

# Teaching guide: Area of study 2

## Popular music

### Contents

You can use the title links to jump directly to the different sections of this teaching guide.

Section	Page
<a href="#">Bohemian Rhapsody</a>	2
<a href="#">Love of My Life</a>	16
<a href="#">Seven Seas of Rhye</a>	24

# Introduction

These guides have been produced to support you with the planning and delivery of the new study pieces for Areas of study 1 to 4 (first teaching from September 2024, with the first exam in Summer 2026).

In the guides, we have provided key contextual and background information and highlight how a range of musical elements are employed within the pieces. The content provided in these guides is not exhaustive, and there may be other interpretations or details which are also valid. Please ensure that you are aware of the full requirements for Component 1 as detailed in the current specification. You may wish to share some or all of this guide with your students.

This guide looks at the following for each piece of music:

- Context
- Structure
- Tonality
- Harmony
- Melody
- Texture
- Tempo
- Metre
- Rhythm
- Articulation
- Dynamics
- Sonority (Timbre)
- Recording techniques.

## Study pieces

The study pieces for Area of study 2 are the Queen tracks:

- Bohemian Rhapsody
- Love of My Life
- Seven Seas of Rhye

## Bohemian Rhapsody

### Set recording

'Bohemian Rhapsody', *A Night at the Opera* (Deluxe Edition 2011 Remastered)

This recording is available on [You Tube](#), [Amazon music](#) and [Spotify](#).

## Score

Students are not required to study the score of this set work, nor to know bar numbers for the exam. However, if a score is used it is available here at [musicnotes.com](https://www.musicnotes.com). Please use the Bb major (original published key version).

## Background information

This knowledge is not assessed.

**Queen** was a British rock band whose fusion of heavy metal, glam rock and theatrics made it one of the most popular groups of the 1970s. The band consisted of Freddie Mercury (lead vocals and piano), Brian May (electric guitar, vocals), John Deacon (bass guitar), and Roger Taylor (drum kit, vocals). The music of the 1970s created a musical bridge from the rebelliousness of the 1960s to the Yuppie culture of the 1980s. A variety of musical styles emerged such as Disco, Funk, New Wave, Progressive Rock, Punk and Soul.

Originally titled 'Mongolian Rhapsody', 'Bohemian Rhapsody' was composed by Freddie Mercury who referred to it as a 'mock opera'. The song was released on 31st October 1975 from the album *A Night at the Opera*. The song took three weeks to record, with seven days spent on the complex vocal overdubbing. On release, the song spent nine weeks at Number 1. Additionally, on Freddie Mercury's death in 1991, it spent another five weeks at Number 1.

Brian May is quoted in the Wikipedia entry on 'Bohemian Rhapsody' as:

'Bohemian Rhapsody' was totally insane, but we enjoyed every minute of it. It was basically a joke, but a successful joke. We had to record it in three separate units. We did the whole beginning bit, then the whole middle bit and then the whole end. It was complete madness. The middle part started off being just a couple of seconds, but Freddie kept coming in with more 'Galileos' and we kept on adding to the opera section, and it just got bigger and bigger. We never stopped laughing ... It started off as a ballad, but the end was heavy.

Critical reaction was initially mixed, but retrospective reviews have acclaimed 'Bohemian Rhapsody' as one of the greatest songs of all time, and it is often regarded as the Queen's signature song. The promotional video is credited with furthering the development of the music video medium.

In May 2002, the jukebox Queen musical *We Will Rock You* opened, with a book by Ben Elton. The futurist comedy is based around more than 24 of Queen's biggest hit songs including 'We Are The Champions', 'Radio Ga Ga', 'I Want To Break Free', 'Somebody To Love', 'Killer Queen', 'Don't Stop Me Now', 'Under Pressure', 'Bohemian Rhapsody', 'Another One Bites The Dust' and 'We Will Rock You'. It tells the story of a globalized future without musical instruments. A handful of rock rebels, the Bohemians, fight against the all-powerful Globalsoft company and its boss, the Killer Queen; they fight for freedom, individuality, and the rebirth of the age of

rock. Scaramouche and Galileo, two young outsiders, cannot come to terms with the bleak conformist reality. They join the Bohemians and embark on the search to find the unlimited power of freedom, love, and Rock!

2018 saw the release of the biographical musical dram film *Bohemian Rhapsody*, focusing on the life of Freddie Mercury.

'Bohemian Rhapsody' is the UK's third best-selling single of all time (after Elton John's 1997 'Something about the way you look tonight'/'Candle in the Wind', and Band Aid's 1984 'Do they know it's Christmas?').

Further general biographical information on Queen is readily available online.

## Context

This information is intended to help students consider the wider context in which the song was composed.

'Bohemian Rhapsody' consists of distinct sections with some musical characteristics of each listed below:

### Ballad characteristics

- Slow tempo.
- Repetitive melody.
- Slow rhythmic patterns.
- Use of 4/4 time signature.
- Mainly legato articulation.
- Use of piano, playing arpeggiated or block chords. The sustain pedal will be used to add tonal colour.
- Other guitars such bass and electric are used.
- Use of the drum kit.
- Vocal techniques can include the use of falsetto and glissando, to emphasis the telling of the 'story'.

### Guitar solo characteristics

- Can be pre-written or improvised.
- Virtuoso playing, with fast rhythmic work.
- Use of scales and arpeggios.
- Technology such as reverb, distortion, delay and chorus are used to alter the sound.
- Uses the wide register of the guitar range.

### Opera characteristics

- An opera would use solo singers, a chorus (SATB) and be accompanied by an orchestra.
- Operas are staged, sung stories of historical or mythological events.
- They have many different songs/instrumental sections.

- Opera may be serious ‘opera seria’ or light-hearted ‘opera buffa’, and generally incorporate the two distinct singing styles of recitative (free rhythm) and aria set piece’ song).

