



“I thought one day, 'Sod it, I'm gonna go and DJ.' Gave up my job, started doing a lot more clubs, and it paid off.”

DARREN EMERSON

Interview by Dan Ackerman

As one of the most influential figures in dance music, Darren Emerson has been writing, recording and performing for more than 17 years. From his groundbreaking work with the band Underworld to his on-fire label Underwater Records, Darren has maintained a high profile almost since his late teens.

"I've always been into playing records, ever since I was three years old and given a record deck," he recalls. "As I got older, hip-hop, scratching and electro really brought me into it. Then house music started coming up from Chicago when I was about 16 or 17, and I was hooked into that and then started doing clubs."

Making the leap from part-timer to professional was a big step for young Darren. "I was working on the futures market when I was 16 up until 19. But my passion was always music and DJing," he says. "But then I thought one day, 'Sod it, I'm gonna go and DJ.' Gave up my job, started doing a lot more clubs and it paid off."

After garnering early critical acclaim from the music press, Darren joined up with Underworld – a band about to break into the limelight. "I was working with two older guys, who didn't really

DARREN PERSON

know much about dance music. They were coming from more of a rock angle," Darren says of the band. "So I told them what was good about dance music – taught them everything about dance music."

But all good things must come to an end, and Darren eventually left the group to pursue a heavier diet of DJing, producing and remixing. Among his projects was the Underwater Records label. "When I left Underworld, I sort of put a lot more energy into that and of course the Underwater label is doing really well now," Darren says proudly.

This new focus allowed Darren to concentrate on the music he loved. "I always play music that I like. I don't want to play music that I don't like, 'cause you wouldn't feel it," he explains, adding, "I'm very open. I like different styles of music. I was into the Chicago house scene from an early age, which is a lot more soulful. Also my parents got me into a lot of Motown stuff when I was younger. People like Gladys Knight, Marvin Gaye, the usual. So I've always been into that side, more soulful stuff."

Darren's influences are wide-ranging. "I admire a lot of people," he tells us. "There's so many DJs these days who are all really good. I've always liked Carl Cox. I really like Josh Wink. Laurent Garnier is more sort of a funky thing. We all grew up on the same sort of music, so we've got the same sort of head."

But Darren was lucky enough to start out in an age before the DJ field was flooded with players. "It's quite hard to work up the ladder these days," he admits, "because there are so many DJs." Looking back, he says, "When I started off it was easy, because no one wanted to be a DJ, it wasn't a big thing then. When I got my decks, house music wasn't even invented, and the DJ thing wasn't really happening."

These days, with amateur DJs a dime a dozen, getting a break can be next to impossible – not that it stops anyone from trying. "Now, every kid for Christmas wants a mixer and two decks. Which is great, because it's making people be artistic," admits Darren. "And hopefully that makes the kid want a little studio as well, and it's making people write music. And that's great because the more music the better."

For those who seek career advice, he says, "All I can say is you gotta believe in what you do."

Making the situation even more difficult is the seeming decline in the UK club industry. "It's taken a little drop, for some of the big clubs," Darren observes in his typically understated manner. "But for me it's been great. We do these Underwater parties. We do them monthly and it's one of the best parties going in the UK at the moment."

"Now, every kid for Christmas wants a mixer and two decks. Which is great, because it's making people be artistic"

"For the bigger sort of clubs like Cream," he says, "they're

a bit more commercial anyway. We were always a bit more on the underground thing. Even though we've had big hits like 'It Just Won't Do,' by Tim Deluxe, which was quite a commercial success, we're not trying to just make money, money, money. We do it because we believe in it, and we do it from our heart."

"But it's always good when you have a commercial hit," he quickly adds, "because it makes more money, it puts us on the map."

Between running a successful record label, DJing around the world and throwing underground parties, Darren hardly has time to work on his next project. "I've got to finish my album," he admits. "I've got about 20 tracks on the go at the moment. I want to try and open up a bit more, bring a lot more guitars in and try some different things. I'm not scared to experiment."