

*Music of the Whole World*  
Series 2: presentation # 1: October 31, 2006

# Planetary Spirits - Music of the Whole S p o o k y World - study materials

compiled and edited by Moshe Denburg

with contributions from –  
Qiu Xia He, Lowell Morris, Mark Parlett, Joseph Danza, Amy Stephen

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General Note

The following study materials are being made available to participants in the educational series, **Music of the Whole World**, presented by the Vancouver Inter-Cultural Orchestra (VICO) at the Vancouver Public Library. The presentation, **Planetary Spirits: Music of the Whole S p ° k y World**, took place on October 31, 2006.

Intercultural Music Study Materials

In honour of Halloween, the presentation **Planetary Spirits: Music of the Whole S p ° k y World** was created, in order to explore how different world music traditions deal with spirits, good and bad. These study materials, though including some discussion of the music attached to the traditions involved, are a departure from the usual materials on instruments and music of the world appended to our presentations. These latter materials form part of a larger work in progress (as of October 2006) entitled *Orchestrating the World - a Manual of Intercultural Music Making* by Moshe Denburg. Portions of this work are available for downloading on the VICO website. To download this study guide, or an expanded one for musicians, go to:

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## Scope and Considerations

Spirits and ghosts play a role in traditions the world over. In some cultures these spirits are of the ancestors, who are honoured and connected with through rituals and festivities. In others, ritualized actions are taken to extirpate evil spirits. In all, the idea of the unseen is prevalent – and is dealt with by costume, masquerade, ritual, music, and dance.

There are many many traditions which deal with unseen spirits, or warding off evil. Here we will touch upon several which will serve as a springboard to further study. These traditions are:

- Halloween Music and Popular Western Culture
- The Balinese Calonarang Play
- Purim - the Jewish Masquerade Festival
- Samhain - the Celtic New Year
- Qing Ming Jie - Chinese Ghost Day
- El Dia de los Muertos - the Mexican Day of the Dead

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## **Halloween Music and Popular Western Culture**

Halloween, in its origins, was a pagan holy time occurring on November 1, observed by the Celts (in Ireland, Scotland, Wales and other parts of Great Britain), and signifying the end of harvest season and the beginning of winter (see below, *Samhai - the Celtic New Year*). Early in the first millenium, around the 9<sup>th</sup> century, it was co-opted by the Christian church to serve as the ‘all hallows even’, the evening before All Saints Day on November 1 (*to hallow* means to make holy). The holiday came to North America with the Irish in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and over time it has been transformed into a popular festival that crosses most ethnic and even faith borders. This is explained somewhat by the fact that the tradition is one primarily for children, where all dress up in various costumes and go ‘trick or treating’ through the neighborhood, collecting candy and other treats, something hard for any child to resist, not to mention his harried parents. It is probable that the children themselves do not know, or couldn’t give a twig, about the meaning of Halloween, its origins and etymologies, and whether it fits in with the religious tradition they are born into. So in this sense Halloween has become, in popular Western culture, a secular festival, a time of playfulness, of ghost stories, and of giving treats to children.

The music of Halloween is connected with the creations of popular culture, such as movies, celebrations and events of various sorts, and in general, with ‘scary’ music - music and songs fashioned specifically to evoke *ghostliness*, *ghastliness*, and the *weird*. We have heard many of them, without associating them only with Halloween time, songs such as: *Season of the Witch* (Donovan), *Sympathy for the Devil* (Rolling Stones), *Black Magic Woman* (Santana), and theme music for shows such as: *Twilight Zone*, and *X-Files*. Western popular culture is replete with ‘spooky’ music, and its prevalence is greatest around Halloween time - in the soundtracks of movies, and in general in the media, to establish the scary mood of the season.

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### Some terms and explanations

**Jack-o-lanterns**, originally made from turnips, in America have been made from pumpkins. They are meant to ward off evil spirits.

**Trick or Treating** has various explanations: a) Since Halloween is a night when the spirit world is out in force, giving a treat to the visitor is a way to ward off the tricks of a ghost or unfriendly spirit. And since the visitor, usually a child, is in costume, you do well to treat him/her well, for you never know who the real person is behind the mask; b) It is a carry over of the tradition of beggars who used to go from door to door at this time year – the time of All Saints Day followed by All Souls Day - offering to say prayers for a family's departed ones in return for food.

