

Profile: Daphne Oram

Daphne Oram (1925–2003) was a British composer and co-founder of the BBC Radiophonic Workshop. She invented the 'Oramics Machine', a combined sound synthesiser and sequencer which allowed composers to draw and control electronic sound synthesis. She was the first composer to be commissioned to provide electronic music for the BBC, producing the soundtrack for the television drama *Amphitryon 38* (1957). In 1958 she co-founded the BBC Radiophonic Workshop, becoming its first director and an indelible impetus on the work produced throughout its history. Oram left the Workshop in 1959, establishing one of the first independent British electronic music studios, at Tower Folly, Kent, from where she devoted herself to 'Oramics,' her drawn sound technique. Not only is Oramics one of the earliest forms of electronic sound synthesis, but it is audiovisual – the composer draws on a synchronised set of ten 35mm film strips which overlay photo-electric cells, generating electrical charges to control amplitude, timbre, frequency and duration of sound.

Oram supported her work on Oramics through commissions, including concert pieces, advertisements, the electronic soundtrack for Jack Clayton's *The Innocents* (1964), the EMI release *Electronic Sound Patterns* (1972), and collaborations with film maker Geoffrey Jones, such as the Oscar nominated British Transport film *Snow* (1963). Alongside her studio work, Oram was a researcher with an avid interest in the science and philosophy of sound. She wrote research papers, gave lectures on electronic music at universities, theatres and festivals, and published the book *An Individual Note, of Music, Sound and Electronics* (1972), which was republished in 2016, giving new generations of composers and electronic musicians access to Oram's unique and radical perspective.

After Oram's death in 2003, her tape collection and papers moved via composer Hugh Davies and the Sonic Arts Network (now Sound and Music) to the Special Collections and Archives at Goldsmiths, University of London, where they are now looked after by the Daphne Oram Trust. The Oramics Machine is preserved by the Science Museum where it has most recently been displayed as centrepiece in *Oramics to Electronica*, an exhibition on the history of British electronic music.

James Bulley