

# THE BLOCKBUSTER BIOPIC BOHEMIAN RHAPSODY AS AN EXPRESSION OF CINEMA/ MUSIC SYNERGY

Jana RADOŠINSKÁ – Lenka RUSŇÁKOVÁ –  
Zuzana TOČENÁ – Martin SCHWARZ

## ABSTRACT:

The study focuses on *Bohemian Rhapsody* (2018, directed by Bryan Singer, later Dexter Fletcher), the biographical drama that reflects on the extraordinary lives and career patterns of the four members of the rock band Queen, predominantly the band's frontman, Freddie Mercury. Given the fact that this feature film has changed the way we perceive the economic potential of biopics entirely, we offer an overview of some of the reasons why it was so successful in terms of the globalised film industry. The main objective of the study is to outline the biographical drama's synergistic tendency in relation to the movie industry and the music business. Acknowledging *Bohemian Rhapsody*'s unprecedented global success, we work with the assumption that certain biographical dramas can, in fact, become globally popular, partly thanks to the fact that they utilise music as a nostalgia-driven narrative tool making portrayals of musicians deeper and more complex. The assumption is addressed via a theoretical reflection on the given topic and through a qualitative content analysis of the biographical drama *Bohemian Rhapsody*.

## KEY WORDS:

biographical drama, *Bohemian Rhapsody*, diegesis, film industry, film music, movie narrative, music industry, soundtrack

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## 1 Introduction: Synergy of the Music and Film Industries

The ways the film and music industries operate in the 21<sup>st</sup> century reflect the enormous influence international media conglomerates hold over the social, political and economic organisation of the globalised world. These segments may produce different kinds of content and services, but their economic activities are significantly intertwined due to direct or indirect ownership ties. The fact that the film and music industries



Assoc. Prof. PhDr. Jana Radošinská, PhD.  
Faculty of Mass Media  
Communication  
University of Ss. Cyril and  
Methodius in Trnava  
Nám. J. Herdu 2  
917 01 Trnava  
Slovak Republic  
jana.radosinska@ucm.sk

Jana Radošinská is affiliated with the Faculty of Mass Media Communication of the University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, Slovakia. Her scientific and research specialisation is based on critical analysis of media culture. She is interested in mainstream filmmaking, the terminological axis of media and communication studies, problems of the culture and entertainment industry, as well as the perspectives of understanding media audiences and digital games.



Mgr. Lenka Rusňáková, PhD.  
Faculty of Mass Media  
Communication  
University of Ss. Cyril and  
Methodius in Trnava  
Nám. J. Herdu 2  
917 01 Trnava  
Slovak Republic  
lenka.rusnakova@ucm.sk

Lenka Rusňáková works at the Faculty of Mass Media Communication of the University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, Slovakia. She deals with new trends in multimedia production and media philosophy. Her scholarly specialisation also includes the culture of digital games, the processes of identity formation in the virtual environment and the narratological frameworks of digital media, especially film works, music videos and digital games. She is also interested in issues of feminism in the sphere of media production, but also in heroism in the context of media culture.



Mgr. Zuzana Točená  
Faculty of Mass Media  
Communication  
University of Ss. Cyril and  
Methodius in Trnava  
Nám. J. Herdu 2  
917 01 Trnava  
Slovak Republic  
tocena1@ucm.sk

Zuzana Točená is a full-time PhD. student at the Faculty of Mass Media Communication of the University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, Slovakia. She is interested in film and episodic production in the context of so-called Internet-distributed television. In her scientific work to date, she has dealt with the original programming of the media companies Home Box Office and Netflix, focusing on the narrative, thematic and sociocultural aspects of various works produced by the named companies. She has practical experience acquired in the field of television production.



Mgr. art. Martin Schwarz  
Faculty of Mass Media  
Communication  
University of Ss. Cyril and  
Methodius in Trnava  
Nám. J. Herdu 2  
917 01 Trnava  
Slovak Republic  
schwarz2@ucm.sk

Martin Schwarz is a full-time PhD. student at the Faculty of Mass Media Communication of the University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, Slovakia. He focuses on digital art and visual aspects of storytelling utilised in digital games. His academic specialisation is centred on identifying various visual connections between film, television production, digital games, comic books and art. His practical experience includes creating illustrations, classic drawing and painting, character design, digital art and animation.

share some of their market structures and both of them function as media oligopolies only deepens the already existing synergistic connections. Digital communication may have changed our lives, but that does not mean it has abandoned this basic economic framework, i.e., the existing distribution of power held over the global and international media markets. We may even say that media conglomerates (such as major music and movie producers, mostly those based in the United States) now operate online and offline and thus have gained even more economic power and social importance.<sup>1</sup> The synergies merging the movie and music industries shape production processes related to both these business sectors, acting as a driving force of a new era of multimedia and multiplatform media entertainment.

Discussing the ways in which the movie and music industries cooperate and merge is rather problematic, as most of the processes of the media industries are becoming increasingly digital and are changing the whole framework of media production and distribution. However, these issues reach far beyond the boundaries of economy and doing (media) business. For example, Meyer considers the fact that the American app industry may soon eclipse the American film industry more interesting for what it means culturally. After all, there is a growing sense that the products of the sector we usually call 'tech' are nowadays attaining cultural primacy. In other words, the web is the new TV and the new cinema.<sup>2</sup> This statement is hard to argue with, especially if we take into account how many live music performances have been cancelled or rescheduled since the COVID-19 pandemic began and how problematic it seems to lure target viewers away from their streaming platforms, large television screens and portable communication devices back to cinemas.

As noted by Finney, today's endurance of the oligopolistic market structure involving major Hollywood production companies outlines the generally applicable economic rules of globally distributed film production. Horizontal and vertical concentrations of ownership are still amongst the most effective risk elimination tools. The oligopolistic character of Hollywood production is further underlined by the fact that it has been dominated by the same six film studios since the mid-1930s, although today they have other (some of them non-American) owners and/or principal shareholders.<sup>3</sup> These companies include Sony Pictures/Columbia, Universal Pictures, Walt Disney Pictures, Warner Brothers, Paramount Pictures and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Studios, the latter being owned by The Walt Disney Company since 2018, which means that the expression 'the Big Six' is now rather questionable. Perhaps it should be replaced by 'the Big Five', given the outlined ownership structure.

One of the most obvious development trends the film and music industries share is their propensity for overproduction. Musical works and motion pictures are produced, distributed and promoted within oversaturated global markets which are increasingly dependent on multiplatform distribution lines and digital communication forms. There is much more music than one can possibly listen to and more films are released than anyone would be able (and willing) to watch. Regarding Hollywood blockbusters, their production routines are financially demanding and time-consuming, marked by the apparent inability of movie producers to adapt to the ever-changing needs and preferences of their target audiences. As a result, we may observe the parallel existence of costly box office flops and surprising hits with relatively limited budget schemes<sup>4</sup> (e.g., the biographical drama *Bohemian Rhapsody* released in 2018, which is discussed below).