### Rock music characteristics

- A fast tempo of between 110 and 140 bpm (beats per minute).
- A strong main vocal part which covers a wide pitch range.
- One or more electric guitars that play rhythm and/or solo lead parts.
- Electric guitars which are repetitive, rhythmic and distorted, and may use blues-based riffs.
- Drum kit beats that play driving rhythms; these include a strong bass drum, a backbeat on the snare and loud cymbals for emphasis.
- An electric bass guitar which provides a backing for the rhythm and lead guitars, occasionally playing riffs.

Some of the lyrics used in ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’ make references to historical, literary, operatic, religious, and theatrical themes.

Lyric	Reference	Meaning
Bielzebub	Literacy	Bielzebub literally means ‘Lord of the Flies’. The devil second to Satan (The Arch angel) expelled from heaven. Bielzebub is a significant character in Milton’s poem <i>Paradise Lost</i> .
Bismillah	Religious	Islamic prayer meaning in the name of ‘Allah’.
Fandango	Operatic	A lively Spanish dance. Mozart’s opera <i>The Marriage of Figaro</i> has a fandango in it. Modern fandangos tend to be accompanied by acoustic/classical guitars and castanets.
Galileo	Historical	An Italian astronomer, mathematician and physicist.
Scaramouche	Operatic	A character in Italian opera. He is generally considered to be a clown or a fool.

The following notes contain musical elements and terms that students should know and understand to answer questions on this study piece in Section B of the exam. **Bold** type is used to draw attention to musical terms. Marks will be awarded for knowledge of other terms if relevant to this area of study/study piece.

## Structure

Section	Time on recording	Bar numbers	Opening lyrics
Introduction	0:00–0:54	1–16	<i>'Is this the real life?'</i>
Ballad section	0:55–2:34	17–46	<i>'Mama, just killed a man'.</i>
Guitar solo	2:35–3:01	47–55	
Operatic section	3:02–4:07	56–96	(after two bars) <i>'I see a little silhouette of a man'.</i>
Rock section	4:08–4:54	97–123	(after four bars) <i>'So you think you can stone me and spit in my eye.'</i>
Outro	4:55–5:54	124–139	<i>'Ooh. Ooh yeah, ooh yeah'</i>

## Tonality

### Introduction

- **Bb major**.

### Ballad section

- **Bb major** (verse 1).
- (momentary) modulation to **Eb major** halfway through each verse.
- **Bb major** (verse 2).

### Guitar solo

- **Eb major**.

### Operatic section

- Abrupt modulation to **A major** (unrelated key).
- **Eb major**.

### Rock section

- **Eb major**.

### Outro

- **Eb major**.
- The song finishes in **F major**.

# Harmony

## Introduction

- The opening A Cappella section of the piece starts on **Bb6 chord** and then uses **dominant 7<sup>th</sup> chords** to form a short **circle of 5ths progression**.
- The rate of harmonic change is mainly either **one chord per bar, or two chords per bar**. The exception to this is the use of four chords per bar (over two bars) on the lyrics '*easy come, easy go, little high, little low*'.
- These four **first inversion major chords (Cb, Bb, A, Bb)** move semitonally and in parallel, down and then up.  
*Please note that the music score uses the enharmonic equivalent of B instead of Cb*
- Spread **Bb7** chord under '*look up to the skies*'.
- **Diminished chord** of **Db** used on the lyric '*doesn't really (matter)*'.
- **Descending semitonal** bass guitar line (**Eb D Db C**) across the lyrics '*any way the wind blows*'.

## Ballad section

- The rate of harmonic change remains as mainly **one or two chords per bar**, with very occasionally more such as the four used on '*Didn't mean to make you cry*'.
- Use of both **major 7ths** and **minor 7<sup>th</sup> chords**, but **more complex chords** are also added, such as Ab+/E, Eb0, Dm7b5 and Bb6.
- The bar before the guitar solo uses three different Bb chords (**Bb major, Bb6 and Bb7**) before a **perfect cadence** to the **Eb major** tonality of the guitar solo.

## Guitar solo

- **mainly diatonic** and **root position** chordal writing.
- some **complex chords** used such as Dm7b5, Bb6.

## Operatic section

- The section starts with **A major** repeated RH chords in **root position**.
- **Subdominant pedal (A)** used in the fast and repeated chordal section '*I see a little silhouette of a man*'.  
The repeated chords used are D/A, A, A0, A
- **Chromatic chord progression** used in the dramatic '*Thunderbolts and Lightning, very very frightening*'.
- **Chromatic chordal progression** used frequently B Bb A Bb ('*I'm just a poor boy...*' and '*easy come, easy go*')  
  - '*Bismillah*' uses **V\_I\_V progression (Bb Eb Bb)** which mirrors the vocal melody.
- After the vocal fireworks and imitative interplay, a long (4 bar) **chord of Bb7** is settled on under the lyrics '*me, for me, for me*' before the **perfect cadence into Eb major** Rock section.

## Rock section

- Chords used are mixture of **diatonic** and **chromatic**.
- Use of **power chords** eg Db5 and F5.
- Tonic key of Eb is reinforced in the first four bar instrumental phrase (three bars of Eb major chord).
- Some use of **chord changes in the middle of bars** are unusual eg '*spit in my ...*'.
- **Repeated chord changes** Fm to Bb and F5 to Bb over the lyrics '*Oh, baby, can't do this to me baby. Just gotta get out, just gotta get right out of here*'.
- Some **abrupt chordal shifts** used eg from Eb to F (tonic to supertonic) and F to Gb (leading to the Cb7 Ab7 dominant 7<sup>th</sup> held Bb7 chord) towards the end of the section.
- Use of three **major 7<sup>th</sup> chords** of **C7b, Ab7 and Bb7** to finish the section.
- The section finishes with a **perfect cadence** in the tonic key Bb7 to Eb7.

