

Where Were You, Scooby Doo: *Like, Shaggy Wanted Us to Go Global. Zoinks!*
Essay



Those pesky, meddlesome kids were all the rage with their investigations into haunted houses, ghost ships, and circuses. *Scooby-Doo, Where are You* originally aired in 1970 and the first season had 17 installments. Saturday morning Scooby Season 1 was excellent. Scooby and the gang traveled around in a groovy floral “Mystery Machine” van. They wore loud, clashing colors and weirdly cut clothing that was a bit distracting for children raised in less groovy houses where rustic sketches and the soft tones of fairy tales were the norm.

Fred was handsome and athletic, Daphne pretty, and Velma intelligent. Amid all the dark colors and spookiness the three were a reassuring presence. Shaggy was goofy and not well groomed. He and his dog, Scooby were easily frightened by the evil machinations of greedy and corrupt characters introduced at the beginning of the show. Shaggy and Scooby were primarily motivated by their stomachs. Scooby always wanted “Scooby snacks.” The Mystery Machine gang thought out loud and speculated about the ghouls and dastardly crooks warding them away. Inevitably, the crook was revealed and sputtered angrily, “If it hadn’t been for you meddling kids...” For the most part, Scooby and his pals roamed mainland America.



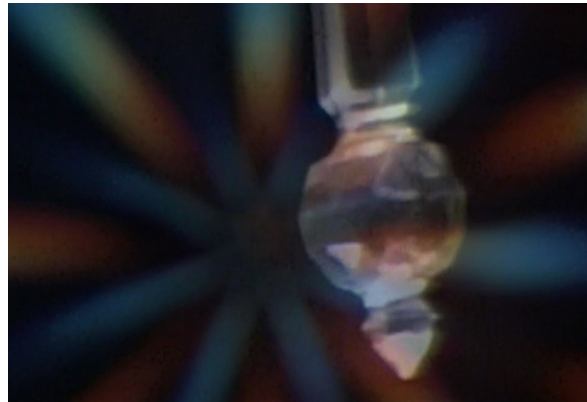
As light and easy as the series was, or at least how this viewer remembers it from its reruns in

the 1980s, it reflected a dark time, possibly a malaise and an uneasy stalemate reached between two warring parties in divisive era. There was always something unsettling about *Scooby-Doo*, and it was not only the clothes, their cut or color, or how the characters spoke or the dangers they faced. It was Halloween extended but not explicitly so. Season 2 had only 8 installments before being canceled and then after a 7 year hiatus reinstated in 1978 with adventures in Bermuda, Venice, the North Pole, Puerto Rico, and Canada, among others. Season 2 hinted at the global thrust with two shows, “The Chinese New Year's Parade” and “A Tikki Scare is Not Fair.”

Other programs aired with initial *Scooby-Doo* run were *Dark Shadows* (1966-1971), a “Gothic” serial that told the story of the Collins family of Maine and the arrival of the vampire Barnabas Collins. Maine is a good place to stage a vampire series. Washington, Oregon, and California would also be credible. This was also the era that produced the intergalactic adventures of the original *Star Trek* program that had audiences focused on aliens as the threat, not other people aboard the *U.S.S. Enterprise*. Where *Scooby-Doo* went global, *Star Trek* went farther out, in fact, intergalactic, man (except in one show they went back in time to the Old West).



Dark Shadows, already hitting its macabre limit when it gained a wide audience, went back in time to 1795. Season 4 took the path most traveled in American entertainment and formulaically pit an annoying religious zealot, Abigail Collins against likeable Victoria Winters, though the real witch was the owl-eyed, buxom Angelique Bouchard. The series had potential to be something better than it was. Its use of a psychiatrist *cum* historian Julia Hoffman had shades of Freud. Hoffman's angular face, excessive eye make-up, and cropped hair are extremely hard to look at and she, along with the weird and at times incredulous plot lines violate Freud's consideration of the uncanny, in his *The Uncanny*. The uncanny is effective when reality is maintain but for one thing. It boggles the mind that classically trained Frid as Barnabas agreed to continue beyond the first few seasons as the story lines were not uncanny but surreal and “supernatural.” There's nothing for one to hold on to, the viewer's logic and patience are tested, and Hoffman's appearance in several consecutive installments, one's eyes are excessively taxed.



One thing is clear - blackmailing people with psychiatric institutionalization was a thing back in the 70s as much as it is today. Hoffman is sweet on dangerous, nasty Barnabas and though she has pangs of ethical conscientiousness, she's not afraid to use her medical training to commit attempted murder and a host of other creepy acts.

That foreboding of a lesser kind finds shelter in children's programs is concerning. Healthy adults can discern between fantasy and fact, though it seems like some are struggling as of late. They can put images and trends into context and measure them against a healthier, acceptable example, if they ever had one. It's well known that children cannot. They resort to programs from their childhood for comfort in times of extreme stress. Were uncanny Freud himself alive today, he may be confounded by the absurd and abnormal made acceptable. Perhaps he would he would hypothesize that his explication of the uncanny was not enough for 70s show producers to spook ordinary Americans because normal had been dismantle.



Photo Credits: Scooby Doo Where are You: Go Away Ghost Ship, E14; Dark Shadows, Seasons 3 and 4.

(Revised and updated from March 2019 version).