The music and film industries extend their focus on celebrity power and talent across multiple sectors of the show business. Elberse addresses this topic in a general manner, acknowledging the fact that neither professionally produced music nor any other media industry can exist on their own, without merging their business activities with other segments, and that all media industries are necessarily driven by star talent: "As it turns out, how executives can best deal with risk is similar across the worlds of film, television, music, book publishing, sports, and other entertainment sectors."<sup>5</sup> In other words, the synergistic strategies

1 RADOŠINSKÁ, J., KVETANOVÁ, Z., VIŠŇOVSKÝ, J.: To Thrive Means to Entertain: The Nature of Today's Media Industries. In *Communication Today*. 2020, Vol. 11, No. 1, p. 18.

2 MEYER, R.: *The App Economy Is Now 'Bigger Than Hollywood'*. Released on 27<sup>th</sup> January 2015. [online]. [2023-02-12]. Available at: <<https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2015/01/the-app-economy-is-now-bigger-than-hollywood/384842/>>.

3 FINNEY, A.: *The International Film Business. A Market Guide Beyond Hollywood*. Abingdon, New York: Routledge, 2010, p. 6.

4 CHANDLER, D., MUNDAY, R.: *Dictionary of Media and Communication*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 148-149.

5 ELBERSE, A.: *Blockbusters: Hit-Making, Risk-Taking, and the Big Business of Entertainment*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2013, p. 6-9.

applied today have blurred the remaining boundaries separating the individual media industries. This fact necessarily complicates any academic and professional debates on film, television, music and digital games production. Biographical dramas such as *Bohemian Rhapsody* that present life stories of still active or late musical celebrities are a logical outcome of the given communication trend. Their purpose is not only to portray celebrity musicians in an engaging way but also to popularise film music which does not have to be created specifically in relation to the film project in question. After all, as Elavsky states, after two decades of unprecedented changes followed by a problematic transition to the digital environment, music producers are forced to look for new opportunities to generate profit that would compensate for their significant economic losses. Popular music being integrated into the audio-visual media production industry can be considered as probably the most effective means of economically strengthening professional music production. The commercial potential of film music (or, musical works created specifically for the needs of the film industry) has increased enormously.<sup>6</sup> Outlining *Bohemian Rhapsody's* synergistic tendency in relation to the film industry and the business of music, our ambition is to discuss how the film utilises music as a nostalgia-driven narrative tool which makes its rather spectacular portrayal of Freddie Mercury deeper, emotionally engaging and more complex in terms of storytelling.

The present discourse analysis works with the assumption that *Bohemian Rhapsody's* unprecedented success is, to a large extent, based on the ways the film's creators use Queen's most popular songs to drive forward the main storyline and provide the narrative with a deeper emotional impact. Considering the aforementioned framework of the analysis, its main objective is to identify the ways in which *Bohemian Rhapsody* utilises Queen's music in order to present Freddie Mercury's life as a story that celebrates his showmanship and unique personality. Thus, our aim is to determine the extent to which *Bohemian Rhapsody* uses Queen's songs in order to 'drive' the main storyline or deepen Freddie Mercury's celebratory audio-visual portrait. Given the context of the discourse analysis in the third chapter of the study, we pose one research question referring to the empirical objective as defined above:

*RQ: In what ways does the film use diegetic and extradiegetic music in order to celebrate Queen's songs and utilise them as narrative items?*

## 2 On Film Music and Its Cultural and Economic Significance

According to Burnett, music production is a key type of media product; it is an important component that indirectly connects various segments of the entertainment industry.<sup>7</sup> Kuhn and Westwell consider (film) music as "a central component of a film's soundtrack, including the score and any other musical elements". As they explain, film music is usually discussed in relation to, but distinct from, the other audio-based structural components of film (sound, namely dialogues and sound effects).<sup>8</sup> Kalynak explains that film score revolves around an essential set of functions: music sustains the film's complexity and meaning, since it bridges potential gaps in the narrative structure caused by editing, often emphasising narrative-based actions driven by both music and the moving image. Music also outlines connotations by setting a particular mood and atmosphere, letting us know more about the time and environment in which the story takes place. Moreover, music is used to underline the characters' natures and goals, accompanying dialogues and connecting the audience to the narrative by appealing to their emotions.<sup>9</sup> According to Grečnár, film music may fulfil the following functions: 1) informational (related to time and space) – music functions in historical, geographical

6 ELAVSKY, C. M.: Music Industry. In DONSBACH, W. (ed.): *The Concise Encyclopedia of Communication*. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2015, p. 395-396.

7 BURNETT, R.: *The Global Jukebox: The International Music Industry*. London: Routledge, 1996, p. 10.

8 KUHN, A., WESTWELL, C.: *Dictionary of Film Studies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, p. 273-274.

9 KALYNAK, K.: *Film Music. A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 62.

and social frameworks, often outlining various life situations; 2) psychological – music influences mentality of the individual recipient; 3) technical – music often smoothens the cuts between scenes caused by editing and visual and narrative transitions between different scenes. It may establish connections between otherwise contrasting movie scenes or start prior to a following scene in order to outline its presumed expressive means and emotional impact.<sup>10</sup> Kuhn and Westwell underline the fact that the importance of film music increased rapidly in the post-studio era, i.e., in the 1960s and 1970s. This shift was driven by corporate cross-ownership between the film and music industries that heralded further transformations of both segments and their deepening synergistic interconnections. In this era, conventional scoring was often combined with the placement of contemporary rock tracks at key junctures of movie narratives. Therefore, it is no surprise that according to film studies, music, especially in its diegetic forms, is an integral element of *mise-en-scène* within a number of movie genres, mostly notably musicals and biopics.<sup>11</sup> However, diegetic music might seem to be the key driving force of the biographical drama, but extradiegetic musical elements are immensely important as well.

The once clear distinction between diegetic and extradiegetic sound (or music) is not as obvious as it once used to be. According to Chandler and Munday, the term “diegesis” most often refers to a narrative world. Considering the theoretical framework of film studies, we might claim that it is “*the spatio-temporal world depicted in the film*”. In contrast, anything originating from or happening outside this narrative world is labelled non-diegetic or extradiegetic. Understandably, this distinction is especially associated with film music and sound in general.<sup>12</sup> Hayward states that the term “diegesis” covers all actions and events depicted on-screen, that is, fictional reality. Diegetic sound thus “*naturally occurs within the screen space (such as an actor speaking, singing or playing an instrument on screen)*”. In contrast, “non-diegetic sound” is sound which is clearly “*not being produced within the on-screen space (such as voice-over or added music)*”. It is also necessary to understand the term “intra-diegetic sound”. It is sound “*whose source we do not see but whose presence we know to exist within the story*”. The most obvious example is the voice-over of a person narrating a story, who is also this story’s protagonist, i.e., appears on the screen, is portrayed within the narrative, although they are not directly depicted at the moment of speaking. However, the diegetic/extradiegetic binarity also applies to audiences, i.e., spectators present on-screen and those watching a motion picture. Diegetic audiences appear within the film to draw the attention of the extradiegetic audience to the story’s protagonist. Drawn into the screen like this, the extradiegetic audiences then experience the “*illusion that we too are part of the diegetic audience*”.<sup>13</sup> Naturally, filmmakers strengthen the appeal of this principle in many different ways, most notably by placing the camera’s ‘eye’ amongst the crowd present on-screen or behind the performing musician’s back, i.e., directly on the stage.

