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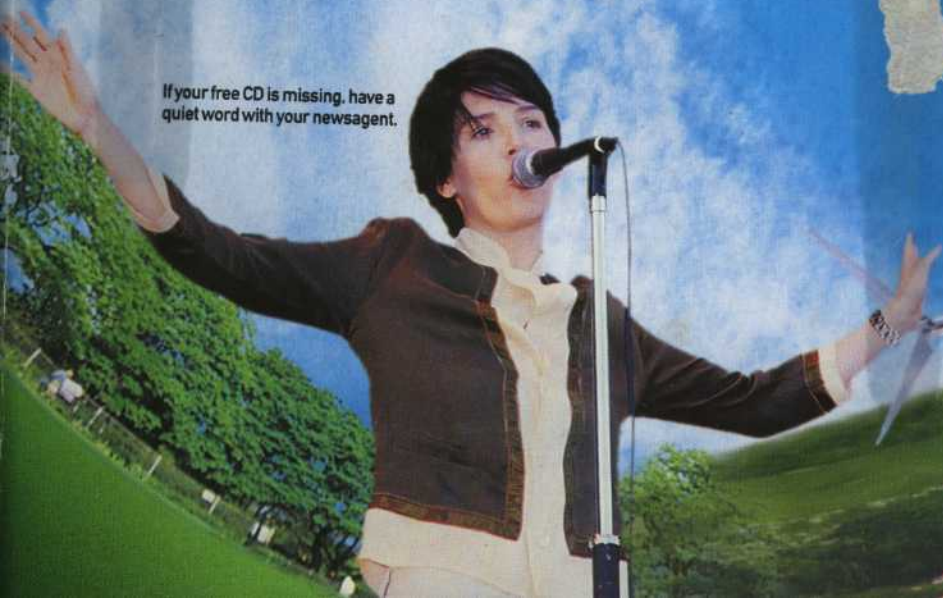
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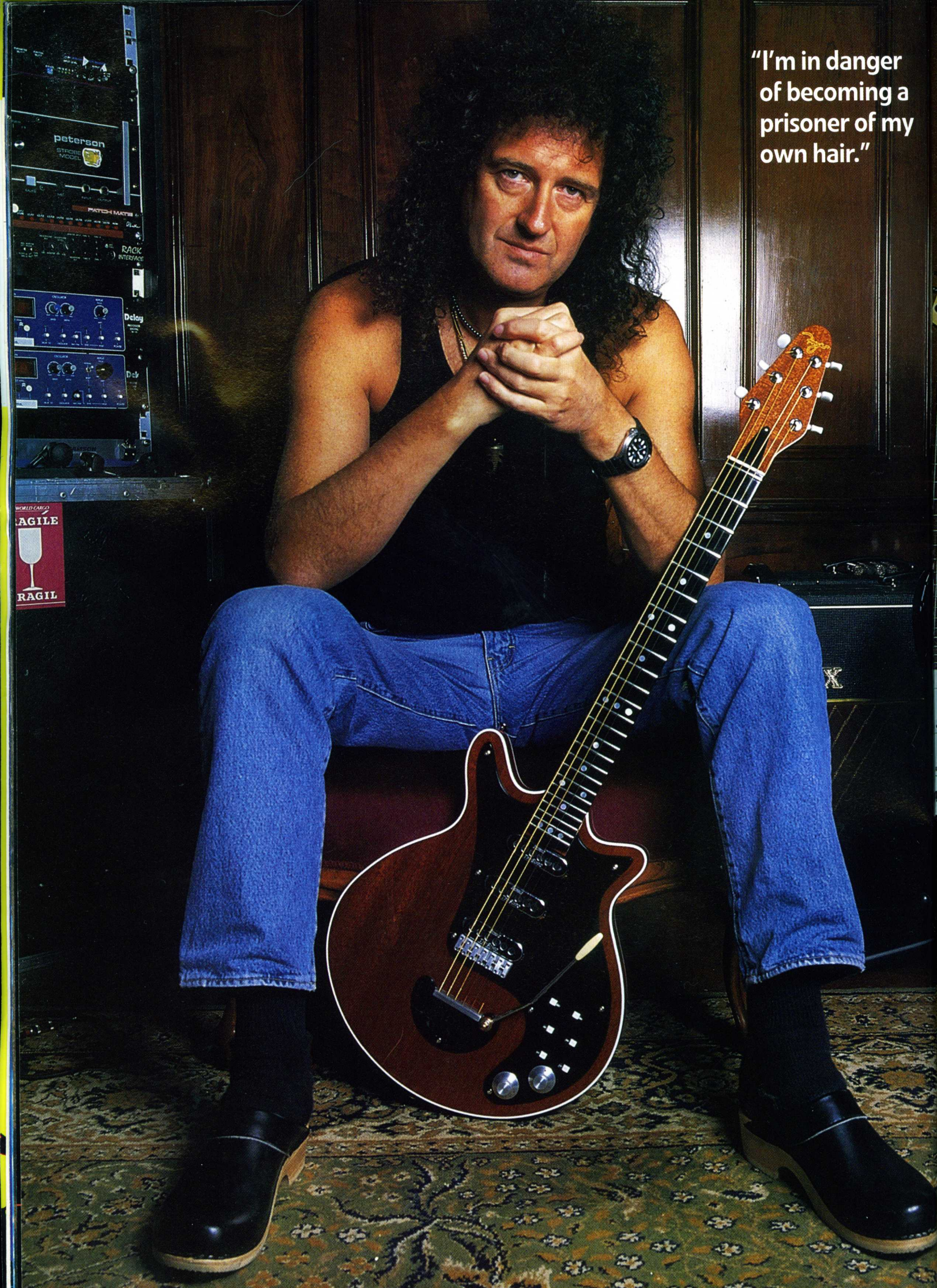
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"I'm in danger  
of becoming a  
prisoner of my  
own hair."



