

'Killer Queen' from *Sheer Heart Attack* (Queen)

Audio 4

'Killer Queen' was written by Freddie Mercury and featured on Queen's 1974 album *Sheer Heart Attack*. It was their first single of many to enter the charts.

The rock band Queen formed at the start of the 1970s. They soon had their classic line-up of singer Freddie Mercury, guitarist Brian May, bassist John Deacon and drummer Roger Taylor. By the mid-1970s they were one of the most popular bands in the world. Their musical style is hard to categorise but it has elements of rock blended with music hall, pseudo-classical arrangements, a mock operatic vocal sound and layered guitars. With their enormous, visually spectacular tours, Queen, led by Freddie Mercury's over-the-top theatrical performances, were unsurpassed at stadium rock. Freddie Mercury was a proficient pianist and an accomplished singer with a wide vocal range.

Following the score

'Killer Queen' here uses a short score. Whereas a full score usually has a separate staff for each instrument, a short score sometimes has more than one instrument per staff and shows only the important elements. In this score there is often more than one electric guitar on a staff. **Articulation signs** have been included in the guitar parts showing, for example, **slides** from one note to the next, **bends** (where the string is bent to raise the pitch of the note) and **vibrato**, where the pitch of a note is fluctuated to add warmth.

Structure

The song is in **verse and chorus** form. The overall structure is:

Verse 1	Chorus 1	Instrumental	Verse 2	Chorus 2	Guitar solo
Verse 3	Chorus 3	Outro			

'Killer Queen' is unusual for a pop song in that it has a **compound time signature** – $\frac{12}{8}$. Most pop songs are in $\frac{4}{4}$ (which is **simple time**). The song has a striking opening – six finger clicks leading into the first verse, followed by simple piano chords giving a steady four-in-a-bar beat. This beat is maintained throughout most of the song.

Freddie Mercury was a talented singer. The vocal line includes wide leaps, covers a wide range and includes **syncopated** rhythms throughout. Much use was made of **multi-tracking** in the recording of 'Killer Queen'. Brian May recorded each of the multiple guitar parts that you can hear in the instrumental sections and then **overdubbed** them. The multi-layered backing vocals were also overdubbed. They are used to add depth to the chorus melody and to fill in between phrases in the second verse.

What to listen for

- Most of the song is in $\frac{12}{8}$ (four beats in a bar) but there are a few bars in $\frac{6}{8}$ (two beats in a bar), e.g. bar 10. Listen for these changes in time signature.
- What is the range of the vocal line?
- Describe the melodic material of the lead guitar.
- How does the song end?

Wider listening

Verse and chorus songs are commonly found in popular music. 'God only knows' by the Beach Boys (1966) and ABBA's song 'Super Trouper' (1980) are both good catchy examples of the form. In common with 'Killer Queen', 'God only knows' makes much use of overdubbing and adventurous harmony.

'Killer Queen' from *Sheer Heart Attack*

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Words and Music by Freddie Mercury

$\text{♩} = 112$

Verse 1 Cm

Vocals

She keeps a Mo - ët et Chan - don_

Piano

Electric Guitars

Drums (finger clicks)

4 B^{b7} Cm B^{b7} E^b

in her pret - ty ca - bi-net. 'Let them eat cake,'_ she says, just like_ Ma-rie An-toi-nette. A

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7

Gm/D E^b7/D^b A^b A^bm E^b/B^b

built - in a - re - me - dy for Krush - chev and Ken - ne - dy, at a - ny time an in - vi - ta - tion

Ooh

Gtr. 1

10

B^b11 B^b7 G⁷ Cm

you can't de - cline. Ca - vi - ar and ci - ga - rettes,

13 B^b E^b D⁷ Gm F B^b Dm

Chorus 1

well versed in e-ti-quette, ex-tr'or-di-na-ri-ly nice. She's a kill-er queen,

16 Gm Dm Gm A⁷ Dm G⁷ F⁷/A G⁷/B C

gun - pow - der, ge-la-tine, dy-na-mite with a la-ser beam. N' gua-ran-tee'd to blow your mind.

Ba, ba, ba, ba,

19 B^b A Dm G⁷ C

Ooh, re-com-mend - ed at the price, in - sa - tia - ble an ap-pe-tite,

gwa a - ny - time,

22

B^b F B^b/F F¹¹ B^b/F F¹¹

Instrumental

wan-na try?

