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The Radiophonic Workshop at Roundhouse, NW1

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Many “unprofitable” departments at the BBC met their end during John Birt’s stewardship. Arguably none, however, has been mourned as intensely as the Radiophonic Workshop. After 39 years creating bespoke music for hundreds of programmes, the corporation’s in-house team of sound boffins were finally sent the way of *Doctor Who*, whose theme tune remains their most celebrated creation.

Of course, as the resurgence of the Doctor attests, it takes more than the whims of one man to kill off a good idea. Fast forward 12 years and the legacy of this unlikely cult is higher than ever. As befits an outfit whose music has become a set text for sonic adventurers ranging from Radiohead to the Aphex Twin, the Workshop’s silver-haired mainstays donned white coats and set about their business with poker-faced solemnity.

We were now in a world where the wobbulator-assisted opening chords of *Ziuzih Ziuzih OO-OO-OO* by the recently departed “star” of the Radiophonic Workshop Delia Derbyshire elicited an audible gasp of excitement — and not without good reason. Like the monochrome robots that appeared on the screens, the composition’s faint air of menace, augmented by a brass section and sundry other musicians, transcended the limited technology that spawned it. Within minutes white coats were removed and faces softened to provide all manner of titillating anecdotal context to the music. Roger Limb revealed that *Swirley* was supposed to be called *Shirley* — an attempt to woo a BBC colleague which foundered when the title was taken down wrongly.

You couldn’t help but feel for the late John Baker, whose groovy ruler-twanging jazz workout *New Worlds* had remained largely unheard by the public, with the exception of its final bars, which became the theme to *John Craven’s Newsround*.

Similarly unfêted at the peak of her creative life was Derbyshire, who had generous tribute paid to her. A reminder that working in a back room can have its advantages, Limb confessed to sharing “an experience” with her in Room 12. Then, with glorious inevitability, the evening climaxed with a thumping orchestral version of the *Doctor Who* theme. For five minutes, Roundhouse became Tardis, chauffeuring its thirty and fortysomething inhabitants to the Saturday teatimes of their youth. As it emptied them back into the Camden rain they were still singing it.