U3: People seem to think I'm just working with funny noises, that it isn't quite serious or something. I think a lot of people have a sort of block about electronic music, they think it must sound frightening and oppressive. – Delia Derbyshire

Biography:
Have you ever heard the theme song to Doctor Who? Or any music that relies on electronic sounds? Then you have Delia Derbyshire to thank. Born in 1937, Derbyshire was a gifted mathematician and musician: she earned degrees in both subjects from Cambridge. She wanted to work for a record company, and applied to DECCA records in 1957, but was denied a job because the company did not employ women. She eventually got a different job with the United Nations in Geneva, Switzerland. Later, she moved to London to spend a short time working for the famous music publishing company, Boosey & Hawkes before being hired to work for the BBC Radio.

She worked in a place called the Radiophonic Workshop, a part of BBC Radio that focused on making experimental sounds using electronics. Derbyshire was interested in the physics of different sounds and used her amazing math skills to create several new sounds. Most of her compositions were written for television shows, but she also produced several extended radio features using her experimental techniques. The most famous of these radio features are called The Dreams and Amor Dei (1964). Many television producers wanted Derbyshire to write music for their productions that were set in the ancient past or a distant future: settings where a traditional orchestra wouldn't feel right. Beyond working in drama and experimental radio, Derbyshire went on to found several important groups in the development of electronic music—Kaleidophon and Unit Delta Plus. Musically, she was famous for creating atmospheric sounds with a contemplative and ethereal quality. She used empty textures with lots of swirling and looping sounds to achieve an otherworldly sound.

In the 1970’s, Derbyshire stopped working for the BBC because she grew weary of the music and television industries. She composed very few pieces between the 1970’s and the 1990’s. Instead, she worked in a museum and bookshop. In the 1990’s, Derbyshire began composing again and composed consistently until her death in 2001. Derbyshire’s music was largely unrecognized during her lifetime. Recently, she has finally been credited for her many musical contributions to the BBC. Now she is regaining recognition as one of the pioneering figures in British electronic music.
Quick Facts:

- One of her favorite sounds was produced by hitting a lampshade in the radio studio and then taking apart and reconstructing the sound’s frequencies.
- She worked with Yoko Ono on one of Yoko’s early projects called “Wrapping Event.”
- She is the subject of a theater production, Standing Wave: Delia Derbyshire in the 1960's and two documentaries called, Alchemists of Sound (2003) and The Delian Mode (2009).
- She wrote twelve symphonies in addition to choral, vocal, band, and orchestral works.

Selected Compositions for Listening:

Spotify Playlist URL: [https://tinyurl.com/delialisten](https://tinyurl.com/delialisten)

- Doctor Who (Opening Theme)
- Quest
- The Pattern Emerges
- Celestial Cantabile
- The Wizard’s Laboratory
- Frontier of Knowledge

Learn More about Delia Derbyshire:

- Delia Derbyshire Personal Website: [www.delia-derbyshire.org](http://www.delia-derbyshire.org)
- FamousComposers.net: [Delia Derbyshire](http://www.famouscomposers.net/delia-derbyshire)
- Short Documentary by Kara Blake: [The Delian Mode](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Kd5Uz95B9Q)