Here is a short list of recordings of and study materials on the music and the phenomenon of Halloween in popular western culture.

### Discography

#### **Sounds & Music for Halloween**

Composer: Lowell Morris

#### **Great Pumpkin Waltz**

from: *It's the Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown*

Composer: Vince Guaraldi

#### **Halloween**

- film soundtrack.

Composer: John Carpenter

#### **Best of Nightmare on Elm St**

- film soundtrack.

Composers: Angelo Badalamenti, Charles Bernstein, Christopher Young, others.

#### **Halloween Hits**

- Various artists. Contains "Monster Mash" by - Bobby "Boris" Pickett, etc.

#### **Also see:**

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_Halloween\\_songs](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Halloween_songs)

- Lists many dozens of songs which relate either directly or indirectly to Halloween.

### Bibliography

#### **Lachmann, Richard.** *Halloween and popular culture*

- Summary: Halloween, from trick-or-treating in shopping malls to Spiderman Costumes and watching the Scream films, 21st century American culture has transformed the scariest night of the year into a multi-billion dollar industry, surpassed only by Christmas. Richard Lachmann, University at Albany professor of Sociology, specializes in the sociology of culture and draws on research and trends to explain Halloween and our popular culture.

## The Balinese Calonarang Play

The Calonarang is a simple tale on the surface but complex in its depth, it is a good example of the idea of transformation and the public display of releasing of good and bad spirits.

The play dramatizes an old Javanese account of the conflict between the evil sorceress Calonarang and the holy man Empu Baradah. The witch, together with her pupils - beautiful young girls who can transform themselves into demons - have spread plague throughout the land and people are dying in large numbers. The holy man seeks to destroy her and end the plague. He sends a heroic warrior to kill her but the witch defeats him. The holy man sets forth and the ultimate scene of the play unfolds.

The witch now appears in supernatural form (Rangda) represented by a demonic mask and fantastic costume, and is confronted by the holy man, also magically transformed and represented by the barong (a dragon). After a symbolic dance of conflict the play comes to an end. Neither character has been defeated.

No script for the play exists and every village interprets the story to suit themselves, but the overall dramatic arc remains the same. The play opens in the graveyard, where the pupils enter and await the witch, who first appears as an old woman. After that there are comedic scenes of pranks being played on the terrified villagers who are fleeing the plague. The main drama leading to the final confrontation takes place after the comedy, and the final scene is in the graveyard. Rangda makes a dramatic entrance from a raised bamboo platform at the kepuh tree, a tree which is sacred to Durga, Goddess of Death and which grows in every Balinese graveyard. The final dance conflict between the guardian dragon-like Barong and Rangda is filled with the ever present spectre of the performers going into trance as the performance ends in an atmosphere of controlled chaos and tension.

There are specific music, rhythms, and dances which accompany the various parts of the play.

### Bibliography

#### **Masks of Bali**

by J. Slattum, P. Schraub  
Chronicle Books, 1992  
ISBN: 0811800628

### Filmography

#### **Trance and Dance in Bali**

- Records a performance of the Balinese ceremonial kris (dagger) dance-drama, which depicts the never-ending struggle between witch (death-dealing) and dragon (life-protecting), as it was given in the village of Pagoetan in the late 1930s. The dancers experience violent trance seizures, turn their crises against their breasts without injury, and are restored to consciousness with incense and holy water. Narrated by Margaret Mead against a background of Balinese music.

From the *Character Formation in Different Cultures* series.  
Produced by Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead. 1952

## Purim – the Jewish Masquerade Festival

The Jewish festival of Purim, which occurs variously between February and March, is similar to Halloween in one important respect – it utilizes the idea of the masquerade to ward off evil. Though it does not deal with death nor with communing with spirits or ancestors, it encompasses a significant good vs. evil theme. The story of Purim is basically that narrated in the biblical Book of Esther. In short it is as follows:

The Jewish people living in the ancient Persian empire (around 500 BCE) were despised by a certain high official, the very wicked Haman. This ‘blot-on-the-face-of-humanity’ Haman convinced the ‘not-too-smart-tippler-of-a-king’ Xerxes to decree that on such and such a day all the Jews of Persia would be, gulp, annihilated! But divinely guided fate intervened, and via the noble actions of Queen Esther, who started out as a modest – or some say not so modest - Jewish princess, and her uncle Mordechai the righteous, the decree was overturned and this ‘idiot-without-a-just-bone-in-his-body’ Haman got hung, and the good guys – the Jewish people – won!

