

UNCUT

QUEEN

Mercury rising!

1974. An upwardly-mobile QUEEN are creating decadent rock pageantry out of the back of a Winnebago. As a new live album captures the start of Queen's imperial phase, BRIAN MAY remembers an "incredible adventure" on £25 a week. Then we raid the *Melody Maker* vaults for an eyewitness report on that '74 tour. "Oh my dear," says FREDDIE MERCURY, "we're at each other's THROATS!"

Interview: Michael Bonner | 1974 feature: Chris Welch

LOOKING BACK ON 1974, a pivotal year for his band Queen, Brian May remembers, "We were fairly small fry in those days. Although it was definitely starting to happen, we were by no means in the upper echelons of rock society.

For the first time, we felt that we had a momentum going. We weren't the only ones pushing it anymore. We kept asking ourselves, 'Where is this going? How far can we go? What is this?'"

Queen had finished 1973 on a high note. They'd played with Mott The Hoople – "we'd got across remarkably well," says May – and now prepared to enter the new year on their first headline tour, supporting new album *Queen II*. The tour ran through March and climaxed with a triumphant homecoming show on the last day of the month at London's Rainbow Theatre. It was the first of two hugely successful tours for Queen that year: they were back out on the road in October, this time to promote their second album of the year: *Sheer Heart Attack*. Reflecting on their incredibly busy schedule during this period, May considers, "We had to be immersed in it, or we wouldn't have survived it. It was an incredibly exciting time." To confirm the band's extraordinary trajectory during 1974, they sold out a further two nights at the Rainbow, November 19 and 20.

All three of the band's landmark London shows from that year are now

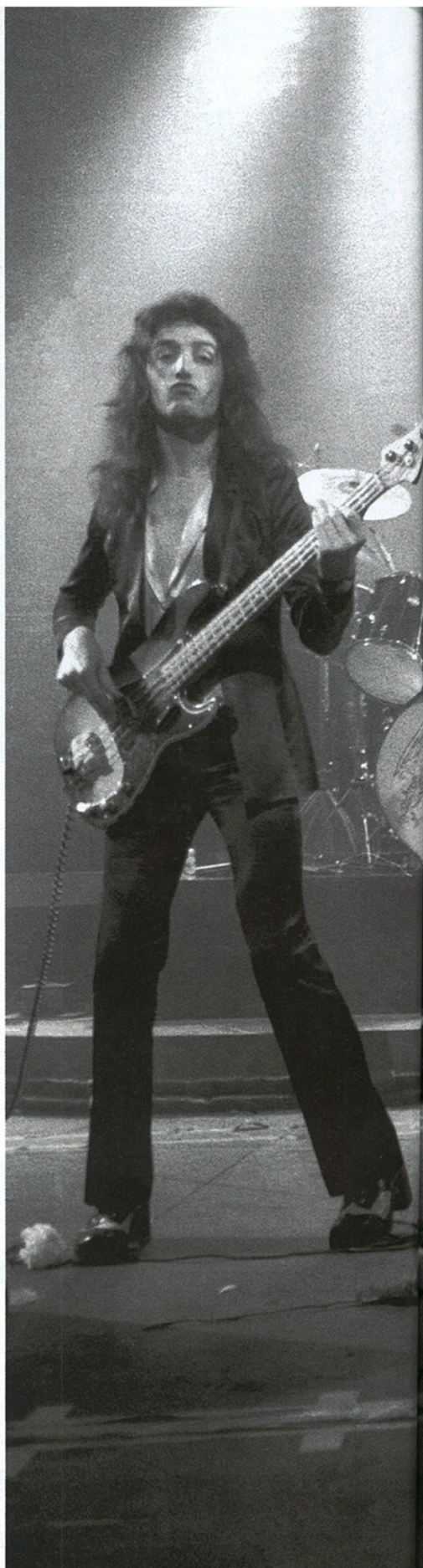
collected on a new *Queen Live At The Rainbow '74* album (reviewed p91), which catches the band as they begin to enter their imperial phase. Directly below, in a new interview, Brian May recounts life on the road in 1974, from the Cleethorpes Winter Gardens to the stage at the Rainbow. Meanwhile, on page 57, we return to November 1, 1974 with a piece from the *Melody Maker* archives, where Chris Welch meets Freddie Mercury in a deserted hotel bar in Liverpool...

