

Mark Linkous de Sparklehorse

Lyon, Ninkasi le 17 octobre 2001

Un vent venu de Virginie est passé par la France cet automne. Les chevaux sauvages de Sparklehorse ont donné une série de concerts dont les spectateurs et les heureux auditeurs de France Inter auront du mal à se remettre.

L'occasion était trop belle. PurJus s'est ainsi laissé porté par la brise aux cotés de Mark Linkous, homme à la fois réservé et ouvert, timide et généreux.

PJ: When you were in hospital in London after your accident in 1997, you received a lot of letters from fans and friends saying how much you and your music were important for them. You said that from this time on you had realised your music could help people get through difficult times. Obviously this is very much underlining in your latest album "It's a wonderful life"...

ML : The title of the new album is sort of...I was lucky enough to have been told how much my music meant to people. I guess when people think you're gonna croke, all the sudden they sort of sworn how much they love you and how important you are. But this record is really meant to be like a gift for everyone. 'Cause of the flowers on the cover. It's more about how almost any person in the street or any window... you could pick any person and hopefully... everybody is important. I don't know... maybe something about my music will inspire one person to tell another person how much they mean to them today before it's too late.

PJ: this may explains the artwork in the booklet where we can see a man holding flowers with its face scribbled out...

ML: yeah because I wanted to keep it anonymous. I wanted to make it a little bit more obvious that it's not all about me. I'm not talking about myself. It's for you.

PJ: You are signed on Capitol Records. We read you had some difficulties with the major label thing and organisation. Do you had enough artistic freedom ? Aren't you interested in signing with a so called "independant" record label ?

ML: The thing is Capitol has changed. They've gone through 3 presidents since I've got signed. The one important thing... All I know... It's nice to have a tour bus and be comfortable Especially when you're on a month long tour and you only have 2 weeks off. It would suck to have to be packed in a van. When I started recording Vivadixie I thought I would be lucky if it'd come out on Matador or something like that. I just happen to get some of the few very cool people in the music industry : my A&R guy - he was my manager at the time. He sort of discovered Ween, so he was pretty cool. And Gary who was that time the president of Capitol, you know he signed Nirvana. They were guys that were on the edge. They would take a chance once in a while. And they are all gone now so I don't know what's gonna happen.

PJ: you also said that Capitol used to release the "pop" songs of your albums as singles, and that you thought these didn't reflect your music that well, the "pop" songs not being the best contribution you wanted to make to music.

ML: In the past, instead of sabotaging pop songs so it couldn't be played on the radio or just bitching about the music industry, I tried to make "Gold Day", something I'd like to hear on the radio, wether it was me or Granddaddy or Mercury Rev or however. And I was really conscious about not putting any uptempo pop songs on the record because I knew that, specially in America, they would be automatically picked to be the single because that's the way it was in the industry - so fucked in America now. I didn't want to contribute to modern rock unless it was something I could be proud of. And there is no single in America [for Its a Wonderful Life].

PJ: Sharko from Belgium told us many artists were making records for radio programmers, and that he felt a bit tortured for his latest album which he had to remix entirely to get proper distribution and airplay. Have you had such propositions?

ML: I would like to hear Granddaddy on the radio in America and Mercury Rev and Sparklehorse and Flaming Lips, Will Oldham, Cat Power...

PJ: Don't these artists have airplay on college radios ?

ML: They do on college radio, but in the end we are all more popular in Europe than we are in America. You know I can talk to people... I was with some journalists from Czechoslovakia (ndlr: Czech Republic I guess...) the other day and I mentioned Will Oldham and Bill Callaghan from Smog and they knew exactly who I was talking about. I was like "You know Smog..." and they "Oh yeah of course". And in America I mention these names and it's just blank stares. They have no idea who you are talking about. So, I mean if... certainly I would never cater to the tastes of whatever... I have no idea of the radio programming... what their deal in America. If it's a conspiracy, it's probably this unspoken thing. And there is more shinetigons involved that I could probably dream of. But the only thing I can do is try to make this kind of music and just hope it'll maybe... Maybe someday somebody... There is a new president at Capitol now, maybe they'll take a chance and say "Ah, this Gold Day song is a really good song. It's got cellos and violins and flutes on it but SHIT let's go for it anyway". I don't think things are gonna change until someone gets a little bolder. Our music is not that weird, not strange at all.

