

Jeff Kirkendall's Thoughts For The Month Column

Thoughts, Opinions, Reviews, Commentary & More!

Hello and Welcome! My name is Jeff Kirkendall and I'm an independent filmmaker and actor from the Upstate New York area. This is the section of the Very Scary Productions website where I write about topics related to independent filmmaking, digital video production, acting, movies in general, horror movies in particular, my own indie movies, as well as anything and everything related or in between.

I decided to create this commentary page because I find that I often come across things that either interest me, excite me, intrigue me, or maybe just bug me. Any topic related to movies and cinema is fair game, from the most mainstream to the most controversial. For example I'll often read about movie projects that I have a strong interest in or opinion on, for one reason or another. This page gives me a forum to discuss these things. It's all about discussion and furthering understanding of our pop culture. Anyone who has feedback concerning what I have to say here, feel free to contact me (see the contact link at <http://www.veryscaryproductions.com/>).

I'd also like to point out that the following is just my opinion, and everyone is free to agree or disagree with what I have to say. Enjoy, and to all the Indies out there: Keep on Filming!

SUBJECT: Halloween 2008, Horror Theme Music and more – October 2008

“Once again the spooky holiday of Halloween is upon us. Once better known as a children’s holiday, the 31st of October has, in recent years, turned into a night when the adults come out to play. Halloween parties are going on at many bars and clubs all around the Capital Region as we speak. Even though Pamela Rhodes is at home feeling bitter now...” This is what Pamela hears come out of her radio one eerie Halloween night in my 1999 short film ***The Green-Eyed Monster***. The movie is in many ways my most classic horror-oriented picture in that it deals with such things as otherworldly voices and dancing zombies. (Yes, you read that correctly... it has dancing zombies in it). * I'm going to be releasing a newly re-mastered DVD version of the movie soon, hopefully in time for Halloween 2008, and it made me think that I haven't written anything about my favorite time of the year in quite a while. The last time I wrote I talked about Trick or Treating as a kid, and how Halloween has become more of an adult's celebration in recent years, with the prevalence of trendy and popular movie-inspired Halloween costumes and adult parties. This time around I'd like to chat a bit about horror theme music and my appreciation for it.

It's really amazing the integral role music can play with movies in general and horror movies in particular. A few years ago I was shopping at one of the major music & video retail chain stores looking through a room full of clearance items that resembled a warehouse with rows and rows of CD's lining the walls. The thought of flipping through these lines of discs was a daunting one; fortunately my shopping wound up only taking a few moments when I saw a CD titled *Very Scary Music – Classic Horror Themes* sitting atop a pile. (I found this disc to be particularly fitting considering the name of my own production company!) This inexpensive gem of a CD has themes on it from many classic fright films such as ***The Exorcist***, ***Psycho***, ***Poltergeist***, ***A Nightmare on Elm Street***, and of course John Carpenter's essential ***Halloween***, among others. Since I bought it

this disc has become one of my staples for the month of October each year. Listening to these compelling tunes one after another makes me think how some of the most memorable horror movie themes are also some of the simplest. One only has to hear those first four haunting piano notes to recognize dream stalker Freddy Krueger's music, and the simple "ki ki ki ma ma ma" theme tells you a killer with the last name of Voorhees is getting closer. (That theme – more of a sound effect really - defined the **Friday the 13th** movie series. And I might add that the Very Scary Music CD has a danceable variation of the **Friday the 13th** music theme on it rather than that basic series of creepy sounds). And of course the **Halloween** theme with its unrelenting staccato piano sticks in one's head long after the music has faded out. And the list of memorable horror theme music goes on and on....

Arguably however, most of the now classic horror movie themes are from films made in the 1980's and earlier. Despite the incredible popularity of the horror genre these days, I'm sure most would be hard-pressed to identify many current themes that have been, or are soon going to be, added to the horror classic themes list. This could be partly due to the fact that in earlier days before the advent of high-tech CGI (computer generated images), music was even more essential to the overall success of the production than it is now. ** And it could also be partly due to the fact that many of the theatrical (mainstream) studio movies being made today are remakes which simply offer updated versions of the original's theme music. Whatever the case, it makes one appreciate these memorable classic horror movie themes more than ever before. Given that thought, what follows below is a list of some of my favorite horror theme music (in very loose rank order). (I've included some television horror theme music for good measure in the list as well). This is music I'll have emanating from the stereo speakers during this wonderful month of October 2008 and for years to come. So I ask, what are some of your favorite spooky/creepy/scary Halloween music choices? Inquiring horror fans want to know!

