

There are several special signs and abbreviations used in the transcription:

	e.g. bar 7	Vibrato – continual small fluctuations of pitch to warm the sound of a note.
	e.g. bar 19	An ottava sign – a direction that the notes sound an octave higher than written.
	e.g. bar 26 and bar 28	Tremolo – a rapid repetition of a note, indicating a cymbal roll in bar 26 and a snare drum roll in bar 28.
	e.g. bar 30	Pitch bend – a small slide in pitch away from a note and back again.
	e.g. bar 34	Slide – a smooth glide in pitch from one note to the next.
P.M.	bar 69	Palm mute – damping the strings with the side of the hand while plucking to produce a very dark, dry sound.

Chord symbols are printed above the top staff. The letter name of a chord also indicates its bass note, e.g. the bass note of Cm (C minor) is C, except in the case of a slash chord, in which the bass note is printed after a diagonal slash, e.g. Gm/D indicates that D, rather than G, is the bass note of the chord.

Although synthesisers were becoming increasingly common in the Seventies, note that Queen did not use them in this or any of their early albums. Their preference was for an innovative use of recording techniques and studio effects.

Brian May played a guitar that he built when a teenager (with help from his father, who was an electronics engineer). It had particularly versatile pickup settings to maximise the range of tone colours possible. This allowed him to switch quickly from an out-of-phase signal (lacking in higher frequencies) at the start of the guitar solo that begins in bar 44, to a normal in-phase sound for the second half of the solo.

He generally used an old small coin as a plectrum, played through a treble booster that introduced some **distortion** to higher pitches. He used a stack of Vox AC30 amplifiers whose design dates back to 1959. Note the use of a **wah-wah** effect in bar 62.

In addition to the extensive use of overdubbing, the members of Queen paid great attention to the details of recording. For example, they chose to use **reverb** on the lead vocal, but not on

Queen actually boasted 'no synths' on many of their early albums, after one reviewer mistook Brian May's unique guitar sound for a synthesiser.

the backing vocals (so the latter sounds as tight as possible, aided by treble boost and compression). Sounds are carefully **panned** in the stereo mix. Listen, for example, to 'anytime' in the backing vocals, panned hard right in bar 19 and similar places, and for the stereo separation of the overlapping guitar parts in bars 55–6 and at the end of the song.

Of particular note is the use of a **phase shifter** to create the unworldly effect on the words 'laser beam' (bar 17 and similar places).

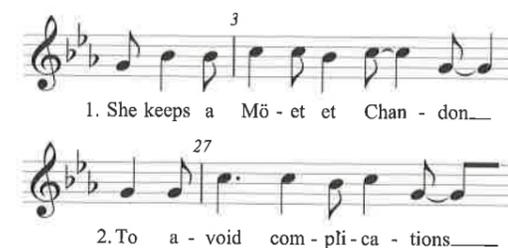
While responsible for some of the most characteristic sounds on Queen recordings, the band's dependence on studio effects did sometimes make it difficult for them to faithfully reproduce their album tracks when performing live on tour.

## Verse and chorus form

Despite the unusual construction of works such as Queen's 'Bohemian Rhapsody', the majority of pop songs are written in **verse and chorus form**, the essence of which is:

- Two or more verses, each of which has different words but similar music, and each of which is followed by...
- A contrasting chorus in which both the words and the music are the same on every appearance.

The number and distribution of stressed syllables often varies between verses, requiring adjustments to the melodic line. This can be seen when comparing the openings of the first two verses of 'Killer Queen', shown below.



1. She keeps a Mö-et et Chan-don\_\_

2. To a-void com-pli-ca-tions\_\_

A song in verse and chorus form may have the following:

- An **intro** (introduction) at the start
- A coda at the end, often known as an **outro** in pop music, especially if the final bars fade out
- A contrasting **bridge**, sometimes called a **middle eight** even if it is not exactly eight bars long
- An **instrumental** which typically replaces a verse with an improvised instrumental solo, often based on the same chord pattern as the verses.