UNCUT: The March 1974 tour finds you playing venues like the Cleethorpes Winter Gardens and the Century Ballroom, Taunton. What was life like on the provincial touring circuit in the early '70s?

BRIAN MAY: It was all new to us. We were becoming a headline act, which we did fairly quickly. It all sold out, and it was very exciting. All this, as a bonus to the fact we thought we were making good music and we were enjoying the artistic side of it. We were boys, and it was an incredible adventure.

So how are you travelling from gig to gig at this point?

I think we were still in a Winnebago. We used to sleep in that, as well, but we pretty soon got fed up with that and checked into hotels. But there wasn't very much money to be made. I don't think we ever made money on tour until 1986. Because in addition to working our way up the levels, we always spent too much on the show. We were always into our toys and ●



Queen live in London,
1974: "It was an incredibly
exciting time for us..."



● lights and sound and production. We were always living beyond our means, which was fun to do. But we didn't care. We didn't really have our eye on how much money we were making, we were just enjoying the trip, really. It was only when there was a bit of a break and we thought, 'Hang on, our managers are driving Rolls-Royces and building swimming-pools and we're still on £25 a week.' It was pretty strange, but that was more a feeling of being taken advantage of.

How were Queen developing as a band during this period?

On all fronts, really. When things are starting up, you think, 'I'll do this for a while, it'll be fun, then I'll get a proper job. It'll never be sustainable.' Then you suddenly turn around and think, 'Oh, hang on, this is becoming what I do.' The more

"The press were telling us we were rubbish but the public response was great"

BRIAN MAY

you do something, no matter what it is, the better you get at it. Especially if you're completely immersed in it every day of your life. You become a touring animal or a recording animal and your skills develop very fast. So you go through quite a transformation, and part of it is letting go – you have to let go of your home life, because it disappears. You can't do that any more, you have to be committed to what you're doing.

In what ways would that manifest itself?

The group becomes your family. We were completely committed. In a sense, you have to let even your friends go at home. Your real friends understand that. I still have a couple of great friends from that period, but they're the ones that

understood that was happening to me. The bubble that you had to live in.

What are your audiences like at this point?

It was a very genuine time for all of us. Those kind of tours make you learn your art and your craft. They knock the band into shape incredibly quickly. You're playing every night, in every situation. You're learning how an audience behaves. And you're actually developing an audience of your own. It's not just 'an' audience; it's 'your' audience. From that point on, it's a two-way communication. It really culminated in Wembley, 1986, when the audience became as important a part of the show as we are. If you could transport yourself back to those gigs, you'd find that most of the audience at a big rock gig would just sit there and not do anything but listen. They might bang their heads, but they wouldn't be standing and clapping, they wouldn't be singing all the words. It was something very special that happened with us. I was proud of the bond we formed with our audiences.

When was the idea first mooted to play the March 1974 Rainbow show?

It came from Mel Bush, who took us on as promoter. He took a chance. We weren't that big at the time. He booked a whole national tour of small theatres, really, but then he said, "By the time you do it, you will be able to fill the

Rainbow." We were quite surprised, because the Rainbow to us seemed like a distant destination, a bit of a dream because we'd seen some of our heroes play there. I remember, we all went to see David Bowie at the Rainbow and thought, 'My God, wouldn't that be incredible if one day we could do this.' So Mel Bush saying, "Yeah, you

can do that, boys," was exciting. It was the climax of the tour, our first real solid headlining gig in our home town, so monumental to us.

Do you have any specific memories of the show?

It was very warm. The place was filled with kids dressed up in the kind of costumes which were of a theme, like the *Queen II* black-and-white theme. Quite glamorous. It was an amazing thing to behold. For the first time, a London audience knew every word and were screaming and shouting. It's funny when you're so close to home, there's always a lot of pressure. But there's also a lot of real excitement. To be a hero in your hometown is odd, actually, but rather nice.

