts two crotchet beats. The third bar presents a chord on every crotchet beat, the faster harmonic rhythm driving the song towards the V-I cadence. The verse of 'Seven Seas of Rhye' is slightly subtler, but no less effective. The eight-bar verse progresses I-I-I-IV // IV-I-ii⁷-V, with one chord per bar. In the first verse, the seventh bar has two beats elided, which doubles the harmonic rhythm briefly. One can also compare the I-IV-I movement, which lasts six bars, with the ii-V movement, which lasts only two bars. The cadential segment of the phrase thus unfolds much quicker than the opening harmonic statements.

This trait of increasing harmonic rhythm at the ends of sections occurs across the corpus; representative examples include 'Dear Friends', 'Now I'm Here', 'In the Lap of the Gods...Revisited', 'Lazing on a Sunday Afternoon', 'Love of My Life', 'Good

Company’, ‘Millionaire Waltz’, ‘Long Away’, ‘Somebody to Love’, ‘It’s Late’, ‘Leaving Home Ain’t Easy’, ‘Dreamer’s Ball’, and ‘Save Me’. In most examples, the rate of harmonic rhythm is simply doubled from one to two chords per bar.

Elsewhere, one finds changes in harmonic rhythm occurring across sectional boundaries. ‘Teo Torriatte’ contrasts a march-like rate of harmonic change in the chorus (often one chord per crotchet beat) with the slower verse rate in the verse (one chord per bar); the same relationship is evident in ‘Dead on Time’, with the verse riff lasting two bars and the chorus harmonies changing twice per bar; and, the bridge of ‘You’re My Best Friend’ is defined in part by the doubled rate of harmonic rhythm.

A couple of consistent variations on this approach stand out. Firstly, in a number of Mercury’s songs, there are fluctuations of harmonic rhythm within sections, which create a sense of musical ebb and flow; often, these short swells accompany a change in tonal emphasis. The harmonic rhythm of the verse from ‘Jealousy’, for example, is 2+2+4+4+2+2+4 in crotchet beats. Here, the second instance of the faster harmonic rhythm marks a brief turn towards the supertonic. One finds very similar patterns in the verses and choruses of ‘Good Old Fashioned Lover Boy’—the movement towards vi, via iii, is swift with one chord every crotchet beat, compared with the two-beat harmonic rhythm from earlier in the phrases. The instrumental section of the ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’ coda also speeds up in harmonic rhythm as the music turns away from E^b major. Once again, the tonicization of vi is marked by the change to a chord every crotchet beat. These features recall the Beatles’ ‘Yesterday’, which has similar swells in harmonic rhythm at the points of tonal movement.

Secondly, there is a tendency for the rate of harmonic change to slow down at the start of bridge sections. ‘Misfire’, ‘You and I’, ‘Need Your Loving Tonight’, ‘Somebody to Love’, and ‘Good Old Fashioned Lover Boy’ are all good examples of the rate of harmonic rhythm halving once the bridge begins. In each case, the section starts off-tonic and thus the slower harmonic rhythm can be heard as a means of emphasising the tonal departure. In several songs, notably ‘Spread Your Wings’, ‘Teo Torriatte’, and ‘Sail Away Sweet Sister’, the harmonic rhythm either slows or is constant at the start of the bridge, but grows to a much quicker rate (often, one crotchet per chord) as the dominant or returning tonic looms. Thus, overall, it is evident that Queen explores

several avenues in terms of changing the rate of harmonic rhythm, but tends to follow the well-defined and conventional practice of increasing this rate in conjunction with structural harmonic events.

4.3 Melody

4.3.1 Melodic Content, Contour and Construction

Melodic construction is best examined, initially, with respect to individual songwriters. While there are common features across songs by different band members, the four songwriters approach vocal melodies in different ways. Taylor's melodies are the most straightforward in their construction. There are variations in terms of phrase length, but the majority of his melodies tend to combine repeated notes and skips along the pentatonic minor scale. His riff-based approach to harmonies also influences the melodic contours, as heard in 'Modern Times Rock 'n' Roll'. The verse melody begins with movement between the third scale degree and tonic; when the guitar chords shift up to the subdominant, the melodic structure follows suit with movement between A and C# (Example 4.8). Melodies from his other songs—'Tenement Funster', 'I'm in Love With My Car', 'Fight From the Inside', and 'More of That Jazz'—are, at times, more expansive range-wise within phrases, but still tend to move up and down in arpeggiated figures (between 1, 3 and 5), with added stepwise movement between 7 and 1.

Had to make do with a worn out rock and roll___ scene The old

bop is get-ting tir - ed needs a rest well you know what I mean___

Fif-ty eight that was great but it's o - ver now_ and that's___ all___

Example 4.8. 'Modern Times Rock 'n' Roll', Lead Vocal, Verse

Statement

Restatement

Departure

Conclusion

Example 4.9. ‘Another One Bites the Dust’, Lead Vocal, Verse

Deacon’s melodies also have clear structural foundations. The sentence structure (Statement-Restatement-Departure-Conclusion, or SRDC²⁰¹) underpins a number of his vocal melodies, particularly in the verse and bridge sections of songs. ‘Another One Bites the Dust’ is a clear example: the opening fragment is repeated once, then followed by a more expansive melodic gesture, which leads to the dominant at the end of the section (Example 4.9). In ‘Need Your Loving Tonight’, the sentence structure is varied. The third part of the sentence (the departure) is lengthened to four bars; there are hints of a sequence between the first and last pairs of bars; and, there is an extra two-bar tag that provides closure to the section, via a 3-2-1 descent. This expanded SRDC structure is evident also in ‘Misfire’, ‘Spread Your Wings’, and ‘Who Needs You’. In the latter song, the sentence unfolds over a twenty-bar verse section. In several examples, one also finds subtle variations to the restatement of the initial melodic fragment. Thus, in ‘In Only Seven Days’, the first melodic fragment, a 7-1 ascent, is expanded to include 2; in ‘Misfire’, the melody falls to 3 in the second phrase, instead of remaining on 5.

²⁰¹ See Summach, ‘The Structure, Function, and Genesis of the Prechorus’, [10].

Despite the clear structures of Deacon’s melodies, there is a reasonable amount of surface variation within those structures. Often, one can observe contrasting statements of stepwise and arpeggiated movement. In ‘Misfire’, the opening fragment is a descending skip along the pentatonic major scale, with the secondary fragment moving around the triad of the relative minor. In ‘Who Needs You’, the verse melody opens with stepwise movement, though there are leaps of a third between 1-3, and 2-#4; the departure section is based around a descending fourth idea, from 6-3. The melodic surfaces of other songs—‘You’re My Best Friend’, ‘You and I’, and ‘If You Can’t Beat Them’—are more varied, with frequent contrasts between leaps, arpeggiated figuration and stepwise movement. Nonetheless, one can still identify underlying melodic contours. Thus, in the verses of ‘You’re My Best Friend’, one can note a rising and falling contour 1-2-3-2-1, which is interrupted by leaps to other chordal notes (e.g. down to A in the second bar); the third scale degree is then emphasised at the structural high point of the verse, before falling back to the tonic (Example 4.10). One finds the same 3-2-1 descent underpinning the bridge section, but with more elaborate surface decorations, such as a leap up an octave to the tonic note. The verse of ‘You and I’ also works around a 3-2-1 descent; this structure, however, is embellished by an initial lift from the low dominant, via an arpeggio, thus producing an arched 5-3-2-1 contour.

Example 4.10. ‘You’re My Best Friend’, Lead Vocal, Verse

If the verses and bridges of Deacon’s songs demonstrate much melodic variation, his choruses and refrains are comparatively standardised, mostly built on descending

lines towards the tonic. In ‘You and I’, the refrain (‘Just you and I’) follows the harmonic descent from the subdominant to the tonic. The choruses of ‘Spread Your Wings’, ‘If You Can’t Beat Them’, and ‘Need Your Loving Tonight’ all outline 3-2-1 descents, with fewer embellishments than in the verse sections. Thus, what one can observe with Deacon’s melodies is a reliance on conventional structures and contours (SRDC, 3-2-1, and 5-1 movement).²⁰² The structures of the verse sections are frequently embellished, involving leaps and arpeggiated figures in both ascending and descending directions. Often, this gives the impression of melodic freedom, which, in turn, stands in contrast to the more direct melodic statements of his songs’ choruses.

May’s melodies can be divided two ways, depending on the song style. In his hard rock songs—specifically, ‘Son and Daughter’, ‘Father to Son’, ‘Sweet Lady’, ‘Tie Your Mother Down’, ‘The Prophet’s Song’, ‘White Man’, and ‘Dead on Time’—the melodic structures are similar to Taylor’s songs, with the prevalence of repeated notes and skips along the Aeolian scale. ‘Sleeping on the Sidewalk’ (Example 4.11) and ‘Dragon Attack’ work from the same techniques, but add the blues-derived descending figure at the end of sections and phrases, respectively. ‘Now I’m Here’ and ‘Brighton Rock’ combine these techniques with a contour-based approach to melody. The former opens with arpeggiated figures, before moving to a repeated-note structure for the verse, akin to, for example, ‘Tie Your Mother Down’. Each phrase, however, ends with a 3-2-1 gesture; the second part of the verse is then based around a short chromatic figure treated sequentially. In ‘Brighton Rock’, the first half of each verse is based on the repetition of B, the initial tonic note; as the song modulates in the second of the verse to E, the vocal note is reinterpreted as 5 of the new key, and enacts a 5-1 descent to conclude the section.



I may get hun - gry but I sure don't wan-na go home_____

Example 4.11. ‘Sleeping on the Sidewalk’, Lead Vocal, Chorus

²⁰² For more on the conventional melodic structures of 1950s and 1960s popular music, see Everett, *Foundations*, 178-189.

In May's other songs, he prefers conventional melodic contours, often without the embellishment found in Deacon's songs. The 3-2-1 descent, for example, underpins both the verse and chorus of 'Sail Away Sweet Sister', with the notes transposed from B minor to D major between sections. The same contour is prominent in the verses of 'Good Company' and 'Doin' All Right', and the choruses and refrains of 'Keep Yourself Alive', 'Brighton Rock', 'Some Day One Day', 'We Will Rock You', and 'Leaving Home Ain't Easy'. In the verse of 'Save Me', the 3-2-1 descent is paired with a leap from the low dominant and then treated sequentially (Example 4.12). The same melodic elements are combined in 'Dreamer's Ball', May's 1930s jazz pastiche: the opening melodic gesture is treated sequentially, as are the arpeggio figures in the chorus; further the 5-3-2-1 gesture concludes both the verse and chorus sections. This gesture forms the structural basis of the chorus of 'Teo Torriatte', as well, with the melody rising by step from 5 to reach 3 at the halfway point of the section; the second half then outlines the descent back to the tonic.

3 2 1 6 5 4

It star-ted off so well They said we made a per-fect pair

Example 4.12. 'Save Me', Lead Vocal, Verse

The verse of 'Teo Torriatte' is based on arpeggiated figures, which is another common melodic gesture in May's songs. In some cases, such as the verses of 'The Night Comes Down' and 'Leaving Home Ain't Easy', the arpeggio structures are disguised by stepwise passing notes. Other examples, such as 'Dear Friends' and the chorus of 'Save Me', are much clearer. One can thus note several prominent structural melodic elements in May's songs: 3-2-1 gestures, 5-3-2-1 gestures, and arpeggios. When combined with his rock-oriented songs, it is evident that May's melodic style combines Taylor and Deacon's techniques. The primary difference between May and Deacon is the ease with which one can identify the melodic structures; embellishments of the underlying structures are much more scarce in the former's songs.

Mercury's approach to melody is inventive. Primarily because he wrote fewer hard rock songs than Taylor and May, the static melodic approach is rare in Mercury's songs. Notable exceptions include 'Let Me Entertain You', the rock 'n' roll pastiche

section of ‘Don’t Try Suicide’, and the bridge section of ‘Liar’. His other hard rock songs are interesting insofar as there is a stronger contour-based approach to the melody. In ‘Jesus’, the one-bar melodic fragments have an internal arch shape, moving from the tonic to the fifth and back. In ‘Great King Rat’, the repeated fragments of the first phrase rise from 3 to 5; in the second phrase, they descend to the tonic, thus creating a structural arch. The subsequent chorus starts on 5 and pushes up to 7; in the second phrase, the melody rises one step further to the tonic. Thus, despite the apparent melodic stasis at a local level, the individual fragments combine to create a shapely sectional contour (Example 4.13). Indeed, throughout Mercury’s songs, one may note the prevalence of contour-oriented melodies and melodic structures.

The musical score for 'Great King Rat' is presented in a single system with six staves of music. The first staff is the lead vocal line, starting with a treble clef and a 4/4 time signature. It features a melodic line with lyrics: 'Great king rat died to-day__ Born on the twen-ty first__ of May__'. Above the first measure, a '3' indicates a triplet. The second staff continues the verse with lyrics: 'Died sy-phi-lis for-ty four on his birth- day__ Eve-ry se- cond word he swore'. Above the first measure, a '5' indicates the pitch level. The third staff continues the verse with lyrics: 'Yes he was a son of a whore Al - ways wan- ted by the law__'. A bracket labeled '5-1 Descent' spans the second and third measures. The fourth staff is the chorus, starting with a treble clef and a 4/4 time signature. It features a melodic line with lyrics: 'Would- n't you like_ to know Ah would- n't you like_ to know peo- ple__'. Above the first measure, a '5' indicates the pitch level, and above the last measure, a '7' indicates the pitch level. The fifth staff continues the chorus with lyrics: 'Great king rat was a dir- ty old man and a dir- ty old man was he__ Now'. The sixth staff continues the chorus with lyrics: 'what did I tell__ you__ Would you like to see?'. A bracket labeled '5-1 Ascent' spans the second and third measures.

Example 4.13. ‘Great King Rat’, Lead Vocal, Verse and Chorus

Within this framework, there are several construction techniques to which Mercury frequently reverts. The first is melodic sequences. The verse of ‘We are the Champions’ makes clear use of a sequence structure; the original melodic pattern 5-7-1 of C Aeolian is repeated up a third in E^b major. ‘Love of My Life’ is subtler. The

opening melodic gesture combines lower neighbour movement with an upward leap. It is the general contour that is then treated sequentially, rather than the specific pitch relations. Related to this technique are instances in which one ‘voice’ of the vocal melody moves against a static note. The verse of ‘My Fairy King’ presents a simple example, in which the melody descends between E and D, with G remaining in place above. ‘Killer Queen’ is a more elaborate example of this trait, with one voice following the descending bass line (in tenths and octaves), and the other tied to the tonic (Example 4.14).

A built in a - re - me - dy for Krus - chev and Ken - ne - dy for
 a - ny time an in - vi - ta - tion you can't de - cline

Example 4.14. ‘Killer Queen’, Lead Vocal, Verse

It was noted that ‘Love of My Life’ has an ascending leap as part of its main melodic idea. Large leaps, upwards of a fifth, are another characteristic of Mercury’s melodies. One finds leaps ranging between a major seventh and ninth as the opening melodic statements in ‘Lily of the Valley’ (Example 4.15), ‘In the Lap of the Gods...Revisited’, and ‘Play the Game’. Elsewhere, in the verse of ‘Millionaire Waltz’, Mercury uses the 5-3-2-1 contour (from ‘Save Me’, above) as the basis for his final melodic statement (akin to ‘Lazing on a Sunday Afternoon’); this gesture underpins the verse of ‘Crazy Little Thing Called Love’ too. In ‘Seaside Rendezvous’, consecutive leaps reveal a contrary motion structure between two voices, both of which close in on the tonic triad.

I am for - e - ver sear - ching high and low But
 why does eve - ry - bo - dy tell me no

Example 4.15. ‘Lily of the Valley’, Lead Vocal, Verse

Mercury also employs leaps within sections to mark points of structural intensity. Thus, in 'Seven Seas of Rhye', Mercury leaps from the tonic to the fifth to coincide with the first appearance of the dominant chord; the melody, up to that point, is consistent in its close-range stepwise movement. In 'Death on Two Legs', the octave leap in the middle of the verse coincides with the unusual $b^{\flat}vi$ chord, the shift to half-time rhythm, and the change in guitar texture (riff to chords). Much the same melodic and textural patterns operate as a climactic gesture in 'Mustapha'. Finally, one finds leaps within phrases to vary a straightforward melodic contour. Thus, in 'You Take My Breath Away', the main verse melody is a rising tonic arpeggio, 1-3-5. The initial movement has a stepwise passing note, while the motion from 3-5 is embellished by a leap to 7.

The musical effect of the leaps and sequences is to give Mercury's melodies an expansive quality. This quality is further evident in light of two other common gestures. The first is a stepwise ascent at the ends of phrases. In 'Millionaire Waltz', the second bridge episode concludes with Mercury stepping up from F to C, as the music modulates from F minor to its relative major; the ascending melodic figure thus mirrors the brighter harmonic content. Perhaps more memorable are the gestures found in 'Somebody to Love' and 'We are the Champions'. In the former song, the structural basis of the verse melody can be heard as a stepwise ascent through an octave. The first gesture falls 5-3-2-1, and despite the change in register (another octave leap), the low tonic is reinforced two bars later. Thereafter, the first phrase concludes on 2, before the ascent gathers momentum, reaching 5 in the fifth bar, and 8 in the sixth bar (Example 4.16). The pre-chorus of 'We are the Champions' also aims for a stirring and rousing quality, achieved in this instance by the purposeful ascent, one note per beat, from tonic to dominant.

Each mor-ning I get up I die a lit tle_ Can bare-ly stand on my feet_ Take a
look_ in the mir-ror and cry Lord what are you do-ing to me I have
spent all my years in be-lie-ving you But I just can't get no re lief_ Lord

Example 4.16. 'Somebody to Love', Lead Vocal, Verse

A final common gesture of Mercury's is to unfold an arpeggio (usually the tonic chord) through an octave, as heard at the start of 'Don't Stop Me Now' (Example 4.17). The arpeggiated octave ascent also appears at climactic points of sections—in 'Love of My Life', without the third degree, and in 'Play the Game'. The latter example is cut from the same melodic cloth as 'Somebody to Love' and 'We are the Champions' in that the ascending melody is paired with a textural build-up and stop: the high melodic note, therefore, is the most emphatic of the phrase. A slightly altered and descending arpeggio figure appears in the 'Bring Back That Leroy Brown' (Example 4.18). If the ascending contours of previous examples convey a swell in intensity, then the descending contour here is the musical analogue, perhaps, of an exaggerated sigh. A similar 'sighing' effect is evident in 'Bohemian Rhapsody', on the words 'Now I've gone and thrown it all away', which descend through a Cm⁷ chord.

To - night_ I'm gon - na have my - self

Example 4.17. 'Don't Stop Me Now', Lead Vocal, Verse

But she met him down_ at the sta tion_ With a shot gun_ in her hands

Example 4.18. 'Bring Back That Leroy Brown', Lead Vocal, Bridge

Aside from these gestures, one finds other common fragments, such as 3-2-1 and 5-1 movement, in Mercury's vocal melodies. Multiple sections of 'My Fairy King',

despite the significant textural and harmonic variations, are built on clear 3-2-1 gestures. It seems to be the case that individual gestures within Mercury's melodies were often quite obvious. What distinguishes his melodies from May's is, first, his access to a more expansive array of gestures (namely, arpeggios and leaps through an octave), and, second, his tendency to juxtapose multiple gestures within a section. Thus, in the space of a seven-bar verse in 'Death on Two Legs', Mercury contrasts a repeated and static motif, a leap of minor sixth, and a descending arpeggio figure. In 'Jealousy', the verse begins with a descending sequence, and ends with a stepwise ascending sequence that reaches the dominant (à la 'We are the Champions'); a new descending sequence then opens the chorus, to be followed a stepwise ascent and then descent through an octave (Example 4.19).

Descending Sequence

Oh how wrong can you be— Oh to fall in love was my ve-ry first mis

Arch Melody

take How was I to know I was far too much in love to see—

Chorus

Descending Sequence

Jea - lou-sy Look at me now— Jea - lou-sy you got me some how— You

Arch Melody

gave me no war - ning took me by sur prise— Jea-lou-sy you led me on—

Scale Ascent

You couldn't lose— you could - n't fail You had su-spi-cion on my trail How how

Scale Descent

how all my jea - lou - sy— I was - n't man e - nough— to

let you hurt my pride Now I'm on - ly left with my— own jea-lou - sy—

Example 4.19. 'Jealousy', Lead Vocal, Verse and Chorus

In praising the melodic construction of 'Hey Jude', Everett notes the way McCartney contrasted various melodic elements, such as leaps and stepwise movement, and sustained notes and quicker melodic motion.²⁰³ The same might be said of Mercury's

²⁰³ Everett, *The Beatles as Musicians: Revolver*, 192.

melodic style, which relies on consistent and identifiable gestures but arranged in inventive and novel ways within the songs, an approach that is reminiscent of the American pop songwriting tradition.

These observations make it difficult to pinpoint any particular melodic structures that define Queen's output in general. Certain gestures—such as the 5-3-2-1 leap and descent figure (e.g. 'Save Me')—appear in songs by May and Mercury, but not in those by Deacon or Taylor. The latter's static approach to melody appears in songs by the others, but not to the extent that one would consider it a feature of their respective individual fingerprints. The best one may summarise Queen's approach to melody is that it relies on identifiable contours and structures, often with a strong tonal foundation (i.e. descents to the tonic, arpeggiated figures, etc.), with varying degrees of embellishment and juxtaposition from the individual songwriters.

4.4 Rhythm

4.4.1 Tempo

The overall distribution of tempi in Queen's songs is tilted towards the slower end of the spectrum. Measures of beats per minute (bpm) convey only part of the picture, because they do not account for surface rhythm and the overall groove, but just under half of the current corpus (44 songs) has a tempo of fewer than 96 beats per minute. There is a further set of twelve songs with tempi between 106 and 118 bpm, and only sixteen songs with tempi faster than 140 bpm. Two of Roger Taylor's songs ('Drowse' and 'I'm In Love With My Car') clock in at 48 bpm, but with their 6/8 time signature and semiquaver-oriented drum patterns, the overall groove does not feel glacial. At the other extreme, 'Stone Cold Crazy' and 'Modern Times Rock 'n' Roll', both hard rock tracks, register at 230 bpm. This initial data suggests a predilection for ballad-like songs on Queen's behalf.

Aside from performance-based fluctuations in tempo, such as pauses or slowing down at cadence points (e.g. the end of the instrumental of 'Love of My Life'), changes in bpm are relatively infrequent, occurring in less than a quarter of the corpus, and

predominantly in Mercury's songs. Changes in either time signature or the rhythmic feel are more frequent and are addressed below. There are three main types of tempo change. The first is a half- or double-time change, as typified by the two bridge sections of 'You and I'. 'My Fairy King' and 'The Fairy Feller's Master-Stroke' also align the change in tempo with structural divisions; in both cases, the instrumental introductions and interludes are in double-time compared with the verses. 'It's Late' takes a similar approach, although the double-time section does not occur until after two verses and choruses. Thus, where Mercury's songs appear to halve in tempo after a rapid introduction, May's 'It's Late' doubles in bpm in the second half of the song. 'Death on Two Legs' shifts to a half-time groove in a more subtle manner, for two-bar phrases in middle of the verses. This latter example blurs the distinction between what one hears as a complete tempo change and what one hears as a temporary change in groove.

The second type of change is equivalent to a half- or double-time shift, although without the rhythmic precision. In 'Bring Back That Leroy', 'Lazing on a Sunday Afternoon', and 'Good Company', the bridge sections slow dramatically in tempo and introduce varying degrees of rubato. In 'Don't Stop Me Now', the introductory verse proceeds at a slow 92 bpm, before the song proper unfolds at at 160 bpm. The third type of tempo change concerns the presence of multiple tempi that are comparatively unrelated. Like the previous types, variations in tempo often align with sectional divisions. 'Millionaire Waltz' exemplifies this approach—the first four bars set out at 160 bpm, before settling into a much quicker waltz at 191 bpm. Later verses fall back to 152 bpm (notably, when the narrator recounts his sadness), and then 138 bpm, before returning triumphantly in the final verse to 191 bpm. 'Millionaire Waltz' follows 'The March of the Black Queen', which also swerves between tempi (72 to 98 to 135 to 74 to 112 bpm) across different sections. In both cases, some changes in tempo accompany changes in time signature, which is the focus of the following section.

4.4.2 Time Signatures and Changes in Metre

Most of Queen's songs (78 of 90) are in 4/4 time. Eight of these songs—'Killer Queen', 'You're My Best Friend', 'Seaside Rendezvous', 'Tie Your Mother Down',

‘Sleeping on the Sidewalk’, ‘My Melancholy Blues’, ‘Dreamer’s Ball’ and ‘Crazy Little Thing Called Love’—have a shuffle groove. Brian May’s skiffle tribute ‘39’, is probably best heard as being in 2/2 with swung quavers, thus giving it a half-time shuffle feel. Although not explicit, ‘Good Old Fashioned Lover Boy’ and ‘The Night Comes Down’ have slightly swung semiquavers, and thus evoke the same half-time shuffle feel, à la the Beatles’ ‘Martha My Dear’ and ‘Hey Jude’, respectively. Of the songs not in 4/4 time, seven are in either duple or quadruple compound time.

In *Days of our Lives*, Taylor professed his enjoyment of drumming in compound time;²⁰⁴ accordingly, two of his songs are in 6/8 time. Mercury, it would appear, also enjoyed writing music with some kind of triple metre or triplet feel—he contributed three songs in compound time, two waltzes in 3/4, three in 4/4 with a shuffle groove, and, as outlined below, switched between simple and compound metres within songs. May is responsible for the three remaining songs in 3/4 time, one of which was his guitar orchestration of ‘God Save the Queen’. As a curious aside, eight of the seventeen songs on Queen’s *Greatest Hits* (spanning the same era of this study) have either shuffle grooves throughout or in sections of the song, which may result in a slightly skewed impression regarding the frequency of Queen’s recourse to this type of metre.

Assymetrical time signatures, such as 5/4 or 7/8, are rare in Queen’s songs. There are examples of such time signatures, but usually only for a single bar. Instead, the group tends to move between different duple, triple, and quadruple metres within songs. Osborn provides a good model for understanding these changes in metre. He distinguishes between ‘tactus-preserving’ and ‘pulse-preserving’ metric modulations. The former is a straight change in metre with a constant tempo of the beat, while the latter maintains the tempo of a ‘pivot pulse’ (or ‘slowest common pulse’) between two metres.²⁰⁵ There are many examples of tactus-preserving changes in metre throughout the corpus, in which an abbreviated bar is inserted into a phrase. A more sustained example is ‘Sweet Lady’, in which the verse and chorus sections are in 3/4, with the bridge section in 4/4 at the same bpm. Much the same technique can be

²⁰⁴ O’Casey, *Queen*.

²⁰⁵ Brad Osborn, ‘Beats That Commute: Algebraic and Kinesthetic Models for Math-Rock Grooves’, *Gamut* 3/1 (2010), 48-49, 54-56.

found in 'Liar', in which the chorus reprise in 4/4 is preceded by a five-bar transition in 3/4. 'Bohemian Rhapsody' offers another example of a tactus-preserving change in metre: the opera and hard rock sections have the same quadruple metre, but with the former in simple time (4/4), and the latter in compound time (12/8).

Genuine metric modulations are based on a shared 'pivot pulse' between the two metres. One of Mercury's common tricks is to insert a bar of 9/8 into a 4/4 framework, maintaining the tempo of the quaver pulse. Such a metric change works on two levels: firstly, quavers are rearranged into groups of three; secondly, there are three beats in the bar, as opposed to two. The net effect of both changes is to evoke a slower tempo, albeit fleetingly. This modulation appears in 'The March of the Black Queen', 'Jealousy' (Example 4.19, above), and 'Play the Game'. A similar pulse-preserving change can be observed in 'Millionaire Waltz', in which the quavers of the 3/4 metre become the quavers of the rock section's 12/8 metre.

Finally, the middle section of 'Bicycle Race' appears complex but works on the same principles. Within each refrain-like episode, there are three tempo changes from a fast 4/4 groove at 164 bpm, to its half-time equivalent for one bar, before repeating this pattern over a longer phrase (Example 4.20). In the third appearance of this episode, the final two beats of the half-time phrase are cut off, and the band shifts directly into a new 6/8 groove. The tempo of the 6/8 section is roughly 55 bpm, with the quaver pulse continuing between sections. What makes this metric modulation striking is that Taylor plays a semiquaver hi-hat groove in the refrain-like episode, but only quaver notes on the hi-hat in the 6/8 section. Thus, although the quaver pulse is preserved, it is not made explicit by the various instrumentalists; in conjunction with the textural changes, this rhythmic and tempo modulation fosters an arresting contrast between the sections.

Bi - cy - cle Bi - cy - cle Bi - cy - cle

Bi - cy - cle Bi - cy - cle Bi - cy - cle

I

The first system consists of three staves. The top staff is the lead vocal line in G major, with lyrics 'Bi - cy - cle Bi - cy - cle Bi - cy - cle'. The middle staff is the backing vocal line, also in G major, with the same lyrics. The bottom staff is the drum part, showing a steady eighth-note pattern. A first ending bracket is marked with 'I' at the end of the system.

want to ride my bi - cy - cle I want to ride my bike I want to ride my bi - cy - cle I

The second system consists of two staves. The top staff is the lead vocal line in G major, with lyrics 'want to ride my bi - cy - cle I want to ride my bike I want to ride my bi - cy - cle I'. The bottom staff is the drum part, showing a steady eighth-note pattern.

Bi - cy - cle ra - ces are co - ming your way

want to ride my

The third system consists of three staves. The top staff is the lead vocal line in G major, with lyrics 'Bi - cy - cle ra - ces are co - ming your way'. The middle staff is the backing vocal line, also in G major, with the same lyrics. The bottom staff is the drum part, showing a steady eighth-note pattern. A first ending bracket is marked with 'I' at the end of the system.

Example 4.20. 'Bicycle Race', Lead Vocal, Backing Vocals, and Drums, Chorus II and Bridge

4.4.3 Phrase Rhythm

Given the well-documented influence of the Beatles on Queen, it seems likely that the former provided the latter with an arsenal of techniques for varying phrase structures

and rhythms.²⁰⁶ Accordingly, Everett's account of the Beatles' approach to phrase rhythm serves as a useful guide for the current study.²⁰⁷ Queen employs foursquare phrasing (multiples of four-bar units) often enough that it can be considered a norm in its output. There are few songs, however, that conform to this norm exclusively. Of the fourteen songs with foursquare phrasing throughout, five are pastiches of older popular styles ('Funny How Love Is', 'Good Company', 'Dreamer's Ball', 'Sleeping on the Sidewalk', and 'Crazy Little Thing Called Love') and two are one-minute long album tracks ('Seven Seas of Rhye' from *Queen*, and 'Dear Friends'). The remaining seven were written from 1976 onwards, and include 'Tie Your Mother Down', 'Drowse', 'We Will Rock You', 'Another One Bites the Dust', 'Rock It (Prime Jive)', and 'More of that Jazz'.

This leaves a majority of songs in the corpus that, in some way, work against the norm of foursquare phrasing. In a number of these songs, the phrase variations can be identified as 'floating' bars. Everett's term refers to a short unit (usually lasting one or two bars) that is attached to the front or back of an otherwise four-bar phrase.²⁰⁸ In Queen's case, one often finds a one- or two-bar floater at the end of a verse or chorus section, which acts as a kind of a pause before the subsequent section. In 'I'm In Love With My Car', for example, the first chorus holds the final IV chord for an extra bar, providing space for a drum fill (Example 4.21). In 'It's Late', each verse concludes with repeated guitar and drum hits of the tonic chord, thus extending the phrase length and building the anticipation for the ensuing chorus. One can find this sort of phrase extension in 'Son and Daughter', 'Get Down Make Love', 'Ogre Battle', 'Great King Rat', 'Fat Bottomed Girls', and 'Save Me'.

²⁰⁶ Said Brian May to *Circus* magazine in 1976, 'I was crazy about the Beatles...Probably Paul McCartney and John Lennon [are the musicians I most admire]'; 'The 3 Phases of Brian May', *Circus*, 7 June (1976), <http://www.queenarchives.com/index.php?title=Brian_May_-_07-06-1976_-_Circus_Magazine> (accessed 29 February 2016).

²⁰⁷ Everett, 'Any time at all'.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

The image displays a musical score for the song 'I'm In Love With My Car'. It consists of two systems of staves. The first system includes a vocal line with lyrics 'Ooh aah', a lead vocal line with lyrics 'Get a grip on my boy - ra - cer roll bar', and a drum line. The second system includes a vocal line with lyrics 'my car', a lead vocal line with lyrics 'Such a thrill when your ra - di - als squeel', and a drum line. The score is written in 6/8 time with a key signature of one sharp (F#).

Example 4.21. 'I'm In Love With My Car', Lead Vocal, Backing Vocals, Rhythm Guitar, and Drums, Chorus

The B section of 'Doin' All Right' is structurally identical to the examples above, but instead of holding the final chord of the B section, there is a two-bar repeat of the ominous $\flat V$ -IV movement. This points to another common type of floating phrase, in which the phrase is extended either by repeating the cadence figure, or by completing the cadence within the section but outside the four-bar phrase boundaries. The chorus of 'Dead on Time' typifies the latter technique—here, the chorus ends on the tonic via a $\flat VI$ -IV-I progression, with the final cadence taking place over the bar line into the ninth bar of the section. The overall phrase structure, therefore, remains intact, but there is a brief pause in the song's momentum. This compares with other examples in which the tonic chord simultaneously provides closure to one phrase, and is the starting-point of the next phrase, as typified by 'In Only Seven Days'. Phrase-extending cadential figures can be found in 'Misfire', 'Mustapha', 'She Makes Me',

‘Lazing on a Sunday Afternoon’, ‘Long Away’, ‘All Dead, All Dead’, and ‘Spread Your Wings’.

This leads to further type of floating phrase in Queen’s output, in which the added bars serve an important structural function, usually as the equivalent of brief pre-chorus. The two-bar floating phrase of ‘Coming Soon’, for example, marks a change in guitar playing (a sustained chord instead of syncopated hits), and an increase in vocal activity with the repeated line ‘they’re always’. ‘Flick of the Wrist’ employs the same techniques, as well as a change in drum groove to repeated tom quavers, and a shift to the dominant harmony. The most striking instance of this kind is ‘We are the Champions’. After a foursquare verse section, there is a three-bar phrase, which, in E^b major, proceeds I-V_b-vi-II-IV/B^b. This final chord is held into the fourth bar, but instead of remaining static (to resolve, one might expect, across the bar line), the backing vocalists spark a new two-bar tag, which, through stepwise voice-leading, results in a spectacular modulation up a tone for the chorus.

As well as floating phrases, Queen frequently alters the phrase length by half a bar. ‘The Prophet’s Song’ provides a good example of this trait. One of the song’s recurring motifs is a sustained hit that punctuates phrases and lasts for two beats. In the choruses of the song, the lead vocal phrase ends in the first half of the bar; in the verses of the song, the lead vocal phrase lasts into the second half of the bar, and thus an extra two beats are required to hold the chord (Example 4.22). The same technique occurs in the chorus of ‘Play the Game’. Other phrase adjustments tie in with the harmonic content. In the instrumental of ‘Sail Away Sweet Sister’, the section appears to conclude with a tonic chord on beat three of the eighth bar; this phrase is extended, however, to accommodate the progression I-III-vi-V, each chord lasting a crotchet. Accordingly, the phrase is expanded by two beats. Similar additions of a half bar can be heard in the verse of ‘Killer Queen’, the choruses of ‘Great King Rat’, the refrain of ‘Somebody to Love’, and the bridge of ‘White Queen (As It Began)’, amongst others.

Verse

Chorus

Example 4.22. ‘The Prophet’s Song’, Lead Vocal, Backing Vocals, Rhythm Guitar, and Drums, Verse and Chorus

Immediately before the first verse of ‘Death on Two Legs’, the backing vocalists sing a wordless chord over a sustained hit, much like ‘The Prophet’s Song’. Mercury’s lead vocal then starts with a three-beat anacrusis. The vocal ‘pause’ and the anacrusis, however, are effectively compressed into six beats, which thus shortens the four-bar phrase by two beats. Half-bar contractions appear in a handful of songs, most of which are penned by Mercury. The first verse of ‘Seven Seas of Rhye’ presents a straightforward example in which the ii^7 chord lasts only two beats, compared with the four beats of the V chord. Interestingly, in the second verse of the song, both the ii^7 and V chords last four beats, with Mercury slightly less hurried to deliver the title line. ‘Good Old Fashioned Lover Boy’ and ‘You Take My Breath Away’ are related insofar as the harmonic rhythm is consistent throughout the respective phrases; instead of the dominant chord being extended (à la ‘Somebody to Love’), it lasts an

equal amount of time as the surrounding chords, which cuts two beats from the phrase.

The examples discussed thus far are united by the consistent presence of four-bar units, against which the phrase variations are heard. In a number of songs, the total length of a section is a multiple of four bars, but the phrases are of uneven lengths. Sometimes, this arises from multiple floating phrases within a section; thus, in 'Seaside Rendezvous', the twenty-bar verse divides into a phrase pattern of 4+2+4+2+4+4 bars. 'The Night Comes Down' is comparatively irregular in its construction. The twelve-bar verse begins with a four-bar antecedent phrase; the consequent phrase cuts out after two bars, and is superseded by a third phrase. This phrase is marked by a new guitar strumming pattern, a new melodic idea, and a brief turn towards the dominant. The initial idea returns in the fourth phrase, but is shortened as it leads into the chorus. The twelve bars of the verse section thus divide into 4+2+3+3 bars. 'In Only Seven Days' is similar in that the varying melodic contours give rise to a phrase structure of 3+2+3 bars. One of Mercury's preferred techniques is to divide an eight-bar section into 5+3 groupings. The verse of 'Jealousy' is a typical example; the chorus 'Killer Queen' also appears to have a 5+3 split although it may be possible to hear both the 'Anytime' and 'Wanna try' vocal lines as single floating bars added to a four-bar and a two-bar phrase, respectively. Regardless, the eight-bar chorus does not divide into equal parts.

In a number of other songs, one finds the same three-bar phrase lengths, but juxtaposed by four-bar phrases, thus creating unusual overall lengths of sections. May's 'Sweet Lady' is built on a four-bar riff that is interrupted after two iterations by a three-bar variant; essentially the first bar is left out. Mercury's three-bar phrase rhythms are more widespread, underpinning the verses of 'Lily of the Valley' (4+3, plus a half-bar contraction), 'Killer Queen' (4+4+3), 'The Fairy Feller's Master-Stroke' (3+4), 'Don't Try Suicide' (4+3), the chorus of 'My Fairy King' (3+4), and the opening instrumental of 'Love of My Life' (3+4). 'Don't Stop Me Now' presents a variation on this technique, with the juxtaposition of five- and four-bar phrases. Unlike the floating tag applied earlier, the five-bar phrase in the verse of this song arises by cycling through the circle-of-fifths, I-iii-vi-ii-V, one bar at a time.

While it is easy to describe many rhythmic features of Queen's songs, as has been done in the three sections above, it is relatively difficult to draw any broader conclusions aside from the normative state of foursquare phrasing in 4/4 time. Indeed, instances of specific rhythmic changes—a half-time shift or a half-bar contraction—tend to be confined to a small number of songs relative to the size of the corpus. At the same time, there are very few songs in this corpus in which there is no deviation from the structural rhythmic norms. Perhaps, then, one might say that the Queen had a broad compositional strategy of varying an element of the tempo, time signature, or phrase rhythm in a song. In a number of songs, such as 'Bohemian Rhapsody', one could observe multiple instances of this compositional strategy; often, however, each song features one particular change or variation, if only for a single section or, even, a single bar. This is not to suggest that rhythm is unimportant in Queen's songs. It does, however, point towards the diminishing influence of psychedelic and rhythm and blues styles on the group, particularly when compared with the rhythmic complexities of the Beatles and Led Zeppelin.²⁰⁹ This point is developed in Section 6.2.1, when features of surface rhythm are explored in further detail.

4.5 The Backing Vocals

Queen's backing vocal arrangements are an integral component of the group's idiolect. Indeed, in 82 songs of the current corpus, there is some kind of arrangement, whether singing in unison ('We Will Rock You') or in an elaborate multi-part section ('Father to Son'). Of the remaining eight songs from the corpus, three are instrumentals. The current discussion addresses the structure of the backing vocals—in essence, how they might be notated—with the aspects of vocal articulation and sonic quality covered in Section 5.1.2.

The basic structures of Queen's backing vocals are straightforward. In the majority of songs, the vocal sections comprise three or four parts arranged in close position. Because of the multi-track approach to constructing the arrangements, there are examples of the number of parts changing within a phrase, either to incorporate added harmony notes (i.e. sixths or sevenths) or to create a sense of vocal expansion. On

²⁰⁹ See, respectively, *ibid.*; Brackett, 'Examining rhythmic and metric practices'.

several occasions (‘Death on Two Legs’, ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’ ‘Bicycle Race’), Queen expand the arrangement to include tenor and/or bass voices, which sit in the octave below the close-position chord (Example 4.23). The addition of voices adds depth to the arrangement, without disrupting the close-position structures of the upper vocal parts.

Gods', 'Death on Two Legs', 'Millionaire Waltz', 'It's Late', 'Dead on Time', and 'Coming Soon' provide an example from each album.

The group does not, however, confine itself to placing the backing vocals in higher registers. Lower-register backing vocals (around and below middle C) are common in May's songs. This is primarily the case when he sang all the backing vocals himself ('Dear Friends', 'Leaving Home Ain't Easy'), given his lower vocal range. Other May-penned songs, such as 'All Dead All Dead' and 'Dreamer's Ball', have arrangements in similar registers, though with all the group's singers. One may note that these examples are all ballad-like tracks (slow tempo, absence of a rhythm guitar), and thus the comparatively mellow sound of the vocal harmonies marries well with the respective soundscapes. This is also the case in Deacon's Latin-flavoured ballad 'Who Needs You', in which the vocal harmonies are positioned in a mid-range register (between A3 and B4).

Te-o tor-ri-at - te ko-no ma___ ma'i-ko___ Ai suru-hi - to yo___

Example 4.25. 'Teo Torriatte', Vocals, Chorus II

He works hard
I work hard eve-ry day of my life___ I work till I___ache my bones At the___
At the end of the day___ Goes home___ goes home on his own
end I take home my hard earned pay___ all___ on my own

Example 4.26. 'Somebody to Love', Lead Vocal and Backing Vocals, Verse II

Within this structural framework, there are a number of variations in terms of the content of the vocal arrangements. Thus, in 'Teo Torriatte', for instance, the three-

part arrangement of the chorus comprises individual melodic lines, which sit in close position relative to one another (Example 4.25). The arrangement in ‘Somebody to Love’, on the other hand, is almost exclusively chordal and static; the backing vocalists’ primary function is to provide rhythmic punctuation à la an Aretha Franklin record (Example 4.26). Despite these variations, several traits are consistent, in terms of the movement of parts and the role of the backing vocalists within the song.

The chorus of ‘Save Me’ typifies two of these traits. Firstly, much movement between different harmonies is predicated on stepwise voice-leading, as can be observed in the latter half of the chorus. Secondly, and alternatively, changes in voicing are common in the case of repeated chords, and sometimes even within phrases, in order to add a degree of melodic contour to the vocal arrangement (Example 4.27). In ‘Save Me’, the backing vocalists change position when moving from the tonic to the dominant chord, before moving by step through the subsequent progression. In the chorus of ‘Good Old Fashioned Lover Boy’, one can note the predominant movement by step, but with occasional voicing changes to create an overall inverted arch contour through the phrase. Other examples of arpeggiated arrangements and variations in voicing can be heard in ‘In the Lap of the Gods’, ‘I’m In Love With My Car’, ‘Seaside Rendezvous’, ‘Love of My Life’, ‘You and I’, and ‘Don’t Stop Me Now’.

Example 4.27. ‘Save Me’, Backing Vocals, Chorus II

Example 4.28. ‘Leaving Home Ain’t Easy’, Backing Vocals, Chorus

Queen adds melodic elements to its vocal arrangements through several other techniques. In the final chorus of ‘Leaving Home Ain’t Easy’, one may note the passing notes of the opening line—in other words, the top voice is the ‘melody’, under which two voices move in parallel (Example 4.28). This observation is confirmed when May sings the same line without backing vocals. Parallel movement

of parts can be found in ‘Killer Queen’, ‘Jesus’, the introduction of ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’, ‘The Prophet’s Song’, ‘The Fairy Feller’s Master-Stroke’, ‘Sail Away Sweet Sister’, and ‘Coming Soon’, amongst others.

The final vocal gesture of ‘Leaving Home Ain’t Easy’ also has the backing vocalists leaping upwards to the final chord, thus ending the phrase with a brighter sounding harmony. These upwards leaps at the ends of sections or phrases appear in a range of contexts, including the bridges of ‘Somebody to Love’ and ‘Bring Back That Leroy Brown’, the second verse of ‘In the Lap of the Gods...Revisited’ (Example 4.29), and the pre-chorus of ‘Killer Queen’. Albeit without the same degree of melodic contour, it is also common for the backing vocalists to ascend to the final chord of a section, as can be heard in the choruses of ‘Sweet Lady’, ‘Tie Your Mother Down’, ‘The Prophet’s Song’, ‘You’re My Best Friend’, and the bridge section of ‘Seven Seas of Rhye’.

Example 4.29. ‘In the Lap of the Gods...Revisited’, Backing Vocals, Verse II

One final gesture is important in providing melodic shape to phrases. The refrain of ‘Somebody to Love’ is an excellent example of the dynamic and expanding gesture. The arrangement begins as a four-part tonic triad chord in close position. Through the refrain phrase, the vocalists span out to a $D^{\flat\text{maj}9}$ chord across two octaves. The same type of gesture plays out much more rapidly in ‘Play the Game’; the three parts become five with the shift to the minor dominant chord. Elsewhere, the common technique is for a three- or four-part chord to emerge from a single part. This approach first appears in ‘Keep Yourself Alive’, written by May, but sung and arranged by Mercury (Example 4.30). He would go on to use it in a number of his songs, such as ‘Lily of the Valley’, ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’, ‘Love of My Life’, ‘You Take My Breath Away’, and ‘Don’t Stop Me Now’.

Example 4.30. ‘Keep Yourself Alive’, Vocals, Chorus

It is worth also considering the relationship between the lead and backing vocal parts. As is outlined further in Section 5.3.2, there is often a clear separation of the vocal sections. This separation is emphasised by the prevalence of call-and-response structures. In the chorus sections, the backing vocalists tend to provide the initial statement, to which the lead singer responds. The length of time between call and response varies: in ‘Killer Queen’, the call lasts three bars, and Mercury’s response lasts five bars; in ‘I’m In Love With My Car’, the backing call comes on the downbeat, pre-empting the vocal melody by two quavers; and, in ‘Save Me’, the lead and backing parts sing for two bars together, before the lead concludes the phrase alone. In verse and bridge sections, the reverse holds, such that the backing vocalists punctuate the points between bars or phrases, and add a textural pad thereafter. The first bridge section of ‘Good Old Fashioned Lover Boy’ is an elaborate realisation of this approach; other examples of this technique can be found in ‘Lily of the Valley’, ‘Flick of the Wrist’, and ‘You and I’.

One may thus point to several sonic patterns and compositional strategies pertaining to Queen’s backing vocals. On the one hand, the varied call-and-response patterns of the lead and backing vocalists may be considered a compositional strategy. Other techniques pertaining to voice-leading, structure, and melodic contours may be regarded as sonic patterns; one final set of examples hopefully illuminates this point. In a selection of songs, Queen layers multiple vocal sections, courtesy of multitrack recording techniques. The opera section of ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’ is likely the most famous example of this feature, although there were precedents by 1975 from ‘My Fairy King’, ‘Father to Son’, and ‘In the Lap of the Gods’. Concurrent and later examples of this feature include ‘I’m In Love With My Car’ and ‘It’s Late’.

In the chorus-like section of ‘My Fairy King’, there are three distinct vocal arrangements to go with the lead vocal, which is part spoken and lower in the mix. One part sings the title line, another provides a counter-melody to the lead vocal (and later introduces an expanding gesture), while the third part punctuates phrases with ‘Ooh yeah’. The entrances and exits of each part overlap, thus highlighting the array of vocal sections through this phrase (Example 4.31). ‘It’s Late’ is comparatively restrained: in the final chorus, one vocal section continues in the style of the previous choruses, while a second section sings ‘aahs’ through the harmonic progression.

Without downplaying these examples, it is crucial to note that from a structural perspective, the multiple sections all work on the same principles. That is, any perceived complexities pertain not to the backing vocal arrangements themselves, but to matters of texture, recording, and sound-box construction, all of which are considered in the following chapter. These structural principles—three- and four-part close position voices with stepwise and arpeggiated movement—may be understood in terms of sonic patterns, because they foster a distinct vocal texture, the consistency of which is enhanced by the common recording and articulation techniques addressed below.

The musical score is written in 4/4 time with a key signature of one sharp (F#). It consists of two systems of four staves each. The first system shows the lead vocal line and three backing vocal lines. The lyrics are: "He rules the air and turns the My fai - ry king— He rules the air and he can see things that are not there_". The second system continues with the lyrics: "Ooh yea_ tide He guides the My fai - ry king— for you and me_". The backing vocal parts feature close-position three- and four-part harmonies with stepwise and arpeggiated movements.

Example 4.31. ‘My Fairy King’, Lead Vocal and Backing Vocals, Chorus

4.6 Analytical Summary

The key findings from this chapter are summarised in Table 4.3 below. These characteristics represent the important ingredients of Queen’s idiolect with respect to the structural elements of their songs. For each trait, two examples are given and it is noted whether the feature is best understood as a compositional strategy or a sonic pattern.

| Musical Parameter | Characteristic (C.S./S.P.) | Examples |
|--------------------------|---|--|
| Form | Use of standard formal template (C.S.) | ‘We are the Champions’ ‘Dear Friends’ |
| | Variation on standard template (C.S.) | ‘Love of My Life’ ‘39’ |
| | Episodic structure (C.S.) | ‘My Fairy King’ ‘Mustapha’ |
| Harmony | Intra-sectional modulations (C.S.) | ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’ ‘Killer Queen’ |
| | Modulations between related keys (C.S.) | ‘My Fairy King’ ‘Jealousy’ |
| | Dual/ambiguous tonal/modal centres (C.S.) | ‘Great King Rat’ ‘White Queen (As It Began)’ |
| | Movement between tonic and dominant harmonies through phrases and sections (C.S.) | ‘Fat Bottomed Girls’ ‘Good Company’ |
| | Stepwise descending chromatic bass line (S.P.) | ‘In the Lap of the Gods... Revisited’ ‘Save Me’ |
| | Phrase-ending minor plagal cadence (S.P.) | ‘You’re My Best Friend’ ‘Love of My Life’ |
| | Common-tone diminished chord (S.P.) | ‘Bring Back That Leroy Brown’ ‘My Melancholy Blues’ |
| | Consecutive secondary dominants (S.P.) | ‘Teo Torriatte’ ‘Leaving Home Ain’t Easy’ |

| | | |
|---------------------------------|--|---|
| | Increasing rate of harmonic rhythm towards cadence (S.P.) | 'Keep Yourself Alive' 'Sail Away Sweet Sister' |
| Melody | Use and embellishment of conventional melodic structure (C.S.) | 'You're My Best Friend' 'If You Can't Beat Them' |
| | Juxtaposition of conventional melodic gestures (C.S.) | 'Good Old Fashioned Lover Boy' 'Don't Stop Me Now' |
| | Static melodic fragments derived from Aeolian scale (C.S.) | 'I'm In Love With My Car' 'More of the Jazz' |
| Rhythm | 4/4 time (S.P.) | 'More of that Jazz' 'Great King Rat' |
| | Metric modulation (C.S.) | 'Bohemian Rhapsody' 'Death on Two Legs' |
| | Variation on foursquare phrasing (C.S.) | 'Love of My Life' 'Seaside Rendezvous' |
| Backing Vocal Structures | Three- and four-part close-position harmonies (S.P.) | 'Good Company' 'Sheer Heart Attack' |
| | Call-and-response structure with lead vocal (C.S.) | 'Killer Queen' 'Leaving Home Ain't Easy' |
| | Stepwise and arpeggiated voice movement (S.P.) | 'Dear Friends' 'Dreamer's Ball' |
| | Expanding gesture (S.P.) | 'Don't Stop Me Now' 'Lily of the Valley' |
| | Parallel melodic movement (S.P.) | 'You're My Best Friend' 'Ogre Battle' |
| | Dual vocal sections (S.P.) | 'It's Late' 'My Fairy King' |

Table 4.3. Summary of Compositional Strategies and Sonic Patterns for Form, Harmony, Melody, Rhythm, and Backing Vocal Structures

5. The Sound-Worlds of Queen's Songs

This chapter documents the vocal, instrumental, textural, and production characteristics of Queen's songs. Many of these sound-world traits are best understood in terms of sonic patterns, insofar as there is a degree of musical consistency from track to track. In the domain of texture, for instance, one finds several standardised textural combinations across the group's output. And even if elements of Queen's studio work involved a high degree of experimentation, this was balanced by stock recording techniques and sound-box layouts for most parts. The findings of this chapter therefore form a contrast with Chapter 4, in which it was argued that the structural elements of Queen's songs were best understood in terms of compositional strategies. The significance of this observation is addressed in Section 6.1.

