Twitter Thread by ProgrammedInequality



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@proginequality

This is Delia Darbyshire. If you've ever watched Dr. Who, you've heard her music--though she wasn't originally credited. What you might not know is that she, and other women at the BBC in the 1960s, were pioneers of early electronic music.



Delia didn't compose the melody to the Dr. Who theme, but she arranged it for electronic "instruments"--at that time a motley assortment of screeching machines not designed for making music. She translated staid sheet music into an otherworldly sound, & making it iconic, ethereal

For comparison: Here's what it sounds like played on a traditional instrument-piano: https://t.co/GBTchDHjKH

Here's what it sounded like when she got done with it: https://t.co/JMGPZdigeD



If you'd like to learn more about Delia Derbyshire, check out this documentary about her and the historical context in which she created her arresting sounds--the period when tv really began to come into its own as a medium: https://t.co/vVf5riA3Wg

If you're hungry for more, here's a longer audio documentary all about her life and work--Delia Derbyshire, Sculptress of Sound: https://t.co/1qALcisRQU

Ah darn, just saw I mistyped her last name in the first tweet--it's Derbyshire, not Darbyshire. Oh well, I can't delete it without wrecking the thread; I'm sure folks will figure it out ;)

And one more thing you might be interested to know: The original producer of Doctor Who was also a woman. In fact, the only woman producer at the BBC at the time (1963). Her name was Verity Lambert, and she went on to have a long career in TV & film: https://t.co/3j1VBl9emT



These examples just go to show, again, how women are often pioneers in fields before those fields become seen as important/lucrative. Electronic music, sci fi TV shows... neither were considered high prestige at the time--they were new and weird.

The reason this is important is because it reminds us that women are often on the cutting edge of tech and media--before they get pushed out as those "edges" become mainstream, and male-dominated.

A lot of times these women become forgotten or submerged, so it's important to remind ourselves periodically what pioneers look like: very often they don't look like what we might expect or what we have been led to believe.

“People seem to think I’m just working with funny noises, that it isn’t quite serious or something," Delia told the @guardian in 1970. By then, she was running the BBC Radiophonic Workshop in all but name. #electronicmusic #WomenInMusic #WomenInSTEM https://t.co/Lmus2EuLvW

Nonetheless, "despite her talent Delia failed to gain widespread recognition during her lifetime, eventually becoming disillusioned with the industry" & going to work as a radio operator in a remote area of England, & then eventually in a bookshop in Northampton. #WomenInSTEM

Read more about her life before and after her time as an electronic music pioneer in this article discussing her posthumously-awarded PhD from her hometown university--Coventry (though she went to Cambridge). She died at 64 in 2001: https://t.co/P5oMg8evTR ht to @srowett for link

One of the most fascinating things this article points out is how her musical sensibilities were shaped by the sounds of war: "Born in Coventry in 1937, Derbyshire’s unique sonic palette was shaped by sounds of the Blitz and the air raid sirens that surrounded her as a child."