The effect on 'laser beam' was produced by a Countryman Phase Shifter, a new piece of kit in 1974. Queen frequently used the latest studio technology in their recordings. Some sources mistakenly refer to this effect as a flanger.

Bar 2 <sup>3</sup>	0:02	Verse 1
Bar 14 <sup>4</sup>	0:27	Chorus 1
Bar 23	0:44	Instrumental
Bar 26 <sup>4</sup>	0:51	Verse 2
Bar 38 <sup>4</sup>	1:15	Chorus 2
Bar 51	1:40	Verse 3
Bar 69 <sup>2</sup>	2:16	Chorus 3
Bar 79	2:35	Outro

**Guitar solo** (Bars 44 to 61) (1:25 to 2:00)

The structure of 'Killer Queen' is shown in the table, above. The section labelled 'instrumental' in bars 23–26 of the anthology is a four-bar link from the end of the first chorus to the start of the second verse. The guitar solo in bars 44–61<sup>3</sup> replaces the voice in the second part of Chorus 2 and the first part of Verse 3, as shown by the shaded area in the table.

## Commentary

### Verse 1 (bars 1–14<sup>3</sup>)

The six finger-clicks that set the tempo and overlap with the start of the vocal are just a lead-in – they are too insubstantial to be called an introduction.

The first two complete bars of Freddie Mercury's elegantly arching melody are repeated for the line beginning 'Let them eat cake,' but now with the second bar changed to rise to a top G:

Although the key is E♭ major, notice how this melody focuses on C and G, the tonic and dominant of C minor, which is the relative minor of E♭ major. Such tonal ambiguity – a deliberate lack of clarity of key – permeates the song. The verse ends with a perfect cadence in G minor (D<sup>7</sup> – Gm in bar 14) and the chorus with a plagal cadence in F (B♭ – F in bars 22–23). It is as if the high-class prostitute of the song has no clear roots.

Having reached top G at the end of bar 6, the vocal starts a four-bar descent from the same G in bar 7 down to the

Brian May remarked in a 1998 interview that Freddie Mercury had a penchant for playing the piano 'in E flat and A flat and F. And these are not places that your hand naturally falls on when playing the guitar.' (Sharp keys are easier for guitarists.)



Queen performing on stage in 1975

dominant (B♭), returning to the upper register for the last two notes of the phrase.

### HARMONIC SEQUENCE

A harmonic sequence is the repetition of a chord pattern at a higher or lower pitch, here V(7)–I in C minor, E♭ major and G minor.

At the start the voice is accompanied only by dry, detached piano chords. Drums and bass guitar enter at the end of bar 6, followed by lead guitar in bar 7. The latter is panned left and plays a chromatic descent from tonic to dominant (E♭ – D – D♭ – C – C♭ – B♭) that shadows the vocal line and initially doubles the bass guitar and left-hand piano part. Backing vocals enter in three-part harmony in bar 8, singing nonsense syllables known as **vocables**, and the phrase ends on a chord of B♭<sup>7</sup> in bar 11.

The expected resolution of this dominant 7th onto a tonic chord of E♭ major is again frustrated – the final phrase of the verse starts on a chord of G major (dominant of C minor, the relative minor of E♭ major) and consists of a **harmonic sequence** in which the second of each pair of chords falls a 5th, bringing the verse to an end on a chord of G minor:

Bar 12–14 could be described as a pre-chorus, following on from an eight-bar verse.

The motif sung falsetto in bar 12 also falls a 5th and is repeated in varied sequence in bar 13 (although not in bar 14). This falling 5th idea will play a significant role in the rest of the song.

