

Sparklehorse shines through trauma



Photo by Danny Clinch

BRIGHT LIGHTS, BIG CITY, HUGE HAT. Sparklehorse's Mark Linkous ponders his musical future.

By Mark Pytlik
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Mark Linkous is sick and tired of being reborn. The amiable singer/songwriter has just concluded an afternoon dip in the pool and seems slightly weary at the prospect of another interview.

Linkous is the brains behind Sparklehorse, a critically acclaimed American rock band whose latest effort, *Good Morning Spider*, has been slightly overshadowed by the circumstances surrounding its conception.

The story goes something like this. While on tour in Europe a few years ago, Linkous accidentally overdosed on a potent mix of alcohol and pain-killers. He retired to his hotel room and promptly passed out. After being discovered hours later, he was rushed to a nearby London hospital where his heart rate subsequently flatlined.

After a brief period where he was clinically deceased, Linkous was revived in the emergency room. Unfortunately, those fateful hours in the hotel room had done their damage. Linkous had passed out with his legs buckled underneath him and by the time he was discovered he had lost all blood circulation to his lower body.

He remained in St. Mary's hospital for months, where he slowly regained his physical faculties well enough to abandon his wheelchair and go back home to Virginia. He then returned to his home studio and recorded *Good Morning Spider*, an album which is clearly influenced by his harrowing experience.

Although Linkous has fully recovered from the incident, he is now having to deal with an unexpected side effect – the media. The consummate songwriter is faced with the prospect of having his musical accomplishments overshadowed by his personal trauma, which by force of repetition has become cartoonish and anecdotal. He seems genuinely frustrated by the media's preoccupation with his past, but understands why many find it so fascinating. "It's like a car crash," he drawls.

"Everybody has a morbid curiosity about it. I'm guilty of doing it with other artists that I love."

Change the subject to music and Linkous clearly becomes more talkative. He is not phased by Sparklehorse's inability to break into mainstream American radio. In fact, he sometimes goes to extra efforts to prevent it. When his label suggested an early version of a song called "Happy Man" might be a potential hit single, Linkous took the demo tape back to his studio and reworked the song so it would never see airplay.

"What happens on commercial alternative radio isn't healthy," he explains. "I sabotaged 'Happy Man' because I didn't think it'd be constructive to hear that on the radio." Linkous' real definition of success would be having one of his more oblique songs break in America, but he calmly concedes it is not likely to happen. "I try not to think about it," he sighs. "It depresses me."

Less depressing is the prospect of another Sparklehorse album, which promises to be just as engaging and experimental as the first two. Couple this with the imminent release of an album from Linkous' side project, *Rabbit*, and you get the impression the lonesome musician is more prolific than most. "Yes," he sighs slowly. "There's always more songs."

Sparklehorse and Mercury Rev are scheduled to play Toronto's Opera House on June 15.