

Jeepers Creepers: Great Songs from Horror Films

A LITTLE NIGHTMARE MUSIC

For an album of tuneful melodies from movies that sometimes took a week or less to make, JEEPERS CREEPERS: GREAT SONGS FROM HORROR FILMS was certainly a long time coming.

It was some 10 years ago, at a New York book and magazine show, that Scarlet Street magazine managing editor Tom Amorosi and I met the multi-talented Bruce Kimmel for the first time. A few weeks later, over dinner at Joe Allen, I mentioned a dream I'd been nursing for several years--a collection of songs from fright films, all newly recorded, using the Broadway, Hollywood, and cabaret talent that had made Bruce's previous albums so tremendously popular. Purely by coincidence, I had with me a complete list of songs that I thought would fit the format. Bruce was enthusiastic. Tom was enthusiastic. Even the waiter was enthusiastic. (Well, actually, the waiter was auditioning.) Sadly, we never got past the talking stage, and there the matter lay, as dormant as Frankenstein's Monster before an invigorating jolt of electricity.

Flash forward--or more appropriately, lightning-flash forward to 2003. Tom and I are again having dinner with Bruce. I bring up the old question of producing HORROR'S GREATEST HITS (as it was then called). Bruce tells me how much it will cost. I say, "Let's do it."

And we do it.

1. WHO KILLED TEDDY BEAR?

The driving melody and powerful vocal is worthy of a mega-bucks James Bond thriller, but WHO KILLED TEDDY BEAR? (1965) was a cheap, tawdry, irresistible psychosexual chiller directed by Joseph Cates (Phoebe's father) and starring Sal Mineo as an obscene phone caller, Juliet Prowse as his victim, Elaine Stritch as the lesbian owner of the discotheque at which they toil, and Jan Murray as a cop obsessed with sex crimes.

TEDDY BEAR played a few TV dates in the 1970s, shocking insomniacs with lurid images of Mineo dressed only in jockey briefs or white chinos so tight that the film's theme might have been "I've Got You Under My Skin," then all but vanished for almost two decades. An article by George Hatch in the Winter 1995 edition of Scarlet Street magazine revived interest in the film, which was picked up by Strand Releasing and shown in major cities across the country. A promised laserdisc (followed by a promised DVD) never materialized, and TEDDY BEAR once again faded away. Even Elaine Stritch--confessing all in the one-woman show that won her a 2002 Tony Award--failed to mention it.

2. GOODY GOODY.

This cheerfully vengeful standard wasn't written specifically for the Debbie Reynolds/Shelley Winters fright flick WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH HELEN? (1971), of course, but its use in that film extends from the opening credits (as part of David Raksin's score) to the closing scene (with the psychotic Winters playing it on the piano while Reynolds, murdered and tied like a scarecrow to an onstage ladder, "rehearses")--and beyond.

Much to director Curtis Harrington's distress,

the film's advertising campaign featured an image of the dead Reynolds, garishly dressed in a bloodied "tin soldier" dance costume, in tandem with the Johnny Mercer lyric, "So you met someone and now you know how it feels." Effective, certainly, but as Harrington was quick to point out, it gave away the end of the picture!

3. LOOK FOR A STAR. Some years before he wrote a seemingly endless string of Top Ten hits for Petula Clark ("Downtown," "I Know a Place," "Colour My World," "Don't Sleep in the Subway"), Tony Hatch, under the name Mark Anthony wrote "Look For a Star" for the sawdust spangled, and blood-specked CIRCUS OF HORRORS (1960). The song went on to become a major hit both in the United States and England.

HORROR's plot concerns a circus whose personnel consists of former thieves, hookers, and killers made gorgeous through the ministrations of crazed plastic surgeon turned ringmaster Rossiter (Anton Diffring). Surprisingly, this isn't presented as a metaphor for Hollywood. "Look For a Star" is played during the performances of thief/hooker/killer/aerialist Elissa Caro (Erica Remberg)--that is, until she threatens to blow the whistle on Rossiter and concludes her act with a trick that can only be performed once.

4. I'VE WRITTEN A LETTER TO DADDY/WHAT EVER HAPPENED TO BABY JANE? Okay, everyone remembers the first number. It's performed--with gestures--in the prologue of WHAT EVER HAPPENED TO BABY JANE? by Julie Allred (dubbed by Debbie Burton) as the young Baby Jane Hudson, and later by Bette Davis (in her own, for want of a better word, voice) as the crackpot Jane becomes after her career, if not her liquor bill, dries up. "I've Written a Letter..." is the sort of sugar-sweet dirge beloved of show biz, with "Barbara Allen" (written in the 1600s), Al Jolson's "Sonny Boy" (1928), "Gloomy Sunday" (1933, and reportedly responsible for a rash of suicides, including that of its gloomy composer, Rezsó Seress), Ray Peterson's "Tell Laura I Love Her" (1960), Mark Dinning's "Teen Angel" (1960), and Bobby Goldsboro's "Honey" (1968) just a few of the stickier samples.

