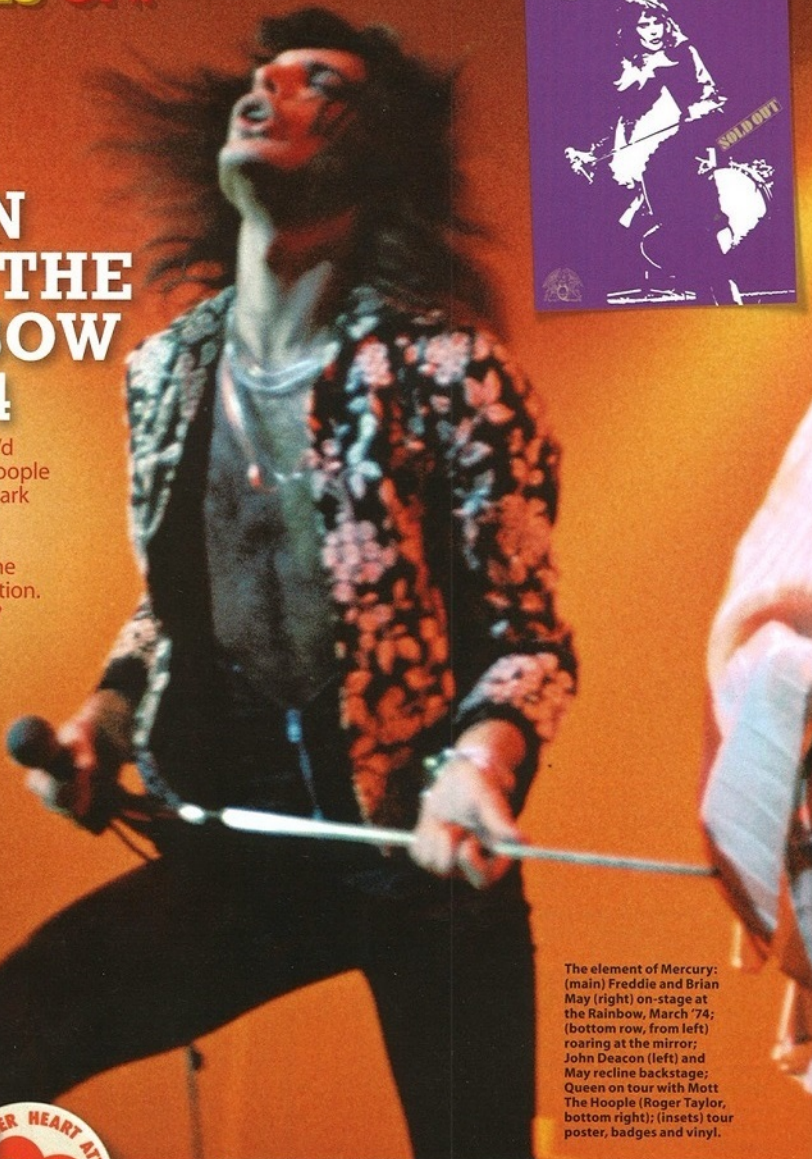


# WHAT GOES ON!

MOJO EYEWITNESS

## QUEEN ROCK THE RAINBOW IN 1974

The previous year they'd supported Mott The Hoople at the iconic Finsbury Park venue. Now they were returning as glamour-crazed headliners on the verge of world domination. How did they get here?



The element of Mercury: (main) Freddie and Brian May (right) on-stage at the Rainbow, March '74; (bottom row, from left) roaring at the mirror; John Deacon (left) and May recline backstage; Queen on tour with Mott The Hoople (Roger Taylor, bottom right); (insets) tour poster, badges and vinyl.

"PEOPLE STARTED COMING TO THE GIGS DRESSED UP AND LOOKING LIKE US."  
Brian May



## PART 1 "EVERYTHING WAS DRAMATIC"

Queen's Brian May (guitar) and Roger Taylor (drums) remember the spectacle, sickness and *Sheer Heart Attack* of their two 1974 Rainbow shows.

