



MUSIC

BEHIND THE DECKS: **KELLY LEE OWENS**

by [Alex Brzezicka](#)

Convert to the Welsh Music Prize winner Kelly Lee Owens' church for spiritual ravers.

Kelly Lee Owens features in our new series featuring creatives operating in the shadows, behind the decks, curtains and scenes. It's time for the most exciting DJs, producers and directors to take the front seat they deserve: right under the spotlight...

Following a sweet ambient sound, coming from one of the backstage trailers of All Points East Festival in London's Victoria Park, we meet Kelly Lee Owens. Welsh electronic musician and producer who, compared to the likes of Arthur Russell, marries techno with transcendence and technology with nature. Wise beyond her years and brought up on DIY indie stages, Kelly uses past experiences to push through the definition of what party music should be like and drags us into another dimension. She's embroidered it with electronic beats, secret spiritual messages on the state of the world and a few words of advice. Only way to decipher it, is to tune in and dance your night away to the sounds of melting glaciers.

Kelly Lee Owens' second album 'Inner Song' turns us inwards, away from the outside chaos to realize that there was no real separation to begin with. We are one. Owen's music's mission is to bring that attitude back to the clubs. Make it a conscious, spiritual space where we find the universe in each other. Talking to Kelly, we got taken away from the loud festival's ground to go on a wild, metaphorical journey revisiting John Cale's Wales, forgotten wisdom and neo-rituals.





How are you doing today? Are you excited to perform later?

I feel so excited. This is only my fourth show in two years after releasing my album. I just feel very lucky to be here and to see all the effort everyone put in and the music community to be able to come together again. Just feel blessed and not take anything for granted.

How does it feel to play your album only now when it was out in the pandemic?

There's something about it because the title is 'Inner Song' so the irony of that. It was like foresight of something about going inwards and that's all we've been able to do. It's a blessing for me that people have had time to soak it up. It assisted people through the pandemic. Now it feels, at least in the UK, like the right time to play it out.

Right now, after the pandemic, there's a sense of longing for collaborations and need to belong to any community, sometimes partially sacrificing individualism on the way. What's your stance on that and what way of creating do you prefer?

I serve best by going into myself and relaying, as honestly and purely as possible, my experiences, which reflect the collective because we are the collective, by going in and transmitting my pain into sound as many other artists do. I think that's the most kind of genuine way of connecting with people and giving them a token to allow them to access their own pain and experiences and perhaps be more open about themselves. It's interesting because I have a lot of male fans and I find them being able to access their emotions via my music which is a beautiful thing to hear. I'm really conscious about male suicide being one of the biggest killers of men which is just crazy. I just feel like I'm exposing myself and hoping that it reaches the people.



Your sound seems very organic and often revolves around the themes of nature and climate change which is not that common in techno music. Do you find music can help people reconnect with nature again?

Everything is nature. We are nature. There is no separation. All these reports coming out at the moment show that we do affect everything else and each other. There's no separation for me whether it's via synth, whether it's via my voice, whether I sample nature literally itself because I always believe that nature is the first sound. All sound is music to me or has the potential to be. Why not take like in a glacier melting and let that do the talking? I can put my own spin on it but actually, the ice is melting. I can find a sample of that happening in real-time and bring it into the consciousness of the club. As I see it, clubs are very spiritual places. People come together once a week maybe, or they did at least, to congregate. To allow themselves to positively escape. We all need that. It's vital to dance, to move your body. That's healing Like Native Americans. Dance is life. Dance is healing. This is ancient. This is nothing new, but I'm interested in exploring these themes.

I feel like it replaced churchgoing for the new spiritual generation.

Absolutely, that's the thing! I'm not personally religious, I am spiritual, but the problem is as we've lost religion there are things about religion that were good as well as being bad. Obviously, the dogma is bad and the things that have happened. There's a lot of difficulty there but there were positives. People coming together once a week, having a place to be. A place to belong. A place where they can express their sorrows. A place where they can be held. A place where they can sing. People get married. People have funerals there. It's these rituals. We've lost that. We've lost so much of that. I was reading about the rise of the industrial revolution. People used to go to rituals and ceremonies a lot more. It was because of the working day that they started cancelling these religious ceremonies. People find belonging there. Maybe this is just a new way of experiencing those things that as human beings we crave, and we need. Pandemic has shown that we need each other.



