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*Mercury: The Afterlife & Times of a Rock God*

© Charles Messina

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**A portion of the proceeds from the sale of this play  
will be donated to amFAR, The Foundation for AIDS  
Research.**

**For all those who have ever been judged...**

**~CM**

*Sample Only*

*Mercury: The Afterlife and Times of a Rock God* was first presented at the Sanford Meisner Theatre in New York City in 1997. It starred Khalid Goncalves as Freddie Mercury.

The play was also presented in 2004 at The Triad Theatre in NYC and starred Amir Darvish in the lead role. Darvish also played Freddie Mercury in the Provincetown production, presented at The Art House in 2004.

The play was produced by Adrienne DelPercio and Gina Ferranti, Press Representative was David Gibbs/DARR Publicity, Stage Management was Christy Benanti, Set and Costume Design by Victoria Jones, Casting by Danny Roth/The Casting House

Sample Only

## Author's Notes

The resemblance of the actor to the subject cannot be overstated in this case. Height and body type should be as close as possible to FM's. We are not looking for abstraction in the presentation, ala 'The Elephant Man.' We want that first beat on Lights Up to create a 'whip to the face' opening, a gasp.

Two accents must be distinct: The British of FM and the Persian of FB.

The set, while simple in design, should resemble Dali's 'Persistence of Memory' in its tone, in the way a monogrammed towel is draped over a basin, or a Superman tank top is draped over a throne. Guitar should be suspended in mid air. We are going for a surreal, other-worldly feel in this anteroom.

While the play does contain nudity, it has been performed both with and without it. The stripping away is an important part of the presentation. The question of nudity is a personal one and can be worked out between director and actor.

The themes of judgment, duality and acceptance are at the heart of the piece. People have asked, "Are you a fan of FM's?" The stock reply, "Who isn't?" But the approach to the piece was truly as a dramatist, using conflict to find truth.

All of the wit, style and charisma of FM are on display here but so too, the pain, heartache and complexity. What one chooses to show the world and what one withholds from the world is a deeply personal decision and a right. It is also what shapes identity in the public arena (whether that arena be worldwide stardom or around the proverbial office cooler.) It is the withholding, or the 'hiding' and the

reasons behind it, that often lead to an internal struggle - a judgment of self, based on a perception of what the outside world would think if they knew the truth. This is based on one's own fears, insecurities, prejudices. So as you read the play - as actor, director, producer, human being - please ask yourself the question: 'What do *I* hide?'

The most loving 'tribute' to someone is to look closely at the whole of their life and to say, 'By God, you were just like me.'

-CM

Sample Only

Then I saw a great white throne and the one who sits on it. Earth and Heaven fled from his presence and were seen no more. And I saw the dead, great and small alike, standing before the throne. Books were opened, and then another book was opened, the book of the living. The dead were judged according to what they had done, as recorded in the books. Then the sea gave up its dead. Death and the world of the dead also gave up the dead they held. And all were judged according to what they had done.

Revelation 20; 11-13

# MERCURY

THE AFTERLIFE AND TIMES  
OF A ROCK GOD

BY CHARLES MESSINA

Sample Only

# MERCURY

## ACT I

*SETTING: A room at 6:48 pm on 24 November 1991.*

*AT RISE: Standing in the center of the room, in full regalia, crown and all, and holding a banana, is FREDDIE MERCURY himself. He speaks.*

### **FREDDIE**

Phoebe! This banana is too fucking small!

*(Freddie tosses the banana over his shoulder.)*

*(He sits on his grand throne.)*

It was in the moments just following my death that I was most alive. Waiting alone in a garish middle room, neither here nor there really, I was given over to quiet contemplation, miraculous moments of repentance, followed by tremendous rapture and finally a face to face with my old nemesis, (pause) uncertainty. I did fret. The judgment from on high could be cruel and sudden, I was told. So, I braced myself. The pain had subsided, that was a good thing. The flesh was back on my bones and the weight of the world was off my shoulders. Thank God, no more hiding the sores. If only I knew the plan. Periodically they ask me to step forward and state my name...

*(In gruff Bulsara voice)* Farook Bulsara, born Thursday, 5 September 1946 in Zanzibar off the coast of Tanzania.

*(Returns to Freddie voice)* In life it was enough. Now I must sit and wait some more. There is a plan for me. There has to be. With all the records and all the fanfare, I've made quite a case for my salvation, indeed. But still I wait. How dreadful! I never pleaded, that is the one thing I can say for myself, I suppose. "Oh, have mercy on a poor faggot's soul." Nor would I.

