

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Danny Elfman

Elisa Leonelli · Thursday, June 24th, 2021

When I heard that [Danny Elfman](#) had recorded a new album of original songs after 27 years, I thought back to the time when I first met this charismatic and wild young man in 1976. I had been fascinated by the live performances of *The Mystic Knights of the Oingo Boingo*, when they were led by Danny's older brother Rick Elfman, and would march in beating on drums, blowing their horns and wearing phantasmagoric costumes. As a photo-journalist always interested in the bizarre, I wanted to photograph this exciting group and I was invited to a studio where they were holding a photo session.



Mystic Knights of the Oingo Boingo (c) Elisa Leonelli

I took some portraits of Danny and other musicians, like clarinetist and composer [Miriam Cutler](#). My photos were published in the Italian weekly *Espresso*.



Miriam Cutler (c) Elisa Leonelli

I met [Rick Elfman](#) when he was shooting his experimental movie *Forbidden Zone*, where Danny plays a devilish bandleader singing a modified version of Cab Calloway's "Minnie the Moocher." Watch it at [this link](#). The Kipper Kids in a boxing ring sing "Bim Bam Boom." You may read my

article about these performance artists and watch them perform the song [at this link](#). You may watch the movie on Amazon Prime in the original 1980 B&W and the 2010 colorized version.



Danny Elfman (c) Elisa Leonelli

In 1979 Danny formed a musical group without the theatrics and called it *Oingo Boingo*. I have on my stereo shelf the vinyls of their first album, *Only a Lad* (1980) and *Boingo Alive-Celebration of a decade 1979-1988*.

In 1985 Danny was recruited by Tim Burton to write the soundtrack for his first movie, *Pee-Wee's Big Adventure*, and has since become a sought-after composer, continuing to work with Burton, and with filmmakers like Gus Van Sant (*Milk*) and Christopher Nolan (*Batman*). For the animated *The Nightmare Before Christmas* by Tim Burton, he also composed the songs and sang the leading role of Jack Skellington. I wrote an article about this cult classic for the Italian film magazine, CIAK, [read it at this link](#).

In 2013 I was invited to attend a Halloween Show of Danny Elfman's Music from the Films of Tim Burton at the Nokia theater, and I had the pleasure of hearing Danny perform live again. Watch him sing "Jack's Lament" [at this link](#).



Danny Elfman's new album *Big Mess* was released on June 11, 2021. You may listen to all 18 tracks [at this link](#), and read his interview in Variety [here](#). The cover artwork is a digital sculpture created by Sarah Sitkin, combining 3 heads of this musical genius and tormented soul.

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