



V&A opens Freddie Mercury | Splendid Things

“I like to be surrounded by **splendid things**. I want to lead a Victorian life surrounded by exquisite clutter”

Freddie Mercury, 1978

8 looks spanning Freddie Mercury’s career are on temporary display this winter

Freddie Mercury | Splendid Things
24 October 2026 – 17 January 2027
Throughout V&A South Kensington
vam.ac.uk

On Saturday 24 October 2026, eight looks worn by the iconic performer and songwriter Freddie Mercury will be revealed at V&A South Kensington as part of a free trail celebrating the global superstar.

Freddie Mercury | Splendid Things marks the 80th anniversary year of Freddie’s birth, paying tribute to one of the world’s most beloved performers. The trail, developed with Mary Austin, Freddie’s former fiancée, close friend and confidante of 20 years, celebrates Mercury’s career through costumes and accessories worn in some of the most memorable music videos and pop performances of modern times. Mary has loaned seven of the looks to the V&A for the display.

Each of the six stops on the trail showcase an iconic moment in Mercury’s career from Queen’s frontman to solo artist, with looks spotlighting his flamboyance, charisma and the multi-disciplinary creativity that helped define his enduring legacy. Each intervention presents some of Freddie’s most memorable looks in dialogue with a unique and dramatic setting in the V&A galleries and will draw synergies with the V&A objects on display, as well as the architecture of the building. Mannequins created especially for the trail are dynamically posed to reflect Freddie’s charismatic stage presence.

The looks spanning the 1970s and 80s include a striking monochrome ensemble worn by Freddie for an early Queen gig at Imperial college and featured on the cover of Queen’s debut album in 1973, as well as the ‘Mercury Wing’ catsuit designed by Wendy de Smet that was worn on stage for Night At the Opera tour, 1975-1976 and seen in the groundbreaking video for Bohemian Rhapsody and his signature crown and cloak

designed by Diana Moseley and worn on the Magic Tour including for Freddie's last stage appearance with Queen at Knebworth, 1986. The looks take us right through to Mercury's success as a solo star with the costume worn in the Made in Heaven music video. Kimonos from Mercury's personal wardrobe also offer a glimpse of the man behind the Mercury persona.

Designed by award-winning theatre and exhibition designer Tom Piper with lighting designer, Lucy Record and sound designer, Gareth Fry – each playful installation is distinct and theatrically staged, bringing to life moments in Freddie's musical career through set dressing and in some spaces – sound and dramatic light. There is a public programme of related events to coincide with the display.

Looks that feature on the trail include:

- **An ensemble worn at Imperial College gig, 1973** - This is a monochrome two-piece worn by Freddie at an early Queen show at Imperial College. Queen would play and rehearse there in their early days. Characteristic of 1970s glam-rock fashion, this look reflects Freddie's early experimentation with stage wear, identity and image making.
- **A jacket from the early 1970s and kimono, 1950–70, both from Freddie's private wardrobe** - The jacket was worn by Freddie for early Queen rehearsals and press shots. Freddie had an appreciation for Japanese culture and design even before the band first visited in 1975. He acquired a great many kimonos during his visits, some of which were worn on stage.
- **The 'Mercury Wing' catsuit and bolero ensemble, 1975** – Inspired by the winged sandals of the Gods, Mercury and Hermes, designer Wendy de Smet incorporated wing motifs at the cuffs and bolero of this piece. Freddie worked closely with the designer on this commission, inspired by The Fairy Feller's Master-Stroke, a painting by British artist Richard Dadd. Close-by will stand **the 'Spine Suit' or the 'Black Queen' suit, 1975** – another collaboration between Wendy de Smet and Freddie. The piece has spikes down the back and sleeves signifying darkness, contrasting with the wings used in the Mercury Wing suit.
- **The Flash ensemble + half mic, 1980** – Flash Gordon, Queen's first and only soundtrack album was created for the 1980 film of the same name. This look includes a red and white Flash T-shirt hand-drawn by Freddie. By this time his stage wear had shifted from '70s glam to simpler ensembles. This is also accompanied by a half-mic that had become synonymous with Mercury on stage.
- **The 'Made in Heaven' music video costume, 1985** – Created for the music video of the single, this costume is inspired by Freddie's love of dance, with references to Stravinsky's The Rite of Spring and Dante's Inferno. Freddie handpicked Diana Moseley to design his costume due to her experience with the costume.

