



The Main Feature

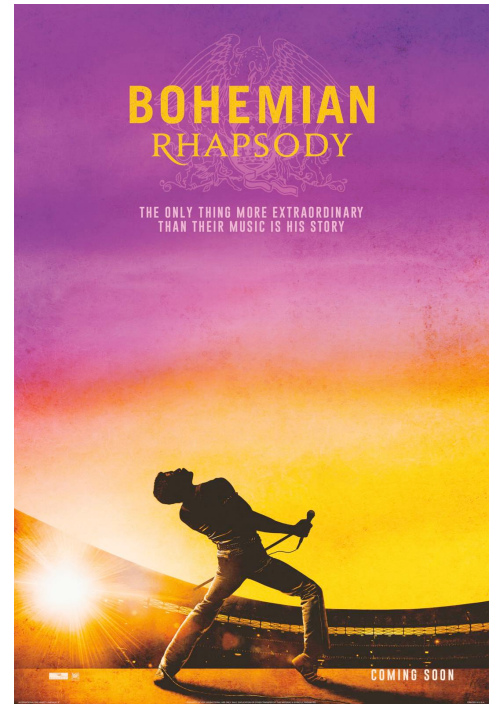
Season 40 – Issue 8 - Screening 9 January 2020

Bohemian Rhapsody

UK/USA, 2018

134 min, Certificate: 12A

Director	Bryan Singer
Screenplay	Anthony McCarten (from a story by McCarten & Peter Morgan)
Cinematographer	Newton Thomas Sigel
Music & Film Editing	John Ottman
Cast	
Rami Malek	Freddie Mercury
Gwilym Lee	Brian May
Ben Hardy	Roger Taylor
Joseph Mazzello	John Deacon
Lucy Boynton	Mary Austin
Allen Leech	Paul Prenter



A musical biopic of the rock quartet Queen. They have been described as one of the most genre-eclectic bands in history, with their oeuvre covering progressive rock, heavy metal, foot-stomping arena anthems, romantic ballads, opera, pop-rock and everything in between. The group spent more weeks in the UK album chart than any other and was voted the “greatest British band in history” by BBC Radio 2 listeners in 2007.

The film covers the years between the group’s formation in 1970 and their triumphal appearance at Wembley Stadium for Live Aid in July 1985. The focus is their lead vocalist and pianist Freddie Mercury (born Farrokh Bulsara), a flamboyant, dentally-challenged, cat-loving extrovert who successfully provokes his fellow band members to expand the group’s range. The eponymous 6-minute long track was released in 1975 despite reservations from the band’s record company and indeed the other 3 members. A montage in the film captures the contemporary (very negative) reviews in the all-powerful music press despite which the record was the UK number 1 for nine weeks and kick-started the now ubiquitous music video format. The band enjoyed several years of chart success and sell-out tours all over the world, but by the early 1980s there were increasing tensions over individual album projects and Mercury’s destructive relationship with his manager and lover, Paul Prenter, who eventually sold a grubby “kiss and tell” story to the Sun (for £32,000). The group came back together for their Live Aid set (subsequently deemed the greatest-ever live performance in a 2005 music industry poll for Channel 4). Mercury tested HIV positive in the mid-1980s, and died of AIDS-related bronchopneumonia in November 1991 at the age of 45.

The film endured a very difficult gestation period. A treatment in 2010 was to star Sacha Baron Cohen as Mercury but after “creative differences” he left the project in 2013. A post-

Skyfall Ben Wishaw was then briefly attached. The film regained momentum in 2016, with Mercury to be played by Rami Malek, star of the Amazon series "Mr Robot" (no, me neither...). Production was well-advanced but unfinished when the director Bryan Singer was fired over "creative disagreements and unexplained absences." An (uncredited) Dexter Fletcher completed the film, which must have been good practice for his next assignment (helming the Elton John biopic "Rocketman").



Critical reaction was almost uniformly lukewarm. The Guardian (2 stars out of 5) opined that "the biopic bites the dust" whilst in a rare display of song-title led agreement across the political spectrum the Telegraph headlined their 3 star review with "Big on swaggering spectacle, but far from a killer Queen." The re-creation of the Live Aid concert was much-lauded and Rami Malek's performance complemented but most critics (and some Queen fans) decried numerous inaccuracies in the film, notably the timing of Mercury discovering his HIV diagnosis and telling the band members. Mercury's bisexuality is certainly not hidden but (in keeping with a 12A certificate) there's none of the bacchanalian excess associated with the rock and roll lifestyle and in some eyes the movie over-emphasises his long-running friendship with one-time fiancée Mary Austin at the expense of his gay relationships. In common with many biopics, it does fall prey to some irritating expository dialogue.

Audiences did not care. The tone was set right at the start of the film with a re-working of the 20th Century Fox fanfare, and the story zips along with energy, affection and invention. Yes, the rough edges of Mercury's life are sugar-coated, but (to coin a phrase) – is this the real life, is this just fantasy? No - it's a movie – and a crowd-pleaser par excellence.

The film opened strongly in the US and UK towards the end of 2018, and very positive word-of-mouth helped fill multiplexes around the world. A final global box office of \$904m represented the highest ever gross for a musical biopic/drama.

The film won four Oscars: Best Sound Editing, Best Sound Mixing, Best Film Editing and Best Actor in a Leading Role - Rami Malek. Writing for The Spectator, Toby Young described the film's success at the Academy Awards as "a triumph over snobby film critics." So there!