I will play for you. That's it. It is what I did best. Some good old fashioned rock-and-roll. And if it's to your liking might I enter through your gates? It's not for me to go out with my tail between my legs like some woof dog or something. You know me better. It's not my style. I am big and fast and hot. Old flamer's like me aren't extinguished, not like this. Rather, we simply burn ourselves out...

*(Freddie disrobes, revealing a body covered with sores. He stands with arms spread open, Christ-like.)*

*(Lights up, stage right.)*

*(He enters a bathtub and proceeds to wash away his sores.)*

*(In Bath)* Love. Right from the start it was love.

*(Then)*

Love was always the thing. Ever since I was small. It was my pursuit in life to find it, and capture it, tie it up, never let it go away. Why must it go away each time? Why does it all end so tragically, no matter how the life lived?

*(Shouting)* Phoebe! Towel!

Realizing there is no response, Freddie reaches for the towel, which is beside the bathtub. As he rises from the tub, he towels himself off and continues.

Father was off traveling too frequently to give me the love that I needed. And mother, mother tried very hard—her only fault was that she wasn't father. The servants waited on me, hand and foot. "Let the servants do it. Let the servants do it." But what were they to do. Could they lie beside me each night and pat my little head and pray, "Dear girl, how blessed, watch over her dreams and make tranquil her deep slumber?" That is not a servant's job! That is a mother's and a father's. That type of love cannot be found in a boarding school, at any price!

*(Then)*

Oh, but that's quite nice. In my heart of hearts I was more famous, more loved and more adored. By not just mum and dad and the servants but by many, by legions! More love than a girl could possibly know what to do with. That was inside. Reality was much colder.

*(Freddie digresses. He begins speaking in a childlike voice.)*

But I don't want to go to boarding school mum. I want to stay here with you. I don't want to go to India. They will make fun of me. They will make fun of my teeth.

*(Freddie continues in his regular speaking voice.)*

St. Peter's. A pretentious British Boarding school smack in the middle of India. All boys. I was eight years old. God! I had to dress myself, make my own bed, wipe my own ass. All for the first time. Where were the servants then, when I truly needed them most? The hardships of reality without those servants. Phoebe, my clothes!

*(There is no response)*

Domestic help can make life sooo easy and can make up for a void. But when they were gone, they were gone. So I had to learn to fend for myself at an early age. It was terrifying. A new, strange place. Filled with strange faces, as beautiful as they were cruel. Those older boys were angels to my eyes and devils to my ears. I loved watching them play. Their young boy bodies just starting to grow into their man bodies. They made me shiver. But I could never tell a soul. And yet those same boys could be so hurtful. From the moment I arrived, they started right in with the donkey jokes.

*(Freddie makes donkey sounds)*

Hee haw! Hee haw!

That was bad enough. Then they took to my name. I hated my name. Farook Bulsara. They loved it. Fuck All Bulsara...Fuck All Bullshitter!

I cried myself to sleep many a night. In my nightmares I could hear them mispronouncing it. But then, one day my nightmares stopped.

*(Freddie digresses into childlike voice.)*

My name is Farook Bulsara. My birthday is 5 September...No, Farok...I want to study art and...no, Farok...I like music and...no, no, Farok...Farok...yes, yes, Freddie will be fine.

*(Freddie continues in his regular voice.)*

And so Freddie ~~it~~ was. I returned home to Zanzibar as Freddie... Bulsara. I felt better, no question, but I wasn't all there yet. I'd grown very restless and very used to being on my own. Thank God the Arabs and Africans started killing each other when they did or I simply would have gone mad, dear. Nothing better than a well-timed political upheaval to put a little fire under one's ass. So we left the bloody servants behind, packed our bags and headed for the motherland... London. I hated it at first. Cold. Overcast. Different. But different was good. Sort of. One thing was the music. The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, The Who and so forth. I dabbled a little in music. Nothing serious. Instead I enrolled at Ealing College to study graphic design. Well, don't look at me. It was the

60's. Everybody and their mother was an artist. So, why not? Why not?

Only problem was, being an artist in those days meant forfeiting one's hygiene or something. God! Fifteen bodies crammed into one flat. Living in squalor for the sake of your art. Sleeping on fucking floors! But I wanted to be part of it. I wanted to be like them. I wanted to look like them. I wanted to be a fair-skinned British bombshell. But I never could be.