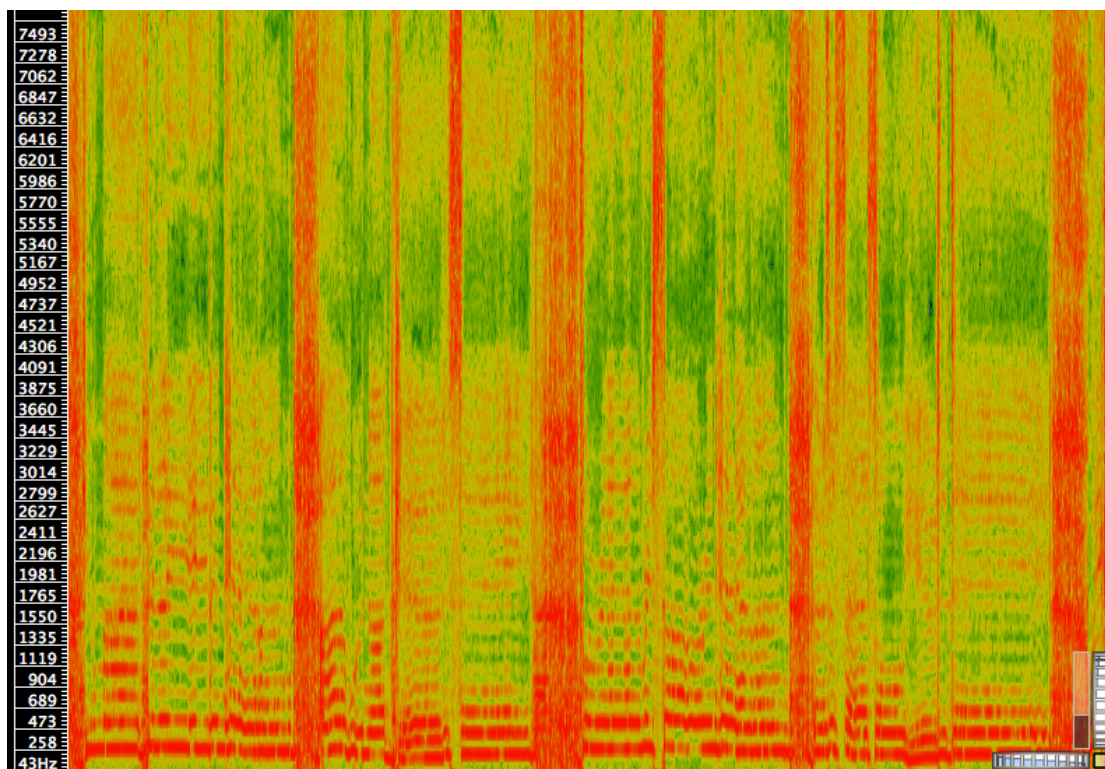
5.1 Vocal and Instrumental Techniques

5.1.1 The Lead Singers

Queen was fortunate to have three singers who were equally capable of singing the vocal melodies. In this corpus, Mercury sings lead on most of the songs, May sings lead on ten songs, and Taylor on seven. May and Taylor's lead singing duties are exclusively on their own songs; Deacon's songs have Mercury singing lead. A number of songs feature Taylor as a secondary lead vocalist alongside either Mercury or May. In the second verse section of 'Bicycle Race', Mercury and Taylor trade lines with one another; in a number of Taylor-penned songs, the singers either alternate sections or blend their voices together (e.g. 'Fun It', 'Sheer Heart Attack', 'Rock It (Prime Jive)', and 'Coming Soon'). In a similar vein, Taylor contributes single lines to 'Good Old Fashioned Lover Boy' (in the second bridge section) and 'Long Away' (at the end of the chorus), the lead parts of which are sung by Mercury and May, respectively.

Each singer brings specific tonal qualities to his singing, as well as certain nuances and inflections, the combinations of which create three distinct vocal profiles. The

overall singing styles of May and Taylor are relatively well defined, insofar as each utilises a circumscribed range of techniques. The discussion will thus centre on outlining the relevant traits for the two singers. In Mercury's case, I argue that he sings in four different voice types, each defined by a particular collection of singing features. The discussion will thus proceed in the same manner but with respect to one voice type at a time. Because of this range, I will conclude the section with a brief discussion of how Mercury uses the different shades of his voice within and across songs. Before proceeding to the findings, it is necessary to acknowledge that some observations must be treated with caution. That is, while one can work with isolated vocal tracks as an aid for pinpointing certain timbral qualities, the evidence is not in a natural state, per se. In identifying the timbre of, say, Brian May's voice, one is actually identifying the timbre of May's voice as it has been recorded and processed on particular songs. It may well be that the difference between a recorded and 'natural' sound of May's voice is minimal, but this cannot be assumed *a priori*.

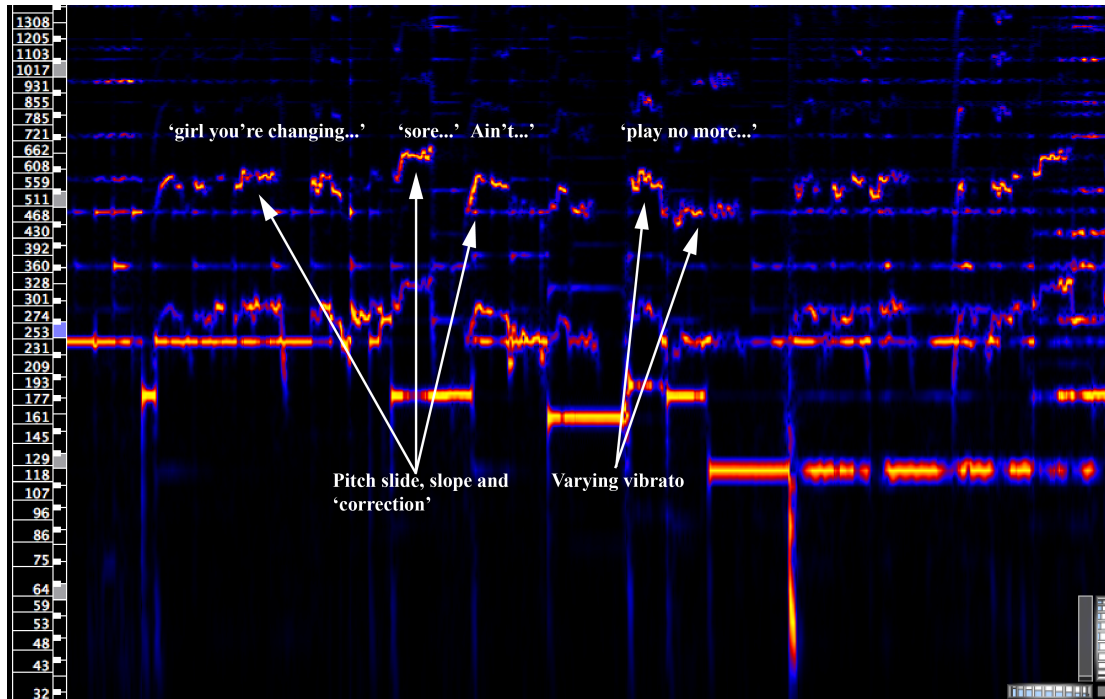


Example 5.1. 'Long Away', Lead Vocal Spectrogram, Verse

Starting with Brian May, his voice had a mellow quality, much more so than the other singers. Example 5.1 is spectrogram representation of the lead vocal track from the first verse of 'Long Away'. The numbers on the left-hand vertical axis are frequency

levels (Hz), with the lines in the body of the image representing sound waves through time. The relative volume and strength of the sound waves at any given point is shown through changes in colour from green (quietest/weakest) to yellow to red (loudest/strongest). The lowest red line represents the fundamental pitch that is sounded, with the red lines above this representing the overtones. For all the spectrograms that follow, care has been taken to ensure a similar vertical scale thus allowing one to tentatively compare the relationship between fundamental pitch and overtone structure across the different voices. In May's case, one can note the prevalence of thick, red lines at the lower end of the pitch spectrum, relative to the thinner and less prominent overtones moving upwards to the middle of the image; this provides a visual account of his mellow vocal tone.

In terms of other tonal characteristics, there is a strong sense of vocal comfort in his middle register (C3 to E4). As his range extends upwards (to a limit of around A4), May's tone thins considerably. Thus, in the chorus of 'Sail Away Sweet Sister', one can hear a slight nasal strain in his voice as the melody ascends past the upper tonic note, D3. In 'Long Away', the final chorus line leaps to A4, on which May sings in a gentle head voice, before returning to his chest voice in the middle register (E4). Accordingly, one can posit a causative relationship between the melodic range and May's vocal timbre, with the higher pitches producing a thinner singing tone.



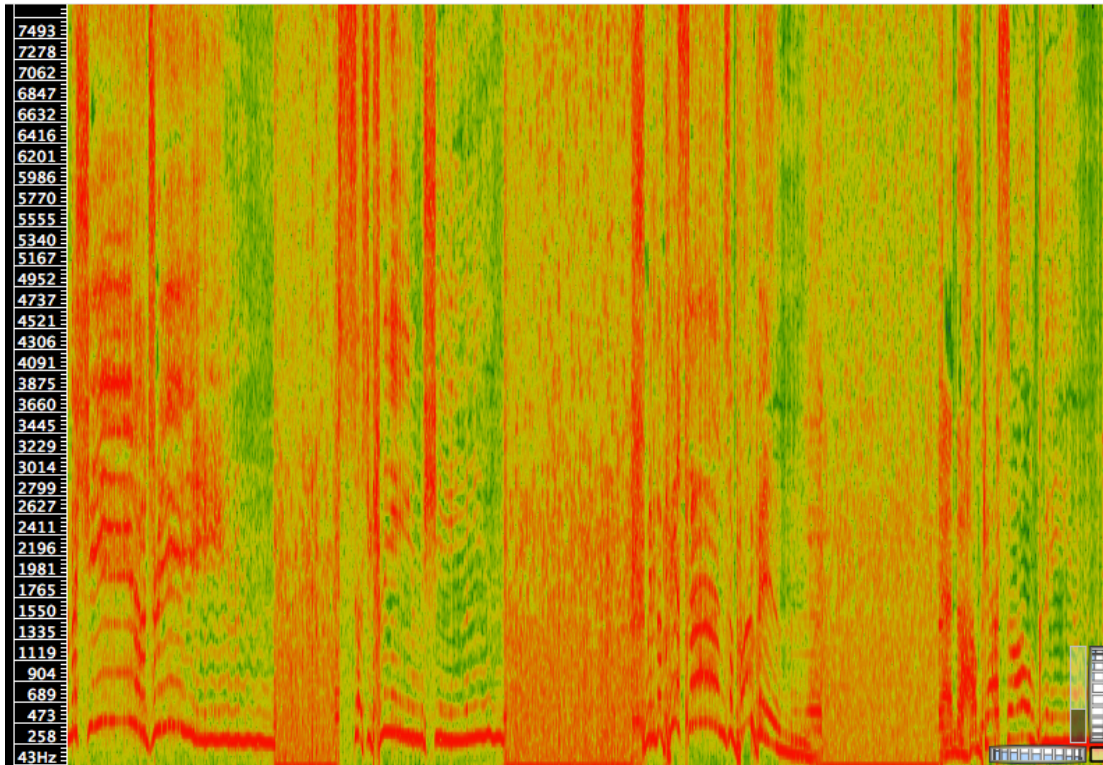
Example 5.2. 'Sail Away Sweet Sister', Melodic Range Spectrogram, Verse

These factors contribute to the natural and unstylised appearance of May's singing, an observation reinforced by his relaxed approach to pitch and straight rhythmic delivery. 'Sail Away Sweet Sister' is representative of the former point. May's lead vocal sound waves can be viewed in the middle of the Melodic Range Spectrogram of Example 5.2; as with Example 5.1, the relative volumes of sounds in the mix are represented by changes in colour, this time from blue to red to yellow (quiet to loud). The sound waves of May's voice are annotated in the image; the other lines represent the bass guitar (the lowest yellow/red line) and the keyboard part (the blues lines in the middle of the image). Looking at May's vocal part, several traits stand out. Firstly, the individual pitches are rarely approached or hit directly; instead, May tends to settle on the exact pitch after its onset. For example, the pitch of the first word, 'Hey', is scooped slightly from below, while the pitch of the syllable 'chan-(ging)' is approached from slightly below the note, before being 'corrected' from above. Secondly, there are variations in the amount of vibrato through held notes. In the second phrase, one can note the slight vibrato on the word 'Ain't, a little more on 'play', before retreating again on the word 'more'. This former word points to a third trait; here, May hits the note and almost immediately slides down in pitch. The flattening of individual pitches is evident at several other points in the verse, on the words, 'sore', 'lady', and 'way' at the end of the section.

In terms of rhythmic flexibility, notated versions of May's singing melodies tend to accurately represent the surface rhythm. The exception to this trait is when the melody contains an upward leap; at these points, May delivers the note slightly behind the beat. The lag is a result of the slide to 'find' the pitch. One can observe this trait in the verse of 'Leaving Home Ain't Easy'; on the first line, the 's' consonant sound of 'outside' has a comparatively lengthy onset before the vowel sound; this consonant coincides with a leap up a perfect fourth. In 'Dear Friends', May elongates the onset of the consonant sound for line-ending words, prior to the melodic pitch; the rhythmic delay in this case is thus much more noticeable than in other examples, which tend to be similar to 'Leaving Home Ain't Easy'.

With the exception of 'Dear Friends', many instances of these nuances are not striking—they can be identified from spectrograms, but are not immediately audible. These details, however, are important because they convey a sense of naturalness in May's singing—pitch fluctuations are not necessarily smoothed out or controlled, and the other inflections evoke the idea of May working within, or even grappling with the constraints of his voice. That is, it requires some technical ability (whether learned or not) to leap and hit higher pitches directly; the pitch slides intimate that May did not seek, consciously or otherwise, to meet such a technical goal. It is notable that while this approach aligns him with 'authentic' rock singers (e.g. John Fogerty, Bruce Springsteen, Bob Segar, Paul McCartney, Bob Dylan etc.),²¹⁰ there is no real attempt on May's behalf to copy or imitate a certain idiom (e.g. country, folk, blues). The combination of traits thus give the impression of May simply singing as his voice is, with little concern for overt vocal stylings.

²¹⁰ Allan Moore, 'Authenticity as authentication', *Popular Music* 21/2 (2002), 211.



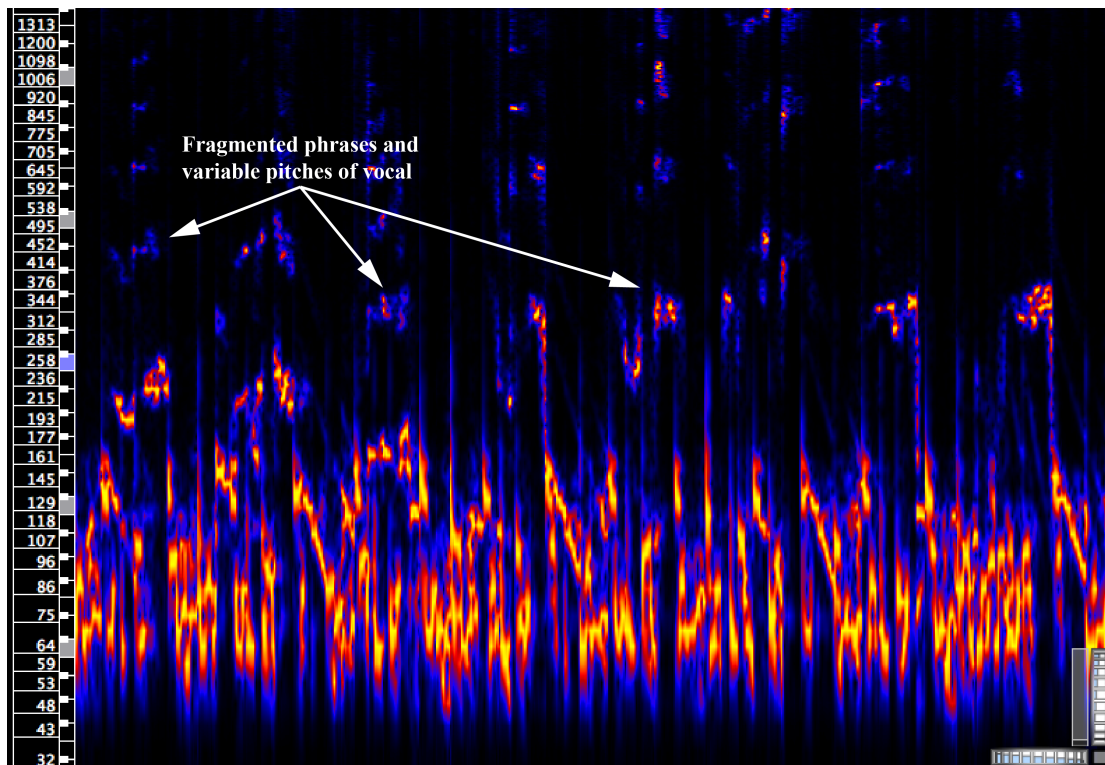
Example 5.3. 'I'm In Love With My Car', Lead Vocal Spectrogram, Verse

Roger Taylor's range extends well beyond that of Brian May's—he reaches the glorious B^b5 at the conclusion of the opera section in 'Bohemian Rhapsody'. His general vocal timbre, use of vibrato, and addition of a gritty tone offer further points of comparison with May. The spectrogram of Example 5.3 presents the vocal track of the first verse of 'I'm In Love With My Car'. Bearing in mind the echo effect and triple-tracking of his vocal, one can note the greater density at the higher end of the spectrum relative to the lower end; one can also compare this with the spectrogram of May's voice in Example 5.1, in which there was a stronger concentration of overtones closer to the fundamental pitch (that is, at the bottom of the image). Although not so evident in Example 5.3, Taylor's singing voice also had a consistently wide vibrato. This is noticeable from the held notes of the introduction of 'Tenement Funster'. Indeed, it is immediately obvious when Taylor alone sang backing vocals because this vibrato is transferred into the multi-part arrangement, as can be heard on 'The Loser in the End' or 'More of That Jazz'.

Taylor occasionally adds a gritty quality to his singing. This trait often appears in the mid-high range of his voice, between C4 and C5. On Taylor's early tracks, 'Modern

Times Rock ‘n’ Roll’ and ‘The Loser in the End’, he switches to his gritty tone sparingly. On the former track, it is most prominent on only the pre-chorus lines, ‘Now listen little baby // let me tell you what it’s all about’. For the remainder of the song, Taylor’s vocal tone is cleaner, despite sitting in much the same register. On the latter track, the verse divides into six couplets; the first four are sung with a clean tone, the fifth is sung in a gritty tone, before Taylor relaxes back into his cleaner voice. There is a clear structural dynamic at play here, an idea that is expanded upon in Taylor’s next song, ‘Tenement Funster’. Here, entire sections of the song are delineated, in part, by the changes in vocal tone, with the chorus sung in a grittier tone next to the gentler strains of the verse. In a number of his other songs (‘I’m in Love With My Car’, ‘Fight From the Inside’, ‘Fun It’, and ‘More of That Jazz’), Taylor favours the strength of his gritty chest voice throughout.

Like May, it would seem that Taylor also conveys a sense of naturalness, although his has more of an improvisatory quality through a fluid approach to both pitch and rhythm. Taylor rarely attacks pitches directly; scoops and slides are common to reach higher notes. He often hovers between sung and spoken notes, which further loosens the accuracy of pitches. ‘I’m In Love With My Car’ is a clear example of this tendency—the first line of the verse presents a clear melodic fragment; the vocal lines thereafter tend to float in between pitched and non-pitched, following the same broad contours, but with varying degrees of melodic precision. On the funk-oriented ‘Fun It’, Taylor’s verse contribution is similarly built around short melodic utterances above a constant groove. The half-sung approach is relatively subtle, although as can be seen in the middle of the spectrogram below (Example 5.4), the exact pitches are intimated rather than explicit.



Example 5.4. 'Fun It', Melodic Range Spectrogram, Verse

Taylor's liberal approach to rhythm operates in conjunction with his semi-spoken approach to melody. Whereas May's rhythmic flexibility entails minor inflections on the beat, Taylor's flexibility crosses the beats, suggesting a separation between the vocal and accompanimental parts of the song. 'More of That Jazz' is consistent in this approach, with much of the verse delivery appearing to drag behind the drum groove. 'Modern Times Rock 'n' Roll' stands out also from a rhythmic perspective, this time for the way Taylor fills up the verbal space of each phrase, to use Griffiths' concept.²¹¹ The first line of the song, 'How to make do with a worn out rock and roll scene', fits comfortably within the four-bar phrase; the six extra syllables of the fourth line, 'Something hard is coming up and it really knocks a hole in the wall', as well as the stream of accents (*really, knocks, hole*), necessitate a more speech-like rhythm in order to fit into the same space. In 'I'm In Love With My Car', Taylor delivers each of the short verse lines with rapid, speech-inflected rhythms, thus leaving a significant amount of empty verbal space in each phrase. In this example, as well as in 'More of That Jazz' and 'Rock It', Taylor's phrasing is notable for his avoidance of the downbeat in each two-bar phrase, which again underscores the apparent separation

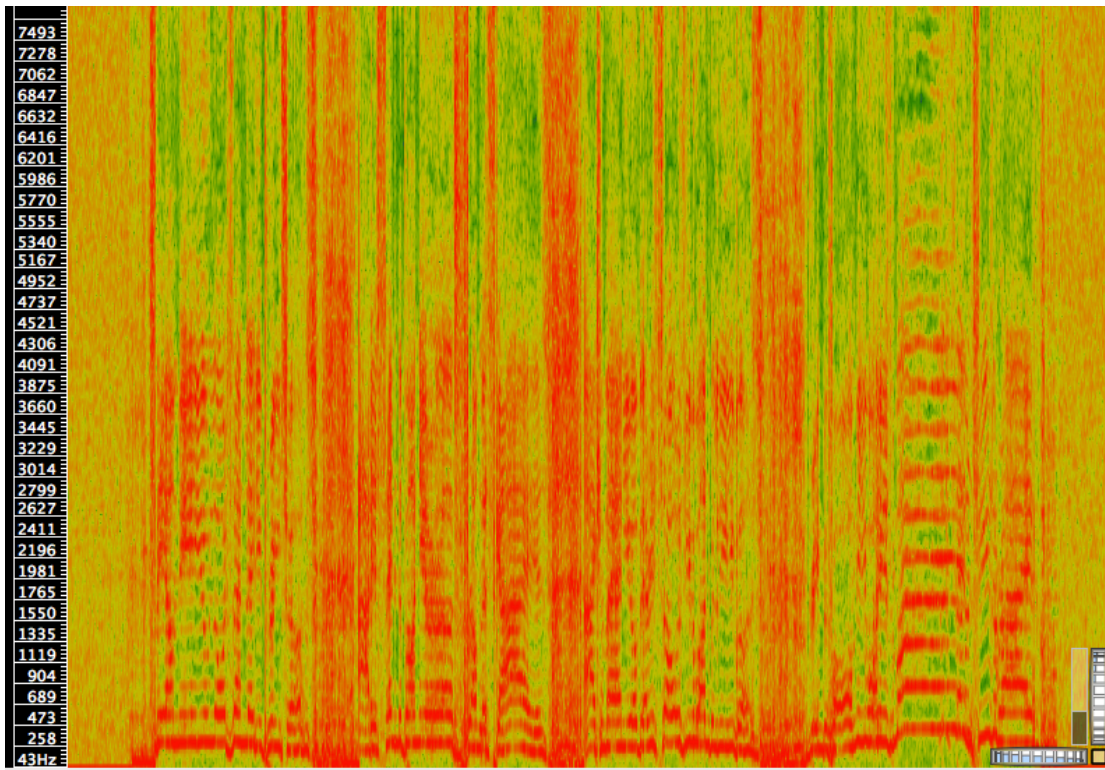
²¹¹ Dai Griffiths, 'From lyric to anti-lyric: analyzing the words in pop song', in *Analyzing Popular Music*, ed. Allan F. Moore (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 43-48.

between the singer and the band. Overall, then, one might suggest that Taylor conveys a sense of performance-oriented freedom, the words seemingly flowing without restraint as he sings. This approach was likely inspired by Robert Plant and Jimi Hendrix, in whose singing one can hear similar traits.

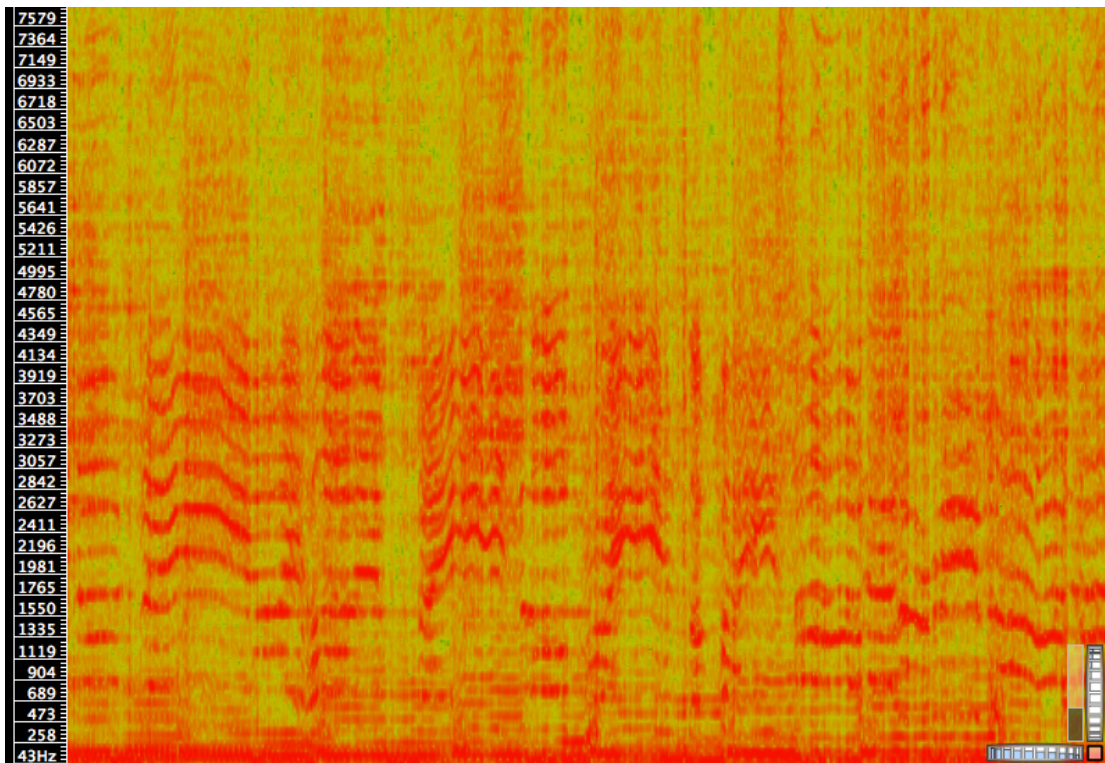
This leaves the lead vocals of Freddie Mercury. Despite the variations in tone, May and Taylor are united by each employing a reasonably well-defined set of singing techniques. The same cannot necessarily be said of Mercury. While his melodic range is impressive—consistently spanning within songs between F3 and C5 or between A3 and D5—it is an ability to vary the colour, tone and articulation of his voice that distinguishes Mercury’s singing from his fellow band members and, indeed, other rock singers. That he could seemingly adjust his vocal tone and colour at will makes it difficult to define in precise terms Mercury’s approach to singing. Nonetheless, it is possible to isolate certain tonal features, pitch and rhythm inflections, and adjustments in volume across his songs. From these individual traits, it is possible to identify four archetypal ‘voices’, each of which is defined by a certain grouping of singing characteristics. The following paragraphs thus outline the characteristics of each voice type, before considering how and when each type was used within songs.

The first voice in Mercury’s arsenal is prominent in ‘Seven Seas of Rhye’. Mercury’s ‘gritty’ voice is defined predominantly through two techniques: he sings in a well-supported and strong chest voice, which is coloured through the addition of gravelly tones. The spectrogram of Example 5.5 shows Mercury’s isolated vocal track from the first verse of the song. Notwithstanding the change in overtone structure at the end of the verse (the far right of the image; to be discussed shortly), one can note both the sonic density in the middle-lower segment of the pitch spectrum, as well as the slightly blurred overtone structure above the fundamental pitch. Unlike Taylor’s growling, which tends to act as a pick-up to a melodic line, one can see that Mercury’s gravelly tone is more consistent through phrases. With respect to pitch and rhythm, this voice type is marked by a relatively relaxed attitude towards pitch—Mercury blurs the exact pitches through the gravel of his voice, although his melodic contours are still easy to hear. By comparison, Mercury’s rhythmic placement of notes is reasonably close to a scored version of the melody. The semiquavers of the

line, ‘I descend upon your Earth’, for instance, are crisp and precise. Finally, Mercury sings at a comfortable, but moderately loud volume in this voice type.



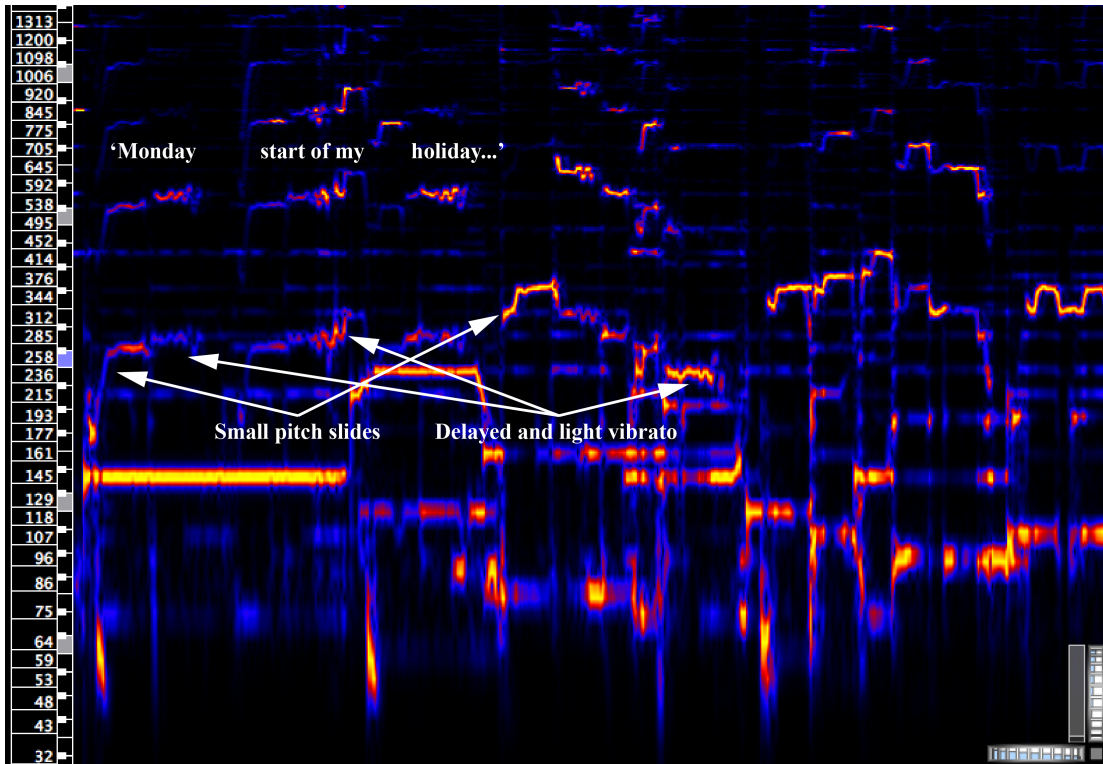
Example 5.5. ‘Seven Seas of Rhye’, Lead Vocal Spectrogram, Verse



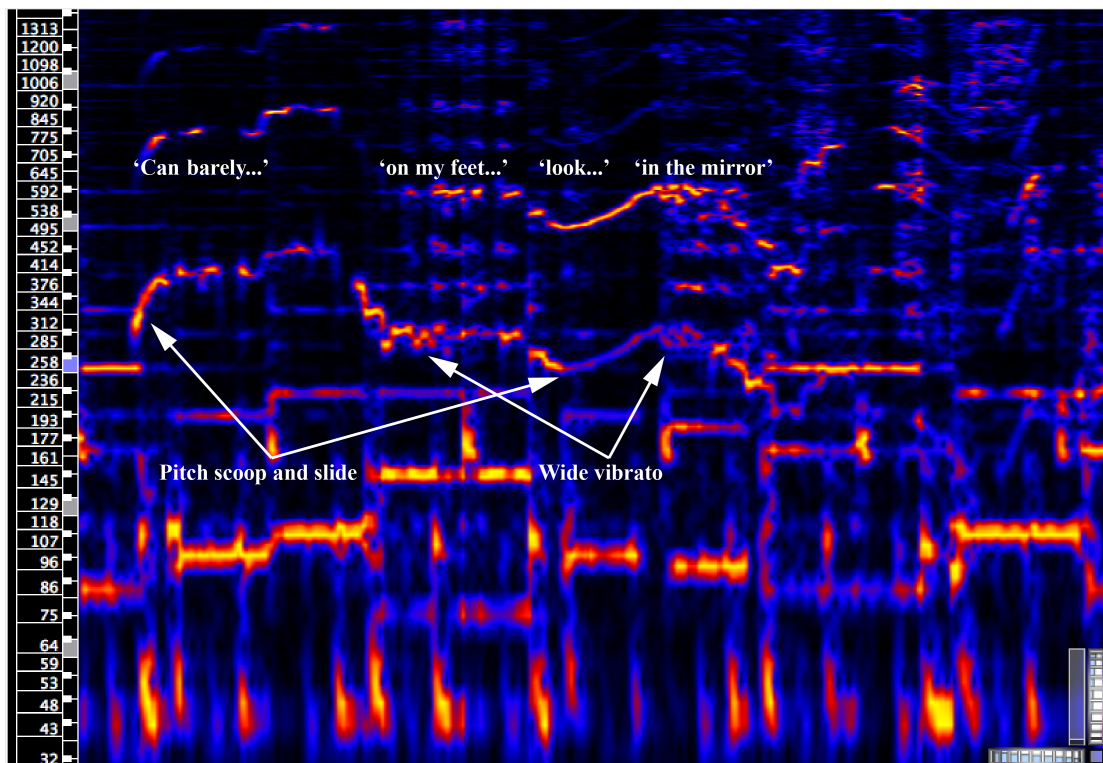
Example 5.6. ‘The Prophet’s Song’, Spectrogram, Pre-Chorus

The second voice—Mercury’s ‘powerful’ tone—is a variation on the first. Mercury retains the strong chest voice, but removes the gravelly tone, and increases the volume of his singing. The subsequent tonal quality is much more resonant. Although Example 5.6 of ‘The Prophet’s Song’ features the sounds of the full band in the spectrogram, one can still identify Mercury’s voice as the thickest and wavy red lines in the middle third of the image. One can see that his singing voice here has a strong and even overtone structure, with the successive overtones of his fundamental pitch as prominent as each other (evident through the consistent red and thickness of the vocal sound waves). When singing in his powerful voice, Mercury rarely uses vibrato and offers a much clearer sense of pitch than in his gritty tone. Although one can observe the occasional upwards scoop, Mercury’s powerful voice is marked by direct attacks on pitches. At the same time, within this vocal type, Mercury often tails off the ends of notes, which seemingly gives the impression of exhaustion, as if he has expended all his vocal effort in attacking the note.

Mercury’s third singing voice may be considered his ‘sincere’ tone. This tone is also based around his chest voice, but sung without gravel and at a softer volume. This vocal type provides the basis of Mercury’s singing in ‘Misfire’, ‘Who Needs You’, ‘In Only Seven Days’, and ‘Need Your Loving Tonight’, all Deacon-penned songs. It is in this voice that one can hear several stylised traits coming into focus, namely, his use of vibrato, sliding upwards to and downwards from pitches, and introducing moments of breathiness into the vocal performance. The opening verse of ‘In Only Seven Days’ displays the varied characteristics of this voice type: Mercury’s first melodic gesture features a brief slide into the note, thus delaying the pitch onset slightly. One can note also at the end of each line, Mercury adds a flutter of vibrato to his voice and lets a little air escape through his note (Example 5.7). The variations on Mercury’s previous chest voices are rather subtle, but they have combined effect of softening the overall tone of his singing.



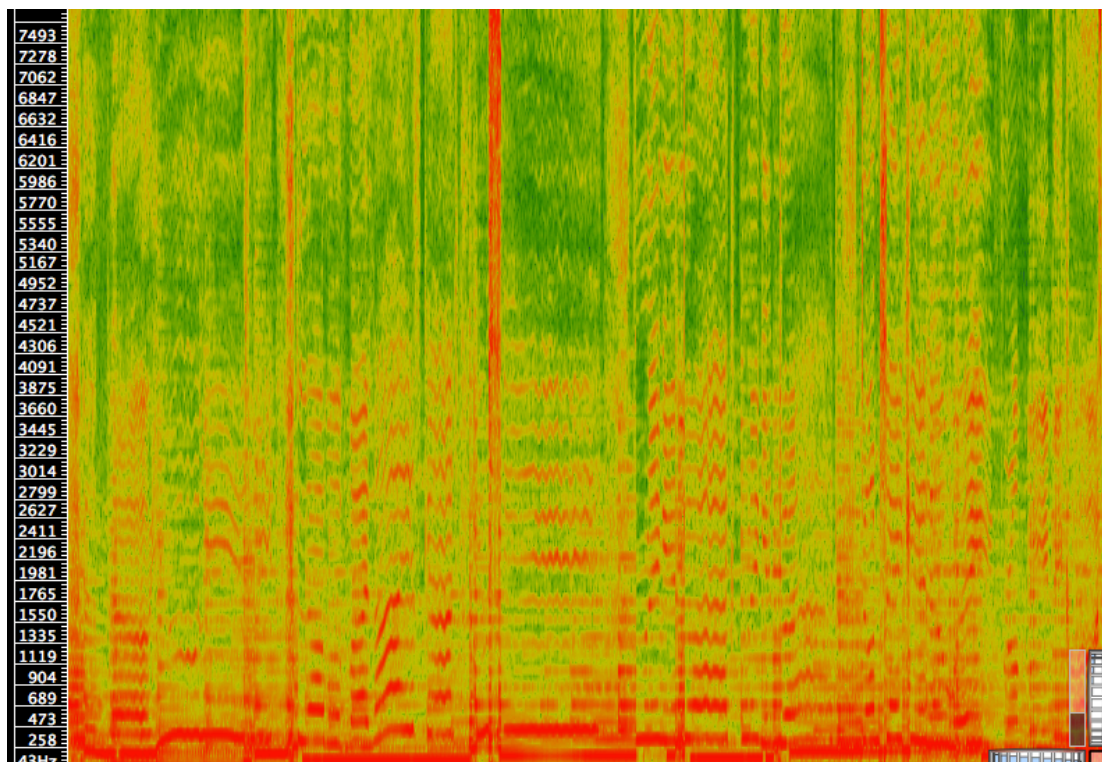
Example 5.7. 'In Only Seven Days', Melodic Range Spectrogram, Verse



Example 5.8. 'Somebody to Love', Melodic Range Spectrogram, Verse

Mercury's fourth singing voice—his 'exaggerated' tone—is the broadest in terms of its constituent traits. It is, perhaps, best understood in terms of the treatment of certain

characteristics; namely, his exaggerated tone overplays the techniques of his sincere voice. That is, the lower volume, the breathiness, the vibrato, and the pitch slides are all important components of the exaggerated voice, but are evident in a much more obvious manner. The spectrogram from the first verse of ‘Somebody to Love’ (Example 5.8) shows, in particular, how the sliding techniques are overblown compared with ‘In Only Seven Days’. Furthermore, in this example, and in others, the drawn out inflections give the impression of Mercury singing behind the beat, given that the pitch and subsequent vibrato arrive well after the onset of the note. The other key component of Mercury’s exaggerated tone is the frequent recourse to his head voice, which has a much lighter tonal quality. In Example 5.9 of ‘Love of My Life’, one can note that Mercury’s voice (represented by the wavy lines, compared with the straight, thick lines of the bass guitar) has almost no presence in the lowest segment of the image; rather the fundamental pitch and overtones are consistent in their presence towards the higher end of the pitch spectrum (into the middle segment of the image).



Example 5.9. ‘Love of My Life’, Spectrogram, Verse

It is rare to find all of these exaggerated techniques used equally in a single song. Rather, different songs tend to emphasise the different ingredients of Mercury’s

exaggerated voice. Thus, in ‘Somebody to Love’, the pitch sliding, vibrato, and breathiness are key features of his lead vocal; his head voice is used on occasion, but not exclusively, and the singing volume is moderate. By comparison, ‘Killer Queen’ features much more of Mercury’s head voice, and his pitch slides and vibrato are noticeable. ‘You Take My Breath Away’ is striking for Mercury’s overly breathy tone at a low volume, and liberal vibrato, but the pitches are attacked directly. What this suggests is that unlike his other vocal types and their consistent characteristics, Mercury’s exaggerated voice is best understood as a compositional strategy, insofar as it represents a particular approach to singing. That is, while there are common traits across instances of his exaggerated voice, the uniting factor is their exaggerated nature.

Mercury’s four voice types offer a template for his singing, but do not account for every song. Often, one can hear Mercury’s tone as floating between two voice types. There is a grey area between the gritty and powerful tones, depending on the amount of gravel in Mercury’s voice: ‘Dead on Time’, for example, can be heard in relation to both categories. Similarly, Mercury’s ‘cool’ singing of ‘Don’t Try Suicide’ appears to add gravel to an overall exaggerated tone. Elsewhere, ‘You’re My Best Friend’ fuses the gritty and sincere tones, while ‘Brighton Rock’ takes the head voice of the exaggerated tone and melds it with the direct attacks of the powerful tone. That said, the four vocal categories provide a framework for understanding how Mercury’s wide-ranging techniques come together in his singing.

The taxonomical approach is also useful for understanding the different ways in which Mercury uses his voice. Although each voice type does not cover his full range—he did not sing in his low register in a head voice, for instance—the different tones are not exclusively dependent on register. Accordingly, one can view the presence of individual voice types as reflective of a compositional choice made by Mercury. Generally speaking, there is a congruous relationship between Mercury’s singing tone and the stylistic content of the songs. Imitations of pre-1970 popular styles and piano ballads, for instance, are almost exclusively sung in Mercury’s exaggerated tone: ‘Killer Queen’, ‘Seaside Rendezvous’, ‘Lazing on a Sunday Afternoon’, and ‘My Melancholy Blues’ are examples of the former, while ‘Lily of the Valley’, ‘In the Lap of the Gods’, ‘Love of My Life’, and ‘You Take My Breath

Away' are examples of the latter. Equally, Mercury's singing in the guitar-based hard rock songs, such as 'Jesus', 'Great King Rat' or 'Son and Daughter' off *Queen*, is predominantly in his powerful vocal tone. It is with Mercury's gravelly voice that one starts to tread interesting ground. In 'Keep Yourself Alive', 'Seven Seas of Rhye', 'White Man', and 'We Will Rock You', the gritty sound of the voice mirrors the harshness of the songs' lyrical content, and matches the hard rock style. Mercury's gritty voice also carries sexual connotations, given its use in 'Tie Your Mother Down', 'Fat Bottomed Girls', and 'Get Down Make Love'.

The case of 'Fat Bottomed Girls' raises the interesting possibility of a double entendre between Mercury's singing and the thematic content of the song, whether in lyrical or stylistic terms. That is, the sexual innuendo of Mercury's voice is pitted against the unconventional topic of the lyrics, not dissimilar to AC/DC's 'Whole Lotta Rosie', written a year earlier in 1977. It is uncommon for Mercury to draw out such juxtapositions, but one can find a couple examples from the group's early output. In 'Liar', Mercury sings the first verse in a slightly restrained, yet still exaggerated style (head voice, breathy); this contrasts starkly with the surrounding electric guitar-based material. From the first chorus onwards, Mercury's moves into his powerful tone, which seems more congruous with the song style. Nonetheless, there is a short stop-time passage after the lengthy instrumental section: the band hits the dominant chord on the downbeat of five successive bars, and each time Mercury responds with the title line, ascending through an arpeggio through the phrase. The fourth utterance of 'Liar' is the highest, and Mercury sings it in a breathy head voice in stark contrast to the surrounding heavy guitar chords and drum hits. Mercury adopts a similar tactic on 'Father to Son'—the vocal section of the song opens with electric guitar, bass guitar and drum hits, above which Mercury sings in a light head voice. As the band settles into the guitar-based verse, Mercury shifts into a moderately powerful voice.

While it is thus common for the vocal tone to match the stylistic backdrop of the song, it is also common for Mercury to change his voice type as a means of articulating the structure of a song. In some instances, this simply means changing the vocal tone in accordance with textural changes across sections. Thus, in 'Millionaire Waltz', the majority of the song features subtle variations of Mercury's exaggerated style: the first verse overplays the pitch slide technique; while the bridge sections bring his

breathiness to the fore. In the rock section, however, Mercury slips into his powerful tone, before returning to his breathy voice in the subsequent vocal section. In other instances, Mercury's changes in tone reflect formal and harmonic dynamics within the song. This point is addressed further in Section 6.2.4, however, it is worth outlining this idea briefly.

'Seven Seas of Rhye' is an illustrative example. Through the verse, Mercury sings mostly in a gritty voice, before shifting to his powerful voice on the word 'mine'. The spectrogram above (Example 5.5) neatly demonstrates the sense of timbral expansion at this point (the far right segment of the image): the powerful voice has a much cleaner overtone structure and brighter sound compared with the darker sound of the preceding bars, as can be seen in the even spacing between the red lines as well as their expanded vertical scope. This change in vocal colour coincides with the apex of the section—the word 'mine' immediately precedes the concluding gesture of an SRDC melodic idea; Mercury's pitch (A4) is the highest of the verse section; the band introduces a dominant chord for the first time in the section; and, they punctuate this point with a textural stop. Mercury's vocal change thus contributes to the overall shape of the section by accentuating the important structural moment. 'Jealousy' offers a similar example, in which Mercury glides between his exaggerated and sincere tones for much of the song. At the end of the penultimate chorus, the harmonic progression is adjusted to accommodate a chorus reprise; over the dominant chord, Mercury shifts from his exaggerated tone into his powerful chest voice, through an ascending melodic line.

There is more that could be investigated with respect to Mercury's singing, particularly in the area of interpretation—how Mercury's singing informed and shaped the lyrical content of songs, and how Mercury interpreted the songs of his band mates. These matters will have to be addressed elsewhere. The primary point to make in this context is that it is the sheer range of vocal qualities that mark Mercury's singing with Queen, as well as his ability to find particular nuances and tones to suit the context of the songs. This is arguably Mercury's greatest strength as a singer; his wide vocal palette is an important factor in adding to, and realising the expressive and dynamic shape of Queen's songs.

5.1.2 The Backing Vocalists

Compared with Section 4.5, this current section focuses on the articulation traits and sonic qualities of the backing vocalists—how, rather than what, they sing. In a small majority of the corpus, the backing vocalists sing in a relatively unstylised manner; in roughly one third of the corpus, the singers add various nuances to their parts. ‘Tie Your Mother Down’ highlights the normative approach of the backing vocalists. The individual parts are sung with an even attack on each note, and at a moderately loud volume, producing a forceful and direct sound. The same traits are evident in a range of songs, from ‘Jesus’ to ‘Now I’m Here’, ‘Mustapha’ to ‘Dragon Attack’. In some tracks, the volume of the singing is noticeably louder. The chorus of ‘Liar’ exemplifies this trait early in Queen’s career: the singers punctuate the textural gaps by singing the title line seemingly as loud as possible. A similar effect is achieved in the opera section of ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’, particularly through the repeated phrase, ‘Bismallah // We will not let him go // Let him go’. The pre-chorus of ‘We are the Champions’ (through the lines ‘And I need to go on // And on // And on // And on’) is the other striking example in the corpus. These instances are best heard as subtle variations on, rather than departures from the norm.

Queen’s stylised arrangements relate to articulation, pitch, and volume inflections. Two main gestures are evident in the opening phrase of ‘Son and Daughter’. Firstly, there is an articulation contrast between the detached opening words (‘I want...’) and the sustained final word (‘you’). In many songs, the final vocal gesture of a section constitutes a held note, often, like ‘Son and Daughter’, following a stopped or sustained hit from the band. Examples of this gesture include the choruses of ‘Ogre Battle’, ‘Great King Rat’, ‘Some Day One Day’, ‘The Prophet’s Song’, ‘White Man’, ‘Flick of the Wrist’, ‘Killer Queen’, and ‘Don’t Stop Me Now’ (final chorus only), the verse section of ‘Seven Seas of Rhye’, and the bridge section of ‘Sweet Lady’.

Secondly, in ‘Son and Daughter’, the vocalists slide between the notes of the penultimate and final chord (E minor to A major). Legato articulation is a prominent feature of many Queen vocal arrangements, appearing in songs across the corpus including ‘The Night Comes Down’, ‘Dear Friends’, ‘Dreamer’s Ball’, and ‘Save Me’. The exaggerated sliding articulation is less frequent, but still appears often

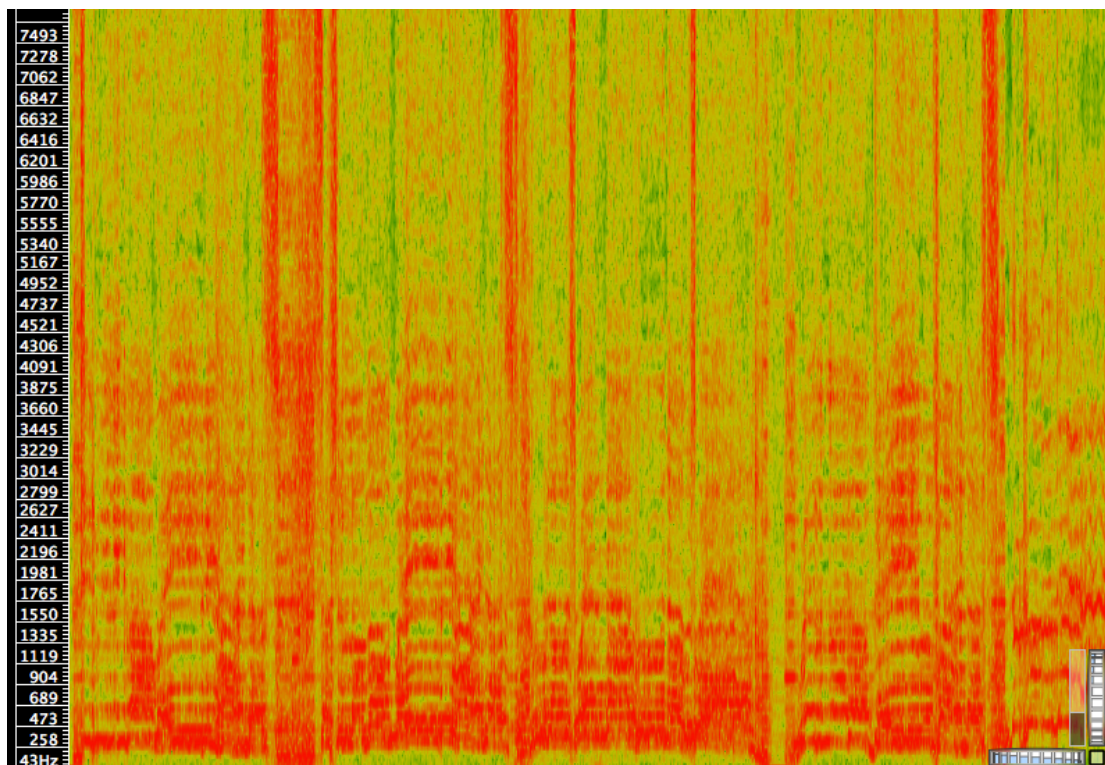
enough to be considered an important sonic pattern. Notable instances of this trait include the verse of ‘My Fairy King’, and the bridges of ‘You’re My Best Friend’, ‘Lazing on a Sunday Afternoon’, ‘Bring Back That Leroy Brown’, and ‘Who Needs You’.