You've been collaborating with John Cale on 'Corner of my Sky'. You're proud to be Welsh and your connection with Wales is a strong one so how did it feel to engage in a creative collaboration with another Welsh musician and get to know the experiences of someone belonging to a generation before?

Beautiful. I have this thing when it comes to the community about elders: they may not know everything, and things change so quickly but they do have wisdom somewhere. They have lived and with living comes experience. They're always saying 'oh boomers, 'oh this generation'. We are always finding ways to divide ourselves from each other. Actually, let's sit in a room. Let's talk. Let's communicate. My way of communicating often is via sound. Of course, John's too so to collaborate with someone who knows the pain of Wales as being an oppressed country by the English state, to not being able to speak in your own language, sing in your own language. Coming from that place, how do you express yourself now? How do we connect to nature and give nature a voice again? It's just been the most beautiful experience for me. I honestly feel like more people should collaborate with people in their 70s and above.

Definitely. I think exchanges of ideas like that are very important to preserve historical identity in music and within communities. There's so much wisdom in the older generations that we must come back to.

Yes. Let's sit down. Let's have a cup of coffee. Let's talk about life. In Wales, if you sit next to someone, they will tell you their life story at a bus stop, a stranger. You realise at the end of it, we're not too dissimilar. We're very similar. We want the same things. Now, there's lots of programmes in terms of governments of division. Divide and conquer. It's ancient but now it's in a different way. A different attack via social media. No. Let's step away from that. Even with the vaccine, how do we keep conversation and connection open through everything? That's what we need.

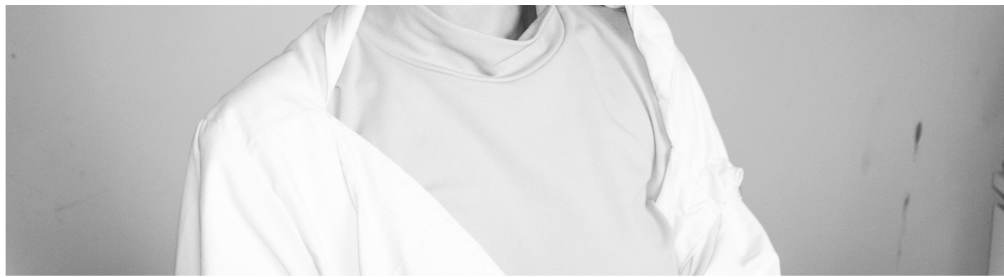
Yes, social media is not as accurate...

No. We came to believe it as fact. Now, luckily, we're moving into an era where we've realised that doesn't work.

It's an echo chamber in a way.

Yes. Absolutely. With voting, you realize as well. All the powers that be and companies are literally paying to influence your mind. It's an interesting place, the Internet. There are positives and negatives to it as with everything but it's just about being able to keep asking questions and wanting to know the truth and not just validate your own opinion.





Going back to rituals, have you got any to get into the zone when you're about to create?

The biggest thing is turning up. It's like people say with yoga: the hardest thing to do is to get on the mat. Once I'm there I can focus but generally in life what keeps me grounded is... I mean, you walked in, and I was listening to my ambient playlist. Setting the mood and floating through life is my thing. I have been swimming more. I have been doing yoga. I like to meditate, not as much as I used to. I have my own rituals where I connect to my ancestors. I read tarot. I have my crystals. I have incense and just ways of connecting to myself. Like prayer but not in that religious sense, just in a spiritual sense connecting to my past, the present and the future. All those things are tightly connected to me. Connecting to my spirituality is the main thing.

What are you working on now?

As with most artists, there's been some working on new bodies of work. I'm about to go on tour to America next week for a full month which would be amazing and then I have a UK tour. I have a big project which I can't talk about at the moment, but which will be revealed in the next couple of months. Creating more of sonic branding and working in the sphere of a client base but keeping my artistic integrity which has been interesting and stuff to do with scores and film and tv and other things. The pandemic has made me think laterally and given me the time to try new things.

Kelly Lee Owens is playing All Points East in London August 2022, for more information click [here](#).

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