

# Decemberists pen chilling tunes

Songs from Blue Oyster Cult and the Beatles provide alternatives for Halloween play lists

BY COREY BOMMEL  
Reviewer

It's that time of year again when people don alternate personas to mingle and celebrate all that is Halloween. Many parties have the same tired soundtracks blaring in the background, with staples like "Monster Mash" and "Thriller." If you dig a little deeper into the musical chest, party hosts and trick-or-treaters will find songs to replace these worn out songs, be they spooky sounding or morbid in content.

There are many familiar songs that might occasionally pop up in Halloween mixes. Creedence Clearwater Revival's cover of "I Put a Spell on You" would be close to the top of that list. The combination of a meandering bass line, eerie guitar riffs that send chills down the spine and John Fogerty's unique bluesy vocals make for a truly supernatural song. The middle section of the song is a haunting blues guitar solo guaranteed to impress. Many might recall another version of this song sung by Bette Midler in the movie "Hocus Pocus." The lyrics lend themselves to witchcraft and practices of the occult.

Blue Oyster Cult is known to have many songs with surreal references. Perhaps one of their better-known songs is "Don't Fear" The Reaper." The song's



Photo provided by decemberists.com

The latest Decemberists album, "The Hazards of Love," includes two spooky songs perfect for Halloween.

lyrics proclaim death as our fate, or an inevitability. Despite the content, the quality of the vocals makes the listener want to sing along. The guitars drive the song down a macabre path, and with the breakdown and solo in the middle, death itself chases the listener.

Although they might be familiar with the song, many listeners don't

realize just how disturbing the subject matter is. "Maxwell's Silver Hammer," from the Beatles, sounds at first like an upbeat, happy tune. The bass bounces along, the singing is peaceful and inviting and the melody is catchy. The guitar is laid back in its progression, and the piano lulls the listener into a safe place. On careful inspection,

however, the lyrics are much more foreboding. The titular Maxwell is actually a serial murderer, and in the course of the song he kills his girlfriend, teacher and the judge proceeding over his trial.

During the late 1990s swing revival, the Squirrel Nut Zippers released their hit "Hell." The name of the song implies evil, but

listening to the song will show otherwise. The song is a jazz-swing blend perfect for dancing. The upbeat tempo, the intensity of the horns and the passion of the lead singer made this song a standout hit. The dark lyrics speak of eternal damnation, as if sung by a man reborn into the concept of the fear of hell. This is a great song to add to dance playlists

Last is a band with several creepy tunes in its library. The Decemberists latest album, "The Hazards of Love," contains two songs about murder, betrayal and revenge. "The Rake's Song" tells the tale of a single father who systematically kills his three children by fire, drowning and poison. The song is driven by numerous drums and creates the perfect atmosphere for murder. Children's voices sing along to the chorus. The song is simple and catchy, but strong enough to make listeners bounce along, making it an especially powerful song to witness live. The companion song, "The Hazards of Love 3 (Revenge!)," relates the revenge of the murdered children as their ghosts return to take vengeance on their father. A meandering organ tune, scratchy strings and slow-beating drums propel the song. This song also features a chorus of children, quite possibly the most terrifying vocalists imaginable, singing the lyrics. It brings to mind the Children of the Corn, and listeners with fear of children should listen to this one with the lights on. This song does not stand well alone, however. It is jaunty and hard on the ears, like fingernails scratching a chalkboard.

## 'The Stepfather' disappoints



Photo provided by welcometothefamily.com

"The Stepfather"



BY NICK FRUMSON  
Reviewer

"The Stepfather" is a poor excuse for a movie. This movie is similar to "Jennifer's Body" in that it showcases young hotties. Instead of Megan Fox, however, it stars Penn Badgley as Michael, the protagonist, and Amber Heard as the bimbo girlfriend. This movie is rated PG-13 and is a remake of the original 1987 version. A horror/thriller movie not rated R is automatically a big red flag for "waste of time."

"The Stepfather" takes place in Oregon in what seems to be early May. Upon his return from military school, Michael finds his mom, Susan, engaged to David, a man she has only known for six months. Susan and David are played by Sela Ward and Dylan Walsh, respectively. Although David appears to be the perfect man for their family, there is something not right about him. As the movie progresses, neighbors die and the remaining characters begin to question David.