## Outro

- Rate of **harmonic change** is mostly every two beats.
- Mixture of **diatonic** and **non-diatonic chords**.
- Use of **dominant 7<sup>th</sup>** and **diminished 7<sup>th</sup>** (towards the end), as well as **complex chords** such as Db6, Cb9, and Bb11.
- The piece **finishes on an F major chord**.

## Melody

### Introduction

- The lyrics are almost all set **syllabically**.
- Use of **repeated notes** '*Is this the real life?*'.
- Use of **portamento** on the lyrics '*(escape from) real(ity)*', '*skies*', '*poor boy*', '*need no (sympathy)*'.
- **Word painting** on '*Look to the skies and see*' – the pitch rises.
- Mainly **conjunct writing**, with the largest interval being a descending octave on '*(doesn't really) matter*'.
- **Phrase repetition** on '*easy come, easy go*'.
- Mixture of **two and three bar phrases**.
- Use of **arpeggiated** piano accompaniment.

### Ballad section

- **Diatonic** vocal melody.
- Backing vocals are added in Verse 2 with **higher register** long notes, using the Piano RH motif, and also **rising sequential octaves** '*oohs*' just before the guitar solo.
- **Arpeggiated** piano accompaniment with **appoggiatura (leaning note)** G over a Bb major chord.
- **Repeated notes** '*Mama*'.
- Continued use of **portamento** '*Mama, life (had just) begun*'.
- Mainly **syllabic setting**, but **melisma** on '*ooh*'.



- **Repetition of pitch** (but not rhythm) on '*put a gun against my head, pulled my trigger now he's dead*'.

## Guitar solo

- **Melismatic four part backing vocal** '*ooh*' at the start.
- Use of **vibrato** on the longer notes.
- Use of **bends/glissando** in all the electric guitar parts.
- Some **repeated melodic patterns**.
- Mainly **conjunct writing** – some ascending scalar and extended scalar writing.
- **Wide register** used - across an octave and a half (Bb to F).
- **Ascending** and **descending phrases**.

## Operatic section

- Significant **chromatic movement** and **pairs of repeated** notes in the melody.
- **Repetition up the octave** on '*Thunderbolt and Lightning, very very frightening*'.
- The four note '*Galileo*' motif uses **two repeated notes**, a **rising semitone** and then a **return to the original note**.
- The seven note '*Galileo Figaro*' motif uses **two repeated notes** and then **the pitch descends**.
- '*Magnifico*' is sung by the backing vocals and starts with a **rising held octave** and the other parts enter with **arpeggiated 3rds** and **one major 2<sup>nd</sup>**.
- Frequent use of **false alto** singing.
- '*Bismillah!*' **ascends** and **descends** through a **perfect 4<sup>th</sup> interval**.
- 'Question and answer' phrases of "*Bismillah! (No, we will not let you go)*"
- The hammering responses of '*we will not let you go*' **risers and falls in step through a minor 3<sup>rd</sup>**
- '*Let him go*' uses **repeated tonic notes** for even more emphasis.
- Use of **repeated phrases**.
- The register of the melody line gets **gradually higher** over the lyrics '*for me, for me, for me.*'

## Rock section

- A feature of the bass guitar pattern in the instrumental start of this section is the **falling (major) sixth** and **rising conjunct/scalar movement**, with a **repeated** and **sequential bar** on the F major chord.
- The first phrase of the vocal line mainly **descends syllabically**, with **repeated notes** and a **rising melisma** on the lyric '*eye*'.
- The second phrase starts in the same way, but has different rising pitches used on the lyric's '*die*', which has a **falling (word painting) glissando**.
- Most of the melodic writing is **conjunct/stepwise**, with most lyrics set **syllabically**.
- The ending instrumental part of this section features a return of the opening bass guitar pattern and a high degree of **scalar** and also some **sequential writing** in the RH piano part.

## Outro

- Longer note descending backing harmonies start his section, with a **repeated phrase** of 'Ooh yeah'.
- **Arpeggiated** piano RH.
- Both phrases in 'Nothing really matters, anyone can' start with **descending/falling notes**.
- **Rising and falling major and minor 3rds** are used across the final four sung phrases, before the long tonic note.
- The final sung phrase has **repeated notes** which fall **chromatically**, before the final jump of a **major 6<sup>th</sup>**.

## Texture

### Introduction

- Both **A Cappella** and **Homophonic/chordal** vocals at the start.
- When the piano enters on the lyric 'Open your eyes' the texture becomes **melody and accompaniment**.  
(still with **homophonic/chordal backing vocals**).
- **Rising octaves** in the 'oohs' just before the guitar solo.
- **LH octaves** in the LH of the piano part just before the guitar solo.

### Ballad section

- **Melody and accompaniment**.

### Guitar solo

- **Melody and accompaniment**.
- One phrase of **homophonic/chordal four part** backing vocal 'Ooh' at the start of the section.
- **Mainly octaves** used in the LH piano accompaniment.

### Operatic section

- **Homophonic/chordal** with the RH A major piano chords and also in the backing vocals 'We will not let you go' later on in the section.
- **Melody and accompaniment** when the vocals enter.
- **Monophonic/single melodic line** where the 'Galileo' lyric is first heard.
- **Antiphonal**.
- 'Bismillah!' is sung in **octaves**.
- 'No, no, no, no, no, no, no!' is sung in **octaves**.

### Rock section

- Electric guitar and bass guitar in **octaves**.
- When the vocal enters the texture is **melody and accompaniment**.

## Outro

- Accompanied **homophonic/chordal backing vocals** at the start of the section.
- **Melody and accompaniment** texture.
- Use of **octaves** in the LH piano part.