### Chorus (bars 14<sup>4</sup>-26<sup>3</sup>)

The sung part of the chorus is eight bars in length. It is not predictable in either structure or key. The eight bars are asymmetrically divided into a pattern of 3+2+3 bars. They start with another falling-5ths progression (F - B $\flat$ ), briefly taking the music from G minor at the end of the first verse to its relative major of B $\flat$  major. However, Mercury focuses on the minor triads of Dm and Gm in this key, leading to a perfect cadence in D minor (A $^7$  - D) in bar 17. This is a key unrelated to E $\flat$  major, again underlining the tonal ambiguity of the song.

Freddie Mercury's multi-tracked backing vocals in bars 15-17 produced a succession of **parallel harmonies** in three and four parts. Notice the carefully coordinated upward slide on 'Queen', the heavy flanging to portray 'laser beam' and the extreme panning of the backing vocals (left for 'Ba, ba, ba, ba' in bar 18 and right on the very high 'anytime' in bar 19).

The two-bar phrase in bars 18-19 flirts with C major before ending on a chord of B $\flat$  major. Mercury then revisits ideas from the verse - the vocal melody from bar 12 is **transposed** to start on A in bar 20 and is again repeated in sequence, but this time a *descending* sequence, resulting in bar 21 becoming a major-key version of bar 12. At the same time, the falling 5ths progression is now extended into part of a **circle of 5ths**:

**Verse 1**

Motif in C minor      Sequence of bar 12, up to E $\flat$  major

**Chorus**

Transposition of bar 12 up to D minor      Sequence of bar 20, down to C major

As in bars 18<sup>4</sup>-19, C major harmony at the end of bar 21 drops to B $\flat$  major in bar 21 for another interjection from the backing vocals. B $\flat$  is the flattened 7th degree of C major. The shift to this chord provides a distinct flavour of the blues, in which the flattened 7th is a characteristic fingerprint.

At the end of the first chorus, the instrumental bridge in bars 23-26 consists of the primary triads of B $\flat$  major (B $\flat$ , F and E $\flat$ )

The technical term for the slide on 'Queen' is **portamento** or **glissando**.

Notice how panning is used as an effect, rather than to create a natural stereo soundscape as in recordings of classical music.

over a dominant pedal on F. This creates a clear expectation of a modulation to the key of B $\flat$  major. However, despite touching briefly on the tonic chord of B $\flat$  major on the third beats of bars 25 and 26, there is no distinctive change of key. Instead a roll on an open hi-hat cymbal in bar 26 (indicated by tremolo beams in the drum part) heralds the arrival of verse 2 with a sideways shift to a chord of C minor in bar 27 and the return of the ambiguous tonality that has been a feature of the song.

### Verse 2 (bars 26<sup>4</sup>-38<sup>3</sup>)

The structure of this verse is similar to verse 1 apart from small changes in the vocal line to accommodate the different words and some extra detail to provide variety.

#### The latter includes:

- Starting the pedal on C at the very beginning of the verse instead of at the third bar
- Adding a snare drum roll in bar 28 (following on from the cymbal roll two bars earlier) that leads to a single triangle note on the first beat of bar 29
- Adding a new guitar fragment in bar 30
- New backing vocals (although still in parallel chords) which emphasise the word 'killer' through repetition. These start a bar earlier than in verse 1 (i.e. in bar 31) - there's also a new interjection of 'Nat'rally' in bar 36
- The transposition of the vocal line down an octave in bar 37, followed by a half-spoken bar 38 (which the bass guitar decorates with a descending chromatic scale in its upper register - not printed in the anthology but shown left).



### Chorus (bars 38<sup>4</sup>-50, including the start of the guitar solo)

Conventionally an **instrumental** replaces a sung verse of a song, but Queen were never conventional. In 'Killer Queen' the instrumental ingeniously spans the last half of this chorus and the first half of verse 3. So, only the first five bars of this chorus are sung - from bar 43 the guitar solo takes over from the vocals, with some other small changes along the way.

The first of these changes occurs at the start of the solo. The falling 5ths progression (A - Dm - G $^7$  - C) that occupied two bars in the first chorus is now doubled in length. This is done by repetition of each bar and forms bars 44-7 with the chord of C major replaced by C minor (A - Dm - A - Dm - G - Cm - G - Cm). Above this, Brian May decorates the falling-5th motif associated with this progression while the piano plays supporting chords.