I mean, this ‘tyrant-without-peer’ Haman was so bad, we react with scorn every time his name is mentioned, which is many times in the Book of Esther. On Purim the entire book is read in the synagogue, and special noise-makers, called *graggers*, are sounded every time the chanter chants the name of that ‘narcissistic-brute-force-evil-doer’ Haman.

*Purim* means lottery, and alludes to the random method which Haman utilized to choose the day on which he would wreak havoc on the Jewish people.

So that’s the gist of it, but the holiday’s meaning goes much further. As with many Jewish narratives of the victory of good over evil, children are encouraged to participate, and all, young and old, are asked to wear costumes and create a grand masquerade. Yes, there are many who dress up as one or another of the Purim story characters – lots of Queen Esthers and Mordechais and Xerxes and Hamans too - but all manner of costumes are welcome. People really go far out on Purim – in North Vancouver there is a Rabbi who dresses up as a woman! His beard is a dead giveaway. He doesn’t happen to be gay, but Purim encourages these kinds of shenanigans. In fact, on Purim it is even a good deed to get drunk! There is a saying that one should drink until he doesn’t know the difference between the two statements, ‘cursed is Haman’ and ‘blessed is Mordechai’.

The upshot of all of this is a liberation story – we are encouraged to put on all manner of costume, to get rid of the stand-pat formulas of who we are, and to raise the perennial struggle of good vs. evil to a plane of unified consciousness.

There is a Jewish saying that declares that when the time of the final liberation comes, the time of the Messiah if you will, there will only be one holiday left, the holiday of Purim. Meaning, as long as truth prevails, even if one is drunk and wearing a mask, there is no danger of forgetting oneself. We will see ourselves and each other clearly regardless of the costumes we wear.

The music of Purim, apart from the rather ugly sounding *gragger* noise, is full of simple and fun songs, usually with a lively beat. It is after all a happy time. There are some quieter and more serene songs as well, songs of thanksgiving for the miracle of divine help that is at the core of the Purim story.

### Bibliography

**Goodman, Philip.** *The Purim Anthology*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1973.

- origins of Purim, Purim in literature, art and music, stories and poems, Purim humor and programs, Purim in the synagogue and a music supplement with notes and a bibliography.

Internet:

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Purim>

## Samhain – the Celtic New Year

(pronounced: sah-ween)

Literally meaning ‘summer’s end’, *Samhain* is popularly known as the Celtic New Year. Belonging geographically to Ireland, Scotland, and other parts of great Britain, it goes back a very long way, and is the actual origin of the western Halloween tradition. Deemed evil by the European church of course because it was pagan, it was incorporated into the church liturgy as *All Saints Day*, around the 9<sup>th</sup> century. The eve of the day became Halloween (see above, *Halloween Music and Popular Western Culture*). This attempt by the Church to replace certain pagan traditions with ones more in keeping with the Christian faith was repeated in several instances, including Christmas and Easter. Samhain however, held its own, and our present day Halloween owes much more to the Samhain tradition than it does the decreed All Saints Day of the church. Certain Christian denominations, on grounds of faith repudiate Halloween in no uncertain terms.

Samhain represents the final harvest, just before the winter. It is a time when the barrier between the earthly and unearthly worlds wanes, and spirits may cross over with greater ease. The festival is dedicated to taking stock of the harvest, and remembering the departed and telling stories of them. The ancestors, thus honoured, are also asked to bring good fortune to their descendants.

On Samhain bonfires are lit – in former times, as well as today in some circles, the bones of slaughtered animals are burnt. These fires also represent a certain purification ritual, to ward off evil spirits; and since all kindle their fires from a common flame, communal interconnectedness is emphasized. Divination games and rituals, especially to predict the name of one’s future spouse and the location of one’s future home, are practiced. Modern day Halloween games, such as bobbing for apples, originated in these rituals of Samhain.

The Celtic tradition generally is full of songs about the ‘other world’, and about ghosts and the like. Here is the text of a well known song from the tradition which personifies death.