I learned early on, my dear, that big girls don't cry. Grin and bear it. That was the way. No matter how much you're hurting inside you never show it. Never. My parents didn't help either. Bad enough being a stranger in a strange land...

*(Freddie digresses, speaks in his native Farsi language.)*

Father, you must learn the language. You must. We're not in Zanzibar anymore. When my friends visit they make fun of you. Father, you must learn to speak the Queen's english!

*(Freddie continues in English.)*

Have you seen my early work? *(Referring to painting of Jimi Hendrix.)* So I could paint. I was quite good actually. The music got me off far more though. Why paint Hendrix, better to be Hendrix. *(Looking up)* Shall I paint for you?

*(Freddie attempts to paint. He finds himself unable. He throws the brush.)*

*(Shouting)* Phoebe! You bought the wrong fucking brushes!

*(FREDDIE continues.)*

Where am I? Oh yes, well, my art school days. They were good old days really. I made all my marks, did my duty or something like that. But it was for them. My passion was performing. Kensington brought that out in me. Kensington Market. Where all the hippest, unemployed artists and musicians converged to bitch about their lack of work and to buy clothes. It was there I found my first pair of crushed velvet trousers. Oh, God! It was there I found Mary. The Virgin Mary Austin. She worked at a stall in the marketplace, right beside my stall. My God, beautiful girl, beautiful, my God! Blonde, sexy, a perfect wet dream on two legs. I thought I'd met Marilyn Monroe or something. I fell in love instantly. Who wouldn't have? We rented a little flat together. It was wonderful...at first. If I had been right, we would have been so right. We probably would have grown ancient and gray together. But it was all wrong. And when I told her so, she...understood.

*(To an imaginary Mary)*

Mary...There is no denying that sometimes a good friend is better than a lover. Mary, you're my best friend!

*(Then)*

I told her I wasn't built to be a family man. The road, with all its wicked influences, and my head being what it was, we could never last as lovers. But she stood by me as a friend should. I love her so. I did love her so. I always told her I could not imagine life without her. Life without her...

*(Freddie reflects, and then continues.)*

So there I was running all around London, doing my best Cliff Richard or something. Surrounded by all those little bands going nowhere fast. Smile! God, nobody knew how to put on a show. But me, oh, I was like fucking quicksilver. They couldn't handle me. Stand still Mercury! Stand still Mercury! They wanted a common front man or something. But I put on a show. That was sort of my way. Turn your fucking head 'round...Now I'm here! I want your undivided attention. I never had it before. But the world stops when I'm on the stage. All eyes front! Or I will slap your fucking hands with a ruler, boy. There are no blind men in my audience, and if there were, even they should see.

*(Then)*

So I had big ideas. But it wasn't until I stumbled upon Brian May, Roger Taylor, and later, John Deacon, that I found anybody foolish enough to listen. Brian, what good are the ears without the eyes? Or the arms without the legs, Deacon John? This is rock and roll we're making, Roger, or have you forgotten? No Grand Dance! No Rich Kids! Only one word dears...Queen. And they will kneel before her majesty upon request.

*(FREDDIE laughs.)*

Center stage, my dear, like Nijinsky, upright and perfect. L'Après midi d'un faune! Oh, so perfect! That is the confidence you need. That is the image. Don't be ashamed to be up there. Any fool can do that. They give the audience the top of their head, and they expect applause? For what? I will prance my prance—like the lovely ballerina—head held high, chin up. Proud. They could have learned a lot from me.

*(Freddie speaks as FAROK BULSARA, his conscientious alter ego, in a thick Persian accent.)*

Stop it, Mercury, stop it. You're boring them to tears. They don't want to hear you talking—they want to hear you sing. Go ahead sing for them, Mercury. This is all you are good for. That is all they care about it. Sing it! We will, we will bore you!

*(Freddie returns to his regular voice.)*

No! I have been many things, Bulsara, but never boring. You may not use that adjective to describe me. Ask those at Hyde Park or Wembley. Were they ever bored? Freddie Mercury entertained their asses. What more could they want? What more could I give? But you want more. What I have given in song and dance is not enough? Do you mean to say that? That is sort of what you're saying. And so you make me wait. I deserve better. Have you forgotten who I am? Or doesn't it matter anymore?

*(In Bulsara's voice)* It never mattered, Mercury.