The chorus again ends with a three-bar link (bars 48-50). This time it is accompanied by a syncopated drum part that contrasts strongly with the emphasised backbeat of bars 44-7.

**Verse 3 (bars 51-61, including the end of the guitar solo)**

This starts like the first verse, with just detached piano chords as accompaniment. Now, however, the melody is taken by guitar in a high register, rather than by voice. Brian May's solo spirals still higher in bar 54, leading to a section in which the notes of chords are staggered and overdubbed to create an arpeggiated **bell chord**. The parts come together in bars 57-61, ending on the dominant 7th of E♭ major (B♭7 in bar 61).



Notes in a 'bell chord' are played and sustained one after another by different instruments or, as here, by overdubs of the same instrument

The dominant 7th which (yet again) doesn't resolve on to the expected tonic chord of E♭ major, is the cue for the lead vocal to re-enter for the pre-chorus section of the verse. Once more it is extended by repeating bars, as shown in the following table:

Verse 1 Bar	Verse 2 Bar	Chords	Verse 3 Bar	Chords
12	36	G <sup>7</sup> Cm	62 63	G <sup>7</sup> Cm G <sup>7</sup> Cm
13	37	B♭ E♭	64 65	B♭ E♭ B♭ E♭
14	38	D <sup>7</sup> Gm F	66 67 68-9	D <sup>7</sup> Gm F B♭ F B♭m F

Freddie Mercury starts an octave lower than in the previous verse but almost immediately leaps to a top G in bar 62. Meanwhile the guitar overdubs link this bar with the previous section. Mercury makes further changes of octave in the bars that follow. The backing vocals in bars 63-7 are new, although they follow the same style of parallel harmonies heard earlier.

Bars 67-9 form dominant preparation in anticipation of the chorus, returning on a chord of B♭ in bar 70. Bass guitar and left-hand piano articulate a pedal on F (the dominant of B♭). The lead guitar embellishes an arpeggiated dominant 7th of B♭ (F<sup>7</sup>). Snare-drum semiquavers add to the excitement.

**Chorus (bars 69-78)**

This is a repeat of the first chorus.

**Outro (bar 79-end)**

The Outro is based on the link that has followed the previous choruses. It includes panned guitar overdubs that suggest an almost contrapuntal texture during the fade out. After a perfect cadence in E♭ major (V<sup>7</sup>-I in bar 81, beats 3-4) the music finally settles on a tonic chord of E♭ major as bar 83 is constantly repeated to fade.

**Texture**

Homophonic, gradually increasing in density from the very light-textured start.

**Chordal** texture for the vocals at the start and end of the chorus. Guitar parts in parallel 3rds in the link following the first chorus (bars 23-26). Brief contrapuntal fragments in the accompaniment (e.g. in bar 62, where guitar 4 imitates the lead vocal, and during the fade-out).

**Tonality**

The key is E♭ major but the tonality is sometimes ambiguous. Verses start in C minor and choruses are in B♭ major, but both quickly modulate.

However, the song ends with a perfect cadence in E♭ major, and the tonic chord of that key is repeated throughout the final fade out.

**Harmony**

Mostly the harmony consists of root position triads with occasional inversions and 7th chords.

Chords are mainly diatonic, with occasional chromatic chords (e.g. A♭m in bar 9). Notice the circle of 5ths progression in bars 20-21 (A - Dm - G<sup>7</sup> - C).

Short pedal points include a tonic pedal in C minor at the start of each verse and a dominant pedal (F in the key of B♭) in the instrumental links at the end of the first and second choruses.

Melodic decoration of the harmony includes prominent and expressive appoggiaturas such as the lead vocal's G against a chord of B♭<sup>7</sup> on the first beat of bar 11 (see left) and B♭ against a D<sup>7</sup> chord on the first beat of bar 14.



