

CONVERSATIONS

DECEMBER 7 2019, 12:01AM, THE TIMES

Emma Freud's legal highs: Massaoke

EMMA FREUD



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Welcome to Massaoke - the not-remotely-ancient art of standing with hundreds, sometimes thousands, of people in a large venue, watching a six-piece band on a stage flanked by huge screens bearing the lyrics of some of the greatest pop songs known to mankind, and singing these classic anthems as loudly as possible in unison.



That's it, that's your evening; a mass karaoke singalong with great lighting, big screens for the words and a live covers band thumping out the backing tracks. So far, so [Bohemian Rhapsody](#). But here's the remarkable bit. It somehow leads to an unexpected rush of humanity, love and respect for the popular song and your fellow man. This is a world with no judgment and no criticism. You are one small, unscrutinised part of a large machine that is making live magic. It's so loud you can't damage it, whatever the state of your vocal cords, and there is a mighty connective power that comes from singing as a united voice alongside your brothers and sisters born of the same musical-genre family.

There you are, standing in a huge hall with hundreds of people singing the same words to the same songs you have sung since you were a teenager, and it suddenly feels oddly familiar; a bit like being in church. To be specific, it's a bit like how church would be if the songs were better, the lyrics were more appropriate to the century in which you're living, the organ was replaced with a cracking band and the dress code was "happy and wear trainers". The feeling when you open your mouth and sing as joyfully as you can without worrying about the noise coming out while standing next to 700 people in the same zone is quasi-religious. You're an important, yet also irrelevant part of the bigger sound; the most crucial element in that room is the connection between the godlike brilliance of the music (esp Queen) and the soul of the people singing. You're a cog in a giant wheel that is going to turn whether you're there or not. It's the unique feeling of being humbled at the same time as feeling like a rock star.

What you actually experience is being human, part of a collective, a spiritual ecstasy that leads to an elemental freedom that evokes an authentic natural high. Whatever you do, whoever you are, for a couple of hours you become part of a collective of humans in harmony, joined by their love of Queen, Bon Jovi or Toto, who are definitely singing from the same song sheet.

Christmas Massaoke takes place on December 14 at the Electric Ballroom, London NW1 (massaoke.com)