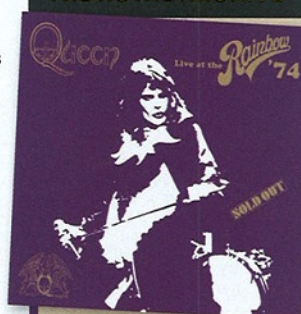
The Live At The Rainbow album was intended to be your third album...

...I've got to be honest, I don't remember that. It's obviously true, because all the documented evidence is there. But I don't remember the third album being a live album. It wasn't something that was in my memory as something important. To my mind, we just got on with making the next studio album. I don't know where that thought came from.

You contracted hepatitis on tour in the States.

Yes, I had to be flown back to the UK. I was extremely yellow. It was a bit of a shock. I had no idea what was happening, but obviously it was very bad. I woke up in hospital. Boston had been the place where we'd really broken through. So it was a real disappointment not being able to go on, because the tour was going really well. So I flew back to England. It turned out the diet they put me on for hepatitis aggravated the stomach condition I'd had for years. So I ended up back in hospital having surgery for stomach ulcers. In between all that, I thought I was recovered. We were in Rockfield recording *Sheer Heart Attack*, so after I'd been hospitalised and had the operation we resumed that and went back out on tour. It was a good job I had a quick recovery.

THE ROYAL ARCHIVE



NOW THAT Live At The Rainbow '74 is coming out, is there more material in the archive?

"There's quite a lot of live stuff in the archive in various states of repair," explains Brian May. "I think we all imagined that it was irretrievable. Bits of it were missing, it was not quite right technically. It's a great tribute to our team that they managed to reassemble it all and make it sound good – and look good, because I don't think we had all the film from the cameras. Roger and I were amazed at how good it sounds and looks. There were various bad transfers at the time, so they ditched all that and went back to all the source material and rescued what they could. It was bits of tape, all falling apart at the seams!"



Live in London '74: (l-r) Deacon, Mercury, Taylor and May

You're back on the road in October, 1974 for the Sheer Heart Attack tour. In what ways was that different from the Queen II tour?

There's a big influx of new material, so it's quite different in structure. We still don't have "Bohemian Rhapsody" or "We Are The Champions" or "We Will Rock You", but it's a very big, anthemic end to the show with "In The Lap Of The Gods... Revisited". Freddie's in his Zandra Rhodes frocks, of course, which he debuted on the Queen II tour. Zandra was great, she was part of assembling the image. We organically grew into it, very much fuelled by Freddie's love of style. He was a great influence.

So what could we expect if we'd attended the show at, say, Victoria Hall, Hanley on October 31?

I remember it very well, actually! You'd see a band of young boys making pretty heavy music, very energetic music, but with a lot of melodic content and a lot of harmonies. We were very keen on our harmonies at the time. The show was already quite theatrical. We had this belief, which was unusual in those days, that actually presentation was important and it was part of the show. So, yes, you could go onstage and keep your back to the audience and wear jeans and play your music and hope that everybody got it. But actually that two hours onstage was an opportunity to present a completely rounded show in every way: big sound, big lights, a big presence, costumes, the whole bit, even make-up in those days. It wasn't a particularly normal thing to do at the time. Although there was the glam rock thing, that was a little different from what we were. We weren't very close to the Sweet or Slade or whatever. It wasn't quite the same thing. We were more theatrical and dressy-uppy, if you see what I mean.

You returned to the Rainbow for two shows in November. How did you up the ante on the March show?

These things are a barometer for us. We're looking for signs that we're doing things right. The fact that you sell a venue out twice rather than once is a nice confirmation that things are growing. It feels like you're building and who knows where you can end up. That was a great feeling, to go back to the Roundhouse and sell it out twice. A feeling of going in the right direction, I guess. It helps to build your inner strength, especially at a time when, as usual, the press were very much against us.

