When she was in high school, Kelly Lee Owens won two certificates: one was for music lover of the year, the other was for daydreamer of the year. “Even as a kid my mum said I would daydream a lot—she called it ‘Kelly’s World,’” the musician and DJ laughs. These prophecies provided the foundation for her career as a respected name in electronic music for ethereal work that uses the steely nature of the genre to articulate a connection with something greater. Her latest album *Dreamstate* is a monument to dreaming, and is the hotly anticipated debut release for The 1975’s George Daniel’s new electronic music imprint on Dirty Hit, dh2. Its pop melodies elevate techno beats to tell a story of heartbreak and subsequent recovery and growth through choosing to gaze higher.

Owens grew up in North Wales among breathtaking Celtic landscapes that have always inspired the sonics of her music. “You’re very grounded when you grow up in the countryside and there’s a sense of freedom because you have a lot of space,” she explains. “It’s quite a derogatory term, being a ‘daydreamer,’ because it undermines capitalism, class, status and all the structures we have in place to make you fit into the system.” The pressure to follow those around her into traditional hands-on careers was felt when she realised she wanted to be an artist. “Everyone has jobs like farmers—very practical, so to be someone whose job it is to dream or reach for your dreams is actually not that common because of survival mode. In order to survive we have to work in jobs that we don’t necessarily love.”

She initially got into nursing because she wanted to use her natural empathy and desire to connect with others. While working at a cancer hospital, Owens was encouraged by patients to pursue her real dream of making music. “It was the greatest gift at the age of 18, to have people close to death telling you what they regret the most in life. It’s always the things they didn’t try or didn’t say—not what they did try and fuck up. They said to me, ‘You’re really good at this but what do you really want to do?’ I said make music. And they were like, ‘Trust us—go and do it.’”

After a decade of working in record stores and getting an alternative musical education in London, Owens eventually got into a studio where synths were being used. It was love at first sight. “The humanity in analogue synths,” she exclaims. “If you don’t put your soul into it, there won’t be any soul—they’re an extension of yourself. Everything clicked for me—I weirdly became obsessed with the sounds. They were obviously very repetitive and allowed you to transcend.” Despite previously being interested in indie and pop, techno suddenly made sense to her. The way she uses equipment to create her unique electronic sound was, and still is, emotionally intuitive. “When you’re not taught by someone or classically trained, you don’t have to colour within any specific lines—there are no limitations when I create.”

After the Covid-19 pandemic and a romantic break-up, Owens began the next level of her personal and spiritual evolution. *Dreamstate* was born from the inner journey she went on; it details the journey from the first rush of post-break-up connection on the album’s pulsing and addictive lead single, ‘Love You Got’ to the dark post-rave insistence on ‘Time To’ that she’s safe to let go of the past and open her heart again. The vocal, piano and string arrangement on closing track ‘Trust and Desire’ (strings played by Kate Bush’s nephew) acts as a vulnerable reminder to forgive yourself for what you did when you were less experienced in life (“*Know better, do better,*” she calls out gently).

All Kelly Lee Owens albums have the qualities of a natural element to them and to her, this one represents air: “It’s all about transcending in a positive way; daydreaming and reaching for a higher perspective.” On its striking 90s movie poster-style album artwork (shot by Samuel Bradley) Owens wears a leather trench coat in a field with electric blue cloudy skies and the wires of pylons running through her head. It’s a visual representation of the spiritual nature of Welsh countryside, the urban edge to techno and the interconnectedness of everything. The euphoric melodies and mantra-like lyrics that implore listeners to ascend in their minds were inspired by the first live shows she played in 2021 post-pandemic, to 75,000 people a night, supporting Depeche Mode. “Dreaming alone is important but ultimately what I realised after [the pandemic] was that the dream state exists so we can commune and dream together,” she says.

As such, Dreamstate is built on the foundations of collaboration, with writing-features from Andrew Ferguson and Matthew McBriar (on the blissful sunrise trance track ‘Rise’) and The Chemical Brothers (on the soft Björk-esque ‘Ballad (In The End)’). “I was so curious to see where my energy could meet with someone else’s,” the highly independent creator explains. “And, more importantly, if I was capable of still being the Executive Producer and it still sounding like me, even though I’m working with different people to write.”

Dreamstate is self Produced by Kelly Lee Owens, mixed by David Wrench with additional production, programming from George Daniel, BICEP, Tom Rowland, Phil Scully, Oli Bayston, James Greenwood.

Owensis playing DJ sets across the globe this summer, having just performed at Glastonbury and a free show played alongside Caribou in a North Wales community centre accessible-to-all. She is touring as support for collaborators The Chemical Brothers and Bicep, and will play at Charli XCX’s PARTYGIRL in Ibiza, which she’s particularly excited about for the female and femme line-up. “That kind of diverse line-up is still much needed in dance music, annoyingly. It will feel like a safe space and it’s going to be *fun*, which I think is the escapism we’ve all craved after the last few years.” *Dreamstate* will be performed to rapturous dancefloors in October later this year.

A rare, venerated woman in techno, Owens recognises the graft and pressure she’s applied on herself to prove her right to be there. She’s thankful that she didn’t write her first track until she was 25, because she had the self-knowledge and rich musical understanding from working in record stores to make her unique dream pop-techno out of the gate. “There’s all this exhausting emphasis on youth in music. The gold is, as you move through time you just get better and you know yourself more and there’s power in that.”

Owens hopes that beyond soundtracking escapism, *Dreamstate* communicates a need to dream expansively, particularly for fans who come from a similar world to her. “When you come from a working class background or you don’t have any help and support, it’s more important than ever to dream about what’s possible for yourself. Because it’s not going to get handed to you—it just isn’t,” she says. “Give yourself permission to dream bigger.”

Dreamstate is out on the 18th October via dh2/Dirty Hit.