The second tune turns up in the film minus its lyrics--notably when it blasts forth from the house belonging to the Hudson Sisters' next-door neighbors (played by Anna Lee and Davis' real-life daughter B.D. Merrill), and effectively drowns out the desperate cries for help from Blanche Hudson (Joan Crawford)--but it's never actually performed. However, it was recorded for promotional purposes by Bette Davis and Debbie Burton for MGM Records in 1962.

5. THE FAITHFUL HEART. With the great success of two films based on his novels--Walt Disney's 20,000 LEAGUES UNDER THE SEA (1954) and Mike Todd's AROUND THE WORLD IN 80 DAYS (1956)--French fantasist Jules Verne became big business in the Hollywood of the 1950s and 1960s. One of the best Verne adaptations came in 1959, with JOURNEY TO THE CENTER OF THE EARTH--though Verne didn't think to include a woman (played by Arlene Dahl) on his journey, much less a duck named Gertrude (played by--well, by a duck)

Bernard Herrmann uncharacteristically included the work of another composer in his background

score, using one of Jimmy Van Heusen's lilting melodies for the three songs intended for top billed Pat Boone. The song itself--"The Faithful Heart," sung by Boone on a makeshift raft in the center of an underground sea--wound up on the cutting room floor, as did "Twice as Tall." (Only "My Love is Like a Red, Red Rose," for which Van Heusen set Robert Burns' poem to music, made the final cut.)

Tom Amorosi initially argued against including "The Faithful Heart" in this collection, since JOURNEY isn't strictly a horror film. I reasoned that any film featuring dinosaurs qualified as a horror--or at least monster--movie. Bruce Kimmel cinched it with "For God's sake, Thayer David eats the duck," which we all agreed was the most horrifying moment in any of the films on our list. Van Heusen's music and Sammy Cahn's plaintive lyrics for "The Faithful Heart" deserve rescue from an undeserved obscurity, and they're presented here in all their gentle beauty.

6. HEY, YOU!/FARO-LA, FARO-LI (SONG OF THE NEW WINE). Universal's horrors always had their euphonious interludes, from disembodied trousers skipping down the lane singing "Here We Go Gathering Nuts in May" (in 1933's THE INVISIBLE MAN) to Frankenstein's Monster (Boris Karloff in 1935's BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN) grooving to the feel-good bowing of a blind hermit (O.P. Heggie) playing "Fit as a Fiddle and Ready for Love." (Future film historians, take note: that last one's a joke!) In 1944, THE MUMMY'S CURSE opens with cafe-owner Tante Berthe (Ann Codee) belting "Hey You!" to a boisterous crowd of Louisiana Bayou dwellers. Later, she's strangled by Kharis (Lon Chaney Jr.), a centuries-old music critic. (Codee had been a vaudeville performer with husband Frank Orth, who wrote the lyrics for "Hey, You!")

The 1943 monster rally FRANKENSTEIN MEETS THE WOLF MAN offers "Faro-La, Faro-Li" at the Festival of the New Wine in the cursed village of Vasaria, sung by Adia Kuznetzoff (born in Russia in 1889, died on Long Island in 1954). Kuznetzoff commits a lyrical faux pas when he sings "...and may they live eternally" to Baroness Frankenstein (Ilona Massey) and the immortal lycanthrope Larry Talbot (Chaney Jr.), who wants only to die, and compounds his indiscretion by concluding that "...life is short, but death is long." Kuznetzoff made a number of films with stars who tried to prove the opposite--his last was 1944's THE PRINCESS AND THE PIRATE, opposite Bob Hope (born in London in 1903, died in Toluca Lake in 2003).

7. HUSH...HUSH, SWEET CHARLOTTE. The song was a considerable hit for Patti Page the Singing Rage, but what little of the actual lyrics are heard in the 1964 Southern Gothic thriller of the same name are warbled first by Joseph Cotten (as Dr. Drew) in an effort to drive Charlotte Hollis (Bette Davis) batty, and then by Al Martino over the closing credits.

The film's plot concerns Charlotte, whose long-ago lover, John Mayhew (Bruce Dern), was sliced and diced with a meat cleaver, dooming the poor girl to spinsterhood. In the tender spirit of the ageless "Lizzie Borden took an axe," the local youths immortalize Miss Charlotte in verse, and the following ditty is heard during CHARLOTTE's opening titles: "Chop chop, sweet Charlotte/Chop chop till he's dead/Chop chop, sweet Charlotte/Chop off his hand and head/To

meet your lover you ran chop chop/Now everyone understands/Just why you went to meet your love chop chop/To chop off his head and hand.”