### DEATH AND THE LADY

As I walked out one morn in May  
I met an old man by the way  
His head was bald, his beard was grey  
His clothes were made of the cold earthen clay

"I'll give you gold, I'll give you pearls  
I'll give you costly robes to wear  
I'll give you all my wealth in store  
If you'll let me live a few years more"

His head was bald, his beard was grey  
His coat was made of the cold earthen clay  
I asked him what strange country from  
Or what strange place he did belong

"Fair lady, lay your robes aside  
No longer glory in your pride  
And now, sweet maid, make no delay  
Your time is come and you must away"

"My name is Death, cannot you see?  
Lords, dukes, and ladies bow down to me  
And you are one of those branches three  
And you fair maid must come along with me"

And that same day this fair maid died  
"Write on my tomb," the lady cried,  
"Here lies a poor distressed maid;  
by Death so cruelly she was betrayed"

### Bibliography on the Internet

- Wikipedia, the online encyclopaedia, is a good resource. Go to: <http://en.wikipedia.org/>  
And search the following terms: **Samhain; Halloween; Halloween traditions**

- For a fine article on Samhain, go to: <http://www.celticspirit.org/samhain.htm>

## Qing Ming Jie – Chinese Ghost Day

(pronunciation note: ‘Q’ is always pronounced as a ‘ch’; thus, Qin = chin)

### Festivals of the Dead

清明节

清明时节雨纷纷，路上行人欲断魂。  
借问酒家何处有，牧童遥指杏花村。  
-杜牧

### Qingming Festival

(a poem)

During the festival of Qingming,  
rain drizzles without end,  
A lone traveler on the road is overcome by grief.  
He would like to know where to find a wine shop  
The shepherd boy points to the village ahead where  
the apricot tree blooms.

- Du Mu ( 803-852)

[Translated by Carol Stepanchuks/Charles Wong]

One of the 24 节气 **Jie Qi** (seasonal markings) on the Chinese lunar calendar, **Qin Ming Jie** is a traditional Han Chinese festival. It begins on April 4, 5 or 6 according to the solar calendar, about 106 days after the winter solstice.

**Qing Ming Jie** – means Clear Brightness Festival; is also called 寒食节 **Han Shi Jie** (Cold Food Festival), or 扫墓节 **Sao Mu Jie** (Sweeping the Grave Festival).

The origin of the custom relates to the story of a man, Jie Zi Tui who lived about 635 BC. He was a friend of the Duke and helped him through hard times. However, being a humble scholar, he refused to accept a high position in the Duke’s court, which was offered to him as a reward, and instead went into seclusion on a mountain. In an attempt to force Jie out of his hiding place, the Duke set a fire. Eventually Jie was found dead next to a willow tree. The Duke, in his remorse, decreed that no fire should be lit on that day, for the remembrance of Jie. This prohibition eventually included cooking fires, so the festival became a *Cold Food Festival*.

Over time, the festival focused on the dead in general. *Sweeping the Grave* can be traced back to the Han Dynasty (206 BC to 220 AD). It is a time of quiet solitude, familial closeness, and graveside worship, a time to commemorate departed ancestral spirits. According to the Chinese, the dead are intimately connected with life and they are responsible for ensuring fertility in the family as well as in the fields. Sacrifices of food and *spirit money* are made at springtime to keep the ancestors in good humor so that the family may receive abundant blessings and good harvests.

Like the secular aspect of Easter, or the rites of spring in various cultures, it is a springtime ceremony, marking the onset of planting, the rebirth of nature, and the beginning of outdoor activity. Thus, the worship of the dead is also about the living.

### Activities associated with the festival of Qing Ming Jie

#### Worship at the Grave

- Sweeping away dirt, cutting down weeds, visiting tombs, and tending to them at least once a year to show that the family has not died out.
- Offering paper money and incense; keeping the ancestors happy!
- Offering food, wine and goods, chicken, eggs, and rice cakes; after the ceremony, fully prepared meals are shared with family and friends in the ancestral hall.
- Wearing and planting willow branches. Willow has the power to protect against evil and bad ghosts.

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### Celebrating the Outdoors

- After visiting family graves and paying respect to their ancestors, people enjoy a spring picnic (Ta Qing).
- Walking over the green grass, playing games such as kite flying, ball playing, swinging, rooster fighting, eating, painting, and carving eggs, and eating blue rich cakes.

