

Classic Doctor Who legend Brian Hodgson reveals why he still thinks it's “dangerous” for gay couples to hold hands on the street

He gave us the sounds of the future – now Brian Hodgson looks back on a lifetime as a pioneer and a gay man in changing Britain



© Brian Hodgson

Published: Monday, 25 May 2026

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This article first appeared in Radio Times magazine.

When Brian Hodgson joined the BBC in 1960, he found it a progressive environment to work in, even if old-fashioned attitudes were not uncommon. “The head of Programme Operations – a man I respected greatly – said he would never employ any homosexuals,” recalls Hodgson. “Had he stuck to that, he wouldn’t have had a department, because two thirds of us were gay.”

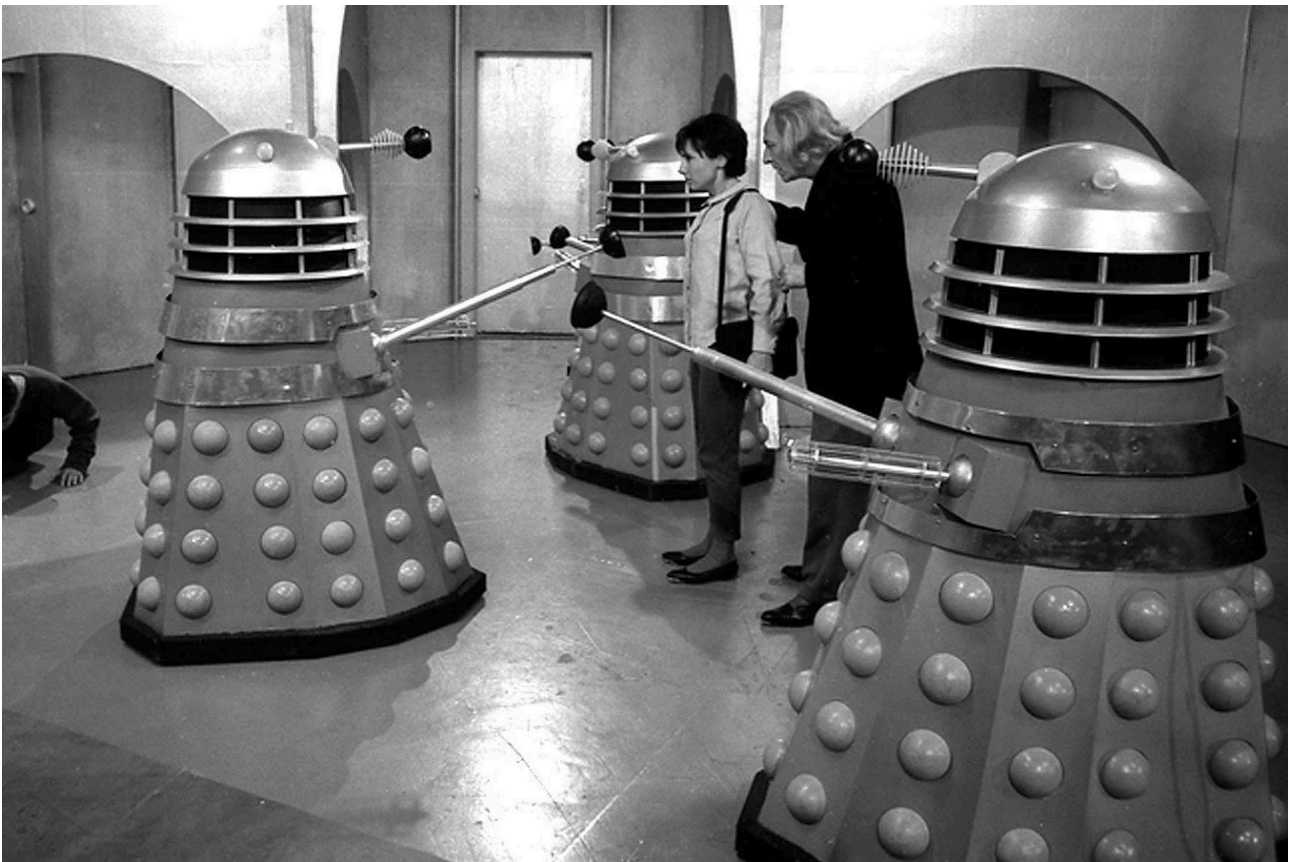
By 1963, Hodgson was established as an avant-garde ace at the BBC Radiophonic Workshop, creating the sound world of early Doctor Who – from the grating voices of the Daleks to the roar of the Tardis as it tore through time and space. He features in my new book, You Are Not Alone: A Gay History of Doctor Who, whose key contributors also include the original director Waris Hussein, actors Katy Manning, Matt Lucas, Mandip Gill and Matthew Waterhouse, as well as current show-runner Russell T Davies. Published just ahead of Pride Month in the UK, it follows the series’ 63-year timeline to explore how social attitudes in Britain have evolved for LGBTQ+ people across the decades.