Some cool horror theme music – perfect listening for the spooky month of October:

- 1). Theme from **Halloween** by John Carpenter – pulse pounding piano music that immediately brings to mind babysitter Laurie Strode (a young Jamie Lee Curtis) fleeing that faceless apparition originally known only as The Shape. Scary stuff indeed!
- 2). Theme from **A Nightmare on Elm Street** by Charles Bernstein – This one is high on my list given what a huge fan I am of the **Nightmare on Elm Street** franchise. There are many scenes in both the original Wes Craven film and the many sequels that followed where I just can't imagine watching without this haunting music as a backdrop.
- 3). Theme from **Re-Animator** by Richard Band – This is a theme that some mainstream film fans might not be overly familiar with. The **Re-Animator** series of films (beginning with 1985's **Re-Animator** and continuing on with its sequels **Bride of Re-Animator** and **Beyond Re-Animator**) are based on eccentric writer H.P. Lovecraft's Herbert West Re-Animator character, and fall squarely in the category of cult horror cinema. The nervous, playful nature of the score is instantly recognizable, complimenting the feel of these quirky but intense movies perfectly.
- 4). The music of Goblin – various themes and scores from Italian genre master Dario Argento's movies. Here's another one that falls into the territory of the dedicated horror film aficionado. Goblin is an Italian progressive synth-rock band with a unique sound that

has contributed quite a bit of impressive music to the films of Dario Argento. If you haven't heard Goblin before and are a fan of 80's music and/or horror movies I highly suggest checking them out. Some Argento movies featuring Goblin music include **Suspiria**, **Phenomena** (released as **Creepers** in the USA) and **Tenebre**.

5). Theme from **Poltergeist** by Jerry Goldsmith – That chorus of children's voices... so eerie and haunting, just like the movie itself.

6). **Shocker** by The Dudes of Wrath (from the **Shocker** soundtrack) – While it is arguably not one of Wes Craven's better known (or successful) horror films, the **Shocker** soundtrack gave us this memorable heavy metal tune by a group made up of various musicians, including Paul Stanley of KISS. It also includes a cool remake of Alice Cooper's *No More Mr. Nice Guy* by Megadeth, and some other equally shocking songs. This is a soundtrack that supports the notion that horror and heavy metal music are a perfect fit.

7). **The Twilight Zone** theme by Marius Constant – Somewhat dissonant, creepy and unnerving. A perfect beginning to a classic television show where one never knew what would happen next.

8). *Friday the 13th The Series* theme by Fred Mollin – *Friday the 13th The Series* was an (unrelated in plot) offshoot of the enduring **Friday the 13th** movie franchise. The show, which focused on three people trying to recover a plethora of cursed antiques, was very popular during the late 1980's. The opening titles showed the inside of the dark Curious Goods antique shop accompanied by this unsettling theme music.

9). **Friday the 13th** theme by Harry Manfredini – “ki ki ki ma ma ma” ... don't look back! It's worth mentioning that if you'd like to hear this incorporated into a good pop rock song, listen to Alice Cooper's 1986 tune *He's Back (The Man Behind the Mask)*, which was the theme to **Friday the 13th Part 6: Jason Lives**.

10). **Jaws** theme by John Williams – This is arguably the most terrifying music theme on the list. I can't imagine anyone daring to listen to this music before, or during, a swim in the ocean.

11). **A Nightmare on Elm Street 4: The Dream Master** – rock soundtrack featuring various artists. Although this may sound like just a standard rock album at first listen, most of the tunes really capture the feeling, mood and themes of the most successful of the Elm Street sequels. Standout tracks include *Love Kills* from Vinnie Vincent Invasion, *Therapist* by Vigil, and Craig Safan's dark and brooding *Resurrection*. This latter piece of orchestral music complimented one of the more memorable sequences (Freddy's Elm Street 4 resurrection) from any of the **Nightmare on Elm Street** sequels.

* “Halloween Reminiscences” was the topic of my November 2004 TFTM column.

** I've discussed the topic of remakes of classic horror films at length in my September 2002 and November 2003 TFTM columns. For remake reviews see the April 2004 (**Dawn of the Dead 2004** review), November 2005 (**The Fog 2005** review), June 2005 (**House of Wax 2005** review), February 2006 (**King Kong 2005** review), February 2007 (**Black Christmas 2006** review), September 2007 (**Halloween 2007** review) and January 2008 (**The Hitcher 2007**) columns.