

ABOUT DELIA

by Clive Blackburn

Delia Derbyshire died on July 3rd 2001 (aged 64)

I first met Delia in 1978, when she returned to London after living in Cumbria. In January 1980 she bought a house in Northampton and in May of that year I moved up from London to Northampton to join her. We first got together to write songs, which was a very frustrating process, as I'm not at all musical - the words were no problem, but I could never communicate the tune that was in my mind. We only ever finalised two songs, which were never published.

Everyone who knew Delia has a story to tell; I could fill this web site with anecdotes about her. She was a remarkable person with a very lively mind, which often went off at strange tangents - conversations with her were never boring. Even at the end of her life, she could still be incredibly innocent, with a very childlike sense of humour. She was the most loyal, honest, trusting, generous friend that anyone could ever wish for, although when it came to the music business, she often feared (with some justification) that people were trying to rip her off.

She had very fixed ideas and could be incredibly stubborn if you had the temerity to contradict her, even over a matter of little consequence. At times she could be so pigheaded that it was infuriating, but then I can be exactly the same myself.

Sometimes we brought out the best in one another, at other times the worst. Delia was a Taurus and I am a Leo, which is supposed to be a bit problematic, if you believe in those things.

She did sometimes display bursts of temper, but they were always short-lived. When she was on her own ground (music or mathematics) it wasn't worth arguing with her - she was invariably right. She did have a wide range of other interests though - which is how she managed to obtain work at an art gallery in Cumbria and a bookshop in Northampton. I found the latter particularly impressive, as she hadn't read a book in years, although she did love books, couldn't resist buying them and often gave them as presents.

No-one who ever met Delia was untouched by the experience and many became life-long, valued friends. She is sadly missed by all of us who were privileged to know her and she has left an enormous gap in our lives.

DELIA'S CAREER

Delia Derbyshire was born in Coventry on 5th May 1937. Her parents had moved there from the Preston area, where most of her surviving relatives still live. Her father died in 1965 and her mother in 1994.

From an early age her musical talent was apparent. She played the violin but her main instrument was the piano and as a young girl she regularly travelled to piano competitions, often winning prizes.

From Barrs Hill School (the local grammar, 1948-1956) she won a scholarship to study mathematics at Girton College, Cambridge (1956-1959). After one year she switched to music and on graduating her degree was an MA in Mathematics Part 1 and Music Part 1. Her other principal qualification was LRAM (pianoforte, performer).

After university Delia held the following jobs:

June-Sep 1959

Tutor in music and mathematics in Geneva, working for the British Consul-General and others.

Sep-Dec 1959

International Telecommunications Union, United Nations, Geneva, working as Assistant to Head of Plenipotentiary and General Administrative Radio Conferences.

Jan-April 1960

Returned to Coventry and taught in a primary school (general subjects).

May-Oct 1960

Boosey & Hawkes music publishers, London. Assistant in the Promotion Dept, dealing with advertising and publicity material.

Nov 1960- Apr 1962

Joined the BBC as a Programme Operations Assistant.

Apr 1962- 1973

Attached to the BBC Radiophonic Workshop, but at the same time doing private work with Brian Hodgson using various independent studios.

LINKS

There is an affectionate tribute to Delia, including an extensive list of her recordings, at delia-derbyshire.dyndns.org

Mark Ayres (composer and Radiophonic Workshop archivist) has a lot of material relating to the Radiophonic Workshop and Dr Who in particular, including a discography, at www.markayres.co.uk