

Trick or treat

by BRIAN LOCKHART

Have you ever heard a song more beautiful than Monster Mash, by Bobby "Boris" Pickett?

It is melodically entertaining, has a swinging beat, and is lyrically insane.

"I was working in the lab, late one night, When my eyes beheld an eerie sight, For my monster from his slab, began to rise, And suddenly to my surprise."

Yes, it's a beauty alright, although I will admit that Beethoven's 6th Symphony comes in at a close second.

It's also a song that can only realistically be played on the radio for maybe three days each year - Halloween, and two days before.

In a few days, the doorbell will start ringing, usually just after dark, that is if you're a good sport and keep the light on or a lit pumpkin on the front porch. You will be greeted by a small group of kids holding a pillow case, shopping bag, or some other receptacle. Some of the very young ones will stare at you with a bit of fear mixed with wonder, prodded on by mom or dad, while the older ones will say "trick or treat?" as a kind of veiled threat of "mob protection?" meaning they won't vandalize your property if you give them some candy.

"He did the Mash, he did the Monster Mash, The Monster Mash, it was a graveyard smash, He did the Mash, it caught on in a flash, He did the Mash, he did the Monster Mash."

Halloween, as we know it in the modern sense, has roots going way back in history.

Much of the tradition started as a Pagan festival by the Celts during the festival of Samhain, when people would light bonfires and wear costumes to ward off ghosts. It was believed that the time between harvest and winter, a transition you didn't appreciate if you were living in a straw covered hut, meant the worlds of the living and the dead crossed over.

October 31, the middle of that season, was determined the best time send a message to the ghosts to go home.

"From my laboratory in the castle east, To the master bedroom where the vampires feast, The ghouls all came from their humble abodes, To get a jolt from my electrodes."

The whole Pagan celebration got a boost when the Romans conquered most of the Celtic territory by 43 A.D. The Romans had their own traditions commemorating the passing of the dead, and they were incorporated into local customs.

As any good Christian knows, most, if not all, Christian holidays have been, or are influenced by Pagan celebrations, whether we like, or admit that. See "Christmas and winter solstice."

The date received further notoriety when November 1 was declared All Saints Day by the Catholic Church. Now we really had something going, a Pagan celebration and a religious day at the same time.

"The scene was rockin', all were digging the sounds, Igor on chains, backed by his baying hounds, The Coffin Bangers were about to arrive, With their vocal group, The Crypt-Kicker Five."

Not a lot of countries celebrate Halloween like we do in North America. The whole trick-or-treat tradition is pretty much a continental thing.

One Polish friend of mine, told me that in Poland, this day is celebrated with a trip to the cemetery where your family are buried. She said the cemeteries are packed with people visiting and even having picnics.

As more immigrants arrived in North America, they brought different Halloween and related traditions with them. Originally, Halloween in North America was celebrated with community parties, although with a decidedly dark twist.

The practice of trick-or-treating comes from an old Scottish custom called 'guising' where children would wear a mask and go door to door asking for treats or money.

Trick or treating didn't really start in North America until the 1930s, and once it started, it really took off as a tradition.

Costumes seemed to have changed somewhat. It used to be normal to dress as a ghost, goblin, a vampire, skeleton, or something similar. Now there are aliens, Star Trek people, robots, and Star Wars characters. It's all good. The idea is to wear a costume and have some fun.

Halloween is big in my neighbourhood and I usually get around 50 kids at the door. I figure I had my fun doing it, now it's payback.

'Out from his coffin, Drac's voice did ring, Seems he was troubled by just one thing, Opened the lid, and shook his fist and said, 'Whatever happened to my Transylvania Twist?'