**BRIAN MAY:** "It's incredible how much happened to Queen in 1974, and even in between the two Rainbow shows we played that year. We'd opened for Mott The Hoople in '73, and in spring '74, we were headlining. Our promoter Mel Bush said to us, 'We're going to finish this tour with a show at the Rainbow.' And we said, 'Mel, do you really think we could sell it out?' We played the first Rainbow show in March. For the last three years it had felt as if it was just the four of us in Queen that believed in what we were doing. Then gradually there was a flood of other people who believed as well. People started coming to the gigs dressed up and looking like us.

We had costumes made by Zandra Rhodes for the tour. Freddie [Mercury] and I wore ours, but Roger didn't, I think he thought he was being made to wear a dress. What we were doing was unfashionable – a lot of progressive rock groups considered it fashionable to eschew any sense of glamour, but we embraced those showbiz elements. And that's what we tried to do at the Rainbow: overwhelm the audience's senses. It's like Freddie sang later [in Queen's *Let Me Entertain You*], 'And to thrill you, I'll use any device.'

After that show, we went to America, opening for Mott again. But I became ill with hepatitis. The doctor said I had to go home. They had to smuggle me on the plane, I looked so bad. Back in England, after we'd started recording [third album] *Sheer Heart Attack*, I started throwing up and had to go to hospital for an operation [May had an ulcer]. Freddie would bring in tapes of what the band were doing – all the harmonies on what became *Killer Queen* – telling me, 'Don't worry, darling, we can't do it without you.'

When we did the second Rainbow show [in November] we'd had a hit with *Killer Queen* and the *Sheer Heart Attack* album. We opened the show with *Now I'm Here*, a song I'd written in hospital partly about Mott The Hoople, who were like a symbol of rock'n'roll. When I see the footage of us from those shows now, I see so much confidence and adrenalin and I think, *My God*, we were such impatient boys.

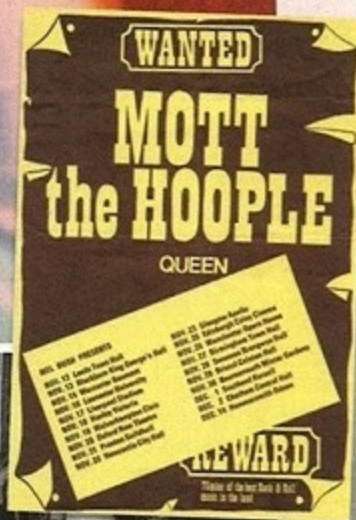
Not long after, the two guys in Sparks came to my house. They'd had a hit with *This Town Ain't Big Enough*, and they said to me, 'Look, your band are OK, but you're obviously not going to have any more hits, whereas we are going to conquer the world. Fancy joining us?' I remember saying, 'I love you guys, but I don't think so. Queen were finally going somewhere.'

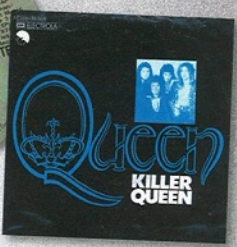
**ROGER TAYLOR:** "When I listen to *Queen At The Rainbow* now I find it extraordinary. I'd forgotten how heavy we were, with things like *Stone Cold Crazy* and *Flick Of The Wrist*. We weren't a pop band. We were like *Led Zeppelin* with harmonies.

The Rainbow was a very prestigious venue. We'd toured with Mott The Hoople and learned a lot. They were quite theatrical and had a sense of drama and I think we nicked a few ideas. Looking at it again now, Freddie hadn't quite developed his thing with the audience. You can tell he had nerves. Brian, Freddie and John all had Zandra Rhodes outfits. I did too, but I didn't like mine. It was way too hot for drumming. But the idea behind the costumes, the lights, everything, was to make a dramatic impact.

By the time we went back to the Rainbow in November, we'd had hits, and it was really taking off again. When I look at the remastered footage now, we look so bloody young, but I find it exciting. I played *In The Lap Of The Gods* in my car on the first day of rehearsal for our current tour [with vocalist Adam Lambert], and it sounded astonishing. Brian and I decided to revisit some of these songs in our new set. We open the show with *Procession* and *Now I'm Here*, like we did at the Rainbow, reminding people of what Queen were like, before the big hits."

**TURN OVER!** FUTURE QUEEN ROADIE PETER HINCE SEES A GROUP TRANSMOGRIFYING IN SILKS AND SATINS.





## PART 2 "HIGHLY CHOREOGRAPHED"

# QUEEN ROCK THE RAINBOW '74

Soon-to-be crew fixture Peter Hince was unimpressed at first, but was humbled when this super-ambitious band made it all make sense.