In ‘My Fairy King’, there is also a slight dynamic swell through the pitch slide, which further emphasises the harmonic movement. This too is characteristic of Queen’s arrangements. The third verse of ‘Crazy Little Thing Called’, for instance, couples a gradual crescendo with legato articulation. In the bridge of ‘Lily of the Valley’, the crescendo is subtle, but mirrored in the expanding structure of the arrangement from one to four parts. The vocal slides are paired with dynamic swells through each note in the introduction of ‘In the Lap of the Gods’, and these short changes in dynamics mark the backing vocals of ‘Love of My Life’, ‘You Take My Breath Away’, and ‘Good Old Fashioned Lover Boy’, amongst others. It is evident, then, that the backing vocal parts are often distinguished by three articulation gestures—dynamic swells, detached and legato contrasts, and pitch slides—each of which can be understood as short sonic patterns.

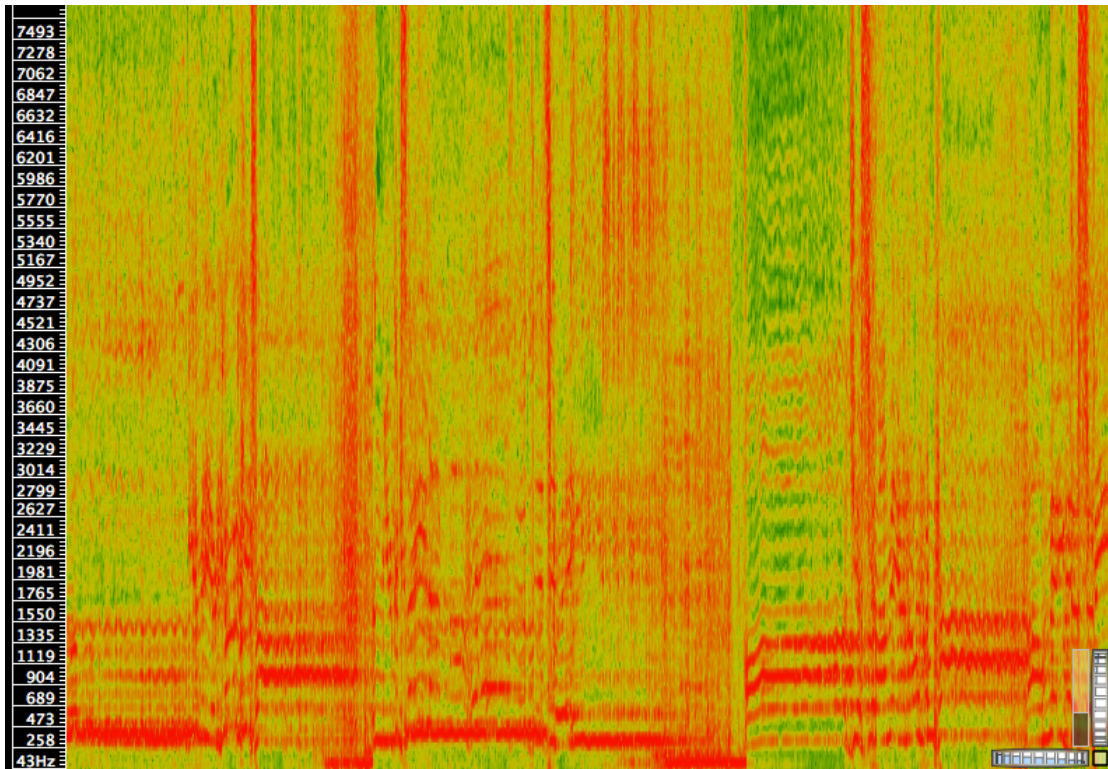
Equally as important are the timbral qualities of the backing vocal arrangements. Various sources on singing, from both choral (i.e. classical) and popular perspectives, stress the need for a good ‘blend’ when combining voices, even if the qualities of such a ‘blend’ are often quite vague.²¹² It is of little concern to say whether Queen’s vocals constituted a good ‘blend’. Rather, one may observe that the spectral qualities of the ‘blend’ depended on the singers involved in creating the arrangement, with the richest timbre stemming from arrangements with all three singers. Thus, in ‘Long Away’, on which May sings all the backing vocals, one can discern a rather mellow sound, despite the higher register of the backing parts. This observation is largely borne out in the spectrogram below, which shows a greater sonic density in lower frequency range, seen through the wall of red sound waves towards the bottom of the image (Example 5.10). By comparison, Taylor’s backing vocals in ‘Tenement Funster’ are lacking this concentration of spectral energy in the same place, but have a

²¹² See, for example, Duane S. Crowther, *Key Choral Concepts: Teaching Techniques and Tools to Help Your Choir Sound Great* (Springville, Utah: Horizon Publishers, 2003), 91ff; Bill Gibson, *The AudioPro Home Recording Course*, vol. 3 (Vallejo, CA: Artistpro, 1999), 215.

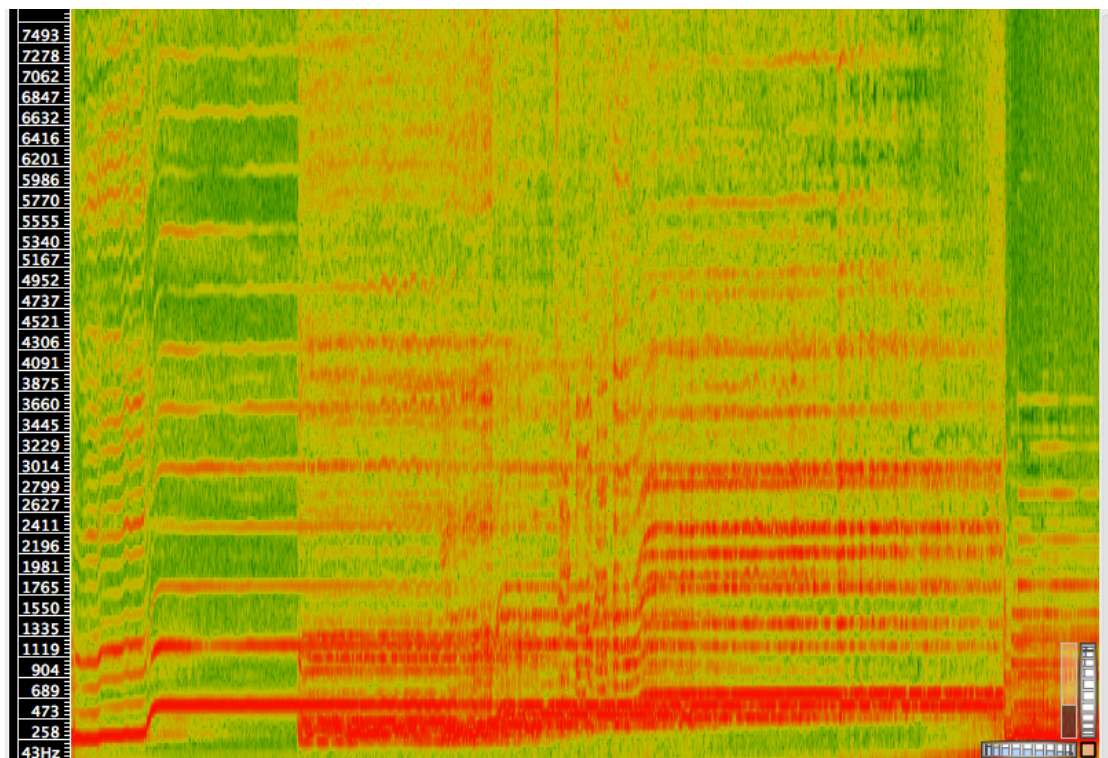
more apparent prevalence of overtones towards the middle of the image (Example 5.11). By comparison again, the a cappella introduction to ‘You Take My Breath Away’, sung entirely by Mercury, has a rich tonal quality. One can note both the clarity of the individual lines, as well as the clean and even spacing of the overtones above the fundamental pitches (Example 5.12). As with the prior section on the lead vocalists, one must be wary of reading too much into the recorded and processed forms of the voices. Nonetheless, the spectrograms offer some insights into the timbral differences when the individual singers created the arrangements alone.



Example 5.10. ‘Long Away’, Backing Vocals Spectrogram, Chorus



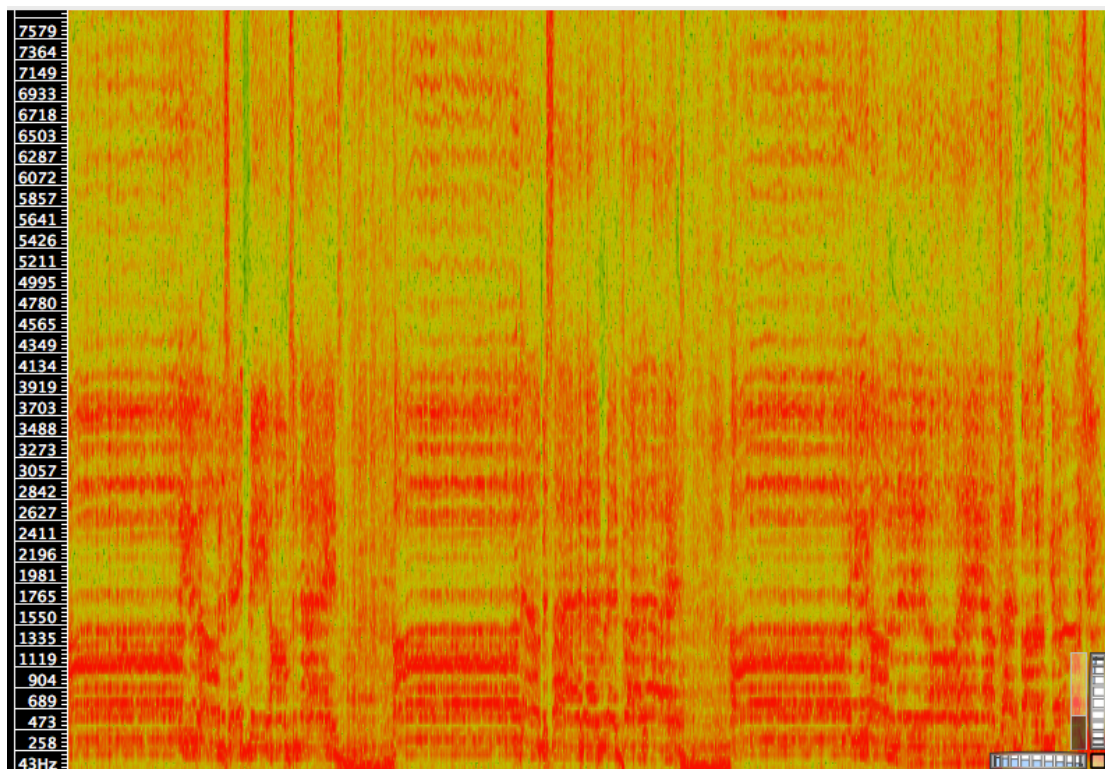
Example 5.11. ‘Tenement Funster’, Lead Vocal and Backing Vocals Spectrogram, Chorus



Example 5.12. ‘You Take My Breath Away’, Backing Vocals Spectrogram, Introduction

The most interesting observations, however, come from the tracks to which all singers contribute backing vocals. As demonstrated here and in Section 5.1.1, each singer

brought particular spectral characteristics to the vocal mix. One might expect, therefore, that a combination of the voices would produce a resonant sound that is strong throughout the pitch spectrum. The *a cappella* chorus that opens ‘Fat Bottomed Girls’ largely confirms this hypothesis. The spectrogram shows high densities of sonic energy throughout the pitch spectrum; compared with previous spectrograms, one can note how the sound waves are almost solid red in the lower half of the image (Example 5.13). Certainly, the group’s predilection for multitracking its voices fosters this sonic characteristic, but the complementary spectral qualities of each singer are crucial in defining the overall sound and timbre of Queen’s backing arrangements. Indeed, for listeners well versed in Queen’s music, it is possible to identify backing vocal arrangements created entirely by one singer, even if the structures and recording techniques are consistent across songs, because of the particular timbral qualities. When the voices come together, however, the sonic result is distinct, built from the unique ‘blend’ of the three singers.



Example 5.13. ‘Fat Bottomed Girls’, Spectrogram, Introduction

5.1.3 Brian May’s Guitar Playing

Accounts of Brian May’s guitar playing often begin with a technical description of his homemade Red Special guitar and end by noting the range of innovative sounds

differences between ‘Son and Daughter’ and ‘Dead on Time’, one may observe the same juxtaposition of harmonic-oriented material (the oscillating notes and boogie pattern) and the melodic-oriented material (the scale lick).

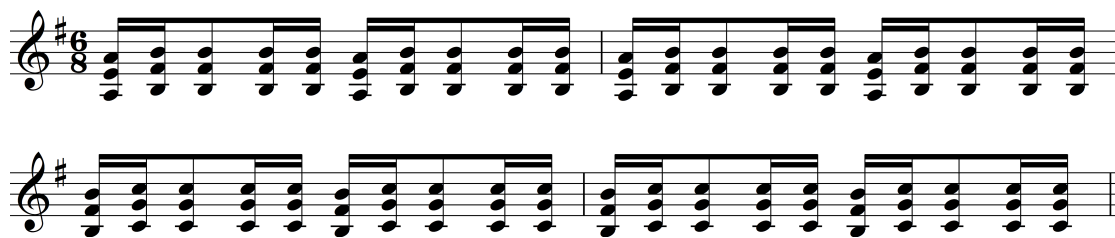
The second category features power chords, more or less exclusively. When the electric rhythm guitars enter in the second chorus of ‘White Queen (As It Began)’, May plays down-strummed chords, outlining the III-VII-i progression. Each chord is left to ring on the guitar after the strum. The pre-chorus and chorus of ‘Brighton Rock’ have much faster harmonic rhythms, but each chord is strummed only once until the final phrase of the chorus. In the second verses of Taylor’s ‘Tenement Funster’ and ‘I’m in Love With My Car’, May plays chords on every downbeat, and lets the chord ring through the bar. And, although there are blues-based licks at the ends of phrases, the choruses of ‘Fat Bottomed Girls’ follow a similar pattern with ringing downbeat chords forming the harmonic accompaniment for the singers. The chord-based playing technique is prominent also in songs featuring May’s rhythm guitar alongside a piano accompaniment. After *Queen II*, this pairing of rhythm guitar power chords and piano became reasonably common, particularly in the ballad-type songs. There are numerous examples of this approach: ‘In the Lap of the Gods...Revisited’, ‘Death on Two Legs’, ‘Spread Your Wings’, ‘We are the Champions’, ‘Bicycle Race’, and ‘Save Me’, amongst others, pit May’s ringing chords in the lower register of the guitar against the gentler sounds of the piano.



Example 5.15. ‘White Man’, Rhythm Guitar, Verse II

The third, fourth, and fifth types of rhythm guitar playing were limited to small subsets of songs. In ‘The Prophet’s Song’ and ‘White Man’ (Example 5.15), May’s rhythm guitar work is best heard as scale-based, but with notes of the riff harmonised a fourth or fifth lower, similar to ‘Smoke on the Water’. Not coincidentally, this type of playing stems from May’s change to drop-D tuning, which produces the open

chord shapes. A fourth approach is heard in several of Taylor’s songs, such as ‘The Loser in the End’ or the bridge of ‘I’m in Love With My Car’. Here, May aligns the chord pattern with a specific rhythmic figure, the latter of which remains constant with the changes in harmony (Example 5.16). And fifthly, by *The Game*, May occasionally played a driving rhythm part of even quavers on the bottom two strings of the guitar, à la the new wave style. ‘Coming Soon’, ‘Rock It (Prime Jive)’, and ‘Need Your Loving Tonight’ offer straightforward examples.



Example 5.16. ‘I’m In Love With My Car’, Rhythm Guitar, Bridge

Separate to the five rhythm categories is an important technique that runs throughout the corpus. In ‘Death on Two Legs’, May doubles the left hand of Mercury’s main piano sequence, in the middle-lower register of the guitar. In textural terms, May moves from the harmonic-rhythm layer to the bass layer of the song. This feature is prominent in many of the scale-based riffs, which are played by May and Deacon on bass guitar an octave lower. Again, ‘Son and Daughter’ is typical, as is the bridge section of ‘Great King Rat’. What is striking, however, about this technique is that May often doubles the left-hand of Mercury’s piano part in songs built on rich harmonic progressions, rather than scale-based riffs. Thus, in the verse of ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’, May follows Mercury and Deacon down the chromatic scale from C to G, as the song modulates from B^b major to E^b major. Other instances of this doubling in piano-based songs include ‘In the Lap of the Gods’, ‘In the Lap of the Gods...Revisited’, ‘We are the Champions’, ‘Mustapha’, ‘Sail Away Sweet Sister’, and ‘Play the Game’, to name a few. The technique was not confined to piano-based progressions or guitar-based riffs either—in ‘Seven Seas of Rhye’, May doubles the ascending bass line, A-B-C-C[#], as the bridge section moves towards its local D major dominant chord; and in the pre-chorus of ‘The Prophet’s Song’, he doubles the ascending chromatic bass line as it also moves towards the dominant.

This latter technique points towards an often unclear distinction between May as a rhythm guitarist and May as a lead guitarist. The doubling of the bass line has the effect of creating a counter-melody in the lower register, which suggests a ‘lead’ guitar approach. The initial point of distinction between lead and rhythm types of playing is register—the subsequent paragraphs focus on the guitar parts played as single notes in the instrument’s middle to upper register, as opposed to the chords, riffs, and other notes in the guitar’s lower register. Further complicating the picture, however, is that within this basic ‘lead’ guitar framework, one can find a variety of arrangement and playing techniques, as well as various combinations of techniques.

While it is possible to simply list all of the traits of May’s guitar playing, one may gain a more nuanced appreciation of his guitar work by establishing further sub-categories. I propose five such types of playing: ‘backing’ guitar arrangement; ‘lead’ guitar arrangement; virtuosic solo guitar; melodic solo guitar; and multi-part melodic guitar. The discussion below will unfold each of these playing types and pinpoint the subtle differences between the categories. This is done with the acknowledgement that some traits cross the different categories—even if there are important differences between ‘My Fairy King’ (type 1) and ‘Killer Queen’ (type 5), it is equally important to note that the guitar arrangements of the two songs share a sonic identity, a point to which I will return at the end of this section.



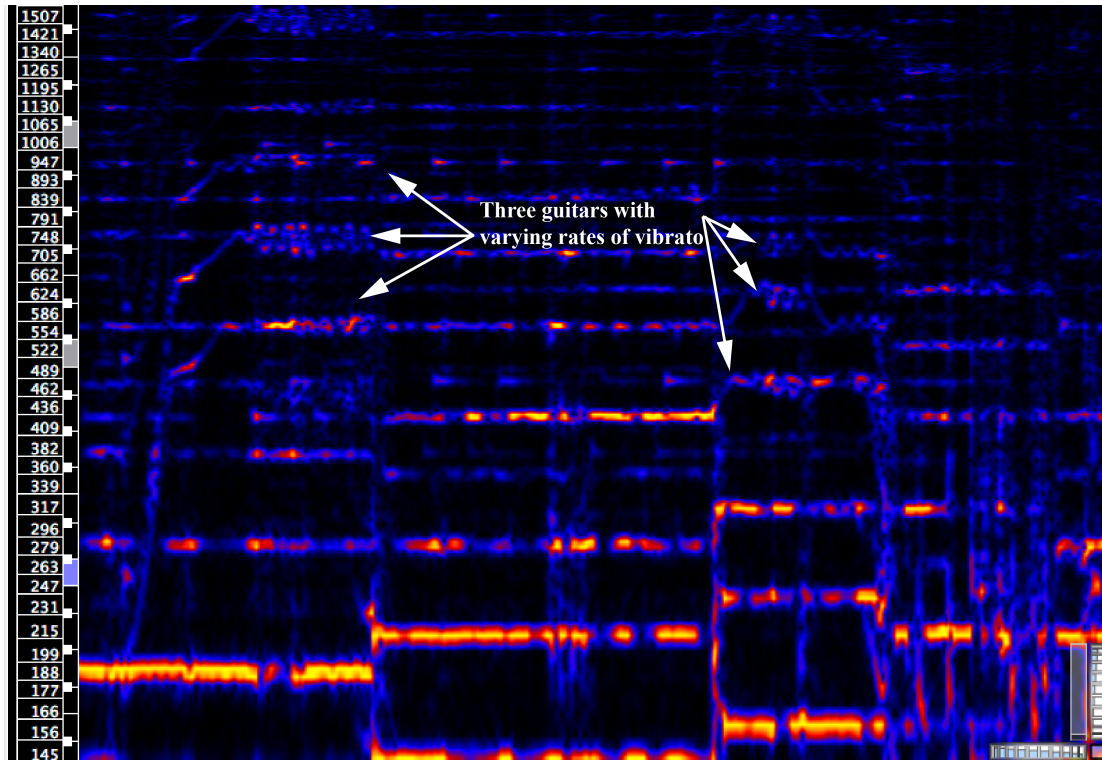
Example 5.17. ‘The Night Comes Down’, Lead Guitar Arrangement, Introduction

‘The Night Comes Down’ presents a good example of a ‘backing’ guitar arrangement. It features three individually recorded guitar lines that comprise the notes of each triad in the harmonic progression. In this instance, the guitars are spaciouly arranged across a tenth (Example 5.17), a voicing structure that would be employed in the introduction of ‘White Queen’ the following year. More common is for the three parts to be arranged in close position, as can be heard in ‘My Fairy King’ or ‘Nevermore’. In other songs, such as ‘Father to Son’, ‘Millionaire Waltz’, or ‘In Only Seven Days’, the arrangement features up to six guitars, although these extra parts are still responsible for providing a harmonic layer to the songs’ textures. This type of guitar

arrangement is defined in part by this textural function, but mostly by May's manner of playing. The guitarist plays the individual lines with a small, consistent vibrato; and, the strings are plucked softly, thereby minimizing the sharp, natural attack of the electric guitar. The overall arrangements, therefore, have a smooth and even sound.

May's 'lead' guitar arrangements follow the same structural principles, but showcase a different approach to articulation. The opening of 'Seven Seas of Rhye' is exemplary. Here, three guitars are layered into a close position G major chord (Example 5.18). May plays each note of the chord, however, with a noticeable string bend that starts a tone below the final pitch; the subdominant chord itself does not arrive, as it were, until well after the onset of the notes. One can also observe from the spectrogram the varying degrees of vibrato, both within and across chords—the G, for example, has much wider vibrato than other notes of the G major chord and subsequent harmonies. Each note of the chord is individually stylised, which may be considered the defining characteristic of the 'lead' guitar arrangements. Indeed, these articulation traits are exactly those noted by Michael Casswell in his instructional DVD on Brian May's lead guitar style (from the *Lick Library* series). Casswell explains that May's vibrato was slow and 'sweet' compared with the rapid techniques employed in metal; further, he suggested it is necessary to 'really eke out those bends' [he demonstrates a slow bend à la 'Seven Seas of Rhye'] to capture May's style.²¹⁶

²¹⁶ Michael Casswell, *Guitar Quick Licks: Mid Tempo Rock, Brian May Style* (Lick Library, 2009). Casswell is a renowned British session guitarist; he also played guitar in the band for the West End Queen musical *We Will Rock You*.



Example 5.18. 'Seven Seas of Rhye', Melodic Range Spectrogram, Introduction

Where arrangements in the previous two categories had harmonic functions, first and foremost, the following playing categories have melodic functions as their foundation. Like other guitarists of the 1960s and 1970s (e.g. Page, Clapton, Hendrix, Blackmore), a number of May's solos comprise fast scale or repeated note passages that move around the guitar along the minor pentatonic and Aeolian scales. The main solo section of 'Brighton Rock' provides a clear model of this approach (Example 5.19). Other representative examples include 'Great King Rat', 'Flick of the Wrist', and 'Modern Times Rock 'n' Roll'. These songs fall easily under the banner of 'virtuosic solo guitar'.

Example 5.19. 'Brighton Rock', Lead Guitar, Instrumental (part II)

In a greater number of lead guitar parts, one can hear stronger melodic qualities. These solos often appear carefully constructed in order to create an identifiable melody, an idea that receives further treatment in Section 6.1.3. The primary features of May's 'melodic solo guitar' parts are the recourse to repetition-and-variation structures and the overall sense of melodic balance. On the first point, solos often unfold an AAB-type pattern, whereby the latter segments of phrases or sections expand upon the earlier material. 'You and I' typifies this approach. The first two bars present an initial ascending idea in a descending sequence; in the third bar, May continues this sequence, but extends the melodic line further upwards into the fourth bar. 'You and I' also highlights the sense of balance inherent in May's melodic solos. The second phrase of the solo section descends in its overall contour (following the overall ascent of the first phrase), and recapitulates the original melodic fragment, thus bringing an element of symmetry to the section. 'Spread Your Wings' and 'Save Me' are close to 'You and I' in their construction.

The solos from ‘Don’t Stop Me Now’ and ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’ adopt these characteristics in more subtle ways. As can be seen in Example 5.20 from ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’, there are individual fragments of melody that appear multiple times through the phrase either identically or with slight variations to match the harmonic progression—these include the arpeggiated figuration, the three-note pattern in the second and sixth bars, the descending sequence figure of the fourth bar, and the ascending scale pattern of the fifth bar. Like ‘You and I’, also, one can note the arch contour that structures the solo on multiple levels. In the opening four bars, the surface melodic gestures rise and fall; these small shapes are couched within an overall ascent towards the high C of the fourth bar, after which the solo makes a gradual descent into the opera section. If this particular solo is more elaborate than other songs, one can still note the shared characteristics with other ‘melodic solo guitar’ parts.

Common-tone (D^b and C[#])

Continuation of chromatic bass line

Example 5.20. ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’, Lead Guitar, Instrumental

The fifth and final category encompasses May’s multi-part melodic guitar work. Compared with the guitar arrangements noted above (types 1 and 2), instances of this

kind bring three separate melodic lines into the one arrangement. 'Killer Queen' is, arguably, the supreme example of this approach, and, indeed, is the song of which May is most proud (Example 5.21).²¹⁷ Three features of this solo are characteristic of May's approach to other multi-part melodies. Firstly, the layering of guitar lines is not immediate; the second and third parts enter after the first four-bar phrase. The delayed introduction of the extra parts varies somewhat, from eight bars in 'Sail Away Sweet Sister' to one bar in 'Long Away'; in the 1930s-style 'Dreamer's Ball', the lead guitar takes the first instrumental solo by itself, with the two other guitars entering for the final 'stomp' chorus. The solo in 'Need Your Loving Tonight' begins with a single lead guitar for six bars; the second and third guitars then double the first guitar for two bars (noticeable in the mix), before playing in thirds in the ninth bar, and then completing the triad in the tenth bar.

²¹⁷ Matt Blackett, 'Renaissance Man', *Guitar Player*, January (2008), <http://www.queenarchives.com/index.php?title=Brian_May_-_01-XX-2008_-_Guitar_Player> (accessed 9 May 2014).

The musical score for 'Killer Queen' lead guitars is presented in three systems. The first system shows the 'Centre' guitar part with a melodic line of eighth notes and slurs. The second system shows the 'Right' and 'Left' guitar parts, with the 'Right' part having a melodic line and the 'Left' part having a melodic line with slurs. The third system shows the continuation of the 'Right' and 'Left' parts, with time signature changes from 12/8 to 6/8 and back to 12/8. The score includes dynamic markings like 'p' and 'f', and time signature changes from 12/8 to 6/8 and back to 12/8.

Example 5.21. 'Killer Queen', Lead Guitars, Instrumental

Secondly, the harmonising occurs in conjunction with either sustained notes or stepwise melodic passages. That this is the case is not surprising, given that both traits facilitate the layering of three parts, compared with, for instance, expansive and leaping melodic lines. Indeed, in 'White Man', the guitar solo is comprised almost entirely of a single descending line of sustained notes, which is passed through two delay units to create a three-part structure. Thus, even though the multiple guitar lines

are frequent in May's solos, it is not necessarily the case that May simply stacks two extra guitars above the main melody. There are certainly instances in which this is the case—for example, 'Need Your Loving Tonight', 'Dreamer's Ball', 'Lazing on a Sunday Afternoon'—but often, one hears the extra guitars coming in and out of the texture to create harmonies at opportune moments, as it were, as is the case in 'Killer Queen'.

Thirdly, 'Killer Queen' draws attention to the changing relationships between the guitar parts. When the second and third guitars enter, they play in counterpoint to the first guitar in a sort of canon-like structure. In the second phrase, the left guitar offers counter-melodic fragments, before the three guitars play together for the final bars of the section. These contrapuntal relationships are prominent in 'Sail Away Sweet Sister', in which the three guitars enter one after the other before coming together in harmony at the end of the first phrase. The second phrase similarly features each line moving independently, before the trio concludes the section together. By comparison, the final instrumental of the Dixieland pastiche, 'Good Company' features a raucous chorus of 'brass' and 'woodwind' instruments (all played on May's guitar), the melodies of which weave in and out of each other's paths, much like the instrumentals of the Temperance Seven's 'Sugar' or 'You're Driving Me Crazy' (the group inspired 'Good Company'). Finally, in 'Keep Yourself Alive', the five guitars are split into a pair and a trio, each of which plays harmonised melody lines; the contrapuntal relationship can be observed, in this instance, between the two sections of guitars.

One may conclude this section by noting the sheer versatility of May's guitar playing, as evident by the five rhythm guitar and five lead guitar archetypes. There are further elements of his playing that have been barely mentioned here: namely, the rhythmic traits of his riff work, and the melodic relationships between the guitar and the voice in Queen's songs. Both ideas are explored further in Chapter 6. For now, one can summarise May's efforts in terms of several compositional strategies and several sonic patterns. In terms of the former, these include: textural contrasts within the rhythm guitar parts; tightly structured and balanced melodic guitar lines; and, varied contrapuntal relationships between three melodic lines in a solo section.

May's prominent sonic patterns include: sustained power chords, doubling the bass guitar line an octave higher; long string bends, and slow and wide vibrato in lead guitar parts; multiple guitar lines arranged in close position.

It is perhaps this last trait that encapsulates both the consistency and variety of May's playing. Arguably, the textural combination of individual guitar lines is the definitive characteristic of May's guitar work. However, as demonstrated above, this combination occurs in many different contexts and with different articulation techniques throughout the corpus. The string-like guitars of 'Father to Son' that pad the verse texture are very different to the intertwining melodic lines of 'Sail Away Sweet Sister', yet both are unmistakably identifiable as May's playing.

5.1.4 Roger Taylor's Drumming

Where other parts (vocal, guitar, piano) were shared amongst band members, Roger Taylor was the sole drummer through Queen's output. It is difficult to sum up his drumming style. He had little interest in the technical possibilities of drumming—he remarked to *Modern Drummer* magazine, 'Every time I see Carmen Appice [of Vanilla Fudge] he's going on about all sorts of amazing things. He might as well be talking about cupcakes'.²¹⁸ Equally, his drumming lacks the sheer variety of grooves and drum patterns that mark Ringo Starr's style in the Beatles. And, his technique was not as minimalist or as subtle as Charlie Watts' (the Rolling Stones). Finally, while Taylor admired Keith Moon (the Who), Mitch Mitchell (the Jimi Hendrix Experience), and, especially, John Bonham (Led Zeppelin), his drumming was neither as virtuosic nor as untamed as his contemporaries.²¹⁹ At the same time, it would be a mistake to label Taylor's drumming 'simple' or 'straightforward'.

What is evident is that he followed, above all, the conventions of rock drumming, all the while borrowing gestures from a variety of stylistic sources including the drummers listed above: the sum of these traits forms Taylor's individual drumming

²¹⁸ Robert Santelli, 'Interview with Roger Taylor', *Modern Drummer*, October (1984), <http://www.queenarchives.com/archivesnew/index.php?title=Roger_Taylor_-_10-XX-1984_-_Modern_Drummer> (accessed 24 April 2014).

²¹⁹ Adam Jones, 'The Power and the Glory', *Rhythm Magazine*, August (2002), <http://www.queenarchives.com/index.php?title=Roger_Taylor_-_09-XX-2002_-_Rhythm_Magazine> (accessed 21 March 2014).

the syncopated snare punctuates the guitar riff. In the chorus of ‘Sweet Lady’, the snare pattern aligns with the bass guitar: here, the snare hits are syncopated, while the kick drum and ride cymbal mark out each quaver beat in the 3/4 bar. ‘Brighton Rock’ is arguably Taylor’s most spectacular drum track, and appears to merge various techniques listed above—he plays a dotted snare pair on the backbeats, with extra snare hits interspersed on the second semiquaver of beats one and three, all at the tempo of 140 bpm (Example 5.23).



Example 5.23. ‘Brighton Rock’, Drums, Verse

With respect to Taylor’s work on the various cymbals of the kit, he predominantly plays quaver notes on the closed hi-hat, except for the backbeats, on which he lifts the hi-hat slightly. This gives extra weight to the backbeat in conjunction with snare drum. The technique is not immediately noticeable from the recordings, but can be heard through close listening. It is prominent, however, in the introduction to ‘Liar’, which seems ironic given the track’s mediocre drum production. Although the snare sound lacks any resonance, the syncopated hits shoot out of the mix when combined with the open hi-hat. On a handful of tracks, Taylor plays with an open hi-hat, either on every crotchet beat (‘Keep Yourself Alive’, ‘Now I’m Here’ ‘You’re My Best Friend’), or on every quaver beat (‘Modern Times Rock ‘n’ Roll’, ‘The Prophet’s Song’, ‘White Man’). The ride cymbal appears infrequently in Taylor’s drumming—the notable occurrences are ‘In the Lap of the Gods...Revisited’, and the choruses of ‘Jesus’ and ‘We are the Champions’. These songs are in 3/4, 12/8, and 6/8, respectively, thus giving each a jazz-waltz flavour. Taylor plays the bell of the ride cymbal on even fewer occasions, notably in sections of ‘Brighton Rock’ and ‘Son and Daughter’.

Finally, Taylor and Mercury shared a desire to use cymbals widely in songs, as a means of both creating a large sound and punctuating phrases. Taylor told *Modern Drummer*, ‘It seems to be very fashionable these days to say, “Oh, I didn’t use any

cymbals on this record”. I love cymbals....They provide wonderful dynamics’.²²¹ Taylor’s fondness for crash cymbals, in particular, is plain to hear across the corpus. Sectional divisions are often marked by a crash cymbal on the downbeat; it is not uncommon also for the crash cymbal to mark every bar in a phrase (ranging from ‘Father to Son’ to ‘Let Me Entertain You’ to ‘Sail Away Sweet Sister’) or even every beat (‘Stone Cold Crazy’, ‘Sweet Lady’).



Example 5.24. ‘My Fairy King’, Drums, Bridge

These features all place Taylor’s work squarely in the framework of conventional rock drumming. On several occasions, however, Taylor explores different types of grooves. The most striking of these departures may be termed a rolling tom groove. This drum beat first appears in the bridge of ‘My Fairy King’ (Example 5.24). In a bar of 4/4 Taylor plays a stomp beat on the kick and snare drums, with floor tom semiquavers subdividing each beat. There are near-identical grooves in ‘The March of the Black Queen’ and ‘Flick of the Wrist’; although Taylor does not use the snare drum in these latter examples, he marks out semiquavers on the floor tom. ‘Liar’ is comparatively sedate in that Taylor plays the high floor tom on the crotchet beats in conjunction with the kick drum (i.e. a stomp pattern), with floor tom quavers on the offbeats. ‘Ogre Battle’ is different again insofar as the tom semiquavers are phrased in conjunction with the guitar riff (Example 5.25). In the introductory instrumental, Taylor plays the low rack tom on the accented semiquavers, before changing to alternating rack and floor tom semiquavers; in the ‘battle’ section, the tom drum pattern reinforces the new march-like guitar riff. In a range of other songs, such as ‘In the Lap of the Gods’, ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’, ‘Millionaire Waltz’, and ‘Play the Game’, Taylor accentuates the rhythms of other instrumental or vocal parts on the floor tom, thus imitating the role of an orchestral timpanist. These characteristics are explored further in the context of Queen’s relationship with glam rock and progressive rock in Sections 6.2.2 and 6.2.3.

²²¹ Santelli, ‘Interview with Roger Taylor’.

Example 5.25. 'Ogre Battle', Rhythm Guitar and Drums, Introduction

Example 5.26. 'Spread Your Wings', Drums, Chorus

Example 5.27. 'Long Away', Drums, Final Chorus

The other side of Taylor's drumming concerns his fills. Generally, Taylor's fills follow rock conventions, insofar as he moves around the kit (often from the higher to lower drums), or adds an element of syncopation with an accented offbeat. The fill in the chorus of 'Spread Your Wings' is an example of the first type (Example 5.26); the fills moving into the coda of 'Long Away' present examples of both (Example 5.27). Some fills clearly reference earlier popular styles—the snare pick-ups of 'Bring Back That Leroy Brown' recall the introductory hits of Bill Haley's 'Rock Around The Clock' or Elvis Presley's 'Blue Suede Shoes'; on the other hand, the one-bar snare

triplets of ‘Crazy Little Thing Called Love’ pay homage to Presley’s ‘Hound Dog’. As these two Queen examples show, fills range from one beat to one bar in length, although the majority occupies the third and fourth beats of 4/4 bars.

There are, however, three specific fills that appear with some frequency through Taylor’s parts. The first has Taylor moving through the kit in triplet semiquavers, as can be heard in ‘The Night Comes Down’, ‘White Queen’, ‘Now I’m Here’, and ‘Long Away’ (Example 5.27). This fill, from a rhythmic perspective, is rife through early rock drumming from the Beatles ‘I Saw Her Standing There’ to the Who’s ‘My Generation’, Hendrix’ ‘Hey Joe’ to Led Zeppelin’s ‘Dazed and Confused’ and ‘Good Times Bad Times’. A second common fill, related to first, compresses the movement through the kit to the duration of one crotchet beat, which is composed of three triplet semiquavers or two semiquavers and a single hit on the subsequent quaver. The semiquavers tend to roll downwards, with the hit being heard on the floor tom and/or kick drum. This fill is often placed on the third or fourth beat of a bar, thus acting as a musical full stop on the preceding phrase; important here is that the floor tom and/or kick drum hit halts the prior momentum of the semiquaver motion. Again, this fill appears in ‘The Night Comes Down’, as well as through ‘Brighton Rock’ (Example 5.28), ‘Death on Two Legs’, ‘Sweet Lady’, and ‘Bicycle Race’, with variations (often just the tom or kick drum hit) heard in ‘Keep Yourself Alive’, ‘Seven Seas of Rhye’, ‘I’m in Love with My Car’, and ‘The Prophet’s Song’.



Example 5.28. ‘Brighton Rock’, Drums, Chorus



Example 5.29. ‘White Man’, Drums, Verse II

Taylor’s third trademark fill was distinguished by its minimal movement around the drum kit. In the second verse of ‘White Man’, there is a two-bar fill played almost entirely on the floor tom; only the snare pick-up on the final offbeat of the bar provides significant pitch-based variety (Example 5.29). Taylor plays the fill with a slight crescendo, volume-wise, and a more obvious crescendo, rhythm-wise, with the

surface activity increasing into the second bar. Perhaps, what is most striking about this fill and its related appearances in other songs (e.g. ‘Somebody to Love’, ‘Save Me’, ‘Keep Yourself Alive’, ‘We are the Champions’) is that it is both repetitive and it emphasises the lowest register of the drum kit, with the clarity and punch of the snare and cymbals reserved for either the upbeat or the subsequent bar. There are dynamics at play, then, not only in terms of articulation, but also in terms of the register of the kit, moving from low to high across the bar line. Although this type of fill was not unheard of in 1970s hard rock (e.g. Aerosmith’s ‘Dream On’), its stylistic origins paint a richer picture of Taylor’s drumming style, and thus I will return to this matter in Section 6.2.4.

Finally, it is worth considering how Taylor’s drum grooves fit in the context of individual songs. Variations in Taylor’s drumming correlate with songs’ formal divisions and dynamics. Thus, in ‘We are the Champions’ or ‘Save Me’, the chorus sections are marked by greater kick drum activity and more liberal use of crash cymbals, in comparison with the verse sections. In multi-sectional songs without a clear structural hierarchy, Taylor uses different drum grooves to delineate the sections, without necessarily contributing to overall dynamic levels. In ‘Liar’, for instance, one can identify six contrasting grooves through the song, ranging from a displaced snare pattern, to a standard rock beat, to several ‘stomp’ beats. Each one aligns with a thematic segment of the song, but there is little sense that the grooves provide shape in relation to one another, so much as they provide textural and rhythmic contrasts between sections. Much the same idea is applicable in ‘Flick of the Wrist’ in which Taylor shifts from a half-time pattern, to a tom groove, to a standard rock pattern, to a four-snare groove, as the song moves quickly through its different sections.

Despite this predilection for seemingly random changes in drum groove, one common transition is from a four-snare pattern into a standard rock groove, which effects a change in intensity: the relenting snare drum gives way to the comparatively relaxed groove of the standard rock beat. Examples of this change can be heard in ‘Great King Rat’, ‘My Fairy King’, ‘Brighton Rock’, ‘The Prophet’s Song’, and ‘The Fairy Feller’s Master-Stroke’. On the opposing side of this equation, by the late 1970s, the variety of grooves within songs had decreased significantly, such that several songs—

'Fun It', 'More of That Jazz', 'Don't Stop Me Now', 'Another One Bites The Dust', 'Rock It (Prime Jive)', and 'Coming Soon'—maintained a single drum groove throughout. This points towards a slightly different approach to drumming, more in line with the new wave style coming into vogue at that time; such a change in drumming technique informs aspects of Queen's stylistic development, discussed in Section 6.3.3.

5.1.5 The Keyboardists

Freddie Mercury and Brian May both played piano on Queen's songs. Mercury was the primary keyboardist, playing on 41 songs; May played on five tracks, all his own compositions. Although Mercury was a more technically accomplished pianist, the fundamental practices of both were similar—indeed, in a live performance of 'Save Me' from Montréal in 1981, May begins by accompanying Mercury on piano, before switching to the electric guitar for the chorus; at this point, Mercury takes over keyboard duties, with no noticeable difference in style.²²²

The standard Queen piano accompaniment contains a mix of two- or three-note block chords and arpeggiated or broken chord figuration in the right hand. The chords typically appear on the downbeats or every crotchet beat of the bar; the arpeggiated patterns unfold on the quaver beats. The right hand mostly sits in the register around middle C or in the octave immediately above. The left-hand part typically contains the bass note of the chord progression, played as a single note or in octaves. The left hand rhythms are static compared with the right hand, with notes played either every crotchet beat or in line with the harmonic rhythm; occasionally, the left hand features a dotted rhythmic pattern (i.e. dotted crotchet plus a quaver). In terms of articulation, the piano parts are often played with the sustain pedal. Both pianists tend to play with a purposeful, but light touch; accents are felt predominantly on the downbeats. Mercury's piano accompaniment in the verse section of 'You Take My Breath Away' outlines these traits in a straightforward manner (Example 5.30).

²²² See Saul Swimmer, *Queen: Rock Montreal and Live Aid* (Eagle Rock Entertainment, 2007).

Example 5.30. ‘You Take My Breath Away’, Piano, Verse

May’s piano parts remain within this playing framework. Mercury, on the other hand, often infuses his parts with various embellishing gestures. One such gesture is to shift between the middle and higher registers of the piano in the right hand, moving from the octave directly above middle C to a higher octave. Example 5.30 offers a subtle example of this trait in the fourth bar of the excerpt with the octave leap to the E^b note. The piano motif from the verse of ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’ offers a more explicit example: on beats one and two of most bars, Mercury plays quaver broken chords in the piano’s middle register; on beats three and four, he plays higher octaves on the crotchet beats (Example 5.31). Other variations on this trait can be heard in ‘My Fairy King’, ‘Nevermore’, ‘Lily of the Valley’, ‘In the Lap of the Gods...Revisited’, ‘We are the Champions’, and ‘Don’t Stop Me Now’. The latter examples differ from ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’ in that the high register playing is ornamental and appears infrequently, as opposed to having a motivic role.

Example 5.31. ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’, Piano, Verse

Another common gesture of Mercury’s is to add weight to the lower end of the keyboard with octave scale runs. This trait is much less frequent in the group’s output;

however, it does appear in a core group of songs between 1974 and 1976. Its origins can be located in the primary bass guitar and piano riff of ‘The Fairy Feller’s Master-Stroke’—instead of the remaining on the root of the chord, Deacon and Mercury double each other through a syncopated arpeggio figure. In ‘The March of the Black Queen’, from *Queen II* as well, Mercury plays a triplet figure in the left hand (the right hand is silent). The two-bar figure runs sequentially down the F major scale, before turning back towards the dominant note in the second bar (Example 5.32). An almost identical figure marks the transition out of the hard rock section of ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’ (Example 5.33); here, the figure is ascending and concludes with an arpeggiated B^b major chord.



Example 5.32. ‘The March of the Black Queen’, Piano, Instrumental II

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Example 5.33. ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’, Piano, Hard Rock Section

‘Millionaire Waltz’, written by Mercury after ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’, reprises the gesture twice within the song. There are similarities with preceding examples in terms of the melodic contours and the structural role of the gesture. Left-hand octaves operate as a transitory gesture leading into the 12/8 section; Mercury plays a stepwise figure, before settling into quaver octaves on the root of the chord (Example 5.34). At the end of the song, Mercury provides a short flourish around the dominant chord before the song’s final perfect cadence (Example 5.35). This gesture appeared to influence May’s playing—in ‘Teo Torriatte’, he concludes each verse with a descending minor scale in the left hand under dominant chords in the right hand. While less striking than the octaves, it still draws attention to the lower register of the piano.

Example 5.34. 'Millionaire Waltz', Piano, Bridge III

Example 5.35. 'Millionaire Waltz', Piano, Coda

A final important point regarding Mercury's playing is his ability to imitate other popular styles, namely from the pre-World War II repertoire, such as music hall and vaudeville. While these styles do not necessarily effect a change in the structural elements of Mercury's playing (i.e. broken chords, left-hand bass notes, etc.), they result in a comparatively detached and lively manner of articulation, often without the sustain pedal that marks the ballad-oriented playing. Thus, in 'Killer Queen' and 'Seaside Rendezvous', for instance, much of the piano part is played either staccato or with lightly detached articulation. These stylistic imitations also necessitate a slightly more percussive touch, often to bring out syncopated rhythms. Although, one finds a number of legato passages through 'Good Old Fashioned Lover Boy', the chorus piano part is notable for the detached playing and light accents on the anticipated chords, in a similar vein to Paul McCartney's playing in 'Martha My Dear'. Finally, the older popular styles often call for decorative gestures in the right hand, a feature that rarely occurs elsewhere in Queen's output. The introductory phrases from 'Seaside Rendezvous' and 'Lazing on a Sunday Afternoon' (Example 5.36) offer brief chromatic embellishments amid short scale and arpeggiated figures, while in

‘Bring Back That Leroy Brown’, one can hear a both types of figures leading out of the instrumental and bridge sections.



Example 5.36. ‘Lazing on a Sunday Afternoon’, Piano, Introduction

As well as these popular styles, one also finds Mercury’s imitation of classical music techniques in a number of songs written in Queen’s early career. Because this betrays a link to the progressive rock style, I will outline these elements of Mercury’s piano work in Section 6.2.3. The overriding impression, however, of Mercury and May’s piano playing is that was relatively straightforward and plain. Arguably, this came out of necessity—with May providing rich instrumental textures and embellishments through his guitar playing, there was little need for piano flourishes. It is this general sense of simplicity that marks their piano playing, and provides a point of comparison with other pianists of the 1970s, as is explored further in Section 6.2.4.

5.1.6 John Deacon’s Bass Guitar Playing

John Deacon was the self-proclaimed ‘quiet’ member of Queen.²²³ He gave very few interviews over the years, and talked very little about his bass guitar playing and influences. It has been suggested by the other band members that he was consistently in tune with the latest pop music trends, but this observation usually concerns his songwriting, rather than instrumental abilities.²²⁴ Deacon, for the most part, followed the conventions of pop-rock bass guitar playing, with the exception of a few subtle gestures.

Deacon’s playing techniques vary according to the textural setup of the song. The verse of ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’ typifies his approach in songs with a consistent piano texture. Here, Deacon doubles, an octave lower, the left hand of the piano. The notes

²²³ Jim Ladd, ‘Interview with John Deacon’, *Innerview* (1977), <http://www.queenarchives.com/archivesnew/index.php?title=John_Deacon_-_XX-XX-1977_-Innerview> (accessed 14 May 2014).

²²⁴ O’Casey, *Queen*.

themselves are not always the roots of chords, rather following the bass line of the chord progression. In anticipation of May's ringing power chords that enter in the second verse, Deacon tends to play one note per chord, with the warm and rich sound of his bass guitar sustained through the bar.

In songs with an acoustic guitar-based texture, or a varied rhythm guitar pattern (i.e. not exclusively power chords or riffs), Deacon provides much of the rhythmic and harmonic foundation—his bass lines in these contexts tend to be slightly more active. Thus in 'Keep Yourself Alive', Deacon plays one note each crotchet beat and although his bass line is primarily structured around the roots of each chord, he adds passing notes to smooth the movement from one chord to the next. Similarly, he moves by step in the chorus, thus producing inverted chords at certain points. In other songs, such as 'Who Needs You' or 'Some Day One Day', the increased activity usually takes the form of a rhythmic motif, such as grouping notes into 3+5 quavers. Finally, in songs with a riff, Deacon doubles the rhythm guitar lines, again an octave lower, or takes responsibility for playing the riff himself. 'The Prophet's Song', 'White Man', 'Dead on Time', 'Stone Cold Crazy', 'Another One Bites the Dust', and 'Dragon Attack' typify this third manner of playing. One can certainly find variations on this template—in the bridge of 'Stone Cold Crazy', Deacon continues to play even quaver bass notes under May's power chords—however, this three-pronged approach encapsulates much of Deacon's work.



Example 5.37. 'The Night Comes Down', Bass Guitar, Introduction²²⁵

Despite these variations in technique, each type of playing is united insofar as it clearly provides the fundamental bass layer of each song. Within this framework, it is possible to identify several gestures that add depth to Deacon's role, insofar as his playing takes on counter-melodic qualities. Firstly, 'The Night Comes Down' presents an early example of Deacon exploring the higher register of his instrument (above concert C3). The bass guitar sits mostly in the middle register (e.g. C2 to C3), until the phrase-ending dominant (approached through an unusual I-VII progression),

²²⁵ The bass guitar sounds an octave lower than is written in the transcriptions.

under which Deacon ascends an octave from A2 to A3 (Example 5.37). One finds similar forays into a higher register in the first bridge of ‘Father to Son’—Deacon begins phrases by playing an F3, followed by an arpeggiated figure down an octave. In this case, the texture is filled by trebly guitars, reverb-laden backing vocals in their upper register, and a hi-hat groove; in other words, Deacon’s bass line fits with the high-pitched nature of the section. Deacon shifts back into the lower register of the bass guitar in the subsequent section, in conjunction with the heavy guitar riffs.

This practice of contrasting lower and higher registers of the bass guitar runs through Queen’s songs. Similar to ‘The Night Comes Down’, the register changes are often achieved through octave leaps. In the bridge of ‘Somebody to Love’, these leaps are reinforced by Taylor and May, both of whom imitate the bassist’s rhythm. Other examples are closer to ‘Father to Son’, in that the octave changes help to shape the phrases and sections. Thus, in ‘Play the Game’, Deacon begins in the upper register, alongside Mercury’s right-hand piano accompaniment, before dropping to middle and lower registers when the drums and backing vocals enter. In ‘Jealousy’, Deacon’s bass line has the opposite trajectory, leaping at the end of the verse section up to B^b3; the octave jump marks both the striking minor dominant chord and the apex of Mercury’s vocal melody.

Example 5.38. ‘Teo Torriatte’, Piano/Harmonium and Bass Guitar, Verse II

A second set of counter-melodic gestures includes scale and arpeggio figures, instead of a regular bass line. In the second verse of ‘Teo Torriatte’ (Example 5.38), Deacon plays around May’s steady piano chords—one hears arpeggios of the tonic triad; sustained notes on different chordal tones, thus producing inverted forms of the basic chord progression; and, he embellishes these sustained notes with turn figures. The sense of a counter-melody is enhanced in this case through the surface rhythms of Deacon’s bass guitar playing. His bass line appears to unfold on its own rhythmic terms as opposed to following specific harmonic or melodic cues.