Brian May in his living room, Windlesham, Surrey, April 29, 1998.

# You sent in a million questions about his hair. You remarked, unforgivably, how similar he and his girlfriend look. You marvelled at his clogs, his famous guitar-made-out-of-a-fireplace and Freddie Mercury's colourful antics. Meet the Queen loving people, Brian May.

Cash For Questions

Words **Mark Blake**  
Photographs **Hugo Dixon**

**T**his surely must be the place. With its imposing black gates and giant security camera craning its robotic neck to monitor Q's arrival, this has to be the house of a titled member of the British rock aristocracy. Not so. For this is the front gate of Brian May's next door neighbour: a fabulously wealthy Arab sheik. As befits the self-effacing former Queen guitarist, his own 19th Century country house lies behind more modest white gates, tucked away at the far end of this remote lane somewhere in Surrey.

May has been tying up the loose ends on his latest solo album, *Another World*, and the house has a workshop-like aura with guitars in varying states of disrepair strewn everywhere. There's no sign of his other half, former *EastEnders* actress Anita Dobson ("She's in Birmingham doing a play"). But the musicianly debris – even the living room is stacked wall-to-wall with amplifiers – suggests a place where work encroaches on home life. Only a gardener's handbook in the toilet hints at regular domestic pursuits.

With his new black clogs resounding off the polished floor, our host strides into view – silk shirt billowing, barnet reassuringly frizzed – fresh from a meeting with his accountant and snuffling softly. "I feel a bit fluey," he apologises. Slipping a Strepisil into his mouth, May leads us to where his fabled home-made guitar, fashioned from a mantelpiece by him and his dad, is waiting to be re-assembled. "First time it's been taken apart in thirty years," he whispers reverentially, before picking up a batch of readers' letters – "Hmm, Spice Girls or All Saints? All Saints I think" – and breaking into a wary smile: "So, I suppose you're going to ask me about my hair." But of course...

**Isn't it tempting to rest on your laurels, Queen royalties must be worth a million pounds a year?**

*Tim Scott, Cambridge*

Ooh, I don't know if it's that much. At the moment the Queen stuff does sell really well, but there's no guarantee it'll go on forever. I was actually perfectly happy when I had no money – which lasted right up until we had

a hit with *Killer Queen* (1974). I never wanted for anything. Funnily enough, I was just trying to explain this to my accountant.

**Does Freddie Mercury ever appear in your dreams?**

*Aidin Vaziri, San Francisco*

From time to time, and for some reason he's always talking to me. I had one dream not

## Cash For Questions

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long after he died where he kept saying, You've got to be there Brian, you've got to be there... And I woke up in a daze thinking, Where have I got to be? I was quite keen to get back to the dream and find out what it was I was supposed to be doing.

**Could you have ever seen Queen disbanding due to boredom or the individual members wanting to try new things?**

*Ewen Gillies, Glasgow*

Not boredom (*laughing*). Being in Queen was never boring. All four of us threatened to leave at different times, because we all felt frustrated and couldn't get our own way. It was such a competitive situation, and we had some fierce battles in the studio. I was always into the heavier stuff and thought everything should have a meaning. Roger (*Taylor, drummer*) was into rock'n'roll in all its different forms. Freddie was up for taking it into different areas that Roger didn't think was part of our world... and on it went. But I think that underlying tension was part of what made us what we were.

**Why did you never finish your thesis and become Dr Brian May?**

*Rebecca Makin, Mirfield*

What happened with my thesis was that I had it typed up and waiting to be bound, and I showed it to my supervisor, who told me I should spend another couple of months on it. Which I did. Then I took it back and he started going on again. And I thought, This is as far as it goes. The band was happening and I remember thinking if I don't quit this and give the group a chance, I'll end up regretting it. I had a good time being an astronomer, and we

**ever make any of you feel uncomfortable?**

*Tony Fleming, Hatch End*

I think we might have all been embarrassed by some of Freddie's antics at some time or another. I don't know about Deacy any more than the rest of us. John did have his feet most firmly on the ground and he was never very impressed by things – that's just his way.

