

## A Musician Whose Fidelity Is To Lo-fi Sounds

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Sparklehorse's Mark Linkous likes things to sound rusty. He likes to leave a song out in the sun too long and wait until it gets stained and starts to droop.

That's why the singer's third album, "It's a Wonderful Life," is full of static, strange frequencies and lots of rattling noises. Linkous' goal is to make everything he records sound as if it issued from a vintage Victrola.

But in the digital age, sometimes it's hard to get back to old places. For one song, he recorded a string section with a plastic mike he found at the dump. Then he used a 1940s wire recorder to capture guest musician Tom Waits playing a piano part.

The problem? The wire recorder "just sounded too good. And the absurd part is that we had to run it through a computer program to give it some static and warmth."

Since releasing his first album in 1995, Linkous has been celebrated as a lo-fi poet with a haunted pop sensibility. The Virginia-based songwriter, who plays tonight at Warsaw in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, crafts ethereal melodies that teem with images of bees, horses, motorcycle parts and the detritus of a backwoods rummage sale.

"I've always tried to make records that gave you the same esthetic impression of watching a documentary on TV," he says. "I've never really been able to articulate that in an intelligent way. But if a sound is scratchy or sounds like it's been rusty, a lot of times that inspires imagery in my head."

While the lugubrious pace and darkness of many Sparklehorse songs have been interpreted as the musings of a depressive personality, Linkous says he has changed his outlook. A 1997 accident that nearly killed him brought a new sensibility, and he says "It's a Wonderful Life" is not an ironic title. Instead, he describes the record as "a gift" and devotes some of its most tender songs to pondering a life with children.

"The one lucky thing about it is that once you're about to croak, everyone tells you how much you meant to them," he says. "That's what inspired me. Suddenly, I was, like, maybe this is what I'm supposed to be doing."