PJ: You live in a ranch in Virginia. How do you keep up with the independant music scene ?

ML: One of the good things about being isolated in the country is there's a lot of... I'm not exposed to a lot of hype. So by the time something reaches me whether it's a movie or an author or a record it's kinda come through some friends. Usually the good stuff gets to me anyway. And a lot of the bullshit doesn't even get to me.

PJ: Are you ever going to work with Daniel Johnston ?

ML: I'm producing his new album. With Alan (qui ?). I tried to get him to open for us on these shows but a while back he got really bad for a while and didn't get out of bed for a year or so... and did not brush his teeth. So he couldn't do this tour with us because he had to have some of his top teeth pulled out. Otherwise he would be here with us tonight.

PJ: did you have opportunities to play outside Paris before ?

ML: I think the only places that we've played other than Paris in France were basically stadiums with Radiohead and I just felt pathetic. At that time the band wasn't together and I was not together. it was just a big mess. The combination that it was a stadium and I was still on a lot of medicine, not thinking straight, not ready to do it.

PJ: you are happier with more intimate venues then.

ML: Definitely, yeah.

passage en revue des albums des artistes appréciés

PJ Harvey - Stories from the city, stories from the sea

ML: her and I are going to record more together. She came the other night to one of the London shows. We are talking about doing a little more recording together. I'm a huge Flood fan. If there was any producer that I'd wanna work with, I think my number 1 choice would be Flood. I kinda lean towards the "To Bring you my love" record, sparsed down and dirty. I really like a lot of this record.

PJ: you are also working with John Parish ?

ML: yeah. we went to Barcelona because my studio had a bad spider problem. I didn't want her to get bit by a spider, and dogs jumping all over her.

Bonnie "Prince" Billy - album

ML: I just love this record. I think he did it in his brother's house. The second [track] (ndrl: Careless Love) just reminds me of all these sort of Virginia acapela balladeers recordings, sort of field recordings. Same aesthetics that really inspired Daniel Johnston early tapes. Almost people singing in their kitchens. This song really reminds me of that, his voice and a little bit of organ in the background.

PJ: are you planning to work with Will Oldham?

ML: we talk about it now and then. He's really great. I love this record. Soothing. The sound is so good. This one is one his best sounding records. This one and the Arise therefore record, that Steve Albini did.

Portishead - Dummy

ML: This is great. I can't wait to hear what they're gonna do next. It seems like they're all recording on their own seperatly. Then they're going to get together and see what comes out. I love Adrian's guitar playing. He's such a great guitar player. He plays with us whenever he can. And Beth, I just love Beth. Her singing is so emotional.

The Silver Mount Zion Memorial Orchestra - Born Into Trouble as The Sparks Fly Upwards

ML : Oh! I've been looking for this. I can't find it. Damn it!

PJ: Why does music from bands like Godspeed You Black Emporor! or ASMZ appeal to you ?

ML: I guess I just started to getting into... The last record that I heard that was really devastating was this GORECKI record Symphony and about the same time I got some earlier Godspeed records. People often ask me about references to animals and children on my records. And I think it's so intriguing to imagine what animals' and babies' perception of everythng is before there is language of any kind. There's something about Godspeed and Silver Mount Zion that is so dramatic and there is really no lyrics or anything.

PJ: The first ASMZ record was written when Efrim's dog was dying from cancer...

ML: there's quite a few of my songs that people think are about people but they are about dogs, turtles.

PJ: we heard of a story about a dog that had been run over and that you had to shoot for it not to suffer...