8. JEEPERS CREEPERS. Alas, poor “Creepers”—what new to do with an Oscar-nominated tune that was introduced by Louis Armstrong (in the 1938 musical GOING PLACES, about a horse called Jeepers Creepers who won’t run unless he hears a song called “Jeepers Creepers”), that was the title of a 1939 Porky Pig cartoon, that was the title of a 1939 feature starring The Weaver Brothers and Elvira, that over the years received dozens of renditions by such as Billie Holiday, Stan Kenton, Tony Bennett, Glenn Miller, Count Basie, Ethel Waters, Artie Shaw, Frank Sinatra, the Hi-Lo’s, the Isley Brothers, Paul Whiteman, Andre Previn, Bing Crosby, and Hayley Mills, and that finally became the titular inspiration for a very popular 2001 horror film (the song is heard several times during the course of the movie) and its 2003 sequel?

Well, something new had to be done, because JEEPERS CREEPERS was also the name of this collection and wasn’t about to be dropped. Bruce Kimmel and arranger Grant Geissman managed brilliantly!

9. THE BLOB. “It crawls! It creeps! It eats you alive!” THE BLOB (1958) was a notable sci-fi scream-fest for a number of unique reasons. It’s the only horror film ever filmed in Chesterville County, Pennsylvania. Its teen hero was played by 28-year-old Steve (billed as Steven) McQueen. His virginal teen girlfriend was played by 25-year-old Aneta Corseaut, who went on to play schoolteacher Helen Crump on THE ANDY GRIFFITH SHOW. (She married Sheriff Andy. Shazam!) And the bouncy title tune was the work of none other than Mack David and Burt Bacharach! What the world needs now are Blobs, Big Blobs....

10. AURORA. Bucking the “Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy” trend, my favorite Andrews Sisters song has always been “Aurora,” sung at the conclusion of the Abbott and Costello comedy, HOLD THAT GHOST (1941). Not only was the song’s inclusion in the film an afterthought, but so were The Andrew Sisters. GHOST was originally shot as a tuneless haunted house farce, but the sisters had scored in two previous teamings with Bud and Lou that same year (BUCK PRIVATES and IN THE NAVY), and Universal Pictures decreed that they be teamed yet again. A few scenes were dropped and two new nightclub sequences were filmed with Patty, Maxene, and LaVerne, along with top-hatted entertainer Ted Lewis.

I met the effervescent Maxene Andrews in the mid-seventies, when she starred with Margaret (“Moonlight in Vermont”) Whiting in a tour of the Broadway musical OVER HERE!, which played Paramus, New Jersey’s Playhouse on the Mall, where I toiled unmightily as the house manager. I became pals with Maxene and her manager/companion, Linda Mills, and offered to drive them to and from the theater. One snowy night, I mentioned my old fave—“Aurora”—and Maxene started to sing it. Linda joined in, but neither were up on the lyrics. I was—and for a few brief shining moments, I was an honorary Andrews Sister. (Patty, I suspect.)

JEEPERS CREEPERS’ “Aurora” is appropriately redolent of disco. The seventies saw renewed popularity for Maxene and Patty (LaVerne had died in

1967), including the Broadway success OVER HERE! (1974), which teamed the sisters for the last time. That same year, a snippet of “Aurora” figured in the dance hit “Cherchez La Femme,” by Dr. Buzzard’s Original Savannah Band. The revival had been sparked two years earlier by Bette Midler’s smash hit reprise of an old Andrews Sisters song—“Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy,” naturally. Me, I’ll stick with “Aurora.” She’s a sweetheart in a million!

11. MOTHRA’S SONG. “Mightiest monster in all creation! Ravishing a universe for love!” Not counting Adam Sandler, is there a less likely star than the magnitudinous moth who flapped her way through MOTHRA (1961, MOSURA in its native Japan), GODZILLA VS. MOTHRA (1964), and a veritable swarm of Japanese monster movies?

The Big Bug is worshipped by the natives of Beiru, including two tiny priestesses (Emi and Yummi Ito) who are sometimes described as fairies and treat the colorful Mothra as a goddess. (Lots of subtext there, but that’s another story.) During the course of Mothra’s debut picture, the priestesses are kidnapped by an unscrupulous entrepreneur (Jerry Ito) and thrust into show business, where—ironically—they’re not only called The Peanuts, but work for them. Happily, The Peanuts’ plaintive chant is more than merely pretty; it’s a telepathic cry for help to Mothra, who comes a-flappin’ and levels Tokyo.

12. YOU’RE MY LIVING DOLL. Continuing in a diminutive vein, we come to a tune from Bert I. Gordon’s ATTACK OF THE PUPPET PEOPLE (1958), sung by Susan Gordon in what amounts to an original cast recording. (In the film itself, “You’re My Living Doll” is sung by Marlene Willis, one of the shrinkees of mad dollmaker John Hoyt.)

