



honouring. Our life would be very different if we were at our closest point to the sun while the earth is tilted *towards* it rather than away from it.

The piece itself has a very minor, interior feel, as in telling a tale around the fireside, shut in from the elements, and developed actually in waking hours from the simple bass ostinato.

## **Snowdrop**

## **Imbolc**

In the traditional Wheel of the Year, Imbolc marks the transition between Winter and the beginning of Spring. This fairly jovial little all-solo guitar piece in G I think reflects the feeling of hope that the Winter's over, represented by the appearance of the snowdrops around early February.

The official timing of all the 'Quarter Days' as they are called, Imbolc, Beltain, Lughnasadh, and Samhain, are usually given as being their Christianised versions, the 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> of the month. If you count the days around between each Equinox or Solstice, they will actually fall around the 4<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> of the month, or, to put it another way, when the sun enters 15 degrees of the appropriate sign.

## **Ostara**

## **Ostara/Spring Equinox**

'Ostara' is the Spring Equinox, marking the original 'Easter' which then for doctrinal reasons gets moved around in fairly absurd manner for Christians. The sun rises due East and sets due West at the Equinoxes, establishing the very points of the compass. A time of superb balance when day and night are of equal length, and woefully ignored, therefore: it should be a major festival now in our civil calendar. It would come as no surprise to understand that modern humanity isn't very interested in *balance*...

While, due to the ambience of the studio I was using on previous albums (a beautifully rural affair near a wood) quite a lot of accidental

birdsong in the background can be heard, here we have birdsong imitated deliberately by the guitar(s).

## **Bel's Fires**

## **Beltain**

All of the 'stations' or spokes of the Wheel of the Year were marked by fire-festivals, not just Samhain/November 5<sup>th</sup> (see below). The traditional May Day celebrations, so severely put down as they were by either Christian authorities of various types, or strangely perverted into military displays by Communist ones, obviously mark the transition from Spring into Summer and is the time of merry-making, sexual union, fertility, the marriage of the May Queen to the Green Man.

The fact that my piece is perhaps surprisingly in a minor key is down to my trying to capture the rush of fertility and new growth of this time, about which there is almost an urgency, and of a sense that only those who have leaped over the Beltain fires might empathise with.

## **'Music Such As Charmeth Sleep'      Litha/Midsummer's Day**

In exactly the same way that Yule and Sol Invictus form a short season, the same is true of the Summer solstice and old 'Midsummer's Day': at the end of the three days of the sun standing still on the horizon it is viewed as starting its reverse journey southward along the horizon.

Midsummer's Eve then is, not coincidentally, a magical time...and Shakespeare's placing of his play about elemental spirits from the Keltic otherworld couldn't have been given a more magical and auspicious setting. The title of the piece comes from 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' accordingly—and the music is intended as a spell or invocation, in the somewhat mysterious key (to me at least) of B ♭ Minor.

## **Soporific**

## **Aphelion/Dog Days**

Aphelion being the opposite of perihelion (see above) marks the rising of Sirius (the Goddess Isis) in Ancient Egypt, and the inundation of the Nile, a natural ecological phenomenon entirely destroyed by the modern industrial society of Egypt. For us in the Northern hemisphere it marks the start of the hottest days of summer. Sirius is also known as ‘the Dog star’ being the brightest star of Canis Major, the greater dog, hence ‘Dog Days’....

I wanted to capture the languor of, say, floating down a lazy river on a sunny, hot summer day—like punting down the Thames, or the *Isis* as she is dubbed in Oxford. The use of slide guitar is to capture this...might be the first time anyone has played slide on a classical guitar?

## **It Is What It Is**

## **Lughnasadh**

Using Davey Graham’s open modal DADGAD tuning, this piece emerged sounding very ‘work-song’ like to me, appropriate for the station of the Wheel least celebrated these days, marking our switch from a largely agrarian way of life to an urban one—it’s the time of the grain harvest, and is named in honour the god Lugh. Even our current school terms and holidays reflect the old pattern, making sure the children with the rest of the community could help bring harvest home. It also marks the transition from Summer to Autumn.

## **Mabon Moon**

## **Mabon/Autumn Equinox**

‘The Son’ in the Keltic tradition, Mabon was a major god-figure after whom ‘The Mabinogion’ is named— a compendium of myths that are the Keltic British equivalent of Homer.

A quiet little tune and sequence in C, sounding, I hope, suitably balanced. ‘Mabon Dawn’ on my previous album SONGS WITHOUT WORDS VOLUME 2 also celebrates this part of the Wheel of the

theme and concept, this little piece arrived around the right time last year as I was putting the suite together.

## **Carnival of Souls                      Samhain**

In the calculation cited earlier then, Samhain would fall not on the eve of ‘All Souls’ (Nov 1<sup>st</sup>), but, let’s see, oh yes on November 5<sup>th</sup>: our one remaining nationally celebrated fire-festival. This dating was the ‘smoking gun’ that revealed to me the date-shift of the ‘real’ quarter days, and I’m not alone in thinking this way—Thomas Hardy for one in *The Return of the Native* makes it clear that he thinks the bonfires of November 5<sup>th</sup> are nothing whatsoever to do with the 1605 ‘Gunpowder Plot’. Other respected writers on the subject that share this view include Hamish Miller of the Michael and Mary line fame.

At Samhain, Gwyn ap Nudd ruler of the entrance to the other world—Glastonbury Tor, of course, the ‘spiral castle’ of King Arthur—rides his ‘wild hunt’ and his white dogs of the otherworld can be if not seen at least sensed. A time that worldwide is seen as ‘a thinning of the veils’, e.g. the Mexhica ‘Day of the Dead’ is given as Nov. 3<sup>rd</sup>.

A musical procession, or march, or ride, in B minor, then, seemed the appropriate piece for this well celebrated station of the year, marking the transition from Autumn to Winter.

## **Wheel of the Year**

The final generic title piece then is for the whole of the Wheel not just one station, its recurring ostinato form reflecting the spinning of the wheel, which, if not absolutely of eternal duration, certainly stretches back into our past, and reaches into our future, to a point beyond the grasp of the human mind and imagination.

Blessed be

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