## Tempo and metre

### Introduction

- The tempo is **moderately slow**, ♩ = 74
- There is a **slight slowing** in the tempo from 'open your eyes' ♩ = 70 onwards to
- Nearly all **4 4 metre apart from one 5 4 and one 9 8 bar** on 'caught in a landslide, no escape from reality'.

### Ballad section

- The **time signature is 4 4** (simple time).
- Tempo is **moderately slow**, unchanging ♩ = 74

### Guitar solo

- The **time signature remains 4 4** (simple time).
- Tempo remains **moderately slow** and unchanging ♩ = 74

### Operatic section

- The **time signature remains 4 4** (simple time) with **one bar of 2 4** after 'Galileo Figaro'.
- There is a **slightly faster tempo** now ♩ = 144

### Rock section

- The **time signature now changes to 12 8** (compound time).
- The **final bar of this section is in 4 4** however.
- This **section is now faster** ♩ = 138
- The end of this section has a '**rit.**'

## Outro

- The time signature is **4 4** to the end of the song.
- The tempo is now **moderately** ♩ = 70 **slow**.
- There is some use of **rubato** in this section and a **rit.** on the lyrics '*nothing really matters, nothing really matters to me*'.
- The tempo then goes back to the original speed (**a tempo**) before a **final rit.** on the final sung phrase.

# Rhythm

## Introduction

- The opening vocal chords all have the same rhythm. This is homorhythmic.
- High level of **syncopation**.
- Some limited use of vocal **regular rhythms** '*easy come, easy go ...*'.
- **Scotch snap** used on '*sympathy*'.
- **Slow moving quaver rhythms** overall.
- **Repeated three quaver motif** on '*easy come, easy go, little high, little low.*'
- Piano accompaniment has mainly **regular rhythms**, with **some syncopation**.
- Piano reinforces the impact of '*easy come, easy go, little high, little low*' with block **crotchet chords** on each beat of the bar.

## Ballad section

- Use of vocal flexibility giving a **quaver triplet effect**.
- (some) **dotted rhythms** '*just begun*'.
- **Repeated notes**.
- **Scotch snap** '*all (away)*'.
- **Syncopated rhythms** '*trigger now he's dead*'.
- Piano accompaniment has mainly RH **quaver movement**, with a descending appoggiatura motif.
- Piano LH has mainly **regular semibreves** and **crotchets**, with the exception being on '*I'm not back again this time (tomorrow)*' which has **syncopated** and **repeated** octave **rhythms**.

## Guitar solo

- **Faster complex rhythms** are used such as **semiquavers**, **triplet semiquavers**, **demisemiquavers** and **sextuplets**. The middle bars of the solo are notated here.
- The solo has a clear rhythmic build-up to the virtuosic higher register passages, before gradually coming down the range, with **slower rhythmic intensity**.
- The bass guitar uses **dotted rhythms** in the accompaniment.

## Operatic section

- Use of **regular quaver** and **semiquaver rhythms** in both the melody and the accompanying piano RH to start with.
- **Repeated rhythmic pattern** on '*Thunderbolt and lightning, very, very frightening*'.
- Use of **Scotch snap** on '*Galileo*' interjections.
- The **rhythmic intensity and complexity builds**, to match the dramatic lyrics.
- **Three note quaver** '*Bismillah!*' motif is answered by a **seven note dotted quaver and six semiquaver pattern**, with the '*no*' then removed to leave just the six note semiquaver pattern, with **occasional interjections of three semiquavers** for '*Let him go*'.
- The final seven '*nos*' are **regular rising quavers** before the final '*Mama Mia, let me go. Beelzebub has a devil put aside*' pattern gives way to **slower moving rhythms for the lyrics** '*me, for me, for me*'.

- Repeated **quaver LH Bbs** and **four crotchet piano Bb 7 chords** lead into the new section.

## Rock section

- **Syncopated** bass guitar and vocal rhythms.
- **Repeated rhythms/phrases.**
- Mainly **short rhythmic notes** in the vocal, apart from the lyrics '*Oh, baby*'.
- The ending piano and bass guitar instrumental has more frequent **regular and repeated quaver rhythms** (from the Cb7 chord onwards).

## Outro

- **Longer rhythmic notes** used on the first descending back vocal.
- Use of **dotted rhythms** on the repeated '*ooh yeah*' lyrics.
- Some use of **cross rhythms** over the '*nothing really matters, anyone can see*'.
- **Regular quaver rhythms** in the RH piano part, minims, and semibreves in the LH.
- **Spread** piano chords.

## Articulation

### Introduction

- **Legato** vocal line.
- **Legato** accompaniment.

### Ballad section

- **Legato.**
- Piano accompaniment is (sustain) pedalled.

### Guitar solo

- **Legato.**

### Operatic section

- Melody has a crisp **staccato** delivery.
- **Staccato** RH piano accompaniment, with some **accents**.

## Rock section

- Bass line scale passage slightly **detached**.

## Outro

- **Legato.**

## Dynamics

### Introduction

- Opening vocals start **mezzo forte/mf**.
- Piano starts **mezzo piano/mp**.

- Gradual **crescendo** over '*Easy come, easy go, little high, little low*'.

### Ballad section

- Vocals are sung **mezzo forte/mf**.
- Gradual **crescendo** in the piano over '*Now I've gone and thrown it all away*'.
- '*Mama, ooh*' is **forte/f**.
- **Decrescendo to mezzo piano/mp** over '*Nothing really matters*'.

### Guitar solo

- **Guitar solo is forte/f**.
- **Crescendos** towards the higher register notes.

### Operatic section

- Starts **mezzo piano/mp** in the piano part.
- '*Thunderbolt and lightning, very, very frightening*' is **forte/f**.
- Alternating **piano/p** and **forte/f** passages on '*I'm just a poor boy, nobody loves me*' and '*He's just a poor boy from a poor family spare him his life from this monstrosity*'.