Malek also won the Golden Globe, Screen Actors Guild and BAFTA for Best Actor. As he is of Egyptian descent his awards drew congratulations from media and government figures there – but the film was still shorn of all gay-related content before it could be screened locally.

Eugene Smith

Eugene Smith muses on the relationship between music and the movies...

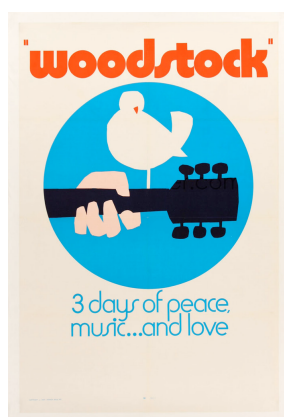
There's always been co-dependence between music and movies: biopics and musicals most obviously but consider too the number of musicians who succumb to the lure of celluloid and the frequency of soundtracks being hawked in the end-credits.

The Biopic – *Rocketman* (2019/Dexter Fletcher/15/121 mins)

Taron Egerton is Elton Hercules John. Several shades darker than *Bohemian Rhapsody* (though possibly the better film) it explicitly details Elton's demons (drink, drugs, sex and an inability to find the right outfit in M&S). The run-time on release in Russia was consequently cut by five minutes. Will it ever be shown there in full? I think it's gonna be a long, long time.

The Karaoke Special - *Mamma Mia* (2008/Phyllida Lloyd/PG/108 mins)

Abba's Greatest Hits sung by an all-star cast and linking a gorgeously photographed tale involving a wedding and bridal paternity. The sequel (2018) was less successful but spared us Pierce Brosnan singing.



The Concert Film – *Woodstock* (1970/Michael Wadleigh/15/184mins)

A sprawling record of The Who, Jimi Hendrix and (er) Sha Na Na performing over three days in a muddy field in upstate New York. Most of the young idealistic unkempt attendees are now pushing 70 – sobering that a fair proportion probably voted to Make America Great Again in 2016.

The Classic Experience – *Amadeus* (1984/Milos Forman/15/160 mins)

Tom Hulce plays Mozart, overcoming his jealous Court rival (Salieri, played by F Murray Abraham) and a patronising Emperor (Jeffrey Jones). Just the right number of notes (and in the right order).

The Power of Musical Celebrity – *Elvis and Nixon* (2016/Liza Johnson/15/86 mins)

Elvis made 31 wholly forgettable films (He Sings! He gets the Girl! He Sings some more!). This is the bizarre (true) story of how Presley (Michael Shannon) arrived unannounced at the White House in 1970 to offer a bemused President Nixon (Kevin Spacey) his services in the fight against drugs.

The 1st film from the 2nd best British Band [Radio 2 poll, 2007] - *A Hard Day's Night* (1964/Dick Lester/PG/87 mins)

Scripted by Alun Owen and with a fine supporting cast, the Beatles overcome mild peril to make it to a TV studio. Rush-released by United Artists as they feared the band were a "Hello-Goodbye" phenomenon.



The Evergreen – *A Star is Born* (filmed in 1937, 1954, 1976 and 2018)

An older (and troubled) man finds and grooms a younger female talent. Romance ensues. Alcohol intrudes. The latest version stars Bradley Cooper and Lady Gaga (who incidentally took her name from the Queen track "Radio Gaga").

And next? A biopic of *Culture Club* is in development: the "Live Aid moment" may be the lead singer's appearance on the BBC Question Time panel in 2000 - or maybe not. But keep those tartan-flecked flares hidden away – there are no current plans to make the *Bay City Rollers Story*.

Comments and reactions to: **Green Book**

No of reaction slips received = 40

Average score = 8.43

Score	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	~	~	~	~	~	~	~	2	23	11	4

A feel-good film. Good choice for Xmas

Entertaining, thought-provoking and amusing!

Pathos and humour in equal portions made a wonderful film. Acting excellent

A very sensitive subject brilliantly directed and acted

Much better than the usual Christmas film!

A wonderful film, which highlighted the prejudice against talented black performers, but in a light, humorous way

Just the right film for Christmas. Well done the committee

Poignant and affecting. Excellent performances. Well-timed selection for Christmas!

Great performances from the two leads – and some political points well made

A beautifully scripted and acted film

Perfect! Yes, I could see it again. Perfect Christmas choice by the committee

A feel-good film, funny but with serious undertones – excellent acting

Great script, great acting. Made me laugh, made me cry

Enjoyed the film immensely. A good choice by the club committee for our Christmas film

Really enjoyed a feel-good film to end the year

Delightful film – perfect for Christmas!

Funny and heart-warming – loved it

Excellent festive choice

My kind of film/music, and USA

Excellent choice for Christmas – really enjoyed it

Excellent

Let's hope every vote counts!

Position	Film	Average score
1	Green Book	8.43
2	The White Crow	7.29
3	Before the Flood	7.17
4	Stan and Ollie	6.92
5	Ballon (Balloon)	6.91
6	Todos lo saben (Everybody Knows)	6.71
7=	Sherlock Jr	6.52
7=	La Tortue Rouge (The Red Turtle)	6.52

Forthcoming attraction: 23 January 2020



Il capitale umano (Human Capital)

The destinies of two families are irrevocably tied together after a cyclist is run off the road by a jeep during the night before Christmas Eve.

“With its stylish lines and creamy production values, Human Capital combines the luxurious look of a classic wish-fulfilment fantasy with a stinging critique of capitalism's excesses and psychic costs.” Washington Post