When Hodgson was young in the 1950s and 60s, homosexual activity between men was a criminal offence, punishable with imprisonment. “It was something you just lived with,” he reflects sanguinely. “A lot of people of my generation said it was actually more exciting when it was illegal. One of my earliest boyfriends, Anthony Hall, was in the BBC Radio Repertory Company. That was when I started to convince myself I really was gay and not what we used to call ‘bi now, gay later’. I didn’t decide on my true sexuality until I was 26 or so.”

Like many thousands, he was relieved when the anti-gay laws were repealed in 1967. “I felt better about myself and more confident. My parents always accepted my boyfriends, though I never formally came out to them. When I told my brother, he said, ‘Well, we’ve known that all the time.’”

In the 1970s, Hodgson met the love of his life. Richard Pointing was a highly regarded wardrobe supervisor in the film industry, credited with such classics as *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, *Bugsy Malone* and *Reds*. “Richard was very talented and, fortunately, we met before all the Aids thing started, and were faithful to each other.”

Hodgson had set up his own recording studio, Electrophon, in Neal’s Yard, Covent Garden, and was joined there by Canadian composer John Lewis. Together they produced some delightfully experimental albums. In 1984, Lewis was hired to compose the music for a Colin Baker *Doctor Who* story, but “John was diagnosed with Aids and died during the production”. As well as processing his grief at his friend’s sudden death, “I had to deal with *The News of the World* and *The Sun* on the phone. They published a list of Aids symptoms, which were like the common cold. The whole world went mad.”



The Daleks in Dr Who. © BBC

Life took a different course for Hodgson in the 1990s. Having trained as a hypnotherapist, he opened a clinic in London's Harley Street but also volunteered his skills at Body Positive, a drop-in centre in Soho for people with Aids and HIV. "The awful thing was for a long time you were told by doctors, 'Well, you've got Aids. Go away and die. We'll treat the symptoms, but you're not going to survive.' That's why complementary therapies were so important, to encourage people to not give up. I developed techniques that seemed to help." Fortunately, by the second half of the 1990s combination therapy began saving lives.

In 2002, Hodgson and Pointing left London for the Norfolk Broads, where they opened a high-end restaurant in the village of Staithe. Hodgson was delighted when Doctor Who was revived in 2005. "Richard and I were devoted fans of Russell T Davies and his work from Queer as Folk onwards." The Time Lord's return also meant Hodgson started receiving royalties for the sound of the Tardis, which he'd cannily registered as a piece of music decades earlier. "It was a great help when Richard was on chemo for leukaemia because it meant we could afford treats. He was only 68 when I lost him in 2011." They'd been together 38 years.

Now 88 and living in an eco-friendly, light-filled new-build, perfect for a TV pioneer, Hodgson has navigated the shifting tides of queer life in Britain across nine decades. What are his hopes and fears for the future? "It's very easy to take what we've achieved for granted. In the current political climate, it would be dangerous for us to sit back and think it's all been done. Because it hasn't. I still think it would be dangerous to walk around the streets holding hands. I'm coming to the end of the road and hoping it doesn't all go into reverse before I'm gone."

Reflecting on his legacy, he says, "I'm eternally amazed that people seem to value my contribution so highly. And I'm proud to have been associated with such a significant part of television history."