### Rock section

- **Forte/f**, with **fortissimo/ff** chordal interjections.
- **Crescendo** in the piano part toward the end of the section.

### Outro

- **Fortissimo/ff** start.
- Gradual **decrescendo** before the lyrics '*Nothing really matters*'.
- Final phrases are sung **piano/p**.

## Sonority (Timbre)

- **Lead vocal** (Freddie Mercury).
- **Backing vocals** in three and four-part harmony (Queen members).
- **180 vocal dubs**.
- **Piano** (acoustic).
- Spread piano chords.
- **Lead Electric guitar** (Brian May).
- Significant electric guitar **overdubbing** used throughout the song.
- **Bass guitar** (John Deacon).
- **Drum kit** (Roger Taylor)
- **Timpani**.
- Shimmering **mark tree** '*Shivers down my spine*' (Ballad section).

## Technology

There are many online articles, and YouTube videos which deal (in a depth not required for GCSE Music) with the highly creative technology used in the making of 'Bohemian Rhapsody'. Due to recording logistics of the 1970s, the band had to bounce (ping-pong) tracks across eight generations of 2 4-track tape, meaning that they required nearly 200 tracks for the very significant numbers of the vocal and guitar overdubs. Listed below are some of the main recording effects which used in the various sections:

### Introduction

- **Reverb** added on the piano.
- **Overdubbing**.
- **Panning**.
- **Flanged** cymbals on '*Anywhere the wind blows*'.

### Ballad section

- **Vibrato** in the electric guitar parts.
- Slight **distortion** added to the electric guitar sound.
- Flanged **cymbals** after '*(thrown it all) away*'.
- **Double tracked** main vocal and piano.
- Gradual **panning** and **overdubbing** 'on '*Anywhere the wind blows*'.
- The guitars are panned.

### Guitar solo

- **Multitracked** and **overdubbed** electric guitar.

### Operatic section

- **Panned** vocals (from left to right).
- **Electric guitar** overdubs and slight distortion.
- **Vocal overdubs**.

### Rock section

- Distorted electric guitar.
- **Palm muting** in the electric guitar parts.
- **Vibrato** in the electric guitar parts.
- Main vocal is **double tracked**.
- Vocals are **panned** dramatically from left to right.

### Outro

- At the end only one guitar plays with a clean sound.
- **Vibrato** in the electric guitar parts.
- Panning.
- **Reverb** on the piano.

# Love of My Life

## Set recording

'Love of My Life', *A Night at the Opera* (Deluxe Edition 2011 Remastered)

This recording is available on [YouTube](#), [Amazon music](#) and [Spotify](#).

Please be aware that the studio version is set by AQA and not the live version. Just for comparison, the live version was revamped to be, in effect, a duet between vocal and guitar.

## Score

Students are not required to study the score of this set work, nor to know bar numbers for the exam. However, if a score is used it is available here at [musicnotes.com](https://www.musicnotes.com). Please use the F major (original published key version).

## Background information

This knowledge is not assessed.

The emotional 'Love of My Life' ballad was written in 1975 by Freddie Mercury. The consensus is that the song was written about his girlfriend Mary Austin. Even though the two split up in 1976, they remained friends until his death in 1991. Freddie said, 'I have Mary, and that gets me through'. He left her an enormous fortune and half of his future earnings.

The song is the only Queen song to use an orchestral harp played by Brian May. The harp is not one of the easiest instruments to play, and Brian May said of the process 'it took longer to tune the thing, than to play it. I just found out how it worked – the pedals and everything – and did it bit by bit'.



## Context

This information is intended to help students consider the wider context in which the song was composed.

*Love of My Life* is a **pop ballad**. Pop ballads can be used to tell a story, with poignant and meaningful lyrics.

Characteristics of a ballad include:

- typically verse and chorus structure
- slow tempo
- (use of) a 4/4 time signature
- legato articulation
- significant use of the piano playing broken chords and block chords
- (use of) a guitar solo.

## Structure

Section	Time on recording	Bar numbers	Opening Lyrics
Introduction	0:00	1–7	
Verses 1 and 2	0:20–1:49	8–31	<i>'Love of my life'</i>
Instrumental bridge	1:37–1:49	31–35	
Interlude	1:49–2:18	36–44	<i>'You will remember'</i>
Guitar solo	2:19–2:59	45–58	
Coda	3:00–end	59–67	<i>'Back, hurry back'</i>

## Tonality

### Introduction

- (implied) **F major** at the start.
- **Bb major** (temporary modulation) in the second phrase.

### Verses 1 and 2

- Starts in **C major**.
- Modulates to **F major** from '*can't you see?*'.

### Instrumental Bridge

- **Bb major** (similarities to the second phrase in the Introduction)

### Interlude

- **D minor** (relative minor).
- **G minor** (passing modulation).

### Guitar solo

- Starts in **F major**.
- **C major** (use of B naturals).
- **Bb major** (use of Ebs).

### Coda

- Starts in **D minor**.
- Finishes in **F major**.

## Harmony

### Introduction

- The first opening three bar phrase has a **dominant pedal** note (C) in the bass.
- Opening bars moves between **chords V7 and I** (please note that the 'N.C on the printed music is incorrect).
- Use of the secondary dominant **G7** (fourth beat) at the end of the introduction.
- The chord progression of G Gsus 4 G G7 uses three different types of a G chord, all used to build up to a **perfect cadence** where the vocals enter.
- (Octaves) G pedal in the piano LH used in the final bar of the introduction.

