

BEHIND THE SCENES

SOUNDS PECULIAR



How would you like to create your own spectacular, spacey sounds? Well, after a trip to the Radiophonic Workshop and a chat with Dick Mills, the man behind *Dr Who's* sound effects, it struck me, that with a bit of imagination, every ardent enthusiast of the programme could soon be filling their own homes with weird galactic noises!

The Radiophonic Workshop was set up by the BBC in the mid-fifties as a kind of experimental sound laboratory. The strange and chilling noises they came up with now casts an eerie background to many well-known television and radio programmes. *Blake's 7*, *Quatermass and the Pit* and *A Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, to name a few!

Perched amongst the dials and buttons of the BBC's own space-age equipment, Dick Mills now creates the incredible sounds of *Dr Who*. With the push of a switch and the casual spin of a dial, the quiet room can be suddenly jolted into a vast explosion of sound. Out of thin air he can conjure the terrifying mur-

murings of a thousand worlds . . .

But you don't need fancy equipment to create all those awesome galactic marvels . . . as I soon found out.

BEHIND THE SCENES WITH THE RADIOPHONIC WORKSHOP.

The familiar sound of the TARDIS take-off, for example, isn't as difficult to achieve as it might seem. In amongst Dick's wondrous futuristic gadgets there lies the remains of a very old piano. Dick just takes a key from his pocket, runs it up the bass string of the sad, neglected instrument, and there you have it — the familiar VRAAMPP of the TARDIS as it leaves one adventure, to find another . . .

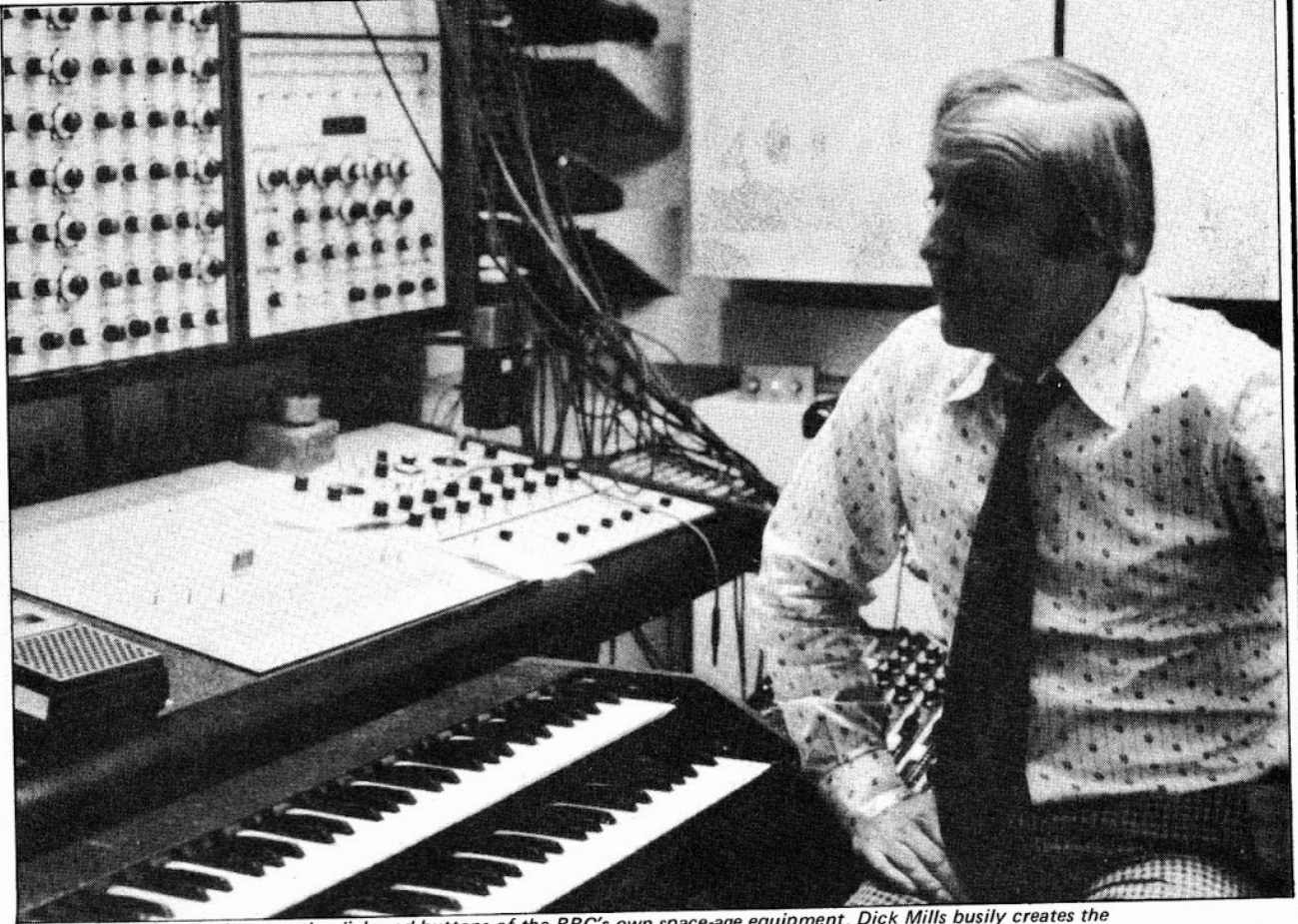
The truth is that "natural" sounds can often achieve a far more interesting and individual effect than their electronic counterparts.

