

THE CLASSIC MUSIC OF HALLOWEEN

by Jon Kirkeleit



While nowhere near as numerous as Christmas songs, still there are a number of records that get dusted off at this time of year. Many are light hearted humorous ditties like, Sheb Wooley's *The Purple People Eater*; *The Monster Mash* by Bobby 'Boris' Pickett & The Crypt-Kickers, *The Blob* by The Five Blobs, or Jumpin Gene Simmons *Haunted House*.

Some are more serious, dare we say, spookier... Screamin' Jay Hawkins *I Put A Spell On You*; Michael Jackson's *Thriller*, *The Witch Queen Of New Orleans* by Redbone, and Kate Bush's *Wuthering Heights*.

For my money, the most serious - deadly serious-- was Jim Stafford's *Jasper*. Now Stafford had a small string of humorous country and pop hits in the mid-seventies. Songs like *Spiders And Snakes*; *My Girl Bill* and *Wildwood Weed*. Hardly the kind of singer you would expect something like Jasper to come from.

But together with country pop singer Dave Loggins, he produced a true heavyweight of a Halloween song. Complete with a plodding baseline, moaning sometimes shrieking women's background vocals, and spoken word verses, the song tells the tale of a rake and a ramblin' man who by the song's end has become something very, very different. Consider the lyric: Shadows danced as blue-veined hands, like spiders spinning strange commands, released the beast that dwells in Jasper Dan. The record was released in the spring of 1976. I believe that it would have enjoyed far greater success had it come out around this time of year.

THE COSMOS OF HALLOWEEN

by Bill Kast

The parade of planets that graced us all Summer is nearly over, but three bright ones are still visible early in the evening. Shortly after sunset, the planets are the first things to appear before the brightest stars pop into view.

How can you tell the difference between a star and a planet? You may have heard that stars twinkle, planets don't. Well, it's true. The more turbulence there is in the upper atmosphere the more stars twinkle, or scintillate. The planets shine with a steady light.

Jupiter is setting far in the southwest, and depending upon your perspective, is probably behind the Sangre de Cristo mountains. The golden globe of Saturn should still be up in the Southwest, not as bright as Jupiter but still appearing before the stars.

Mars will be up over the horizon to the South, very bright and as orange as a pumpkin. It should be the first thing you see in the sky after sunset. Mars made a historically close pass by Earth last July. Even though it's diminishing in size daily, Mars is still pretty close, bright and big. Take a look with a pair of binoculars and you may be able to see it as a tiny orange disc. The Moon is in the last quarter phase and won't be up until after midnight. No howling at the full moon this Halloween!

Halloween and Astronomy

Most of us know about the four major astronomical events of the year here on Planet Earth: the Summer and Winter Solstices and the Spring and Fall Equinoxes. Each season is roughly 90 days long.

Ancient astronomers further divided the year with four "cross quarter" days, each one halfway (or 45 days) between an equinox and a solstice. The Autumn cross quarter day was celebrated by the Celts and Druids of the British Isles as Samhain or "Summers end". The day was associated with death and spirits, and evolved into our modern day Halloween.

By the way, this author was born on April 30th, close to the Spring cross quarter day. April 30th is celebrated by the ancient Germanic tribes as Walpurgisnacht, the night that the Witches cavort with the Devil in the Hartz Mountains. Walpurgisnacht is the opposite day of the year from Halloween, exactly six months divide the two days. Coincidence? I hardly think so. (www.binocrane.com)



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