

Aphex Twin: Biography

Richard D James is the alpha male of electronica, a sinewave surfer and synthesiser symbiant, as likely to set up his FX under the polythene peaks of a well appointed Wendy house as choreograph the flexing of a bunch of fully pumped female bodybuilders whose muscle profiles suggested they'd changed their order from cheesecake to beefcake.

Of his multiple alias and alter egos - AFX, Polygon Window, Caustic Window, The Dice Man - none are active, even Aphex Twin, the primary conduit for his creativity is at rest or play, compensating for the years of accelerated development. Maybe he's just enjoying the fruits of his labour. The six figure sum he received for supplying the cranked-up soundtrack to tyre manufacturers Pirelli's world spanning athlete ad proved that all the extra income from company's risqué calendars, de rigueur fixtures on the workshop walls of grease monkey mechanics the world over, wasn't going to waste. Like any modern mercenary, Aphex sunk his lucre into a tank and a bank, both decommissioned husks, one several tonnes of army surplus hardware sitting in his parent's front garden, the other a disused financial institution converted into living quarters.

Growing up in Cornwall, subject to a perverse combination of spectacular scenery and bone-crunching boredom, Richard cultivated life-long friendships with the Rephlex crew, the label he co-founded with Grant Wilson Clarridge to explore "new innovations in the dynamics of acid" but whose remit grew to encompass the nouveau E-Z listening of the Gentle People, the hard-edged electro of Detroit legends Drexciya and Dynamix II and the nascent productions of close friends and audio allies Squarepusher, Muziq and Luke Vibert.

An affinity with electronics took him out of the South West for full time studies at Kingston Poly, where he sussed out how to make machines sing and aced the competition by dropping out of the course when techno's calling became irresistible. Skipping lectures, he synthesised *Digeridoo* and *Analogue Bubblebath*, the one that had grown men brawling like adolescents unbalanced by the sudden uprush of testosterone in their bloodstreams as they tried to secure the last white label copies in stock.

His first full-length release for Belgium's R&S label, *Selected Ambient Works 85-92* emitted meditative serenity, a balm that dampened neural noise and eased synaptic traffic in the gridlocked heads who played it. Even if titles like *Green Calx*, *Delphium*, *Actium* sounded like noxious compounds conjured by industrial chemists, *SAW85-92* avoided clinical spick and span sterility.

Richard's profile was hotting up but his creations were getting cooler, past the point of chill out and down the Celsius scale toward shivery unease. Now signed to Warp, *Selected Ambient Works Volume II* was like a X-ray of its predecessor, pitched between the discreet music devised by ambient OG Brian Eno on his mid-70s bed of pain and the paralysing drones of electroacoustic endeavour. It's icy beauty ensured Aphex's inclusion in the Isolationism strand of serial anthologist Kevin Martin's vital Virgin compilation series while the discs' dislocated moodstates would later underscore the queasy routines of dark comedy magus Chris Morris' Blue Jam. *SAWVII* conformed to a colour scheme whose spectrum ran from rust to ochre to copper to terra-cotta, assigning each track a different pigment of brown instead of a name. The chromatic coding befitted the music's darkening hues, but it wasn't an arbitrary act to escape easy classification. Richard revealed he was one of the tiny percentage of the population blessed/cursed with Synesthesia, the sensory disorder that short circuits sufferer's receptors into picking up mixed messages from the 5 senses. Morsels in the mouth assume a precise geometric shape and musical notes can spark colourfloods in a field of vision, the kind of hallucinations most of us have to jack a tab to access.

So days were filled with tasty colours and tactile sounds and nights were spent

dreaming lucidly, calling the shots in mental movies where, as he confessed to David Toop in *The Face*, he regularly defied death in an escalating series of scenarios, savouring every detail of the mise en scene. "I often throw myself off skyscrapers or cliffs and zoom off right at the last minute. That's quite good fun. It's well realistic." Because his creative urges wouldn't conform to the tyranny of the body clock, he indulged in marathon sleep deprivation sessions to maintain an edge. When his brutalised constitution went west, he applied his somnolent skills to the task, proving that he really could make music in his sleep.

By third album *I Care Because You Do* Rich was back making beats, rhythms percolated into a cascading cavalcades or wheezing like a chronic asthmatic scaling a five story stairwell before realising he's left his inhaler on the front porch. But *I Care...*'s real breakthrough saw Rich becoming witness to an enraptured marriage between the divided disciplines of modern classical and electronica. The avant garde old guard got hip real quick, ears pricked by the young pretender's assimilation of their innovations. Aphex performed studio surgery on Gavin Bryers elegiac *Sinking Of The Titanic* while Philip Glass accepted his first 'pop' commission since *S'Express*, sympathetically rescoring Aphex's *lcct Hedral* chiller.

By the bite-sized *Richard D James Album*, Aphex's abstract beats became an exact science, anglepoised to ricochet with terminal velocity, from *To Cure A Weakling Child*'s fitful whip-pan rhythms and *Yellow Calx*'s corrugated breaks. The philharmonic splatterbreak of *Girl/Boy* proved Rich hadn't forsaken his avant classical muse, but the raging pH values of trax like *Cornish Acid* and *Peek 824545201* indicated Rich's lysergic flashback was in full effect. *To Cure A Weakling Child*'s cherubic, cut-up choristers and radiophonic fanfares linger on in daffy dynamics of the closing *Logon Rock Witch*, rolling out on a rhythm section designed by Heath Robinson, all cog sinister rotary motions, cuckoo clock chimes and broken bedspread springs.

However advanced Richard's rhythmic science became, it was the devastatingly beautiful melodies underpinning his tracks that forged genuine emotional connections with people, turning initial fascination into hardcore devotion. One fan, a Japanese poetess was so profoundly touched by Richard's music that after her death she was buried along with her Aphex collection.

Yet it's Richard's visual identity that's arguably cemented mainstream attention. A string of unforgettable videos proved Aphex is the lone twin who seeks community in crowd of clones. At first it was a tag team of giant teddy bears raised on a diet of jujitsu and *Donkey Rhubarb* who wandered off into the sunset before the Tellytubbies could gorge themselves on their first bowl of tubby custard. Then in Chris Cunningham's wicked promo for *Come To Daddy*, Aphex latex transforms Gingham girlies and Parka-sporting pre-teens into monstrous, shape-throwing ankle-bitters tearing around decaying estates and necrotic towerblocks, a newsprint nightmare made flesh. Subliminal social commentary cedes into a sardonic riff on celebrity when the immaculately conceived TV travesty of Jesus arrives on the scene - a demon seed birthed from a cathode womb, part Nosferatu, part alien abductor archetype and part emaciated concentration camp survivor - to bust a biddy's eardrums and claim his bastard offspring. By 99's *Windowlicker* vid he's still the daddy but this time his dominion is over loot and booty, a hirsute narcissist cruising LA streets in a mile long limo for ho's to freek into same face hootchies.

Richard's involvement with the visual arts has seen his first tangible manifestation of this century, providing soundtrack to old ally Chris Cunningham's first short film *flex*, a hardcore video instillation filmed not under the unremitting glare of studio-tanning arclights but in the murky depths of an underwater pool for The Royal Academy's *Apocalypse: beauty and horror in contemporary art* in London, exhibited alongside work by avant provocateurs Jeff Koons and Jake and Dinos Chapman whose perverse power to confound and confront, alarm and delight provides Richard D James with the most fitting company he's ever kept.