Gtr. 1 Gtr. 3 8va

25

F B^b E^b/G F¹¹ F B^b E^b/G Cm

Verse 2 To a - void com - pli - ca - tions she

8va

28 B^b7/C Cm B^b7/C E^b

ne - ver kept the same ad - dress, in con - ver - sa - tion she spoke just like a ba - ron - ess.

Gtr. 2

31 Gm/D E^b7/D^b A^b A^bm E^b/B^b

Met a man from Chi - na, went down to Gei - sha Mi - nah, but then a - gain in - ci - dent - 'ly if you're

Ooh A kill - er, a kill - er, she's a

Gtr. 1

40 Gm Dm Gm A⁷ Dm G⁷ F⁷/A G⁷/B C

gun - pow - der, ge - la - tine, dy - na - mite with a la - ser beam, gua - ran - teed to blow your mind. Ba, ba, ba, ba,

43 B^b A Dm A Dm

a - ny - time,

Guitar Solo

46 G Cm G Cm F11

Gtr. 1

Gtr. 3

Gtr. 4

49 Cm

Cm

52 Bb7/D Cm Bb7/C

Bb7/D

Cm

Bb7/C

8va

55 Cm/Eb Gm/D Eb7/D^b A^b A^bm Eb/B^b

(8)

Gtr. 2 8va

Gtr. 3

58 B^b11 B^b7 Eb/B^b B^b11 B^b7 Verse 3

Drop of a

62 G⁷ Cm G⁷ Cm B^b E^b

hat she's as will-ing as, — play - ful as a pus-sy cat, — then mo-men-ta - ri-ly out of ac - tion,

Ooh,

Gtr. 2 w/ wah--l

Gtr. 3 w/ wah--l

Gtr. 4 w/ wah---l

65 B^b E^b D⁷ Gm F B^b F

tem - po-ra-ri-ly out of gas, — to ab - so-lute - ly drive

ooh, — da, — da, — drive you wild, —

Gtr. 1

68 B^bm F B^b Dm

Chorus 3

She's all out to get you. — She's a kill-er queen, —

P.M.-----|

71 Gm Dm Gm A⁷ Dm G⁷ F⁷/A G⁷/B C

gun - pow - der, ge-la - tine, — dy na-mite_ with a la-ser beam. — gua-ran-teed_ to blow your mind. —

Ba, ba, ba, ba,

74

B^b A Dm G C

Ooh, re-com-mend - ed at the price, in - sa - tia - ble an ap-pe-tite, a-ny-time,

Detailed description: This system contains measures 74, 75, and 76. The vocal line starts with a rest in measure 74, then sings "Ooh, re-com-mend - ed at the price, in - sa - tia - ble an ap-pe-tite, a-ny-time," across measures 75 and 76. The piano accompaniment features chords B^b, A, Dm, G, and C. The guitar part has a triplet of eighth notes in measure 76.

77

B^b F B^b/F F¹¹ F B^b E^b/G

wan-na try? You wan-na try...?

Outro

Gtr. 1
Gtr. 2

Detailed description: This system contains measures 77, 78, and 79. The vocal line has a rest in measure 77, then sings "wan-na try?" in measure 78 and "You wan-na try...?" in measure 79. The piano accompaniment features chords B^b, F, B^b/F, F¹¹, F, B^b, and E^b/G. A box labeled "Outro" is placed above the piano part in measure 79. The guitar part includes two staves: Gtr. 1 and Gtr. 2, with various chordal and melodic lines.

80

F Bb Eb/G F Bb Eb

Musical score for measures 80-81. The score includes a vocal line with a fermata, a piano accompaniment with chords and moving lines, a guitar line with a 3/8 time signature, and a bass line with chords and eighth notes. Chords F, Bb, and Eb/G are indicated above the vocal line.

82

Repeat to fade

Musical score for measures 82-85. The score includes a vocal line with a repeat sign and a fermata, a piano accompaniment with chords and moving lines, two guitar lines (Gtr. 3 and Gtr. 4) with 8va markings, and a bass line with chords and eighth notes. The instruction "Repeat to fade" is present.