In what way?

They seemed to be trying to tell us we were rubbish. But the fact that the response from the public was so great and growing so fast was a help to us. Our view of the press has never been very good since then.

So there you are with Zandra Rhodes costumes, playing these regional dates: what are the facilities like at the venues?

Pretty basic. Behind the exterior they were not glamorous at all! We'd turn up to tiny dressing rooms and make the best of it. It was part of the fun. We were personally penniless. We didn't have an extravagant lifestyle. But it was fun!

MICHAEL BONNER

Persian popinjay
Freddie Mercury in
his Zandra Rhodes
outfit, London 1974



**TAKEN FROM MELODY MAKER,
NOVEMBER 9, 1974**

"P EOPLE THINK I'M an ogre at times. Some girls hissed at me in the street... 'You devil.' They think we're really nasty. But that's only onstage. Offstage, well I'm certainly not an ogre." Freddie Mercury is a star, nevertheless.

The first real rock supremo since Robert Plant or Rod Stewart.

Exuding élan, arrogance and stagecraft, he has emerged at the head of Queen to claim his crown. And step aside all ye who scoff or mock, for Queen are trundling ahead with inexorable momentum.

Freddie was shouting at me in the deserted bar of a Liverpool hotel at 11am on Saturday. No — he wasn't expressing anger at recent *MM* criticisms of the band. He was just trying to make himself heard above the noise of a woman sucking at a carpet full of cigarette ash, with her Holiday Inn vacuum-cleaner.

"Oh my dear, she's coming this way."

"I get more from the crowd when they're going wild... it brings more out of me!"

FREDDIE MERCURY

Freddie sighed as the din grew louder.

Fastidious, elegant, he maintained an even temper, despite the ravages of last night's celebrations. Many bottles of champagne had been consumed in the aftermath of a riotous reception for the boys at Liverpool's stately, if somewhat battered Empire.

Inevitably, thoughts had turned to another group of long ago, who caused similar scenes as they trod those hallowed boards. Oddly enough, Brian May, Queen's fleet-fingered lead guitarist, uses AC-30-watt amplifiers, just like The Beatles.

But Queen's music is from the '70s — not the '60s. Cleverly arranged, carefully timed, delivered with maximum effort to create the greatest impact, it works on a young and receptive audience like a bombshell. Forget eight-year-olds screaming at the Osmonds. Their big brothers and sisters are learning how to yell again.

"Yes, I like an audience to respond like that," Freddie was saying. "Maybe we'd like them to sit down and listen to some of the songs, but I get a lot more from them when they're going wild; it brings more out of me."

Q Ueen ARE A strange, refreshing bunch. They are in that happy position in a band's history, when the first wave of excitement and success is breaking over them. Events are moving rapidly. Singles and album hits in Britain. America is within their grasp and beckoning seductively. Yet their image may have served to confuse and sow seeds of suspicion.



Queen take tea at Freddie Mercury's flat, Holland Road, West Kensington, London, in early 1974

● Like any band achieving success too quickly for the media's liking, they are under-fire, although they seem more disappointed with the critics than hostile. The whole situation is an exact replica of Led Zeppelin back in 1969, when they were first deluged with self-righteous cries of abuse.

Perhaps Queen have gone about the business of forming a successful group with too much skill and intelligence. And yet they cannot be blamed for wanting to avoid the mistakes of their forebears. They have the example of the last 10 years of triumph and failure in the world of rock music to study, and they have profited from the examination.

Like many of Britain's most significant rock talents, Queen are collegians who have abandoned their degree courses for the lure of showbiz.

Freddie Mercury, in fact, has a degree in graphic art. Roger Meddows-Taylor, their drummer, studied dentistry and has a degree in biology. Brian May, incredibly, is an infra-red astronomer, and could become a doctor if he completed his studies. When Concorde raced the sun to study an eclipse, he was in line to join the team of scientists on board.

John Deacon, their bass guitarist, has a degree in electronics. If ever the band's stage equipment presents a problem, then the roadies are tempted to call on him for expert advice.