**Melody**

See 'Commentary', above.

**Word painting and word setting**

There is little word painting, other than the upward glissando to emphasise the sarcastic use of 'queen' in the chorus, the phaser effect on 'laser beam', and the high vocals and excited snare drum rhythm on 'wild' in bar 67.

The word setting in the lead vocal is almost entirely syllabic. Note that the x-headed notes in bar 38 indicate notes that are half-spoken in the indicated rhythm.

**Rhythm**

The song is in compound quadruple metre (12/8 time) with a few bars containing only two beats (6/8 time).

The division of the beat into long-short patterns (♩ ♪) rather than into two equal quavers is known as **shuffle rhythm** or **swing rhythm**. You can get a feel for shuffle rhythm by counting beats as 'one to two to three to four to one ...' etc. Lean on the numerals and keep the word 'to' short.

Every verse and chorus begins with an **anacrusis** or pickup, and there is frequent syncopation (e.g. the tied notes in bars 3–11 of the lead vocal). The tempo of 112 bpm (beats per minute) is a steady speed that is fairly typical of rock music.

## Style

Although the style of 'Killer Queen' is stadium rock, the shuffle rhythm, jangle piano and backing vocals seem to hark back to an earlier age of popular music, rather like the retro hits of the late Sixties that evoked the popular music of the Twenties (known in America as the Vaudeville era), such as 'Winchester Cathedral' and 'Finchley Central' (New Vaudeville Band, 1966 and 1967 respectively), and 'When I'm Sixty-Four' and 'Maxwell's Silver Hammer' (The Beatles, 1967 and 1969 respectively).

### ANACRUSIS

An anacrusis is a note, or group of notes, before the first down-beat in a phrase.

## TEST YOURSELF

1. Name two genres that were important in the early development of rock 'n' roll.
2. Who usually played piano in Queen's songs?
3. In what year was the album *Sheer Heart Attack* released?
4. What was the significance of the song 'Killer Queen' in Queen's work?
5. Name two hits by Queen other than 'Killer Queen'.
6. Why is Queen's music often described as stadium rock?
7. What is meant by a transcription of a rock song?
8. What is unusual about the piano sound in 'Killer Queen'?
9. How does the bass guitar part relate to the left hand of the piano part in this song?
10. Explain the difference between vibrato and tremolo.
11. How are the x-headed notes in the score performed by Freddie Mercury?
12. What is another name for an outro?
13. What is **a. shuffle rhythm** and **b. a middle eight**?
14. Name a percussion instrument heard in 'Killer Queen' that is not normally found in a drum kit.

Answers: See page 218

## Dictation

One of the questions on the exam paper will be headed 'Musical dictation'. In it you could be asked to use music notation to supply a few missing notes in a short passage from a set work, or to identify a particular rhythm or chord pattern from a set work.

In part (a) of the question below you have to add the missing note lengths under the bracket on a single-line staff that begins with a percussion clef.

In part (b) you have to add missing pitches, using the rhythm shown by the notes above the staff. The small 8 below the clef is a reminder that the voice sounds an octave lower than the treble clef indicates. Don't be confused by the fact that there is a blank space in bar 2 to avoid giving away the answer to part (a). Be alert to the possibility that at least one of the notes you have to supply may have occurred earlier in the melody.

In the exam, the extract for dictation will be specially recorded.

### DOES IT ADD UP?

In this type of question, check that the bar concerned has the number of beats shown by the time signature after you have added your answer.

## MUSICAL DICTATION

Listen to the first six seconds of 'Killer Queen' **four times** without following the anthology score as you answer both the questions below.

Alternatively, the first four bars of the vocal part of 'Killer Queen' could be played four times for you on the piano, rather than using the anthology CD.

- a.** Add the missing rhythm on the score below: (3)

- b.** Add the missing pitches on the score below: (4)

Total for question 7 marks

Answers: See page 218