

CREATING MONSTERS 2018

13 DAYS OF HALLOWEEN PLAYLIST

BY BRANDON POLITE

18 Oct. Kanye West (feat. Jay-Z, Rick Ross, Nicki Minaj, & Bon Iver), "Monster" (2010) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pmEkOZMhva4>

The third single from his brilliant fifth album, *My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy*, the track finds Ye and company conceiving of themselves and the music business they're a part of as monsters. It's an ominous and fun track, featuring a standout verse from Jay-Z and a career-defining turn from Minaj.

19 Oct. David Bowie, "Scary Monsters (and Super Creeps)" (1980) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FkFvnyOQr3w>

The title track from Bowie's 14th studio album on which he reinvented himself once again, this time shifting from the experimental rock of the so-called Berlin Trilogy to the more mainstream – though still arty – new wave, post-punk, and new romantic sound his earlier glam-period music had greatly influenced. The song traces the descent of a lonely young woman into paranoia and ultimately madness.

20 Oct. Bauhaus, "Bela Lugosi's Dead" (1982) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OKRjfIPiJGY>

A band whose indebtedness to Bowie cannot be understated, British post-punk group and gothic rock pioneers Bauhaus' first single is a sparse nine-minute meditation on the death and "afterlife" of cinema's most enduring Dracula.

21 Oct. Wu-Tang Clan, "Protect Ya Neck" (1993) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ROIUR4gkPIE>

While not technically about monsters or horror, "Protect Ya Neck" – off of Staten Island hip-hop group Wu-Tang Clan's seminal album *Enter the Wu-Tang (36 Chambers)* – is the perfect follow-up to a song about cinema's most famous Dracula. Brilliantly produced by RZA (aka Prince Rakeem), the track is a classic, featuring standout verses from Old Dirty Bastard and, one of my personal top 5 rappers, GZA (aka The Genius).

22 Oct. The Charlie Daniels Band, "The Devil Went Down to Georgia" (1979) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sh7BZf7D5Bw>

This hit bluegrass song features a fiddle contest between Satan and a young man named Johnny over Johnny's soul. Satan's first salvo is a contemporary rock solo, but he's eventually thwarted by Johnny's traditional country and bluegrass fiddling – both parts brilliantly played by Charlie Daniels. For his victory, Satan awards Johnny with a golden fiddle, then vanishes into the Georgia night.

23 Oct. Black Sabbath, "Black Sabbath" (1970)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0IVdMbUx1_k

The title track from what many consider to be the first proper heavy metal album, "Black Sabbath" finds the Birmingham, UK quartet delving into the occult and horror themes typical of early British hard rock and heavy metal. The main riff is built around the tritone, an interval so dissonant within the Western tonal system that it came to be called "diabolus in musica," or the Devil in Music. Lyrically, the song recounts an experience bassist and main songwriter Geezer Butler had after going deep into the occult. He awoke one night to find a large black figure looming over him. Was it merely a sleep paralysis-induced hallucination, or an actual demonic visitor?

24 Oct. Camille Saint-Saëns, *Danse Macabre* (1874)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9CHqhsMP80E>

This piece is a tone poem for orchestra by French composer Camille Saint-Saëns. It opens with Death appearing in a graveyard at the stroke of midnight on Halloween night (indicated by the twelve harp plucks that open the piece). The dead emerge from their graves and have a ghoulish rave while Death plays his fiddle. Death's solo begins with the tritone, the "Devil in Music" also found in "Black Sabbath." The jiggling bones of the dancing skeletons is referenced by the xylophone. The piece builds to a frenzy but abruptly changes tone as the cock crows (on oboe, of course!), dawn breaks, and the dead return to their graves, eagerly anticipating next year's dance party.

25 Oct. Ghost, "Dance Macabre" (2018)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Gr63DiEUxw>

Another macabre dance party, this time from a Swedish band who blends a death metal sensibility with glossy pop production, catchy hooks, and ghoulish imagery. Similar to Saint-Saëns's piece, Ghost's "Dance Macabre" begins with a reference to the chiming of midnight. Narrated by Cardinal Copia (lead singer Tobias Forge's recent stage persona), the song follows a man who wishes he could "bewitch" his beloved so that they might dance forever and their doomed (perhaps already failed) relationship will never end.