Their amiable, efficient American manager, Jack Nelson, is somewhat in awe of them. "Freddie designed the group's logia, y'know, and he never even told me. If you look, you'll see it encompasses the four astrological signs of the group. Freddie's a Virgo."

Jack has managed the band since they first emerged from London's Trident Studios. "They go to Japan after they've been to the States in

April. It's funny, they are the number one group in Japan, above Jethro Tull, Yes and ELP, and even Deep Purple, and they used to OWN Japan. But they've never seen Queen yet – it's all through the *Queen II* album."

"IT WAS VERY POPPY AND UNREAL..."

FEBRUARY, 1974. Just over a week before the *Queen II* tour begins, the band are invited to perform their new single, "Seven Seas Of Rhye" on *Top Of The Pops*, filling in at the last minute for

David Bowie. They record an alternate backing track at Eel Pie Studios and on February 24, record their first appearance for the TV show. The single peaks at No 10.

"It's hard to even remember now what *TOTP* was like," says May. "It was a very formulaic show and most people mimed.

It was very poppy and unreal and most of us who followed a serious road towards making music didn't like it. Nevertheless, it was your vehicle for being seen by more people. Suddenly, there's an explosion of awareness. So to get on there was a big break for us, it really was. We were shoved on at the last minute and it was done in the studio with no audience, as there was a strike going on. It was thrown together very quickly, but it made a big difference. Suddenly, the record's charting and this whole kick comes in from outside."



Meanwhile the vacuum-cleaner roared in ever decreasing circles. "I'm feeling less than sparkling this morning," said Freddie, who admitted that the concert had been exhausting, even before the champagne took its toll.

Sheer Heart Attack, their third album, just released, had already received a dose of press abuse. How did Mercury react?

"The album is very varied, we took it to extremes, I suppose, but we are very interested in studio techniques and wanted to use what was available. We learnt a lot about technique while we were making the first two albums. Of course, there has been some criticism, and the constructive criticism has been very good for us.

"But to be frank I'm not that keen on the British music press, and they've been pretty unfair to us. I feel that up-and-coming journalists, by and large, put themselves above the artists.

"They've certainly been under a misconception about us. We've been called a supermarket hype. But if you see us up on a stage, that's what we're all about. We are basically a rock band. All the lights and all the paraphernalia are only there to enhance what we do.

"I think we are good writers – and we want to play good music, no matter how much of a slugging we get. The music is the most important factor.

"This is our first headline tour, and the buzz has got around, without any support from the media. I suppose they like to find their own bands, and we've been too quick for them.

"You see, when we started out, we wanted to try for the best. The best management, the best record deal, we didn't want any compromise, and we didn't want to get ripped-off. So far, it has paid off.

"In America, we've broken the ice already. As you know, we started a tour there last year, supporting Mott The Hoople, but Brian was taken ill and we had to come back. But we had a Top 30 album hit there, we've undertaken a huge

project, but it's all good fun."

How long did Queen spend in planning their project of world domination?

"You make it sound so preconceived!" Freddie protested. Mercifully the cleaning device wailed to a halt, and helped dampen a threatened Mercurial outburst.

"Believe it or not – it was spontaneous! It grew and grew, and remember, we'd all been in bands before, so we had plenty of experience of what NOT to do, and not be flabbergasted by the first rosy offer.

"That's how much planning went into it. This isn't overnight success, you know, we've been going for four years! We just got the right people to work for us, and the right company, and it's taken a long time.

"And yet we've been accused of being a hype, compared to bands we've never even heard of, and then finally told that we didn't even write our own songs. That hurt. Right from the start we have been writing our own songs, and that was the whole point – to come up with some ORIGINAL songs.

"In this country, to gain respect in a short while seems very difficult, and the papers like to feel they have you in their grasp. Well – we slipped out of their grasp."

However, Freddie is the first to admit that there can be dissent within the group, as well as without. "We tend to work well under pressure. But do we row? Oh my dear, we're the bitchiest band on earth. You'll have to spend a couple of days with us. We're at each other's THROATS. But if we didn't disagree, we'd just be yes-men, and we do get the cream in the end."

