

When the Freddie Mercury Tribute Concert for AIDS Awareness was over in April 1992 ... / Anne Meyer, The Mercury Phoenix Trust.

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When the Freddie Mercury Tribute Concert for AIDS Awareness was over in April 1992 and all the money from televising the concert in the USA (\$853,000) distributed to different charities by FOX Television in the states, it remained to decide how the rest of the money from the Wembley date would be donated to AIDS charities as announced. That is, the proceeds from the box office, the television in the rest of the world outside the US and merchandising.

Of course the money could have been donated to any of the leading AIDS charities in the UK, the simplest thing to do; the Terrence Higin's Trust for example, who had already benefited from the re-release of Bohemian Rhapsody which earned over £1 million for the charity. However, Roger, Brian, John and Jim Beach wanted to be more involved in how and where the money was given, so they established a registered charitable trust: the Mercury Phoenix Trust. The deeds of the Trust allow for a maximum of four Trustees and Roger, Brian, Jim and Mary Austin offered to take on that responsibility.

I started work on July 1st 1992 as Charity Coordinator and as such, deal with all correspondence of the Trust and report regularly back to the Trustees and Peter Chant, a long time financial advisor of the band who was appointed administrator of the trust.

As soon as it had been announced that the AIDS charities were to benefit from the proceeds of the concert, mail poured into the Queen office and my first task was sorting through these letters and putting on hold those requests for funds which I thought might well be awarded a grant. Then followed a period of learning about HIV/AIDS and advice was sought not only from the main AIDS charities in the UK, but also the World Health Organisation in Geneva, who are especially concerned about Third World countries.

A preliminary Trustees meeting was held in July to set out grant-making criteria and a further meeting in August enabled the first donations to be made. One of the first grants of £7,000 was given to the National network of Body Positive Groups for their Fourth National Conference. Later, many of the Body Positive Groups themselves, throughout the country, benefited from grants of £5,000 each. As the name indicates, the majority of the voluntary workers for these charities are HIV positive or have AIDS; they also have a positive outlook on life despite the effects of the illness.

Grants totalling £390,295 were distributed by the Trust in 1992 to 31 different AIDS charities mostly in the UK, but also in Holland, Germany, Denmark, Rumania, Ireland, Uganda, South Africa and Mexico. In 1993 the Trust looked carefully into research projects and a team of doctors and scientists working at the now named Freddie Mercury Building for AIDS Research in Holland received £80,000 for their research plan into gene therapy approach, with a promise of £160,000 more over the next two years. £474,615 were donated in 1993 to 23 charities, of which £146,615 went to charitable bodies in the US and Canada. Approximately £200,000 is ready to be donated to a number of charities early this year, once financial decisions are made.

Often requests for money have to be refused for a variety of reasons; choices have to be made and I'm glad Roger, Brian, Jim and Mary are there to take on these difficult decisions. There are often differences of opinion on the validity of a particular project but in the end all the donations are given resulting from judicious and unanimous decision by the Trustees.

The Trust has been approached by the Department Of Health for coordination of grant-making policy and recently has become a founder members of the AIDS Funders Forum, a new group of fund-donating charities in the UK, coordinated by the National AIDS Trust. The Forum meets quarterly and has just had it's second meeting.

Naturally when a Trust gives money away at the above rate eventually there is no more left. However, a lot of effort has been put into releasing the Freddie Mercury Tribute concert on home video and making the "Five Live" George Michael/Lisa Stansfield/Queen mini album possible, all of which brought fresh funds into the Trust. For the future, there is talk of Lisa Stansfield donating her recording of "I Want To Break Free" on her new EP to the Trust and you have already heard of the National Collection planned for November/December of this year, organised by our Chief Coordinator, Maureen Barclay, on behalf of the trust. Thank you to those of you who have offered assistance to Maureen in becoming Area Collectors for the National Collection. However, all ideas for raising funds are welcome. Please feel free to write to me care of the Queen Office if you have any ideas or suggestions.

So you see, the Mercury Phoenix Trust is going strong, nourished by the courage and commitment of the people who are inspired by Freddie Mercury, his magic and his music.

ANNE MEYER, THE MERCURY PHOENIX TRUST