

Killer Queen Queen

Tonality/Harmony

- Tonic key is Eb major – unusual for rock music
- Ambiguous as opens with a C minor chord
- Many passing modulations
- Fast harmonic rhythm (2, 3 or 4 chords per bar)
- Parallel vocal harmonies (b. 14-17)
- Short, detached chords at the start
- Most chords in root position (some 1st or 2nd inversion)
- Chromatic bassline and guitar (b. 7)
- Lots of 7th chords (b. 4)
- Pedal point (b. 27-30)
- Circle of 5th (b. 20-21)
- Altered chords and extended chords (b. 47 - F11)

Rhythm/Metre/Tempo

- Moderato 112 BPM
- 12/8 compound quadruple time
- Extra 6/8 bars added, to extend the phrase (b. 10)
- Swung feel
- Frequent syncopation
- Anacrusis before verses and choruses
- Frequent syncopation (b. 44-46)
- Triplets (b. 18)

Instrumentation

- Lead vocals and backing vocals
- High male tenor & falsetto
- Piano, overdubbed with honky-tonk piano
- Electric guitar (up to 4 parts)
- Bass guitar
- Drum kit (+ bell in b. 29)
- Guitars and vocals are overdubbed
- Variety of guitar and recording techniques used

Music Technology

Panning – moving the recorded sound to left or right speaker (bars 55-61 & 73-74)
EQ – adjusting the low, mid and high frequencies
Reverb – adding ‘space’ to the sound, as if changing the physical environment
Flanger – an effect used to create a swirling or swooshing sound - ‘laserbeam’
Wah-wah - filtering the sound using a rocker pedal (think 70’s cop shows and funky music!). Listen to the start of Verse 3.
Distortion/overdrive – creates a rougher, more gritty sound on a guitar.

Guitar Techniques

- **String bends**  - distorts/changes pitch
- **Picking** - detached or separated
- **Sliding**  - slides between pitches
- **Pull -offs** - smooth change of pitch downwards
- **Hammer-on** - smooth change of pitch upwards
- **Vibrato**  - fluctuating pitch
- **Palm Mute (P.M)**  - alters timbre of notes

Structure Texture

- Verse-Chorus Form**
- Intro finger clicks
 - Verse 1
 - Chorus 1
 - Instrumental
 - Verse 2
 - Chorus 2
 - Guitar solo (2 parts)
 - Verse 3
 - Chorus 3
 - Outro

- Mainly homophonic
- Overdubbed vocals, use of layering
- Guitar imitates melody (b.44)
- Imitation (guitar b.3&4, b.48)
- 3-part guitar texture (b. 50)
- Panning in backing vocals (b. 42-3)
- Panning creates antiphonal effect

- Syllabic word setting
- Anacrusis before verses and choruses
- Chromatic descending sequence (b. 7-8) in guitar and bass
- Some spoken text (b. 38)
- Mostly conjunct with small leaps
- Some larger leaps (b. 6-7 = major 6th) (b. 62 = octave leap)
- Portamento slide on “Queen” (b. 15)
- Backing vocals a mix of words and vocables
- “Laser beam” word painting (flanger) (b. 17)

Melody

Context

- Written by Freddie Mercury
- Featured on album ‘Sheer Heart Attack’ by Queen, British Rock band
- Rock piece with musical theatre qualities
- Theatrical elements
- Composed in 1974
- Lyrics are about an upper-class prostitute