THE GIG: AN atmosphere approaching bedlam is prevalent inside the Empire, long before Queen emit a hint of activity behind the sombre barrier of the safety curtain. Hustler have come and gone, and now the audience are hungry for action. Bad reviews? Supermarket rock? Thousands of Queen's Liverpool supporters look suspiciously as if they couldn't care neither jot nor tittle.

They whistle and chant and clap with all the precision of the football terraces. The ancient cry of "Wally!" still heard in northern territories, echoes around the faded gilt décor.

Jack Nelson is intrigued by the cry, wonders if Wally are a local group and wants to sign them, until informed that Bob Harris already has a stake in the real thing.

Mersey accents boom over the PA: "We do apologise for the technical hitch, it's to do with the PA system and we are assured the show will start in two, three, four minutes."

More whistles, as tough-looking lads in white trousers and combat jackets with ELP

1974 TOUR STATS!

QUEEN II TOUR

Tour rehearsals venue: Ealing Film Studios

Opening show: March 1, Blackpool Winter Gardens

Last show: May 11, Uris Theatre, New York

No of shows played: 41

Support band: Nutz

Riot took place at: Stirling University (March 16) when Queen failed to return to the stage after three encores

Ticket price for Blackpool Winter Gardens show: £1 (£1.10 on the door)

SHEER HEART ATTACK TOUR

Opening show: October 30, Palace Theatre, Manchester

Last show: December 13, Palacio De Los Deportes, Spain

No of shows played: 29

Support band: Hustler

Stalls ticket price for Rainbow show: £1.75

and Jethro Tull emblazoned on the back, pass beer bottles and conduct the audience with cheeky gestures.

It's all in fun and the only mild aggro comes when Queen's entourage from London try to claim their seats near the front. "Fuck off!" directs one youth as PR Tony Brainsby pleads for his seat. "All these seats are taken, up to that gentleman there," says Tony, pointing at me.

Ribald laughter from the watching stalls, and repeated cries of "Ooh – Gentleman!" Grousing, the seat pirates eventually relinquish their hold, with dark mutterings of: "All right, but we'll see you outside."

The battle was in vain, for as the party took their seats, the safely curtain went up, and the audience rushed forward. Instantly, the house lights went up again and the curtain jerked uncertainly down.

A nervous man with face ashen of hue appeared at the side of the stage clad in incongruous evening dress, as if he were the master of ceremonies and this was old tyme music hall.

"There is no way we are going to start..." he began. "All you have to do is enjoy the show..." But there was a way. Somebody turned a blinding spotlight on the managerial figure, and he retired defeated, as the curtain halted in mid descent and began a jerky upward movement.

Within seconds most of the audience were standing up to gaze desperately at the darkened empty stage, and there they were – shadowy figures bounding towards the waiting instruments. The lights blazed, and there was evil Fred, clad all in white, the archetypal demon

rock singer, pouting and snarling: "Queen is back. What do you think of that?"

A tumultuous roar indicated that the mob were well disposed to the idea.

It was difficult to assess the early part of the band's performance because the fans with that wonderful selfishness of clamorous youth, decided to stand on their seats, their bodies screening both sight and sound.

As a non-paying guest, I was not too worried on my account, but felt sorry for the kids at the back who had paid their cash.

Retiring to the back of the theatre, and giving up the hard-won seats, we watched the scenes of tumult, including a boy on crutches, perhaps unable to see, but desperately waving his steel supports in supplication.

The band's strategy and appeal began to take shape as they tore through such dramatic pieces as "Now I'm Here", "Ogre Battle", "Father To Son", and "White Queen" from the second album. Roger's drums are the band's workhorse, punching home the arrangements, and mixing a sophisticated technique with violent attack. Roger says his favourite drummer is John Bonham. Brian is a fervent, emotional guitarist, who is like a Ronno-figure to Freddie, and is obviously a gifted musician. The onstage attention is judiciously divided between them, and when May takes a solo on his homemade guitar, Mercury leaves the stage, only to return in a stunning new costume.