ML: My brother in law hit the dog and me being the elder I was trying to be the man and say "The dog is suffering and it's my duty as the elder to shoot him". And of course I wasn't quite man enough to hold the gun right up to the skull and shoot him. I had to point it at him and close my eyes because I didn't want to see the bullet hit him. So it was just so horrible. I ended up shooting him a lot of times. I think the consequences was that whole me getting sick and being in the hospital thing from shooting that dog.

The Cardigans - Rise and Shine

ML: A lot of journalists are really surprised about me working with Nina [Persson]. But I always just loved the Cardigans, I always thought there was something absolutely pure.

PJ: Are they popular in the USA ?

ML: Well of course 'Lovefool' was big big hit. But I really like all their stuff, especially their early stuff. I mean 'Rise and Shine'... A lot of these songs are just so simple and purely great pop songs, almost like Buzzcocks records or something. Nina's voice is like honey... just like licking honey off a plate glass. Her voice is so beautiful.

PJ: how was your experience producing Nina's solo album, A Camp ?

ML: it was great. I mean I tried to talk her out of it but she really wanted me to do it. So I did

it and it was a good experience. I'm really glad that I did it. I was just afraid I would ruin her career and that she'd end up living in a van or something. But I think it came out really good. The songs are great. They remind me of Jimmy Webb songs. I love her.

Granddaddy - album

ML: The B-side of this... Jason [Lytle] played me this the last time I visited him. I'm just constantly astounded by Jason. I think he's our Neil Young. If we do this West Coast tour, the drummer's brother has a band that sounds a lot like Granddaddy but still really good. So I think they might be opening for us in California.

Ed Harcourt - Here Be Monsters

PJ: Ed Harcourt opened for you in England for a few dates...

ML: He kind of brightens up the whole place when he walks into the room.

Al Green

ML : So much great stuff on this record. The best drumming. The drummer is just... simple conservative drummer.

PJ: would you recommend other great soul music artists ?

ML: not so much... definitely Al Green. I sort of went from Al Green to Public Enemy. And now I dig really hard to find... I don't know I like Q-Tip, there's not a lot of soul music that I can get into these days. I really like Kool Keith.

PJ : what about the Four Tops ?

ML : Oh the Four Tops, yeah. Well the Impressions too. Curtis Mayfield, he's just great. The Isely Brothers. "Keep on pushing" from Curtis Mayfield and The Impressions, it's one of my favorite songs.

Bill Evans - Live at the Village Vanguard

PJ : were you influenced by some jazz ? Mingus ?

ML : yeah, some of Mingus stuff, the stuff that sounds like... animals fucking. I also like a lot of this Bill Evans. Some John Coltrane. And Ornette Coleman. I'm not that real astoop with a lot of jazz stuff but I know what I like and I know what I don't like.

PJ : what are the artists we may want to discover ?

ML : I can't think of anything. You are so on top of music. [A Silver Mount Zion] is what I would suggest but you already know that. You got it before I did. (ndlr: vous aussi procurez-vous ce splendide album, distribution Chronowax depuis peu)

PJ : maybe some of your friends' bands ?

ML : oh yeah, there's this band in Virginia called **Labradford**. They're friends of ours. I can't really think of anyone else...

PJ : in other interviews you mentioned minimalist electronic music, like Oval...

ML : Well, Oval, this guy **Markus Popp** he's basically **Oval** and **Microstoria**, same guy. And there's this latest record by **Thomas Brinkmann**. He basically made it with blank vinyl and a razor blade, and he cut beats. It's really amazing. We play it after the show. And then before the show we play Fennesz, Endless Summer. (ndlr : à ce sujet, lire [cet article](#) de Planet of Sound). It's a great great record. 'Cause with a lot of these minimalist guys, there's really no melody whatsoever. With this latest album from Christian Fennesz, I think he's the first one to break through. It sounds like a 70's Bread record that has been set on fire and run through a laptop. It's amazing. I think it's a really important record.

"It's a wonderful life" a été classé n°3 dans le classement des meilleurs albums de l'année par les Inrockuptibles, derrière - hmm... - Röyksopp et A Silver Mount Zion.