The climax fight scene is truly heart-racing. The viewer sees David unravel as he drops his act, forgets which persona he is using and starts attacking his new family. After a suspenseful chase scene, Susan is trapped in the upstairs bathroom with David trying to break in. The movie goes against the helpless woman being saved by a male protagonist cliché when Susan grabs some broken glass off the

floor and stabs David in the neck. Later in the scene, David is confronted by all three of the remaining characters. It was enjoyable to see this movie break away, however slightly, from the "bad scary movie" mold.

This movie definitely had the creepiness factor. As an attempt to replace the traditional "pop out" moments in thriller flicks, the movie uses a strong but not overbearing creepiness, shown early in the movie. It portrays David shaving and packing up his stuff, neatly laid out on the counter. As he leaves his house the viewer see his children and wife lying dead on the floor. The camera frequently pans away from the scene to reveal David watching from a distance or through a window. The movie uses the classic "closing the mirrored medicine cabinet to reveal someone standing behind you" trick, which is pretty much a staple among crappy scary movies. But in this movie's case, they use a basement door.

The movie's antagonist David sets this movie apart from others. He isn't just the insane, psycho serial killer who randomly kills people. His family dies or he kills them (not really sure which), and he becomes obsessed with finding the perfect family. His obsession makes him crazy about the "ideal 1950s family" but not the cliché "kill everyone" crazy like most bad guys are. Moviegoers witness the progression of his mental breakdown and see how different he is from other bad guys in scary movies.

The music in this movie makes it semi-worthwhile. The music was excellent and incredibly creepy. It actually had melody and a quality construction. Good music is hard to come by, but "The Stepfather" pulls it off nicely.

## 'Saw VI' doesn't cut it



BY ANDY MOORE  
Reviewer

On National Public Radio's talk show, "All Things Considered," the writers of "Saw VI," Patrick Melton and Marcus Dunstan, claimed they intend the "Saw" films to be social commentary. They even said the films are humorous. For instance, the latest installment of a never-ending series brings up the issue of health care reform as some of the victims are in the health insurance business. The writers called this a "not-so-subtle political message."

While it is true that "Saw VI" brings up timely issues in our often corrupt society, this feeble attempt at social commentary exposes the director's and the writers' sick fantasies and complete lack of humanity.

The relatively low budget "Saw" films have earned an astonishingly large sum of money and attracted a cult following. The first "Saw" film only cost \$1 million but earned \$100 million. "Saw VI" has not been so lucky, and it was no surprise when I saw several people exit the theater prematurely.

The "Saw" films are sometimes grouped in the "torture porn" category by critics. This is an interesting and even harsh name for a genre, but it sums it up pretty well. Nothing is left to the imagination in any of these movies because the audience gets to see every limb severed, every disemboweling and whatever else the writers concoct.

What is especially disturbing about the "torture porn" genre is found in an examination of the MPAA rating system, which labels sex as obscene and violence as acceptable. This point displays what would actually make the film more watchable (sex sells!), but unfortunately one scene with sex or nudity would give the film an NC-17 rating and ultimately doom the film to low box office earnings. This alone shows the sad state of the film industry.

For those who do not already know, the "Saw" films started in 2004, and I recall the first one being the most shocking film I had seen at the time. With an ambiguous conclusion, it was already apparent that the sequels would never cease. When will directors finally just abandon the



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project and move on to something different?

This film mostly revolves around a man in the health insurance business whose unethical practices have left too many people without proper health care. One of these people happens to be the notorious Jigsaw murderer, who soon exacts revenge.

One of the few social commentaries available for our generation among the debate for health care reform has come in the form of a low budget horror film more likely to be remembered for the gore than for the point in question. One of the characters in the movie even suggests that the Jigsaw killer is a vigilante, and I can only respond to that with a few four-letter words.

"Saw VI" attempts to make the same ill-conceived commentary on humanity as the other films in the series. Jigsaw's torture devices in these films send the wrong message about the issues addressed in the movie, as if the film is suggesting that extreme violence

is the only solution to society's problems. Jigsaw's torture devices are meant to teach people moral lessons about the preciousness of life, apparently, but it is done so gratuitously that I wonder if the directors and writers actually believe the vicious character and the values he represents.

A character with these same values of morality and humanity was created earlier in the 1995 film "Se7en," in which a psychopath played by Kevin Spacey had one victim for each of the seven deadly sins. There were no sequels to "Se7en," so it remained shocking without exhausting the audience with an excess of plot twists. It was also a better, more original film in general.

"Saw VI" is a waste of time and sweet money, and if you have just eaten, it can have other side effects. I know that Kirksville has slim pickings for movies with the holiest day of the year, Halloween, just around the corner, but I suggest sticking with the horror classics.