

Queen Nation Reigns at OOC Fair



Queen Nation

By Simone Goldstone | Soundcheck Columnist

On Wednesday night, Aug. 4, Queen Nation (a tribute to Queen) took its rightful throne at the OC Fair.

Many attendees, including me, have already seen the group and couldn't wait to see them perform in The Hanger at the OC Fair. Queen Nation plays their parts so brilliantly (down to the most minute details), which makes them a tribute band a cut above the rest.

From the inscription of Brian May's name on the Red Special replica, to the English accent and colloquialisms adopted by their mega-star counterparts, you might as well be seeing the real deal.

Earlier in the day at the pig races (yes, the OC Fair has pig races), a girl in front of me was wearing a Queen shirt, so I knew I was in good company.

The concert started. Gregory Finsley, in Freddie's signature Superman outfit complete with

a leather hat, red leather pants, and the iconic graphic T-shirt, exploded into action.

"C'mon, get up!" With Finsley's uncanny resemblance in stature, tone, voice, and expression, you might as well be witnessing a mirage. For one night you can feel like you're cast as an extra in the "Bohemian Rhapsody" movie.

Mardi Gras Beads hung on every microphone, which the group periodically threw into the audience. Another delight of the show was that just like Queen fans, Queen Nation spectators feel like a family. The woman in the seats next to ours wasted no time befriending us, eager to dance with fellow fans. Later on, a young man leaned into my aisle to ask me if the group were wearing wigs, as every curl and shag of Roger's (Pete Burke) and Brian's (Mike McManus) hairstyles were immaculate.

Finsley has just as much charisma as the original Freddie. The moves! The hips! The pipes!



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The group started with "Let Me Entertain You," setting the mood for the two-hour set. When we got to "Ay-Oy," we might as well have been at Live Aide with how well the audience knew to echo the notes. We had just as much fun playing our parts as they did. One thing I love most about Queen Nation is their interaction with the audience. Every

attendee feels acknowledged, appreciated, and included.

A favorite song of mine was "Radio GaGa," a tune Roger Taylor wrote. Clapping high above my head in sync with thousands of others, I never wanted the song to end. Speaking of Roger Taylor, I was thrilled with Burke's rendition of "I'm in Love with My Car." I really appreciated showing Roger's songs some love and hearing the deep cuts.

When "Hammer to Fall" came on, my friend, too tired from our fair activities earlier, stayed seated. The lady next to me immediately pulled me to her, and I danced with Queen comrades who were strangers only moments ago. This is how Queen fans are though, a community.