In a similar counter-melodic vein, Deacon also infuses his bass lines with scale passages. The most pronounced examples are found at opposite ends of the corpus. Leading into the structural climax of ‘Liar’, Deacon plays a four-note riff in a high register against a lament-style guitar progression; he then marches, in even crotchets, down an E Aeolian scale towards the local dominant, B. When doubled by May on the electric guitar, the scale has a menacing quality. By comparison, Deacon’s descent through a B^b major scale in the bridge of ‘Crazy Little Thing Called Love’ has a breezy quality; here, the stepwise movement offers a subtle contrast to the arpeggiated bass line that predominates through the song. The same scalar movement is evident in

another pastiche of Queen's—'Bring Back That Leroy Brown'—while elsewhere, the scale runs form brief points of counter-melodic interest between phrases, as can be heard in 'Doin' All Right', 'Some Day, One Day', 'Killer Queen', 'You and I', 'My Melancholy Blues', and 'Jealousy'.

Deacon's third type of counter-melodic gestures involves variations in articulation, namely contrasting legato and staccato passages in close succession. Often, this gesture is employed in conjunction with the other two gestures: thus, in 'Teo Torriatte', Deacon's arpeggiated figures are played with staccato articulation and in the instrument's high register. Another example of this feature, 'We are the Champions' is considered in Section 6.2.4, with respect to the stylistic influences on Deacon. Examples of these counter-melodic gestures can be found in songs either with a strong piano or acoustic guitar accompaniment—in other words, when another instrument is providing the rhythmic impetus, with or without the drums. Several songs with lively, arpeggiated bass lines actually featured Deacon himself recording the rhythm instruments—guitars on 'Misfire', electric keyboard on 'You're My Best Friend'. Although the recording processes for these songs are not documented, one suspects Deacon may have laid down the guitar and keyboard tracks first; with the song and textural structure in place, he may have felt free to experiment with the bass line.

Outside of these examples, the counter-melodic gestures tend to be confined to certain parts of the song, often the introductory or verse sections, with the more straightforward bass guitar techniques underpinning the chorus sections. 'Teo Torriatte' exemplifies this trend. It would seem that such an example encapsulates why Deacon's playing may be considered a less important component of the group's output—the variations and embellishments are limited, which, perhaps, dulls any sense of interesting or striking bass lines. Whether one casts this observation in a positive or negative line is a matter of personal preference; nonetheless, the subtle variations in Deacon's bass guitar provide a degree of character to his playing alongside the conventional techniques, and must be regarded as important ingredients in the overall makeup of Queen's idiolect.

5.2 Instrumentation and Texture

This section overlaps considerably with the analysis of the sound-box and the performance style of each band member. Thus, the primary aims here are documenting the instrumentation, identifying common combinations of instruments, and examining how and where changes of instrumentation occur in Queen's songs.

5.2.1 Textural Foundations and Instrumentation

Perhaps the most notable aspect of Queen's instrumentation is what did not appear through the 1970s. The group famously displayed a 'No Synthesizers' tag on its album covers. This was intended to remind or notify audiences that the variety of sounds on the records was produced entirely on 'traditional' rock instruments.²²⁶ When an Oberheim OB-X finally appears on 'Play the Game' from *The Game*, its presence is somewhat crude—overlapping, descending glissandi open the song, and in the bridge the same sounds are employed in counterpoint to the guitar part. Other common instruments missing from Queen's lineup include string sections (compared with Elton John, Electric Light Orchestra) and a saxophone (Bruce Springsteen, the Rolling Stones, David Bowie). A Hammond organ appears very briefly in 'Liar' and 'Now I'm Here', but it is low in the mix and has little impact on the overall soundscape, compared with its use in the hands of Jon Lord (Deep Purple) or John Paul Jones (Led Zeppelin). Finally, unlike the Beatles and other 1960s artists, there is no exploration of unusual or 'foreign' instruments, such as the piccolo trumpet or sitar, in Queen's songs.

That said, different types of rock instruments appear on isolated occasions. These auxiliary instruments include a honky-tonk piano in 'Killer Queen' and 'Seaside Rendezvous'; a twelve-string guitar in 'Long Away', and ukuleles in 'Bring Back That Leroy Brown' and 'Good Company'; a harmonium in 'Teo Torriatte', and a Wurlitzer electric piano in 'You're My Best Friend'; and, timbales in 'Get Down Make Love', Syndrum pads in 'Fun It', and maracas and a cowbell in 'Who Needs You'. These extra instruments often reference wider musical styles, such as Baroque

²²⁶ See Simon Zagorski-Thomas, 'The stadium in your bedroom: functional staging, authenticity and the audience-led aesthetic in record production', *Popular Music* 29/2 (2010), 259.

pop ('Killer Queen'), vaudeville ('Seaside Rendezvous'), Dixieland ('Good Company'), and 1960s folk rock ('Long Away').

Overall, the textures of Queen's songs are best understood in terms of particular instrumental foundations, above which other instruments and voices are added. There are six common textural foundations. The most common comprises two overdriven electric guitars playing rhythm parts, alongside the bass guitar and drums. This textural combination underpins a third of the songs in the corpus, with a particular presence on *Queen*, and evenly distributed thereafter. 'Son and Daughter' is a standard example of this combination from the first album, and 'Coming Soon' is a standard example from the final album of this corpus. On several occasions, such as 'Sweet Lady' and 'Ogre Battle', May plays three rhythm guitar parts to bulk up the songs' textures.

The second most common instrumental combination features the twin rhythm guitars, bass, and drums, along with a piano. This texture is typical of Queen's rock ballads, such as 'We are the Champions', 'Sail Away Sweet Sister', and 'Save Me', although, it also marks several of the group's early hard rock songs, notably 'Seven Seas of Rhye'. Related to this is the third common textural setup, which abandons the rhythm guitar parts, and gives primacy to the piano, bass guitar and drums; 'Jealousy' is a prime example of this texture. The fourth common texture may be considered a further variation insofar as the full drum kit is removed from the mix. It remains either completely absent, as is the case in 'You Take My Breath Away', or provides brief points of decoration through cymbal or snare hits, as is the case in 'Lily of the Valley'. The fifth common instrumental texture substitutes the acoustic guitar for the piano and/or electric guitar, to go with the bass guitar and drums; 'The Night Comes Down', 'She Makes Me', and 'Crazy Little Thing Called Love' are all good examples of this textural foundation.

The sixth instrumental structure appears later in the 1970s, which is not surprising given its roots in funk and disco styles. In a number of songs, the accompaniment is carried predominantly by the bass guitar and drums, the former intimating the harmonic content, the latter providing the rhythmic structure. 'Another One Bites the Dust' is undoubtedly the most famous example of this approach; other examples

include 'Fun It', 'Dragon Attack', and the opening segment of 'Don't Try Suicide'. Although much less common than the other textural combinations, this particular configuration of instruments is important because it highlights the changing styles of Queen's songs.

A variety of instruments is added to these textural foundations, also with a great degree of regularity. To start with two less obvious examples, extra crash cymbals are frequently overdubbed into mix, particularly in the climactic sections of songs. The final chorus of 'The Prophet's Song' provides a noticeable example of this feature, as do the instrumental sections of 'White Queen'. Secondly, an acoustic guitar is sometimes added behind the piano or rhythm guitar accompaniment; 'Spread Your Wings', 'Save Me' and 'In Only Seven Days' are instances of the former, 'Need Your Loving Tonight' is an instance of the latter. In both cases, the extra cymbals and/or acoustic guitar add some depth to the texture and little else.

The most common textural embellishments revolve around vocal parts, and the lead and harmonised guitar arrangements. With the exception of 'Procession' and 'God Save the Queen', every song in the corpus features a lead vocal track. For very small segments of some songs, a second lead vocal is added, often harmonising the primary vocal a third higher. This feature may be considered an extra lead vocal, as opposed to a backing vocal, given the added voice tends to be the same timbre as the existing voice. That is, Freddie Mercury harmonises his lead vocal in 'Great King Rat' and 'My Fairy King', while Taylor sings two lines a third apart in 'Fun It' and 'Fight From the Inside'. For the backing vocal arrangements, the setup is highly standardised. The texture features a single three- or four-part arrangement; or, a four-part arrangement divided into smaller segments, with each segment placed in a different part of the sound-box. As noted in Section 4.5, several songs feature two three- or four-part arrangements, with each contributing different vocal content. What is important in these instances is that these seemingly extravagant arrangements do not appear out of place. The construction of both the vocal sections in these songs is the same and thus, fundamentally, there is a sense of textural enrichment rather than altering the overall sound-world.

As noted in Section 5.1.3, May's guitar arrangements can be divided according to their 'lead' or 'backing' style of playing technique. In either case, it is rare for a song to feature a three-part arrangement in both playing styles. More common is a three-part arrangement of one particular nature; these can be found across all the textural foundations. Thus, in 'She Makes Me', the three-part 'backing' guitars sit above an acoustic guitar accompaniment; three 'lead' guitars sit above acoustic guitars also in 'Dreamer's Ball'. Perhaps, the only trend to emerge in this respect is that the rhythm guitar-based songs tend to feature a three-part 'lead' arrangement, as can be heard clearly in 'Seven Seas of Rhye' or 'Brighton Rock', with piano-based songs more often featuring 'backing' style arrangements, as heard in 'Love of My Life' or 'Nevermore'. This pattern only holds to a certain extent, however, with 'White Queen' ('backing' guitars plus rhythm guitars) and 'Killer Queen' ('lead' guitars plus piano) offering exceptions.

The other common addition in this respect is a single lead guitar. The lead guitar appears in instrumental sections regardless of the textural setup; it is predominantly in songs with twin rhythm guitars that this extra lead guitar enters in vocal sections also, as can be heard in the second verses of 'White Man', 'Fat Bottomed Girls', and 'Dead on Time', and the second chorus of 'It's Late'. Songs with a lead guitar plus a 'backing' guitar arrangement are rare—'Good Old Fashioned Lover Boy', 'You Take My Breath Away', and 'Love of My Life' are notable instances—which likely reflects the fact that the extra instrumental layers produce increasingly dense textures. In a similar vein, the guitar arrangements rarely exceed three parts, although some instances can be found in which two three-part arrangements are layered on top of each other ('Millionaire Waltz'), or placed on opposite sides of the sound-box ('Misfire'), thus ensuring a degree of textural delineation.

In terms of a complete textural setup, Queen's rich instrumental layering does have its limits. Although it is common to find an instance of each textural component within a song, it is uncommon to find everything together in one place. The textural embellishments are usually restricted to one 'lead' part (vocal or guitar) and one 'backing' part (vocal or guitar), with the section of the song dictating the particular configuration. 'White Queen' offers a good demonstration of how this approach plays out. The start of the instrumental bridge features a lead acoustic guitar, accompanied

by the two acoustic rhythm guitars, bass, drums, and a vocal arrangement. In the second part of this section, rhythm guitars take over the accompaniment role and electric guitars fill both the 'lead' and 'backing' parts of the texture; when the lead vocal enters, the lead guitar remains, but the backing guitars are replaced by a backing vocal arrangement. The final chorus of 'Killer Queen' is notable for its incorporation of a four-part vocal arrangement, three-part guitar arrangement, and a lead vocal; the absence of rhythm guitars leaves space for these parts.

The textural setups of Queen's songs can thus be understood in terms of a series of sonic patterns, which pertain to both the accompanying foundations (one of six types), as well as the individual embellishments. If there is no precise textural construction that defines Queen's output, then it is easy to point to a number of regulated ingredients, which are used on a consistent basis, and which give the group's songs a distinct sonic flavour.

5.2.2 Textural Changes

It is common for Queen to employ multiple contrasting textures within individual songs. There are four primary ways in which Queen changes texture within a song. Firstly, a number of the textural changes can be explained in terms of formal patterning, with changes in instrumentation occurring in specific sections. These changes create a textural hierarchy that aligns with the song structure in the following (low-high) order: first verse-second verse-chorus. 'Save Me' is typical of this approach—the first verse contains piano, bass guitar, and lead vocal; the chorus introduces the drums, rhythm guitars, and a vocal arrangement. The second verse removes the rhythm guitars in favour of alternating vocal and guitar arrangements, before the chorus texture returns. The hierarchy is thus created through two techniques: the introduction of the rhythm guitars in the chorus, and the presence of the drums in the second verse section, in an implicit comparison with the first verse section. Although the exact instrumentation differs, elements of this textural pattern are consistent across a number of songs. 'It's Late', 'Sail Away Sweet Sister', 'We are the Champions', 'White Man', 'Dreamer's Ball' and 'Good Company', for instance, all replicate the general pattern of 'Save Me'. 'Fat Bottomed Girls' replicates the contrasting absence and presence of the drums in the verse and chorus

sections. 'In the Lap of the Gods...Revisited' and 'You and I' have drums from the outset, but introduce rhythm guitars after the first verse. In 'Teo Torriatte', the same hierarchy is in place, but with the textural high point delayed until the bridge section.

The second type of textural change is also predicated on formal regularity, but with only adjustments to the embellishing strands of the song's texture. In 'Love of My Life', the backing vocals enter in the second verse; a lead guitar is introduced in the bridge section. The piano and bass guitar, however, are constant throughout. The sense of textural hierarchy is thus diminished in favour of textural inflections. Other songs that follow this type of pattern include 'Son and Daughter', 'Killer Queen', 'Seaside Rendezvous', 'You Take My Breath Away', 'Who Needs You', 'Somebody to Love', 'Leaving Home Ain't Easy', 'Dead on Time', 'Long Away', 'Sweet Lady', and 'If You Can't Beat Them'.

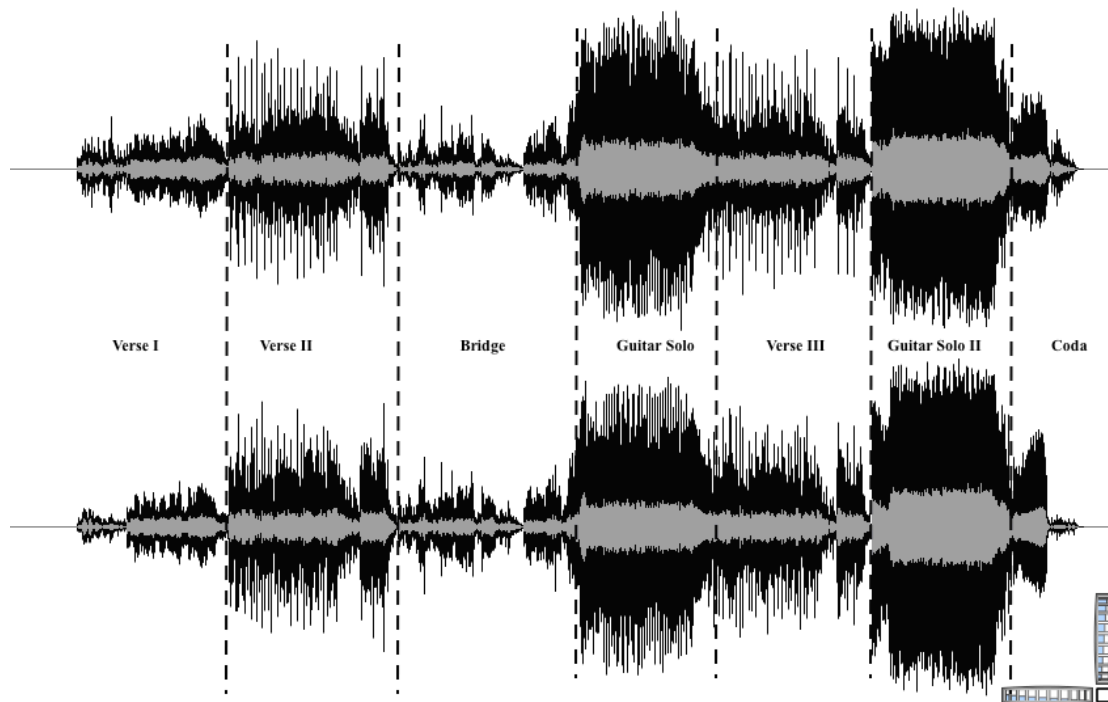
The third type of textural change is essentially a variation on this pattern. It involves a consistent foundation texture and variations in embellishments, but with an even further reduced sense of sectional hierarchy. In 'Misfire', for instance, the verses feature a guitar arrangement over the acoustic guitar accompaniment; in the bridge, the guitars are swapped for a vocal arrangement. There is textural contrast between the sections, but little sense of growth or expansion. 'Now I'm Here', 'Drowse', 'Coming Soon' offer further examples of this approach.

The fourth type of change encompasses adjustments to both the textural embellishments and foundation, but without the formal regularity and hierarchy of the previous examples. It is these examples that are the most difficult to explain for the simple reason that they tended to avoid certain patterns of variation. In 'My Fairy King', for instance, one can identify five segments with differing textures. The piano is consistent throughout; the drums appear in the first, third, and fifth segments; and, the bass guitar is missing from the fourth segments. Two vocal sections appear in the second segment, and one vocal section appears at the start of the third segment. Further, a lead guitar is present through much of the song, but drops out of the fourth segment, while a guitar arrangement only enters in the final section of the song. In a song such as 'The March of the Black Queen', the contrasting textures between sections are even more noticeable. The opening segment is piano-based; this is

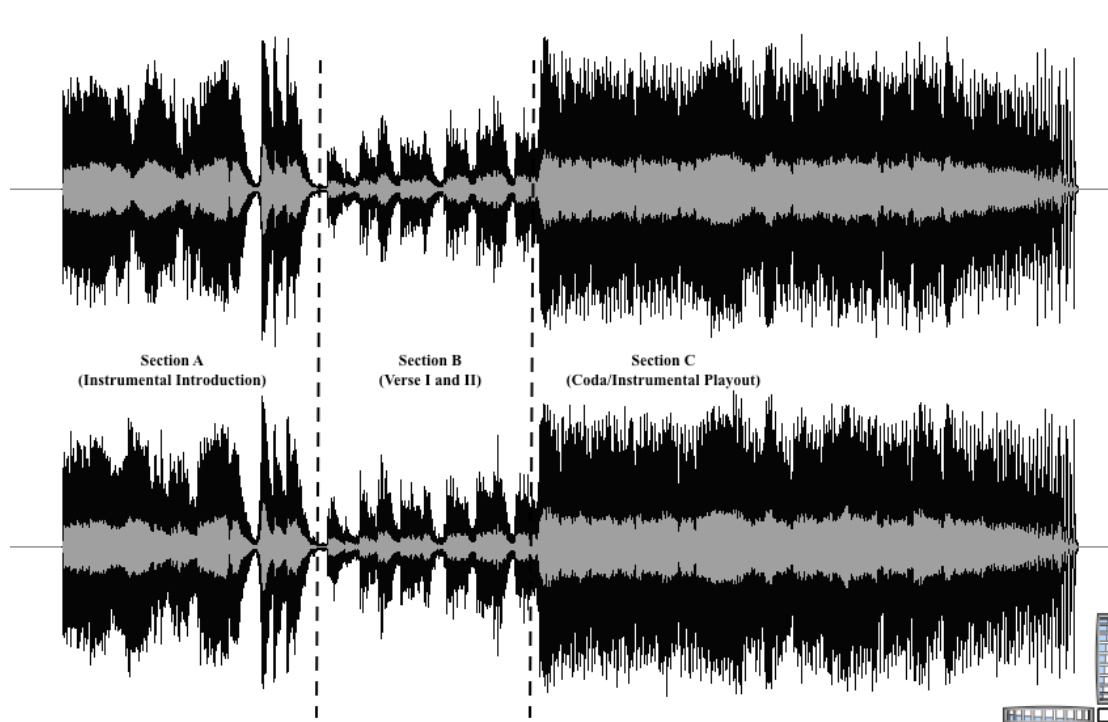
followed by the addition of drums and bass guitar to the mix, along with a lead guitar. Later sections feature two rhythm guitars and, alternatively, only a piano and lead guitar. Furthermore, there are multiple variations in vocal and guitar arrangements across all of these sections. In these instances, one can observe frequent changes to both the embellishing and fundamental textural strands, although, one cannot identify a particular that pattern that results in specific combinations of instruments at certain points in the songs.

From these four types of textural change, it is possible to identify two overarching compositional strategies. The first is that sections of Queen's songs tend to be defined by a particular textural setup; changes thus occur along sectional boundaries. On some occasions, textural continuity is present across two or more formal sections (i.e. two verses). The important point is that textural crescendos and diminuendos are relatively rare within sectional boundaries. Thus, in 'My Fairy King', the entrance and exit of the drums happen rather abruptly over the sectional bar lines, and in 'Dreamer's Ball', each change of embellishing instrumentation takes place at the start of the new verse or chorus. This compositional strategy crosses all four types of textural change listed above.

The second compositional strategy is for adjacent textures to be highly contrasting in their density. This strategy is evident primarily in the first and fourth groups of songs. To return to 'My Fairy King', the key element of the textural pattern is the alternating sectional presence of the drums. This strategy produces a number of dynamic levels within these songs, between which Queen would move either in a regular order (group one) or in an irregular manner (group four). The waveform images of 'Doin' All Right' (Example 5.39) and 'In the Lap of the Gods' (Example 5.40) highlight clearly these two compositional strategies in visual form, despite the fact that both songs have different accompanying and embellishing textures, and different formal plans. These images show the levels of volume in the left and right channels of the song over time; the temporal scale has been adjusted to show the complete song. The annotations highlight the broad sectional changes; one can clearly see that these sectional changes correspond with marked changes in dynamic level as one combination of instruments gives way to another.



Example 5.39. 'Doin' All Right', Waveform



Example 5.40. 'In the Lap of the Gods', Waveform

Finally, it is worth noting that a common textural feature in Queen's songs is a stopped or sustained hit, most often at the end of a section. These patterns take one of two forms. In some instances, there is a complete cut of sound, often after a drum fill, as can be heard in the verse sections of 'Crazy Little Thing Called Love', or after the

first verse of 'Fat Bottomed Girls'. In a larger number of instances, one finds a sustained hit, in which the band effectively stops, but leaves an accompaniment sound ringing through the ensuing textural gap. Most often this takes the form of a guitar chord below a lead vocal line (e.g. 'Now I'm Here', 'Ogre Battle', 'We are the Champions', 'Somebody to Love'), or a sustained backing vocal chord (e.g. 'Death on Two Legs', 'In the Lap of the Gods', 'Seven Seas of Rhye', 'The Prophet's Song', 'White Man'). Such techniques are ubiquitous in both Queen's output and popular music, in general, that little further discussion is warranted, except to note that such a sonic pattern is a key part of the group's idiolect.

5.3 The Sound-box

By 1973, when Queen recorded its first album, stereo mixing was normative in the production of popular music. Furthermore, Queen worked from the outset of its career with Trident Studio's sixteen-track recording unit. Thus, it is possible to approach this section from the perspective that the sonic construction of Queen's songs reflects choices made during the production process, as opposed to being constrained by technological limitations. As with the texture analysis, this section begins from the basic sound-box structures, which are consistent across Queen's songs, before examining the embellishments above or divergences from these structures.

5.3.1 Recording Queen

The band members of Queen made no secret of their desire to utilise the recording studio to its fullest potential.²²⁷ Examples of recording and production 'tricks' are common through the group's output. The extensive vocal multitracking on 'Bohemian Rhapsody' or 'Somebody to Love' are standout examples. Elsewhere, Brian May evokes other instruments, such as a 'Dixieland orchestra' on 'Good Company' and the 'harp' on 'Love of My Life', the sounds of which come from his guitars. Notable instances of effects on instrumental and vocal tracks include the flanging on Taylor's drums in 'Sheer Heart Attack', the phasing on the 'Killer Queen' backing vocals, and

²²⁷ See, for instance, Tom Browne, 'Interview with Queen', *BBC Radio One*, 24 December (1977), <http://www.queenarchives.com/index.php?title=Group_-_12-24-1977_-_BBC_Radio_One> (accessed 2 October 2014).

the guitar riff of 'Ogre Battle' played backwards. This experimentation may be considered one of the group's compositional strategies, insofar as the recorded results varied from song to song.

At the same time, one finds a good deal of consistency with respect to the recording of Queen's tracks and the subsequent placement of sounds in the sound-box. Against the experimental compositional strategy are thus a number of production-oriented sonic patterns. In terms of common recording and production techniques, little information has been provided in interviews and documentaries. Nonetheless, while addressing the making of 'Bohemian Rhapsody', Roy Thomas Baker said that 'the first half or ballad section was done with piano, drums and bass—the normal routine'.²²⁸ Based on this statement and the consistent sonic qualities between the opening of 'Bohemian Rhapsody' and other Queen songs, one can assume that this segment represents the normative recording techniques of the group. Mercury's piano was picked up by two Neumann U67 microphones. The same microphones were used on Taylor's drum kit, except for the kick drum, which was captured by an AKG D12 microphone. For much of the 1970s, Taylor's kit had a 'live' quality, thus suggesting a blend of the close microphone and overhead microphone signals. Towards the end of the decade, as the group experimented with funk and disco pastiches, Taylor's kit is noticeably drier with very little ambience: 'Another One Bites the Dust' typifies this shift, as does 'Fun It', also from *The Game*.

Deacon's bass guitar in 'Bohemian Rhapsody' was recorded primarily by direct input, to ensure a full and warm sound in the mix. It was also captured from his amp and filtered into the direct signal, thus adding ambience as well as enhancing the bass sound. As for May's rhythm guitars, multiple microphones were placed around his Vox AC30 amps to capture the different levels of room ambience. From there, Baker blended multiple signals to go into the final mix. On other occasions, May would feed his electric guitar through the 'Deacy Amp', a creation of John Deacon's. The small one-watt amp, when combined with May's treble booster and distortion pedals, produces a distorted but highly compressed guitar sound. The 'Deacy Amp' is thus

²²⁸ Mark Cunningham, 'Roy Thomas Baker & Gary Langan: The Making Of Queen's 'Bohemian Rhapsody'', *Sound on Sound*, October (1995), <http://www.soundonsound.com/sos/1995_articles/oct95/queen.html> (accessed 20 June 2014).

employed for a number of the guitar orchestrations through Queen's output, such as in the coda of 'Bohemian Rhapsody'.²²⁹

The lead vocal tracks were the products of standard recording techniques. Most lead vocals were double-tracked; Mercury's lead vocal, however, was sometimes only single-tracked, but treated with a reverb featuring a long decay and short pre-delay that both maintains the voice's presence and intimates a large, resonant space. In some songs with denser instrumental textures (e.g. 'You're My Best Friend'), Mercury's vocal has an echo, which is not particularly audible, but adds sonic depth nonetheless. In Taylor's case, some vocal tracks were triple-tracked (e.g. 'Tenement Funster'), and he nearly always sang with a noticeable 'slapback' echo. This was possibly a stylistic reference to older rock 'n' roll styles, but may have also been employed to counter the singer's strong, but relatively thin vocal tone.

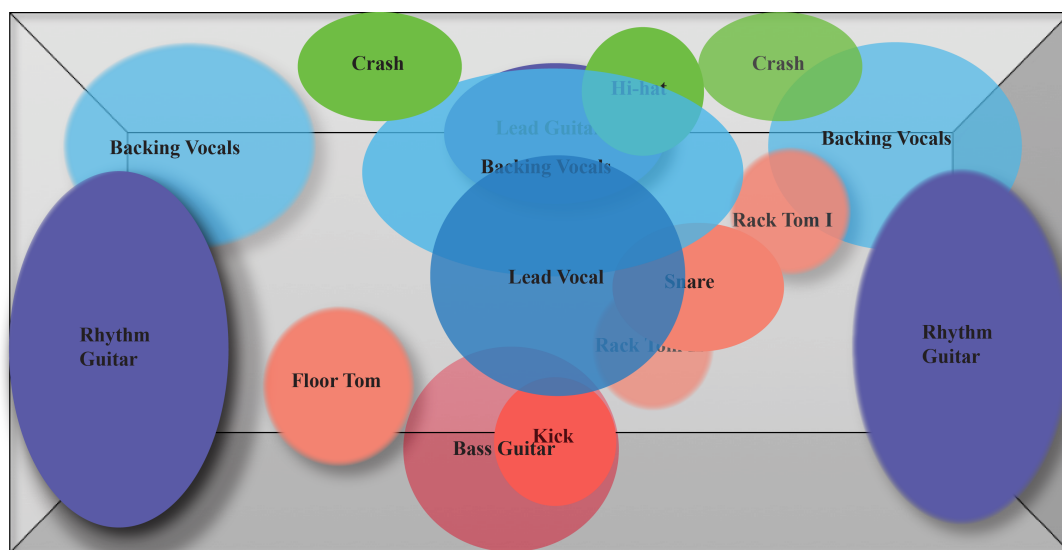
Finally, the recording of the backing vocal tracks followed an unusual, but similarly regular approach. One of Roy Thomas Baker and the group's innovations was to have each singer of the group contributing to each part of a backing vocal arrangement. As visually stylised in the 'Somebody to Love' video, the three sang each note of a chord into the same microphone. The result was a three-part harmony sung by nine voices. May noted that these harmonies were, at the very least, double-tracked, thus producing a rich and powerful backing vocal choir composed of anywhere between 18 and 36 voices.²³⁰ When only one sang the backing vocal parts, the same recording technique was employed. This particular process is crucial in defining the sonic quality of Queen's vocal arrangements. However, it is worth noting it was not a constant detail across the corpus. Most of the arrangements on *Queen* appear to have been recorded with one or two voices per part; the same observation seems to hold for much of *Queen II*. On 'Ogre Battle', the voices have clearly been multitracked, but one can still hear the individual singers (Taylor especially) in the mix. From *Sheer Heart Attack*, the blending process becomes normative.

²²⁹ See Greg Fryer, 'Brian News - June 2005', <<http://www.brianmay.com/brian/briannews/briannewsjun05.html>> (accessed 20 June 2014).

²³⁰ Longfellow, *Classic Albums: Queen*.

5.3.2 The Construction of Queen's Sound-boxes

Queen's approach to constructing the sound-box is best understood in a similar manner to the songs' textures: there tends to exist a central axis of instruments, around which the embellishing textural components are positioned. Moore and Dockwray identify sonic balance as a key feature of the normative stereo mix from the 1970s onwards.²³¹ In the case of Queen, and other bands, without doubt, timbral balance is the guiding principle: sounds on one side of the sound-box have an equivalent sound on the opposite side.



Example 5.41. 'It's Late', Sound-box, Final Chorus

The final chorus of 'It's Late' neatly illustrates how a typical Queen sound-box is structured, in terms of the fundamental and embellishing textural components (Example 5.41). There is a central axis of bass guitar, kick drum, snare drum, lead vocal, and hi-hat. The two rhythm guitars are placed on the left and right edges of the sound-box, thus providing a frame to the stereo image. In terms of depth, the rhythm guitars are near the front of the mix, along with the bass guitar and lead vocal; the kick and snare drum are positioned slightly in the background. This layout is easily altered with the addition of the piano, or the removal of rhythm guitars. The piano is spread across the centre of the image, thus either maintaining a sense of balance in the

²³¹ Moore and Dockwray, 'The Establishment of the Virtual Performance Space in Rock', 232-33.

absence of other instruments, or leaving the acoustic or electric guitars to remain on the outer edges.

The other textural parts fit around this axis, whilst maintaining the sense of timbral balance. The extra components of Taylor's kit are distributed across the lateral space of the sound-box, with crash and ride cymbals usually positioned towards the back of the mix, one on either side. If the ride cymbal is not used, as is the case in 'It's Late', an overdubbed crash cymbal sits opposite its 'original' counterpart. Taylor's tom drums are spread across the stereo image, with the high rack tom usually positioned half way between the centre and right edge of the sound-box; the floor tom tends to sit just to the left of the kick drum, and thus a fill through the toms take the listener across the centre line of the sound-box (e.g. final chorus of 'It's Late').

The guitar and vocal arrangements are inserted in a similar manner. As noted in Section 5.2.1, it is rare for a song to feature both arrangements concurrently, and thus one often substitutes for the other location-wise. The vocal arrangements are often placed in the centre of the sound-box, behind the lead vocal and with a wider stereo spread. When additional arrangements are added, or when a four-part arrangement is split into two segments, these separate segments of voices sit on the left and right sides, within the frame of any rhythm guitars. In the case of a split arrangement, such as 'The Prophet's Song', 'Good Old Fashioned Lover Boy' or 'Leaving Home Ain't Easy', the left channel voices tends to sing the lower harmony parts, and the right channel voices sing the higher parts.²³² Example 5.41 demonstrates how the layers of voices in 'It's Late' are separated and positioned carefully around the sound-box in order to balance the stereo image.

A lead guitar in the mix often occupies the same position as the lead vocal—front and centre—although it sits further back when playing alongside the singer. May's three-part 'lead' arrangements have the extra pair of guitars on either side of the centrally-located lead guitar, thus creating a similar lateral setup to the vocal arrangements. The second verses of 'Seven Seas of Rhye' and 'Brighton Rock' demonstrate this positioning clearly. In instances of 'backing' guitar arrangements, the same spatial

²³² This does not necessarily reflect a standard choir layout.

principles are at play. In ‘In Only Seven Days’, the instrumental section ends up with five electric guitars in the mix; the stereo image is thus divided five ways with each guitar occupying a separate position across the left-right spectrum. On other occasions, the individual tracks are bounced into a single guitar choir track, such as in the second chorus of ‘We are the Champions’ or in ‘Mustapha’; here, the arranged guitars sit in the centre of the sound-box.

The previous paragraphs outlined a normative setup for Queen’s sound-boxes. Neither the positioning of instruments, nor precise timbral balance is constant throughout every song. It is not uncommon, for instance, for the lead guitar to be placed slightly off-centre when heard alongside the lead vocal. Nonetheless, the setup above highlights the consistent zones of the sound-box in which individual parts tend to be placed. It is also worth noting several of Queen’s early tracks from *Queen* and *Queen II* counteract these norms—Taylor’s drum kit is sometimes divided and spread in a more irregular manner, with the snare positioned close to the edge of the sound-box; ‘Great King Rat’ and ‘Liar’ present interesting examples of this early trend. Because these early tracks also present other variations with respect to the overall environment of the sound-box, continuation of the present discussion will be postponed until Section 6.3.2, in which changes to the ‘Queen sound’ are considered further.

5.3.3 Queen’s Dynamic Sound-box

May has been open about the group’s admiration of Hendrix’ and the Beatles’ treatment of the stereo space. He recalls ‘Freddie putting on the *Electric Ladyland* album and we would be running around his little stereo finding out which bits came out of which speaker at what time, and finding all these wonderful little magic things that were going on, so we were very conscious of that’.²³³ May could have been referring to ‘Crosstown Traffic’, with its backing vocalists ‘crossing’ the sound-box rapidly in the chorus, or to ‘Gypsy Eyes’, in which the two rhythm guitars appear to talk to each other across the sound-box in the introduction, or Mitch Mitchell’s drums that sweep from the left side to the centre and back. By the same token, the young

²³³ ‘Queen - A Kind of Magic’, *BBC Radio 1 Interview*, December (1995), <http://www.queenarchives.com/index.php?title=Group_-_12-XX-1995_-_BBC_Radio_1> (accessed 10 April 2014).

musicians would have certainly enjoyed John Lennon's voice wandering through the stereo space of 'A Day in the Life', as well as Led Zeppelin and Robert Plant's spatial exploration in the breakdown of 'Whole Lotta Love'.

By 1973, there were a number of precedents in the rock world for creating a dynamic sound-box. The notion of a dynamic sound-box, in which parts move or appear to move, may be considered a general compositional strategy that Queen realises in different ways. 'In the Lap of the Gods' presents an extreme version of dynamic movement in the symphonic introductory section. May's fanfare guitar figure pans from left to right, and when the backing vocals sing the title line, their unaccompanied voices on the final word ('Gods') travel in a clock-wise circle away from the listener (i.e. left, back, right, front-centre). Other examples of this kind include the 'ticking' sound that opens 'The Fairy Feller's Master-Stroke', the expansive sweep of May's guitar choirs in 'Leaving Home Ain't Easy', the flanged tom drums of 'Sheer Heart Attack', and the right to left movement of Taylor's cymbals in the instrumental introduction of 'The Night Comes Down'. In each instance, one perceives the individual sound or group of sounds as moving across and around the sound-box.

Queen's dynamic sound-box is evident more often by drawing the listener's attention to different zones of the sound-box in quick succession. Taylor's standard drum fills through the toms is a prime example (e.g. 'It's Late'), whereby each tom drum moves the point of focus towards the centre of stereo image from the outer edges. The introduction to 'Keep Yourself Alive', with May's layered guitars, works on the same principles. The three guitars are introduced one at a time, on the left, right, and in the middle of the sound-box, thus encouraging the listener to move through the sonic space.

'Killer Queen' offers a sophisticated take on the dynamic sound-box approach. Mercury's lead vocal in the verse is supported by the backing vocalists; the latter sit behind the former and are spread slightly wider, as is the conventional layout. In the chorus, the backing vocals take over the 'lead' role and thus are positioned in the front of the mix. When Mercury returns, with the phrase 'And guaranteed to blow your mind', the backing vocals move to the bottom left corner ('Bah bah bah') and then to the top right corner ('Anytime'). The space between the two vocal phrases

provides sufficient time for the voices to apparently move, without the listener tracing the actual path from point to point (cf. 'In the Lap of the Gods').

In the previous examples, there is not necessarily a common thread of where the dynamic sounds move. In other songs, one can identify a sonic pattern, which is built around an antiphonal relationship between parts on opposing sides of the sound-box. One of the primary examples of this trait is the repeated 'Galileo' calls in the opera section of 'Bohemian Rhapsody', with the alternating high and low voices bouncing from left to right in the sound-box. Other examples of this call-and-response gesture can be found in the vocal arrangements of 'Nevermore', 'In the Lap of the Gods', 'Now I'm Here', 'Flick of the Wrist', 'You and I', and 'You're My Best Friend', as well as in the guitar echoes and arrangements of 'Brighton Rock', 'The Fairy Feller's Master-Stroke', and 'Misfire'. These examples demonstrate that although Queen experimented somewhat with sound-box construction, the group was consistent in terms of both moving parts around the stereo image (a compositional strategy), and, further, moving certain parts between specific, opposing positions (a sonic pattern).

5.4 Analytical Summary

The key findings from this chapter are summarised in Table 5.1 below. These characteristics represent the important ingredients of Queen’s idiolect with respect to the sound-based elements of their songs. For each trait, two examples are given and it is noted whether the feature is best understood as a compositional strategy or a sonic pattern.

| Musical Parameter | Characteristic (C.S./S.P.) | Examples |
|--|---|---|
| Vocal Techniques (Taylor) | Piercing vocal timbre (S.P.) | ‘Tenement Funster’ ‘I’m In Love With My Car’ |
| | Rhythmic freedom (C.S.) | ‘I’m In Love With My Car’ ‘More of That Jazz’ |
| Vocal Techniques (May) | Mellow vocal timbre (S.P.) | ‘Some Day One Day’ ‘Leaving Home Ain’t Easy’ |
| | Tone shaped by register (C.S.) | ‘Leaving Home Ain’t Easy’ ‘Sail Away Sweet Sister’ |
| Vocal Techniques (Mercury) | Powerful voice (S.P.) | ‘Now I’m Here’ ‘Save Me’ |
| | Gravelly voice (S.P.) | ‘Keep Yourself Alive’ ‘Another One Bites the Dust’ |
| | Exaggerated voice (S.P.) | ‘Love of My Life’ ‘Play the Game’ |
| | Sincere voice (S.P.) | ‘Who Needs You’ ‘In Only Seven Days’ |
| | Juxtaposition of voice types (C.S.) | ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’ ‘Save Me’ |
| | Voice types congruent with lyrical content (C.S.) | ‘Get Down Make Love’ ‘Another One Bites The Dust’ |
| | Backing Vocal Techniques | Pitch slides (S.P.) |
| Crescendo through note (S.P.) | | ‘Love of My Life’ ‘You Take My Breath Away’ |
| Timbre determined by combination of vocalists (C.S.) | | ‘More of That Jazz’ ‘Leaving Home Ain’t Easy’ |

| | | |
|---------------------------------|---|---|
| Rhythm Guitar Techniques | ‘Galloping’ tremolo rhythms (S.P.) | ‘Keep Yourself Alive’ ‘Dead on Time’ |
| | Ringling chords on downbeat (S.P.) | ‘White Queen (As It Began)’ ‘It’s Late’ |
| | Electric guitar doubles bass guitar (S.P.) | ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’ ‘We are the Champions’ |
| | Riffs derived from pentatonic minor scale (C.S.) | ‘Son and Daughter’ ‘Tie Your Mother Down’ |
| | Juxtaposition of rhythm guitar playing styles (C.S.) | ‘Modern Times Rock and Roll’ ‘I’m In Love With My Car’ |
| Lead Guitar Techniques | String bending (S.P.) | ‘Seven Seas of Rhye’ ‘Stone Cold Crazy’ |
| | Melodic construction techniques in guitar melody (C.S.) | ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’ ‘Play the Game’ |
| | Solo melodies derived from pentatonic minor scale (C.S.) | ‘Great King Rat’ ‘Jesus’ |
| | Guitar harmonies arranged in close position; played with smooth articulation (S.P.) | ‘Father to Son’ ‘Millionaire Waltz’ |
| | Guitar harmonies arranged in close position; played with ‘lead’ articulation (S.P.) | ‘Seven Seas of Rhye’ ‘Ogre Battle’ |
| | Variations in contrapuntal relationships between guitar parts (C.S.) | ‘Sail Away Sweet Sister’ ‘Killer Queen’ |
| Piano Techniques | Three-note chords plus broken chord figuration in right hand (S.P.) | ‘Sail Away Sweet Sister’ ‘Jealousy’ |
| | Left-hand octave scale runs (C.S.) | ‘The March of the Black Queen’ ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’ |
| | ‘Classical’ figuration (C.S.) | ‘In the Lap of the Gods’ ‘Love of My Life’ |
| | Dual register figures (C.S.) | ‘Save Me’ ‘Lily of the Valley’ |
| Drum Techniques | Rock beat (S.P.) | ‘Keep Yourself Alive’ ‘Dragon Attack’ |
| | Rolling tom drum groove (S.P.) | ‘Liar’ ‘Flick of the Wrist’ |

| | | |
|--|--|---|
| | Punctuating tom drum hit (S.P.) | ‘Seven Seas of Rhye’ ‘Sweet Lady’ |
| | Floor tom crescendo fill (S.P.) | ‘Somebody to Love’ ‘White Man’ |
| Bass Guitar Techniques | Staccato articulation (S.P.) | ‘We are the Champions’ ‘Sail Away Sweet Sister’ |
| | Playing above middle C (S.P.) | ‘Millionaire Waltz’ ‘Sail Away Sweet Sister’ |
| | Counter-melodic playing (C.S.) | ‘Liar’ ‘Millionaire Waltz’ |
| | Arpeggiated realisation of chords (S.P.) | ‘Teo Torriatte’ ‘We are the Champions’ |
| Texture | Piano-bass guitar-lead guitar foundation (S.P.) | ‘Lily of the Valley’ ‘Love of My Life’ |
| | Piano-bass guitar-drums sound foundation (S.P.) | ‘Don’t Stop Me Now’ ‘Jealousy’ |
| | Piano-bass guitar-rhythm guitar-drums foundation (S.P.) | ‘Seven Seas of Rhye’ ‘Sail Away Sweet Sister’ |
| | Rhythm guitar-bass guitar-drums foundation (S.P.) | ‘Brighton Rock’ ‘Tie Your Mother Down’ |
| | Acoustic guitar-bass guitar-drums foundation (S.P.) | ‘Some Day One Day’ ‘Who Needs You’ |
| | Bass guitar-drums foundation (S.P.) | ‘Fun It’ ‘Another One Bites the Dust’ |
| | Imitation or invocation of pre-1970s styles (C.S.) | ‘Long Away’ ‘Seaside Rendezvous’ |
| | Juxtaposition of contrasting textures (C.S.) | ‘Doin’ All Right’ ‘In the Lap of the Gods’ |
| | Use of electric guitar to mark contrasting textures (S.P.) | ‘In the Lap of the Gods...Revisited’ ‘Play the Game’ |
| | Stopped or sustained hit (S.P.) | ‘Ogre Battle’ ‘Crazy Little Thing Called Love’ |
| Production and Sound-box Techniques | Balance of sound-box timbres (S.P.) | ‘It’s Late’ ‘Mustapha’ |
| | Multitracked backing vocals with three singers (S.P.) | ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’ ‘Somebody to Love’ |

| | | |
|--|--|---|
| | Double-tracking on lead vocal (S.P.) | ‘Seven Seas of Rhye’ ‘Sweet Lady’ |
| | Antiphonal vocal call-and-response across sound-box (S.P.) | ‘Nevermore’ ‘Brighton Rock’ |
| | Dynamic sound-box (C.S.) | ‘Keep Yourself Alive’ ‘In the Lap of the Gods’ |
| | Experimental production techniques (C.S.) | ‘Good Company’ ‘We Will Rock You’ |

Table 5.1. Summary of Compositional Strategies and Sonic Patterns for Instrumental Techniques, Texture, and Sound-box

6. Synthesis

6.1 Analytical Summary and Issues

6.1.1 Queen's Song Types

Sections 4.6 and 5.4 presented the key traits of Queen's idiolect from the era 1973-80. The two tables made it clear that Queen's idiolect during these years comprised a range of compositional strategies and sonic patterns pertaining to all facets of the group's musical output. It should be noted that such characteristics appeared with varying degrees of frequency across the corpus—the six main textural combinations were each much more consistent than, say, Freddie Mercury's left-hand scale runs on the piano. That being said, this aspect of Mercury's piano playing appeared in songs with many other idiolect traits. As such, I would argue one might hear the piano gesture as stylistically important because of its surrounding context. While this is a statistically misleading conclusion, it perhaps is reflective of some listeners' experiences. In any case, the traits listed in Tables 4.3 and 5.1 may all be considered isolated gestures that, in some way, provide Queen's songs with their distinct musical flavour.

In addition to these individual characteristics, it is possible to identify several broader gestures that combine traits in multiple domains. One such examples occur in 'Son and Daughter', when Roger Taylor plays a fill on the snare drum before the full band articulates a syncopated surface rhythm. Gestures of this nature point towards a particular mode of playing as a group, an idea that receives greater exploration in Section 6.1.3. Another such gesture occurs in 'We are the Champions', when Brian May (double-tracked in both stereo channels) switches suddenly to overdriven guitar, plays a downbeat power chord, and follows this by doubling John Deacon's bass guitar line through a stepwise descent. In bringing together multiple features that defined the group's output, such a phrase has a strong concentration of Queen-like traits, an idea that is explored further in Sections 6.2.4 and 6.3.3.

| Song Type | Musical Characteristics | Examples |
|------------------|--|--|
| Piano ballad | Piano-bass guitar sound-world (Sonic Pattern) Prevalence of sequences and leaps in melodic construction (S.P.) Exaggerated voice type in Mercury's lead vocal (S.P.) Intra-sectional modulations (Compositional Strategy) | 'Lily of the Valley' 'Love of My Life' 'Jealousy' |
| Rock ballad | Piano-bass guitar-electric guitar-drums sound-world (S.P.) Textural expansion in choruses (S.P.) Inter-sectional modulations (C.S.) | 'In the Lap of the Gods... Revisited' 'Spread Your Wings' 'Save Me' |
| Acoustic ballad | Acoustic guitar-bass guitar-drums sound-world (S.P.) Modal inflections in harmonic language (C.S.) Fundamental verse-chorus structure with or without formal embellishments (C.S.) | 'Some Day One Day' 'Long Away' 'Leaving Home Ain't Easy' |
| Episodic song | Electric guitar-bass guitar-drums sound-world (S.P.) Open-ended thematic ideas (C.S.) Changes in harmonic perspective (C.S.) | 'I'm in Love With My Car' 'Fight From the Inside' 'Rock It (Prime Jive)' |
| Rhapsodic song | Juxtaposition of sound-worlds (C.S.) Multiple thematic ideas (C.S.) Frequent modulations and changes in harmonic perspective (C.S.) Changes in tempi and metre (C.S.) | 'My Fairy King' 'The March of the Black Queen' 'Millionaire Waltz' |

Table 6.1. Song Types in Queen's Corpus

It is possible also to identify groupings of particular characteristics. This gives rise to five song types that are prevalent throughout the corpus, summarised in Table 6.1.

This type of summary is useful because it allows one to note the various points of connection between subsets of songs in Queen's output. Further, it provides a useful framework for understanding other songs that do not immediately reside in one particular category: 'Play the Game', for instance, can be heard as a meeting point of the piano ballad song type (virtuosic melody construction, exaggerated lead vocal singing) and the rock ballad song type (sudden changes of texture).

At the same time, it pays not to place too much emphasis on these song types for two reasons. Firstly, it is, perhaps, more accurate to group even smaller subsets of Queen's songs. For instance, 'Love of My Life' and 'You Take My Breath Away' are related by their slow tempi, ballad-style piano, four-part vocal sections sung entirely by Mercury, and 'backing' guitar arrangements. Alternatively, 'The Prophet's Song' and 'White Man' are related by the drop-D guitar tuning, Aeolian-based riff material, rhythm guitar-based texture, and parallel vocal lines.²³⁴ On a related note, one can also note specific gestures that only appear in a small number of songs. The combined presence of a hard rock instrumental texture and a 12/8 drum groove, for instance, is limited to 'The March of the Black Queen', 'Bohemian Rhapsody', and 'Millionaire Waltz'. The fact that these three songs may be considered 'rhapsodic' is not irrelevant; but one could not reasonably argue that such traits are characteristic of Queen's rhapsodic songs, in general. Secondly, and at the other of the spectrum, a number of the idiolect traits are not confined to particular song types or further subsets of songs. That is, features of Queen's idiolect appear in specific songs, regardless, not because of the song type.

Ultimately, one is reminded of Moore's point that such means of categorisation, in terms of song types, song pairs, or idiolect '[tell] us something different about how we organize the sequence of sounds issuing from instruments or speakers...any organization we impose on those sounds is literally that—it is an organization we individually, socially, impose'.²³⁵ This is not the place to pursue or resolve any of the tensions between the different analytical perspectives, interesting as they may be. Instead, I wish to return to the traits that comprise Queen's idiolect, and consider what the implications are from such findings. In other words, how are we to understand the nature of Queen's idiolect? One way to answer this question is to consider the concept in relation to a specific song. There is no better example for doing so than 'Bohemian Rhapsody', the 1975-masterpiece that, more than any other song, encapsulated Queen's idiolect.

²³⁴ Sharp observers may note that both pairs of song come from *A Night at the Opera* and *A Day at the Races*, recorded one year after each other. This is certainly not coincidental; however, I would also point to earlier pairs of songs (e.g. 'My Fairy King' and 'The Fairy Feller's Master-Stroke') and later pairs of songs (e.g. 'If You Can't Beat Them' and 'Need Your Loving Tonight') as evidence that this observation may be more widespread than the mid-1970s.

²³⁵ Moore, 'Categorical Conventions', 441.

6.1.2 The Nature of Queen’s Idiolect: ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’

To begin this discussion, I will briefly outline several of the most salient characteristics of the song as a whole—namely, its formal and harmonic plan, and its stylistic and studio experimentation—and consider whether such details are replicated elsewhere in Queen’s output. From a formal perspective, ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’ maps well onto Osborn’s ‘Multi-Part Monothematic’ through-composed form, in that specific ideas repeat within a section group, but not explicitly across the song.²³⁶ The form and associated tonal centres are mapped out in Table 6.2. Suffice to say, there is no other song in Queen’s output that unfolds this particular number of ideas in such an order. ‘In the Lap of Gods’, mentioned in Section 4.1.3, may also be considered through-composed, but only has three section groups, and repeats each idea within a section multiple times.

| Section Group | Section | Tonal Centres | Time | Description |
|---------------|---------|---------------------------------|-------|--|
| I | A | B ^b | 0’00 | <i>A capella</i> and piano ballad introduction |
| II | B | B ^b – E ^b | 0’48” | Verse I |
| | B | B ^b – E ^b | 1’48” | Verse II |
| | B’ | E ^b | 2’35” | Guitar solo |
| III | C | A – E ^b | 3’03” | Opera section |
| IV | D | E ^b | 4’08” | Hard-rock section |
| V | E | E ^b – F | 4’55” | Instrumental and vocal coda |

Table 6.2. ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’, Formal and Harmonic Outline

The harmonic plan is also striking for its juxtaposition of modulations between closely-related tonal centres (the F-B^b-E^b major axis), and tonal centres a tritone apart (A-E^b). As noted above also, in Section 4.2.1, modulations between these exact keys can actually be located at several other points across Queen’s corpus; many other

²³⁶ See Osborn, ‘Understanding Through Composition’, [13].

songs explore the same tonal relationships. And yet, there is no other song that is built on this particular configuration of tonal centres, and in this particular order.