"I was a roadie for Mott The Hoople when I first met Queen at Manticore rehearsal studios in Fulham in November 1973. I thought they were a bunch of tossers who would never make it. They were dressed in their silks and satins and ladies' garments even to rehearse. Freddie had his one glove and sawn-off mikestand. I thought they were too prissy.

Queen supported Mott on that '73 tour, and the musicians all got on fine. There was a little one-upmanship, but stories that Queen blew Mott off stage aren't strictly true. They went down as well as any other support group. Sometimes people watched them, but

some nights half the audience stayed in the bar. Again, it was the same when they went to America together, and Brian went home sick.

But a lot changed in a year. By the time Queen played the Rainbow in November '74, they'd really grown up. They'd had *Sheer Heart Attack*, had a hit with *Killer Queen* and Mott had broken up! They split just before Queen's second Rainbow gigs. I remember going along to watch Queen, and what was so striking is that it was like seeing a different band.

I'd previously worked for Tony Defries and MainMan on David Bowie's *Ziggy Stardust* shows, and I remember one of the shows was filmed. I don't think I'd even heard of a video camera before. Afterwards, everyone – the band, lights, sound, crew, wardrobe – all went to a suite at the Grosvenor House hotel in Park Lane to watch the

Raging Bulsara: (above) the incomparable Freddie does his hair in the Rainbow dressing room; (inset) global Queen wax; (below, right) Peter Hince at dinner; (left) Brian May's father Harold's ticket to the show.

tape. I thought it was fantastic. But notes were made about what worked and what didn't: costume changes, lights, blackouts. It was highly choreographed.

Queen at the Rainbow that night reminded me of that. I'm not saying they ripped Bowie off, but there were little parallels. Bowie used the *Clockwork Orange* theme as his intro tape. Queen had their intro tape, *Procession*. Then Freddie appeared in the big white cape doing *Now I'm Here*. It was highly polished. After that first Mott tour, they'd released *Queen II* and *Sheer Heart Attack*. They had a longer set and a broader set. I also realised that when I'd first seen them dressed up at Manticore it was because they wanted to make a point and show that they were serious. A year later and it all made sense.

How things had changed. Mott were a great rock'n'roll band, but there wasn't a lot of ambition there. Ian Hunter was ambitious, but not so much the others. Now Mott had fallen by the wayside, and it was as if Queen had come up on the inside lane. The difference with Queen and a lot of other bands was drive. A lot of the time the drive comes from the management. With Queen it came from the band. I went to the Rainbow that night because Mott had split and I thought I might get a job. You never knew who you might bump into. A few months later I was working for Queen."

As told to Mark Blake

**"MOTT HAD FALLEN BY THE WAYSIDE... QUEEN HAD COME UP ON THE INSIDE LANE."**

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Queen release *Live At The Rainbow '74* – featuring the March and November shows, live footage and much more – in numerous regal formats on September 8.

Johnny Dove, Matthew, ©Queen Productions Ltd, Peter Hince, Thanks to Rockarchive.com

CD!

# MOJO

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149 REVIEWS

## FILTER ALBUMS

### Queen

★★★★

#### Live At The Rainbow '74

VIRGIN. CD/DL/DVD/LP

**Multiple-format box set revisits Mercury and co's silk-and-satin glory days.**

Queen performed at the Rainbow in London's Finsbury Park in March and November 1974. In between, they played their debut US shows, recorded *Sheer Heart Attack*, their high-watermark third album, and bagged a Top 10 hit with Killer Queen. Aptly, their manic energy is the most distinguishing feature here. Early album cuts Stone Cold Crazy and Ogre Battle attest to Queen's prowess as a heavy rock band, albeit one with more panache than most; less Watney's Red Barrel, perhaps, more Mateus Rosé. The accompanying DVD, though, reminds viewers that Freddie Mercury – a sartorial riot in his Zandra Rhodes-designed tunic – didn't emerge fully formed as the poised frontman of 1985's Live Aid, though a romp through Shirley Bassey's Big Spender signposts the roaring camp humour and musical eclecticism that followed. After 12 years of *We Will Rock You: The Musical*, and umpteen TV ad soundtracks, this is truly a breath of fresh air.

Mark Blake