### Reference Books for further study

English:

Mooncakes and Hungry Ghosts - Festivals of China  
By Carol Stepanchuk and Charles Wong  
China Books ISBN 0-8351-2481-9

Calendar of Traditional Chinese Festivals and Local Celebrations  
By Chan Sui Jeung  
Wan Li Book Co. ISBN 962-14-2020-2

Chinese:

节俗—中国民俗文化  
鸿宇 编著  
宗教文化出版社 ISBN 7-80123-603-3/.151

节庆—中国民俗文化丛书  
盖国梁 著  
上海古籍出版社 ISBN 7-5325-3259-3/G.259

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## El Dia de los Muertos (The Mexican Day of the Dead)

Pre-dating the arrival of the Spaniards and the Christian church by several millenia, *El Dia de los Muertos* is a 5 day festival celebrated around the end of October-beginning of November. It commemorates the dead, honours the spirits of the departed, and is meant to help overcome the fear of death, even mocking it.

Like *Samhain*, there is a certain belief, at the core of the holiday, that at certain seasons the living and the dead can communicate more easily with each other. It is a season for the dead to come back to the land of the living and visit with their loved ones. *El Dia de los Muertos* is both a festive event and a deeply spiritual one, a time for families to remember their dear departed. Like the Chinese *Qing Ming Jie*, people visit the graves of the deceased, clean them and decorate them. At home they construct little altars, called *ofrendas*, where they place offerings, often in the form of the departed's favourite food or drink.

Other symbols and foods involved with the festival include:

- *Calacas* and *Calaveras* (skeletons and skulls), which are utilized as decorations and are found everywhere, depicting every human guise – skeleton doctors, soldiers, athletes, and so on. They may be made from all sorts of materials - wood, paper mache, plastic, and so on.
- *Pan de Muerto* (Day of the Dead bread), is a treat made with flour, butter, sugar, eggs, orange peel, anise and yeast, and with strips of dough depicting bones and tears.
- Sugar skulls, sometimes also made of chocolate, are another tasty treat.

The main activities of the festival are:

- a) Rituals and gatherings at cemeteries;
- b) Parades or *comparsas*.

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Since the festival involves celebration, much music is associated with it, especially the very traditional *rancheras*, songs in  $\frac{3}{4}$  time, quite typical of the folk music of Mexico and Latin America. A famous ranchera, appropriate to the 'death theme' of *El Dia de los Muertos*, is La Llorona (The Weeping One). It tells the story of a woman who wanders the earth forever looking for her children, whom she drowned in a fit of rage and sorrow. Children are scared solid by her, and they are likely to begin behaving well when they are told that they might end up being drowned by La Llorona if they don't shape up!

### Bibliography

- Wikipedia, the online encyclopaedia, has a fine article; Go to:

<http://en.wikipedia.org/>

And search the term: **Day of the Dead**

- Other excellent internet articles can be found at the following links:

<http://www.inside-mexico.com/featuredead.htm>

<http://www.azcentral.com/ent/dead/>

[http://www.mexconnect.com/mex\\_/muertos.html](http://www.mexconnect.com/mex_/muertos.html)

<http://latino.sscnet.ucla.edu/research/folklore.html>

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### Other Festivals and Observances

**Pitri Paksha** – This is a Hindu festival honouring the ancestors, observed in India as well as in other parts of Southeast Asia. It occurs in early fall and lasts a fortnight. Offerings of food and water are made to the ancestors, bringing blessings upon them, and upon their living descendants.

**Kaddish** – In the Jewish tradition, for an entire year after one's father or mother passes away, one goes to the synagogue to recite a special prayer, called the kaddish, several times a day. Kaddish means sanctification, and the prayer extols and sanctifies God. By dint of a living descendant praising God, it is considered meritorious for the soul of the departed, who may thus gain access to heaven more readily.

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**Comments, feedback, or suggestions? Please let us know at: [moshe@vi-co.org](mailto:moshe@vi-co.org)**

### For more information on intercultural events, music, and study

The Vancouver Inter-Cultural Orchestra (VICO),  
 #12 - 719 East 31st Avenue Vancouver, BC V5V 2W9  
 Tel. 604-879-8415 Fax 604-873-0501  
 mailto: [info@vi-co.org](mailto:info@vi-co.org) web: [www.vi-co.org](http://www.vi-co.org)

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