**How did Cozy Powell's death affect you?**

*Edward Kelly, Stanmore*

Very much (*seriously*). He played on the new record and we toured together. I'm remixing a track on my new album as a tribute to him and I expect that somebody somewhere will complain that I'm trading off his memory, but I don't think there's been enough noise about his passing. Cozy was unique.

**Is Noel Gallagher a good guitarist?**

*Thomas Kingston, Country Cork*

Er... no. I don't think he's the world's worst guitarist, but I don't think he's someone you'd put on and start thinking, Wow, how does he do that? (*fumbles with musicians' magazine on coffee table, with, among others, May and Gallagher on the front cover*). That's not his thing though, is it? It's more of a band thing. But they're not



Brian May: "Hmm, do fat bottomed girls really making the rocking world go round?"

**"I'd like to be viewed as something alive and relevant, and not some fossil."**

Theatre so it can have more comfortable seats. I don't think that's right.

**Do you ever regret any of the more, ahem, unusual video moments in Queen's illustrious career?**

*Mike Seymour, Bonn, Germany*

I was never terribly fond of the one we did for It's A Hard Life. Freddie was dressed up as an amorous prawn. It was one of my favourite songs of his and I remember being terribly disappointed that he wanted to wear this costume, but he insisted on it. A good video can make all the difference. I remember loving R.E.M.'s Everybody Hurts, and I never really connected with them before then.

**My nan claims that you knocked on her door about two years ago. She says you were looking for a certain house and were in the wrong street. Can you confirm or deny that you were wandering around the Beeston area of Leeds knocking on old ladies' doors?**

*James Forbes, Swillington*

Mmm (*looks bemused*), knocking on old ladies doors? Doesn't ring any bells. My ex-wife comes from Leeds, so that might be a connection.

**As a Queen fan of many years, I felt uneasy with Made In Heaven (the posthumous Queen album) and Queen Rocks (compilation). Did you not think the Queen chapter of your life should have been closed?**

*Neil Riddell, Exeter*

I do think that chapter should be closed and thought so then. But there were other

He was always a bright lad: Brian May's article in Nature magazine, December 1972.



Queen, circa 1984 (from left): Brian May, Freddie Mercury, John Deacon, Roger Taylor.

had a couple of papers published in the journal of the Royal Astronomical Society and Nature magazine, but I don't think I was good enough to work at it for the rest of my life.

**Do you think any of your solo stuff comes close to matching Queen?**

*Geoff Powell, via e-mail*

Queen does cast a very long shadow, but I apply the same quality standards to my solo records as I did to Queen – which is probably why it takes me so damn long. It's been six years since the last one (*Back To The Light*) and I like to think that since then I've got out in the real world and interacted with people a bit more, which has to be a good thing.

**Rumour has it that John Deacon was very embarrassed by Freddie's flamboyance. Is this true, and did Freddie's sexuality**

the new Beatles. I don't think anybody comes close to The Beatles, including Oasis.

**I once bumped into Roger Taylor in my local Sainsbury's where he was filling out a Lottery ticket. Why do mega rich rock stars still do the Lottery?**

*Steve Burley, Guildford*

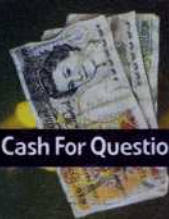
I'm stunned to hear that (*looks appalled*). I can't imagine Roger doing it. I despise the Lottery. There's less chance of you becoming a millionaire than there is of getting hit on the head by a passing asteroid (*grins at unwitting astronomical reference*). I don't agree with how the money's spent either. It's disgusting that a million pounds would make sure no kid in this country ever died of leukaemia again – probably – because it would pay for a big enough register to help find the bone marrow. But instead they give millions to the National

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grant. Two of us (knowledge support in the form of Francisco Sanchez Martinez and Dr K. J. Sci. Instr., 44, 360 (1967). during our stay in Tenerife. T. R. HICKS B. H. MAY N. K. REAY Department, Imperial College London

Sci. Instr., 44, 646 (1967) Sci. Instr., 44, 360 (1967). New York, 1939). (1956). (Oxford Univ

Cash For Questions



"I don't wear clogs on stage." May models other generously heeled footwear while playing live with Queen, 1974.

remember thinking it would have been nice if he'd warned me about that.