It may seem that in terms of biographical dramas depicting musicians, diegetic music is much more important than extradiegetic musical moments. However, Winters claims that what is often considered extradiegetic (non-diegetic) music may actually play a large role in the creation of narrative and cinematic space.<sup>14</sup> Minding the fact that many uses of music in film tend to blur the boundaries determining the diegetic/non-diegetic distinction, Holbrook works with the term “ambi-diegetic music”. According to the author, it is “*an important element in the product design of motion pictures*”, namely a situation when a musical performance actually appears on-screen (diegesis), but it also helps to advance the film’s dramatic development (non-diegesis). This strategy “*plays a key role in shaping the consumption experience of a movie audience*”. Furthermore, ambi-diegetic music in films may be perceived as a kind of product placement, since a particular offering – a musical performance – is inserted into the work in a manner intended to structure the movie’s meaning and shape its appreciation. Most often, such “*ambi-diegetic cinemusical moments work to develop the characterisation of a leading protagonist*”.<sup>15</sup> Holbrook further explains that these kinds of cinematic situations

often involve a character actually performing a tune or song on camera (i.e., within the image) “*in a way that adds depth to that character by forming persona-related associations*”, which elaborate on thematic aspects of the plot or advance relevant symbolic identifications to enrich the meaning of the scene, providing dramatic development.<sup>16</sup> As we believe, many sequences within the movie *Bohemian Rhapsody* function like this. For example, the moment when Freddie Mercury argues with his bandmates regarding John Deacon’s new song Another One Bites the Dust is followed by a sequence merging diegetic music (Mercury, May and Deacon perform a part of the song for the still upset Roger Taylor) and extradiegetic music (the spectacle of the band passionately recording the song is combined with the portrayal of Mercury’s reckless social life, namely with his dreamlike foray into a gay club). We may presume that this is how the movie depicts the moments when Mercury contracted HIV – in a rather tasteful and symbolic manner.

There is one more term to consider – “meta-diegesis”. Carroll claims that “meta-diegesis” is an expression coined by Gorbman, who used it to challenge the long-held assumptions regarding film music. In this context, “meta-diegesis” refers to the sounds internally heard by characters, “*whether it is in their dream, imagination or other such device*”.<sup>17</sup> A moment like this can be encountered in *Bohemian Rhapsody*, when Freddie Mercury, trying to calm down, wanders around the Rockfield farm and still hears his bandmates arguing over their breakfast, when the unmistakable, iconic opening piano melody of the song *Bohemian Rhapsody* starts to ‘play inside his head’.

Whether diegetic, extradiegetic or ambi-diegetic, music present in a motion picture fulfils many different functions. Slobin reminds us that when used in audio-visual works, music tends to signal the genre categorisation of the narrative. Relying on well-known codes attached to specific music instruments, this system often employs orchestration, special effects (e.g., synthesised or electronic sounds) and “*a whole set of expectations about what makes music happy, sad, threatening, nostalgic, scary, tearful, or ethnic*”. As the author emphasises, this complex of signs and subtexts is able to ‘infiltrate’ practically all the cinema systems around the world, regardless of local ideologies, which, in a way, makes it culturally and ideologically universal.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, film music has its local, regional and national specifics which we always need to consider.

Farkaš and Šurinová claim that one of the most important aspects of the relationship between music and image lies in the extent to which music is able to interpret the visuals.<sup>19</sup> Addressing the narrative potential of music, Wingstedt, Brändström and Berg underline the fact that narrative media music, i.e., music used for narrative purposes in multimedia such as film, television or digital games, “*is becoming one of the largest sources of musical experience in our daily lives*”. Even though we typically experience it at an unconscious and unreflected level, narrative media music actively contributes to creation of narrative meaning within multimodal interplay with image, speech and sound effects. In other words, the authors suggest that “*what we (think we) see is to a large degree determined by what we hear*”. When combined, musical and visual expressions are able to form complex “multimodal statements”.<sup>20</sup> Looking at the same topic from a different point of view, Boschi identifies two major shifts calling for a fresh scholarly perspective. First, the author thinks that the related academic debates need to focus on identity, i.e., to explore the ways of approaching audio-visual texts in a manner that would allow future debates on identity. Second, she underlines music’s ability to tell a story alongside moving images, which becomes very interesting because music is “*learning new languages*” thanks to being integrated into increasingly complex multimedia forms. Following the same line of thought, Gorbman sees music as “*the supreme border-crosser of narrative categories*”, meaning that we still do not know enough about visual pleasure and narrative cinema, i.e., about the relationship between the pleasures afforded by (film) music and the pleasure of narrative itself: “*When/how do they mutually reinforce, or otherwise interact*”

10 GREČNÁR, J.: *Filmová hudba od nápadu po soundtrack*. Bratislava: Slovak Academy of Sciences, 2005, p. 27.  
 11 KUHN, A., WESTWELL, G.: *Dictionary of Film Studies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, p. 273-274.  
 12 CHANDLER, D., MUNDAY, R.: *Dictionary of Media and Communication*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 100.  
 13 HAYWARD, S.: *Cinema Studies: Key Concepts*. London, New York: Routledge, 2000, p. 84-86.  
 14 For more information, see: WINTERS, B.: The Non-Diegetic Fallacy: Film, Music, and Narrative Space. In *Music & Letters*, 2010, Vol. 91, No. 2, p. 224-244.  
 15 HOLBROOK, M. B.: *Ambi-Diegetic Music in Films as a Product Design and Placement Strategy: The Sweet Smell of Success*.

In *Marketing Theory*, 2004, Vol. 4, No. 3, p. 171.  
 16 HOLBROOK, M. B.: The Ambi-Diegesis of ‘My Funny Valentine’. In LANNIN, S., CALEY, M.: *Pop Fiction: The Song in Cinema*. Bristol, Portland, OR: Intellect Books, 2005, p. 48.  
 17 CARROLL, B.: *Feeling Film: A Spatial Approach*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, p. 35.  
 18 SLOBIN, M.: Preview of Coming Attractions. In SLOBIN, M. (ed.): *Global Soundtracks: Worlds of Film Music*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2008, p. VIII.  
 19 FARKAŠ, T., ŠURINOVÁ, L.: Fenomenológia zvuku a hudby v horore. In *Communication Today*, 2012, Vol. 3, No. 1, p. 46.  
 20 WINGSTEDT, J., BRÄNDSTRÖM, S., BERG, J.: Narrative Music, Visuals and Meaning in Film. In *Visual Communication*, 2010, Vol. 9, No. 2, p. 210.

with each other?<sup>21</sup> It is necessary to underline that there is a significant difference between our perception of sound and the ways we perceive moving images. Monaco points out that while we automatically hear all incoming sounds, including music, we choose what parts of scenes to focus on, i.e., which parts of the moving image will attract our attention.<sup>22</sup>

