

# I couldn't bear to see Freddie wasting away

This week, Freddie Mercury would have been 60. His lover, Jim Hutton, was with him for the final six years. Interview by **TIM TEEMAN**

There's an element of fairytale to Jim Hutton's life, though he'd roar at the suggestion. A rough-hewn Irishman, he is utterly direct, has a husky voice, drinks heartily and doesn't take himself or the topography of his roller-coaster life — the ordinary guy who got his prince, then lost it all — that seriously. "I'm gasping for a cigarette," he moans, as he recalls the night that he met Freddie Mercury in March 1985.

That evening the former hairdresser (he's the least "gay" gay hairdresser you're ever likely to meet) was down to his last fiver. A man sidled up to him at the bar in Heaven, the London gay club, and asked him what he would like to drink. "We were both wearing a tight white vest, ice-blue jeans," Hutton says. "I said, 'No, what are you having to drink?' And he said, 'Large vodka'. Then he said, 'How big is your cock?'"

Mercury would often say that by way of an introduction. But the flamboyant showman was nothing like the private man who shared the last six years of his life with Hutton. Had he not died of Aids in 1991, Mercury would have turned 60 on Tuesday but Hutton, 57, is having nothing to do with the many commemorative celebrations. He is marking the occasion at home in Ireland, recalling nights such as Mercury's 40th birthday at a club in Munich, when Hutton dressed up in a multicoloured sequined jacket and the whole doolally affair, drag queens and all, was captured for the video of *Living on My Own*. "If he was here, I'd raise a cup of tea to him and say 'Happy birthday, lad'," says Hutton.

That first night, the two men and Mercury's friends stayed up all night at Mercury's Kensington flat (he also had an eight-bedroomed Georgian house, Garden Lodge, near by). It was only after he and Mercury had sex and Hutton had gone to the kitchen to make a cup of coffee that he was told who Mercury was.

"Joe (Fanelli, Mercury's cook) told me. I honestly hadn't recognised him. It didn't matter to me. My preference was for meatier men. From the waist down Freddie was a swizzlestick. But there was something about him. He pursued me. One night I had made my supper, bangers and mash, when Freddie called, asking me to dinner. 'I'm just making mine', I said. He said, 'Turn it off. I'm sending a chauffeur to pick you up.'"

Hutton became part of the Garden Lodge "family", which included Fanelli and Peter Freestone, Mercury's assistant. He watched backstage when Mercury electrified Live Aid in July 1985. "I was gobsmacked. You could feel the effect his stage presence had on the crowd. Afterwards Elton [John] came and said, 'Bastard, you've stolen it.'"

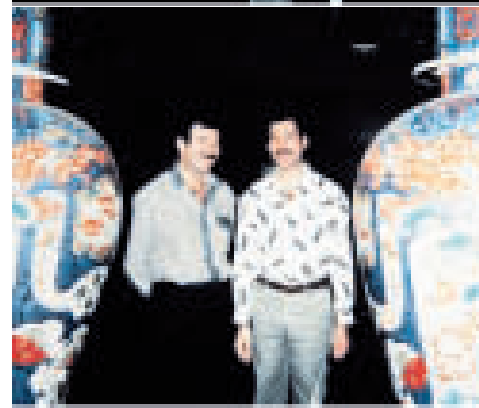
The extravagances of Mercury's world were

new, though not dazzling, to Hutton, who had been brought up in a large Irish family in Co Carlow, the seventh of ten children. His father was a baker. He studied to join an order of brothers but fell for one of his teachers and become an apprentice hairdresser instead. By the time he met Mercury he was working at the Savoy.

Hutton moved in to Garden Lodge in early 1986. Were they monogamous? Hutton "veered a little bit but not much, I'm a one-man man", while a friend of Mercury's told Hutton that the star had a boyfriend in Munich. "She said that things weren't going well between them and Freddie was bringing me to Munich to make this other guy jealous. I didn't say anything; it would have given Freddie control. I saw him with another guy in Heaven and we had a huge row. He told me he did it to make me jealous. Then one day I saw him leaving his Kensington flat with another guy and we had an argument. I told him he had to make his mind up. And he said, 'OK', he wanted to be with me. Deep down I think that he wanted to be secure with someone who was down to earth and not impressed by who he was."

Mercury's hedonism has been overstated, says Hutton. Sure, there were waiters at Queen's 21st birthday party with holes cut out of the backsides of their trousers, and, yes, Mercury did cocaine — but "recreationally and not that much". Their domestic routine was settled. "He loved his cats. I'd get in from work. We'd lie together on the sofa. He

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would massage my feet and ask about my day." Hutton gave up his Savoy job and Mercury employed him to garden and do odd jobs for £600 a month. "One day I was clearing out the pond, I was in waders, and he said he wanted a hug, and so we hugged, me dripping muck all over the carpet."

Mercury kept significant parts of his life — Hutton, Queen, his family — separate. Hutton says that they were both naturally private. "He might have worried about how coming out would have affected him professionally but he didn't say that. We both thought our relationship, and being gay, was our business."

Mercury discovered he had Aids in 1987. He had a Kaposi's sarcoma lump on his shoulder. KS is such an advanced symptom of Aids — wasn't there any preceding sign that

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he'd been infected with HIV? No, says Hutton, nothing. "His attitude was 'Life goes on'. He took AZT and nearly every other drug available. The doctors came to the house to treat him." Hutton didn't take a test himself. "I was afraid." An HIV test he took in 1990 confirmed that he had the virus. He didn't tell Mercury until he tested positive again a year later. "All Freddie said was 'Bastards'."