‘Bohemian Rhapsody’ is probably most famous for its ‘opera’ section, a sixty-second fragment in the middle of the song that was immortalised in the original music video. McLeod argues that a number of thematic and stylistic references are brought together within this section, such that ‘the confused context of these terms serves both to highlight the foreign intrusion of opera in a rock anthem and parody the lack of understanding of foreign language opera common to most rock fans’.²³⁷ Indeed, when asked about the opera influences, Mercury was rather coy: ‘I did some research’ was his enigmatic response.²³⁸ Nonetheless, two stylistic references are most apparent. The first is to the light operatic works of Gilbert and Sullivan. This is evident through the call-and-response dialogue between the lead vocalist and the vocal chorus, the sudden changes in dynamics in line with this dialogue, and the light, homophonic instrumental parts that accompany the voices. Numbers such as ‘I am the Captain of the Pinafore’ from *H.M.S Pinafore* or ‘I am the very model’ from *The Pirates of Penzance* serve as useful points of comparison. Where Mercury was reluctant to divulge his sources, May has been open about the second primary influence on the section. The *a cappella* vocal line ‘Magnifico’ features the voices in a staggered, descending arpeggio. This was intended as homage to Mantovani’s cascading strings.²³⁹ Perhaps because of the long-standing success of the song, commentators often reflect on the classical music influences on Queen.²⁴⁰ But, as is suggested in Section 6.2.3, pastiches of classical music were uncommon in Queen’s output; ‘Millionaire Waltz’ and ‘Love of My Life’ are the only other examples to offer sustained references to classical styles.

Finally, on a related note, the opera section is a *tour de force* of Queen’s prowess in the recording studio. The extent of the overdubbing that produced the operatic vocal arrangement is somewhat legendary within the Queen literature; even if the exact number of overdubs is unknown, Brian May’s anecdote about the translucent reel of

²³⁷ McLeod, ‘Bohemian rhapsodies’, 194.

²³⁸ Andy Davis, ‘Queen’s Bohemian Rhapsody’, *Record Collector* 166 (1993), <<http://www.brianmay.com/queen/rcjun93/rcjun93.html>> (accessed 17 September 2014).

²³⁹ O’Casey, *Queen*.

²⁴⁰ See, for instance, de Boer, ‘On the Margins’, 83ff.

tape points to the recording effort required to create the song.²⁴¹ While the multitracking process was a common feature of Queen's studio practices, 'Bohemian Rhapsody' is an extreme example of this trend. 'Somebody to Love' also has a dense vocal arrangement, but the vast majority of Queen's songs in this corpus appear to have much smaller arrangements, composed of approximately 24-36 voices. The production of 'Bohemian Rhapsody' can thus be regarded as a one-off venture in terms of the expansive vocal recording techniques.

The point of these short descriptions is that, viewed from certain perspectives, many features of 'Bohemian Rhapsody' are not replicated in an identical manner elsewhere in Queen's output. 'I don't want to keep playing the same formula over and over again, otherwise you just go insane. I don't want to become stale. I want to be creative'.²⁴² This is what Mercury told an interviewer in the 1970s, and to a certain extent the analysis above reflects these sentiments. What is evident through Queen's corpus is that the structural elements of their songs—particularly, the formal templates and the tonal relationships—are best understood in terms of compositional strategies, which gives rise to a variety of unique formal and harmonic patterns, one example of which is 'Bohemian Rhapsody'. By the same token, Queen's experimental production techniques and wider stylistic references are also best understood in terms of compositional strategies, insofar as these traits are articulated in different ways from song to song. To borrow from Spicer, Queen visited many different 'style planets' in its 1970s songs, but tended to only visit a particular planet once before making a separate voyage to a new destination.²⁴³ Again, 'Bohemian Rhapsody' represents one distinct example of these compositional strategies. Taken together, one can understand Mercury's comments on the song made to *Sounds* magazine in 1976: 'I'm going to shatter some illusions. It ['Bohemian Rhapsody'] was just one of those pieces I wrote for the album: just writing my batch of songs'.²⁴⁴

²⁴¹ See Longfellow, *Classic Albums: Queen*.

²⁴² Tony Parsons, 'Is This Man a Prat?', *New Musical Express*, 18 June (1977), <<http://www.queenonline.com/en/the-band/interviews/freddie-mercury-1/is-this-man-a-prat-/>> (accessed 18 September 2014).

²⁴³ Spicer, 'Reggatta de Blanc', 125ff.

²⁴⁴ John Ingham, 'Mercury Rising: The Queen Interview', *Sounds*, January (1976), <http://www.queenarchives.com/index.php?title=Freddie_Mercury_-_01-XX-1976_-_Sounds> (accessed 18 September 2014).

It is equally important, however, to temper Mercury's comments with two further observations. Firstly, despite the overt variations in the structural and stylistic elements of Queen's songs, the identification of the compositional strategies means there was marked consistency in the nature of these differences. Brian May suggested that Queen was fortunate to have begun their career at the tail end of the Beatles and Jimi Hendrix' careers—he noted that these two artists served as 'role models' and 'it was like finding a rule book on how to break the rules'.²⁴⁵ This speaks to the fact that while elements of Queen's songs could be considered experimental, the group was experimental in much the same way from song to song. The reference to Gilbert and Sullivan may be a one-off in Queen's corpus, but it is consistent with the group's recourse to pastiche in other songs; the structure is not identical to any other songs, but is consistent with other expansive, unconventional formal templates in Queen's oeuvre. Thus, even if 'Bohemian Rhapsody' appears unique in Queen's output, it is not difficult to reconcile it with many other songs based on the shared compositional strategies.

Secondly, 'Bohemian Rhapsody' features many of the group's sonic patterns—May's doubling of the bass line, close-position vocal harmonies, close-position guitar harmonies, the use of common-tone diminished chords, antiphonal call-and-response vocals across the sound-box, a rolling floor tom drum fill, and so forth. As can be extrapolated from Tables 4.3 and 5.1, Queen's sonic patterns tended to comprise surface gestures, often pertaining to arrangement and instrumental techniques and short harmonic sonorities or progressions. The unique structures of individual songs, including 'Bohemian Rhapsody', are thus filled with Queen-like sounds. And, as is the case with 'Bohemian Rhapsody', the presence of sonic patterns ensures that the group's imitations of pre-1970s musical styles retained the aural character of the group. Put another way, 'Bohemian Rhapsody' is Queen's individual take on the style of Gilbert and Sullivan.

To offer a broad analytical conclusion, then, regarding Queen's idiolect, one might say that the group struck a fine balance between precise musical similarities and consistent musical differences. Through the years 1973-80, Queen's idiolect was very

²⁴⁵ Interview with the author, 4 September 2014, Auckland, New Zealand.

well defined in terms of both compositional strategies and sonic patterns. The implication of this observation is that no song in the group's output appears completely surprising or unusual. Where songs differed structurally or stylistically, they could often be reconciled with others through the common compositional strategies. That is, despite 'Bohemian Rhapsody' unfolding a distinct structure in relation to other songs in the corpus, we might be tempted to remark something along the lines of, 'It was the *type of thing* Queen would do'. And even at their most experimental, as is surely the case with the 1975-hit, Queen's songs rarely sounded unfamiliar, courtesy of the consistent sonic patterns. Such observations capture the nature of Queen's idiolect and account for the impression that the group's songs seem different and alike, often at the same time. The methodological distinction between sonic patterns and compositional strategies, within the overarching concept of an idiolect, allows one to reach this richer and more nuanced conclusion.

It is, perhaps, worth adding a short note on 'Bohemian Rhapsody'. I would argue that the most remarkable aspect of 'Bohemian Rhapsody' is not that it is consistent with Queen's idiolect, but that it presents all of the primary compositional strategies and sonic patterns that marked Queen's output during the 1970s. 'Killer Queen', for instance, featured a typical modulation scheme, a wider stylistic reference, as well as numerous sonic patterns (close position voices and guitar harmonies), but within a pared-back formal structure; 'The March of the Black Queen' had an expansive structure and featured close position vocal and guitar arrangements, but did not really venture from the stylistic world of rock music. Thus, 'Bohemian Rhapsody' acts not simply as a summary but as the epitome of Queen's idiolect in the first half of the band's career. As suggested in Section 2.2, much of the literature invariably highlights the ambitious musical techniques and subsequent commercial success of 'Bohemian Rhapsody'. It is worth pausing, however, to acknowledge another achievement of Mercury, May, Taylor, and Deacon: in 1975, they distilled the musical essence of Queen into six minutes of operatic rock music.

6.1.3 The Gestural Unity of Queen

The idiolect analysis focused on individual gestures and characteristics, with the implication that each one by itself defined, in a small way, Queen's output. This

section takes a slightly different stance on an idiolect. As noted in Section 3.3.6, much of the commentary on Queen has asserted the supposedly unique musical interrelationships of the group. That is, the music of Queen was defined not by what one musician did, but what all the musicians did in conjunction with each other. Although Section 5.1 covered the instrumental and vocal nuances of each band member, it would be too great a task to examine every musical interrelationship present in these findings. Further, many findings in this regard would seem unremarkable—Deacon’s bass guitar rhythms, for instance, often align with Taylor’s kick drum pattern, a technique that is standard in most popular music styles.

Nonetheless, it is evident that the musical relationship between Brian May, as lead guitarist, and Freddie Mercury, as lead singer, betrayed an underlying compositional strategy of gestural unity. By this, I mean that in a number of songs the gestures of one musician are heard in the part of the other musician. There were further instances in which this unity crossed into other instrumental and vocal parts, as will be highlighted below. As per the comments above on Deacon and Taylor, it is important to note that a number of these traits appear elsewhere in the popular music repertoire. Queen was certainly not the only band to present aspects of gestural unity. Without extended comparative analysis, these findings should thus be understood primarily as characteristic, rather than unique, features of the group’s songs.

The idea of gestural unity plays out in three primary ways. The most straightforward manner is when May’s guitar melody is almost identical to the vocal melody. ‘Lazing on a Sunday Afternoon’ is a good example. May’s first lead guitar part of the instrumental verse is a rendition of the vocal melody from first verse, albeit in a different key and with several embellishments. Example 6.1, with a transposed guitar melody, highlights the similarities nonetheless. ‘You Take My Breath Away’ and ‘Play the Game’ are similar in that the guitar melodies intimate closely the vocal melody, but offer greater variation as the instrumental section progresses. In both instances, though, it is clear that the vocal melody has provided the foundation for the guitar.

Lead Vocal

I go out to work on Mon-day mor-ning Tues-day I go out to ho-ney moon—

I'll be back a gain be-fore it's time for sun-ny down I'll be la zing on a Sun-day af-ter noon

Lead Guitar (transposed)

Example 6.1. ‘Lazing on a Sunday Afternoon’, Lead Vocal and Lead Guitar (transposed), Verse and Instrumental Melody

More common are songs in which May presents a guitar melody that is structurally similar to the lead vocal. The presence of shared harmonic progressions between the vocal and instrumental sections of these songs facilitates this unity in terms of phrasing. Further to this, however, May would often adopt the same approach to melodic construction, as can be heard in ‘Killer Queen’ (Example 6.2). The lead vocal of the verse begins with a two-bar phrase; the repeat of this phrase expands upwards in the second bar, leading into the harmonically expansive section. As noted in Section 4.4.1, the subsequent vocal phrase is a masterful demonstration of ‘voices’ moving against each other in the single part. May’s lead (centre) guitar work echoes all of these characteristics. Indeed, the start of the instrumental over the chorus chord progression replicates the melodic lines and contours of the chorus melody. When the ‘proper’ instrumental starts over the verse harmonies, May’s opening melody is repeated and expanded in the first four bars.

Subsequently, the two extra guitars (Example 5.22, above) enter into the same type of contrapuntal relationship as was evident in Mercury’s lead vocal. Perhaps more significantly, the central lead guitar itself evokes the dual voices of the lead vocal, with the presence of the C^b and B^b . The movement between these two notes acts as a lower counterpoint to the upper ‘voice’ of this guitar line that sits around the E^b . If ‘Killer Queen’ presents a rather sophisticated form of unity, then other examples such

as ‘Keep Yourself Alive’, ‘You’re My Best Friend’, ‘Need Your Loving Tonight’, and ‘Save Me’ are comparatively straightforward in that May’s guitar melody simply adopts the same approach to melodic and phrase structure as the lead vocal from the corresponding section of the song.

Lead Vocal *Initial Phrase*

She keeps a Mo - et et Chan - don in a pret - ty ca - bi - net

Repeat and Expansion

Let them eat cake she said Just like Ma - rie An - toi - nette A

Two-part structure; descending voice

built in a - re - me - dy for Krus - chev and Ken - ne - dy for a - ny - time an in - vi - ta - tion

you can't de - cline

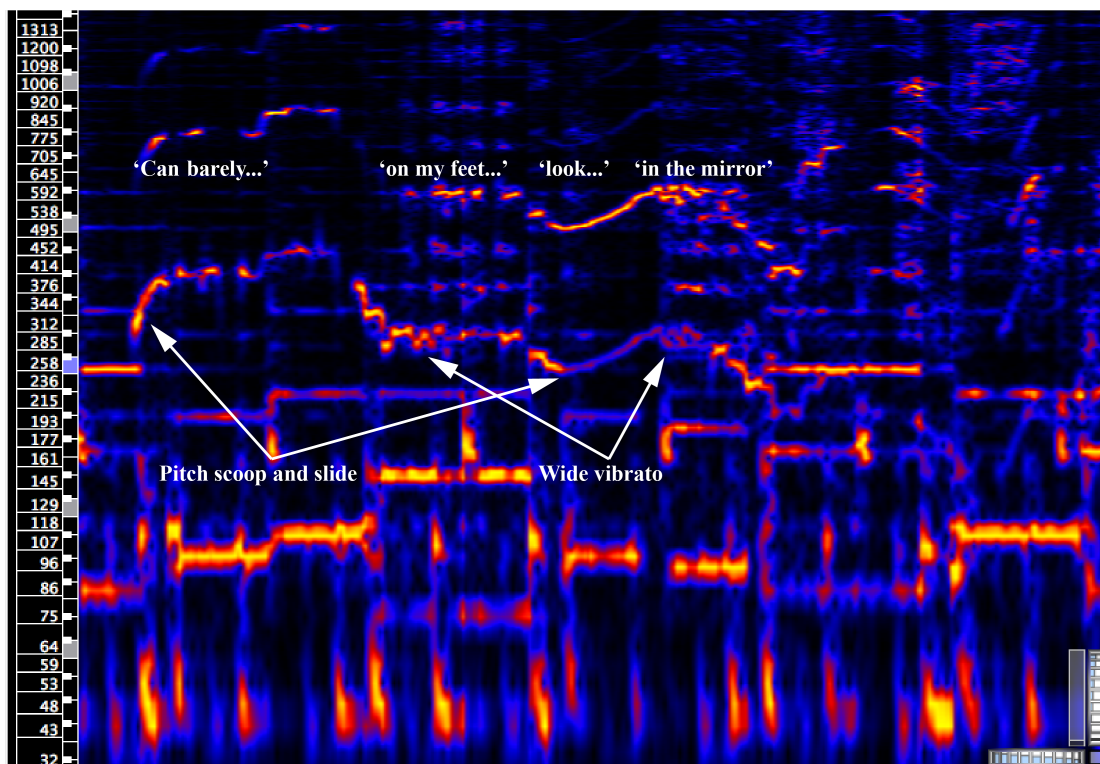
Lead Guitar (transposed) *Initial Phrase*

Repeat and Expansion

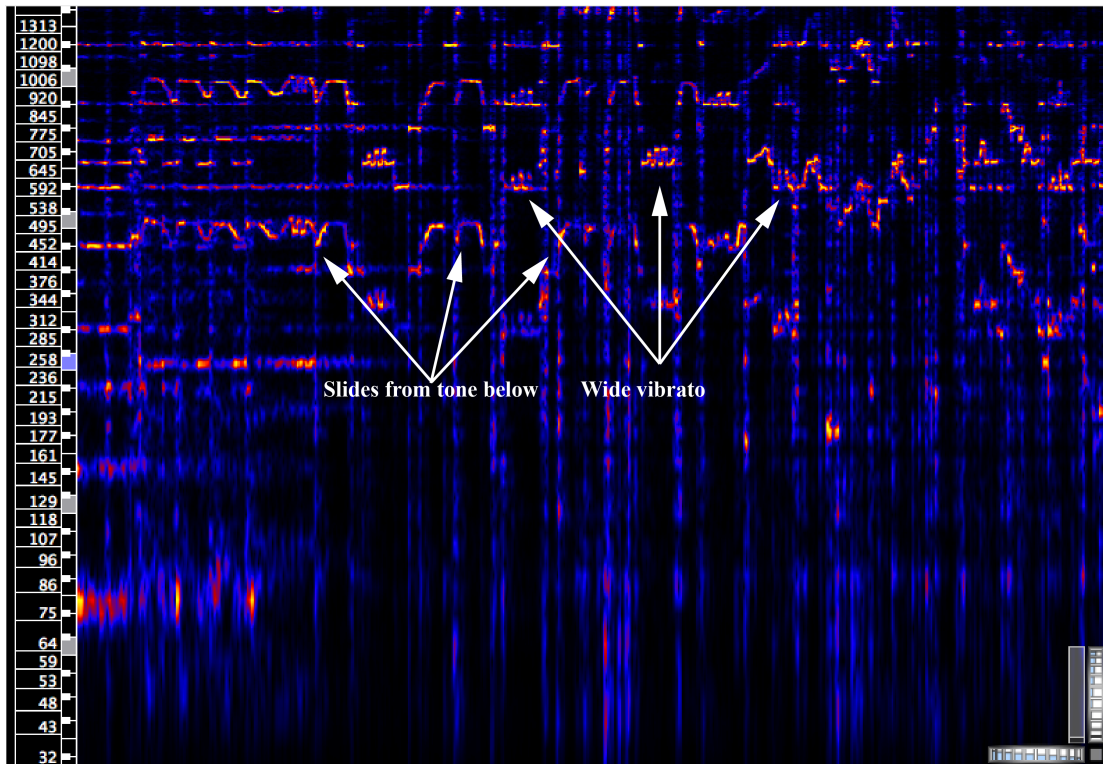
Two-part structure; descending voice

Example 6.2. ‘Killer Queen’, Lead Vocal and Lead Guitar I, Verse and Instrumental

The third type of gestural unity concerns articulation parallels between Mercury and May. ‘Somebody to Love’ exemplifies this approach. Mercury sings much of this song in his exaggerated voice, with slides and scoops up to higher melodic pitches, and with a delayed and controlled use of vibrato that gives longer notes a slight emphasis after their onset (Example 6.3). Turning to May’s guitar solo, it is possible to note, as per above, the similar phrase and melodic structures. One can also note that many of these articulation characteristics are also present (Example 6.4). May uses wide vibrato on the sustained notes, which often gives the ends of gestures and phrases a slight accent, much like Mercury’s singing. May also bends into the opening notes of the solo in a noticeable manner, as well as at other points, particularly the repeated notes of the third bar and the concluding phrase gesture of the fourth bar. Further to this, both musicians’ pitch slides (if difficult to assess for Mercury) tend to start a tone below the final pitch and last approximately one quaver beat, the elongated slide of Example 6.3 (‘Take a *look...*’) notwithstanding.

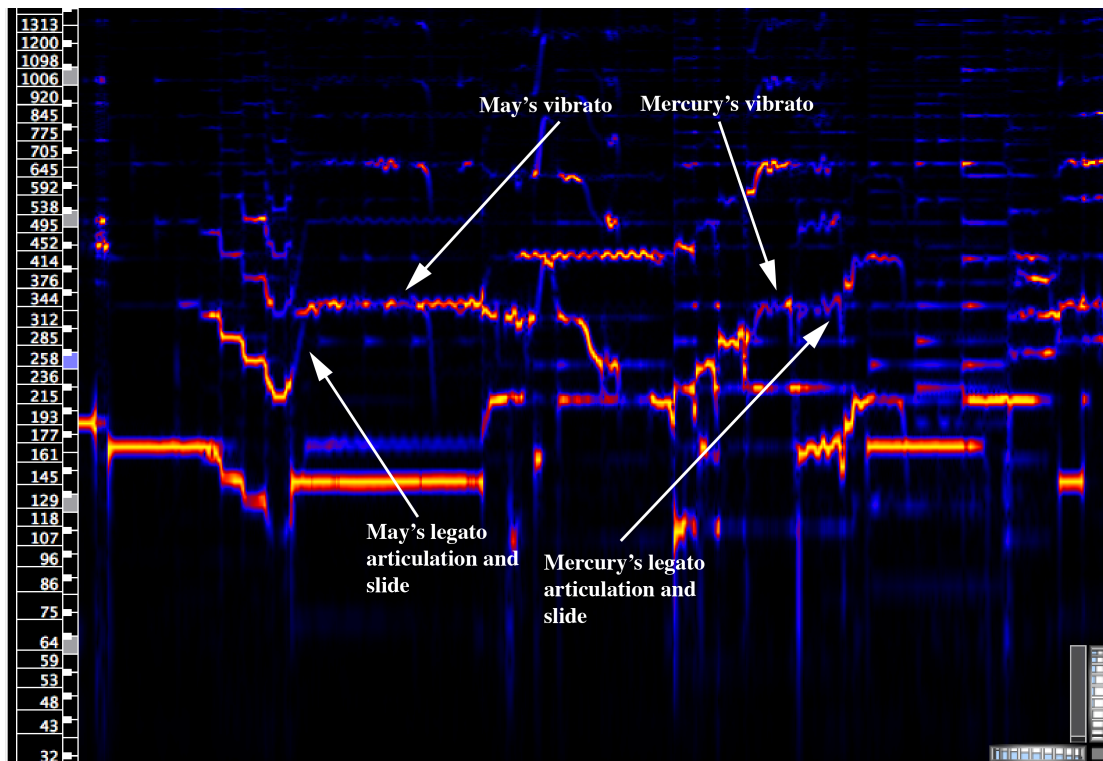


Example 6.3. ‘Somebody to Love’, Melodic Range Spectrogram, Verse



Example 6.4. 'Somebody to Love', Lead Guitar Melodic Range Spectrogram, Instrumental

Consistencies in terms of vibrato and articulation can also be observed in 'Love of My Life', even if they are, perhaps, less obvious than 'Somebody to Love'. From the spectrogram leading into the bridge section (Example 6.5), it is possible to identify a slightly narrower vibrato in May's guitar playing (on the left of the image) than in Mercury's singing once he takes over the melody; but, there is a degree of consistency with respect to the rate of vibrato, which is slow enough to produce a warm and gentle emphasis on individual pitches. One can also observe the consistent legato articulation as the individual melodic lines ascend. In the cases of both 'Somebody to Love' and 'Love of My Life', I would argue that the consistencies in articulation should not necessarily be understood in terms of imitation, per se. Rather, both the singer and guitarist appear to use these techniques in a similar manner and to a similar degree in order to shape the individual gestures of their melodic parts. Here, then, gestural unity reflects a common approach to performance.



Example 6.5. 'Love of My Life', Melodic Range Spectrogram, Bridge

The instances of gestural unity noted above are all rather small-scale in their focus: that is, between single melody parts of the lead vocal and lead guitar. One can identify other types of gestural unity, which are similarly concerned with the interactions between two or three of the band members: May's doubling of the bass lines on electric guitar is one such instance; the group's coordinated and syncopated rhythm hits (e.g. the hard rock section of 'Bohemian Rhapsody') are another. There are also several examples in the corpus in which the notion of gestural unity plays out on a larger scale. I will briefly consider one of these examples, 'Good Old Fashioned Lover Boy' (Example 6.6). In this song, one can observe both a range of isolated examples of gestural unity as well as networks, as it were, of gestures that cross instrumental and vocal parts.

B.Vs

Mercury

Lead Guitar

Guitar Choir

Piano

Bass Guitar

When I'm not with you

I miss those long hot summer nights—

Think of you all ways

When I'm not with you

Think of me al - ways love you__ love you__

Think of you al - ways love you__ Hey boy where'd you get__ it from

Hey boy where did you go__ I learned my pass-ion in the good old fash-ioned school of lo-ver boys

The score consists of several systems. The first system includes a vocal line and a piano accompaniment with triplets. The second system continues the piano accompaniment. The third system introduces a guitar part with a 4/4 and 2/4 rhythm change. The fourth system continues the guitar part. The fifth system shows the piano accompaniment and guitar part in 4/4 time. The sixth system continues the piano accompaniment and guitar part. The seventh system continues the piano accompaniment and guitar part. The eighth system continues the piano accompaniment and guitar part.

The image displays a musical score for the song 'Good Old Fashioned Lover Boy'. It consists of multiple staves for different instruments and vocals. The key signature is B-flat major (two flats) and the time signature is 4/4. The score includes:

- Vocal Line:** A lead vocal line with lyrics: "Di-ning at the Ritz_ we'll meet at nine".
- Lead Guitar:** A melodic line with various techniques like bends and vibrato.
- Guitar Choir:** A multi-voice guitar part with complex rhythmic patterns.
- Piano:** A harmonic accompaniment with chords and arpeggios.
- Bass Guitar:** A rhythmic bass line.

Example 6.6. 'Good Old Fashioned Lover Boy', Backing Vocals, Lead Vocal, Lead Guitar, Guitar Choir, Piano, and Bass Guitar, Bridge II and Instrumental

To begin, the introductory verse features May playing a counter-melody to Mercury's vocal. The guitar line follows the contours of the voice and crescendos and slides upwards in conjunction with Mercury's high vocal note in the penultimate bar of the section. The second bridge and instrumental sections display greater gestural unity between the full band; a transcription of this section is presented in Example 6.6. At the end of bar 33 (the second bar of Example 6.6), Mercury adds an innocuous semi-quaver run to his chordal piano pattern, the rhythm of which Deacon imitates in the following bar as part of a turn figure on the bass guitar. This figuration appears frequently through this and the subsequent instrumental section. In particular, May employs the turn as a guitar counter-melody, and then as a call-and-response motif between the lead and 'backing' guitars.

There are further parallels to draw between the vocals of the first bridge section (not shown here) and the guitars of the instrumental section. In the first bridge, Mercury delivers his lead vocal line—'Ooh let me feel your heart beat'—with detached articulation. Through the following lines, Mercury connects each word of the phrase, but emphasises the hard consonant sounds ('can you *feel* my *love* heat // come on and sit in my...'), thus maintaining a sense of detached articulation. This contrasts with the backing vocalists, whose legato delivery is exaggerated through slides between harmonies. Returning to the instrumental section, one can hear the same gestural contrasts between the lead guitar and the guitar arrangement. Through the instrumental, May frequently plays the lead guitar with staccato articulation, or in short phrases with a staccato note at the end; this contrasts with the sliding guitar harmonies underneath. Thus, across the song, there are motivic, contour, phrasing, and articulation parallels between the voices and instruments, a rich example of the gestural unity that characterised a number of Queen's songs. This allows one to understand the group's output not in terms of isolated gestures, but as the distinct musical product from the work of four musicians.

In drawing these connections, it would be disingenuous to suggest that there was a conscious effort on the May's behalf to make his lead guitar work imitate Mercury's singing. The pitch bending and vibrato, for instance, of 'Somebody of Love' are characteristic of May's playing in general, and are not confined to songs in which

Mercury sings in an exaggerated tone. Nonetheless, as May himself has said on working with Mercury:

Some of my best times were producing a vocal out of Freddie, sort of coaxing him in various directions. A lot of the other best moments were Freddie doing the same for me the other way round, him saying, “Brian, why don’t you try this?” while I was doing the guitar solo... Most of my best guitar work was done on Freddie’s material because it was so inspiring.²⁴⁶

It would thus appear that May was often responding to Mercury’s singing and constructing his guitar melodies accordingly. There would be scope for further investigations in this area. Such connections open up rich interpretative possibilities, especially in songs where the lead guitar takes over the vocal melody at key structural junctures (e.g. the coda sections of ‘My Fairy King’ and ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’). And, there would also be scope for considering the nature of gestural relationships in other rock bands of the time. Analyses of this kind could be conducted using similar processes as above: comparing the phrase structure, the melodic content, and the articulation of the respective parts, in order to measure, as it were, the scope of such unity. As an extra layer to the apparatus, it could be useful to analyse the spectral content of different parts, which may reveal further timbral similarities or disparities. To raise a fleeting and tantalising idea on this matter, I would suggest that gestural unity was not a feature of Jimmy Page and Robert Plant’s relationship in Led Zeppelin’s songs given the divergences in all domains noted above; on the other hand, gestural unity can be heard in the interplay between Bruce Springsteen and Clarence Clemmons of the E Street Band, through both the frequent imitation of melodic material as well as the consistent guttural tone. Why this is the case, and how such findings might relate to Queen, are questions to be answered another time.

6.2 Stylistic Influences

The discussion of Queen’s idiolect and output has, for the most part, isolated the musical traits from wider stylistic trends. This section shifts the focus outwards with a view to understanding how Queen sat in the context of 1970s popular music. As

²⁴⁶ Ben Mitchell, ‘Interview: Brian May Discusses Queen’s Greatest Moments’, *Guitar World*, June (2011), <<http://www.guitarworld.com/interview-brian-may-discusses-queens-greatest-moments>> (accessed 2 July 2014).

pointed out at the start of this thesis, many commentators have struggled to place Queen in a particular musical style of this era. In Stanley's words: 'somehow they remained hard to pin down...they seemed genuinely detached from pop'.²⁴⁷ Similarly, other commentators have suggested that Queen's music flirted with different musical styles. Three of the styles most frequently associated with the group are hard rock, glam rock, and progressive rock.²⁴⁸ The problem with such appraisals mentioned is that they rarely dig into the nature of Queen's relationship to wider musical styles; furthermore, the same authors rarely consider what constitutes these wider styles in the first place, or if they do, the subsequent definitions are shallow. Promane's approach seems typical: he connects 'heavy metal' (analogous to hard rock, one presumes) with 'long guitar solos', glam rock with 'flamboyant and androgynous imagery', and progressive rock with the incorporation of 'classical, jazz and world music'.²⁴⁹

There is no easy solution to this problem, for the simple reason that styles only exist 'prototypically'; as Moore notes, 'one cannot define an exhaustive list of features that all members of a style have, and that will enable any listener to make the same labelling decision no matter what their background'.²⁵⁰ Thus, already, the analyst is at a disadvantage insofar as the stylistic goalposts never stay in the same place. Despite these issues, it is still possible to consider the musical connections that can be drawn between the group and other artists from the same era. From Moore once again: 'Consider a style to be like a constellation: it consists of individual stars, and everybody can see the same stars, but how they draw the constellation will depend on their perspective'.²⁵¹ Although the analysis that follows is framed in terms of concrete labels, it is, perhaps, better conceived as a more fluid process of locating Queen's songs in the night sky and drawing the connections between them and the other musical stars nearby. For each style, I will begin with several general remarks on Queen's musical relationship to the label, before discussing one or two examples or issues that highlight the nature of Queen's place in the various worlds of 1970s rock.

²⁴⁷ Stanley, *Yeah Yeah Yeah*, 506.

²⁴⁸ Promane, 'Freddie Mercury and Queen', 22.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ Moore, *Song Means*, 119-120.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

6.2.1 The Hard Rock Connection: The ‘Dominant Voices’ of Brian May and Roger Taylor, and ‘Dead on Time’

Moore writes of David Bowie that his ‘dominant voice is nearer to hard rock than anything else’.²⁵² This observation is based on the prevalence of the electric guitar in Bowie’s songs across his career. The same idea is applicable to Queen. In 39 songs of the current corpus, the primary accompaniment role was filled by overdriven electric guitars. For these songs, then, the basic textural setup followed artists such as Led Zeppelin, Jimi Hendrix, Cream, and Deep Purple, all of whom may be regarded as central to the hard rock style. In a further 20 Queen songs, the texture was built around piano and overdriven electric guitars, either as a textural combination (e.g. ‘Seven Seas of Rhye’) or in contrasting sections (e.g. ‘Get Down Make Love’). And in a further 23 songs, a piano or acoustic guitar took on the primary accompaniment role, with support from overdriven guitars in either a counter-melodic role (e.g. ‘Don’t Stop Me Now’), or in a secondary harmonic role (e.g. the orchestration of ‘My Fairy King’). The absence of overdriven electric guitars in the other eight songs of the corpus is noticeable. An initial argument can thus be made that 39 of Queen’s songs shared a close relationship with the hard rock style on account of the instrumentation. Further to this, one might argue that Queen took the textural elements of its ‘dominant stylistic voice’ (i.e. the overdriven electric guitar), and moved them into other stylistic contexts, such as piano ballads. That is, even if a song such as ‘You and I’ does not reside in the centre of the hard rock style, the rhythm electric guitars and orchestrated lead guitars demonstrate the transferral of hard rock gestures into the piano-based context of the song.

The same kinds of arguments can be made about Roger Taylor’s drumming, which owes its greatest debt to John Bonham. This connection is not surprising given Taylor’s noted admiration for the Led Zeppelin drummer.²⁵³ Indeed, Taylor’s song ‘The Loser in the End’ opens with a drum beat that is a clear imitation of Bonham’s introduction to ‘When the Levee Breaks’ from several years prior. In songs with dual rhythm guitar parts—that is, those closest to the hard rock model—Taylor often

²⁵² Moore, *Rock*, 202.

²⁵³ Chris Welch, ‘Queen: A Seventies Bombshell’, *Melody Maker*, 11 September (1974), <http://www.queenarchives.com/index.php?title=Freddie_Mercury_-_11-09-1974_-_Melody_Maker> (accessed 30 August 2015).

imitated Bonham's trademarks. Specifically, the Queen drummer tended to divide the crotchet beats in a bar of 4/4 into semiquavers and play one of several kick drum patterns underneath the consistent hi-hat quavers and snare backbeats (Example 6.7). Each variation likely stemmed from Bonham's drum tracks. Thus, the double semiquavers of 'It's Late' (6.7a) echoes 'When the Levee Breaks'; the dotted pattern of 'Seven Seas of Rhye' (6.7b) is similar to 'The Ocean'; and, the reverse dotted pattern of 'White Man' (6.7c) recalls 'Immigrant Song'. As with Bonham's drumming, one often finds a number of these patterns within the same example such as the choruses of 'The Prophet's Song' or 'Fat Bottomed Girls'. 'The Prophet's Song' showcases further Bonham trademarks of hitting the snare on both quavers on beat four (e.g. 'The Ocean'), or in a dotted pattern on the final backbeat of each bar ('The Crunge').

The image contains three musical staves, labeled a), b), and c), each representing a different drum groove in 4/4 time. Staff a) shows a pattern of double semiquaver notes (eighth notes) on the kick drum, with a snare backbeat on the second and fourth beats. Staff b) shows a dotted pattern on the kick drum, with a snare backbeat on the second and fourth beats. Staff c) shows a reverse dotted pattern on the kick drum, with a snare backbeat on the second and fourth beats. Each staff includes a drum set icon and a 4/4 time signature.

Example 6.7. 'It's Late', 'Seven Seas of Rhye', 'White Man', Drums, Verse and Chorus Grooves

It is worth noting also that the semiquaver kick patterns of the hard rock songs slip into other tracks, which do not display such an obvious connection with the hard rock style. For instance, the dotted pattern (6.7b) appears in the instrumental payout of 'In the Lap of the Gods', the chorus of 'Teo Torriatte', and the chorus of 'Play the Game', the latter two of which are piano ballads. It is evident, therefore, that Taylor's hard rock drumming crossed into different musical contexts, in much the same way as the electric guitar texture marks much of Queen's output regardless of the overall style of individual songs.

There are other gestures that stem from the hard rock style and move across other styles in Queen's output—the downbeat power chord (see Section 6.3.4 below) is a

primary example. What I wish to focus on, however, are Queen’s songs that can be located in the centre of the hard rock style—namely those with dual electric rhythm guitars—and consider the relationship between these tracks and other hard rock songs of the 1970s. ‘Dead on Time’, from *Jazz*, typifies Queen’s relationship with the wider style, and highlights how the group sampled and brought together traits from different segments of the hard rock world.

It has already been noted that Taylor’s drumming is closest to Bonham’s and ‘Dead on Time’ is no exception. Although the fast tempo precludes a semiquaver kick pattern, Taylor hits the snare twice on the fourth beat of most bars. There is a further connection with Led Zeppelin in terms of the rhythm guitar work through the verse, which alternates in four-bar segments between power chords and a scale-based riff (Example 6.8). In its contrast between heavy chords and driving rhythms, the rhythm guitar playing would appear to follow, in particular, ‘Immigrant Song’ and ‘Black Dog’, as well as, in general, ‘Dazed and Confused’, ‘Heartbreaker’, ‘Houses of the Holy’, and, to a lesser extent, ‘Communication Breakdown’ and ‘Rock and Roll’. The power chords of the verse also betray the influence of the Who. One of Pete Townshend’s trademarks was to play a downbeat power chord that would sustain and ring over a driving rhythmic pattern: ‘Pinball Wizard’ epitomises this gesture. In ‘Dead on Time’, it is only the power chords themselves that point to the Who; other songs, however, reveal this influence more specifically with the continuation of a rhythm part underneath the guitar chords (e.g. ‘Seven Seas of Rhye’, ‘Father to Son’, etc.).



Example 6.8. ‘Dead on Time’, Rhythm Guitar, Verse

If the contrasting rhythm guitar patterns position Queen in the centre of the hard rock world, around Led Zeppelin and the Who, then other surface rhythms cloud the stylistic picture somewhat. In ‘Dead on Time’, the second chorus-like section features a new rhythm guitar part, which is based on a semiquaver subdivision of each crotchet (Example 6.9). These rhythmic patterns were a hallmark of Queen’s hard rock songs, appearing in the bridge sections of ‘Liar’, ‘Ogre Battle’, and ‘It’s Late’; and,

throughout ‘Keep Yourself Alive’, ‘Great King Rat’, ‘Seven Seas of Rhye’, ‘Brighton Rock’, ‘The Prophet’s Song’, and ‘White Man’, amongst other tracks. This rhythmic trait appears to take its inspiration from the galloping-like pattern (a quaver followed by two semiquavers), which was famous from Western film theme music (e.g. Morricone’s theme for *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*), and which was also to be found in early hard rock songs, such as the Beatles’ ‘Get Back’, Deep Purple’s ‘Hard Lovin’ Man’, and Led Zeppelin’s ‘Immigrant Song’.



Example 6.9. ‘Dead on Time’, Rhythm Guitar, Chorus II

The distinguishing feature of this rhythm guitar playing is that despite the irregularities of the semiquaver divisions, each crotchet beat is emphasised in a bar of 4/4, a point made explicit in the post-chorus of ‘Dead on Time’ by Roger Taylor’s four-to-the-floor kick pattern. In this regard, it is close to the ‘classical’ rock rhythm (alternating crotchet and triplet quavers) that appears also in the early hard rock repertoire, such as in Jeff Beck’s ‘Bolero’, Deep Purple’s ‘Hey Joe’, Black Sabbath’s ‘Children of the Grave’, and Uriah Heep’s ‘Gypsy’. It is here that one can observe Queen’s greatest divergence from the hard rock style of Led Zeppelin, the Who, or even the Rolling Stones.

There are two prominent characteristics of these latter artists’ rhythm guitar parts: firstly, space in the riff for the snare drum on beats two and four; and secondly, a degree of surface syncopation, evident through uneven groupings of quavers or semiquavers, which is set against the regular backbeat pattern. The final two-bar guitar riff of ‘Stairway to Heaven’ offers a classic example of both traits: the first bar features the guitar on beats one and three, with the snare taking beats two and four; the second bar overlays a 3+3+3+3+2+2 semiquaver group on the underlying 4/4 beat (Example 6.10). Such a technique is so standard as to warrant little attention;

however, it forms an important contrast to the ‘classical’ approach and its variations adopted by Queen, in which irregular groupings occur *within* beats, as opposed to *across* beats, thus ensuing that the ‘subtactus’ and ‘tactus’ levels of the metre remain consonant with each other, to borrow from Biamonte.²⁵⁴



Example 6.10. Led Zeppelin, ‘Stairway to Heaven’, Rhythm Guitar, Hard Rock Section

Brian May’s lead guitar work in ‘Dead on Time’ offers further insight into Queen’s relationship to the hard rock style. From the second verse onwards, and through much of the instrumental sections, May plays rapid guitar licks based around the pentatonic minor scale; this virtuosic playing is consistent with any number of 1970s rock guitarists, such as Jimmy Page, Ritchie Blackmore, Randy Rhoades, and so forth. But the striking feature of May’s lead guitar work is the three-part harmonized lines that open the song and appear in the second half of the instrumental section. Although his orchestrations are a much celebrated part of his guitar work, May and Queen certainly did not present the first instances of dual lead instruments playing a third apart. Even by 1973, when Queen began their career, this trait was not uncommon in the hard rock repertoire. Jimmy Page offers a couple of examples (‘Bring It On Home’, ‘Black Dog’), as does Deep Purple (‘Highway Star’), and the Allman Brothers Band (‘Blue Sky’, ‘Jessica’, ‘Rambling Man’). In subsequent years, glitter groups would also get in on the act, as can be heard in ABBA’s ‘Mamma Mia’ and Mud’s ‘Dynamite’ and ‘Tiger Feet’, for instance. In this sense, one can hear May as drawing not from a specific artist, but rather from the general stylistic pool of hard rock.

What defines May’s orchestrations is that they extend beyond the standard two-part arrangements of his predecessors. In a roundabout way, this actually demonstrates a further connection with the likes of Page, Hendrix, Blackmore, *et al.*, who shared a compositional strategy of expanding the musical potential of the electric guitar. May’s expansive guitar arrangements can be heard as his equivalent of Hendrix’ wah-wah

²⁵⁴ Nicole Biamonte, ‘Formal Functions of Metric Dissonance in Rock Music’, *Music Theory Online* 20.2 (2014), <<http://www.mtosmt.org/issues/mto.14.20.2/mto.14.20.2.biamonte.php>> (accessed 1 July 2014).

pedal, or Page using the violin bow on the guitar strings, or Blackmore infusing his solos with classically-derived figuration.²⁵⁵ This idea resonates with May's experiences as a young guitarist. He has talked of seeing Jimi Hendrix live in concert, and subsequently thinking, 'I've got to start being adventurous. I haven't been looking far enough into the future. I've got to start seeing what I can really do'.²⁵⁶

There is, however, one final point worth making with respect to May's guitar arrangements. Although not evident in 'Dead on Time', it was noted in Section 5.1.3 that one may draw a distinction between May's 'lead' harmonised guitars and May's 'backing' harmonised guitars. The former approach is exemplified in 'Dead On Time' through the notable string bending on the individual notes of the introduction. The latter approach is exemplified in 'Father to Son' from *Queen II*, another hard rock song; it is evident through a direct attack on the note, and small, consistent vibrato. These 'backing' guitar harmonies, therefore, have an overall smoother and even sound. In this regard, they appear to imitate the texture of a string section or orchestra that might pad out the harmonic layer of a ballad—the Carpenter's 1972-hit 'Goodbye to Love' is a typical example, as is Elton John's 'Goodbye Yellow Brick Road'.

Discussing May's guitar orchestrations, de Boer argues that 'this technique [layering] was one that audiences had rarely heard before'.²⁵⁷ This statement must be treated with some caution. Audiences of the 1970s would likely have been familiar with the sound of layered guitars, but not to the extent developed by May. That is, he layered three parts instead of two; he took this trait from hard rock into other musical styles, such as the Baroque pop of 'Killer Queen' or, even, the 1930s jazz of 'Dreamer's Ball'; and, finally, May brought the sounds of another style (i.e. the pop ballad) into the instrumental sphere of hard rock. What was novel about May's guitar arrangements was not the fact that the guitars were layered, but rather their harmonic scope, the musical contexts in which they were heard, and the textural imitations of other instruments.

²⁵⁵ See, for instance, Steve Waksman, *Instruments of Desire: The Electric Guitar and the Shaping of Musical Experience* (London: Harvard University Press, 1999), 237ff; Robert Walser, 'Eruptions: Heavy Metal Appropriations of Classical Virtuosity', *Popular Music* 11/3 (1992).

²⁵⁶ Nuno Bettencourt, 'The Life of Brian', *Guitar World*, August (1991), <http://queenarchives.com/index.php?title=Brian_May_-_08-XX-1991_-_Guitar_World> (accessed 18 February 2014).

²⁵⁷ De Boer, 'On the Margins', 129.

The complete relationship of Queen with the hard rock style is thus not as straightforward as would initially appear. On the one hand, it is clear that the group adopted a number of traits from the wider hard rock style, in terms of the predominant instrumentation, and May's general approach to rhythm and lead guitar playing. Furthermore, one can pinpoint specific connections between segments of Queen's songs and artists, who were central to the hard rock style, such as the drumming of Taylor and the power chords of May, which relate well to Led Zeppelin and the Who, respectively. On the other hand, there are a number of details that colour this stylistic relationship. The prevalence of galloping-like rhythm guitar patterns moves Queen away from the rhythm and blues-influenced groups, and May's orchestrations, while stemming from other hard rock artists, offer points of difference with his contemporaries and predecessors. Although not necessarily the case in 'Dead on Time', aspects of Queen's harmonic language further contribute to the movement of Queen away from the centre of hard rock. Put simply, the highly directional chorus tag of 'Keep Yourself Alive'—I-III_c-vi-IV-V-I—contrasts strongly with the modal harmonies of Led Zeppelin, Deep Purple, and others. Thus despite being the 'dominant voice', it must be acknowledged that Queen did not adopt wholesale the traits of hard rock, and nor were they averse to developing and fusing other traits with the instrumental sounds of this style.

6.2.2 The Glam Rock Connection: Musical 'Over-Emphasis'

Queen's relationship with hard rock was relatively straightforward to assess, insofar as the broader style traits could be identified with a degree of ease. The same cannot be said about Queen's relationship with glam rock and progressive rock, for the simple reason that both labels are rather slippery and ambiguous, albeit in different ways. Part of the problem with glam rock is that it is rarely viewed in terms of common musical traits, and more in terms of an artistic movement, marked by certain attitudes and ideals. Moore summarises this position neatly:

Neither Frith nor any other writer seems to suggest that 'glam rock' may be descriptive of a musical style. Indeed, the stylistic differences between David Bowie and Roxy Music, Lou Reed and the New York Dolls, and even 'glitter'

rockers like Slade, Marc Bolan, Gary Glitter and the Sweet, were far more pronounced than the similarities. I would suggest that for most of these figures, the musical style tended to be impervious to the image.²⁵⁸

Moore further suggests that Bowie ‘forced attention upon the notion that a performer can inhabit a persona, rather than the persona being an aspect of the performer’.²⁵⁹ This view is supported by Auslander, who argues, ‘Glam provided very public images of alternative ways of imagining gender and sexuality...The demand for the freedom to explore and construct one’s identity...is glam rock’s most important legacy’.²⁶⁰ These comments resonate in Freddie Mercury’s context, given both the creation of his stage persona (his given name was Farrokh Bulsara) and the contrast between his flamboyant on-stage presentation and his quiet and introverted demeanour offstage.²⁶¹

It is possible to draw musical parallels between Queen’s output and artists who fall under the glam rock banner, although it is, perhaps, worth starting by noting several glam rock traits that largely bypassed Queen’s songs. Auslander has identified a trend from this era, which he describes as ‘performing the 1950s in the 1970s’.²⁶² He argues that this trend played out through a number of musical, thematic, and extra-musical cues. One of the auspicious traits, in this regard, was the glam rockers’ recourse to boogie-oriented guitar patterns, as can be heard in the songs of T-Rex, Suzi Quatro, Mud, the Sweet, Slade, and so forth. A second trait, as noted by Moore, was the adoption of the doo-wop harmonic progression (I-vi-IV-V) and its close variations. This progression is prominent in Elton John’s ‘Crocodile Rock’, Bowie’s ‘Drive-In Saturday’ and ‘The Prettiest Star’ (I-vi-II-V), and Mud’s ‘Lonely This Christmas’.²⁶³ With respect to these two stylistic elements, Queen’s relationship to glam rock is rather tangential. The group only worked with boogie patterns on several occasions (namely, ‘Now I’m Here’ and ‘Sweet Lady’); further, they tended to avoid I-vi-IV-V progressions, in favour of I-vi-ii-V patterns, which points more to the influence of Tin Pan Alley music. As is explored further in Section 6.2.4, Queen looked to the past for

²⁵⁸ Moore, *Rock*, 126.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

²⁶⁰ Auslander, *Performing Glam Rock*, 234.

²⁶¹ Mercury himself often fostered this impression in interviews. See the footage from O’Casey, *Queen*.

²⁶² Philip Auslander, ‘Good Old Rock and Roll: Performing the 1950s in the 1970s’, *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 15/2 (2003).

²⁶³ Allan F. Moore, ‘What story should a history of popular music tell?’, *Popular Music History* 1/3 (2006), 335.

musical inspiration, but the overt sense of 1950s nostalgia that marks other glam rock songs is largely absent in Queen's output.

The musical connections with glam rock lie elsewhere in Queen's songs. To start, it was noted above that one Queen's common instrumental textures featured the piano as the primary accompanying instrument, with lead electric guitars providing counter-melodic voices. 'My Fairy King', 'In the Lap of the Gods', 'Love of My Life', and 'Don't Stop Me Now' offer examples from across the corpus. The piano-lead guitar combination can be found through the Beatles' output, such as in 'Carry that Weight', 'Let It Be', as well as in the later work of Paul McCartney (e.g. 'Maybe I'm Amazed'). That said, this sense of partnership between an acoustic and electric instrument (as opposed to the electric guitar overpowering the piano in, say, 'Seven Seas of Rhye') mirrors much of David Bowie's early 1970s output ('Moonage Daydream', 'Rock 'n' Roll Suicide', 'Life on Mars', 'The Prettiest Star', etc.), as well as the songs of Be-Bop Deluxe (e.g. 'Jets at Dawn', 'Love is a Swift Arrow').

A secondary parallel between glam rock groups and Queen is the presence of tom-drum oriented grooves, in conjunction with a four-to-the-floor kick drum pattern. Unlike Taylor's imitations of John Bonham, these grooves were not overly common in Queen's output, and would only be utilised in one or two sections of a song. Thus, in only the verse and initial chorus of 'Liar', Taylor 'rides' the floor and lower rack tom on the quaver beats, while kicking the bass drum on every crotchet.²⁶⁴ For the subsequent instrumental sections, Taylor moves into conventional rock beat. In the instrumental of 'Flick of the Wrist', the tom drum groove in semiquavers is actually very similar to the groove of Buddy Holly's 'Peggy Sue', and again the kick drum marks out the underlying crotchet pulse.

One of the notable features of glam rock drumming, particular on the 'glitter' side of this label, was the grooves without hi-hats and with a 'stomp' (i.e. four) kick drum beat for one non-chorus section of the song. Further, it was not uncommon for the drummers to mark out the quaver subdivisions of the crotchet beats on the floor tom. This approach has its clearest representation in Gary Glitter's 'Rock and Roll',

²⁶⁴ Another reading of this drum pattern in 'Liar' is that it was borrowed from Led Zeppelin's 'Four Sticks', but 'straightened' into a 4/4 groove.

although it is possible to find similar drum patterns in Mud's 'Dynamite' and 'Tiger Feet'; Suzi Quatro's 'Can the Can' and 'Devil Gate Drive'; Sparks' 'This Town Ain't Big Enough'; and the Sweet's 'Teenage Rampage', 'Blockbuster', and 'Hell Raiser'. It is worth noting that Taylor did not play the same grooves as can be found in the songs mentioned above, favouring either rolling semiquavers or a 'galloping' pattern on the tom drums. Nonetheless, with the lack of cymbals in these sections combined with a consistent pulse on the kick drum, Taylor's grooves have sonic qualities (rumbling and driving) that are consistent with glam rock drumming.

The two points made thus far have tied Queen into the glam rock style, but in relatively loose ways. That is, the acoustic-electric textures of Queen are realised differently to other glam rock artists; further, this trait is so broad that it is difficult to view it as a defining feature of the wider style. The drumming techniques of Taylor were sonically close to other glam drummers, but were found only in fragments of the Queen's output. The following paragraphs document two textural approaches that were both common amongst glam rock artists, and relatively widespread across Queen's songs. Because the discussion focuses on textural approaches, rather than specific textural patterns, these points emphasise Moore's earlier suggestion that glam rock artists were bound less by consistent sounds, and more by a shared musical aesthetic.