### Verses 1 and 2

- The harmony used is **diatonic**.
- **Slow moving** harmonic change, with mainly one or two chords per bar, but occasionally three and four chords per bar.
- The chord progression of **G Gsus 4 G G7** is used on the lyric '*now you leave me*'.
- A similar **C C7sus C7** is used on '*Love of my life can't you*'.
- Some added sus and **dominant 7<sup>th</sup> chords** are used.
- **Perfect cadence in F major** at the end of the first verse.

## Instrumental Bridge

- The harmony used is **diatonic**.
- First inversion chords (eg Bb major and F major chords) used on some second and fourth beats of the bar.
- This section finishes on a home tonic chord of F major, before moving to the relative minor (D minor).

## Interlude

- Maintains slow rate of harmonic change, **mainly one chord per bar**.
- Complex chords used such as F#m7b5 and the first and the only **diminished 7<sup>th</sup> chord** used (**F#dim7<sup>th</sup>**).  
used on '*side to remind you*'.
- **C C7sus C7** pattern returns on '*I still love you*'.

## Coda

- Starts by using a **repeated five bar chord progression** used halfway through verse 1.
- The piece ends with a **Gm7 Bbm6** (minor subdominant) **F progression**.
- **Plagal cadence** to finish the piece.

## Melody

### Introduction

- The introduction has **seven bars**, consisting of one **three bar phrase**, and one **four bar phrase**.
- The RH playing is **mostly disjunct**.
- There are some **occasional repeated notes**.
- A RH **trill** is used in bar 5 in the piano.

### Verses 1 and 2

- **Rising** and **falling** phrases.
- **Word painting** and **accented passing note** on the lyric '*hurt me*'.
- (Some) **repeated notes**.
- (Rising) **octave leap** '*now you*'.
- **Wide range** of the melody - between F and A (major 10<sup>th</sup>/compound major 3<sup>rd</sup>).
- **Bends** used in the guitar solo.

## Instrumental Bridge

- Piano line is **mainly disjunct** in the RH.
- A RH **trill** is used in the piano RH just before the guitar solo begins.

## Interlude

- **Repeated notes** in phrases.
- (Some) **arpeggiated** writing.
- (Some) **conjunct/stepwise** writing.
- (Some) **falsetto**.

## Guitar solo

- **Repeated rhythms** eg dotted quaver two demisemiquaver pattern.
- **Repetition** down an octave.
- (Use of) **glissando, slides/portamento**.
- (Use of) the **higher register playing** (up to top F).
- (Use of) **3rds and 6ths** in the faster melodic passages.

## Coda

- (Descending) **sequence** on the second '*love of my life*'.
- Harp returns in this section to play **spread arpeggiated chords** at the ends of some phrases and over the final chord.

# Texture

## Introduction

- **2 part** and **3 part** texture.
- (Mostly) **melody and accompaniment** texture.
- **Homophonic/chordal** harp playing.

## Verses 1 and 2

- (Mostly) **melody and accompaniment** texture.
- **Homophonic/chordal** texture in backing vocals.

## Instrumental Bridge

- **Melody and accompaniment**.

## Interlude

- **Melody and accompaniment**
- **Homophonic/chordal**

## Guitar solo

- **Melody and accompaniment**.
- **Homophonic/chordal** guitar passage.

## Coda

- **Melody and accompaniment** texture.

# Tempo and metre

## Introduction

- **Moderately slow**, ♩ = 84
- **4 4 time signature** (simple time).

## Verses 1 and 2

- **Moderately slow**, ♩ = 84
- **4 4 time signature** (simple time).
- One **3 4** bar used in both Verse 1 and Verse 2 '(because) you don't'.
- One **6 4 bar** is used in Verse 2 on 'to me' in the bar before the instrumental bridge.

## Instrumental Bridge

- **Moderately slow**, ♩ = 84
- **4 4 time signature** (simple time).
- **One bar of 2 4** just before the guitar solo begins.
- A slight **accel.** is used, leading into the guitar solo.

## Interlude

- **Moderately slow**, ♩ = 84
- **4 4 time signature** (simple time).

## Guitar solo

- **Moderately slow**, ♩ = 84
- **4 4 time signature** (simple time).
- Some **accel.** used in the piano playing.
- **Rubato** used in the electric guitar line.

## Coda

- A **rall.** is used at the end to bring the song to a close.

# Rhythm

## Introduction

- **Regular rhythms** (RH piano quavers, LH crotchets, semibreves).
- Use of **repeated notes** in the RH.

## Verses 1 and 2

This four-note tied pattern starts the first three phrases.



- **Repeated rhythms.**
- (Use of) **regular rhythms.**
- (Some) **syncopation.**
- **Scotch snap** used on the lyric '*bring it back*'.

## Instrumental Bridge

- **Regular rhythms** in the piano part.
- RH piano has **mainly quavers**, LH has **mainly crotchets.**

## Interlude

- Starts with the **same vocal pattern** (see above.)
- (Some) **syncopation.**

- Many **regular** and **repeated** rhythms.

### Guitar solo

- **Dotted quaver/semiquaver** used.
- **Syncopation**.
- **Longer** (higher register) **tied notes**.
- Electric guitar solo has **faster rhythms** such as semiquavers and demisemiquavers.
- Rhythmic intensity becomes more faster and frenzied on the piano, before subsiding.

### Coda

- Uses the **same material as halfway through the verse** (but slightly varied to start with).
- **Repeated rhythms** on the two final '*love of my life*'.

## Articulation

- **Legato** throughout.

## Dynamics

### Introduction

- Starts **piano (p)**.
- Second phrase **mezzo forte (mp)**.
- **Crescendo** up to where the vocals enter.

### Verses 1 and 2

- Mainly **piano (p)** and **mezzo piano (mp)**.
- **Crescendo** swells (backing vocals) in verse 2.
- **Decrescendo** towards the ends of phrases.

