



If you're looking for a deep dive into Queen lead singer Freddie Mercury's relationships with his bandmates, or insight into Mercury's songwriting process, or even a historically accurate chronological account of the band's formation and rise to fame, you won't get it in Bryan Singer's biopic, *Bohemian Rhapsody*.

On the other hand, if you'd like to spend a couple of hours awash in Queen music and in awe of Rami Malek's extraordinary talent, get thee to the theater pronto.

*Bohemian Rhapsody's* screenplay is rife with factual inaccuracies and timeframe adjustments, all clearly designed to make for a more cinematic and emotional experience. Just as one must often give up her allegiance to the source material in order to enjoy a novel adaptation, *Bohemian Rhapsody* asks the audience to go on a journey that is more about a passion for music and performance than it is about adhering strictly to "the original."

That journey follows Mercury from young adulthood (when his name was still Farrokh Bulsara) through Queen's incomparable performance at Live Aid in 1985. It chronicles his relationship with lifelong friend Mary Austin (about whom he wrote the song "Love of My Life" and who received the majority of his estate upon his death); band members Brian May, Roger Taylor, and John Deacon; band manager Paul Prenter (portrayed in the role of the film's villain for the purposes of cinematic narrative); and the beginning of his relationship with Jim Hutton, whom he lived with from 1985 until his death in 1991.

The events in the film are engaging, and the film's 134 minutes speed by thanks to quick pacing, great performances, and (of course) terrific music. Malek's performance as Mercury, in particular, is incredible.

There are plenty of humorous moments and "here's an imagined version of the birth of another song you're familiar with" musical sequences, and the screenwriters' adjustment of chronology guarantees that the hankies come out at exactly the right time.

For me though, in spite of Malek's nigh perfect transformation into Mercury's stage persona, I missed the connection to the man who was once Farrokh Bulsara, a somewhat shy, uncomfortable Indian "outcast" with bad teeth and a desire to keep his homosexuality hidden from the world.

This was not Malek's fault. If fault exists, it is with the screenwriters, who packed as many events into the movie as possible, often rushing through years at a time to hit all the high notes (so to speak).

This may have been because much of what was going on during those off-screen periods wasn't terribly attractive, and in order for the film's climax to work, the audience has to sympathise with Mercury.

Excessive partying, sexual debauchery, and drug use are alluded to, but they're downplayed significantly, and the script even goes so far as to imply that these behaviors were simply a brief phase Mercury went through, inspired by the peer pressure of villain, Paul Prenter.

The problem is, the filmmakers actually disconnect the audience from Mercury's true self by implying that his unhealthy choices (specifically those that led to his contracting AIDS) would not have been made if it had not been for Paul Prenter's influence.

Portraying Freddie Mercury as his lover's puppet strips him of his magnetic power and turns him into a caricature of a tragic hero.

Additionally, while the scenes depicting the band creating some of Queen's most iconic songs are fun, they lack soul. In the end, Queen's creative process feels more like something out of *Glee* than a brilliant combination of musical talent and unconventional genius.

That's not to say that I didn't get home and add some Queen songs I'd forgotten about to my Spotify playlist. Nor does it take anything away from the film's great energy and passion. But I still don't feel like I know anything more about off-stage Freddie Mercury than I did before I watched the film, and that's a disappointment.

Final Grade B