Herget distinguishes three types of analogy between cinematic visuals and acoustics – affective analogies (parallelism, ambivalence, divergence in emotional content), narrative analogies (e.g., an allusion to historical times, distant places) and structural analogies, which become apparent in synchronicity or asynchronicity at a temporal and spatial level (e.g., the musical tempo can be adapted to the cutting sequence or vice versa). The author refers to Boltz's research, claiming that these analogies are able to shape the audience's attention and focus it on specific elements of the film, influencing the perception and interpretation of the filmed events.<sup>23</sup> Mera and Stumpf's eye-tracking study proves that "music is able to direct how we see by quickly switching attention to target foci as well as lengthening fixations, and that music can also encourage exploration of visual scenes outside targets."<sup>24</sup> Affective analogies often emphasise the controversial nature of a protagonist's actions, meaning that the musical context could potentially lead to any kind of moral judgement. Based on their empirical inquiry, Bullerjahn and Gulderning suggest that our interpretations of film scenes are influenced by the emotions perceived in the film music.<sup>25</sup> Steffens' research inquiry reveals that in one of four cases, music has a significant effect on recipients' emotions evoked by a film work and also indirectly influences their moral judgements.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, research conducted by Hoeckner et al. shows that film music can influence character likability and the certainty of knowing the character's thoughts.<sup>27</sup> It is thus reasonable to presume that film music helps the viewer to unconsciously 'decide' which character to love, like, ignore or hate and provides them with a better idea of what the protagonists think and how they may act.

The economic importance of film music needs to be addressed as well. When talking about bankability of the film score, we usually focus on the term "soundtrack" which, according to Kuhn and Westwell, refers to "a recording of the musical accompaniment to a film". It usually contains the film score and any compiled music from other sources that is included in the film. Soundtracks have been commercially released since the studio era, but they are generally seen as a key feature of New Hollywood.<sup>28</sup> Smith claims that the production of motion picture soundtrack albums has flourished for decades, being an important tool of film promotion and an aesthetic and cultural phenomenon in its own right. The author mentions the movie *Wayne's World* (1992, directed by Penelope Spheeris) that includes the song *Bohemian Rhapsody*, the titular song driving the narrative of the 2018 eponymous blockbuster: "The remarkable success of the *Wayne's World* soundtrack during the early nineties is a case in point. The album was not only a best-seller on *Billboard's* charts but also revived interest in the rock group Queen, spurring sales of the group's greatest hits package and bringing the single '*Bohemian Rhapsody*' heavy radio play more than fifteen years after its initial release. The latter's success came in large measure from the way it was featured in the film." To be more specific, the movie's protagonists boomed their car stereo, bopping "their way down suburban streets in a comic set piece that is in many ways the equivalent of the song and dance numbers of classical Hollywood musicals."<sup>29</sup>

21 KASSABIAN, A.: Roundtable: Current Perspectives on Music, Sound and Narrative in Screen Media. Anahid Kassabian (convenor) with Elena Boschi, James Buhler, Claudia Gorbman, Miguel Mera, Roger Mosley, Ronald Sadoff, and Ben Winters (contributors). In MERA, M., SADOFF, R., WINTERS, B. (eds.): *The Routledge Companion to Screen Music and Sound*. New York, Abingdon: Routledge, 2017, p. 111.

22 MONACO, J.: *Jak číst film: Svět filmů, médií a multimédií*. Prague: Albatros, 2004, p. 151.

23 HERGET, A.-K.: On Music's Potential to Convey Meaning in Film: A Systematic Review of Empirical Evidence. In *Psychology of Music*, 2021, Vol. 49, No. 1, p. 25. See also: BOLTZ, M. G.: Musical Soundtrack as a Schematic Influence on the Cognitive Processing of Filmed Events. In *Music Perception*, 2001, Vol. 18, No. 4, p. 427-454.

24 MERA, M., STUMPF, S.: Eye-Tracking Film Music. In *Music and the Moving Image*, 2014, Vol. 7, No. 3, p. 3.

25 See: BULLERJAHN, C., GÜLDENRING, M.: An Empirical Investigation of Effects of Film Music Using Qualitative Content Analysis. In *Psychomusicology*, 1994, Vol. 13, No. 1-2, p. 99-118.

26 STEFFENS, J.: The Influence of Film Music on Moral Judgments of Movie Scenes and Felt Emotions. In *Psychology of Music*, 2020, Vol. 48, No. 1, p. 3.

27 See also: HOECKNER, B. et al.: Film Music Influences How Viewers Relate to Movie Characters. In *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts*, 2011, Vol. 5, No. 2, p. 146-153.

28 KUHN, A., WESTWELL, G.: *Dictionary of Film Studies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, p. 389.

29 SMITH, J.: Banking on Film Music: Structural Interactions of the Film and Record Industries. In DICKINSON, K. (ed.): *Movie Music, the Film Reader*. London, New York: Routledge, 2003, p. 63.

Top-selling film soundtracks in the United States over the years include *The Bodyguard* (1992, directed by Mick Jackson) with 11.7 million sold copies, *Titanic* (1997, directed by James Cameron) with 10 million albums and *The Lion King* (1994, directed by Rob Minkoff, Roger Allers) with 7.7 million sold units.<sup>30</sup> These movies' popularity was strongly driven by their title songs. *The Bodyguard* is inherently associated with the love song *I Will Always Love You*, interpreted by the movie's female star, the late singer and actress Whitney Houston. *Titanic* applied a different strategy, as its title song, *My Heart Will Go On*, was not interpreted by one of the actresses appearing on-screen, but rather by the Canadian popstar Celine Dion. Being an animated movie, *The Lion King* presents a collection of extraordinary songs, most notably the Oscar-worthy piece *Can You Feel the Love Tonight*, composed and performed by Elton John. Quite understandably, this kind of economic performance is nowadays practically unreachable due to wide availability of multimedia distribution platforms and subscription-based digital services. However, *Bohemian Rhapsody's* soundtrack was still able to hold a top 10 position in 25 different album charts during 2018 and 2019, becoming one of Queen's top selling albums.<sup>31</sup> It initially debuted at No. 22 on the U.S. *Billboard* 200 with 24,000 album-equivalent units, which included 12,000 pure album sales.<sup>32</sup>

One would presume that most people interested in purchasing a movie soundtrack album do so after seeing the movie and hearing the music included in it. However, Keown's research suggests that there is no significant difference between whether soundtrack albums are purchased before or after viewing the film of the soundtrack. On the contrary, these purchase decisions depend on a number of different factors. The obtained research data outlines that some of the most frequent circumstances leading to purchasing soundtrack albums amongst film music enthusiasts are related to the composer, watching the film, desire of owning the newly expanded (or extended/remastered/reissued) edition, and limited pressings/low quantities available for purchase.<sup>33</sup> In other words, some buyers may purchase a soundtrack album (or a part of it via digital distribution) just because the music was composed by Hans Zimmer.

