

DR. EUGENE CHADBOURNE

HORROR PART 10:

CONCERT BAND MASSACRE BY EVIL SPELL

An evil Satanic ritual conducted by a cheerleader causes a concert band director to have new evil powers. The bandmaster will now spend his evenings in a haunted state, sending out horrible curses against former students who didn't practice and as a result missed cues or messed up complicated passages. The last sounds they hear before dying are those moments from screwed up concerts that they were responsible for.

This back story came to me as a plot line for a horror movie based on this composition, but the idea itself dates back more than a year. While rounding up discarded vinyl at an estate sale, I came across a pile of sides pressed by a studio in Greensboro in the '60s, documenting concerts by Grimsley High School concert band and orchestra.

I knew immediately I wanted to create a piece in my "Horror" series based on whatever subsequent mutilations of these recordings that I would be able to dream up with. As usual I spent months figuring out different systems and ways of combining all the material on these vinyls. This CD shouldn't be considered the last word on this subject: at any time, if I felt like it, I could return to all these records and create a new Horror Part 10 from them. In fact one early idea about this CD would be to create a certain number of short tracks, then have each copy of the CD contain a different sequence and selection, no two alike. Instead I wound up more partial to the extended version featured here in which there are no track divisions, i.e. opportunities to escape.

Of greatest importance to me is to mention the actual band directors I discovered in the process of creating this CD, in particular Herbert Hazelman. He was in charge of the Grimsley Concert Band for 42 years! The programs of these recitals, one of which was dedicated to the memory of John F. Kennedy following his assassination, included much of Hazelman's original compositions as well as generous servings of contemporary music by others. Hazelman was responsible premieres of compositions by M. Thomas Cousins, Donald White and John Barnes Chance as well as Gunther Schuller's Meditation for Concert Band.

In addition there was of course plenty of what one might expect at such shows: Sousa, medleys of whatever was popular on Broadway, Wagner, Cole Porter, Elgar, Mozart. At least one involved a chorus, another an accordion soloist. To my delight on one side I noticed that Pete Dennis was featured as a percussion soloist. He was a really good friend of drummer David Licht and hosted Shockabilly everytime we played in Nashville. Since I had heard that Pete was back in Greensboro and working as a mailman, I also thought about inviting him to my studio to perform an updated percussion solo.

The reason I didn't was that I was scared. That's the same reason I didn't contact any of the people involved in the original performances. Sometimes while working on my Concert Band Massacre by Evil Spell, I imagined them storming my studio with torches, like the peasants in a vintage horror film.

One of the main things the composers and band directors involved—one of the discs was from the Kiser Junior High outfit—might indeed get angry about is if they recognized passages of their music too distinctly. Thus I worked fiendishly trying to make it impossible to recognize anything, anticipating the possibility that I might have to redo parts to eliminate something too recognizable that I had overlooked. Which would be a pleasure, as were the original experiments—but not because I didn't like the original performances and felt they had to be mutated.

As suggested in the first paragraph, a high school concert band might hit some real clinkers in a performance. I found some moments on these records that sound like Albert Ayler live in heaven with celestial all-stars, true, yet I found much more really great playing.

At one point I became so enamored with Hazelman's activities that I thought of turning the whole thing into a tribute to him and to focus on reinterpreting his compositions. Fear may have again affected my decision not to take this route, but also the understanding that I would be removing the work from my Horror canon because it would no longer fit, there is nothing horrific about Hazelman at all.

I did not myself play in a high school concert band. Since my instrument was guitar, the only option was the jazz stage band. They had a guitarist with whom I quickly established a feud. Those familiar with my biography will recall that I was completely drummed out of the Boulder High School music department classes following my decision to show up stinking of rum and flash vampire teeth during the dress rehearsal of the Christmas pageant manger scene. I had been cast as Joseph as part of a vendetta against me by my music theory teacher, who also was directing the pageant. He was mad at me because I improvised on the piano during my allotted practice hours rather than working on the homework assignments.

Simultaneously, Boulder High had a fine orchestra teacher who encouraged contemporary music and presented premieres of ambitious pieces by students, one of which featured an electric guitar soloist. (Not me.) The orchestra teacher, whose name I don't recall, went home and got a copy of Ayler's Spiritual Unity when he came upon me and some friends listening to a live Chicago album in which there was about five seconds of saxophone squeaking.

I make my music so I can listen to it. That certainly goes for this disc, which I enjoy listening to because it reminds me of two recordings I really like. One is the march piece Anthony Braxton did on the Creative Orchestra Music album on Arista. Another is sections of the Alan Silva orchestra recordings on BYG. I am releasing this CD as a birthday present to myself, I turned 53 yesterday.

Eugene Chadbourne
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