Into a medley now, and apart from their slickness, and Freddie's dynamic presence, the extra power of almost choral vocal harmonies is appreciated, something that few bands with a central lead singer can achieve.

The camper aspects of Queen are displayed in "Leroy Brown", a gay, Dixieland tune that Freddie insists is inspired by the Pointer Sisters.

Then their first hit "Seven Seas Of Rhye", and a lunatic tempo on "Stone Cold Crazy", "Liar", and the finale from "Lap Of The Gods".

Dry ice began to envelop the stage, and as red light glowed through the fog, group and audience took on an eerie aspect, like a scene from some Wagnerian forest, as arms waved like young saplings in a night breeze.

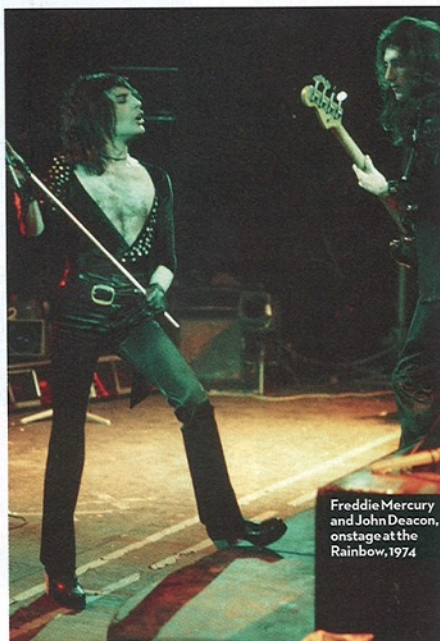
Then an explosion of white light, and two red flares burn over a deserted stage. Queen have gone, signalling a desperate roar of "MORE!"

After some three minutes, the band responded to the insistent demand: "We want Queen," Wally having been long forgotten. Into "Big Spender", with its slow, measured pace and finally "Modern Times Rock'n'Roll", an apt anthem for a group of our times.

The band are still developing, and their mixture of heavy rock and glamorous display might seem curious.

But as Queen makes its royal tour of the land, the effect on their subjects is to inspire unmitigated loyalty. And amid predictions of gloom for the British rock scene, it is a healthy and encouraging spectacle. **© CHRIS WELCH**

Queen: Live At The Rainbow '74 is released on September 8 by Virgin/EMI



Freddie Mercury and John Deacon, onstage at the Rainbow, 1974

UNCUT

New Albums



QUEEN

Live At The Rainbow '74

VIRGIN

8/10

The funky metal years

This box documents two gigs at the Finsbury Park Rainbow from a pivotal year in Queen's history, when the single "Killer Queen" transformed these much-derided glam metal also-rans into a chart-topping, piano-based studio rock outfit. The first concert accompanied the *Queen II* LP tour of March '74 and, throughout, Freddie Mercury hardly touches the "jangle box" (as Brian May describes the piano before "The Fairy Feller's Master Stroke"). Instead, this is a metal band dominated by May's monstrous riffs: from the Black Sabbath-sized sludge rock of "Son And Daughter" to the Hendrix-isms of "Great King Rat". The second gig, recorded just after the launch of *Sheer Heart Attack* eight months on, sees Mercury's piano starting to occupy centrestage (especially on "In The Lap Of The Gods") and adding a vaudevillian touch to "Bring Back Leroy Brown". Both gigs also prove that those operatic harmonies weren't just studio creations – "Ogre Battle" shows all four bandmembers interspersing the galloping doom metal with squealing, pitch-perfect chorales. They hadn't quite mastered the arena rock swagger showcased on 1979's *Live Killers*, but this is a more satisfying collection.

EXTRAS: Seven packages, some of which

7/10

include a DVD/Blu-ray of the November gig. A Super Deluxe Box features a 60-page hardback book and reproductions of tickets, brochures and memorabilia. **JOHN LEWIS**