

FREDDIE'S DEAD — OR IS HE?

ACCORDING TO A NEW BOOK BY A SURREY BUSINESSWOMAN, MR MERCURY ISN'T READY TO STOP TALKING YET.

PETER DOGGETT INVESTIGATES

When John Lennon died in 1980, our sister magazine *The Beatles Book* was inundated with letters, expressing every possible variety of shock and grief. But amidst the heartfelt tributes came a handful of more disturbing missives — claims that the writers were in touch with the Beatle from beyond the grave, that Lennon was living downstairs, even that they were having an affair with Fab John's ghost.

Just as sensational crimes attract dozens of false confessions, rock stars' deaths seem to strike a chord with the vulnerable, lonely and depressed. So where does that leave Melina Richmond? She's the pseudonymous author of *A Kind Of Magic: Queen, The Secret Revealed*, which is billed as "the book that Queen DON'T want you to read". Too right they don't: if Ms Richmond isn't crazy, then the band's late vocalist, Freddie Mercury, is communicating with her from wherever rock singers go when they die. And she doesn't even like Queen.

Just another headcase, you're thinking, though not many headcases get to write a book about their experiences, or recruit Queen's former PR man, Tony Brainsby, to promote it for them. And when Freddie keeps telling Melina to buy *Record Collector*, who are we to doubt that it's really him?

Though Ms Richmond's book isn't a literary classic, the story it tells is gripping enough on a purely human level to transcend any flaws. By her own account, Melina has suffered more than her share of abuse and turmoil, from husbands, lovers, relations and so-called friends. Then into her life pops a pop star, in search of peace, who warns her when Queen are about to be on the radio, feeds her the phone numbers of close associates and friends, and drops in tidbits of gossip and information at the most unlikely moments.

In the flesh, Melina Richmond is disarmingly normal — organised, amusing, attractive and generally good company. She has a 10-year-old daughter, her own small business, and also a nice line in self-mockery: "If I read about someone who was supposed to be haunted by Jimi Hendrix, I would tend to think, 'I'm sorry, but they're barmy'. If it kept turning up, I'd think, 'Where's the proof? What does this have to offer me?' So I know that people are naturally going to think I'm crazy. I'm as gobsmacked as everyone else, frankly, that this hasn't actually driven me insane — unless I am, and I don't realise it!"

So what does Freddie have to say for himself? "He did ramble on a while ago about Spandau Ballet," she says, "but he didn't give me any phone numbers or addresses. And he made several comments about Elton John and his manager John Reid, who apparently used to manage Queen. When I was thinking about PR companies for this book, I came across Tony Brainsby's name in a copy of *Record Collector*, and I heard a voice somewhere far off, saying very gently,

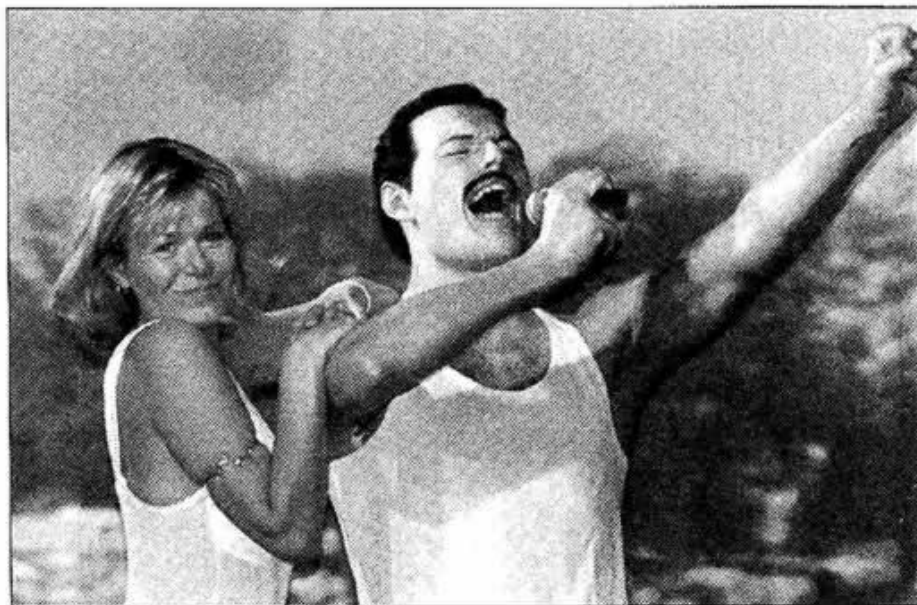
"That's the guy you want'. So I phoned Tony up and discovered that he used to work for Freddie. That was the last time Freddie gave me any direction for this book."

Convinced? Some of Freddie's friends, like singer Peter Straker and Kenny Everett's widow Lee, apparently are. "If an unknown girl rings up friends of a pop star who's died and says she's speaking to him," Melina says, "the natural reaction would be to slam the phone down. If there was constant pestering, then they'd bring the lawyers in. That didn't happen. I have made good relationships with people who knew Freddie, and certain ones have been very open-minded and receptive."

But not a none-too-mysterious Guitarist Friend of Freddie's, who according to the book demanded that Melina leave his presence immediately. A downmarket Sunday tabloid even claimed that she was stalking him and other Queen associates, and the the Guitarist's legal friends were alerted to hold her at bay. Not true, Melina insists: "I never received any communication from any lawyers to do with anyone connected with Queen. I left the Guitarist alone when he asked me to, and fortunately that matter has now been sorted out through mutual friends."

When Ms Richmond first took her story to the press, a photographer came to her house. As they spoke, 'Freddie' alerted Melina to the fact that the lensman had been outside his house during his final days. The photographer confirmed this statement a few days later.

Usually, though, Freddie seems satisfied with day-to-day trivia — particularly since a traumatic episode in 1992. Melina went to the College of Psychic Studies, where a woman scolded her for listening to the "AIDS man". Freddie got cross, Melina passed the



Melina Richmond — but is that the real Freddie Mercury, or is it Memorex?

message on, and a row ensued. That night, Melina writes, "In my dream I followed Jesus to a cliff edge where Freddie was also standing. Below the cliff was the purest light of all colours, but so bright you could hardly look at it . . . Eventually, in silence, Freddie fell to the light. Jesus turned to me and I followed him away from the cliff edge . . . I thought, 'Well, that's the end of that, then'."

But it wasn't. Freddie still appears in Melina's mind but, she says, "He's far more peaceful. There's a lot more silence. There's no disturbance. I think that if he's in heaven now, which I believe he is, he will do whatever he wants to do. He's entitled to come down and have a chat with me if he wants to, if it's not bothering me — and it certainly hasn't been. I don't see any harm in it."

And if the world laughs? "I don't mind, because I know what's happened to me. It's between me and my conscience. People can make up their own minds. If they laugh, then it's fun for them. Great! Have a laugh. I know how it sounds: 'Freddie Mercury is alive and well and living with a girl in Surrey'. It's quite an amusing angle, isn't it? Quite funny, really. But life goes on." Especially, it seems, for Freddie Mercury.

A Kind Of Magic is published by Magic Publications Ltd., 788/790 Finchley Road, London NW11 7UR, price £12.99