One such parallel is the 'glittering' textural surfaces, which refers to the presence of high frequency timbres in the mix. This trait comes to life through different instruments, such as the horns of Bryan Ferry and Roxy Music's songs (e.g. 'Price of Love', 'This Is Tomorrow', 'Let's Stick Together'), the keyboards of ABBA ('Mamma Mia', 'So Long'), the high register guitar harmonies of Mud ('Tiger Feet'), and the vocal harmonies of the Sweet ('Teenage Rampage'), amongst other examples. In Queen's case, the group adopted a variety of these textural patterns to create a shimmering texture: specifically, harmonised guitar 'strings', harmonised lead guitars, and three and four-part vocal sections. The consistent presence of these types of sounds thus gave Queen's songs a consistently 'glittery' textural surface, as per the songs of other glam bands.

Moore raises another point of similarity amongst glam rock groups. He argues that ‘these styles [1960s and 1970s pop] were treated with irony by the British art school movement in the early 1970s in glam rock...partly through over-emphasis of its distinctive features, in particular its focus on rich instrumental timbres’.²⁶⁵ Moore cites Queen in this regard, albeit without further details. His appraisal, however, is pertinent; the notion of over-emphasis is fruitful for explaining elements of Queen’s songs, and represents the strongest link between the group and the glam rock style. Running through Queen’s songs are musical gestures that can be interpreted as over-emphasised representations of wider stylistic traits.

Brian May’s doubling of a stepwise bass line is, perhaps, the prime example of this approach. To extrapolate from Moore, this harmonic feature stems from ‘sophisticated’ 1960s pop, namely the Beatles, in whose songs one finds similar chromatic bass lines and stepwise movement. Thus, the descent in the verse of ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’—Cm-Cm/B-Cm/B^b-Cm/A—has a harmonic counterpart in the Beatles’ ‘Michelle’. By playing these bass lines on overdriven electric guitar, May draws significant attention to this harmonic motion—it is thus over-emphasised. Equally, one can view this gesture as an ironic treatment of the hard rock style. One of the features of the hard rock style was the single-line riff, usually played in the lower register of the electric guitar and on the bass guitar at the octave below—numerous examples abound from the Beatles’ ‘She’s So Heavy’ to Hendrix’ ‘Manic Depression’ to Led Zeppelin’s ‘Black Dog’. From a textural perspective, then, May’s doubling of the bass line can be heard as drawing on the hard rock style. The irony lies in the fact that this hard rock textural gesture is married with a pop harmonic gesture. There is a further layer of irony in that the raw power of hard rock is juxtaposed by the emotive and sentimental connotations of the descending bass lines.²⁶⁶

Similar kinds of points can be made regarding other Queen gestures. As noted in Section 6.1.1, another of Queen’s arrangement techniques was for the full band to play syncopated hits. From a rhythmic perspective, the gestures again stem from the

²⁶⁵ Moore, *Song Means*, 145.

²⁶⁶ See, for instance, Chapter 9 of Dominic Pedler, *The Songwriting Secrets of the Beatles* (London: Omnibus Press, 2010), Kindle.

hard rock style. Indeed, the similarities are plain to hear between Led Zeppelin's 'What Is and Never Should Be' and a number of Queen tracks in which the third or fourth of the beat of the bar features a hit on the semiquaver offbeat (Examples 6.11 and 6.12). In some Queen songs, the exaggeration partly comes from double-tracking the rhythm guitars, such that the syncopated figure appears more forceful (e.g. 'White Man'). Further to this, in 'What Is and What Never Should Be', Bonham does not actually punctuate the syncopated hit, but rather the subsequent quaver on the crash cymbal. In Queen's songs, this kind of gesture is always pre-empted by a short snare fill and marked by the crash cymbal. Thus, one might argue that the exaggeration lies in the degree to which the band signposted these rhythmic hits.

Example 6.11. Led Zeppelin, 'What Is and What Should Never Be', Rhythm Guitar, Bass Guitar, and Drums, Chorus

Example 6.12. 'Son and Daughter', Rhythm Guitar, Bass Guitar, and Drums, Verse

It was not only 1960s pop and hard rock styles that received Queen's exaggerated treatment. Queen's approach to arranging can even be viewed as over-emphasising the traits of glam rock itself. As noted above, other glam rock bands created a 'glittery' sound from one or two instrumental techniques. Queen, on the other hand, often juxtaposed rich vocal and guitar arrangements in the same song, thus creating a double dose, as it were, of shimmering textures. Furthermore, the band's

arrangements tended to be more substantial, with three or four guitars instead of two, or a multi-tracked vocal choir with eighteen voices instead of a single harmony part (e.g. the Sweet's 'Hell Raiser'). To offer a good illustration of this point, the Sweet's 'Block Buster!' ends the chorus with a sustained hit, the three-part vocal harmony singing the title lyrics on an E major chord; the top voice sings the fifth (B4) and there is a phasing effect on the vocals. One year after 'Block Buster!' reached the top of the UK charts, Queen recorded 'Seven Seas of Rhye' and 'Killer Queen', and employed almost identical vocal figures at the end of the respective bridge and chorus sections. 'Killer Queen' also features a phasing effect that creates a timbral connection with 'Block Buster!'. Aside from slight harmonic variations, both arrangements extend beyond the vocal scope of the Sweet track. 'Killer Queen' is richer in textural density with its multi-tracked four-part arrangement, and the vocals in both Queen tracks reach higher notes—the top part of the 'Killer Queen' arrangement reaches a D5, while in 'Seven Seas of Rhye', Roger Taylor's harmony note soars to A5.

This is not to suggest that Queen deliberately set out to create richer and more expansive arrangements than the other bands around them. Rather, these observations support the view that Queen was bound to these other artists by a common aesthetic goal. This resonates with Brian May's comments many years later: 'we didn't necessarily feel we were part of a trend. We just suddenly found we were in the midst of it'.²⁶⁷ This comment, somewhat inadvertently, points towards Queen's dual relationship with both hard rock and glam rock, and allows for a summary of the stylistic connections made thus far. The band members always made explicit in interviews their admiration for fellow hard rock artists, such as Led Zeppelin, Jimi Hendrix, and the Who.²⁶⁸ As Section 6.2.1 demonstrated, many of the musical traits from this style appeared throughout Queen's songs. Equally, Queen belonged to the artistic movement of glam rock in the early 1970s. May's comment suggests that the group did not necessarily seek to emulate Bowie or other glitter rockers; this perhaps explains the lack of specific musical traits from these other artists, such as the boogie guitar patterns. Nonetheless, Queen's treatment of its inherited musical sources, from

²⁶⁷ Alan di Perna, 'Brian's Song', *Guitar World*, January (1993), <http://www.queenarchives.com/index.php?title=Brian_May_-_01-XX-1993_-_Guitar_World> (accessed 16 February 2014).

²⁶⁸ For instance, Alexis Korner, 'Brian May - Guitar Greats', *BBC Radio One* (1983), <http://www.queenarchives.com/index.php?title=Brian_May_-_XX-XX-1983_-_Guitar_Greats_-_BBC_Radio_One> (accessed 30 August 2015).

1960s pop to hard rock, was consistent with the elaborate and exaggerated approach of the band's glam contemporaries.

6.2.3 The Progressive Rock Connection: Classical Music References, 1973-1976

It is Queen's relationship with progressive rock that is the most difficult to assess. A number of writers confidently assert that the British group had something to do with 1970s progressive rock; as Desler states, 'Queen contributed well-known specimens that match the definition of progressive rock laid out in [Kevin Holm-Hudson's *Progressive Rock Reconsidered*]',²⁶⁹ Yet the same authors are much less forthcoming about the extent and nature of Queen's relationship with the broader movement. Furthermore, with progressive rock defined in varying ways across the literature,²⁷⁰ the analytical framework is rarely stable enough to develop a sound connection between Queen and the wider label. Nonetheless, there are several common themes running through the progressive rock discourse; it is possible to bring Queen's music into contact with these themes. What makes this relationship interesting is that on the surface, it would appear many features of Queen's songs relate well to the traits of progressive rock; with a slightly more nuanced approach, however, this relationship is weakened. I will offer a couple of introductory examples to highlight this idea, before developing a richer argument with respect to Queen's references to classical music.

It is crucial to note, before proceeding to the analysis, that the arguments below rely exclusively on drawing comparisons between Queen and surrounding discourse on progressive rock. While this discourse itself has often been developed through analysis of individual tracks and artists, the subsequent understanding of progressive rock as a broad label has developed with a hint of confirmation bias, insofar as it is centred on artists and characteristics that endorse the existing conceptions of the label (that is, progressive rock songs are formally complex and are influenced by classical

²⁶⁹ Desler, 'History without royalty?', 400. For similar comments, see Jochen Eisentraut, *The Accessibility of Music: Participation, Reception, and Contact* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 111.

²⁷⁰ For several variations on the conception of progressive in style and/or genre terms, see Edward Macan, *Rocking the Classics: English Progressive Rock and the Counterculture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 11; Kevin Holm-Hudson, 'Introduction', in *Progressive Rock Reconsidered*, ed. Kevin Holm-Hudson (New York: Routledge, 2002), 2; Chris Anderton, 'A many-headed beast: progressive rock as European meta-genre', *Popular Music* 29/3 (2010), 430.

music). In other words, there has been no systematic and comprehensive study of progressive rock that has shown how representative and accurate (or not) such conceptions of the movement may be. This is only to raise the caveat that the ideas to follow will answer the question of Queen's relationship to progressive rock only to a certain extent, and in only in the context of this particular discursive framework. With the benefit of further studies or other conceptions of progressive rock, one may develop alternate ideas.

One of the key ideas of the progressive rock discourse is that artists explored more complex and expansive song forms, to the point of entire album sides comprising either a single track (e.g. Yes' 'Close to the Edge') or united 'tableaux' (e.g. Genesis' 'Supper's Ready' or Pink Floyd's *The Dark Side of the Moon*).²⁷¹ Moore summarises this approach as 'the possibility of a move for popular song from the self-contained, three-minute love song, produced for purposes of entertainment alone, into new means of expression'.²⁷² Queen followed the various strands of this trend. As noted in Section 4.1, many of its songs incorporated multiple thematic ideas and expanded song forms beyond the bounds of existing templates. At nine minutes long, and with seven distinct thematic ideas, 'The Prophet's Song', from *A Night at the Opera*, exemplifies this trend. Furthermore, the coda is an instrumental section in which Brian May alters and extends the original theme of the song, thereby creating a link into the subsequent album track 'Love of My Life'. This gives the impression that Queen intended for listeners to experience the album in its entirety by joining multiple songs together into a larger unit. This view is strengthened in light of the instrumental soundscape and national anthem 'God Save the Queen', which open and close the album, respectively. These two segments create a sonic frame, thus suggesting it is the album that is the 'self-contained' unit rather than the individual songs themselves, similar to the Beatles *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, or Pink Floyd's *The Dark Side of the Moon*. It is evident, therefore, that these elements of formal

²⁷¹ See Mark Spicer, 'Large-Scale Strategy and Compositional Design in the Early Music of Genesis', in *Expression in Pop-Rock Music: Critical and Analytical Essays*, ed. Walter Everett (New York: Routledge, 2008); Shaugn O'Donnell, "'On the path': tracing tonal coherence in *The Dark Side of the Moon*", in *'Speak to Me': The Legacy of Pink Floyd's Dark Side of the Moon*, ed. Russell Reising (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006). Both authors emphasise the coherence of the large-scale musical unit under consideration.

²⁷² Moore, *Song Means*, 144.

construction at both smaller (song) and larger (album) levels bear similarities to other cases in the progressive rock repertoire.

This view, however, is shallow. Firstly, with respect to the structures of individual songs, Section 4.1.2 demonstrated that the common approach in Queen's output was not to dismantle the formal conventions of popular songs, but to treat these conventions as the foundation for a more expansive structure. Thus, in 'The Prophet's Song', there is still a clear verse-pre-chorus-chorus template in place, to which Queen add two bridge-like sections, one *a cappella* vocal section, and an instrumental section. Clearly, this extra material creates an unconventional overall structure, in line with the trends of progressive rock; but it is important not to overlook the degree to which Queen still relied on the formal conventions of pop music, in terms of repeating and ordering certain thematic ideas within this structure.²⁷³ Secondly, despite the pretence of a large-scale, unified entity (i.e. the album), there are a few musical grounds on which could argue for any sense of thematic coherence across songs (e.g. 'The Prophet's Song' to 'Love of My Life'), let alone across the album as a whole. It may be more appropriate to regard *A Night at the Opera* and similar experiments on previous albums²⁷⁴ as large-scale medleys, whereby discrete musical units (the songs) are fused with connecting phrases, thus creating a larger unit that is unified temporally but not thematically.

These observations point to some ambiguity over Queen's relationship to progressive rock. I would argue that the nature of this relationship is best understood in terms of a distinction between progressive rock as a style, and progressive rock as a genre. This is not an easy argument to make, for the simple reason that the concepts of style and genre are themselves understood in many ways in popular music discourse.²⁷⁵ However, by constructing the concepts in a certain manner, it is possible to draw such a distinction, and this, in turn, allows for a more nuanced understanding of Queen's place in the progressive rock movement. While this argument could be pursued further with respect to the formal structures of Queen's songs, I will change focus and

²⁷³ This is a point that could certainly be made with respect to the large-scale songs of other progressive artists, such as Pink Floyd's 'Shine on You Crazy Diamond' or Yes' 'Roundabout'.

²⁷⁴ On *Queen II*, for instance, 'Ogre Battle', 'The Fairy Feller's Master-Stroke' and 'Nevermore' are joined together.

²⁷⁵ See Moore, 'Categorical Conventions'.

instead consider Queen's references to classical music. This is another musical feature that is often considered to bring Queen under the progressive rock banner. Promane, for instance, cites Queen's classical music references as proof of the group using progressive rock 'musical signifiers',²⁷⁶ while Josephson cites the presence of 'madrigal forms' on *A Night at the Opera* as proof of Queen's progressive status.²⁷⁷ Despite a lack of evidence from both authors, it is the discursive logic that is important here: Queen used classical music techniques, as did progressive rock bands, and thus Queen was connected to progressive rock.

To understand this relationship in greater depth, it is necessary to work through elements of this discourse. To start, a number of authors have argued that the use of classical music techniques and structures was one of progressive rock's defining characteristics; Macan provides a forceful assertion of this position—'The progressive rock style will be shown to be indebted to the classical tradition in the realms of instrumentation, structure, and virtuosity'.²⁷⁸ Analysts have subsequently highlighted the connections between classical music and the music of progressive rock bands.²⁷⁹ Insofar as these analysts identify a shared musical trait, one might say that the use of classical music techniques constitutes one element of progressive rock as a style. This follows the definition of style as set forth by Meyer in Section 2.3.1, in terms of a musical pattern replicated across the output of multiple artists. Or, following Moore, one might argue that the references to classical music operate in terms of a consistent 'manner of articulation' of a gesture, whether in terms of form, instrumental techniques or harmonic language. Admittedly, this feature constitutes an extremely broad stylistic trait; the fact that it is apparently shared across different works labelled 'progressive rock' suggests it can be regarded as a stylistic marker nonetheless.

²⁷⁶ Promane, 'Freddie Mercury and Queen', 22.

²⁷⁷ Josephson, 'Bach Meets Liszt', 67-68.

²⁷⁸ Macan, *Rocking the Classics*, 16.

²⁷⁹ Examples of these analyses include John Covach, 'Echolyn and American progressive rock', *Contemporary Music Review* 20/4 (2000); John R. Palmer, 'Yes, 'Awaken', and the Progressive Rock Style', *Popular Music* 20/2 (2001); John J. Sheinbaum, 'Progressive Rock and the Inversion of Musical Values', in *Progressive Rock Reconsidered*, ed. Kevin Holm-Hudson (New York: Routledge, 2002); Mattias Lundberg, 'Motivic cohesion and parsimony in three songs from Gentle Giant's *Acquiring the Taste* (1971)', *Popular Music* 33/2 (2014); Mattias Lundberg, "'To Let it Be Without Pretense": Canon, Fugue, and Imitation in Progressive Rock 1968–1979', *Music Theory Online* 20.3 (2014), <<http://www.mtosmt.org/issues/mto.14.20.3/mto.14.20.3.lundberg.php>> (accessed 14 October 2014).

The idea of progressive rock as a genre is altogether more complex, only because the concept of genre is understood in different ways across music-related disciplines. In popular music studies, genre has tended to be conceived as an overarching category that accounts for the musical, performative, visual, economic and distribution, and socio-cultural conventions of a particular label.²⁸⁰ In traditional musicology, however, genre has tended to be concerned more exclusively with the musical traits of a work in accordance with its title: thus, the ‘symphony’, as a genre, is defined by certain characteristics pertaining to instrumentation (orchestral), length (three or more movements), form (sonata form for the first movement), and so forth.²⁸¹ What unites both sides is the idea that genre involves a dialogue between composer or artist and audience. Thus, in Kallberg’s words on Chopin: ‘a kind of “generic contract” develops between the composer and listener: the composer agrees to use some of the conventions, patterns, and gestures of a genre, and the listener consents to interpret some aspects of the piece in a way conditioned by this genre’;²⁸² and thus, in Walser’s words on heavy metal: genres ‘function as horizons of expectation for readers (or listeners) and as models of composition for authors (or musicians)’.²⁸³ It is in this regard that Moore argues that genre pertains to the ‘identity’ and ‘context’ of gestures, or ‘what’ a piece of music sets out to do, as opposed to ‘how’ these aims are realised in musical form (style).²⁸⁴ Accordingly, one may view genre, *contra* the concept of style, in terms of the meanings and ideas that inform and underpin the stylistic traits.

This idea correlates with the segments of the progressive rock discourse in which authors discuss the apparent motivations behind the classical music references. Two points stand out in this part of the literature. Firstly, progressive rock artists sought to fuse disparate musical worlds, with traits from each sphere being important ingredients in the complete musical product; in Holm-Hudson’s words, ‘It may be more to accurate to describe progressive rock as an attempt to merge rock’s beat with

²⁸⁰ Fabbri’s work is pioneering in this regard; see Fabbri, ‘A Theory of Musical Genres’. Other studies that take a similar approach include Simon Frith, *Performing Rites: On the Value of Popular Music* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1996), 75-95; Borthwick and Moy, *Popular Music Genres*; Fabian Holt, *Genre in Popular Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

²⁸¹ See, in particular, Jim Samson, ‘Chopin and Genre’, *Music Analysis* 8/3 (1989), 215ff.

²⁸² Jeffrey Kallberg, ‘The Rhetoric of Genre: Chopin’s Nocturne in G Minor’, *19th-Century Music* 11/3 (1988), 243.

²⁸³ Walser, *Running with the Devil*, 29.

²⁸⁴ Moore, ‘Categorical Conventions’.

certain aspects of art music's style'.²⁸⁵ Secondly, progressive rock artists sought to bring together the ingredients from opposing ends of the cultural spectrum, with progressive rock thus unifying high and low cultures in a new art form; in Atton's words, 'At the heart of progressive rock was an imperative to create a rock-based music that drew on what its musicians conceived as sophisticated "artistic" modes of musical expression...progressive rock embraced specific dominant values of high art from the outset'.²⁸⁶ Thus, within the discourse of progressive rock, the important idea is not simply the notion of bringing together different musical styles, but the opposition between high and low musical values, which dissipates in the musical text.²⁸⁷

Thus, one is left with a distinction between progressive rock as a style, which concerns the referencing of classical music techniques and traits, and progressive rock as a genre, which concerns the reasons and meanings that inform this borrowing. This is, of course, a rather narrow conception of genre, particularly in the field of popular music studies. Although this distinction between style and genre is useful in terms of labelling and packaging these ideas, what is actually crucial is the dichotomy between musical traits and musical functions. It is this dichotomy that allows for the more nuanced understanding of Queen's relationship to progressive rock as seen through the group's classical music references.



Example 6.13. 'The March of the Black Queen', Lead Guitar and Piano, Coda

²⁸⁵ Holm-Hudson, 'Introduction', 11.

²⁸⁶ Chris Atton, 'Living in the Past?': value discourses in progressive rock fanzines', *Popular Music* 20/1 (2001), 30, 33. Interestingly, Keister and Smith suggest an opposing view that progressive rock artists bestowed the credibility and cultural value of rock music on art music; see Jay Keister and Jeremy Smith, 'Musical Ambition, Cultural Accreditation and the Nasty Side of Progressive Rock', *Popular Music* 27/3 (2008), 447.

²⁸⁷ Sheinbaum's analysis of Yes' 'Roundabout' provides the clearest exposition of these ideas; see Sheinbaum, 'Progressive Rock'.



Example 6.14. Mozart, Piano Sonata in D major, 1st movement, bars 124-27

The nature of Queen’s references to classical music varied across the corpus. To start, it is worth noting the appearance of several traits that appear to reference classical music with a small ‘c’. One such example is the use of cadential trills in the piano or lead guitar part, as can be heard, for instance, in ‘The March of the Black Queen’ (Example 6.13), ‘The Fairy Feller’s Master-Stroke’, ‘Love of My Life’, and at the very end of ‘Millionaire Waltz’. Another example of this idea is evident in Roger Taylor’s drumming, when he plays the floor tom drum like a timpanist, accentuating vocal and rhythmic figures. This can also be heard in ‘The March of the Black Queen’ and ‘Millionaire Waltz’ (in the 12/8 rock sections of both songs), as well as in the introduction to ‘In the Lap of the Gods’ and the opera section of ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’.

In these cases, one could argue that the band members of Queen are imitating performance practices from classical music. But, they are performance practices from a rather acontextual vision of the concert repertoire. It is not difficult to identify pieces of classical music in which these traits appear. Cadential trills can be found in many piano sonatas by Mozart (for example, Piano Sonata in D major, K. 284, 1st movement, bars 125-6; Example 6.14) and, the basic approach to timpani playing can be heard in Tchaikovsky’s *1812 Overture* or Rachmaninoff’s Piano Concerto no. 2 in C minor, to select a pair of classical staples. But it is unlikely that such works provided direct inspiration for the Queen members. As Holm-Hudson advances, many progressive rock artists’ knowledge of classical music would have probably stemmed from ‘a few music-appreciation classes and viewing films such as *Fantasia* as a

child',²⁸⁸ or, in Queen's case, maybe catching the 'popular' classics on the *BBC*.²⁸⁹ What this suggests in this context is that the trills and the timpani-like drumming cannot really be considered references to specific classical styles, but are instead general approximations of the sounds and techniques of classical music.

Three examples from *A Night at the Opera* and *A Day at the Races* bring the issue of style and genre into focus. These examples all feature extended and precise references to classical music sources. Starting with 'Love of My Life', the song is notable for its extended instrumental interludes that appear between the verse and bridge sections. From Example 6.15, one can observe a number of important traits in Mercury's piano part—the linear construction of the voices; the parallel movement of outer voices against a static inner voice; the figuration change from scale passages to broken intervals, the upper voice of which descends; and, the surface rhythm changes in the left hand from walking quavers to semiquavers in conjunction with the right hand. Taken together, Mercury's piano playing offers a clear imitation of the Baroque keyboard style, particularly Bach's. Indeed, it is not difficult to find a number of these features through *The Well-Tempered Clavier*; variations on all the techniques can be found in this brief excerpt from Prelude No. 15 in G major from Book II (Example 6.16). Mercury has simplified Bach's style, most evidently by using three voices instead of four; nonetheless, there is a clear classical reference point in 'Love of My Life'.

²⁸⁸ Kevin Holm-Hudson, "Come Sail Away" and the Commodification of "Prog Lite", *American Music* 23/3 (2005), 380.

²⁸⁹ Although slightly predating the childhoods of Queen's band members, Christina Baade presents an excellent overview of the type of repertoire heard on the *BBC* during World War II; see Christina Baade, 'Radio Symphonies: The BBC, Everyday Listening and the Popular Classics Debate during the People's War', in *Ubiquitous Musics: The Everyday Sounds That We Don't Always Notice*, eds. Elena Boschi, Anahid Kassabian, and Marta Garcia Quiñones (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2013).

The musical score for 'Love of My Life' is presented in a multi-stem format. It includes a vocal line with lyrics 'I still love you', a lead guitar line, and piano accompaniment. The score is divided into several systems, each with specific annotations:

- System 1:** Features a vocal line with lyrics 'I still love you' and piano accompaniment. The time signature changes from 4/4 to 2/4 and back to 4/4.
- System 2:** Includes a lead guitar line with annotations: 'Linear construction' and 'Parallel 10ths in outer voices'. The piano accompaniment continues.
- System 3:** Shows a lead guitar line with a 'Contrast between scale and broken chord figuration' annotation. The piano accompaniment features a 'Change in L.H. surface rhythm' annotation.
- System 4:** Continues the piano accompaniment with the 'Change in L.H. surface rhythm' annotation.

Example 6.15. 'Love of My Life', Lead Guitar, Backing Vocals, and Piano, Instrumental

Example 6.16. Bach, Prelude in G major, *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, Book II, bars 1-10

Staying with *A Night at the Opera*, it has already been argued in Section 6.1.2 that the opera section of ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’ is best heard as an imitation of Gilbert and Sullivan’s light opera style, in addition to the reference to Mantovani’s ‘cascading’ strings. The following year, Freddie Mercury wrote ‘Millionaire Waltz’. The song was similar to ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’ and ‘Love of My Life’, insofar as it featured an episode that referenced a particular classical style. Example 6.17 presents the first segment of May’s guitar solo, following the 12/8 hard rock section. The episode is a clear imitation of a Viennese waltz—as can be seen from the piano reduction of Example 6.18, there are obvious parallels with the primary theme from Johann Strauss II’s *Wiener Blut* waltz, op. 354, such as the upwards melodic leap from the fifth to the third scale degrees, the use of chromatic neighbour notes, the repetition of the theme over a slowly unfolding harmonic progression, and the juxtaposition of legato and staccato articulation. Going beyond Example 6.17, it is possible also to hear the primary theme of Strauss’ *Blue Danube* waltz in May’s solo and subsequent guitar arrangement, on account of the accelerating harmonic rhythm and thickened texture as the section reaches its climax; ‘Millionaire Waltz’ then leads into a passage with sustained hits and guitar scales, a trait very much reminiscent of ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’.

The first system of music consists of three staves. The top staff is a treble clef staff with a key signature of three flats and a 3/4 time signature. It contains a melodic line that begins with a whole rest for the first four measures, followed by eighth and quarter notes. The grand staff below it (treble and bass clefs) provides accompaniment with chords in the treble and eighth notes in the bass.

The second system continues the piece. The top staff features a melodic line with a triplet of eighth notes in the second measure, followed by a quarter note and a half note. The grand staff accompaniment remains consistent with the first system.

The third system shows the melodic line in the top staff moving through various intervals and rests. The grand staff accompaniment continues to provide a steady harmonic and rhythmic foundation.

The fourth system concludes the piece. The top staff features a melodic line with a half note and a quarter note. The grand staff accompaniment ends with a final chord in the treble and a whole note in the bass.

The first system of the musical score consists of four staves. The top staff is a single treble clef line with a key signature of three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat) and a 3/4 time signature. It features a melodic line with a triplet of eighth notes in the first measure, followed by quarter and eighth notes. The second staff is a single treble clef line with a grand staff bracket on the left, containing a piano accompaniment with chords and a triplet of eighth notes. The third and fourth staves form a grand staff with treble and bass clefs, providing a piano accompaniment with chords and a steady bass line.

The second system of the musical score consists of four staves. The top staff continues the melodic line with quarter notes and a triplet of eighth notes. The second staff continues the piano accompaniment with chords and a triplet of eighth notes. The third and fourth staves continue the piano accompaniment with chords and a steady bass line.

The third system of the musical score consists of four staves. The top staff continues the melodic line with a triplet of eighth notes, followed by quarter and eighth notes. The second staff continues the piano accompaniment with chords and a triplet of eighth notes. The third and fourth staves continue the piano accompaniment with chords and a steady bass line.

Example 6.17. 'Millionaire Waltz', Lead Guitars and Piano, Instrumental Waltz



Example 6.18. Johann Strauss II, *Wiener Blut*, Piano Reduction, Primary Theme

At this point, it is possible to relate the findings back to notions of style and genre. With respect to style, one can argue that Queen followed similar paths to other bands around them in terms of incorporating features of classical music in their songs. It is possible that this relationship is diluted somewhat—there is little of the toccata-like keyboard figuration that marked Keith Emerson’s playing; further, Queen’s rich textures are not overtly similar to the ‘symphonic’ style of Yes. Nonetheless, there are reasonable points of comparison between Queen examples and other songs from this era—the Baroque stylings of ‘Love of My Life’ compare well with Gentle Giant’s ‘As Old as You’re Young’; the arpeggiated piano figuration of ‘In The Lap of the Gods’ recalls Rick Wakeman’s organ ‘Roundabout’; and the extended references of ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’ and ‘Millionaire Waltz’ are not dissimilar in their approach to ELP’s reworkings of Mussorgsky and Copland, or Yes’ revisions of Brahms. Accordingly, there is a certain degree of stylistic continuity between Queen and progressive rock.

It is in the area of genre, however, that the relationship is strained. That is, it is difficult to argue that the meanings and ideas from the progressive rock discourse are articulated in Queen’s songs. In terms of musical fusion, the generalised classical references, such as the cadential trills, exist in an unequal partnership with the popular elements of the song. They offer brief moments of surface decoration, rather than fusion. ‘Love of My Life’ is more interesting in that it offers something more, it seems, than surface decoration, and yet the sense of fusion remains weak. Mercury’s Bach-like interludes are thematically and structurally distinct from the vocal sections of the song, which unfold a conventional AABA form. Indeed, as can be seen from

Example 6.15, the sectional boundaries are clearly demarcated by Mercury's transition from a chordal, ballad style in conjunction with the singing, to the Baroque imitation for the instrumental sections. Classical and popular styles are thus juxtaposed but there is no real attempt at bringing the two worlds together.

The references of 'Bohemian Rhapsody' and 'Millionaire Waltz' are more tightly woven into the overall structures of the song. In 'Bohemian Rhapsody', for instance, the common-tone diminished progression (e.g. on the lines 'He's just a poor boy // from a poor family') appears throughout the song, thus providing thematic coherence in spite of the obvious textural and stylistic disparities. That said, in these songs, the other genre conventions of progressive rock are undermined. What is striking about these pastiches is that they appear to reference the popular end of high culture. An idea such as this is deserving of much greater attention; however, one can find with ease references to the middlebrow artistic aspirations of Gilbert and Sullivan, Mantovani, and Viennese waltzes. Thus, from Cannadine: Gilbert and Sullivan 'created a new form of entertainment precisely pitched between the music hall and the concert hall, which was intelligent but not intellectual, tasteful but not pretentious, tuneful but not cloying'.²⁹⁰ Leydon points to Mantovani's aim of pleasing the 'fifty percent in the middle' of the record-buying public, as well as the scorn—the 'gush of lush'—heaped on him by critics.²⁹¹ And, writing about the 'universality' of the nineteenth-century dance form, Katz points out that 'the main supporters of the waltz were the members of the audience who required lighter music and wanted to be entertained'.²⁹² While acknowledging the difficulty of drawing together production and reception ideas from different historical contexts, it is not implausible to suggest that Queen brought together the 'low' culture of rock with the 'low' end of 'high culture', thus undercutting the dichotomy that is so fundamental to the progressive rock discourse. Again, it is possible to hear Queen as engaging some of the stylistic traits of progressive rock, whilst resisting the genre ideas of the same label.

²⁹⁰ Qtd. in Ian Bradley, *Oh Joy! Oh Rapture!: The Enduring Phenomenon of Gilbert and Sullivan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 4.

²⁹¹ Rebecca Leydon, 'The Soft-Focus Sound: Reverb as a Gendered Attribute in Mid-Century Mood Music', *Perspectives of New Music* 39/2 (2001), 100, 101.

²⁹² Ruth Katz, 'The Egalitarian Waltz', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 15/3 (1973), 377.

There is a different angle regarding Queen and progressive rock, which relates to the group's 'progression' through different musical styles across its career; this idea is pursued through Sections 6.3.3 and 6.3.4.²⁹³ For now, it may be that the best label for Queen is 'prog-lite'. Holm-Hudson's term refers to artists and songs that approach progressive rock, but do not fully commit, as it were, to its style and genre characteristics.²⁹⁴ He cites Styx' 'Come Sail Away' as the *locus classicus* of 'prog-lite'; the song blends multiple stylistic elements, presents a fantasy narrative, and references classical music, but does so in a relatively unsubtle and unsophisticated manner. What makes the case of Queen interesting is that label fits the group but in a different way: Queen's 'lite-ness' stems from the fact that the band engaged some progressive rock traits (style) but not others (genre). At the risk of generalising, I would argue that the same type of argument could be made with respect to the group's approach to form. That is, Queen used techniques that appeared to create larger-scale song forms, thus following the same stylistic path as other progressive artists; but such techniques as the linking passages between songs are illusory in terms of actually developing a large-scale musical unit. Even if Queen's tracks ran longer, at times, than the 'three-minute love song', there are few grounds on which to argue that Queen abandoned the notion of the song as a self-contained entity. Like the classical music references, the musical traits are in place, but the meanings, perhaps, are not, thus leaving Queen on the periphery of the progressive rock movement.

6.2.4 The Musical World(s) of Queen: 'We are the Champions'

One may conclude that different segments of Queen's songs were influenced by different trends of 1970s rock music. That is, several structural elements (form and wider stylistic references) drew on progressive rock; the basic musical arrangements stemmed from hard rock; and, Queen's development of these arrangements owed more to glam rock. 'Millionaire Waltz' neatly highlights the way in which all three trends work together in a single example. The song is built from multiple short episodes and features a pastiche of a classical music style (progressive rock); the instrumentation follows a typical rock band setup with overdriven electric guitars

²⁹³ I explore this other angle further in Nick Braae, 'Queen's classical music references, 1973-76; or, was Queen a progressive rock band?', in *Prog Rock in Europe: An overview of a persistent musical style*, ed. Philippe Gonin (Dijon: Editions Universitaires de Dijon, 2016), 125-127.

²⁹⁴ Holm-Hudson, 'Come Sail Away'.

(hard rock); and, the complete arrangement densely layers these electric guitars well beyond the norms of other hard rock bands (glam rock).

While this tripartite stylistic division is useful, in general, it does not capture the full range of musical influences that filtered into Queen's songs on a regular basis. Indeed, what was striking about Queen's output was not simply the fact that the group related to progressive, hard and glam rock, but the fact that its idiolect itself incorporated musical gestures from an even wider array of styles. This section addresses this idea through a close analysis of the musical gestures that appear in the verse and chorus of 'We are the Champions', a song that captures multiple traits of Queen's idiolect. By pinpointing the stylistic origins of these gestures, it is possible to understand how Queen fused wider stylistic traits in its music, which, in turn, fostered the ambiguity of Queen's place in the world of popular music, as suggested in Section 1.2.3. The final part of this section theorises briefly the supposedly unique quality of Queen's idiolect.

I will work through the gestures of Queen's idiolect in terms of increasing stylistic diversity. To begin, the instrumental texture is built initially around the combination of a piano, bass guitar, cymbals, and lead vocal; subsequently, two overdriven electric guitars enter the mix along with a four-part vocal section and the remainder of the drum kit. As already discussed in Section 6.1, the dominance of the electric guitars in the instrumental texture positions 'We are the Champions' in the sphere of hard rock. The presence of the piano dilutes the hard rock influence, but not so much as to alter the fundamental sound-world of the song. Further to this, the sudden appearance of the electric guitars, on the downbeat of the pre-chorus, relates this part of Queen's idiolect to the hard rock style of the Who and Led Zeppelin, above all. The connection with Led Zeppelin is further evident through Taylor's drumming in the chorus section, in which he lifts the hi-hat slightly when hitting the snare, producing a heavier backbeat, à la John Bonham's drumming style. The 'dominant voice' of Queen's idiolect is thus hard rock.

The other components, however, of Queen's idiolect stray away from hard rock. Freddie Mercury's piano playing is not overly distinctive—in fact, what defines it is, perhaps, its unstylised nature. The arpeggiated and chordal approach is consistent

with other pianists of the 1970s, such as Paul McCartney, Elton John, Billy Joel, Roy Bittan, Leon Russell, and Rick Wakeman, to name a few. And yet, Mercury's playing contains fewer of the embellishments that mark the work of the other pianists—there are no arpeggiated flourishes (Wakeman), no counter-melodies (Bittan), little recourse to a heavy chorale-like texture (Joel), only occasional right-hand octaves in the high register of the keyboard (Russell), and syncopated figures only receive slight accents (cf. John). The closest comparison one may draw is between Mercury and McCartney on account of the heavy left-hand octaves leading into the chorus (à la 'Maybe I'm Amazed' or 'Let It Be'); even without McCartney's light gospel touches, evident through his percussive right-hand, it is probably the Beatles' ballads ('The Long and Winding Road', 'Hey Jude', 'Carry that Weight', etc.) that inform Mercury's general approach. His piano parts are thus heard best in terms of a pop ballad style.

Similar arguments may be made about John Deacon's bass guitar playing. For the most part, his playing is also unstylised, given that he tends to play held notes, or short connecting phrases that follow the left-hand of Mercury's piano part. It is in the verse of 'We are the Champions' that one hears Deacon's typical variations on this approach. Deacon moves away from Mercury's piano parts, offering several counter-melodic figures—arpeggios and short scale passages—in the high register of the instrument; further interest is created through contrasting staccato and legato articulation. These three gestures—counter-melodic figuration, use of high register, and variations in articulation—suggest that Deacon's role was not confined to providing the fundamental bass layer of a song. This observation betrays the influences on Deacon's playing. The primary source is likely Paul McCartney; indeed, one can find all of the gestures noted above within the sixteen-bar verse of the Beatles' 'Something'. Another point of comparison may be with Elton John's bassist, Dee Murray. 'Burn Down the Mission' highlights Murray's flair—his bass line in the second verse is made up of arpeggiated figures played with staccato articulation. One can note similarly active bass guitar parts in 'Levon', 'Where to Now St Peter?', 'Country Comfort', and 'Tiny Dancer'. To varying extents, Murray's bass lines dance around the chords and arpeggiated figures of Elton John's piano parts, just as Deacon does in the verse of 'We are the Champions'.

One can thus understand Deacon’s bass guitar playing as following closely the work of his British predecessors. It is difficult to place these bass guitarists within a single style; although in the case of McCartney, Murray, and Deacon, they appear to operate within a highly refined pop style, in terms of bringing melodic elements to their bass guitar playing. The key factor in these cases is the presence of other stable accompaniment parts (such as John or Mercury’s piano playing), which gives the bassists space for musical exploration. The main difference between Deacon and the other bass guitarists is that his counter-melodic gestures tended to be brief and confined to segments of a song, such as the opening verse. After these points, Deacon moved into a more conventional mode of playing— that is, with fewer embellishments, and in the middle to lower register of the instrument. Accordingly, like Mercury’s piano playing, Deacon’s bass guitar work gives away few overt stylistic clues, but in more subtle ways, draws Queen towards 1970s pop styles.



Example 6.19. ‘We are the Champions’, Drums, Pre-chorus

Returning to Roger Taylor’s drumming, the fill leading into the chorus of ‘We are the Champions’ is notable for its insistent hits on the floor tom (Example 6.19). Notwithstanding the semiquaver triplets, the repeating floor tom hits do not bear an overt resemblance to John Bonham’s style for Led Zeppelin. A typical Bonham fill involved triplets running across the kit; Taylor’s fill offers a crescendo from the lower end of the kit up to the crash cymbal hit on the chorus upbeat. This type of fill is common through Queen’s output, as can be heard in ‘Keep Yourself Alive’, ‘Father to Son’, ‘Somebody to Love’, ‘The Prophet’s Song’, ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’, ‘White Man’, and ‘Save Me’, amongst others. In its repetitive nature, Taylor’s fill draws a stylistic line to the ‘big’ ballads of 1960s pop music. A common feature in these songs was a general increase in drumming activity through the song, with a grandiose fill ushering in the climactic chorus. Gerry and the Pacemakers’ cover of ‘You’ll Never Walk Alone’ is a classic example of this pattern. One can hear similar types of fills in songs by Dusty Springfield (‘You Don’t Have To Say You Love Me’, ‘I Just Don’t Know What To Do With Myself’), the Crystals (‘Da Doo Ron Ron’), the Righteous Brothers (‘Unchained Melody’, ‘You’ve Lost That Loving Feeling’), and

Joe Cocker ('With A Little Help From My Friends'). The common denominators in these 1960s tracks are Phil Spector and Hal Blaine. Blaine's rolling snare and tom fills punctuated the Righteous Brothers' and the Crystals' hits, and would have influenced Bobby Graham who drummed on Dusty Springfield's tracks. In these songs, the fill is often played on both the snare and floor tom, though its driving nature parallels Taylor's fills.

Closer to Queen's era, Jim Gordon's drumming, particularly on George Harrison's first solo album *All Things Must Pass* (1970) bears close comparison with Taylor's approach. One can note the repetitive snare and floor tom fill that runs through Harrison's 'Hear Me Lord'; there are slight variations in 'I Dig Love' and 'All Things Must Pass'.²⁹⁵ Gordon was Blaine's protégé, and similar fills from his recordings of the early 1970s (Joe Cocker's live album *Mad Dogs and Englishmen* and Derek and the Dominoes' *Layla & Other Assorted Love Songs*) help to strengthen the line of influence from Taylor back to the 1960s ballads; May and Taylor's pre-Queen band Smile played, for instance, as the support act for Cocker in 1969.²⁹⁶ Accordingly, there are precedents for Taylor's drumming gesture in songs that reside in close stylistic proximity to Queen. The origins of this particular type of fill, however, lie in the pop music of the 1960s, which, again, draws Queen's music away from the 1970s rock style.

The image shows a musical score for backing vocals in 6/8 time. The melody consists of eighth notes: A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F5, G5, A5. The lyrics are: "And I need to go on and on and on and on". The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of one flat (Bb), and a 6/8 time signature. The notes are beamed together in groups of three, with a repeat sign at the end.

Example 6.20. 'We are the Champions', Backing Vocals, Pre-chorus

As Taylor plays his rolling floor tom fill, the backing vocalists undertake a harmonic manoeuvre, shifting the song upwards from E^b major to F major, by way of stepwise chromatic voice-leading underneath an upper pedal (Example 6.20). Although this figure differs in its harmonic content to other Queen examples, the voice-leading

²⁹⁵ Ringo Starr drummed alongside Gordon on *All Things Must Pass*, and reportedly contributed the tom fills for 'I Dig Love'. Nonetheless, the presence of Gordon and Phil Spector (the album's producer) forges a clear path to the mid-1960s songs and Hal Blaine.

²⁹⁶ '27.02.1969 - Concert: Smile live at the Royal Albert Hall, London, UK', *Queen Concerts*, <<http://www.queenconcerts.com/detail/live/1343/smile-live-27-02-1969-royal-albert-hall-london-uk.html>> (accessed 29 April 2014).

approach is consistent with prior songs, such as ‘Killer Queen’ or ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’. The common-tone half-diminished chord (the C is common to the third and fourth chords) is also consistent with Queen’s wider output, with the diminished seventh version of this harmonic sonority appearing in ‘In the Lap of the Gods’, ‘My Melancholy Blues’, and ‘Jealousy’, for example. Although it is difficult to relate a single chord to a single style, several sources of potential inspiration come to mind. The first is the Beatles, in whose songs one can find juxtaposed major and diminished chords with the same root note (e.g. ‘Because’, ‘The Sheik of Araby’, ‘Like Dreamers Do’).

Taken together with Queen’s voice-leading practices, however, this harmonic gesture points towards the influence of Tin Pan Alley songs. The passing diminished harmony between two chords with roots a second apart is what Everett terms the ‘Broadway seventh’ progression, named because of its appearance in Broadway songs.²⁹⁷ He cites ‘Hello Dolly’ as a typical example; the verse is based on a I-i^o-ii⁷-V pattern, thus producing similar voice-leading to We are the Champions, with the inner voices moving by chromatic steps against the tonic pedal. A near-identical pattern, written as I-^biii^{o7}-ii⁷-V, opens Glenn Miller’s ‘Moonlight Serenade’. Finally, similar harmonic progressions, in terms of voice-leading can be found in the bridge of ‘Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas’ (iii⁷-^biii^{o7}-ii⁷), while in Gershwin’s ‘Nice Work if You Can Get It’, a descending chromatic bass line is harmonised as V_b-^bvii^{o7}-vi⁷. Mercury and the other band members were obviously familiar with pre-World War II American popular styles, given the extended stylistic references of ‘My Melancholy Blues’ or ‘Dreamer’s Ball’. The voice-leading practices and harmonic character of this excerpt from ‘We are the Champions’ would further suggest that techniques from the earlier repertoire filtered their way into Queen’s idiolect.

The remainder of the backing vocal arrangement furthers this American stylistic connection. Despite claims by de Boer that Queen’s backing vocals stemmed from classical choral music,²⁹⁸ the vocal arrangements likely took their immediate cue from 1950s and 1960s American pop and soul styles. The defining features of the Queen

²⁹⁷ Everett, *Foundations*, 204.

²⁹⁸ De Boer, ‘On the Margins’, 93-100.

vocal arrangements are the close position, three- and four-part structures and the textural separation from the lead vocalist. It is this latter point that is important. A key feature of the vocal arrangements of, for instance, Aretha Franklin ('Respect', 'Think', 'Do Right Woman, Do Right Man') and Elvis Presley ('Don't Be Cruel', '(There'll Be) Peace in the Valley'), was the call-and-response structure, which depended, for its effect, on a clear distinction between the lead and backing sections. Although this specific technique does not really appear in 'We are the Champions', it is frequent throughout other Queen songs ('Keep Yourself Alive', 'The Night Comes Down', 'Liar', etc.); and, 'We are the Champions' still retains the textural separation between lead and backing parts, in a manner analogous to other 1960s pop songs, such as Dion and the Belmonts' 'Runaround Sue' or the Ronettes' 'Be My Baby'.

The American connection is further strengthened with respect to the common Queen technique of creating a dynamic and expanding vocal arrangement (Example 6.20). In 'We are the Champions', the pre-chorus arrangement begins with a single ascending voice ('And I need to go...'), before the four parts triumphantly conclude the vocal flourish in a higher register ('...on and on and on and on'). This recalls the opening of the Beach Boys' 'Barbara Ann', in which the first line is sung by a solo voice, the second line by four voices, and the third line introduces the 'lead' part on top of the arrangement. This dynamic gesture was also characteristic of American vocal group the Four Freshmen; their songs often opened with this type of gesture, the four vocalists singing in unison before expanding into an open-position chord.

But, if only to confuse the stylistic picture somewhat, it is worth noting that high register male vocal harmonies were common within the rock styles of the 1970s. They were a trademark of Uriah Heep's output, as can be heard in 'Gypsy', 'Easy Livin'', 'Rainbow Demon', 'Echoes in the Dark', and 'Stealin''. Further, in the David Coverdale era of Deep Purple, high register vocal harmonies often concluded the choruses over a sustained hit, such as in 'Highway Star', and, more noticeably, in 'Lay Down Stay Down'. These songs bear similarities to the concluding vocal gestures of both the pre-chorus and the chorus in 'We are the Champions', as well as to the choruses of other Queen songs such as 'It's Late' (final chorus only), 'Don't Stop Me Now', 'Dead on Time', and 'Play the Game'. The backing vocals, therefore, hovered between different musical styles. Some aspects of the Queen arrangements

can be heard in relation to hard rock artists, and indeed other glam rock bands as suggested in Section 6.2.2; at the same, their structural elements and textural functions within songs highlighted a close musical relationship between the group and American pop music.

Finally, there is Freddie Mercury's voice. His singing is arguably the one aspect of the group's output that is hardest to pin down in stylistic terms. Nonetheless, by looking at his vocal traits from two angles, it is possible to identify several connections with other popular styles. Firstly, following Section 5.1.1, 'We are the Champions' highlights two of Mercury's vocal tones: the 'exaggerated' voice in the verse, and the 'powerful' voice in the pre-chorus and chorus. The 'exaggerated' tone, with its effortless quality, is unusual in the world of rock music. The precedents for this vocal type can be located in the show tune or cabaret style of singing. In this regard, there is common ground between Mercury and his Trident Studio companion, David Bowie, who also brought a sense of flair and exaggeration to his singing. On a song such as 'The Prettiest Star', one can hear Bowie stretch out particular words (e.g. 'Cold fire' from the first line), as well as elongate the slides between pitches (e.g. through the line 'Staying back in your memories'). This is similar to the subtle emphasis Mercury places on the ends of lines in the verse of 'We are the Champions', such as on the words 'dues', 'time', and 'crime'.

Other important influences on Mercury's singing style are Liza Minnelli and Marilyn Monroe. Mercury was open about his admiration for Minnelli, suggesting that her performance in *Cabaret* (1972) was a significant influence on his performing style. Indeed, the pair was close friends, with Minnelli performing 'We are the Champions' at Mercury's Tribute Concert in 1992.²⁹⁹ In several songs from *Cabaret*—namely, 'Mein Herr', 'Maybe This Time', and 'Cabaret'—one can hear Minnelli's liberal approach to pitch sliding and scooping, sudden and dramatic lapses into a breathy voice, as well as her over-enunciation of certain consonants. As with Bowie's singing, these exaggerated techniques withstand close comparison with Mercury's approach. Monroe's influence on Mercury can be heard primarily in terms of the tone of the voice. In the introductory verse to 'Diamonds are a Girl's Best Friend', from

²⁹⁹ See, for example, Lesley-Ann Jones, *Mercury: An Intimate Biography of Freddie Mercury* (New York: Touchstone, 2012), 97, 165.

Gentlemen Prefer Blondes (1956), Monroe sings in a very breathy tone, low in her register, before jumping into a gentle head voice; this register and vocal colour shift takes place through the line, ‘I prefer a man who lives, and gives...[expensive toys]’. Throughout the phrase, Monroe glides between the pitches, with the sharp upwards contour emphasised through a pitch slide. The words ‘lives’ and ‘gives’ receive further emphasis through the flutters of vibrato that Monroe adds well after the attack and onset of the note. There are a number of technical consistencies between Monroe’s vocal style and Mercury’s exaggerated style—the breathiness, the use of the head voice, the pitch slides, and the delayed vibrato. To further the comparison, Monroe’s light tone in her head voice conveys the same sense of grace and effortlessness.

While Mercury’s exaggerated voice ties his singing to the cabaret style, his powerful voice arguably harks back to the early pop singers, namely Elvis Presley and Roy Orbison. This is a something of a tenuous connection to make, primarily because the tone of Mercury does not necessarily match the distinctive sonic qualities of Presley or Orbison. The reason for this connection lies in the resonant qualities of these singers’ voices: that is, each sings in a well-supported chest voice that has a strong overtone structure. Furthermore, this trio of singers retained a smooth and consistent tone in their upper register, as opposed to straining their voice to reach the higher notes; as Mercury ascends through the lines ‘I’ve had my share of sand kicked in my face // And I’ve come through’, it is possible to hear shades of Roy Orbison singing ‘Be mine tonight’ in ‘Pretty Woman’ or ‘I’ll love you even more // than I did before’ in ‘Crying’, or of Presley singing ‘I don’t care if it’s right or wrong’ in ‘Help Me Make it Through The Night’. This is, perhaps, the key difference between Mercury and rock singers in the vein of Robert Plant, whose apparent vocal power stemmed from the extensive upper range and the inevitable strain that comes in this register, as opposed to maintaining a rich timbral quality.

Mercury’s change in vocal tone enhances this connection with the older generation of singers. As outlined in Section 5.1.1, Mercury’s did not simply command different vocal tones; he used his voice to articulate the structural shape of Queen’s songs. ‘We are the Champions’ is a prime example of this trend: Mercury changes immediately from his lighter exaggerated voice to his powerful tone as the other instruments mark

the start of the pre-chorus. These vocal dynamics are again reminiscent of Presley ('Help Me Make It Through The Night', 'Trouble', and more subtly, 'Love Me Tender'). They also bring to mind the crooner style, which, following the standard arrangement techniques of big band songs, involves a general increase in vocal intensity through the sections of a song. Nat King Cole's 'L-O-V-E' is straightforward. He sings much of the first half of the song with a clean tone and at a soft volume, not dissimilar to Mercury's sincere voice; as the song increases in textural density, Cole's voice becomes more animated, such that by the end, he is singing at a much louder volume in a clear, well-supported chest voice. Frank Sinatra's cover of 'New York, New York' offers a more blatant example, with the half-time coda section marked by a distinct crescendo in Sinatra's singing. Continuing along this stylistic path. Mercury's dynamic changes also bring to mind Cilla Black's singing, whose marked shifts between light and heavier vocal tones often highlighted the structural high points of her songs: representative examples include 'Anyone Who Had a Heart', 'You've Lost That Loving Feeling', 'Alfie', and 'You're My World'.