*(In Freddie's voice)* Fame and fortune were everything, Bulsara. And I wore them well, darling. I was never shy. I could never let me get away with that. Long ago I told you shyness is the enemy of fame. So I removed humility from my diet altogether and I never starved. In fact, I was a bit of a hog. I ate up that spotlight as if I'd been waiting my whole life for a full meal, how yummy! I even had seconds, my dear Bulsara.

Do you remember the first time you saw Freddie Mercury? So much life, fun. You could hardly take your eyes off me. You had to admit to yourself that I was your greatest creation. Oh, how you showed me off! On the side of the road, in bars. Before you knew we would be doing concert halls and stadiums, you were sure about Freddie Mercury. I was the genuine article and you sold me like cheap champagne. But I didn't mind. I went along with it all, for fame and fortune's sake. What some women won't do for a man!

It was funny...I loved every minute of it. Stage was where I belonged. Sort of where I was most comfortable. You knew that. You took advantage of that a little. Don't worry gorgeous, I forgive you. It's all behind us now. All those nights you looked down on me like I was crazy, but you were into it just as much as I was. Every time I turned my head you were busy wetting yourself quite nicely. I reassured you that you were wet enough

already but still you were at it. Sort of zipping away like that...

*(He licks his fingers and jokingly dittles his privates.)*

*(He laughs)* Playing the guitar or something like that. I suppose you were having a grand old time. Weren't we all? I mean, all those times I was out there you never said anything. How was I to know? If it bothered you so, why didn't you protest, Bulsara? 'Stead of sitting there like some silly old mute or something. Shit, yeah, the applause was loud, but I could have heard your voice above it all. I always listened for your voice, Bulsara. So often you were quiet! The cheers must have drowned you out and by the time the audience stopped, you'd forgotten what you intended to say. I wish you'd have kept a diary. Then again, your memory was long.

*(In Bulsara's voice)* Yes! I even remember the days when you wouldn't so much as put a cigarette in your young mouth. And there you were drinking, smoking, and doing cocaine. Then there was no stopping you. Like talking to a wall. When did we become such a mootad? I'm not proud of that. Believe me. But like Mercury always said...

*(In Freddie's voice)* ...it was part of the game, dear.

*(In Bulsara's voice)* But it felt good, I must admit...it felt good.

*(Freddie snorts cocaine and then continues in his regular voice.)*

Sure it felt good, you fucking idiot! Wouldn't have done it otherwise. After all, a party's a party. And Freddie Mercury had some parties. You thought yourself above my parties so you locked yourself in your room like a stubborn child. Ah yes, my memory is long as well. You thought I would come up there and beg you, "Please come out, Bulsara. Please show your face."

But my guests never even missed you. Prudes like you only ruin the fun anyway. Do you know what you missed? Fun, that's what. While you pouted, I partied. I did coke like it was going out of style. As if tomorrow were some sort of a rumor. Knowing you, you probably listened by the top of the banister, out of sight but taking it all in like a nosey spy or something. I could just see you there. One ear to the ruckus downstairs, the other to the bedroom door, one finger in your ass. How sad!

You can't have your cake and eat it too, darling. Don't give me that bullshit, Bulsara! You were invited. You simply chose the puritanical path, self-righteous bitch that you are. Where did it get you? You have nothing to show for it. At least Freddie Mercury had her fun, my dear. You let guilt rule you. Not me. I told you time and again that guilt is the enemy of pleasure. But you snickered your snicker. You thought you were so much better than me. But what were you doing while I was having multiple orgasms in my skull? You let your hair down.

We had it out many nights when you refused to be a good hostess and hid out in the loo until all the guests were gone. When I checked on you afterward, you would always be sound asleep in your bed, like a little angel. You always knew how to hide your horns. *(Pause)* If only I had been more like you Bulsara, maybe we might not be in this place, in this fucking predicament. Oh well...

*(In Bulsara's voice.)* What an awful row between my heart and my mind! My whole life I have not known with which one to side. Too often I have sided with Mercury, against my better judgment, leaving common sense to the common people. But you always told me *(Bulsara mocks Freddie)* ... there are all sorts of exceptions for royalty, my dear.

*(In Freddie's voice)* You were so indecisive, Bulsara. Whenever you could not decide between this and that, I chose the other thing. But I was happy just to be playing, strumming my little guitar *(FREDDIE picks up acoustic guitar)*, pretending to be *(mock Elvis Presley voice)* the king... *(laughs)* or the queen.

*(Freddie attempts to play his guitar. He is unable.)*

*(Shouting)* Phoebe! This shitty guitar won't play the chords I want it to play!