Susan’s dad, the prolific Bert I., was the producer/director/writer/effects wiz behind such enduring sci-fi and horror hits as THE AMAZING COLOSSAL MAN (1957), BEGINNING OF THE END (1957), THE CYCLOPS (1957), EARTH VS. THE SPIDER (1958), WAR OF THE COLOSSAL BEAST (1958), TORMENTED (1960), THE MAGIC SWORD (1962), VILLAGE OF THE GIANTS (1965), and EMPIRE OF THE ANTS (1977), in several of which Susan performed. Susan also had a considerable career on her own, appearing in THE FIVE PENNIES (1959) opposite Danny Kaye and television’s ALFRED HITCHCOCK PRESENTS, GUNSMOKE, 77 SUNSET STRIP, and THE TWILIGHT ZONE, among many other shows. (In one episode of MY THREE SONS, she plays Chip’s girlfriend; in another, “dream” episode, she plays Chip!)

ATTACK OF THE PUPPET PEOPLE, by the way, was directly responsible for Richard M. Nixon’s resigning the presidency of the United States. On the night of the Watergate burglary, which eventually brought down Nixon’s administration, a lookout in the Howard Johnson Motel across the street from the Watergate apartment complex was supposed to warn the miscreants via walkie-talkie if he saw the law approaching. Instead, he was immersed in a movie on TV and failed to buzz his fellow crooks. The movie was about this mad dollmaker, see....

13. STELLA BY STARLIGHT. Here’s a trivia question—what, besides the fact that they’re both Paramount

releases, do THE UNINVITED (1944) and THE NUTTY PROFESSOR (1963) have in common? Answer: Victor Young’s wistful melody “Stella by Starlight,” the theme for sad, ghost-ridden Stella Meredith (Gail Russell) in the first film and jazzed up by Les Brown and his Band of Renown as the theme for college co-ed Stella Purdy (Stella Stevens) in the second.

The song—with or without its ethereal Ned Washington lyrics—became a jazz staple over the years, recorded by John Coltrane, Chet Baker, Stan Kenton, Miles Davis, Dizzy Gillespie, George Benson, Erroll Garner, Wes Montgomery, Charlie Parker, and many more. JEEPERS CREEPERS returns “Stella by Starlight” to its mellifluous—if unearthly—origins as a mimosascented nocturne for a haunted night.

14. I WAS A TEENAGE HORROR MEDLEY. This collection affords music lovers the unprecedented opportunity to hear “You Gotta Have Ee-Ooo” (from 1958’s HOW TO MAKE A MONSTER), “Eeny Meenie Miney Moe” (from 1957’s I WAS A TEENAGE WEREWOLF), and “Daddy Bird” (from 1958’s FRANKENSTEIN’S DAUGHTER) as never before—on key.

In HOW TO MAKE A MONSTER, set at a Hollywood film studio, American International Pictures—which never, by the way, owned an actual studio—decides to abandon its popular teen horrors in favor of teen musicals. As an example of the latter, John Ashley belts out “You Gotta Have Ee-Ooo,” and the song belts right back. AIP horrors, AIP musicals—what’s the diff?

Unlike Ashley, Kenny Miller was a seasoned singer, but when it came time to film “Eeny Meenie Miney Moe” for I WAS A TEENAGE WEREWOLF, he was thrown a curve ball by producer Herman Cohen, he of the penchant for casting young hunks—some of them nude models for muscle mags—in his horror films. Miller is on key, but he and the orchestra meet only in passing. Instead of prerecording the song and performing it before the camera to the playback, Miller had been forced to sing live to minimal accompaniment, counting the song in his head. Later, the music was added—two measures out of synch, according to Miller in his 1999 autobiography. Cohen promised to fix it before TEENAGE WEREWOLF went into general release. It never happened.

The party scene in FRANKENSTEIN’S DAUGHTER highlights the musical stylings of the Page Cavanaugh Trio and the son of one of the silent screen’s greatest comics, Harold Lloyd Jr. Cavanaugh made several other film appearances, including Howard Hawks’ A SONG IS BORN and Doris Day’s debut feature ROMANCE ON THE HIGH SEAS (both 1948). Lloyd Jr.—who suffered a massive stroke at age 34 and died six years later, in 1971—was no great shakes as a rock ‘n’ roller, but we can still be grateful that he showed up to warble a couple of tunes. But for Junior, the film’s male lead—John Ashley—might have stepped up to the mike.

The “Teenage Horror Medley” is fine, nostalgic fun and brings JEEPERS CREEPERS: GREAT SONGS FROM HORROR FILMS to a fitting end. Or do they? Horror films are notorious for concluding with just a hint of further frights to follow. And let’s not forget the final end title at the close of THE BLOB—that big, blazing question mark.

Richard Valley