

Dr Who

By Gibson Nolte

For anyone spending time in the Commonwealth over the past 44 years one of the most recognisable signature tunes must surely be the theme to Doctor Who. From the catchy bass line that kicks it off right through to the wobbly, windy finale the piece is a watershed on both the pop culture and electronic music maps.

Originally composed by British television composer extraordinaire Rob Grainer (rongrainer.org.uk) the piece was arranged into the form we all know and love by electronic music pioneer Delia Derbyshire. Delia's work is idolised on the informative but seldom-updated www.delia-derbyshire.org and on the exhaustive (if a little dry and ugly) www.delia-derbyshire.dyndns.org. Fans can also download a copy of her out of print and otherwise hard to find 'Electrosonic' LP through Rapidshare at http://rapidshare.com/files/19103716/delia_derbyshire_-_electrosonic_lp.rar

At the time of the arrangement, Derbyshire was working for the BBC in the legendary-yet-mysterious Radiophonic Workshop where themes and soundtracks to many of the BBC's most popular shows were painstakingly recorded and edited on cutting edge analogue tape equipment. Electronic music buffs would do very well to check out Ray White's detailed (and somewhat technical) Radiophonic Workshop essay at myweb.tiscali.co.uk/whitefiles/b2_h/4_radiophonic_workshop/rws/pgs/r01.htm and also to head over to youtube.com where a search for 'Radiophonic Workshop' will bring up a wealth of archival and reproduced material including the impressive 2005 BBC documentary 'Alchemists of Sound'.

Of course over the last 4 decades the Doctor Who theme has been subjected to several tweaks and undergone a couple of facelifts, some less sanctioned than others. A couple of these versions have been rearranged with the intention of providing an updated face for subsequent Doctor Who series (check out the docco on the making of the 1980 version – and dig the Yamaha CS-80 and ARP Odyssey - at www.chipcollection.com/videos/making-of-the-doctor-who-theme while others have been banged out by fans as tributes. Scores of non-sanctioned, user-submitted versions of the theme, ranging in genre from metal through dub and on to hip hop, can be enjoyed at whomix.trilete.net/?wmid=music... but beware, while some of these versions are cool or crafty enough to cause one's foot to begin tapping, others may cause your brain to explode. If one or two of the creations are enough to get the creative juices flowing, or if you're having the family around for tea and want to have a lounge room sing along, you can download scans of the original Ron Grainer sheet music (arranged for piano) from www.millenniumeffect.co.uk/audio/tributes/sheet.html

And finally, if you want to learn more about the detailed history of the Doctor Who theme you can check out Mark Ayres's article at http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/Mark_Ayres/DWTheme.htm while general Doctor Who fans should have a look at the well-resourced www.bbc.co.uk/doctorwho/