

Gerd Janson

(Running Back)

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Guilty Feet Have Got No Rhythm!

biography

Gerd Janson didn’t want to be a DJ. That’s probably why he’s now such a good one.

Born in Romania and raised just outside of Frankfurt, Janson came of age during a time when dance music was experiencing its first major boom in Germany. Things were much different in those days—back then, the average DJ had approximately the same level of prestige as the folks working behind the bar—but the music that had drawn him in all the same, his interest having been piqued by a Sven Väth tape his scout leader had played in the van while the troupe was en route to a hiking excursion. It was a lightbulb moment, and within a few years, Janson was sneaking into clubs and attending clandestine raves, largely content to soak in the culture while spending all night on the dancefloor.

Somewhere along the way, Janson started collecting records and, yes, learning to DJ. But it was his work as a journalist that he first made a serious impact on the dance music sphere, funneling his passion—and his opinions—into his writings for groundbreaking magazines like Groove and Spex. Later on, he fell in with Red Bull Music Academy, becoming a staple of the initiative’s famed couch interviews while conducting thoughtful conversations with a litany of iconic artists.

Being an artist himself, however, wasn’t necessarily a priority, even as he immersed himself deeper and deeper into the culture. In the early 2000s, Janson had started his own label, Running Back Records, while he was still attending university. By the time the 2010s rolled around, it was widely recognized as one of dance music’s most sharply curated outposts, and that reputation holds true to this day. Unbound by genre orthodoxy and guided by the words of none other than George Michael—“Guilty feet have got no rhythm” is the label’s unofficial motto—Running Back has released music from the likes of Theo Parrish, Todd Terje, Solomun, Marcel Dettmann, Maurice Fulton, KiNK, Octo Octa and others far too numerous to list. The catalog contains an impressive collection of talent, to be sure, but Janson himself is its connective tissue, and regardless of whether he’s working with legends or veritable unknowns, he has a real knack for issuing artists’ most memorable tunes. That knack—or, more specifically, those ears—have also served Janson well in the DJ booth. Since 2000, he’s held down a residency (alongside Thomas Hammann) at Offenbach’s famed

Robert Johnson nightclub, but as his reputation steadily grew throughout that decade and the one that followed, so did his gig calendar. Once known as a quintessential “DJ’s DJ,” Janson is now a staple of the international touring circuit, and thanks to his seemingly limitless flexibility, he’s become the rare figure who’s as comfortable playing at a niche Tokyo nightclub as he is at a forest festival or an Ibiza beach party. A regular behind the decks at both Panorama Bar and Circoloco, he’s revered by heads and himbos alike, and while some of that can be chalked up to the encyclopedia-level knowledge of dance music Janson has accumulated over the years, what really connects with people is his unwavering commitment to the idea that joy is the most important element of any dancefloor.

Janson follows a similar path in the studio, routinely filling his tunes with bright melodies and even brighter synths. There’s a classic sensibility to his work, which leans heavily into old-school house, Italo, disco and garage (the American kind), but what ultimately defines most Gerd Janson productions is their ability to activate the dancefloor. Striking a balance between fun and function isn’t always easy, but Janson has spent the better part of two decades honing his studio chops. Much of that time was spent as one half of Tuff City Kids, a project best known for its dancefloor precision and unfettered devotion to the art of the remix. Over the course of the 2010s, the highly sought-after duo were recruited to put their stamp on everyone from Pet Shop Boys to Avalon Emerson, and though Janson has become more of a solo operator in recent years, he’s continued to be a dedicated remixer, reworking the Chemical Brothers, Paul Woolford, Christine and the Queens, Metronomy and dozens of other acts from across the musical spectrum.

Everyone, it seems, wants a little bit of Gerd Janson in their life—or, at the very least, at their party. And why wouldn’t they? He’s a genuinely beloved figure, and one who holds up dance music’s most celebrated history and traditions, not via pedantic lectures about the way things used to be, but by doing the work, continually honing his craft and quietly connecting the dots between the past and present. Janson may not have set out to be a DJ, but now that it’s become his life, he’s determined to offer up something that’s ebullient and life-affirming.