- **The cloak and crown ensemble worn on the Magic Tour, 1986** - This cloak and crown ensemble was worn by Freddie for show climaxes on the Magic Tour. Freddie had commissioned the pieces from designer Diana Moseley, expressly looking for a costume that would finish off the shows in grandiose fashion. This majestic look encapsulates the theatricality and humour of the beloved performer.

Presented in the V&A Tapestry Gallery, alongside the display of the white 'Mercury' wing ensemble and the black 'Spine suit', the trail includes – **Creating a masterpiece** - a unique, spatial audio reimaging of Queen's Bohemian Rhapsody. Award-winning sound designer Gareth Fry has created an atmospheric and magical sonic experience using the original isolated recordings from 1975, reworking them into an ambient recording to accompany the display of these costumes. The sonic installation has been made possible by d&b audiotechnik.

Kate Bailey, Senior Curator of Theatre and Performance at the V&A said: 'We are thrilled to display Freddie's most iconic costumes at the V&A, celebrating one of greatest performers and songwriters of all time. Reflecting his love of 'splendid things' and his passion for art, design and fashion, Freddie is very at home in the V&A galleries. Each stop on the trail speaks to a different side of his multi-disciplinary creativity, inviting visitors to see these remarkable costumes up close, and to consider the artistic and cultural impact of Freddie's life and work.'

Mary Austin explains that Freddie Mercury's striking costumes were an integral, and carefully considered, part of his stage persona: 'As the records became more successful and the response grew stronger, his confidence deepened and his performance settled. What I saw now was an artist continuously developing while the seed of who he was stayed intact. The clothes were part of that exploration. Freddie understood early on that he wasn't just wearing clothes; he was providing an image to match the scale of the space and the vastness of the crowd. He was there to entertain, and everything about what he wore fed into that' (Mary Austin quoted in "A Life in Lyrics" published by HarperCollins on September 1, 2026).

Mary Austin adds: 'As we celebrate Freddie's legacy in what would have been his 80th year, the clothes and costumes to be displayed at the V&A tell a hugely important part of his story both on and off the stage. Never mere accoutrements, his costumes and clothes were essential to his performances, creative vision, and wider self-expression, carefully designed to create a lasting visual and emotional impact that has reached across the generations and still reverberates today.'

This winter, visitors will also be able to see Freddie Mercury | Splendid Things during **Festive Fridays**, a new series of after-hours festive evenings taking place every Friday

from 20 November to 18 December. Alongside the trail, enjoy pop-up performances, entertainment, with seasonal drinks available to purchase throughout the evening, with the chance to discover seasonal gifts and get a head start on Christmas shopping across our three shops.

- ENDS -

For further PRESS information about the Freddie Mercury | Splendid Things at the V&A, please contact the Press Office on press.office@vam.ac.uk / +44 (0)20 3949 2502 (not for publication).

A selection of press images is available to download free of charge from pressimages.vam.ac.uk.

Notes to Editors

- Freddie Mercury | Splendid Things will be on at the V&A from 24th October 2026 - 17 January 2027
- Freddie Mercury | Splendid Things will be on display across the V&A's permanent galleries and is free to visit

About V&A South Kensington

The V&A is a family of museums dedicated to the power of creativity. V&A South Kensington is a world of extraordinary global creativity, with unmissable exhibitions, experiences and educational programmes for all. One of London's most iconic buildings, it is home to national collections of art, design, fashion, photography and furniture to theatre, performance, architecture, and ceramics, as well as the UK's National Art Library. It is a place where everyone can experience a story of creativity that spans 5,000 years and every creative discipline, which brings that story to life through programmes and activities for all ages and specialisms, and world-leading research and conservation.

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About Mary Austin

When Mary Austin first met Freddie Mercury in 1970, it marked the beginning of an enduring friendship that would shape the rest of each of their lives. As a 19-year-old working at the legendary Biba fashion store in Kensington, Mary met 24-year-old Freddie, who ran a stall selling his artwork and vintage clothes in Kensington Market. They became engaged three years later, on Christmas Day 1973, the same year that Queen released their debut album. After Mary and Freddie's relationship came to an end in the mid-1970s, they remained a central presence in each others' worlds for the next two

decades. When Freddie passed away in 1991, he left his home, Garden Lodge, and his possessions to Mary, who has treasured and celebrated the memory of her beloved friend ever since.

A new book “A Life in Lyrics” celebrating the career and creativity of Freddie Mercury – and including Mary’s personal perspectives and recollections – will be published by HarperCollins on September 1, 2026.