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## Obituary, Delia Derbyshire

BEST KNOWN for creating the theme tune for the *Dr Who* television series, Delia Derbyshire was in the vanguard of British electronic music throughout the Sixties and Seventies. Indeed she was often thought of as the unsung heroine of British electronic music, her enthusiasm pollinating the minds of the many creative people she worked with, including Paul McCartney, Karlheinz Stockhausen and Pink Floyd.

Not long after joining the BBC in 1960 as a trainee studio manager, Derbyshire asked for - and was granted - an attachment to the Radiophonic Workshop, where she was to remain for many years. She created the *Dr Who* theme from a score by Ron Grainer during two weeks in a converted roller-skating rink in Maida Vale, using oscillator swoops and tape splices. When Grainer heard the result he asked "Did I really write that?" "Most of it" was Derbyshire's loyal reply.

But much of her time was spent working with composers and acoustic innovators, particularly in the world of *musique concrete*. She was Luciano Berio's assistant at the Dartington Summer School in 1962 and worked in the mid-1960s with Peter Zinovieff, bringing electronic music to the fore in advertising and film music.

In 1966 she worked with Paul McCartney and George Harrison at an event called "The Carnival of Light" at the Chalk Farm Roundhouse, and later that year she produced what she later called a "bloopy track" of almost psychedelic music for Anthony Newley.

Meanwhile, she continued to work at the BBC, and although nothing else quite achieved the international fame of the insistent and menacing *Dr Who* theme, the Radiophonic Workshop and Derbyshire were inseparable, particularly when there was a call for music to accompany programmes set in the distant past, the future or deep in the human psyche.

Brought up in Coventry, Delia Derbyshire studied at the grammar school and read maths at Girton College, Cambridge. Told by Decca in 1959 that the company did not accept women in its studios, she went to Switzerland as a translator for the United Nations before working briefly for the music publisher Boosey & Hawkes.

By the mid-1970s Derbyshire was so disillusioned by the failure of electronic music to make headway in this country that she withdrew from the medium. For the next 20 years, while the rest of the country caught up with her, she worked for an art gallery, a bookshop and a museum. In recent years she had

begun composing once more. "Without the constraints of doing 'applied music', my mind can fly free and pick up where I left off," she explained.

She is survived by her partner, Clive Blackburn.

**Delia Derbyshire, composer, was born on May 5, 1937. She died of renal failure on July 3, 2001, aged 64.**