**What is the most embarrassing experience you have had on stage?**

Lars Daneskov, Denmark

We used to have this massive crown that doubled up as the lighting rig. We'd start the show doing *We Will Rock You*, with this crown in the middle of the stage. There'd be Freddie on one side and me – the majestic guitar hero – on the other. There'd be an explosion and loads of smoke and the crown was supposed to start elevating. One night in Holland something went wrong with the hoist, and one side majestically rose, while the other majestically fell. I think it helped break the ice.

**People call you the nice guy of rock. If so, why were you such an arsehole when I met you backstage at the Ulster Hall in Belfast?**

David McComb, Queen's Park

I've always been too much of a nice guy, I'm such a pleaser (*emphatically*). Freddie was never like that. A kid could be waiting outside for five hours, and Freddie would be like, Oh, fuck off, darling, I need my rest. I'm the nice guy who sits there signing everything that's put in front of me. There were a couple of times on my last tour, when I got flu and I just had to go home otherwise I would have died, but there's always someone who wants just one more picture. I do try my best but there are times when you have to say, Enough. Maybe that's what happened.

**There has been much speculation about backwards masking on *Another One Bites The Dust* – supposedly saying, It's fun to smoke marijuana. Is this true?**

Dave Parr, Editor, Queen Newsletter

No. People seem to find these things, don't they? Wasn't there another song that was supposed to say, Satan is your friend?

**Do you feel like you've made it as Brian May now or do you think people still see you as Brian May, ex-Queen guitarist?**

Elaine Burnay, Willingdon

I think I'm a bit of each. For a time I didn't want to answer any questions about Queen. Truthfully, though, I'd love someone to come up to me and say, I love your new record, it's new and it's different, rather than, How do you do that guitar effect on *A Night At The Opera*? I'd like to be viewed as something alive and relevant, and not some fossil.

**Tied anybody's mother down, and if so, what did you do with her?**

Ralph Hobbs, North Allerton

Ha ha! I was on top of a mountain in Tenerife, playing some riffs while the sun came up, when the words to that song came into my head. I thought it was a crap title, but Freddie said it meant something to him, so he knows the answer, and who am I to argue?

considerations. Right up until the end Freddie asked me for lyrics and music that he could work on, and he was adamant that this material should be released. After he died, my way of dealing with it was to go out on tour. But Roger and John became very impatient with me and started working on the tapes. I didn't want this stuff to go out without my involvement, so I took the tapes off them, felt that they'd done it wrong and spent months putting it all back together. Doing *Made In Heaven* was like assembling a jigsaw puzzle, and I'm sorry if this guy feels uneasy about it, but I wouldn't have put my seal of approval on it if I hadn't thought it was up to standard.

With *Queen Rocks*, we had this feeling that some of those early Queen albums had got a bit lost and we wanted to remind people that we were always a rock band. But it had to have the hits on, some of which I know were on the greatest hits record, otherwise it would have been obscure for the sake of it. Personally, I'd rather people just bought *Queen II*.

**Is there any more unreleased Queen material?**

J. Yeddings, Nuneaton

Very little. There's a song that Freddie recorded with Michael Jackson, but we haven't worked out a way to complete it. There's some very early stuff, too, but it's a bit too rough.

**Ever thought of cutting your hair?**

Martin Brunvand, Oslo

**Why do you always wear clogs?**

Graham Gordon, Ottawa

Sometimes I wish I had a paper bag over my head and people just listened to the music. I do think about getting it cut (*fumbles with hair*). I like it, though, because it's unfashionable, and I despise fashion. But there's another side to it – people that aren't into

Queen, see me and immediately assume that because I look this way I can't have anything relevant to say about their lives. And I like to surprise them by proving that it's not the case. There are times, though, when I flick through magazines like yours, and I do think I'm in danger of becoming a prisoner of my own hair. As for the clogs? They're comfortable and I have claustrophobic feet. I always go for trainers on stage these days. I don't like wearing clogs when I'm performing, because, er... the guitar lead tends to catch under the heel.

**"I was never very fond of the video for *It's A Hard Life*, with Freddie dressed up as an amorous prawn."**

**Asked about the most bizarre thing you ever experienced together with Freddie Mercury, you once replied: "Travelling on a Number 9 bus". What happened on that bus?**

Livia Rohrmoser, via e-mail

God, we used to do that journey every day. I think we had flats in Barnes at the time – although Freddie might have been in Earl's Court – and we used to meet on the Number 9 bus on our way into town to invade the offices of Trident (*our management company*) and ask them why they weren't doing anything about our record. That bus journey was always frustrating, but I can't remember Freddie doing anything special on it.

**Who, in your opinion, performed the best Freddie tribute at the Wembley Stadium gig... and the worst?**

Paul Steven Parr, Great Bardfield

I'd have to say George Michael for the best. There's a certain note in his voice when he did *Somebody To Love* that was pure Freddie. David Bowie doing the *Lord's Prayer*? Er, I

Happy lookalikes (from left): Brian May & Anita Dobson.