As per a number of gestures discussed above, it is important not to overlook the fact that Mercury's moderately wide range and powerful vocal tone were still congruous with other 1970s rock singers. The differences between Mercury and Plant or, say, Paul Rodgers of Bad Company are subtle, but important as they contribute to the distinct sonic identity of Queen's music. In the way that Mercury used his voice structurally, and in the way he exuded consistent control over his vocal tone, there is a much closer musical relationship between the Queen frontman and pop singers from the 1950s and 1960s. And thus, once again, one finds another trait that appears to push Queen away from the rock world of the 1970s. Indeed, what the analysis above demonstrates is that Queen's idiolect, while rooted in the instrumental textures of 1970s hard rock, comprised musical gestures originating in a range of wider styles, notably 1960s pop, but also as far afield as pre-war American popular songs. There are other components of Queen's idiolect that were not included in this analysis, namely the numerous harmonic traits that likely came from the Beatles (e.g. descending bass lines, mixed mode cadences), and the use of melodic sequences. These other traits, however, would have only strengthened the argument being made that Queen's idiolect brought together musical gestures from a diverse range of stylistic sources.

Returning to the points made in Section 1.2.3, a number of writers referenced the ‘unique’, ‘autographic’, and ‘identifiable’ nature of Queen’s idiolect; they all intimate that Queen’s music somehow stood out from other rock or pop artists. One reviewer supported this position, suggesting, in 1977, that Queen’s diverse style ‘[prevented them] from being lumped together with all the other third-generation English heavy metal bands’.³⁰⁰ It is tempting to fall back on the argument that no other band fused gestures from such an array of styles, and thus Queen was ‘unique’. This logic, however, could be applied in some way to most artists; it does not necessarily explain why such ideas are so prominent in the discourse on Queen. In other words, was Queen’s idiolect more distinct than the idiolects of other bands?

This notion of more or less distinct idiolects holds some currency in writing on popular music. Moore invokes the idea when he writes, ‘the search for an idiolect is perhaps one of the most instructive aspects of Slade’s long career’.³⁰¹ And from rock critic Robert Christgau: ‘Listen first to [The Doors’] *The Doors* and *Morrison Hotel*, then to [Creedence Clearwater Revival’s] *Creedence Clearwater Revival* and *Cosmo’s Factory*. To an outsider, all four records (excluding “The End” and “Alabama Song”) probably sound pretty much the same’.³⁰² In both instances, the implication is that the groups’ respective idiolects are not distinct—Slade does not sound like Slade, but like a host of other artists. The writers above suggested that Queen, in essence, only sounded like Queen. This idea, though, is clearly misleading based on the prior analysis above: clearly, the gestures of Queen’s idiolect relate well to a number of other artists and styles, if one listens carefully.

This raises the question, then, of what makes an idiolect distinct? Such a question is almost impossible to answer for a number of reasons, chief among them that ‘distinctiveness’ is an abstract concept; there is no set musical point at which something becomes, or stops being distinct. Secondly, and on a related note, the notion of distinction can be interpreted in different ways, such as meaning ‘different’

³⁰⁰ ‘Queen’s Déjà Vu ‘At the Races’’, *Washington Post*, 2 July (1977), <http://www.queenarchives.com/index.php?title=Queen_-_02-07-1977_-_A_Day_at_the_Races_-_Washington_Post> (accessed 15 February 2014).

³⁰¹ Moore, *Song Means*, 294.

³⁰² Robert Christgau, ‘Creedence: Where Do You Go From The Top?’, *Village Voice*, February (1970), <<http://www.robertchristgau.com/xg/bk-aow/creedence.php>> (accessed 18 November 2013).

or ‘memorable’. While ‘different’ may be ‘memorable’ (e.g. Bob Dylan’s voice), the former does not necessarily lead to the latter (e.g. the music of Status Quo). Thirdly, any appraisal of difference will depend on the listener’s musical experience; and thus, the entire matter rests on subjective evidence. Future work in the field of music information retrieval may be able to provide more empirical evidence on sonic similarities between tracks, but the current tools in this area are not sufficiently advanced to be of use at present.³⁰³

Despite these problems, it is possible to reframe the question, and ask, ‘how might one reach the conclusion that Queen’s idiolect was distinct’? If much less statistical than music information retrieval, Covach’s concept of ‘musical worlding’ provides a way forward. He argues:

The musical world of a piece is a number of other works that form a kind of background—a body of other pieces that create a purely musical context for some particular piece. The musical world of a piece is usually not something of which we are conscious when we listen, but is the product of our cumulative experience in music.³⁰⁴

Covach suggests, in general, that when one song shares characteristics with other songs, a listener assimilates it into the musical world of those other songs. When this process of assimilation occurs, it is usually evidence of a common style between the songs.³⁰⁵ The idea is similar to Green’s notion of delineation. For Green, all listeners distinguish (or delineate) between ‘music’ and ‘noise’; as one’s musical experiences grow, one may make ‘finer distinctions between late Haydn and early Beethoven, Tamla Motown and Disco’.³⁰⁶ Both authors thus argue that listeners place songs within a conceptual framework, based on similarities between works in that

³⁰³ See François Pachet et al., ‘The Cuidado Music Browser: an end-to-end electronic music distribution system’, *Multimedia Tools and Applications* 30/3 (2006). One can view demonstrations of the programme at <http://www.jj-aucouturier.info/projects/mir/> (accessed 25 February 2014). The initial findings, however, are limited—there seems little connecting ‘Therapy’ by the Knives with ‘Hit Me With Your Best Shot’ by Pat Benatar, except the distortion on the guitar; similarly, the fact Ben Harper’s ‘Forever’ shares the same acoustic instrumentation as Leonard Cohen’s ‘Suzanne’ is an unremarkable observation.

³⁰⁴ John Covach, ‘Destructuring Cartesian Dualism in Musical Analysis’, *Music Theory Online* 0.1 (1994), [16], <<http://www.mtosmt.org/issues/mto.94.0.11/mto.94.0.11.covach.art>> (accessed 12 November 2013).

³⁰⁵ John Covach, ‘Pangs of history in late 1970s new-wave rock’, in *Analyzing Popular Music*, ed. Allan F. Moore (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 179-180.

³⁰⁶ See Green, *Music on Deaf Ears*, 33-37.

framework. Covach broaches the opposite situation as well: when a listener does not understand a piece of music or a song, it is because he or she cannot locate a musical context into which to place that example.³⁰⁷

The fundamental point, from an analytical perspective, is this: the ease with which a song is assimilated into a musical world depends on how much a song holds in common with others in that musical world. This argument can be extended, such that the hypothetical listener attempts to assimilate an artist's idiolect, as heard through a particular song, into a specific musical world. The implication is the same—as common musical ground between one artist and the surrounding musical world decreases, the process of assimilation increases in difficulty. An alternative way of conceiving this issue is Tagg's notion of 'hypothetical substitution'; he explores how meaning or effect changes in a piece of music, when an individual detail, such as pitch contour, tempo, metre, or harmony, is hypothetically adjusted.³⁰⁸ One might invoke the same process here with respect to an artist's idiolect, in terms of 'substituting' gestures from the 'home' musical world for gestures from an alternative musical world. As more gestures are substituted, the relationship between the idiolect and its 'home' musical world is weakened.

One can consider these ideas in relation to Queen's idiolect. It has been argued already that the group's 'dominant voice' is hard rock, on the basis of the consistent guitar-oriented textures and drum patterns. Accordingly, one might suggest that hard rock is the 'home' musical world of its idiolect—in other words, this is the fundamental world into which a listener may attempt to 'assimilate' Queen. At the same time, many other gestures from Queen's idiolect relate, in isolation, to other musical worlds. Thus, as the hypothetical listener starts to assimilate Queen into the world of hard rock, this process may be disrupted by 'out-of-this-world' traits. A number of these external gestures are not too difficult to reconcile with the hard rock style: the soul-influenced vocal sections, for instance, appear in the music of Elton John (e.g. 'Burn Down the Mission', 'Love Lies Bleeding'); and, the 1960s pop drumming techniques found a ready place in Bruce Springsteen and Meat Loaf's

³⁰⁷ Covach, 'Deconstructing Cartesian Dualism', [17].

³⁰⁸ Tagg, 'Analysing Popular Music', 50-53.

output, courtesy of Max Weinberg. Thus, Queen infused its 1970s hard rock world, with traits also employed by contemporaneous artists.

The gestures come from further afield make the process of assimilation even more difficult. While it was suggested that Freddie Mercury's singing techniques were not wholly different to other 1970s singers, his recourse to 1950s and 1960s models of crooning and musical theatre singing offered a clear departure from the soul-influenced approaches of Plant, Rodgers, Coverdale, and so forth. Further to this, the incorporation of Tin Pan Alley harmonic gestures offered another clear departure from the modal-oriented harmonic language of the 1970s hard rock style. With the appearance of these gestures from more distant stylistic origins, attempts at assimilation into the world of hard rock are repeatedly thwarted for the hypothetical listener. Accordingly, while one may still locate Queen in the world of hard rock, the position of the group is sealed off from other artists. That is, Queen created a distinct position within the world of 1970s hard rock by substituting 'home' gestures for stylistically distant gestures. One may argue that a listener, in trying to place the band in 1970s contexts, may simply create a new musical world that encompasses only the music of Queen. Of course, this argument is entirely hypothetical in terms of understanding of how listeners make sense of what they hear, but on these grounds, it is possible to understand why de Boer, Stanley, and others talk of the group's 'unique sonic fingerprint'.

6.3 Queen Through the 1970s

6.3.1 Issues of Stylistic Development

The discussion of Queen's idiolect, its constituent parts, and its relationship to stylistic trends has thus far been conducted from a synchronic perspective. This section considers elements of Queen's idiolect from a diachronic perspective, with an underlying focus on whether any musical changes through the years 1973-80 can be construed in terms of stylistic development. For the members of the band, ideas of evolution, growth and maturity held much currency. John Deacon, the bass guitarist, addressed this implicitly, when he told a BBC interviewer about their studio

experiences: ‘all of us try and learn what the studio does because that helps to get the sounds and ideas and to do what you want’.³⁰⁹ Freddie Mercury addressed these ideas more explicitly on numerous occasions. Talking about his increasingly elaborate stage costumes in the late 1970s, he said, ‘It’s a progression with the music and I felt, for want of better words, if our music was getting mature and sophisticated so should our stage act’.³¹⁰ The same year, Mercury told *Circus* magazine:

Each time we go into the studios, it gets that much more difficult...because we’re trying to progress, to write songs that sound different from the past. The first album is easy, because you’ve always got a lot in your head that you’re anxious to put down. As the albums go by, you think, ‘They’ll say I’m repeating a formula’. I’m very conscious of that.³¹¹

That one should find the Queen members expressing these views is hardly surprising. The value of artistic growth and evolution is a prevalent idea in popular music discourse. Consider preeminent rock critic Robert Christgau writing on Credence Clearwater Revival: ‘The most reasonable complaint about Credence’s music is that it always sounds the same...The rock devotee would probably argue that each pair [of albums] shows a similar paucity of development. But the rock and roll fan, accustomed to taking his differentiation in small increments, perceives no sameness and no stasis’.³¹² Recently, Bill See lamented the lack of ambition in modern rock bands:

My Chemical Romance, Fall Out Boy, Blink 182, Jimmy Eat World, and Pennywise (I could go on) pump out inoffensive, interchangeable product...how many artists that have broken through commercially even think about challenging themselves and evolving? There’s a reason the Clash were called “the only band that matters.” Few bands ever evolved, expanded and crossed genres with such stunning results as the Clash.³¹³

³⁰⁹ Browne, ‘Interview with Queen’.

³¹⁰ Parsons, ‘Is This Man a Prat?’.

³¹¹ Wesley Strick, ‘Queen’s own tale of success’, *Circus*, January (1977), <http://www.queenarchives.com/index.php?title=Group_-_01-31-1977_-_Circus_Magazine> (accessed 1 September 2014).

³¹² Christgau, ‘Credence’.

³¹³ Bill See, ‘The Battle to Stay Relevant’, *PopMatters*, 6 November (2011), <<http://www.popmatters.com/column/150435-the-battle-to-stay-relevant/>> (accessed 1 September 2014).

Such ideas and expectations can be traced, above all, to the Beatles. In Hopkins' words, 'One of the many things the Beatles would give rock was the concept that groups should evolve and grow – developing musically – rather than stand in place and merely continue to issue dozens of records that sound like those that preceded them'.³¹⁴ Riley makes a similar point, arguing that the 'entire Beatles catalogue witnesses a growth – both musical and personal...their early sound peaks with *Hard Day's Night*, progresses uneasily through *Help!* and *Beatles for Sale*, ripens and blooms on *Rubber Soul* and *Revolver*'.³¹⁵

Common to the various statements and appraisals above is the lack of musical evidence in support of the respective arguments, vague references to genre crossing and 'increments' of 'differentiation' notwithstanding. The fundamental task of this section is to answer the apparently straightforward question: how, in musical terms, did Queen develop through its career? Unfortunately, it is far from obvious as to what constitutes 'development' or 'evolution' in musical terms in a popular music context. Thus, the initial task is to consider some of the wider literature in order to develop a framework for understanding Queen's development. Drawing particularly on the work of Moore and Sheinbaum, I argue that the notion of musical development must be conceived in broad and flexible terms. The analytical task is not to hold up the music to a specific benchmark of development, but rather to identify the elements of change in an artist's output, and then understand the nature of that change. These observations can then be related to ideas of development and maturity, as expressed by the musicians or critics. Furthermore, it must be appreciated that how one understands an artist's career trajectory is dependent on the analytical focus—that is, tracing the path of different details over time will produce different pictures of the music in question. It is up to analysts and listeners, then, to debate and argue whether particular readings of an artist's career are more satisfactory than others.

Several previous studies have implicitly and explicitly addressed the idea of musical development. Covach's analysis of the Beatles' formal structures offers a good starting point. He demonstrates that the group began its career utilising standard formal templates, such as AABA or simple verse-chorus; after *Rubber Soul* (1965),

³¹⁴ Quoted in Moore, *Rock*, 215.

³¹⁵ Tim Riley, 'For the Beatles: notes on their achievement', *Popular Music* 6/3 (1987), 267-268.

one can observe an array of formal structures that break with and expand upon the earlier conventions. These changes in form marked the Beatles' transition from 'craftsmen' to 'artists'.³¹⁶ Covach is clear in not assigning greater or lesser aesthetic value to either period of the Beatles' output; nonetheless, it is easy to see how one may read the notion of development into the Beatles' output, on account of the increasing complexity of the songs' formal structures.

This represents the modernist position on artistic development. This idea may be familiar from classical music discourse. Beethoven is the *locus classicus* in this regard, with his works often assessed in terms of a tripartite division (early-middle-late), each period of which represents a structural or aesthetic advance on the previous material.³¹⁷ In a popular music context, Macan articulates this view clearly in his work on progressive rock. Specifically, he is highly critical of the bands' turns towards more pop-oriented models after the heyday of the progressive rock movement in the mid-1970s. He laments the 'levelling off' of formerly distinct genres in the 1980s, with many groups, such as Yes, Rush and Genesis, reduced to being 'followers rather than innovators; at its worst, their of music of this period could sound uncomfortably derivative of major New Wave performers'. Macan argues that these bands abandoned the symphonic sounds of the Mellotron, rhythmic complexities and tempi changes, and expansive formal structures, all of which had marked progressive rock of the mid-1970s.³¹⁸ In opposition to the trajectory of the Beatles, the progressive rock bands' careers are viewed here as artistically regressive on account of the simplification of musical materials. The extension of this modernist position is that artists' career paths can be conceived only in linear terms: upwards correlating with

³¹⁶ Covach directs readers to Daniel Harrison's study of the Beach Boys, which reaches similar conclusions regarding Brian Wilson's songwriting through the mid-1960s see John Covach, 'From "Craft" to "Art": Formal Structure in the Music of the Beatles', in *Reading the Beatles: Cultural Studies, Literary Criticism, and the Fab Four*, eds. Kenneth Womack and Todd F. Davis (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 51; see also Harrison, 'After Sundown'.

³¹⁷ Kerman et al. offer both an overview and a critique of this view; see Joseph Kerman et al., "Beethoven, Ludwig van," in *Grove Music Online* (Oxford University Press, 2014). There have been numerous further studies that concentrate on composers' late styles, which are also considered to represent an advancement of technical and aesthetic potential; see, for instance, Edward Said, *On Late Style: Music and Literature Against the Grain* (London: Bloomsbury, 2006); Joseph N. Straus, 'Disability and "Late Style" in Music', *The Journal of Musicology* 25/1 (2008); J. Daniel Jenkins, 'After the Harvest: Carter's Fifth String Quartet and the Late Late Style', *Music Theory Online* 16.3 (2010), <<http://www.mtosmt.org/issues/mto.10.16.3/mto.10.16.3.jenkins.html>> (accessed 21 April 2014).

³¹⁸ Macan, *Rocking the Classics*, 192-193.

development correlating with complexity; static; or, downwards correlating with regression correlating with musical simplicity.

Moore has launched a sustained critique of the modernist view of artistic development. His conclusion on this matter is worth quoting at length:

The language of rock progressed from its blues roots, via the appropriation of elements of diverse stylistic practices, until the 1970s, at which point it seemed to reach an impasse, which has been overcome by various returns to simplicity, combined with greater sophistication in the less determinate domains, particularly texture and timbre. If this explanation is adequate, a style can only 'progress' to the point at which it has all the possible materials available for use. Thereafter, these elements can only be juggled to produce new, different, but not 'better' styles. After this point, styles change, but do not develop.³¹⁹

Moore is concerned here with broader musical styles as opposed to the work of individual artists. As noted, however, in Section 2.3, the concepts of style and idiolect are related, differing only in their scope (i.e. multiple artists vs. single artists); thus, Moore's comments are equally applicable to the musical progression of individual artists. Put another way, given that the works of individual artists comprise the styles of which Moore speaks, those artists must play by the same rules: their music can change over time, but increase in complexity and sophistication only to a certain point. The key to Moore's argument is that the language of popular music, as defined by melodic, rhythmic, harmonic and textural traits, has remained constant since the 1970s. Any changes of style must therefore occur within this framework, as opposed to through the expansion of the framework, hence the emphasis on 'change' rather than 'development'. Elsewhere, Moore has explored the implications of this argument. He points to the prevalence of seemingly 'anachronistic' musical ventures that can be instead viewed as continuations of past styles in the absence of modernist developmental narratives.³²⁰ And, on popular music of recent years, Moore takes a decisively postmodernist stance: 'you must celebrate these momentary explosions of

³¹⁹ Moore, *Rock*, 215.

³²⁰ Allan F. Moore, 'Anachronism, responsibility and historical intension', *Critical Musicology Journal* (1997), < <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/music/info/critmus/>> (accessed 4 July 2014).

energy’ that come from each ‘newest great band’ because ‘we should expect no linear development’.³²¹

The modernist and postmodernist positions thus give analysts two options. The first is to identify the musical changes in an artist’s output and assess such changes in terms of a complex-simple/development-regression dichotomy. The second is to identify the musical changes in an artist’s output and view each change as equal to any other, thus removing explicit ideas of artistic development and evolution from the analysis. The modernist perspective is problematic because it judges the artist against inappropriate ideals; the postmodernist perspective takes into account the nature of the materials of popular music, but provides little insight into understanding the trajectory of an artist’s output, as may be documented by critics or musicians.

A third option between these poles has been explored effectively by Moore and Ibrahim, and Sheinbaum. From their study of Radiohead’s idiolect, Moore and Ibrahim argue that the group’s career can be understood as a ‘journey whose direction is more easily conceived as moving from “simple” to “more difficult/complex” rather than the other way round’. They suggest, however, that a better reading of Radiohead’s career is in terms of its ‘elliptical nature: it appears the band solved the problem of following *OK Computer* by gradually returning to its original musical ideals’.³²² Sheinbaum’s analysis directly counters Macan’s reading of progressive rock post-1970s. He provides close analyses of Yes’ ‘Owner of a Lonely Heart’ and Rush’s ‘Subdivisions’. Having acknowledged the commercial-oriented elements of these tracks (namely, instrumentation and basic form), he argues that these features are balanced by the retention of complex musical traits from each band’s past output, such as the unusual time signatures in the case of Rush.³²³ One reading of Sheinbaum’s analysis is that progressive rock bands *did not regress* (the implied double negative is intentional) because they retained difficult musical elements from earlier in their careers. Sheinbaum’s ultimate conclusion, however, is that progressive rock bands were instead ‘in a complex way...attempting to continue and develop its [progressive rock’s] ideals by constructing what can be read as a classical-like

³²¹ Moore, *Song Means*, 160-161.

³²² Moore and Ibrahim, ‘Sounds like Teen Spirit’, 152.

³²³ See Sheinbaum, ‘Progressive Rock’, 33-43.

periodization'. That is, the 1980s turn towards commercial styles represented a new phase in the progressive rock movement, analogous to, say, Beethoven's transition from middle period to late period works.

These two examples highlight analytical approaches that take the best from the modernist and postmodernist perspectives. In terms of the latter, the emphasis remains on identifying musical change across songs. Contra Macan, Sheinbaum carries out this task in great detail—much care is taken to pinpoint what exactly in the music changes, and what does not. In the terms of the former, the authors take their analyses a step further; but rather than forcing the musical changes into a simple-complex framework, they attempt to understand the nature and direction of the musical changes in nuanced terms. In many ways, this is the interesting part, because the analyst is invited to find an appropriate model or template that maps an artist's career output—Moore and Ibrahim's 'elliptical' model is one such example; Moore's conception of style history (noted above) suggests a wave-like model, where short-scale increases in sophistication reach breaking point and then start over;³²⁴ the Rolling Stones' career suggests a plateau-like model, whereby any musical changes stop at a certain point.³²⁵ Narratives from classical music discourse may also be useful: Webster highlights three primary methods of organising a composer's output, including the 'originary' narrative (emphasis on early output), the 'organic' narrative (emphasis on middle output), and the 'teleological' narrative (emphasis on late output).³²⁶ In any case, none of these accounts of musical change reflects a better or worse career path; rather, the analytical task is to understand how these trajectories may relate to ideas of development and growth as put forth by critics and musicians. That is, Moore and Ibrahim do not argue that Radiohead's 'journey' is or is not

³²⁴ Zak's analysis of Roy Orbison's 'Sweet West Texas' style relates well to this model; Zak demonstrates how a segment of Orbison's career can be viewed as the growing confluence and culmination of traits and influences that stem from his time in Texas, analogous to building to the crest of a wave; see Zak, 'Only the Lonely'. Aspects of David Bowie or Bruce Springsteen's careers may also be understood in these terms, although there are likely interesting questions in the former case as to whether such renewal is evident in musical or image terms.

³²⁵ I am reminded of Hector's suggestion that after 1974, the Rolling Stones made 'the decisive entry into a comfortable living as rock's elder statesmen... there would be few musical surprises in the future'. See James Hector, *The Complete Guide to the Music of the Rolling Stones* (London: Omnibus Press, 1995), 95.

³²⁶ See James Webster, 'The Concept of Beethoven's "Early" Period in the Context of Periodizations in General', *Beethoven Forum* 3 (1994).

reflective of the band's musical maturity; but, the authors leave open the possibility that one may understand the 'journey' as synonymous with 'progress' .

Before proceeding to Queen, it is necessary to make one final point. The appraisals of an artist's musical change will be shaped by the details on which the analyst focuses. This is where much of the tension lies between Macan and Sheinbaum's analyses of progressive rock. Macan is primarily concerned with musical style, insofar as he addresses the traits shared by numerous progressive rock artists and their relationship to the traits of other groups of artists (i.e. new wave bands). Sheinbaum, on the other hand, is concerned primarily with musical idiolect, insofar as he addresses the traits common to a single artist (i.e. Yes and Rush, individually).³²⁷ Both evidently listened to the same songs, but their conclusions depended on the details afforded primacy. Accordingly, one reaches a relativistic and open-ended, but also inviting position, where artistic development can be understood in whatever way the analyst chooses, in terms of both the features under investigation, and how such features are traced and appraised through time. At that point, it becomes a matter of debate as to which reading best explains and represents the music in question.

6.3.2 The Development of the 'Queen Sound'

The following sections address the idea of Queen's stylistic development from four perspectives—the 'Queen sound'; styles employed by Queen; the cumulative idiolect of Queen; and the role of one idiolect gesture within Queen's songs across the corpus. In line with the arguments made above, each perspective offers a contrasting view of how Queen's musical career unfolded. This first section is a brief case study that considers the notion of the famed 'Queen sound'; this moniker is taken to refer to the traits of Queen's idiolect as pertaining to arrangement and production techniques. The story told here concerns the changes in the 'Queen sound' after the group's early albums (*Queen* and *Queen II*), which stemmed from Queen's increasing control in the studio that fostered these particular changes. Accordingly, this case study also

³²⁷ As noted in Chapter 2, Moore has argued extensively that the crucial element of the progressive rock movement was that one could observe a split between style and idiolect, such that artists could move freely between different styles, as Macan observes, while retaining, as Sheinbaum observes, their unique musical characteristics; see Moore, 'Gentle Giant's "Octopus"'.

demonstrates how a rich understanding of Queen's studio practices is important for understanding the group's idiolect and perceived development.

Two examples highlight the changes in the 'Queen sound' between 1974 and 1975. 'White Queen (As It Began)', from *Queen II*, offers an excellent example of the group's early sound, while 'Death on Two Legs', from *A Night at the Opera*, offers an excellent example of the group's consistent sound from 1975 onwards. For this analysis I will hone in on one excerpt from each song: the instrumental bridge of 'White Queen' and the pre-chorus of 'Death On Two Legs'. From these two excerpts, one can actually note a number of similarities pertaining to the songs' respective arrangements. Despite subtle differences in instrumentation (the former song features a harmonised guitar arrangement), the sound-boxes of both songs have a wide lateral spread of the instruments, with the rhythm guitars providing a frame to the stereo image, and the other instruments (tom drums, vocal harmonies, cymbals, etc.) occupying the space towards the central axis of snare, kick drum, bass guitar, and lead vocal/guitar. There are further sonic consistencies with respect to the changes of texture through these excerpts. Although Roger Taylor's drumming and Brian May's acoustic guitar playing become slightly more animated through the instrumental section of 'White Queen', the introduction of the overdriven rhythm guitars is sudden, creating a forceful juxtaposition between the 'acoustic' and 'electric' textures. The same idea holds in 'Death on Two Legs', in which May's single rhythm guitar is transformed into two parts (one in each stereo channel), and a four-part vocal arrangement enters the mix concurrently. The textural contrast here is not between 'acoustic' and 'electric' sounds, but is similar to 'White Queen' in terms of the dramatic increase in density.

The key differences between these tracks lie in the nature of the space in which these sounds are heard—what Moylan has termed the 'perceived performance environment' of a song.³²⁸ There are two main differences between 'White Queen' (and the early 'Queen sound) and 'Death on Two Legs' (and the later 'Queen sound'). Firstly, reverb effects have been used much more sparingly on the instrumental and vocal tracks of 'Death on Two Legs'. The two rhythm guitar parts and the massed vocal

³²⁸ Moylan, 'Considering Space', 179-180.

arrangement sit close to the front of the mix, which, overall, occupies a rather cramped space. In comparison, various parts of the ‘White Queen’ arrangement are bathed in reverb, namely, the ride cymbals, the backing vocals, and the harmonised guitars. This reduction in reverberation represents one obvious change in the ‘Queen sound’ between 1974 and 1975. Writing on contemporary metal, Mynett has observed that reverb is used sparingly when recording the quad-tracked, distorted rhythm guitars, in order to maintain the instruments’ sonic ‘intelligibility’ in the mix.³²⁹ It is not a stretch to suggest similar ideas are at play in Queen’s tracks, in terms of retaining the clarity of Queen’s multi-layered vocal and guitar arrangements, which are similarly treated with minimal reverb.

John Deacon later acknowledged the benefits of working alongside Roy Thomas Baker, who ‘knew all the technical ins and outs of the studio’ and transferred this knowledge to the group members.³³⁰ Although these observations are generalised, it may be possible to read in them a sense of learning through the early albums. This would partly explain the changes of the production of individual parts in Queen’s arrangements. One may argue that the group and Baker developed a better understanding of how to realise most effectively the ‘Queen sound’, in terms of enhancing the clarity of the rich arrangements.

There is one further difference between the ‘performance environments’ of ‘White Queen’ and ‘Death on Two Legs’; it is here that one identifies the most important development in the ‘Queen sound’. The earlier track is a good example of what Brøvig-Hanssen and Danielsen have described as a ‘surreal’ setting, as opposed to a ‘natural’ setting. The authors make clear that any distinction between these settings is context-dependent; nonetheless, their ‘surreal’ examples mostly arise when the individual sounds of a song occupy different spatial and acoustic environments.³³¹ This is very much the case in Queen’s songs recorded in 1973 and 1974—that is, while one can perceive the individual sounds of tracks coming from different

³²⁹ Mark Mynett, ‘Achieving Intelligibility whilst Maintaining Heaviness when Producing Contemporary Metal Music’, *Journal on the Art of Record Production* 6 (2012), <<http://arpjournal.com/1858/achieving-intelligibility-whilst-maintaining-heaviness-when-producing-contemporary-metal-music/>> (accessed 21 October 2014).

³³⁰ Purvis, *Queen*, 47.

³³¹ Ragnhild Brøvig-Hanssen and Anne Danielsen, ‘The Naturalised and the Surreal: changes in the perception of popular music sound’, *Organised Sound* 18/1 (2013).

locations in the sound-box, the sounds do not cohere in a unified sonic environment. Thus, in ‘White Queen’, the ride cymbals, guitar arrangements, and backing vocalists appear to be situated in large, highly reverberant space; the snare and tom drums, on the other hand, appear to be situated in a small, dry space.

The tracks from 1975 onwards consistently appear to unfold in a ‘natural’ setting. It is necessary to be cautious about this appraisal, given the environment of ‘Death on Two Legs’ is anything but realistic—one could never sit in the apparently small room and be able to distinguish clearly the backing vocals over the two electric guitars and drums. Following Zagorski-Thomas and his notion of ‘sonic cartoons’, what is important is the fact that Queen gave the impression of performing, as a complete band, in a unified sonic setting.³³² This impression is fostered in two main ways. The first is the ‘live’ sound of the core parts of the drum kit (kick drum, snare, hi-hat), the bass guitar, the piano, and the initial rhythm guitar. Based on interviews with Roy Thomas Baker and Gary Langham, it would appear that the standard practice from *A Night the Opera* onwards was to record the basic rhythm track live, before overdubbing extra parts.³³³ Secondly, the reduced amount of reverb on the overdubbed textural components, such as the guitar and vocal arrangements, allowed these parts to sit within the sonic environment established from the ‘backing’ track. It is this two-part approach to production that consistently marks Queen’s output from 1975 onwards, and can be viewed as the final piece of the puzzle of the ‘Queen sound’.

This raises the question as to why such a change can be observed across Queen’s output. Brian May offered a specific explanation.³³⁴ He noted that the early albums, *Queen* and *Queen II* especially, were made in accordance with the principles of the ‘Trident sound’—‘the Trident sound was based on everything being damped down, so nothing interfered with anything else...so you had the drums in a little booth all covered in bits of tape so they don’t ring too much...and the guitars, they would put

³³² Simon Zagorski-Thomas, ‘Cartoons of space’, paper presented at the *Performance in the Studio Online Conference*, 29 April 2013, <<http://artofrecordproduction.com/index.php/aesthetics/natural-versus-artificial/entry/cartoons-of-space>> (accessed 9 November 2014); Simon Zagorski-Thomas, *The Musicology of Record Production* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 49ff.

³³³ Cunningham, ‘The Making Of Queen’s ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’’.

³³⁴ The following quotes are from an interview with the author in Auckland, New Zealand, 4 September 2014.

the amp in some place that was very absorbent...the engineers would say, “don’t worry, we’ll put the reverb on afterwards””. This comment resonates with the appearance of the ‘dead’ drum sound from ‘White Queen’, as well as the artificial environment of the overall track, which would have stemmed from the post-recording reverb effects. While this particular sound was famous in the early 1970s, courtesy of albums by David Bowie (*Hunky Dory*) and Elton John (*Goodbye Yellow Brick Road*), it ran contrary to Queen’s desired sound which was closer to what Zagorski-Thomas has tentatively identified as the 1970s ‘UK Sound’.³³⁵ Again, in May’s words: ‘That [the ‘Trident sound’] was completely not what we were about. We wanted to have the natural sounds and ambience. The whole thing about playing as a group is that everything does interfere with everything else’.

May further recalled the group having to ‘fight to get their own way’; only in small fragments of *Queen II* and *Sheer Heart Attack*, and then *A Night at the Opera* did the group succeed in ‘getting the drums to be ambient and ringing and getting the live sound to the backing track’. Indeed, on tracks such as ‘Ogre Battle’ (*Queen II*) and ‘Brighton Rock’ (*Sheer Heart Attack*), the hi-hat has a ‘live’ sound in the mix, but the toms lack the same natural reverberation; ‘Stone Cold Crazy’ has a comparatively natural drum sound, but there is some divergence between the environment of the band (a moderate-sized rehearsal space) and the environment of Mercury’s lead vocal (a reverberant space). The exception in this context from the pre-1975 stage of Queen’s output is ‘Killer Queen’ (*Sheer Heart Attack*); the rich array of sounds are located in a unified sonic environment, as one would hear consistently from the following year onwards. May has spoken elsewhere of how this song was a breakthrough for the group, in terms of the precision of the recording and production, and it would seem likely that this song acted as a model for how the group wanted its future records to sound.³³⁶

Through the years after ‘Killer Queen’, there would be variations in the overall size and shape of the environments in which Queen’s songs were located: ‘We are the Champions’ unfolds in a luxuriant, reverberant space; ‘It’s Late’ in a moderately sized band room; ‘Save Me’ in a space falling between the two prior songs. What remains

³³⁵ See Zagorski-Thomas, ‘The US vs the UK Sound’.

³³⁶ O’Casey, *Queen*.

consistent, however, is the appearance of a ‘natural’ setting, and it is this detail that is key to the ‘Queen sound’, along with the textural changes and lateral construction of the sound-box.³³⁷ Accordingly, one may read the ‘Queen sound’ in terms of a linear model of change, insofar as the group’s sound started at one point and moved to another point. Given that this endpoint may be construed as a better realisation of Queen’s arrangements, and given it reflected the sonic vision of the band, it is possible also to read this change in terms of the grouping advancing or developing in musical terms. That is, where the early Queen tracks displayed a number of arrangement techniques that would be used on the albums to come, it was not until *A Night at the Opera* that the all the parts of the ‘Queen sound’ fell into place.

6.3.3 Changes in Style and Idiolect

It is possible to track other musical elements over the full corpus. This section traces the changes of style and then Queen’s idiolect through the years 1973-80. Both angles produce interesting readings of Queen’s output, but because the overall findings do not adequately map out the progress of Queen’s career, I offer a final perspective in Section 6.3.4. This section considers one particular gesture of Queen’s music, which provides the most insightful view of the group’s musical development through the 1970s and into the 1980s—this development cannot be accounted for solely in terms of musical style, nor in terms of idiolect alone, instead lying at the intersection of these two concepts.

Table 6.3 lists the musical styles that underpin Queen’s songs from 1973-80. As Section 6.2 made clear, identifying and labelling the style of a number of Queen songs is a difficult task, for the simple reason that the group blended musical elements from a range of sources, both explicitly and implicitly. A track such as ‘Liar’ could easily fit into the ‘hard rock’ category on account of its instrumentation, and yet with its multiple song sections (‘progressive rock’), four-to-the-floor groove in the verse (‘glam rock’), and variations in singing style (‘cabaret’), there are enough features to

³³⁷ As noted in Chapter 5, some of the later drum tracks on the funk-oriented songs (e.g. ‘Another One Bites the Dust’ and ‘Fun It’) are less ambient than the mid-1970s tracks, signalling a potential return to the ‘surreal’ setting, albeit of a different nature. Within the context of this corpus, however, these tracks represent exceptions rather than a new norm.

cast doubt on this initial appraisal. Short of developing a complex labelling system, these issues are insurmountable.

In what follows, stylistic labels are attached to songs based on a subjective judgment as to the most salient feature of the song. Thus, ‘progressive rock’ relates to unconventional formal structures; ‘hard rock’ relates to the presence of overdriven rhythm guitars playing chords and riffs; ‘acoustic rock’ relates to the presence of acoustic guitars as the rhythm instrument; ‘glam rock’ relates to the presence of a boogie guitar pattern; ‘new wave’ relates to tremolo guitar patterns; ‘funk rock’ relates to an emphasis on the bass riff; and the various references to older popular styles are based, predominantly, on instrumental techniques. The main category that has been introduced for this purpose is ‘piano rock’, which captures Queen’s distinct textural combination of a piano as the primary rhythm instrument and overdriven electric guitars as embellishing instruments; the variation ‘piano ballad’ is employed for the same types of songs, but without an explicit drum part.

| Album | Song | Style |
|------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------|
| <i>Queen</i> (1973) | ‘Keep Yourself Alive’ | Hard rock |
| | ‘Doin’ All Right’ | Hard rock |
| | ‘Great King Rat’ | Hard rock |
| | ‘My Fairy King’ | Progressive rock |
| | ‘Liar’ | Hard rock |
| | ‘The Night Comes Down’ | Acoustic rock |
| | ‘Modern Times Rock ‘n’ Roll’ | Hard rock |
| | ‘Son And Daughter’ | Hard rock |
| | ‘Jesus’ | Hard rock |
| | ‘Seven Seas Of Rhye’ | Hard rock |
| <i>Queen II</i> (1974) | ‘Procession’ | Hard rock |
| | ‘Father To Son’ | Hard rock |
| | ‘White Queen (As It Began)’ | Hard rock |
| | ‘Some Day One Day’ | Acoustic rock |
| | ‘The Loser In The End’ | Hard rock |
| | ‘Ogre Battle’ | Hard rock |
| | ‘The Fairy Feller’s Master-Stroke’ | Progressive rock |
| | ‘Nevermore’ | Piano ballad |
| | ‘The March Of The Black Queen’ | Progressive rock |
| | ‘Funny How Love Is’ | 1960s pop |

| | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|------------------|
| | 'Seven Seas Of Rhye' | Hard rock |
| <i>Sheer Heart Attack</i> (1974) | 'Brighton Rock' | Hard rock |
| | 'Killer Queen' | Baroque pop |
| | 'Tenement Funster' | Hard rock |
| | 'Flick Of The Wrist' | Progressive rock |
| | 'Lily Of The Valley' | Piano ballad |
| | 'Now I'm Here' | Glam rock |
| | 'In The Lap Of The Gods' | Progressive rock |
| | 'Stone Cold Crazy' | Hard rock |
| | 'Dear Friends' | Piano ballad |
| | 'Misfire' | Acoustic rock |
| | 'Bring Back That Leroy Brown' | 1940s jazz |
| | 'She Makes Me' | Folk rock |
| | 'In The Lap Of The Gods...Revisited' | Piano rock |
| <i>A Night at the Opera</i> (1975) | 'Death On Two Legs' | Hard rock |
| | 'Lazing On A Sunday Afternoon' | Music hall |
| | 'I'm In Love With My Car' | Hard rock |
| | 'You're My Best Friend' | Piano rock |
| | '39' | Skiffle |
| | 'Sweet Lady' | Hard rock |
| | 'Seaside Rendezvous' | Vaudeville |
| | 'The Prophet's Song' | Progressive rock |
| | 'Love Of My Life' | Piano rock |
| | 'Good Company' | 1920s Dixieland |
| | 'Bohemian Rhapsody' | Progressive rock |
| | 'God Save The Queen' | Traditional |
| <i>A Day at the Races</i> (1976) | 'Tie Your Mother Down' | Hard rock |
| | 'You Take My Breath Away' | Piano ballad |
| | 'Long Away' | 1960s folk rock |
| | 'Millionaire Waltz' | Progressive rock |
| | 'You And I' | Piano rock |
| | 'Somebody To Love' | Piano rock |
| | 'White Man' | Hard rock |
| | 'Good Old-Fashioned Lover Boy' | Music hall |
| | 'Drowse' | Acoustic rock |
| | 'Teo Torriatte (Let Us Cling Together)' | Piano rock |

| | | |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------|
| <i>News of the World</i> (1977) | ‘We Will Rock You’ | Hard rock |
| | ‘We Are The Champions’ | Piano rock |
| | ‘Sheer Heart Attack’ | Punk |
| | ‘All Dead, All Dead’ | Piano rock |
| | ‘Spread Your Wings’ | Piano rock |
| | ‘Fight From The Inside’ | Funk rock |
| | ‘Get Down Make Love’ | Piano rock |
| | ‘Sleeping On The Sidewalk’ | Blues rock |
| | ‘Who Needs You’ | Acoustic rock |
| | ‘It’s Late’ | Hard rock |
| | ‘My Melancholy Blues’ | Cabaret |
| <i>Jazz</i> (1978) | ‘Mustapha’ | Persian rock |
| | ‘Fat Bottomed Girls’ | Hard rock |
| | ‘Jealousy’ | Piano rock |
| | ‘Bicycle Race’ | Progressive rock |
| | ‘If You Can’t Beat Them’ | Hard rock |
| | ‘Let Me Entertain You’ | Piano rock |
| | ‘Dead On Time’ | Hard rock |
| | ‘In Only Seven Days’ | Acoustic rock |
| | ‘Dreamer’s Ball’ | 1930s jazz |
| | ‘Fun It’ | Funk rock |
| | ‘Leaving Home Ain’t Easy’ | Acoustic rock |
| | ‘Don’t Stop Me Now’ | Piano rock |
| | ‘More Of That Jazz’ | Hard rock |
| <i>The Game</i> (1980) | ‘Play The Game’ | Piano rock |
| | ‘Dragon Attack’ | Funk rock |
| | ‘Another One Bites The Dust’ | Funk rock |
| | ‘Need Your Loving Tonight’ | New wave |
| | ‘Crazy Little Thing Called Love’ | Rockabilly |
| | ‘Rock It (Prime Jive)’ | New wave |
| | ‘Don’t Try Suicide’ | Piano rock |
| | ‘Sail Away Sweet Sister’ | Piano rock |
| | ‘Coming Soon’ | New wave |
| | ‘Save Me’ | Piano rock |

Table 6.3. Styles of Queen’s Songs, 1973-80

One primary trend is apparent from Table 6.3. The number of tracks labelled ‘hard rock’ and ‘progressive rock’ decreases in the latter half of the 1970s, in favour of

tracks labelled ‘new wave’ and ‘funk rock’. On the surface, at least, this would suggest a career trajectory not dissimilar to the progressive rock bands of Macan’s study, whose supposed loss of musical vitality reflected the shift from complex rock-oriented styles to simpler pop-oriented styles. It is tempting to read this overview of Queen’s output in terms of abandoning the styles in which the band made its initial impression, and adopting styles that, perhaps, offered greater commercial rewards. The fact that the group’s breakthrough in the American market came in 1980 with the funk rock-styled ‘Another One Bites the Dust’ would seem to confirm these ideas.

This reading, however, is too simplistic. Firstly, the linear trajectory presupposes that Queen began their career operating in a certain style. Although ‘hard rock’ is clearly the most common style through the group’s early albums, the stylistic construction of these albums is by no means homogenous, with references to folk style traits (‘acoustic rock’) and progressive style traits appearing several times. Furthermore, as noted in Section 6.2.1, even Queen’s relationship to hard rock was complex, with the group drawing on different strands of that style. Accordingly, it is difficult to hear Queen as located centrally in one particular style at the start of its career. Secondly, and by the same token, it is difficult to hear Queen as located centrally in one particular style by 1980. Indeed, this sketch analysis alone suggests the group operated in five different styles on *The Game*, with a further four different styles appearing on the prior album *Jazz*. Of these styles, new wave and funk rock were clearly additions to Queen’s repertoire in the late 1970s and early 1980s. But even with the increased presence of these ‘new’ styles, it is difficult to argue for the wholesale substitution of one style in favour of another, thereby diminishing the accuracy of a linear narrative. The third mitigating factor against this linear narrative is that there is a degree of stylistic continuity through the 1970s. That is, even if new wave and funk rock songs start to appear from 1977, it is not the case that the hard rock and progressive rock elements disappear completely from Queen’s output. Both styles are present on *Jazz*, while *The Game* offers several examples of the piano rock style that had been part of Queen’s output since at least *Sheer Heart Attack*.³³⁸

³³⁸ I say ‘at least’ because the instrumental texture of piano and electric guitars had been in use since ‘My Fairy King’ from *Queen*.

For all of these reasons, then, it is difficult to posit a linear trajectory when assessing the musical styles of Queen's songs through the years. A more appropriate appraisal may be in terms of an accumulative narrative, whereby the group added to its stylistic repertoire as it progressed through its career. This type of narrative captures the group's two main tendencies of introducing new musical styles, as well as retaining older styles (i.e. hard rock and progressive rock) in its musical arsenal. This narrative also captures the way in which Queen introduced multiple new styles at certain points through the corpus. The process of accumulation was most prominent, for instance, on *A Night at the Opera*, when the group explored a range of pre-1970s styles. In counterpoint to the accumulative phases, there are subsequent periods of consolidation, during which a previously introduced style is used frequently to strengthen its place in Queen's repertoire. Thus, the 'piano rock' style appears often through *A Day at the Races* and *News of the World*, following its introduction in *Sheer Heart Attack*; while, on *The Game*, the group strengthened their hold on the funk rock style, which had appeared on occasion on *News of the World* and *Jazz*. Finally, it is easy to understand how this accumulative model may relate to the discourse of musical development: each point of accumulation can be viewed as a step forward, insofar as Queen was expanding the potential styles available to it as a band.

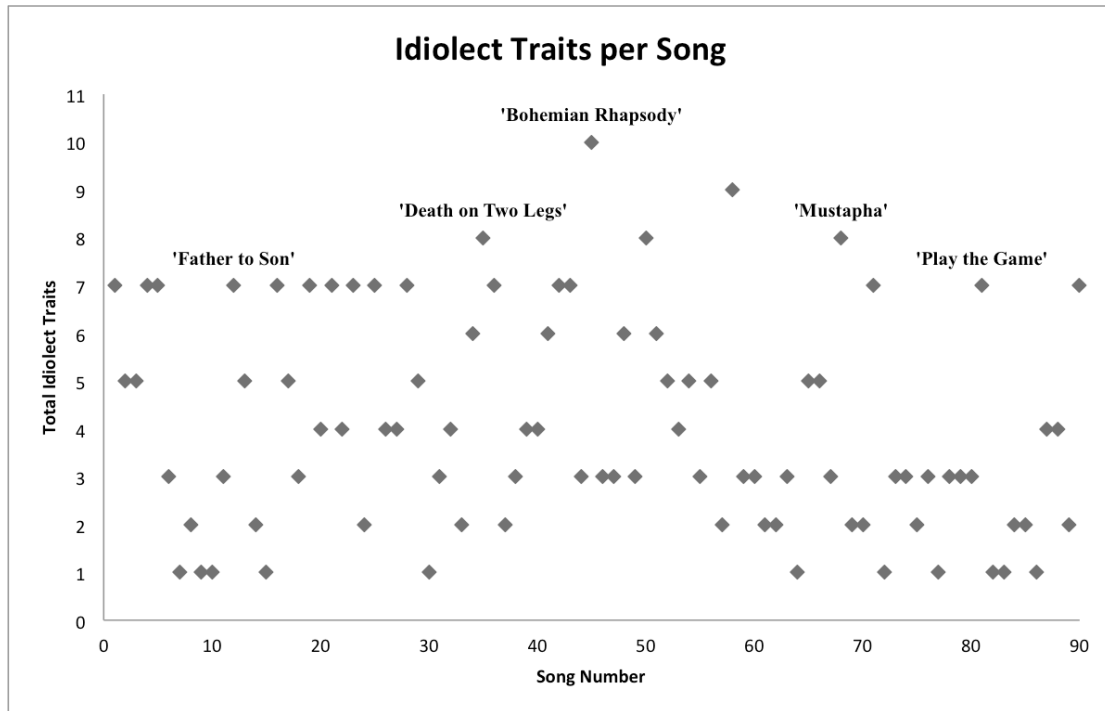
The accumulative model, however, should be treated with some caution—not because it does not fit the data, but because the data itself, in terms of stylistic labels, is shaky. Further to issues of stylistic fusion, some labels appear to miss the point. 'Bicycle Race', for instance, is labelled 'progressive rock' on account of its complex formal and harmonic structure. As a simple label, this is fine, but, as Moore suggests,³³⁹ what is more striking about the song is that its primary musical characteristics reflect Queen's compositional strategies (unusual formal structure; modulations between related keys; tempi modulations) and sonic patterns (vocal and guitar arrangements). In other words, 'Bicycle Race' offers a clear representation of Queen's idiolect; thus, it may be more accurate to say that the style of the song is simply 'Queen'.

³³⁹ Moore, *Song Means*, 235-236.

With this idea in mind, it is appropriate to consider the notion of musical development through the lens of Queen’s idiolect. In Section 6.1, it was argued that Queen’s idiolect comprised a number of compositional strategies and sonic patterns, each of which provided a Queen-like flavour to a musical setting or context. Accordingly, one can track the number of these traits appearing in each song through the corpus; this, in turn, provides some indication of any growth or changes in the relative strength of Queen’s idiolect—were some phases of the period 1973-80 more Queen-like than others? Did the group gradually bring together various traits into a coherent idiolect? Did Queen develop a distinct musical ‘voice’ as a band?

| Idiolect Traits | |
|--|--|
| Compositional Strategies | Sonic Patterns |
| Expanded/unconventional form | Close position vocal arrangement |
| Pre-1970s style reference | Close position guitar arrangement |
| Dynamic and/or experimental production | Power chord textural change |
| Modulation across and/or within sections | Electric guitar doubling bass line |
| | ‘Broadway seventh’ and/or upper pedal voicing harmonic gesture |
| | Floor tom drum groove or fill |

Table 6.4. Queen’s Common Idiolect Traits, 1973-80



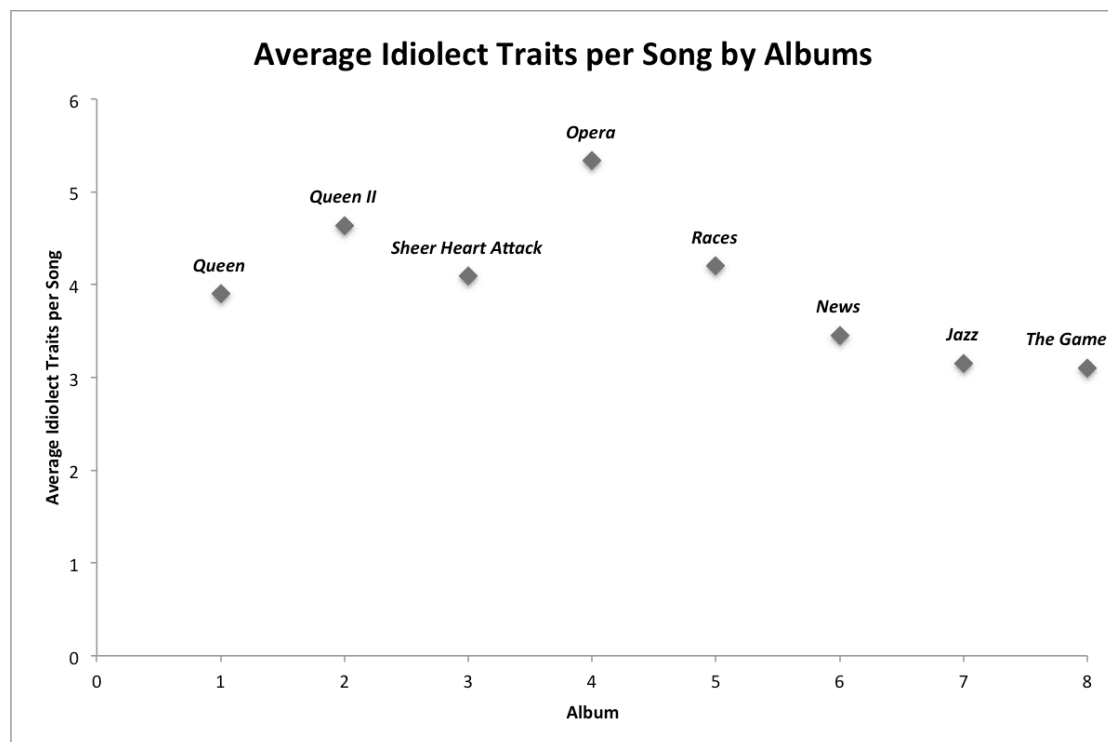
Graph 6.1. Idiolect Traits per Song, 1973-80

This segment of the analysis focused on ten of Queen’s key idiolect traits, which are listed in Table 6.4. The selection of these traits stemmed from Tables 4.3 and 5.1. While not statistically derived, these traits arguably represent the most salient and defining features of Queen’s songs through this period. Graph 6.1 documents the total number of these traits to appear in each song through the corpus, with several songs marked for ease of presentation. There is little that one can read into this particular graph, with the exception of the high number of idiolect traits that appear in songs from early in Queen’s career. ‘Keep Yourself Alive’, the opening track from the self-titled debut *Queen*, is one such example. The start of the song is a magnificent instance of Spicer’s ‘accumulative’ process, whereby the various layers of the texture, including three guitars, the bass guitar and kit, are brought into the mix one part at a time.³⁴⁰ Amplifying this layering approach is the placement of sounds around the sound-box; each new instrument draws the listener to a different spatial location. Thus from the very first bars of its output, Queen’s dynamic manipulation of the sound-box is on display. Following this, one finds many other traits that would recur in the coming years—the song has two bridge sections and a lengthy introduction surrounding a straightforward verse-chorus structure (subverting formal conventions);

³⁴⁰ Spicer, ““(Ac)cumulative Form””.