26 Oct. Maria Schneider, "Dance You Monster to My Soft Song" (1994)—perf. La Jazz Jaus Bing Band

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qcHSa4dk7Bk>

Here is a third tune about dancing monsters, this time from celebrated jazz composer and big-band leader Maria Schneider. The piece, inspired by Paul Klee's 1922 [painting](#) of the same name, combines dense chromatic harmonies with an off-kilter dance-like rhythm which results in an uncanny mood. (My thanks to our very own Nikki Malley, Associate Professor of Music, for helping me out with this description!)

27 Oct. Parliament, "Dr. Funkenstein" (1976)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=noqMfTRKNlo>

Another dance tune, but this time narrated by Dr. Funkenstein, alter ego of P-Funk mastermind George Clinton, from Parliament's 1976 album, *The Clones of Dr. Funkenstein*. At the track's outset, the good doctor announces that he is "Preoccupied and dedicated / To the preservation of the motion of hips." And it's really hard to resist giving in and letting loose to the tune's funky grooves, ecstatically exclaiming, "We love to funk you, Funkenstein / Your funk is the best! / Take my body, give it the mind / To funk with the rest."

28 Oct. Geto Boys, "Mind Playing Tricks on Me" (1991)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KutXyPEEbQs>

Widely considered one of the best hip-hop tracks of at least the 90's, if not all time, "Mind Playing Tricks on Me" goes deep into the darkest parts of the human psyche with references to delusions, paranoia, and post-traumatic duress. The Houston rap trio of Scarface, Willie D, and Bushwick Bill unfold a drug-fueled waking nightmare filled with seemingly needless violence and gore. The standout verse is taken by Bushwick Bill and begins, "This year Halloween fell on a weekend / Me and Geto Boys are trick-or-treating / Robbing little kids for bags." Somehow, things go downhill from there!

29 Oct. Lou Reed, "Halloween Parade" (1991)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pb_r-lwB8t8

An abrupt shift in tone from the Geto Boys, Lou Reed's song – from his 15th and perhaps best solo album, *New York* – is a beautiful, mournful observation of the annual LGBT celebration in Greenwich Village (the titular Halloween Parade) in the wake of the AIDS epidemic. Reed's narrator tries but fails to enjoy the parade, as he is both haunted and comforted by memories of friends who lost their lives: "But there ain't no Hairy and no Virgin Mary / you won't hear those voices again / And Johnny Rio and Rotten Rita / you'll never see those faces again." It's warm and aching lovely.

30 Oct. Ministry, "Every Day Is Halloween" (1984)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KFPI9b9N6CQ>

This song, from industrial metal pioneers Ministry, still in their earlier synth-pop phase, offers a defense of the Goth subculture, with their black makeup, macabre dress, and disaffected attitude toward mainstream culture. The song presents the inner monologue of a nonconformist whom others can't accept because he dresses up as if it were Halloween everyday. In response, he sneers that, like him, they're playing dress-up, too . . . just in the conformist uniform of mainstream America.

31 Oct. Michael Jackson, "Thriller" (1982)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sOnqjkJTMaA>

One of the best songs from the greatest pop record of all time, which became one of if not the best music videos of all time. There is no better Halloween song than this. Written by Rod Temperton and produced by the incomparable Quincy Jones, the song is an homage to horror films and includes a "rap" by horror movie legend Vincent Price. It is far and away my favorite song and has been since I was a little kid.

Bonus The Shaggs, "It's Halloween" (1969)

https://youtu.be/11_nsW151tg

We shift from a great track from one of the best albums of all time to an awful track from one of the worst albums of all time. The Shaggs were a sister outsider rock act from the late 60s and early 70s. This Halloween-themed track, on which none of the sisters are in sync metrically, melodically, or harmonically, is from their 1969 debut album, **Philosophy of the World**. Listening this record is the musical equivalent of slowing down to look at a car wreck – you want to turn away from it, yet some part of you can't help but stare. This album is to rock music what **Plan 9 from Outer Space** is to film, falling into the coveted (?) category of so-bad-it's-good.