



Chuck Berry
Inducted 1986

SCARED STIFF

What Makes Music Scary?



ACTi



The Beatles
Inducted 1988



Trent Reznor
Inducted 2020



The
Chordettes

Ghosts! Goblins! Things that go bump in the night! People can be scared by almost anything. One thing that may not always come to mind is music. Often accompanying film and television, music serves as a soundscape to make the audience feel unsettled. By analyzing a few pieces, one can begin to understand how music can scare the living daylights out of someone.

FEAR



Michael Jackson
Inducted 1997, 2001

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BOO! Scared? Fear is something as old as life itself. Rooted in our “flight or fight” response, fear occurs when our brains feel a threat or imbalance in our emotions we don’t recognize. Sometimes it’s a natural response such as being chased by a dog. It can also be learned- when we see a “Danger, Keep Out!” sign. Some people dislike the feeling of fear while others enjoy it. Regardless, music can trigger that emotional imbalance in your brain to make you feel scared, frightened, and potentially threatened.

SCARED STIFF

ROCK & ROLL
HALL OF FAME



The Beatles
Inducted 1988



INSTRUMENTATION

“Being For The Benefit of Mr. Kite”-1967

Whether it’s a shrieking violin or a pulsating drumbeat, instruments are a crucial element of making music scary. Some instruments have a spooky tone, while other instruments are used in unconventional ways to create strange, unexpected sounds. This can play upon our common fears and unpleasantries.

LISTEN AND REFLECT:



John Lennon
Inducted 1988, 1994

Listen to The Beatles' "Being for the Benefit of Mr. Kite." Reflect on the following questions:

- What common fear does this song represent?
- Which instruments are used to achieve a sense of fear?
- What emotions or feelings do you experience while listening (tense, surprised, unsettled)?



The Beatles
Inducted 1988



INSTRUMENTATION

“Being For The Benefit of Mr. Kite”-1967

By using organ, chimes, and a calliope, this song may have some listeners experience the common fear of clowns and carnivals. To those with this fear, the song may be unsettling to listen to.

“A SPLENDID TIME IS GUARANTEED...”



Below are a list of common fears. For each fear think of an instrument that would best represent that fear:

- Arachnophobia (fear of spiders)
- Aerophobia (fear of flying)
- Claustrophobia (fear of small spaces)

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**Nine Inch Nails
Inducted 2020**

ARRANGEMENT

“Came Back Haunted” -2013

Music can also be arranged specifically to send a chill down your spine. Unnatural timing can make a song sound disjointed, while dissonant chords and melodies may act as a tension builder and add an unpleasant tone. In some ways, artists and composers may have the instruments play in a way that makes the music feel alive.

LISTEN AND REFLECT:



**Nine Inch Nails
Inducted 1989**

nine inch nails: came back haunted

Listen to Nine Inch Nails' "Came Back Haunted" and pay attention to the musical arrangement. Reflect and consider these questions:

- What instruments do you hear, and how do they convey a horror setting?
- Describe Trent Reznor's voice and how he adds a horror element to the lyrics?
- What other stylistic and melodic choices are made that add something uneasy about the song?



Nine Inch Nails
Inducted 2020

ARRANGEMENT

“Came Back Haunted” -2013

Throughout “Came Back Haunted,” the band uses sequenced synthesizers and sound samples to create supernatural-sounding melodies. The tone of each motive has a movement as if the music is living and breathing. Trent Reznor often sings in a whisper to offer tension and a spooky air about the lyrics.

“SAW SOME THINGS ON THE OTHER SIDE”



Listen to a piece of music that is arranged to be scary. This can be from a scary movie soundtrack or a song with a horror theme. Discuss and answer the following questions:

- **How does the arranger create a scene of horror with the music?**
- **Are there familiar instruments, strange sounds, or a mixture of both?**
- **If there are lyrics, does the singer paint a scary picture with their articulation?**

THE FUNCTION OF MUSIC

“Mr. Sandman” - 1954



**The
Chordettes**

As discussed, music can be considered scary because of the instruments used or the notes that are played. However, some music achieves the status of being scary simply because of its use in media over the years.

Horror films often use relatively happy sounding music to juxtapose the scary events happening on screen.

HALLOWEEN

*Music Composed and Performed by JOHN CARPENTER
in association with ALAN HOWARTH*



LISTEN AND REFLECT:

The Chordettes' "Mr. Sandman" appeared in many horror films over the years. Listen to the song and use the lyrics as an additional resource to reflect on the following:

- What musical elements makes this song sound scary?
- Why would film directors use a song like "Mr. Sandman" in a horror film?
- How do we understand music in different contexts?

THE FUNCTION OF MUSIC

“Mr. Sandman” - 1954



**The
Chordettes**

Horror films often use relatively happy sounding music to juxtapose the scary events happening on screen. “Mr. Sandman” has been attached to many spooky pieces of media despite not having any scary elements we have discussed. It is the juxtaposition of innocence and horror that gives “Mr. Sandman” its scary qualities. It defies our expectation of the song because of the context it is in.

“SANDMAN...I’M SO ALONE...”



Think of a scene in a film or television show that is scary. Find a song that contrasts the scariness of the scene. Share your song with a colleague and answer the following questions:

- **What musical elements make this song sound scary?**
- **Describe a scene that could change the meaning of the song?**
- **How would the function of the song change if it was played over a scene from a comedy?**



 **Stevie Nicks**
Inducted 1998, 2019

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