Taylor punctuates the final beat of phrases with a floor tom hit; there is a three-part vocal arrangement in the chorus, the instrumental section features a five-part guitar arrangement; and, May’s rhythm guitar playing alternates between a ‘galloping’ pattern and power chords.

Viewed retrospectively, one might argue that Queen began its career in 1973 with a fully-formed idiolect; a more nuanced argument might be that Queen’s idiolect through the 1970s drew heavily on musical traits presented on the opening album. On this point, May commented that the band members had ‘a pretty strong vision when they started’ and were ‘pretty clued on’ as to the types of records they wanted to emulate.³⁴¹ Such an observation raises interesting points with respect to the notion of development. That is, the prevalence of certain idiolect traits from the outset would appear to leave little room for progress and growth—Queen had already found their musical voice in 1973.



Graph 6.2. Average Idiolect Traits per Song by Albums

While it is true that some of Queen’s earliest material shares much common ground with later tracks, it is not completely accurate to suggest that Queen’s idiolect was

³⁴¹ Interview with author, Auckland, 4 September 2014.

fully realised from the opening tracks of *Queen*. Instead, what one finds in the first two albums are a handful of tracks—'Keep Yourself Alive', 'Liar', 'My Fairy King', 'Ogre Battle', 'The March of the Black Queen', and 'Seven Seas of Rhye', especially—that offer good representations of Queen's idiolect, as well as other tracks—'Jesus', 'The Night Comes Down', 'Modern Times Rock 'n' Roll', and 'The Loser in the End'—that offer less representative examples of Queen's idiolect. Graph 6.2 provides greater detail to this argument. This graph presents the average number of idiolect traits per song grouped into each album. Thus, on *Queen*, songs featured on average just fewer than four idiolect traits. Drawing Graphs 6.1 and 6.2 together, what one observes through the middle of the 1970s (*Sheer Heart Attack* to *A Day at the Races*) are not necessarily songs that a more Queen-like (i.e. more idiolect traits), but *more songs* that are Queen-like across an album. Indeed, it is difficult to find a song on *A Night at the Opera* and *A Day at the Races* that is not reflective in numerous way of Queen's idiolect. To return to May's comments, if Queen began its career with a reasonably strong vision, then it is by its third and fourth albums that this vision is realised on a more consistent basis.

Similar to the arguments made with respect to the changes of the 'Queen sound', it is this increased consistency that can be understood as reflecting the group's musical development. In terms of Queen's idiolect, then, one might suggest an organic narrative, insofar as the emphasis is on the secondary phase of the group's career (i.e. post-*Sheer Heart Attack*). The idiolect data would further support this reading given the declining level of average idiolect traits per song in the second half of the 1970s—once Queen had fully realised its idiolect vision on *A Night at the Opera*, the band appeared to recede from this high point. Graph 6.1 further supports this narrative—both the early and late 1970s songs are marked by clusters of examples at the lower end of the idiolect scale.

Again, however, the problem with this argument is not so much the interpretation of the data, but the limitations of the data itself. While it may be intuitive to suggest that more idiolect traits produce a more Queen-like song, there is no real evidence that supports this assumption in the first place. Accordingly, it is debatable whether fewer idiolect traits per song, or on average per album, can be viewed as some kind of musical regression. What the numbers do not convey is how the traits of Queen's

idiolect operate within the context of actual songs. Furthermore, there is a sense of incongruity between the two views put forth thus far, in that the stylistic perspective suggested continual development through accumulation, while at the same time, the idiolect analysis suggested growth followed by decline. As suggested above, neither view is right nor wrong; however, by considering the idiolect traits as part of individual songs, it becomes possible to understand how style and idiolect relate to one another, which, in turn, allows one to develop a stronger position on Queen's musical development.

6.3.4 The Downbeat Power Chord Gesture

It would be too great a task to discuss the function and purpose of all of Queen's idiolect traits within individual songs, and thus, in this final section, I will consider one prominent gesture that occurs regularly across the corpus and is a key component of Queen's idiolect. The gesture in question is the downbeat power chord, played by May on his overdriven electric guitar. As noted above, the first appearance of this gesture is in the verse of 'Keep Yourself Alive', where, after four bars of the 'galloping' pattern, May plays the middle phrases as power chords, before concluding the section with another 'galloping' pattern. The power chord thus enters into a brief textural relationship, with movement between driving, sustained, and driving rhythm guitar parts. The striking feature of the power chord is that it creates a strong contrast with the surrounding material, a quality that is exacerbated by the sudden and dramatic nature of the textural change. On the subsequent album track, 'Doin' All Right', the instrumental section is demarcated by sudden textural changes, from acoustic guitar to distorted electric guitars. The electric guitar of the latter song is not played with the same sustain technique as in the former, but there is similar textural relationship at play—movement from light to heavy. In a final example from *Queen*, the instrumental version of 'Seven Seas of Rhye' starts with four bars of Mercury's piano riff, before May's power chords punctuate and then ring through the on-going piano line. In this case, then, the downbeat power chords are superimposed on, rather than juxtaposed by the acoustic piano texture. Nonetheless, the power chords enter into the mix in the same sudden and dramatic manner as in the previous examples.

On the following two albums, one finds similar instances of this gesture: in the reworked version of ‘Seven Seas of Rhye’, for instance, the double-tracked downbeat power chords punctuate the piano riff, before taking over as the primary accompaniment part for the song. The power chords act as introductory gestures as well in ‘Father to Son’. ‘In the Lap of the Gods...Revisited’ from *Sheer Heart Attack* offers a slightly different take on this gesture. Here, May enters on the electric guitar at the start of the pre-chorus, and on the first appearance of the dominant chord in the song. This approach reappears in ‘Death on Two Legs’—the first dominant chord of the song is marked by double-tracked and ringing power chords. In the early tracks (e.g. ‘Doin’ All Right’), the guitar gesture had been used, along with changes in the drum groove and bass guitar playing, as a means of delineating the sectional and/or divisions. In these mid-1970s tracks, one finds the guitar gesture being employed in conjunction with other formal and harmonic devices. The textural pattern itself of a sudden downbeat power chord on overdriven guitar is constant; but its placement means that May’s rhythm guitar has a significant role in articulating the songs’ structural dynamics and high points. This latter function continued through songs from the subsequent albums—in ‘We are the Champions’, ‘Spread Your Wings’, ‘It’s Late’, ‘Sail Away Sweet Sister’, and ‘Save Me’, the downbeat power chord is delayed until the pre-chorus or chorus section, thus amplifying the structural importance of this section. In ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’, there is no chorus, but the electric guitar power chord starts at the point of modulation in the verse; again, the guitar shapes the song’s structural dynamics.

As the previous examples suggest, any musical development does not lie in the gesture itself, which remains remarkably consistent through the years. Instead, one may be tempted to put forth another organic narrative with respect to the role of the gesture within songs. This reading emphasises the electric guitar’s function in illuminating the structural shape of Queen’s songs from the mid-1970s onwards. But, consider a song such as ‘Play the Game’: the track is a piano-based ballad, which has a climactic point in the chorus articulated by a five-part vocal arrangement, minor dominant chord, and stop-time textural hit. Yet in this instance, the electric guitar power chords enter suddenly *after* the chorus; the dramatic gesture is divorced from the structural high point of the song. What is problematic is the implication that the ultimate purpose and function of the downbeat power chord gesture is to outline the

structure of a song. Again, while one *can* interpret the group as making better use of the gesture by using it in conjunction with traits, there seems no reason why one should regard the ‘surface’ uses of the downbeat power chord, in early tracks and ‘Play the Game’ as less effective. Thus, the issue with this organic narrative is that one set of songs is considered to be a benchmark, with other tracks viewed as variations, aberrations, or less sophisticated instances.

There is another way to hear the guitar gesture that obviates some of these issues. Returning to the songs from *Queen*, discussed above, what was also striking was the way they proudly displayed Queen’s influences, namely Led Zeppelin and the Who. As noted in Section 6.2.1, the dramatic textural changes from ‘acoustic’ to ‘electric’ instrumentation was a hallmark of the former group, as evident from ‘What Is and Never Should Be’, ‘Babe I’m Gonna Leave You’, ‘Bring It On Home’, and, to a lesser extent, ‘Stairway to Heaven’. Further, the verse pattern of ‘Keep Yourself Alive’ (‘galloping’ guitar followed by power chords) was clearly modelled on the introduction and verse rhythm guitar patterns of ‘Immigrant Song’. As also noted in Section 6.2.1, ‘Seven Seas of Rhye’ and later tracks, with their superimposition of downbeat chords on a piano part, are strongly reminiscent of the Who’s similar layering of ringing power chords over a driving rhythmic pattern, such as in ‘Pinball Wizard’ or ‘Won’t Get Fooled Again’. Thus, even though the analysis was framed in terms of examining a gesture from Queen’s idiolect, I would suggest that in the early years of Queen’s output, the downbeat power chords would *not* have been heard by contemporary listeners as Queen-like, but rather in relation to the dominant hard rock bands of the day. This was certainly Gordon Fletcher’s impression in 1973 when writing for *Rolling Stone*; his review is worth quoting at length:

Rumor has it that Queen shall soon be crowned "the new Led Zeppelin," which is an event that would certainly suit this observer just fine. There’s no doubt that this funky, energetic English quartet has all the tools they’ll need to lay claim to the Zep’s abdicated heavy-metal throne, and beyond that to become a truly influential force in the rock world. Their debut album is superb. The Zeppelin analogy is not meant to imply that Queen’s music is anywhere near as blues-based as the content of Led Zep I & II. No, their songs are more in the Who vein, straight-ahead rock with slashing, hard-driving arrangements that rate with the

finest moments of Who's Next and Quadrophenia.³⁴²

Moving forward almost a decade to 1980 and the reviewer from the same publication made no mention of Led Zeppelin and the Who, despite some of the musical similarities between *Queen* and *The Game*. Rather, Steve Pond noted 'some of the current record consists of the same inflated ballads and metallic shuffles that have padded every previous Queen disc'.³⁴³ Again, one cannot know other listeners' reactions; however, I would argue that by the time of *The Game*, the downbeat power chord gesture, amongst other musical traits, would have not been heard in relation to the group's influences, but rather as a sonic marker of Queen itself. That is, when May's power chords punctuate the post-chorus section of 'Play the Game', the gesture is best understood not as another Led Zeppelin or the Who reference, but as the Queen musical fingerprint stamped on a Mercury-penned piano ballad. In this regard, any musical development lies in a listener's changing interpretation of the gesture—from a reference to a wider musical style or influence to a typical feature of Queen's output.

The strength of this interpretation lies in the way it ties together the previous perspectives on Queen's musical development. Because it depends on listener interpretation, it is not clear how quickly or when the transition occurs from stylistic reference to idiolect trait (i.e. when does one stop hearing Led Zeppelin and start hearing Queen in the guitar power chord?). Nonetheless, the mid-1970s albums would seem a logical point at which this change may have occurred. As Graphs 6.1 and 6.2 demonstrated, this was the phase during which Queen used more frequently the various gestures that had previously marked sections of its output, including the power chord gesture. One may suggest, therefore, that the increasing consistency of the group's idiolect traits may have allowed listeners to 'recognize [Queen's music] as their work individually'.³⁴⁴

³⁴² Gordon Fletcher, 'Queen: Album Reviews', *Rolling Stone*, 149 (1973), <http://www.queenarchives.com/index.php?title=Queen_-_12-06-1973_-_Queen_-_Rolling_Stone_%28Issue_149%29> (accessed 28 July 2014).

³⁴³ Steve Pond, 'Review: The Game', *Rolling Stone*, 326 (1980), <http://www.queenarchives.com/index.php?title=Queen_-_09-18-1980_-_The_Game_-_Rolling_Stone_%28Issue_326%29> (accessed 30 January 2015).

³⁴⁴ Moore and Ibrahim, 'Sounds like Teen Spirit', 140.

Further, and more importantly, this interpretation of the guitar gesture allows one to reconcile the stylistic and idiolect perspectives on musical development. Indeed, I would argue that the true nature of Queen's musical development can be understood as lying at the intersection of style changes and idiolect traits, and may be described in terms of an 'expedition' narrative. That is, as Queen accumulated and progressed through different styles, the band annexed this musical ground with the traits of its idiolect, akin to an explorer planting a flag in a new territory. This model allows one to understand the presence of the power chords and other idiolect traits in Queen's songs. 'Mustapha' exemplifies this idea. The song is one of Mercury's more bizarre songwriting efforts, with melodic and harmonic material based around the Phrygian mode, and a vocal introduction featuring quarter-tone inflections (hence the stylistic description, 'Persian rock', above). About ninety seconds into the track, May enters dramatically into the song with downbeat electric guitar notes that double the bass line; this is followed by close-position guitar and vocal arrangements. 'Mustapha' clearly stakes out new stylistic ground; at the same, the presence of the group's idiolect traits reminds the listener that Queen is undertaking this stylistic adventure.

The expedition narrative also explains the apparent decline in Queen's idiolect from the late 1970s onwards. A song such as 'Coming Soon' marks a foray into the new wave style: May plays even quavers on rhythm guitar, Taylor's drum groove remains consistent through the song, the phrasing is foursquare, and the overall structure is based on repeating verse and chorus sections. Arguably, it is only the four-part vocal harmony at the end of the chorus that provides a strong indication that this is Queen's take on new wave. But, one vocal arrangement is all that is required for the group to make its sonic mark on the new style.

Thus, in terms of the expedition model, it is not the quantity of idiolect traits that is important; rather, the crucial factor is that Queen had an idiolect that could be stamped on any given style. It is this dialogue between musical difference in terms of style and musical consistency in terms of idiolect that marks Queen's output through the period 1973-80. Each side of the equation is important for overall musical development. That is, without the stylistic accumulation, there would be no sense of progression given the relative sameness from track to track; equally, the retention of Queen's idiolect through this process of accumulation ensured that the group did not

lose its distinct musical voice. To return to various conceptions of progressive rock, Moore has forcefully argued that the 1970s movement should best be understood as the point of ‘emancipation’ of idiolect from style;³⁴⁵ artists could move freely across style boundaries while retaining the distinct elements of their idiolect. One of the key themes of this chapter has been the gestural nature of the group’s idiolect—the idea that each musical ingredient could provide a Queen-like flavour to any particular song, or, in this case, stylistic setting. On these grounds, Queen may well be the definitive progressive rock band, for what has been demonstrated here is that the first half of its career is best viewed as wide-ranging musical journey (or ‘progression’) with each stylistic turn marked by the group’s distinct sonic fingerprints.

³⁴⁵ Moore, ‘Gentle Giant’s “Octopus”’.

7. Applications and Conclusions

7.1.1 'Sounds Like' Queen

In the late 1980s, the Australian television show *The Money or the Gun* ran a segment entitled 'Stairways to Heaven', in which local bands and musicians would cover the iconic Led Zeppelin song in different musical styles. Some acts delivered a pastiche of a general style, such as swing or blues-rock, while others assimilated 'Stairway to Heaven' into the style of individual songs, such as the B-52s' 'Rock Lobster'. This research concluded with a similar recording venture in order to demonstrate an understanding of Queen's idiolect in practical terms—in other words, how could an existing song be made to 'sound like' Queen?

A decision was made, however, not to cover 'Stairway to Heaven' because I felt that the Led Zeppelin song was not the type of song that Queen would have written in the first place. From a structural perspective, 'Stairway to Heaven' is remarkable for its slow-burning transformation of a three-note descending bass line, from the chromatic progression of the verse to the bare Aeolian power chords of the final up-tempo section. Notwithstanding the fact that Queen used a similar chromatic progression on several occasions, the idea of a single harmonic cell underpinning an entire song was highly unusual for the group. Furthermore, the harmonic transformation of the original 'Stairway to Heaven' is supported by the gradual textural crescendo over the nine minutes of the song. Again, this approach to structural dynamics is foreign to Queen, who favoured abrupt changes in instrumental texture.

The point of the television segment, of course, was to evoke a particular musical style regardless of whether 'Stairway to Heaven' fit with the new stylistic context.

Nonetheless, it was decided that a more appropriate task would be to record a Christmas medley in the style of Queen. Three 'traditional' Christmas pop songs (i.e. pre-war American songbook) were chosen and fashioned into a medley, each segment of which imitated a Queen texture or song type: a hard rock model, a piano ballad, and a rock ballad. This choice of repertoire was made for several reasons. Firstly, it emphasised the connection between the British group and pre-war American popular

styles; this connection is made explicit in a number of pastiches (e.g. ‘Seaside Rendezvous’ and ‘My Melancholy Blues’), but filters into the group’s idiolect, as was suggested in Section 6.2.4. Secondly, the idea of a medley related well to Queen’s episodic approach to form, and provided something of a structural template above which different instrumental and vocal textures could easily be contrasted. Thirdly, the idea of recording Christmas songs spoke to Queen’s place in the 1970s glam rock era, during which a number of British bands wrote new songs for the Christmas season. Slade’s ‘Merry Xmas Everybody’ and Wizzard’s ‘I Wish It Would Be Christmas Everyday’ are the examples *par excellence*.

The original songs (‘We Wish You a Merry Christmas’; ‘Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas’; ‘I’ll Be Home for Christmas’) provided the harmonic and melodic material for the medley; only a short introduction and coda were added to this material. The segments of each song were then arranged into the different instrumental combinations, and written as a MIDI score. This score—consisting of drums, bass guitar, electric guitars, and piano—was then realised using a combination of sounds on Ableton Live and GarageBand to create the final backing track. All the vocals were recorded ‘live’, before a final mix was completed, which can be heard on the CD attached to this thesis.

The recording incorporated many of Queen’s idiolect traits including: the ‘galloping’ rhythm guitar, close position vocal harmonies and guitar arrangements, sliding vocal harmonies, expansive and ascending vocal harmony gestures, floor tom hits, syncopated band hits, and sudden changes in instrumental texture. Further to this, segments of the song were inspired by specific Queen examples. Thus, the opening is modelled on equal parts ‘Keep Yourself Alive’ and ‘Seven Seas of Rhye’; the piano ballad takes its cue primarily from ‘Love of My Life’ and ‘You Take My Breath Away’; and, the coda lifts the closing harmonic descent from ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’.³⁴⁶

³⁴⁶ As an interesting aside, I would add that the final chord was an accidental imitation of ‘No One But You’ written by the group in 1997, and a song that I have known for many years before this current research. Writing out the arrangement, I naturally assumed that a big final chord following a quiet coda would be a ‘Queen-like’ pattern, only to discover that such a feature does not readily appear in the group’s 1970s corpus. Given ‘No One But You’ is about as close as one gets to Queen (post-1991) paying homage to Queen (pre-1991), the reference feels vaguely appropriate in this context.

Different elements of the recorded medley are more and less convincing as representations of Queen's idiolect. Even if the final product is not a perfect imitation, the process was instructive in terms of understanding the nature of Queen's idiolect, further to what was advanced in Section 6.1.2. Having decided upon the structure of the song (by using the work of others), the creation of an arrangement was quick, given the well-defined textures and arrangement structures employed by Queen. That is, the lead guitars were layered in close position, the backing vocal parts were also a case of fleshing out the chord structure, and the entrance of rhythm guitars in 'White Christmas' simply aligned with the cadential juncture. The actual 'recording' phase, however, was difficult in terms of emulating the precise timbres and performance techniques of the group. The MIDI approach made it a challenge to capture the tone of the Red Special as well as May's articulation techniques (i.e. vibrato and varied rates of pitch bending). Similarly, the recording of the lead vocals illuminated the rather extraordinary control of Freddie Mercury's singing. That is, as I attempted to sing louder or more forcefully, or add subtle inflections, it was often at the expense of pitch and rhythmic precision. With these sounds in place, their arrangement in the sound-box was another easy phase in this process, again, because Queen's layouts were so consistent—rhythm guitars were panned hard left and right, with the remaining vocal, guitar, and drum parts were spread evenly across the stereo image. The final mastering phase was challenging once again, but, perhaps, more in the sense of fitting together many pieces of an aural puzzle.³⁴⁷ This modest 'song' numbered over thirty tracks by the end, and thus it was a case of finding space for each part in the mix, while also allowing the vocals and guitars, especially, to have a dominant presence.

Writing on the reasons for style change and development, Meyer notes that a style must have a sufficient degree of 'generality' if it is to be replicated.³⁴⁸ What this recording project demonstrated was the 'generality' of certain components of Queen's idiolect: namely, the 'galloping' guitars, the textural setup, the sound-box arrangement, and the backing vocal and guitar constructions, all of which could be replicated with ease. Other elements such as form and harmonic language have a

³⁴⁷ Someone with greater studio and production experience would likely have found this stage much more straightforward.

³⁴⁸ Meyer, *Style and Music*, 140.

much lesser degree of ‘generality’ within Queen’s idiolect. That is, it would have been possible to copy procedures from individual songs, but not imitate Queen’s idiolect, hence the decision to utilise existing material. Following on from this recording, this continuum of generality, which mirrors my own compositional strategies-sonic pattern distinction, could provide a useful framework for understanding the nature of Queen’s influence on later groups; in other words, what of Queen have other artists been able to replicate? Finally, if nothing else, the recording made one appreciate the skill required to have produced the elaborate Queen songs of the 1970s. Overall, listeners will likely hear some details that are particularly Queen-like, and others that are less so. And perhaps the difficulty in creating the perfect imitation is a testament to Purvis’ comment: Queen was a ‘once-in-a-lifetime band...never to be repeated’.³⁴⁹

7.1.2 Summary of Key Findings

Sections 4.5, 5.6, and 6.1 documented the key findings of the analysis, with respect to prominent compositional strategies and sonic patterns of Queen. It was argued that across Queen’s corpus, one could also identify five prominent song types, which are defined predominantly by different approaches to form, harmonic structure, and texture. The analysis was informed by six research questions. The detailed answers to these questions were provided in the individual sections of Chapter 6. A summary of these findings and answers is provided below.

1) What musical components comprised Queen’s idiolect from 1973-80?

Queen’s idiolect comprised a range of compositional strategies that produced related but different musical features across individual songs, and sonic patterns that produced consistent musical features across individual songs. The group’s primary compositional strategies related to the formal and harmonic structures of songs, as well as the group’s stylistic and production experimentation. By comparison, the group’s primary sonic patterns related to arrangement techniques, production and sound-box techniques, and harmonic

³⁴⁹ Purvis, *Queen*, 11.

gestures. The group's songs tended to follow one of five textural patterns, defined by a particular instrumental combination. Similarly, the structures for guitar and vocal arrangements—three or four parts in close position—and Brian May's rhythm guitar techniques—bass doubling and power chords, especially—remained constant across the corpus. Queen's typical harmonic gestures were short and striking patterns—consecutive secondary dominants and common-tone diminished chords—that gave any musical context a Queen-like musical flavour.

2) How did Queen's idiolect, or elements of their idiolect, relate to other rock and pop styles in the 1970s?

Queen's songs brought together traits from multiple styles. The basic instrumentation of Queen's songs was rooted in the hard rock style insofar as overdriven electric guitars were prevalent. The structural elements of the group's songs, as well as Queen's recourse to pastiche, owed more to the progressive rock trends of this era. Queen's rich arrangements and treatment of these inherited styles, however, aligned with the glam rock aesthetic of the 1970s. In addition to these primary stylistic influences, Queen's idiolect incorporated traits from an even wider array of sources, including the Beatles (harmonic language), 1960s pop (drumming), soul (vocal arrangements), 1950s pop (singing), and pre-World War II American popular music (harmonic gestures). The fusion of these diverse stylistic elements may be one reason why rock historians have struggled to place Queen in a singular stylistic category.

3) How did Queen's idiolect, or aspects of its idiolect, change during this period?

One predominant change across Queen's first three albums related to the apparent sonic environment of the band's recordings. The shift from 'surreal' to 'natural' settings stemmed from the group's increasing control over studio decisions and practices. Across the entire corpus, Queen changed musical style frequently, in a manner best understood as 'accumulative'—the group

adopted new styles while still reverting to previously used styles. The group's idiolect changed much less in terms of its constituent parts. As a collection of gestures, however, Queen's idiolect appeared more consistently in the mid-1970s recordings. Queen's overall development is best understood as combining the style and idiolect perspectives into an 'expedition' narrative, whereby each step into a new style was marked by the sounds of Queen's idiolect.

4) How can one understand the musical relationships between the group members of Queen?

The musical intra-relationships of Queen are best understood in terms of gestural unity. In several areas of Queen's songs, one can hear the gestures of one band member being imitated by another. This is particularly the case between Brian May, on lead guitar, and Freddie Mercury, singing lead vocals. May's guitar melodies often adopt the same melody, or melodic phrasing and contours, as the singer; further, both employ comparable articulation techniques to shape their respective melodies. In several songs, this gestural unity crosses into other parts, thus creating a network of gestures that are shared across the band members.

5) How did 'Bohemian Rhapsody' relate to the musical characteristics of Queen's idiolect?

'Bohemian Rhapsody' is one of Queen's most enduring and well-known songs. Written and recorded while the band was on the verge of bankruptcy and dissolution, 'Bohemian Rhapsody' presents all of Queen's prominent compositional strategies and sonic patterns, including an expansive formal and harmonic scheme, a wider stylistic reference, close-position guitar and vocal arrangements, and antiphonal sound-box gestures. More than any other song in the Queen corpus, 'Bohemian Rhapsody' musically embodies the group's idiolect. 'Bohemian Rhapsody' also epitomises the manner in which Queen's songs can be reconciled with each other in the corpus—the compositional strategies pertaining to form, harmonic structure, and style mean that the

group's experimentation can be understood in relation to similar undertakings across the corpus; equally, the sonic patterns mean that the unique elements of individual songs (i.e. form, harmonic structure, and style) are balanced by musical traits that are highly familiar from the rest of the group's output.

6) How can the analytical findings be applied in a musical context?

The analytical findings were corroborated through a self-made recording of a Christmas medley 'in the style of Queen'. This recording of three traditional Christmas songs aimed to imitate the idiolect of Queen through arrangement, recording, and production techniques. The process was instructive for demonstrating which aspects of Queen's idiolect are easier than others to imitate—writing the arrangement and placing instruments in the sound-box were straightforward because these elements were defined by specific sonic patterns across Queen's corpus. The performance elements, such as the guitar and singing techniques, were more difficult to imitate, which underscores the distinct contribution made by the band members to the overall sound of Queen.

7.1.3 Future Research

Desler's article in *Popular Music*, discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, highlighted the dearth of academic research on Queen, a position, she argued, that owed much to the prevailing socio-cultural views within popular music studies.³⁵⁰ It was also argued in Chapter 2 that Queen's presence in the analytical part of the discipline has been minimal, because its music had not previously been a good fit with the discipline's broader aims and approaches. With the increasing prevalence, however, of analyses of styles and idiolects, non-notated musical elements, and mainstream popular artists, this study of Queen sits comfortably in the current trends of popular music analysis.

This thesis has been the first sustained piece of analysis on the British rock group. Accordingly, it has started to fill a particular gap in the academic literature, as well as

³⁵⁰ Desler, 'History without royalty?'

providing much richer and more nuanced insights into the nature of Queen's music. There is, however, much more Queen-related research that could be conducted; I will conclude with five suggestions. Firstly, there is scope to pursue further matters of style and Queen's placement within and around the different strands of 1970s rock music. It was tentatively suggested, for instance, that gestural unity was a trait in the music of both Queen and Bruce Springsteen, an unusual observation given the pair seemed to operate in very different musical contexts. Further investigations may reveal common stylistic heritage or other shared musical ground. On a similar note, the discussion of Queen in relation to glam rock and progressive rock relied on rather contested ideas of what actually constituted those styles. More nuanced discussions of these styles in the first place may result in different appraisals of where Queen sits in the wider contexts, both in musical and extra-musical terms. Finally, in this regard, the Beatles have been mentioned on a number of occasions throughout this thesis, but I imagine this influence is more important than has been discussed here, particularly with respect to individual songs.³⁵¹ There would be much scope for investigating the manner in which Queen took so many aspects of the Beatles' work and updated them for the world of 1970s rock.

Secondly, the analysis considered Queen's music from idiolect and style perspectives, but did not investigate in great detail the traits of the individual songwriters. Like the Beatles, all of the Queen members were songwriters and each had his own fingerprints and approaches to songwriting. There are interesting stories to be told of how the traits of the group were balanced against the traits of the individual writers; elsewhere, I have pursued initial ideas of this kind in the context of Roger Taylor and his 1981-solo album, *Fun in Space*.³⁵²

Thirdly, the generalised nature of the analysis (i.e. large-scale idiolect trends) meant that smaller subsets of songs received little attention. Queen's rhapsodic songs would be ripe for further analysis, particularly with respect to ideas of formal processes. That is, while one can easily describe the textures and structures of these songs, such

³⁵¹ I am thinking, for instance, of the connections between 'Play the Game' and 'Hello, Goodbye', or 'In the Lap of the Gods...Revisited' and 'Hey Jude', or 'Penny Lane' and 'Killer Queen'. Spicer's work on intertextuality may provide a useful framework for such analysis; see Spicer, 'Strategic Intertextuality'.

³⁵² Nick Braae, 'Breaking Free of Queen: Roger Taylor's *Fun in Space*', in *All by Myself: Essays on the Single-Artist Rock Album*, ed. Steve Hamelman (Rowman & Littlefield, forthcoming).

analytical methods do not adequately explain the idiosyncratic manner of how the songs unfold in terms of the unusual succession and repetition of ideas. The combination of particular traits (multiple thematic ideas, rapid modulations, sharp textural contrasts) fosters a sense of musical momentum through each song that is both directional and non-directional, in terms of moving towards unknown structural junctures. Theories of closure and musical time may provide a useful framework for exploring and understanding the structural dynamics of these songs.³⁵³

Fourthly, this thesis has largely eschewed matters of interpretation, with respect to both complete songs and individual details. A fruitful area of enquiry may be Freddie Mercury's performing style. His technical singing traits were outlined in some detail in Chapter 5, along with a brief discussion on the relationship between song style and vocal tone; these features could be brought into contact with ideas of communication. It is often said that Mercury's greatest gift, certainly as a live performer, was an ability to connect with his audience;³⁵⁴ this quality would appear to lie at the intersection of Mercury's physical gestures, the content of his singing (i.e. lyrics), the way in which he sings, as well as his relationship with the performing conventions of other rock singers. The notion of authenticity has received much attention in popular music studies; the case of Freddie Mercury would likely offer a fresh perspective on these ideas.

Fifthly, the story of Queen's music is only half-told. There remains the group's output from *Hot Space* to *Innuendo*, as well as various recording projects undertaken since Mercury's death. What makes the 1980s, in particular, fascinating is that it is often maligned in the historical narrative of the group; the group is seen as turning away from its rock sound towards the synthesized instruments of disco and funk. Yet, there remained a number of 'rock' tracks during this decade ('Hammer to Fall', 'Princes of the Universe'), as well as ballads ('It's a Hard Life'), and rhapsodic-like songs ('The Miracle'). While 'Staying Power', the first track off *Hot Space*, marked a noticeable change in Queen's sound-world, courtesy of a synthesizer bass, drum machine, and

³⁵³ From traditional musicology, several sources seem pertinent: Jann Pasler, 'Debussy, "Jeux": Playing with Time and Form', *19th-Century Music* 6/1 (1982); Jonathan D. Kramer, *The Time of Music* (New York: Schirmer, 1988); Kofi Agawu, 'Concepts of Closure and Chopin's Opus 28', *Music Theory Spectrum* 9/1 (1988); Anne Heyland, 'Rhetorical Closure in the First Movement of Schubert's Quartet in C Major, D. 46: a Dialogue with Deformation', *Music Analysis* 28/1 (2009).

³⁵⁴ O'Casey, *Queen*.

horns, there are consistencies throughout the following decade in relation to the 'classic' style of Queen's 1970s output. The concept of an idiolect as well as the ideas of musical development could be useful for understanding both the changes that Queen undertook post-1980, as well as the continuities that persisted throughout the group's career. The next analytical step, then, may be to consider the group's output in the second half of its career and detail the stylistic paths taken by Queen once the band had ascended to the peak of the rock music world.

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9. Discography

The following discography does not list every song cited in the thesis, but rather provides a comprehensive overview of the key albums and singles that informed this research. In the interests of space, track listings have been provided only for the Queen albums that formed the analytical corpus.

ABBA. 1976. *Greatest Hits*. Epic: EPC 42-69218.

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———. 1966. *Revolver*. Parlophone: PCS 7009.

———. 1967. *Magical Mystery Tour*. Capitol: MAL 2835.

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82419 2 8.

———. 1968. *The Beatles*. Apple Records: PCS 7067/8.

———. 1969. *Abbey Road*. Apple Records: PCS 7088.

———. 1970. *Let It Be*. Apple Records: PCS 7096.

Tony Bennett and Count Basie. 1959. *Strike Up the Band!* Roulette: SR-25072.

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RCA Victor: SF 8287.

———. 1973. *Aladdin Sane*. RCA Victor: RS 1001.

———. 1974. *Diamond Dogs*. RCA Victor: APL1-0576.

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Cream. 1968. 'Sunshine of Your Love'. Polydor: 56286.

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Deep Purple. 1971. *Deep Purple In Rock*. Harvest: SHVL 777.

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Derek and the Dominos. 1972. *Layla and Other Assorted Love Songs*. Polydor: 2625 005.

Aretha Franklin. 1967. *I Never Loved a Man the Way I Love You*. Atlantic: SD 8139.

———. 1968. *Lady Soul*. Atlantic: SD 8176.

———. 1968. *Aretha Now*. Atlantic: SD 8186.

Gary Glitter. 1972. *Glitter*. Bell Records: BELLS 216.

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———. 1968. *Electric Ladyland*. Track Record: 613008/9.

Elton John. 1973. *Goodbye Yellow Brick Road*. DJM Records: DJLPD 1001.

Led Zeppelin. 1969. *Led Zeppelin*. Atlantic: 588171.

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Mud. 1974. *Mud Rock*. RAK Records: SRAK 508.

Elvis Presley. 2007. *The Essential Elvis Presley*. RCA: 82876890482.

Queen. 1973. *Queen*. EMI: EMC 3006.

A1. 'Keep Yourself Alive'

A2. 'Doin' All Right'

A3. 'Great King Rat'

A4. 'My Fairy King'

B1. 'Liar'

B2. 'The Night Comes Down'

B3. 'Modern Times Rock 'n' Roll'

B4. 'Son and Daughter'

B5. 'Jesus'

B6. 'Seven Seas of Rhye' (Instrumental)

———. 1974. *Queen II*. EMI: EMA 767.

A1. 'Procession'

A2. 'Father to Son'

A3. 'White Queen (As It Began)'

A4. 'Some Day One Day'

- A5. 'The Loser in the End'
- B1. 'Ogre Battle'
- B2. 'The Fairy Feller's Master-Stroke'
- B3. 'Nevermore'
- B4. 'The March of the Black Queen'
- B5. 'Funny How Love Is'
- B6. 'Seven Seas of Rhye'

———. 1974. *Sheer Heart Attack*. EMI: EMC 3061.

- A1. 'Brighton Rock'
- A2. 'Killer Queen'
- A3. 'Tenement Funster'
- A4. 'Flick of the Wrist'
- A5. 'Lily of the Valley'
- A6. 'Now I'm Here'
- B1. 'In the Lap of the Gods'
- B2. 'Stone Cold Crazy'
- B3. 'Dear Friends'
- B4. 'Misfire'
- B5. 'Bring Back That Leroy Brown'
- B6. 'She Makes Me'
- B7. 'In the Lap of the Gods...Revisited'

———. 1975. *A Night at the Opera*. EMI: EMTC 103.

- A1. 'Death on Two Legs (Dedicated To...)'
- A2. 'Lazing on a Sunday Afternoon'
- A3. 'I'm In Love With My Car'

- A4. 'You're My Best Friend'
- A5. '39'
- A6. 'Sweet Lady'
- A7. 'Seaside Rendezvous'
- B1. 'The Prophet's Song'
- B2. 'Love of My Life'
- B3. 'Good Company'
- B4. 'Bohemian Rhapsody'
- B5. 'God Save the Queen' (Instrumental)

———. 1976. *A Day at the Races*. EMI: EMTC 104.

- A1. 'Tie Your Mother Down'
- A2. 'You Take My Breath Away'
- A3. 'Long Away'
- A4. 'Millionaire Waltz'
- A5. 'You and I'
- B1. 'Somebody to Love'
- B2. 'White Man'
- B3. 'Good Old Fashioned Lover Boy'
- B4. 'Drowse'
- B5. 'Teo Torriatte (Let Us Cling Together)'

———. 1977. *News of the World*. EMI: EMA 784.

- A1. 'We Will Rock You'
- A2. 'We are the Champions'
- A3. 'Sheer Heart Attack'
- A4. 'All Dead, All Dead'

- A5. 'Spread Your Wings'
- A6. 'Fight from the Inside'
- B1. 'Get Down, Make Love'
- B2. 'Sleeping on the Sidewalk'
- B3. 'Who Needs You'
- B4. 'It's Late'
- B5. 'My Melancholy Blues'

———. 1978. *Jazz*. EMI: EMA 788.

- A1. 'Mustapha'
- A2. 'Fat Bottomed Girls'
- A3. 'Bicycle Race'
- A4. 'If You Can't Beat Them'
- A5. 'Let Me Entertain You'
- B1. 'Dead on Time'
- B2. 'In Only Seven Days'
- B3. 'Dreamer's Ball'
- B4. 'Fun It'
- B5. 'Leaving Home Ain't Easy'
- B6. 'Don't Stop Me Now'
- B7. 'More of that Jazz'

———. 1980. *The Game*. EMI: EMA 795.

- A1. 'Play the Game'
- A2. 'Dragon Attack'
- A3. 'Another One Bites the Dust'
- A4. 'Need Your Loving Tonight'

A5. 'Crazy Little Thing Called Love'

B1. 'Rock It (Prime Jive)'

B2. 'Don't Try Suicide'

B3. 'Sail Away Sweet Sister'

B4. 'Coming Soon'

B5. 'Save Me'

———. 1982. *Hot Space*. EMI: EMA 797.

———. 1984. *The Works*. EMI: CDP 7 46016 2.

———. 1986. *A Kind of Magic*. EMI: CDP 7 46267 2.

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Frank Sinatra. 1956. *Songs for Swingin' Lovers*. Capitol: W653.

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10. Analytical Appendix

The following table provides fundamental musical information about each of the songs from the corpus used in the thesis. Although not as detailed as providing transcriptions or scores of each song, the appendix should provide readers with some points of reference for the analysis of Chapters 4, 5 and 6. In conjunction with the appendix, the reading experience will likely also be enhanced by having sound recordings accessible; these are readily available through online services such as YouTube and Spotify.

| Album | Song | Songwriter | Form | Primary Key/s | Primary Textural Setup |
|---------------------|------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------|---|--|
| <i>Queen</i> (1973) | ‘Keep Yourself Alive’ | Brian May | Verse-Chorus-Bridge | F major; D major | Rhythm/Lead Electric Guitars; Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |
| | ‘Doin’ All Right’ | May | Compound AABA | D major; E major | Piano; Rhythm/Lead Guitars; Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |
| | ‘Great King Rat’ | Freddie Mercury | Compound AABA | A Aeolian; G major; D major | Rhythm/Lead Guitars; Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |
| | ‘My Fairy King’ | Mercury | Episodic | G major; E minor; A minor; D major; C major | Piano; Lead Guitars; Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |
| | ‘Liar’ | Mercury | Episodic | D major; E Aeolian | Rhythm/Lead Guitars; Organ; Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |
| | ‘The Night Comes Down’ | May | Verse-Chorus + Instrumental | E Aeolian; D major | Acoustic Guitar; Lead Guitars; Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |
| | ‘Modern Times Rock ‘n’ Roll’ | Roger Taylor | Verse-Chorus-Bridge | E Aeolian | Rhythm/Lead Guitars; Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |

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|------------------------|--|---------|---|--------------------------------|---|
| | ‘Son And Daughter’ | May | Episodic | E Aeolian | Rhythm/Lead Guitars; Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |
| | ‘Jesus’ | Mercury | Verse-Chorus + Instrumental | B minor | Rhythm/Lead Guitars; Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |
| | ‘Seven Seas Of Rhye’ | Mercury | Verse | D major | Piano; Rhythm/Lead Guitars; Bass; Drums |
| <i>Queen II (1974)</i> | ‘Procession’ | May | AB | G minor | Lead Guitars |
| | ‘Father To Son’ | May | Episodic | G major; F major; E major; | Rhythm/Lead Guitars; Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |
| | ‘White Queen (As It Began)’ | May | Verse-Chorus- Bridge + Instrumental | E Aeolian; E Dorian | Acoustic Guitar; Rhythm/Lead Guitars; Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |
| | ‘Some Day One Day’ | May | AABA | A major | Acoustic Guitar; Lead Guitars; Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |
| | ‘The Loser In The End’ | Taylor | AABA | A Aeolian | Rhythm/Lead Guitars; Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |
| | ‘Ogre Battle’ | Mercury | Compound AABA | A Aeolian; G major; A major | Rhythm/Lead Guitars; Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |
| | ‘The Fairy Feller’s Master- Stroke’ | Mercury | Episodic | E minor; A minor; C major | Piano; Lead Guitars; Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |
| | ‘Nevermore’ | Mercury | Strophic | F major | Piano; Lead Guitars; Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |

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| | ‘The March Of The Black Queen’ | Mercury | Episodic | E minor; G major; A minor; F major; C major; C minor; E ^b major; A minor; E major; C major | Piano; Rhythm/Lead Guitars; Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |
| | ‘Funny How Love Is’ | Mercury | AABA | C major | Piano; Lead Guitars; Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |
| | ‘Seven Seas Of Rhye’ | Mercury | ABBA + Instrumental | D major; G major | Piano; Rhythm/Lead Guitars; Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |
| <i>Sheer Heart Attack</i> (1974) | ‘Brighton Rock’ | May | Episodic | B major; E major; E Aeolian | Rhythm/Lead Guitars; Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |
| | ‘Killer Queen’ | Mercury | Verse-Chorus | E ^b major; B ^b major; F major | Piano; Lead Guitars; Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |
| | ‘Tenement Funster’ | Taylor | Verse-Chorus-Bridge | E Aeolian; G major | Rhythm/Lead Guitars; Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |
| | ‘Flick Of The Wrist’ | Mercury | Episodic | G major; E minor; A Aeolian | Piano; Rhythm/Lead Guitars; Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |
| | ‘Lily Of The Valley’ | Mercury | AABA | C major; | Piano; Lead Guitars; Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |
| | ‘Now I’m Here’ | May | Episodic | D major; A major; E major; B major | Rhythm/Lead Guitars; Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |
| | ‘In The Lap Of The Gods’ | Mercury | Through-composed | C major; F major | Piano; Lead Guitars; Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |

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| | 'Stone Cold Crazy' | May | AABA + Instrumental | G Aeolian; B Aeolian | Rhythm/Lead Guitars; Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |
| | 'Dear Friends' | May | Strophic | D major | Piano; Lead/Backing Vocals |
| | 'Misfire' | John Deacon | Verse-Chorus- Instrumental | G major; B ^b major; B major; C [#] major | Acoustic Guitar; Lead Guitars; Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |
| | 'Bring Back That Leroy Brown' | Mercury | Verse-Chorus- Bridge | C major | Piano; Lead Guitar; Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |
| | 'She Makes Me' | May | AABA | A major | Acoustic Guitar; Lead Guitars; Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |
| | 'In The Lap Of The Gods...Revisited' | Mercury | Verse-Chorus | D major | Piano; Rhythm Guitar; Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |
| <i>A Night at the Opera</i> (1975) | 'Death On Two Legs' | Mercury | Verse-Chorus + Instrumental | B minor; D major | Piano; Rhythm/Lead Guitars; Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |
| | 'Lazing On A Sunday Afternoon' | Mercury | AABA | E ^b major; A major | Piano; Lead Guitars; Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |
| | 'I'm In Love With My Car' | Taylor | Verse-Chorus- Bridge + Instrumental | D major | Piano; Rhythm/Lead Guitars; Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |
| | 'You're My Best Friend' | Deacon | Verse-Chorus- Bridge | C major | Electric Piano; Lead Guitars; Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |
| | '39' | May | Verse-Chorus + Instrumental | A ^b major | Acoustic Guitar; Lead Guitars; Double Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |

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| | ‘Sweet Lady’ | May | Verse-Chorus-Bridge | E major | Rhythm/Lead Guitars; Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |
| | ‘Seaside Rendezvous’ | Mercury | AABA | C major; F major | Piano; Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |
| | ‘The Prophet’s Song’ | May | Episodic (Verse-Chorus) | D minor; G major; B ^b major; E Aeolian | Rhythm/Lead Guitars; Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |
| | ‘Love Of My Life’ | Mercury | AABA + Instrumental | C major; F major | Piano; Lead Guitars; Bass; Lead/Backing Vocals |
| | ‘Good Company’ | May | AABA | F [#] major | Ukelele; Lead Guitars; Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |
| | ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’ | Mercury | Through-composed | B ^b major; E ^b major; F major | Piano; Rhythm/Lead Guitars; Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |
| | ‘God Save The Queen’ | Traditional | Strophic | G major | Lead Guitars; Drums |
| <i>A Day at the Races</i> (1976) | ‘Tie Your Mother Down’ | May | Verse-Chorus | A major | Rhythm/Lead Guitars; Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |
| | ‘You Take My Breath Away’ | Mercury | AABA + Introduction | C minor; E ^b major | Piano; Lead Guitars; Lead/Backing Vocals |
| | ‘Long Away’ | May | Verse-Chorus | A major | 12-string Guitar; Lead Guitars; Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |
| | ‘Millionaire Waltz’ | Mercury | Episodic | C major; F major; F minor; E ^b major; A ^b major | Piano; Rhythm/Lead Guitars; Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |
| | ‘You And I’ | Deacon | Verse-Chorus-Bridge + Bridge | D major | Piano; Rhythm/Lead Guitars; Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |

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| | ‘Somebody To Love’ | Mercury | Verse-Chorus-Bridge | A ^b major | Piano; Rhythm/Lead Guitars; Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |
| | ‘White Man’ | May | Verse-Chorus | D minor | Rhythm/Lead Guitars; Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |
| | ‘Good Old-Fashioned Lover Boy’ | Mercury | Verse-Chorus- Bridge + Bridge | E ^b major | Piano; Lead Guitars; Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |
| | ‘Drowse’ | Taylor | Verse-Chorus- Bridge | D major; E major | Acoustic Guitar; Slide/Rhythm/Lead Guitars; Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |
| | ‘Teo Torriatte (Let Us Cling Together)’ | May | Verse-Chorus- Bridge | D minor; D major | Piano; Rhythm/Lead Guitars; Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |
| <i>News of the World</i> (1977) | ‘We Will Rock You’ | May | Verse-Chorus + Instrumental | E minor; A major | Rhythm/Lead Guitars; Percussion; Lead/Backing Vocals |
| | ‘We Are The Champions’ | Mercury | Verse-Chorus | E ^b major; F major | Piano; Rhythm/Lead Guitars; Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |
| | ‘Sheer Heart Attack’ | Taylor | Verse-Chorus | E ^b major | Rhythm/Lead Guitars; Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |
| | ‘All Dead, All Dead’ | May | Verse-Chorus- Bridge | F major; D minor | Piano; Lead Guitars; Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |
| | ‘Spread Your Wings’ | Deacon | Verse-Chorus- Bridge + Bridge | D major | Piano; Rhythm/Lead Guitars; Bass; Drums; Lead Vocals |
| | ‘Fight From The Inside’ | Taylor | Verse-Chorus- Bridge | E Aeolian | Rhythm/Lead Guitars; Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |

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| | ‘Get Down Make Love’ | Mercury | AABA + Instrumental | E ^b Aeolian; G major | Piano; Rhythm/Lead Guitars; Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |
| | ‘Sleeping On The Sidewalk’ | May | Verse-Chorus | B major | Rhythm/Lead Guitars; Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |
| | ‘Who Needs You’ | Deacon | Verse-Chorus | A major | Acoustic Guitar; Lead Guitars; Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |
| | ‘It’s Late’ | May | Verse-Chorus + Instrumental | A major; C major | Rhythm/Lead Guitars; Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |
| | ‘My Melancholy Blues’ | Mercury | Strophic | E ^b major | Piano; Bass; Drums; Lead Vocals |
| <i>Jazz (1978)</i> | ‘Mustapha’ | Mercury | Episodic | F Aeolian; F [#] Aeolian; G Aeolian; C Aeolian | Piano; Rhythm/Lead Guitars; Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |
| | ‘Fat Bottomed Girls’ | May | Verse-Chorus | D major | Rhythm/Lead Guitars; Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |
| | ‘Jealousy’ | Mercury | Verse-Chorus + Instrumental | G minor; B ^b major; F major | Piano; Acoustic Guitar; Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |
| | ‘Bicycle Race’ | Mercury | Episodic | A ^b major; B ^b minor; F major; C major; D major | Piano; Rhythm/Lead Guitars; Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |
| | ‘If You Can’t Beat Them’ | Deacon | Verse-Pre- Chorus-Chorus | D major; E major | Rhythm/Lead Guitars; Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |
| | ‘Let Me Entertain You’ | Mercury | Verse-Chorus- Bridge | E Aeolian; A major; B Aeolian | Piano; Rhythm/Lead Guitars; Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |

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| | 'Dead On Time' | May | Verse-Chorus-Bridge | F# major | Rhythm/Lead Guitars; Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |
| | 'In Only Seven Days' | Deacon | AABA + Instrumental | D major | Acoustic Guitar; Piano; Lead Guitars; Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |
| | 'Dreamer's Ball' | Mercury | Verse-Chorus | A major | Acoustic Guitar; Lead Guitars; Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |
| | 'Fun It' | Taylor | Verse-Chorus | E major | Rhythm/Lead Guitars; Bass; Drums; Drum Pads; Lead/Backing Vocals |
| | 'Leaving Home Ain't Easy' | May | Verse-Chorus + Instrumental | A major | Acoustic Guitar; Lead Guitars; Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |
| | 'Don't Stop Me Now' | Mercury | Verse-Chorus | F major | Piano; Lead Guitars; Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |
| | 'More Of That Jazz' | Taylor | Episodic | E major | Rhythm/Lead Guitars; Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |
| <i>The Game</i> (1980) | 'Play The Game' | Mercury | Verse-Chorus-Bridge | C major; F major | Piano; Synthesizer; Rhythm/Lead Guitars; Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |
| | 'Dragon Attack' | May | Verse-Chorus | D Aeolian | Rhythm/Lead Guitars; Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |
| | 'Another One Bites The Dust' | Deacon | Verse-Chorus | F minor | Rhythm Guitar; Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |
| | 'Need Your Loving Tonight' | Deacon | Verse-Chorus | E major | Acoustic Guitar; Rhythm/Lead Guitars; Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |

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| | 'Crazy Little Thing Called Love' | Mercury | AABA | D major | Acoustic Guitar; Lead Guitar; Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |
| | 'Rock It (Prime Jive)' | Taylor | Verse-Chorus + Introduction | B major | Rhythm/Lead Guitars; Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |
| | 'Don't Try Suicide' | Mercury | Episodic | D major; G major | Piano; Rhythm/Lead Guitars; Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |
| | 'Sail Away Sweet Sister' | May | Verse-Chorus- Bridge | B minor; D major | Piano; Synthesizer; Rhythm/Lead Guitars; Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |
| | 'Coming Soon' | Taylor | Verse-Chorus | A ^b major | Synthesizer; Rhythm/Lead Guitars; Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |
| | 'Save Me' | May | Verse-Chorus | G major; D major | Piano; Synthesizer; Rhythm/Lead Guitars; Bass; Drums; Lead/Backing Vocals |