



Chris Douglas aka Dalglish

## Dalglish

### *Benacah Drann Deachd*

Highpoint Lowlife CD/DL

Chris Douglas haunts his own music. A nomad and something of a loner, he has rattled around the electronic music network like a busted component for the last decade and a half, starting in San Francisco where he DJed and put on parties with the likes of Jonah Sharp of Spacetime Continuum, before releasing his first music via Detroit, where, as a young white teenager, he used to hang out with Underground Resistance's Mad Mike Banks and Drexciya's James Stinson. He finally ended up in Europe, after Autechre invited him to play their All Tomorrow's Parties festival in 2003. He now resides, perhaps by default, in Berlin, where he fits in to the extent that no one there really cares if you fit in or not. Here, the beautiful yet sometimes harrowing electronic music he makes as OST, Rook, Dalglish and a number of other variations and alternative spellings can lurk comfortably in the shadows beneath the blinding searchlight of mainstream Techno. *Benacah Drann Deachd* – fumbled Gaelic for *Farewell Cursed Decade* – is an attempt to unburden himself of the memories of a troubled decade by labelling 11 tracks with their dates of creation ("25.6.2010", "8.4.2006"), and collecting them together like intimate diary entries safely locked away in a old journal.

All his work is littered with memories. Dalglish is partly a nod to Scottish footballer Kenny, but more significantly, the surname of a friend; *Waetka*, the title of a 2007 album released under the name OST which found a home on Joachim Nordwall's eclectic Swedish label iDEAL, was apparently the name of a woman with whom he shared a fleeting bar encounter. But the references are deliberately encrypted, their spellings mangled and cross-wired from different languages ("Sa Deiforeadh", "Damlicht", "Borak"). What at first glance looks like the usual data-bite titles of electronic tracks is on closer inspection more like an inner monologue conducted in conflicting languages.

It's appropriate, because his music is one of the most striking evocations of the life of the mind that you're ever likely to hear. The music is substantially live, improvised within a loose framework, and the shifting layers of grey-green tone, fractured samples and nervous tics that whip around the stereo field obsessively tease out new geometries and shapes. "I have been alone since an early age and through my work I learned a lot about expression, humanity, emotions," he says via email correspondence. With *Benacah Drann Deachd*, he explains, he is seeking "clarity and less regret". Listening to it, I'm reminded of a genius/madman tracing relationships and signs on the wall of his room in an attempt to understand forces at work in his life – or in his mind.

The introverted electronic music of **Dalglish** evokes the regret-soaked, intimate journals of an American loner adrift in Europe.

By **Derek Walmsley**

Douglas once described *Waetka* as "relaxing", and has characterised Dalglish as the more 'beats' end of his output. Yet the central dynamic is of turmoil, of rhythms and layers working against each other before they briefly align in a moment of precious equilibrium. For me, his use of found sounds evokes something akin to agoraphobia. Rather than using field recordings as exotic signifiers or textural padding, real textures are bent into the music as if the world is warped – notably in "7.3.2009" – its shapes looming over you as if viewed through a fisheye lens.

It would be a tough listen if it weren't so resonant. The very last track on *Benacah Drann Deachd*, "6.8.2002", tentatively reaches for and holds a spintingling minor-key melody five minutes in and just two minutes before the end of the album. The effect is like your thoughts falling into alignment the moment before you go to sleep, a state of grace that's lost in the waking world the next day. "7.3.2009" skittles glassy marbles over a massive planar surface, while gamelan or balafon-like figures flicker gently above. "30.12.2007" is a kind of dubbed-out click track composed of shivers and ping-pong echo.

There are parallels between Douglas and another former Techno producer now operating way off the grid. Like Gerald Donald of Dopplereffekt, Douglas spent the 2000s progressively shedding his music of any recognisable rhythm or pulse, instead

sketching abstract yet enormous spatial architectures from electronic sound. Both had close relationships with the late James Stinson of Drexciya; both left the US to live in Europe after their initial releases. But whereas Donald's work since *Linear Accelerator* has paid homage to temples of science and engineering such as the Deutsches Elektronen-Synchrotron in Hamburg and the Large Hadron Collider near Geneva, Douglas's music suggests the flipside: hostile spaces, frightening geometries, engineering on an inhuman scale. I can't help but think of Michael Madsen's 2010 documentary *Into Eternity*, about the enormous Finnish Onkalo bunker for nuclear waste, which outlines the problems of trying to warn civilizations thousands of years in the future of its contents. The answers mooted in the documentary include creating enormous landscapes of menacing spikes, or concrete labyrinths where passages always lead to a dead end. Douglas's work can trigger a similar kind of flight-or-fight instinct.

But this is intensely personal music, and comparisons can be found with kindred spirits outside of electronic music – the intuitive loops and layers of Andrew Chalk, or the creeping layers of noise and busted synths of Nate Young. It shares that kind of restless, unstable, all-too-human quality, one which makes its brief moments of clarity all the more real and all the more beautiful. □