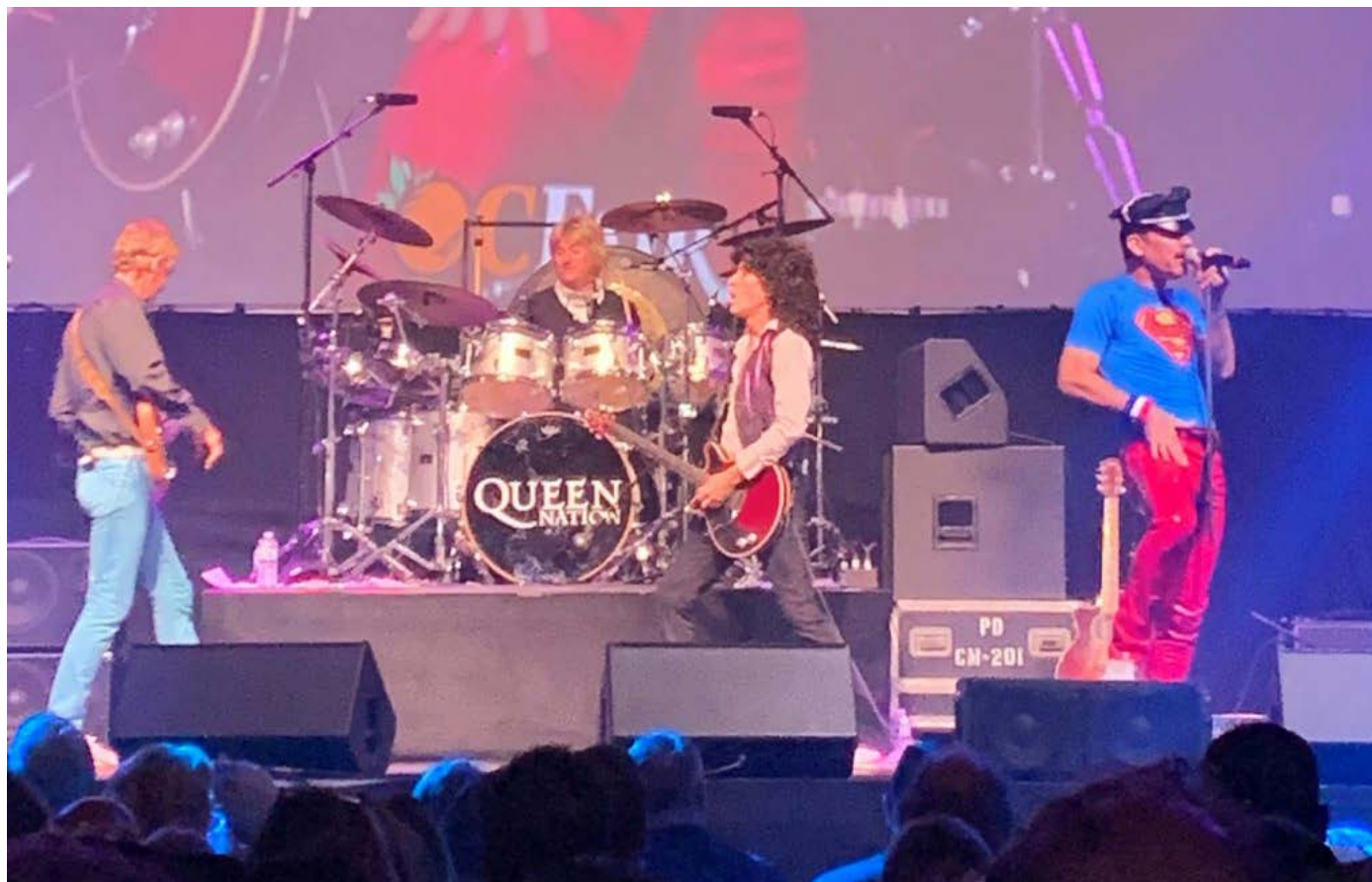
"It's like a family reunion," the band says. I couldn't agree more.

"The bloody fair is completely sold out!" Finsley somehow delicately bellowed in a perfectly British accent. "We are singing Queen but we're not doing all the work- we need you to sing and shake your bums, but right now we need you to snap just... like... this..." I was shocked to see teenagers were up and dancing the second "Killer Queen" started. It's great to see music transcend through generations. Queen Nation noticed it, too.

"We have a bunch of eight-year-olds here tonight," McManus nodded at the children in the front row. "This one's for the kids, it's named after something you might want- no, not Mac and Cheese- it's called Bicycle."

The humor was outrageous and deliciously fun.

"This next tune is from 'News of The World,' have you gotten it yet, Darlings?"



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Ah yes, time traveling again. To my absolute delight, some rather obscure numbers I thought I'd never get to hear made the set list. During a silence after the much appreciated "Love of My Life" (all the phone lights came out, bathing in the crowd in white) I shouted, "Play '39!"

Burke came back on stage with a tambourine, and they played the tune perfectly. True fans clapped along and sang it back, while many got familiar with the song for the first time. Impressed by their repertoire, I don't think I stopped beaming after that. "39" was written by Brian May, sounding as close as Queen can get to folk music. The song tells the tale of a time-traveler arriving back on Earth to find everyone he knew gone. I felt much like a time-traveler that night, as if I was seeing Queen at the Rainbow in '74.

"And now a special message from management: everybody dance!"

That's how Queen Nation cheekily introduced "Crazy Little Thing Called Love."

The humor continued throughout the show: "If you buy a t-shirt after, you'll be our best friend," Finsley said before the namesake song came on.

The hits soon followed: "Somebody to Love," "Don't Stop Me Now," "Under Pressure," and "Another One Bites the Dust." How does the band have so much energy? After making sure we all brought our best opera voice, "Bohemian Rhapsody" followed. The stuffed Pikachu's swayed in the air along to "We Are the Champions," eliciting an emotion like no other.

Here we are, in 2021, across the Atlantic, paying homage to a British rockstar who appeared in the charts nearly 50 years ago. And yet, the legend continues. I'll say this: Queen Nation made Freddie Mercury proud that night.

"It's great they keep Freddie's spirit alive, isn't it?" I ask in the car after the show. My friend shakes her head, "No, Freddie's spirit lives on in all of us."

Thank goodness Queen Nation is here to remind us of that.

For a list of upcoming shows at the Hanger at the OC Fair, visit <https://ocfair.com/oc-fair/entertainment/the-hangar/>.

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