### 3 Music as a Part of Storytelling in *Bohemian Rhapsody*

The first important musical aspect included in *Bohemian Rhapsody* is driven by Queen's song *Somebody to Love*. The introductory part of the movie consists of a sequence that shows Freddie Mercury (Rami Malek) while he is preparing for Queen's Live Aid performance. The sequence also includes images of excited audiences entering Wembley stadium and technicians getting ready for the show. The song is extradiegetic, also fulfilling its ambi-diegetic purpose. Isolated from his true family (parents, sister, Mary Austin) and 'brothers' (Queen members Brian May, Roger Taylor and John Deacon), Freddie Mercury sees the event as an opportunity to find 'somebody to love'. The song thus outlines the movie's general atmosphere, pivotal idea and message. 'Somebody to love' also applies to the people present at Wembley who impatiently wait to see and celebrate Queen and the band's lead singer, i.e., the diegetic audience.

This opening sequence is followed by showing young Freddie Bulsara in his rather miserable day job at the Heathrow airport in 1970. While waiting for the bus, Freddie tries to create a new song. This moment is accompanied by Smile's well-known song *Doin' All Right*. Initially, the music appears to be meta-diegetic, since it is presumably 'playing' inside Freddie's head (the context of the following scenes suggests that he has

30 MARICH, R.: *Marketing to Moviegoers*. Burlington, Oxford: Elsevier, 2005, p. 126-127.

31 KIELTY, M.: '*Bohemian Rhapsody*' Gives Queen Highest Chart Position Since 1980. Released on 13<sup>th</sup> November 2018. [online]. [2023-02-22]. Available at: <<https://ultimateclassicrock.com/bohemian-rhapsody-soundtrack/>>.

32 CAULFIELD, K.: *Billboard 200 Chart Moves: Queen Scores 17<sup>th</sup> Top 40 Album with 'Bohemian Rhapsody' Soundtrack*. Released on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2018. [online]. [2023-02-22]. Available at: <<https://www.billboard.com/pro/queen-bohemian-rhapsody-album-debuts-top-40-billboard-200-chart/>>. Remark by the authors: The term "album-equivalent unit" equals one album sale, 10 (legal) song downloads or 1,500 song streams.

33 KEOWN, D.J.: A Descriptive Analysis of Film Music Enthusiasts' Purchasing and Consumption Behaviors of Soundtrack Albums: An Exploratory Study. In *Psychology of Music*, 2016, Vol. 44, No. 3, p. 428.

been attending Smile's concerts repeatedly and that he is familiar with the band's work). This also applies to the subsequent scenes in which Mercury is confronted with his family's disapproval regarding his lifestyle. The song thus 'bridges' three different sequences – Freddie at work, Freddie avoiding his family and Freddie watching Smile in a pub –, which smoothen the editing. The moment Freddie is shown at the pub, watching Smile on the stage, Doin' All Right turns into a diegetic musical piece, as the song is now obviously performed by Smile. This song encourages optimism, 'telling' the characters that everything is going to be all right, even in relation to Mercury's bad day job, problematic family life and the fact that the band underperforms and that its lead singer decides to quit ("Yesterday my life was in ruin, now today I know what I'm doing, I gotta feeling I should be doing all right.").<sup>34</sup> The key part of this musical moment is ambi-diegetic, bound to the moment when Brian May (Gwilym Lee) and Roger Taylor (Ben Hardy), disappointed by how the evening has turned out, meet Freddie Bulsara in the parking lot. Their joint interpretation of the song lets May and Taylor know that they have found a new lead singer; thus, they are doin' all right after all.

Freddie Bulsara's first on-stage performance with Smile also involves the new bass player John Deacon (Joseph Mazzello). However, the main character faces a series of unflattering remarks, because the audience is not happy to see Freddie replacing Tim Staffell. The song that the band performs, Keep Yourself Alive, conveys a diegetic portrayal of the audience members changing their opinions as a result of Freddie's striking improvisation, energy and showmanship. The song's meaning is strongly associated with the film's message ("Now they say your folks are telling you, be a superstar, but I tell you just be satisfied, stay right where you are..."),<sup>35</sup> that is, it is much more important to savour each moment experienced while trying to break through and 'stay alive', have fun instead of losing one's soul in exchange for becoming famous. Keep Yourself Alive's ambi-diegetic extent also persists in the following scene when May, Taylor and Deacon pick up Freddie at the airport, heading to a series of small-scale concerts across the United Kingdom (the movie never shows Bulsara/Mercury working at the airport again). Freddie is thus 'still alive' thanks to Brian, Roger and John who accompany him on his journey to fame; however, they make music not to become famous, but rather because they cannot exist ('stay alive') without doing so.

The band's first recording session is portrayed through diegetic use of Seven Seas of Rhye. This song is filled with positive energy and playfulness, which is also evident when the viewer sees Freddie, Brian, Roger and John recording their first demo. They experiment and use a variety of peculiar, but efficient and immediately available items to create special sound effects which are supposed to make the song unique (e.g., they place a fistful of coins upon Roger's drums). One of the most impressive sound effects (used multiple times over Queen's decades-long career) is associated with repeatedly 'bouncing' the vocals from left to right. Their song recording adventure easily attracts the attention of a major record label representative who is conveniently present in the studio.

Another aspect of the narrative utilisation of music is present in the scene depicting Freddie's birthday celebration. Even though the song Happy Birthday is, of course, not authored by Queen, its diegetic use is intertwined with obvious ambi-diegetic qualities. Freddie reacts irritably to a conversation during this family lunch attended by his parents, sister, Queen members and other friends. It bothers him that the Bulsaras share stories from his childhood, emphasising the fact that he was born in Zanzibar and that he is a descendant of the persecuted Indian Parsi minority. What irritates him the most is the fact that his parents still call him Farrokh and not Freddie, which reveals his real name to the members of the band. Therefore, he ignores the conversation and starts singing Happy Birthday to himself, also playing the song on the piano. Regarding ambi-diegesis, Freddie uses the song to suppress these unwelcome moments. Singing Happy Birthday to himself, he once again insists on being Freddie Mercury, not Farrokh Bulsara ("Happy birthday, Mr. Mercury, happy birthday to me..."). This is the moment when Farrokh Bulsara is 'born' again to become Freddie Mercury, despite his father's disapproval. The sequence is further developed in terms of another musical piece – an excerpt of Queen's song Lazing on a Sunday Afternoon ("I come from London town...") outlining Freddie's

34 SMILE: *Doin' All Right (...Revisited)*. Track No. 3 on the Original Soundtrack *Bohemian Rhapsody* by Queen. [CD]. USA : Universal International Music, 2018.

35 SMILE/QUEEN: *Keep Yourself Alive (Live at the Rainbow)*. Track No. 4 on the Original Soundtrack *Bohemian Rhapsody* by Queen. [CD]. USA : Universal International Music, 2018.

tendency to consider himself as a trueborn Brit even though he was born in Africa. The emotional impact of the scene is outlined by Freddie being addressed as Freddie Mercury during a phone call; the caller informs him that the band has caught the attention of John Reid (Aidan Gillen), a prominent manager affiliated with the mainstream music industry.

