**ACTRESS**

“20 years since self-releasing his first productions Darren J. Cunningham is firmly established as the club visionary of his generation.” **Boomkat**

“A force of nature within electronic music and club culture.” **The Quietus**

“Vaunted English electronic producer Actress is a cerebral standard-bearer” **Pitchfork**

“one of the great poets of club culture” **The Guardian**

“In terms of idiosyncratic yet thoroughly danceable electronic music, Cunningham remains nearly peerless.” **The Wire**

**Actress** (aka Darren J Cunningham) is a giant of electronic composition, a far-seeing philosopher-complicator whose explorations have prefigured and pioneered many of the great themes in the club since his acclaimed label debut *Splazsh* in 2010. Now 2024 marks the beginning of a new kosmische mood for his tenth album, and his first for Norwegian avantgarde label Smalltown Supersound.

Over the sweep of Darren’s career he has not only created his own arcane language, filled with hermetic references and interdimensional techno and electro but he arrived at many of the currents of the last twenty years first; often pushing out the waves and ripples of influence in his wake; from reimaging Stockhausen to collaborating with an AI trained on his own music as far back as 2018.

Actress’s first love growing up in the post-industrial Midlands was football. It was a career-ending injury that while he was playing in the West Bromwich Albion youth team that was music’s good fortune, forcing a change in professional trajectory. Drawn to visual art, his other favourite was clarinet, classical training that he would use later in his career. A devotee of Detroit techno and particularly, Derrick May, Carl Craig and Kevin Saunderson, Cunningham, had the good fortune to have a friend sell him a studio setup for £200.

After moving to London, Actress funded his degree in Recording Arts with a grant from the Professional Footballers Association for young players whose careers had been finished by injury. The result was a complete submersion in the dance subcultures of the capital. Founding his own label Werk Discs for his debut album *Hazyville*, he emerged seemingly pushing back against demarking lines, never using a metronome or the grid within the work.

Werk Discs had been spun out of a club night founded by Darren and friends. The label went on to release the most vital producers of the late 00s; Lone, Helena Hauff, Zomby, Lukid. Cunningham’s second album in 2010 *Splazsh* represented a breakthrough, topping The Wire’s Rewind Albums of the year list and later being added to Pitchfork’s Top 100 Albums of 2010s. Released on Honest Jon’s, a label jointly founded by Damon Albarn, Actress travelled to the Democratic Republic of Congo to record a track for Albarn’s *Kinshasa One Two* album.

**Actress’** third record *R.I.P.* was inspired by Milton’s poem *Paradise Lost* and was hailed as a masterpiece, seeing a significant musical shift towards a meditative 21st century rewiring of mid-century classical that would indicate his creative direction. In 2013, he formed the Werkhaus creative group to produce a show with artists Eddie Peake and Nic Hamilton at St John’s Church Hackney, a one off performance titled *A shared cultural memory*. His fourth LP in 2014 titled *Ghettoville* saw the shift to a darker atmosphere, with many fearing the end of his recording work, with the album self-described as the "black tinted conclusion of the Actress image". That was proven to be a misunderstanding of the intention of the text, as he followed up with an instalment of the DJ-Kicks mix series in 2015. His next move in 2017 was the afrofuturist *AZD* themed around chrome and inspired by art like Anish Kapoor’s *Cloud Gate*, outsider artist James Hampton and hip-hop pioneer Rammellzee. Pronounced “AZID,” the title was an anagram of his nickname, Daz.

Also in 2017 he worked with Sandunes, Jack Barnett (These New Puritans), percussionist Jivraj Singh and vocalist Priya Purushothaman to respond to Steve Reich’s seminal piece *Different Trains*. They delivered a series of audiovisual events, culminating in a performance at a festival on the edge of the desert in Rajasthan.

The 2018’s *LAGEOS* album was made with the London Contemporary Orchestra and originally performed at a legendary sell out concert at the high temple of British brutalism, the Barbican. The record was an experiment in forming synergy between electronic machine and acoustic elements. Greek composer and architect Iannis Xenakis was a reference - they took inspiration from the architectural layouts of the Barbican for the score. In 2019, he returned to the classical world and the Royal Festival Hall on the Southbank, performing his reimagining of Stockhausen - titled *Sin (x) II*. The piece was based on the opening scene of the opera *Mittwoch Aus Licht* - called *Welt-Parlament*. *Mittwoch* was just one opera in seven of Stockhausen’s 29-hour *Licht* cycle - composed over 26 years. **Actress** had knowingly taken on one of the most difficult and controversial composers of the century. 2018 also saw him preshadow our 2024 discourse about machine intelligences, when he revealed the Young Paint project - an EP made by an AI trained on his own earlier work “progressively emulating the Greyscale to Silvertone process Darren J. Cunningham started during the recording of the *Hazyville* LP”. Using the freedom of the underground pseudonym he has also released music under the aliases Bank Of England, GNESIS, THAT KNIGHTSBRIDGE OG, DIAL 666 8100 - and maybe more.

2020’s critically acclaimed *Karma & Desire* followed*,* featuring Mercury Prize winner Sampha, Zsela, Aura T-09 and “a broken romance espionage ethereal short film” by creative director and performance artist Lee Nachum aka Bootee featuring cameos from Zsela, Yves Tumor, Sampha, Aura T-09 and Actress. Last year saw *LXXXVIII* (88, a reference to the artist's numerological beliefs) and its inspiration in game theory and chess released to further acclaim. Whether inspired by warehouse raves, Stockhausen or sci-fi, **Actress** has left a body of work that stands as like an inscrutable monolith, replete with secrets of the far future.

The calm, meditative, infinite vistas of the new record *Statik* were foreshadowed with Actress’ first release with Smalltown, a rare remix in 2022 of the label’s Norwegian-Mexican atmospheric Fourth World world weaver Carmen Villain. Combined with photos and art from Norwegian photographer based in Paris Ola Rindal, *Statik* presents a dreamlike progression in Darren work; infinitely deep loops of fractal thoughts, with a levity and flow, a master at work. Ola represents the latest collaborative partner in a career filled with them; from performance shows with White Cube artist Eddie Peake, being the subject of work by Belgian visual artist Pierre Debusschere, a single with Mercury Prize winner Sampha to being photographed by Turner Prize winner Wolfgang Tillmans and having fronted campaigns for Acne and Cav Empt. He’s also released a garment with leading LA brand Braindead.