Hutton was healthy. Mercury was becoming more ill. "The doctors thought he shouldn't do the *Barcelona* video. But his attitude was 'I'm not going to let this thing beat me'. I noticed how skeletal he'd become only on the morning of his last birthday. Maybe I was in denial. But I think Freddie knew when it was the time to let go. He decided to come off his Aids medication three weeks before he died."

Mercury was nursed by Fanelli and Freestone. "He wanted me to do it but I couldn't bear to see him wasting away," says Hutton.

"He once spoke about dying and I said, 'I don't want to hear that talk'. The last proper conversation we had took place a few days before he died. It was 6am. He wanted to look at his paintings. 'How am I going to get downstairs?' he asked. 'I'll carry you,' I said. But he made his own way, holding on to the banister. I kept in front to make sure he didn't fall. I brought a chair to the door, sat him in it, and flicked on the spotlights, which lit each picture. He said, 'Oh they're wonderful'. I carried him upstairs to bed. He said, 'I never realised you were as strong as you are.'"

The night before he died of bronchial pneumonia, a statement was released in Mercury's name revealing that he had Aids. Hutton claims that he didn't compose it him-



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"I was gobsmacked. You could feel the effect his stage presence had on the crowd," says Hutton, who saw Mercury steal the show at Live Aid in 1985. Facing page: shots of the pair in Japan, 1986, and Hutton today

Then, during Christmas 1995, he was sitting on his couch when he heard the tick-tock of the carriage clock Mercury had given him. A friend had wound it up, but Hutton took it "as a sign it was time to move on". He started on a course of HIV drugs, and moved back to Ireland where he works as a carpenter and odd-job man with one of his brothers. His health is good. There have been flings, and one long-term relationship with a guy who couldn't bear to hear Mercury's name mentioned, although Hutton reassured him that he wasn't competing with a ghost.

Hutton has two dogs and five cats, and would like "a companion more than a lover". His mother "pulled a fast one on me" by dying in 1996, the week before he returned to Ireland. He laughs, recalling her

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reaction to the pressmen who banged on her door to tell her that her son was Freddie Mercury's lover. "Yes, I know," she replied impatiently. (When Hutton told her he was HIV positive, she said: "Ah, we thought you might be.")

What would Mercury have been doing at 60? "Waiting for his pension book," Hutton roars, though adds seriously that Mercury would probably have gone on to writing scores for opera or ballet. Yes, he thinks of Mercury, "but not all the time". He turns up the radio full blast if a Queen song comes on. Lately he's become fixed on the track *Innuendo*. Had Mercury lived he thinks that they would have still been together. He still wears the platinum signet ring that Mercury gave him. (Mercury used to complain when Hutton took it off to garden.)

Hutton once dreamt that they had bought a cottage together; another time, in a semi-sleep, he felt he and Mercury were lying suspended in a tunnel of feathers. "Most of my treasured possessions are up here," he says, tapping at his head, and he still has the framed four-leaf clover that he gave Mercury for his 40th.

"That's what I remember most: his impish smile when you'd give him a gift," Hutton says. "He would be as happy with 60 roses as 60 Picassos. His face really would light up. One Christmas I created a mountain-scene trainset. [Queen's] Roger Taylor and Brian May came over and all three of them played with it, three big hairy kids." Remembering his lover's happiness, Hutton smiles, then pleads can he go now and have that damned cigarette.

Freddie Mercury: A Kind of Magic, Tuesday, September 12, 1TV1, 9.45pm

self. "He couldn't have done. He wasn't capable. His manager, Jim Beach, released it. I don't think he would have wanted it. He wanted his private life kept private." As for the criticism that he should have been honest about about being gay and having Aids, Hutton says that Mercury's reaction would have been "F\*\*\* them, it's my business."

Hutton was with Mercury as he died. "He was dosed on morphine and in Neverland. He wet himself. I knew that if he woke up and saw that there'd be blue murder so Peter and I changed his underwear and while I was putting his boxers on I knew he'd gone. I don't know how. Joe got a mirror to check his breath and that was it.

"I went into my bedroom and stopped a carriage clock Freddie had given to me: the time was 12 minutes to 7. I briefly switched off the lights on the trees in the garden — a true Irishman would have turned all the lights off in the house, but instinct told me not to because of the press outside. Then I went upstairs and spoke to my mother. I was crying my eyes out." Mercury's mother, Jer, sent him a "lovely" letter thanking him for being there for her son.

Hutton and Mercury didn't do deep and meaningful. "We communicated a lot without saying anything. But he constantly wanted to know that I loved him. And of course I did, deeply, and told him. When he

was diagnosed he said to me, 'I would understand if you wanted to pack your bags and leave'. I told him, 'Don't be stupid. I'm not going anywhere. I'm here for the long haul.'"

Hutton claims that Mercury had verbally stated that he should stay at Garden Lodge after his death but nothing was signed and he was given three months to leave. This "devastated" him and he went "absolutely crazy", using the £500,000 that Mercury had left him to go on holiday, buy a house in Shepherds Bush and build a home in Ireland, where he now lives. "In all honesty, my only thought was 'How long have I got to live?'"