The menacing squelch of a slow, slithering monster is thus effectively achieved with the aid of a bucket of mud and a sink

plunger, or even by rubbing a great wodge of grease between the palms of your hands! Dick explained that if you slow a sound up it gives the impression of belonging to a much larger monster. So remember — the slower the sound the bigger the threat!

A cardboard box full of grit and stones offers countless possibilities. The noise of a million marching troops can be captured by simply shaking the box in a steady rhythm. And one must not forget the ghostly creak of a haunted house, or an approaching danger — an important part of any sound producer's repertoire. Luckily it's a noise that's easy to achieve with the help of a piece of string, brown paper and a handy chair-leg! By tying the string firmly to the chair-leg and then sliding the paper down the taut string, the resulting creak is enough to send shivers down any self-respecting spine!

Before you all rush off to begin your newly-found careers in alien sounds, there's one or two things that you ought to know about the life of a sound



Perched among the dials and buttons of the BBC's own space-age equipment, Dick Mills busily creates the incredible sounds of Dr Who.



producer. For one thing, it's a lot of hard work getting exactly the right sound for each unearthly moment.

"Every programme's a challenge," says Dick "with its own unique set of problems – no two spaceships or monsters will sound the same. Each is different."

You can't just make a good scary noise and hope that it'll do! Each monstrous piece of hardware will have to first be carefully inspected before giving it an appropriate sound. This involves brave, precarious trips to the studios, nimbly avoiding careering cameras and the old uncontrollable monster. Mixing, albeit professionally, with Daleks or any such number of horrifying galactic terrors can be a pretty harrowing experience.

Danger lurks everywhere – on and off the screen. Dick recalls a frightening time when, during the filming of the *Dr Who* adventure "The Brain of Morbius" –

the whole set could have blown to smithereens! Avid viewers will remember that particularly exciting moment when the Doctor was to be burnt alive. It was a difficult scene to film. Gas pipes were constructed to supply the necessary flames, whilst pipes of oil vapour were to lend a suitably smoky flavour to the scene. Well, you guessed it – the flames got too close to the oil vapour and an almighty explosion was imminent! Fortunately studio hands were able to avert disaster but it only goes to show that a sound producers life can get pretty hot!

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NEXT WEEK:

SPECIAL EFFECTS!