Queen's first major hit song, Killer Queen, is used to establish a sharp contrast between the band's forced appearance on the British music chart television programme *Top of the Pops* and Freddie, Brian, Roger and John doing what they truly love – performing on the 'real' stage. This diegetic utilisation of music allows the narrative to proceed smoothly. The initial scene is artificially created, outlined by the band members' complaints about not being able to play live. Their rather dull performance is quickly replaced by another scene in which they present the same song to thousands of enthusiastic listeners. As the song is about a woman who is admired, proud of herself and unavailable, we may mention the connotatively associated term "drama queen" which refers to a person who is quick to lose their temper or overreact, drawing attention to themselves. This context may be observed while the band members complain about the instruments provided by the *Top of the Pops* staff and the BBC's production practices, acting as drama queens.

The moments when Freddie, Brian, Roger and John travel across the United States during their first concert tour overseas involve a complex combination of diegetic and extradiegetic music, even though *Fat Bottomed Girls* remains the only piece of music used. The sequence aims to specify the exceptional way in which Freddie and his bandmates establish their contact with live audiences. The song *Fat Bottomed Girls* turns into extradiegetic music multiple times, accompanying mundane activities and endless bus rides from one American city to another. Calling his girlfriend Mary Austin (Lucy Boynton) who does not travel with Queen during the tour, Freddie encounters a truck driver who looks at him provocatively while heading towards the men's restroom. This scene is a clear remainder that Freddie Mercury starts to explore his homosexuality in the United States, specifically during this tour. The song's lyrics ("Oh, won't you take me home tonight, oh, down beside your red fire light, oh, and you give it all you got...")<sup>36</sup> are cheeky and even though they originally refer to admiration and desire related to curvy women, a specific moment occurring during one of the concerts (Freddie playfully slapping Brian's bottom, exclaiming that he has a big backside, too) metaphorically expresses Mercury's sexual awakening, clearly indicated by the truck driver scene, but without explicit exposure.<sup>37</sup> The daring and challenging lyrics of the song complement the outlined scenes, but also establish the atmosphere of the environment ("I've been singing with my band, across the water, across the land...").<sup>38</sup>

*Bohemian Rhapsody*, the song the analysed movie is named after, plays a crucial role within the film's narrative. Its opening part is briefly used early in the movie, during a rather quiet scene when Freddie and Mary spend some time together. Freddie uses his piano to play a small part of a song he has been carrying inside his head (diegesis). Not aware that *Bohemian Rhapsody* is to become one of the band's most successful songs, Mercury remarks that this melody has potential. However, the indicated potential is clear when Mercury and his bandmates start to record a new album at the Rockfield studio. Freddie remembers the initial melody after he leaves the other Queen members, uninterested in hearing them argue about Roger's 'not-strong-enough' song *I'm in Love with My Car* and an excerpt from Brian's new text. He lights a cigarette and thinks about the song he has written, trying to combine the lyrics with the right melody. When it does happen, *Bohemian Rhapsody* first represents meta-diegesis as it only resonates inside the singer's head, turning into diegetic expression the moment Mercury starts to play the piano and sing it. The band members then record the song in the studio, trying to comply with Freddie's ongoing critical notes and demands. The film uses diegesis to point the viewer's attention towards specific parts of the song. Such light-hearted, playful moments allow us to pay attention to *Bohemian Rhapsody*'s uniqueness in detail. These dynamic shots thus depict the artists as

36 QUEEN: *Fat Bottomed Girls*. Track No. 6 on the Original Soundtrack *Bohemian Rhapsody* by Queen. [CD]. USA : Universal International Music, 2018.

37 Remark by the authors: The truck driver is played by Adam Lambert, the young American singer cooperating with Queen, i.e., with the band's founding members that are still active – Brian May and Roger Taylor. Lambert is known to be a gay man.

38 QUEEN: *Fat Bottomed Girls*. Track No. 6 on the Original Soundtrack *Bohemian Rhapsody* by Queen. [CD]. USA : Universal International Music, 2018.



autonomous creative personalities able to shine even in Mercury's presence (most attention is focused on May's guitar solo and Taylor's exceptionally high 'Galileo' vocals, not on Mercury's lead vocals that were presented quite spectacularly in the previous scene). The individual segments are repeated until Freddie is satisfied, which underlines his creative dominance at this stage of the group's career. The way the band members work together is simple, yet impressive; it is a bit reckless, full of joy and free of any personal conflicts or frustrations expressed before (Figure 1). This allows the song to function as an ambi-diegetic narrative item, as it brings the band back together.



Figure 1: Freddie, Brian, Roger and John having fun while recording *Bohemian Rhapsody*  
Source: WILLIAMS, O.: *Bohemian Rhapsody. Ze zákulisí filmového megahitu. Oficiální kniha k filmu*. Brno: Jota, 2019, p. 89.

Queen's song *Now I'm Here* represents the development of Freddie's personal conflicts and troubled private life (*"I'm just a, just a new man, yes, you made me live again..."*).<sup>39</sup> Oscillating between diegetic and extradiegetic use of the song, the film's creators initially use this piece of music to spectacularly depict Queen's popularity booming across the world. The sequence slows down in Rio de Janeiro where this song is performed by Queen during a concert. The sequence's ambi-diegetic qualities are clear when Freddie decides to call Mary, making excuses why he has so little time to talk to her. The music non-diegetically outlines the following course of events – Mercury openly acknowledges homosexuality (expressed by men around him as well as his own) when he watches the manager Paul Prenter (Allen Leech) and his young lover entering their apartment and later orders Prenter to throw the young man out, because he is interested in Prenter and thus jealous.

This motive is further explored when Mercury returns to his fiancée and together, they start to watch a recording of Queen's performance in Rio de Janeiro, especially the moments when the audience starts to spontaneously sing along during *Love of My Life*, the song Freddie composed for Mary. The extradiegetic audience (the film's viewers) were able to hear this melody earlier, during Queen's stay at the Rockfield farm. Back then, Prenter watched Mercury singing this song and attempted to establish physical contact between

them, but his advances remained unanswered. Insisting that his love for Mary is stronger than his physical needs, Freddie reacted in an indifferent manner. Now, while talking to Mary, Mercury admits to her that he *"might be bisexual"* while *Love of My Life* still resonates in the background, on TV. The couple's emotional break-up is thus accompanied by the ballad's lyrics (*"Love of my life, don't leave me, you've taken my love, and now desert me, love of my life, can't you see? Bring it back, bring it back, don't take it away from me, because you don't know what it means to me..."*).<sup>40</sup> Once again, Queen's music completes the narrative and deepens its emotional framework.

