

## Why Freddie Mercury?

Even 30 years after his death, Freddie Mercury is one of the best known British musicians. Mercury is an interesting subject for celebrity studies because he allows to analyse the dynamics between gender and Race in popular music. Queen's music videos oftentimes contain a multitude of references to their earlier music videos, therefore Queen and Mercury are a prime example to show how artists can construct their own image through visuals.

### Contexts

I will use approaches from gender studies and Critical Race Studies as well as celebrity studies with a focus on popular music.

He is often referred to as a shy person with an extroverted stage persona -> the idea that the „real person“ behind a public persona is unknown became a part of Mercury's image

### Keywords

**Symbolism** – How did Mercury and Queen use (British) symbolism?

**Gender** – Did Mercury's bi-/homosexuality influence the way he was perceived by the media? How did Queen and Mercury “play” with gender norms?

**Identity** – Was Mercury's Parsee heritage a part of his public persona or was it “hidden”?

**Self-reflexiveness** – What role does it play in the construction of Mercury's public persona?

**Britishness** – How is it connected to the keywords above?

# Freddie Mercury

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## Queen's band logo and the Royal Coat of Arms

- They strongly resemble each other; instead of animals representing England and Scotland, the animals in Queen's logo represent the band members' star signs
- The band name *Queen* not only refers to the Queen of England but also to drag queens
- Also frequently used in their live shows: the Union Jack, a crown and an ermine cape
- Royal Coats of Arms, Union Jack and regalia are the ultimate symbols of Great Britain
- Using these symbols is seen as a way in which Mercury as a homosexual immigrant claimed Britishness



Freddie Mercury – The Great Pretender (Official Video Remastered) 00:01:44

## The Great Pretender – music video analysis

- The video uses most of the symbolism used in earlier Queen videos: the crown, the ermine cape, the flamboyant outfits
- features Mercury (and R. Taylor) in drag -> a kind of “pretending” and reminiscent of the I Want to Break Free music video (which was negatively received in the United States for the cross-dressing it contains)
- Supports the idea that a performer is a pretender with countless incarnations whose „real“ identity is unknown to the public
- ends with Mercury standing among a large amount of life sized cut-outs of himself

## Sexuality and Identity

- In the 1980's he adopted the so called *clone look* (moustache, short hair, muscular, tight jeans) that was popular among gay men (Fouché, Paul J.P., et al 2018)
- His death of HIV: he became a target for homophobia
- Queen's music videos used a camp aesthetic (Botescu-Sirețeanu 2019)
- The fact that he was an immigrant never became a part of his public persona
- The name change from Farrokh Bulsara to the more English sounding Freddie Mercury suggests that the non-British heritage should be hidden

## Conclusion

- Mercury's sexuality contributed significantly to his public persona while his identity as an immigrant hardly became a factor in the construction of Mercury's stage persona at all
- Mercury's ongoing popularity is still a major factor in the economic success of Queen to this day (merchandise, ticket sales, film adaptation of Mercury's life)

## Literature Cited

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