### Interlude

- **Mezzo forte (mp)**.
- Use of **crescendos**.
- Instances of **forte**.

### Guitar solo

- **Crescendo** in the piano part.
- (Some) **forte** piano playing.

### Coda

- Back to the **mezzo piano (mp)**.
- Some **crescendos** and **decrescendos**.

## Sonority (Timbre)

- **Tenor voice** lead vocal (Freddie Mercury).
- (Some) **false**setto used.
- **Backing vocals**.
- **Piano**.
- The use of the **sustain pedal** on the piano adds tonal colour.
- (Orchestral) **harp** used, with some spread chords used in both the introduction and the coda.
- **Electric guitar**.
- **Bass guitar** (uses higher register notes).

## Technology

- **Reverb**. used on the lead vocal, lead guitar part and all the vocal lines.

# Seven Seas of Rhye

## Set recording

'Seven Seas of Rhye', *Queen II* (Deluxe Edition 2011 Remastered)

This recording is available on [You Tube](#), [Amazon music](#) and [Spotify](#).

## Score

Students are not required to study the score of this set work, nor to know bar numbers for the exam. However, if a score is used it is available here at [musicnotes.com](https://www.musicnotes.com). Please use the D major version of the song.

## Background information

This knowledge is not assessed.

The song 'Seven Seas of Rhye' first appeared as an instrumental track on Queen's 1973 debut album. It was later released as a song with the same title on their 1974 album *Queen II*. After performing the song on the BBC's 'Top of the Pops', the song became Queen's first hit, reaching number 10 on the UK Singles Chart. The song is officially credited to Freddie Mercury, although Brian May contributed to the second middle-eight section which features his trademark guitar sound. Freddie based the song on a fantasy world called Rhye in which fantasy-themed events take place.

## Context

This information is intended to help students consider the wider context in which the song was composed.

'Seven Seas of Rhye' is a **hard rock** song.

Characteristics of 1970s hard rock music include:

- A fast tempo of between 110 and 140 bpm (beats per minute).
- A strong main vocal part which covers a wide pitch range.
- One or more electric guitars that play rhythm and/or solo lead parts.
- Electric guitars which are repetitive, rhythmic and distorted, and may use blues-based riffs.
- Drum kit beats that play driving rhythms; these include a strong bass drum, a backbeat on the snare and loud cymbals for emphasis.
- An electric bass guitar which provides a backing for the rhythm and lead guitars, occasionally playing riffs.



## Structure

Section	Time on recording	Bar numbers	Opening Lyrics
<b>Introduction</b>	0:00	1–10	
<b>Verse 1</b>	0:20	1 1–20	<i>'Fear me you Lords'</i>
<b>Verse 2</b>	0:37	1 1–19 and 21	<i>'Can you hear me and Lady preachers'</i>
<b>Bridge 1</b>	0:57	2 2–32	<i>'Sister I live and lie for you'</i>
<b>Instrumental Solo</b>	1:17	3 3–38	
<b>Bridge 2</b>	1:36	3 9–46	<i>'Storm the master marathon'</i>
<b>Verse 3</b>	1:51	4 7–56	<i>'Begone with you short and shady senators'</i>
<b>Final Instrumental</b>	2:09	57 onwards	
<b>Outro</b>	2:27		<i>'Tiddely-om-pom-pom!'</i>

- The song includes an **introduction**, **verses**, **bridges**, an **instrumental** of which one is a solo, and an **outro**.
- There is no **chorus**.
- In place of a **chorus**, a short vocal **hook** is sung at the end of each verse.

### Introduction

- The song opens with a ten-bar introduction. There are no vocals. The opening two-bar riff is played by a solo piano.

### Verses 1 and 2

- Both verses are ten bars in length. The final two bars of each verse repeat the first two bars of the opening solo piano riff. The piano riff provides a link into the sections that follow.

### Bridge 1

- The bridge is an unusual length of eleven bars. The final two bars repeat the first two bars of the piano riff heard in the introduction. This provides a link into the lead guitar's solo.

### Instrumental Solo

- A 10-bar section dominated by both the lead and rhythm guitars.

### Bridge 2

- The vocal parts return. The second bridge is slightly shorter than the first, lasting only eight bars.

### Verse 3

- As verses 1 and 2, verse 3 is ten bars in length. The piano riff is **not** played during the final two bars and is heard at the start of the following instrumental instead.

### Final Instrumental

- The opening piano riff begins the section. The guitars take on a prominent role to conclude the song before the outro begins.

### Outro

- The song finishes with the nursery rhyme '*Oh! I do like to be beside the seaside*' which fades at the end.

## Tonality

- The 'Seven Seas of Rhye' is in **D Major**, the **tonic** key.
- The solo section includes an unusual **modulation** to the key of **Bb major**, the **flattened submediant (6<sup>th</sup> note)**.
- At the end of the solo section the key returns to **D major**.
- Bridge 2 **modulates** to the **subdominant** key **G major**.
- The tonic key of **D major** returns at the end of this section.

## Harmony

- The harmony is predominantly **diatonic**, but there is occasional use of **chromatic** harmony.
- Chords are mostly used in **root position** but there are occasional examples of **first** and **second inversions**.
- The song features an arpeggiated piano introduction based on two chords: **D major** and **G major**. The first three pitches of bar 1 are a **D major** chord played in **root position** *D, F#, A*. Next a **G major** chord played in **second inversion** *D G B*. This D major and G major pattern alternating pattern is a feature of the introduction.
- **Power chords** are used in the introduction, with the last three chords being *D, Em (Em9) and A7*.