The next two songs, both used diegetically and each of them taken from the portrayed Live Aid performance in which they are not included, at least not in the cinematic version of the film,<sup>41</sup> help the narrative to confront Mercury's personal struggles with the conflicts escalating within Queen. *Crazy Little Thing Called Love* accompanies Freddie's arrival to a lavish party taking place at his mansion. The song is used to present the main character in this crucial phase of his life. Dressed in an extravagant outfit resembling royalty and trying to suppress his sadness and loneliness that result from Mary's absence, Mercury embraces his true nature, but does not consider any possible consequences (*"This thing called love, I just can't handle it, this thing called love, I must get 'round to it, I ain't ready..."*).<sup>42</sup> It is obvious that other members of the band feel neither comfortable nor welcome, showing their disapproval and leaving early. The same conflict develops during a following recording session. While waiting for Freddie to show up, the band temporarily tames the previous disagreements by creating one of its rock 'anthems' – *We Will Rock You*. The song serves as a driving force of closer interaction between the band and its fans, but also between the individual band members. The concept of ambi-diegesis allows the film to show Freddie, Brian, Roger and John having fun together once again, first in the studio and then on the stage. While performing live, the band members experience the song's true energy – at Madison Square Garden in New York, thousands of hands are clapping and feet are beating against the wooden floor in perfect unison, as the band intended.

The very same idea is explored when the band meets at the recording studio once again, this time arguing in relation to Freddie's impulsive decision to fire the band's manager, John Reid. The conflict is further fuelled by Prenter who articulates his unsolicited opinions on the latest musical trends (especially disco music) and tries to influence Queen's creative decisions. However, music is what calms everybody down. John's new song *Another One Bites the Dust* also captures the group's lawyer Jim 'Miami' Beach (Tom Hollander) who eventually agrees to become their manager as well. The song's suggestive interpretation merges diegetic and extradiegetic moments. Deacon first uses the initial bass riff to interrupt the quarrel. Mercury then decides to interpret the song's intro while facing the still upset Taylor. The following montage partly takes place in the studio, but also includes non-diegetic footage of Mercury and Prenter entering a gay club. The song is thus used to show the band's passionate, ecstatic recording session visually intertwined with Mercury's risky personal venture. This is an ambi-diegetic interpretation of the moment when Freddie contracts HIV/AIDS that does not require any direct depiction of a homosexual intercourse or other explicit details. The viewer is able to understand this concept very well, watching a tasteful and rather symbolic portrayal of the reason why (*"another one bites the dust"*). Quite paradoxically, while making music with Queen, Mercury seems to be more excited than during his wander across the club. The song's lyrics refer to his endless search of passion, contentment and physical satisfaction; however, even though Freddie seems to be happiest when making music, this does not mean he does not keep searching elsewhere, which foreshadows his personal tragedy.

However, another song in Queen's extensive repertoire, *I Want to Break Free*, is met with public disapproval and moral panic. What should have been a parodic portrayal of four female characters (reflecting one of the world's longest-running television soaps, *Coronation Street*) is misinterpreted as Freddie's moment of coming out (*"But life still goes on, I can't get used to, living without, living without, living without you by my*

39 QUEEN: *Now I'm Here*. Track No. 8 on the Original Soundtrack *Bohemian Rhapsody* by Queen. [CD]. USA : Universal International Music, 2018.

40 QUEEN: *Love of My Life (Live at Rock in Rio)*. Track No. 10 on the Original Soundtrack *Bohemian Rhapsody* by Queen. [CD]. USA : Universal International Music, 2018.

41 Remark by the authors: The complete Live Aid performance (including *Crazy Little Thing Called Love* and *We Will Rock You*) is available on DVDs and Blu-Rays carrying the film – as a bonus material. See: SINGER, B. (director): *Bohemian Rhapsody*. [Blu-Ray]. Bratislava : Bontonfilm, 2019.

42 QUEEN: *Crazy Little Thing Called Love*. Track No. 9 on the Original Soundtrack *Bohemian Rhapsody* by Queen. [CD]. USA : Universal International Music, 2018.

side, I don't want to live alone, hey, God knows, got to make it on my own, so baby can't you see, I've got to break free...").<sup>43</sup> Involving both diegetic and extradiegetic moments, the film depicts the making of this song (or rather the music video accompanying it) as a seemingly funny event filled with self-irony (all band members are in drag, portraying women of different ages more or less convincingly). However, Freddie later uses the public backlash as an excuse to leave the band. He repeatedly mentions the criticism following the song's release, taking it personally, in relation to his lifestyle.

As the part of the movie depicting Freddie's solo career is marked by his creative crisis and personal dissatisfaction, most of the music associated with the individual scenes is markedly extradiegetic. The only diegetic music is thus provided by excerpts of Mercury's solo recordings I Was Born to Love You and Mr. Bad Guy (Freddie listens to the results of his effort in the recording studio, looking quite annoyed). The power of the music is, however, strengthened during one of the following extradiegetic sequences when Mercury decides to leave Prenter for good. Disgusted by Prenter's carelessness and indifference, Freddie, accompanied by extradiegetic use of Queen and David Bowie's Under Pressure, quite literally leaves his temporary home and walks away in heavy rain, which corresponds with the song's lyrics: "*Pressure, pushing down on me, pressing down on you, no man asks for, under pressure that burns a building down, splits a family in two, puts people on streets (...)* These are the days it never rains, but it pours..."<sup>44</sup> Under Pressure continues to play during Prenter's 'exclusive' television interview which Mercury watches stoically on TV. However, Freddie does not seem to be concerned about his secrets becoming publicly known; the only thing he cares about is getting rid of Prenter, that is, relieving the pressure he has been feeling since he left Queen.

Mercury's interaction with the television screen then moves from Prenter's pathetic 'confession' to a series of concerned TV reports regarding the spread of HIV/AIDS amongst gay communities, especially in the United States. The musical framework of this turning point is provided by Who Wants to Live Forever, the song originally created for the movie *Highlander* (1986, directed by Russell Mulcahy). However, in this case its lyrics accompany Mercury's secret visit at the hospital where he finds out that he is HIV-positive,<sup>45</sup> which means that no matter how much he wants to live forever, he will not live for long: "*There's no chance for us, it's all decided for us, this world has only one sweet moment set aside for us...*"<sup>46</sup> This fits the film's narrative, because Mercury immediately identifies Live Aid as the only sweet moment left this world has set aside for him (this is not true in relation to objective, i.e., lived reality, but it is undoubtedly true in the context of the movie's plotline). Freddie himself underlines the importance of Live Aid not only during his meeting with the band, but also while Queen is rehearsing Hammer to Fall. The inclusion of Hammer to Fall is diegetic, since it is supposed to portray Mercury's physical weakness and problems with his vocal cords. The song's masculine and daring lyrics are contextually connected with the scene: "*Oh ev'ry night and every day, a little piece of you is falling away, but lift your face the western way, build your muscles as your body decays, yeah...*"<sup>47</sup> Freddie admits that he is HIV-positive to Brian, Roger and John, but refuses to stop working and intends to make music for as long as he is able to 'lift his face the western way'.

