

WATERCOLORS

QUEEN, FOR A DAY

Classic Albums Live brings *A Night at the Opera* for a night at Hard Rock Live

By Kirk Hartlage

Depending on what type of music you listen to, "A Night at the Opera" can mean so many different things — and many types of clothes.

Hard Rock's Classic Albums Live series, which reproduces classic 1970s rock live on stage, brings the oh-so-gay-friendly Queen's *A Night at the Opera* to the T-shirts and jeans crowd on Friday, Nov. 11. It's part of an unusual series of concerts that seems to have caught on with rock fans.

"This is like putting the original album on your turntable," says Craig Martin, founder, CEO and self-proclaimed coffee boy of Canadian-based Classic Albums Live. "We select the best musicians and create every nuance — every click, boom, pop and bang on the record — and reproduce it live."

Martin is quick to note that the concerts are not about imitations or

impersonations as no performer dresses up like the original band members. He equates seeing a Classic Albums Live show to attending a concert featuring music by Mozart or Bach performed by an orchestra.

"Queen raised the stakes on stealth gayness."

You wouldn't expect a bewigged and foppish composer sitting on stage during one of those shows, so don't expect re-creations at this one.

To faithfully provide the album's intricacies, Martin hires an entire rock orchestra for each performance. The upcoming Queen show will include a 10-piece band with four guitar players and two lead singers. For other albums, Martin has brought in marching bands, children's and gospel choirs and sitar players to appease his "no samples" rule. For his Pink Floyd's *Dark Side of the Moon* concerts, Martin uses real alarm clocks on stage for *Time*.

SOUNDS LIKE A GIRL

Because of Queen's trademark high-pitched vocal ranges, and Martin's desire to accurately recreate their sound, he hired Leslea Keurvorst as one of the concert's lead singers. She takes the notion of singing what was once a man's tenor part in stride.

"They were some pretty girly guys," Keurvorst says, emphasizing that she's referring to "Freddie's and the boys' voices, not their masculinity." "A lot of people think Freddie Mercury sang all those high notes," Keurvorst says, "but drummer Roger Taylor actually sang all the high notes."

Keurvorst says Queen's influence on rock music is an enormous one. She's often heard from other musicians that *Bohemian Rhapsody*, a No. 1 single from *A Night at the Opera*, is the aural equivalent of the Kennedy Assassination.

"Everyone knows when the first time he or she heard it was," she says.

The song was indeed ground-breaking as it was one of the first singles released that lasted longer than three minutes. Rock purists point to the technology used to create the entire album as instrumental in assuring its classic status. Six studios were used to create the album with its multiple overdubs and harmonies. For many years, *A Night At the Opera* was one of the most technologically advanced pieces ever.

"These were pretty educated people who still managed to thrash out some heavy, heavy rock while incorporating classical, baroque, Noel Coward-British music hall and other styles of music," Keurvorst says. Because of that, the album appealed to a broad audience and was certified gold in the U.S. within three months of its release in December 1975.

"Ultimately, the group's willingness to experiment, even when they fail, makes them interesting," a 1976 Rolling Stone critic wrote. "What sets them apart is their selection of unlikely effects: acoustic piano, harp, a cappella vocals, no synthesizers."

IT WASN'T ALL DISCO

Queen's influence on music remains some 30 years later as their theatrial harmonic sounds echo in modern-day groups like Jet, Scissor Sisters and other 1990s neo-glam rockers.

But in the 1970s, when gay music equaled disco, Queen offered a gay man picking up a guitar. Though Queen helped prove that not all gay music had to be techno, Mercury's ability to connect with straight audiences also proved noteworthy.

"Queen raised the stakes on stealth gayness," says Dave White, a music critic for *Instinct Magazine*. "Freddie Mercury was a super-fag who managed to somehow trick straight audiences into thinking he

wasn't, even though he was so clearly a super-fag, all prancy and everything."

Still, Queen's biggest influence remains on music. Mercury-esque singer Keurvorst believes the group's grandeur and sense of theatrics was and is still appealing to anyone appreciative of performance theatrics, "and that doesn't matter if they're gay or a drama queen of any ilk."

The group's theatrics have even caught the eye of Broadway. *We Will Rock You* is the latest rock-and-roll musical featuring a score of popular tunes from a well-known band. The show has played a number of international destinations, likely gearing up for a run on the Great White Way.

At the end of the day, Martin says the group and its music are more than a socio-political commentary.

"Face it, we're talking about rock and roll," Martin says. "It's about people coming together, drinking and dancing — that's what we're talking about here."

That certainly sounds like the attitude to have, no matter what you're wearing to this *Night at the Opera*. ▽



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QUEEN'S A NIGHT AT THE OPERA

WHAT: Classic Albums Live Series.

WHEN: 8:30 p.m., Friday, Nov. 11.

WHERE: Hard Rock Live Orlando.

HOW: Tickets are \$26 in advance, \$28 on the day of show at the box office.

MORE INFO: Call (407) 351-LIVE or visit HardRock.com.

M-S 10am-5pm • Sundays 12Noon-5pm
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