- Verse 3 uses a slightly varied chord progression when compared with the opening two verses.
- The word '*smile*' and the phrase '*I'll take you to the seven seas of Rhye*' is sung over a **G minor** chord. The sixth note of the chord is added (an E natural) to create a **G minor 6** (or **Gm6**) chord.
- In bridge 1 the first four chords **ascend by step** - D major, E minor, F# minor and G major.
- On the second syllable of the words 'sister' and 'mister' a chord of **C major** is used. This is an example of a **flattened chord VII** in D major.
- In the instrumental solo section the chords of **Bb major** (the tonic - chord I) and **Eb major** (the submediant - chord IV) alternate throughout.
- A **tonic pedal note** is used in the final instrumental.
- The **harmonic rhythm** is slow. Chords change gradually and often consist of only one chord per bar.

## Melody

- Verses 1 and 2 begin and end with the same piano **riff** heard in the introduction.
- This riff can be described as **arpeggiated** or using **broken chords**.
- The phrase '*the seven seas of Rhye*' is an example of a **melodic hook**.
- The hook is sung three times and **descends by step (conjunct)**, except on the final two words '*of Rhye*' where it **descends a major third**.
- Each verse has a range of an **octave**.
- The first phrase of each verse **descends a perfect fourth**.
- **Leaps (disjunct)** are heard before each vocal hook. Examples are heard at the ends of verses 1 and 2 where the melody **ascends a perfect fifth** (D to A) and the end of verse 3, where it **ascends by a minor seventh** (B to A).
- Verses 2 and 3 begin with an **anacrusis**.
- **Blues notes** are sung in bridge 1. The third degree of the scale is flattened (**F sharps** become **F naturals**). Also, the guitar solo has blues notes with a likewise flattened third and seventh).
- Freddie Mercury sings a high D at the end of bridge 1, showing off his wide vocal range.
- The lead guitar plays a short **descending scalar** passage immediately before the solo and some **ascending scalar** passages at end of the solo.
- The nursery rhyme '*Oh! I do like to be beside the seaside*' is sung during the outro.

## Texture

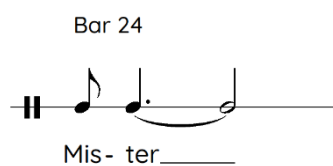
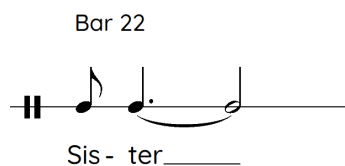
- The opening two-bar riff is a piano solo, played in **octaves**.
- The introduction is **homophonic**.
- The verses, bridge and instrumental sections are **melody with accompaniment**.
- The backing vocals often sing in **close harmony** and ascend to the final chord of a section.
- At the ends of the verses the band effectively stops, leaving the accompaniment to ring through the textural 'gap'.

## Tempo and metre

- The bpm (beats per minute) is ♩ = 127. It is lively and fast.
- The time signature is **4/4 - common time**.
- Occasionally the time signature changes to **2/4**. This is evident at the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> verse on the hook '*the seven seas of Rhye*', and at the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> bridge on the last echo of the word '*ever*'.

## Rhythm

- The song features a piano introduction in which the right hand plays **semiquavers** for 8 bars.
- **Semiquaver** runs are played by the lead guitar at the end of the solo.
- **Dotted rhythms** are heard in the vocals in each verse.
- **Syncopation** can be heard throughout. Two notable examples are on the words '*sister*' and '*mister*' in the bridge.



- The drum kit often plays a **backbeat** that emphasises the second and fourth beat in the bar.
- There are many drum kit **fills**. The first fill heard at the end of the introduction plays **triplets**.
- The band accompanies the vocal hook with accented, **sustained chords** played by the electric guitars.

## Articulation

- There is frequent use of **legato** in the scalar runs played by the lead guitar.
- The nursery rhyme is sung **legato** in the outro.
- The snare drum backbeat is played **staccato** on beats 2 and 4.
- The electric guitar power chords are **accented**.

## Dynamics

- The piano solo begins **mezzo forte (mf)** – fairly loud).
- The bass and lead guitars enter **fortissimo (ff)** - very loud) from bar 3.
- A **diminuendo** heard on the lead guitar at the end of the solo section and verse 3.
- A **crescendo** is created feedback on the electric guitars before bridge 2 begins.
- Power chords are played **ff** by the electric guitars.
- The crash cymbals are **accented**.

## Sonority (Timbre)

- The song consists of **lead** and **backing vocals**, a **piano**, a wide range of **electric guitars** including two **rhythm**, three **leads** and one **bass guitar**, a **drum kit**, a **tambourine** and a **stylophone** (a very small electronic keyboard played with a stylus).
- Electric guitar techniques include the use of:
 

<b>Portamento</b>	Pitch slides found in bar 5 of the introduction and verse 2
<b>Palm muting</b>	The side of the strumming hand is used to mute the notes being played; examples heard in bridge 1.
<b>Vibrato</b>	Slightly raising and lowering a pitch to create a ‘wobble’ type effect, heard in bar 6 of the introduction
<b>Power chords</b>	Loud, powerful and distorted chords played during the introduction.
- The **tambourine** enters during bridge 1.
- ‘*Oh! I do like to be beside the seaside*’ is played by the **stylophone**.
- The backing vocals sing in **close harmony** in bridge 1, reaching a top A at the end of the section (see example above).

## Technology

- **Overdubbing** is used for four part vocals and multiple guitars.
- The lead vocal part is **double-tracked** in verse 3.
- **Reverb** and **stereo panning** are added to the vocal lines.
- The electric guitars use light **distortion**.
- **Echoes** are heard at the end of the solo, followed by **feedback** created by the electric guitar.
- The echoes have a short **delay** time with the repeats lasting about two bars.

- The song ends with a **cross fade**. Instruments blend into the band singing '*Oh! I do like to be beside the seaside*'.
- The three-part electric guitar arrangements are often **panned**. Two are in **stereo** and placed either side of the centrally located lead guitar.