

THE STAGE

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Desmond Briscoe

Desmond Briscoe was a pioneer of electronic music in the fifties, and co-creator of the BBC's Radiophonic Workshop.

Under his management of the workshop from 1960 to 1984, scores of in-house composers produced exciting music for hundreds of radio and television programmes, using natural sounds manipulated on magnetic tape.

Briscoe's constant battle with BBC bureaucracy for more equipment, space and money resulted in the Radiophonic Workshop becoming one of the most influential music studios in the world, whose pioneering work paved the way for the

explosion of electronic music in the late 20th century.

Harry Desmond Briscoe, born in Birkenhead on June 21, 1925, joined the BBC in Manchester at the age of 16, as a junior programme assistant. After the Second World War, he rejoined the Corporation in 1948, creating sound effects and incidental music in the drama department.

When the BBC set up the Electronic Effects Committee in 1956, Briscoe and his colleagues began experimenting with early tape recorders.

His breakthrough commission, which led to the setting up of the workshop, was Samuel Beckett's first play for radio, *All That Fall* (1957).

When the Radiophonic Workshop was established the following year, Briscoe was joined by fellow pioneer Daphne Oram and engineer Richard 'Dickie' Bird. One of their earliest successes was the unearthly music for the TV

series *Quatermass and the Pit* (1958). Later, in 1963, the workshop created the theme music for *Doctor Who*, from a score by Ron Grainger.

In the seventies, the workshop was working on some 250 programmes a year.

The Radiophonic Workshop closed in 1998 but by then Briscoe had already retired.

Desmond Briscoe died aged 81 on December 7, 2006. He is survived by his son David.

Nick Smurthwaite