The movie's spectacular ending is driven by Somebody to Love, the song used at the beginning to set the atmosphere and determine the story's main idea and purpose. However, this time the song extradiegetically accompanies images involving all people (and other living beings) who love Mercury and those he wants to talk to or reconnect with prior to Live Aid. The viewer sees him talking to his cats, seeking Jim Hutton (Aaron McCusker), his future lover, at his home and visiting the Bulsaras after many months (or presumably years) of ignorant absence. Mercury's family calmly accepts the tentative announcement that Hutton is now Freddie's boyfriend. Freddie thus makes sure that everyone he cares about will watch Live Aid, either up close or on

43 QUEEN: *I Want to Break Free*. Track No. 13 on the Original Soundtrack *Bohemian Rhapsody* by Queen. [CD]. USA : Universal International Music, 2018.

44 QUEEN: *Under Pressure (feat. David Bowie)*. Track No. 14 on the Original Soundtrack *Bohemian Rhapsody* by Queen. [CD]. USA : Universal International Music, 2018.

45 Remark by the authors: This scene also indirectly confronts Freddie with an ordinary young man obviously dying of AIDS he briefly meets at the hospital, which deepens the main character's inner vulnerability hidden underneath his stellar, self-confident public image.

46 QUEEN: *Who Wants to Live Forever*. Track No. 15 on the Original Soundtrack *Bohemian Rhapsody* by Queen. [CD]. USA : Universal International Music, 2018.

47 QUEEN: *Hammer to Fall*. Track No. 19 on the Original Soundtrack *Bohemian Rhapsody* by Queen. [CD]. USA : Universal International Music, 2018.

TV. This list includes the Bulsaras, Jim, Mary and her new partner, as well as the band's manager Beach and Mercury's cats back at his house. This connection established between different parts of Freddie's life thus solves the ongoing conflicts; now he truly has 'somebody to love'.

The long-expected Live Aid performance practically turns the movie into an autonomous musical experience. All included music is, of course, diegetic, interpreted by Mercury, May, Taylor and Deacon and their diegetic and extradiegetic audiences singing along. At certain moments, the viewer sees Brian, Roger and John, even Beach, Hutton and Austin being as fascinated as average spectators are – they are well aware how much power Mercury holds over the audience (especially during his trademark interactive segment 'Ay-Oh'). This hyperreal portrayal of Live Aid points out the event's cultural significance and remarkable atmosphere. Queen's live session is able to overwhelm not only the audiences at the stadium, but also all the people watching their performance on TV and the extradiegetic audiences (the film's viewers) as well. Thus, the viewer experiences a parasocial transfer of emotions; the pure joy of seeing Queen back together is intertwined with sentiment and a sense of nostalgia. The scene completes the celebratory nature of the film story that presents Mercury as a person who is complicated and eager to live on his own terms, but who is also inimitable and charismatic.

## 4 Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of the study was to identify and interpret the ways in which the biographical drama *Bohemian Rhapsody* uses Queen's music in order to dramatize Freddie Mercury's life story. This discussion necessarily leads to the conclusion that biopics portraying musicians are amongst the most important media products which represent the cinema/music synergy. Regardless of the (often negative or mixed) critical reception of the biographical drama genre, biopics about musicians still portray real people and/or events. We have to keep in mind that the used degree of dramatization differs based on the course of the actual events and producers' decision as to what kind of a portrayal they aim to create. While evaluating these movies' quality and significance, both critics and viewers form their specific opinions on the depicted personalities or events prior to the film's reception. This means that prejudice is an important factor that should be minimised when assessing the quality of such a movie, but it is highly questionable if the involved parties are either capable or willing to do so. Loyal fans of musicians or bands tend to interpret such biopics from a purely emotional point of view, showing dissatisfaction when their perception of a star is different from how the movie portrays them. The mentioned tendency to harshly evaluate most biopics is thus understandable, which makes the synergy of two large media industries work at a financial level, but less so at an ideological one.

Nevertheless, in the case of biopics depicting musicians, their music obviously helps to tell who the portrayed personalities were/are and specify the values they represent(ed). This allows movie producers to present famous musicians as opinion leaders or advocates of important social affairs often concerning human or civil rights. Thus, biopics about musicians not only emphasise the power of an individual, but also 'revive' significant public figures who shape(d) the social and cultural framework of the relevant era – even though some parts of these films are necessarily hyperbolised and different from the actual events, which is also the case of *Bohemian Rhapsody*.

This repeatedly used strategy allows Queen's music to function as a key element of the film's narrative which ensures the continuity and logical as well as emotional connections between different moments and environments. The ways in which diegesis and non-diegesis are combined (and ambi-diegetic and meta-diegetic aspects are used) are usually subject to music itself. The film carefully works with music to establish a close connection between the story and its recipient, driven by Queen's most popular songs. As expected, diegetic music is dominant and plays the key role, but extradiegetic, ambi-diegetic and meta-diegetic moments allow the narrative to better (that is, more vividly) communicate what the protagonists think and why they act the way they do. We may also note that it is not clear whether the particular pieces of music used in the movie were arranged to emotionally deepen its narrative or, vice versa, whether the narrative was arranged to provide the used music with a new set of meanings.

One way or another, Queen's music is used efficiently to deepen the emotional engagement of the viewer. For example, Love of My Life associates Mercury's old and new love lives, first accompanying the scene in which Paul Prenter kisses Freddie (who will later become his lover) and then the scene focused on Freddie's coming out and break-up with Mary Austin. The latter situation literally associates the song's lyrics with what is happening on the screen – Freddie is losing Mary's affection, but he is not ready to let go and therefore asks her to keep wearing the engagement ring he gave her. The song Bohemian Rhapsody is mentioned multiple times throughout the movie; various sources of its inspiration are present in key sequences, establishing subtle contexts and associations. Thus, the film's title not only outlines Freddie Mercury's uniqueness and conveys a convincing and appealing portrait of a true bohemian; it also explains that Bohemian Rhapsody results from a diverse spectrum of inspirations and determines the band's musical style, often referred to as 'rock opera'. The film repeatedly uses structural analogies related to both temporal and spatial levels; the cutting sequences are carefully adapted to correspond with the musical tempo and the used songs' lyrics.

*Bohemian Rhapsody* is an extraordinary display of the cinema/music's creative and economic synergy, an exceptional case of truly understanding where these media industries meet and merge, but maybe even a convincing model of the biographical drama of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>48</sup> Even though the movie, like all biopics about musicians, tends to involve easily identifiable connotations and spectacular visuals related to stage performances, there is much more to observe. In this case the value of the narrative lies in its ability to include music as a complex semiotic system, i.e., as a driving force that motivates the extradiegetic audience to experience Freddie Mercury's dramatized story while singing along to Queen's carefully picked songs whose lyrics often 'comment' on what is happening in the movie. Therefore, the principles of social semiotics (as defined by Chandler) are used in a manner that allows us to gain wider awareness of why and under what conditions the recipients of the movie might interpret it (and the music included in it) in different ways.<sup>49</sup> These interpretations are, according to Danesi, necessarily conditioned by our social conventions, education, upbringing, individual cultural experience and many other factors related to the film's sociocultural context.<sup>50</sup> In other words, we may presume that people who do not favour Queen's music and do not speak English (i.e., do not fully understand the individual songs' lyrics) may overlook many of the music/narrative synergies as unimportant or they may even not identify them at all.

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