*(In Bulsara's voice.)* It's not the guitar, Mercury. It's you!

*(In Freddie's voice.)* “Oh, sit down Bulsara your rubbish!” The other kids would shout. And I took it in perfect stride. I didn't get on with those little monsters anyway, so their words bounced off my tough coat. They despised the portion of themselves which could never be like me. Let them eat their hearts out now, Bulsara. Look at me! You have not heard their records lately, have you? How they laughed at the little Persian princess with the big teeth doing the St. Vitus Dance. They shot their daggers out of pure jealousy. What nerve they had! But their words didn't crush me. On the contrary, they drove me. I could have been poison in their eyes, but I had to be me, always a bit of a free spirit.

*(In Bulsara's voice, laughing.)* Free Spirit? Yes. We always love to lie to ourself, don't we? We weren't free at all. We were a prisoner of our own fear right up until the very end...and beyond. We hide our sexuality, our nationality, and our stupid teeth. All for fears of being exposed.

*(In Freddie's voice.)* I wish I could expose my heart to show you how dearly I love the spotlight. But now you must take my word for it. The only proof stands before you, I suppose. Is it not enough? And you want more. I cannot give anymore. That is that. *(Pause)* God, I never thought I should have to beg for my redemption. *(Sarcasm)* Oh please, please, please...

*(In Bulsara's voice.)* Oh dear!

*(In Freddie's voice.)* Stay out of this, Bulsara!

It seems you've already made up your mind and colored me a fiend without knowing any better. Poor thing. Truth is, you thought you knew the real me, but how could that be when I hardly knew her myself. That backward face in the mirror is just a shell, you know. Tell me, what reprehensible thing angered you so? Was it the music? The lyrics? The get-ups? Or was it something else? You look down on me with great indignation, but the truth of the matter is that I am being scolded for loving my fellow man. You never could stand to see me win. You want the last word. Fuck you. You're not getting it this time. This sudden, unexpected punishment serves as little more than a nuisance. But I tell you, if you do not let me go it shall be your loss!

*(In Bulsara's voice.)* Why don't you try buying your way out of this one, Mercury

*(In Freddie's voice.)* Shut up Bulsara!

I can't buy immortality. I know that. Richer girls than me have tried and been turned away. Can't say, "Oh, I was a saint, now let me in." Not that easy nor is it true. I could throw myself at your mercy. But I do fear you would lose all respect for me and I for myself. Now how do you suppose we settle this once and for all like women? *(Pause)* Say, I've got an idea. How about I do what I do best, one last performance, for the ages.

And if it stirs you, then you welcome me in with open arms. If it doesn't, then we go the other way. Do I drive a hard bargain?

*(In Balsara's voice.)* That was your answer to everything, Mercury. We'll perform. Run around like a stupid Persian popping-jay. You never wanted to take the time to deal with reality. You never learn. It doesn't work here. You can't just shake your ass and get your way. It's not going to work. It's all over. Do you understand? It's all over now. You don't have to do this anymore, Mercury. You don't have to prove anything. Just leave it alone.

*(In Freddie's voice.)* Phoebe, let's go shopping! I do think I am an addict. I love to shop and I don't feel the slightest bit guilty. Every good woman has a vice. Some have numerous ones is all. *(Shouting)* I am, therefore, I shop! Descartes or something.

I certainly could use a decent pair of trousers, I suppose. I want to be at my best for my big finale. A nice kimono would be wonderful. I don't suppose I could have one last trip to Japan, could I? *(Pause)* It is too much to ask at this point. It's just that I know how fussy I can be and I do have quite a bit riding on this one. May I at least take one more last, long, leisurely bath?

*(In Balsara's voice.)* No, Mercury, we may not have one last, long, leisurely bath. We could bathe ourselves for all eternity and still never be clean enough. Never.

*(In Freddie's voice.)* Let us get something straight, right here, right now, Bulsara. This is what I do. And when I do it, I do it all the way. Here I sit at the Bridge of the fucking Separator awaiting my rise or my fall and all you can do is “ho-hum” when I ask you the simplest of questions regarding the smallest of necessities. I could not do many things well in life Bulsara, but I can do this! And if I didn't do this, I don't know what else I would do. I can't cook, or something *(FREDDIE mumbles)* and wasn't very good at being a housewife. But I've been doing this long enough to know it's in my blood. So, now, may I have a bath?

*(Lights out.)*

*(Pause)*

I'll take that as a no!

**END OF ACT ONE.**

**END OF SAMPLE.**