

July 8, 2009 by Matt

KID VINYL MEETS SPARKLEHORSE – OCTOBER 2006

It's early on a rainy Saturday, early in October 2006, and Becky and I are standing outside the Fez Club in Reading. Last week, Sparklehorse kicked off their UK tour in Bristol, playing to promote their first album in five years, 'Dreamt for Light Years under the Belly of a Mountain', tonight they're playing here, and Kid Vinyl is being allowed to spend some time with the man who essentially is Sparklehorse, Mark Linkous.

We're greeted by Sparklehorse's ever-affable tour manager, Stephen (later at the show I spot him gleefully singing along to every song), who informs us he has to go wake Mark up. This is terrible. When I was fifteen, I used to play the song '*Spirit Ditch*' on repeat on my Discman in bed. I feel very guilty that the man who used to sing me to sleep is waking up on our account. When we're introduced he doesn't seem to mind in the least, however, in fact he seems genuinely pleased to be talking to us, and delighted and bemused by the dragon clock we've brought as a gift. Sparklehorse's touring bass player Paula Jean Brown (ex- of The Go-Gos and Giant Sand) pops in to check Mark's okay for food and coffee (there's quite a sense of family on the tour bus), and the interview begins...

Matt: How's the tour going so far?

Mark: Oh, really good

Matt: You've been really busy, you were just touring the States a couple of weeks ago...

Mark: Yeah, we did seven shows over there, and I think this is like our third show in England now. We went from the States, did seven shows there, then flew into Heathrow, and went to Paris and did a couple of TV shows, and then our first gig in the UK was Bristol a few nights ago.

Matt: Did starting in Bristol in any way relate to Adrian [Utley, Portishead member and Sparklehorse collaborator] being there?

Mark: Well, it was a coincidence but the reason I play there most of the time, well, I think every time I've played Bristol I've played at the Fleece and Firkin, I think that's where I met Adrian and those guys, they came to see our first gig there. But yeah, they came – Adrian and John Parish came to see us, so that was nice. It's always nice seeing them. I didn't get to see Beth [Gibbons - Portishead], she was out of town on her farm.

Matt: So, how do you think things are different playing in Europe to playing in the States?

Mark: Well, it used to be a lot different. In the States for a long time, up until the last album, the audiences weren't very quiet when I played quiet songs, but now it's changing, and I kinda dreaded playing the States this time because of that, but they were really different this time out, I'm not sure what happened, but they're really quiet now, and they're really enthusiastic for the loud songs, and they sang a lot, they sang a lot of songs very loudly, which I like. So in the States it's getting more like playing in the UK and Europe, where people sort of caught on immediately, with the first album over here. So it's getting better in the States.

Becky: You've always collaborated with so many people, which is interesting, and I wondered if you could form an all-time supergroup to play with, and they could be dead or alive, who would be on that all-time Sparklehorse tour?

Mark: Well, the drummer that's playing with me now is my best friend of twenty years, his name's Johnny Hott, and he's my favourite drummer ever, living or dead, so I kinda have my favourite drummer with me already, and my bass player is Paula Jean Brown, she used to play with Giant Sand, and she's great, and the guy who plays guitar and keyboards [Chris Michaels] is from Mississippi, and he's fantastic too. I don't know if I had to form a supergroup, I don't know. As far as drummers go it would either be John Bonham, or – yeah, probably John Bonham would be the drummer. I don't know it's hard to say because when I recorded in Barcelona, I kinda had a great supergroup, like Polly Harvey was playing piano and guitar, and Adrian was playing guitar and John Parish was playing bass. So I guess me being able to make Sparklehorse evolve into anything I've almost kinda made my own supergroups in real life a couple of times.

Matt: On a similar theme to supergroups, you produced a record for Daniel Johnston, and then hooked up with The Flaming Lips for the Daniel Johnston tribute record *Discovered Covered: The Late Great Daniel Johnston...* when you made that were you really conscious that he would be hearing it?

Mark: Well, Daniel played with me when we played in Houston, Daniel's group Danny and the Nightmares opened for us so I saw Daniel last week, and he loves *Free Yourself*, I mean he's told me many times it's his favourite record of his, and we've been talking on the phone since then and he's got all these songs saved up that he wants me to produce another album, and as far as the cover thing goes, umm, I didn't really think about, I wasn't really hyper-conscious about Daniel hearing the covers, y'know, I was just really just trying get the highest profile musicians I could find to cover his songs because I just wanted to raise money for him, because the intention of the whole record was to raise money for him to have assistance when his parents pass on, so that he can have assisted living, because he's not really capable of taking care of himself. So, really the first intention was getting the biggest names I could get like Tom Waits, and 'Go', the song that I recorded, it's always been one of my favourite songs of his, and the second verse of that song sounds like lyrics that Wayne [Coyne, The Flaming Lips] would write anyway to me, so that's why I got Wayne to sing on that.

Matt: I read somewhere that you're maybe thinking of working more with Dangermouse as well

Mark: Yeah, I think we're supposed to start in December, to do like a Dangerhorse record. I don't know what it's going to be, I think I would like to maybe get him to pull out more of his hip hop background, y'know, and whatever kind of melodic pop thing that I do, y'know try to meld that in with his hip hop thing. But try to make it really raw and have that kind of minimal vibe that a lot of stripped-down hip hop has, very sparse and minimal, I'd like for it to be like that but have pop elements as well.

Becky: Like hip-pop?

Mark: Yeah, haha.

Becky: I've always seen you as a great story-teller, and I wondered if you had a favourite fable, or favourite fables, whilst you were growing up, and if so what would we learn from them?

Mark: Fable? Umm, there was one about, I guess it's sort of an Appalachian story about, umm, sometimes when people get together in the South, for the last couple hundred years they'll sacrifice a pig, roast a pig, and there's a story beforehand – before one of these big pig roasts they have the pigs are kept in a pen, y'know to contain them, and the younger children were playing around, throwing rocks at the pig, and the elders put a stop to it and set them down and tried to teach them some respect – y'know just because we're going to eat the pig, kill it and eat it in a

couple hours doesn't mean you can stand and throw rocks at it right now, so I think that kinda stuck with me at an early age as a reference of respect for things and people.

Becky: There's a lot of imagery of mountains and landscapes in your songs, so I wondered if your songwriting is affected by the landscape you're in, y'know if you were living somewhere more urban it would be different, I certainly know Bjork has always said the landscape was a huge influence on her...

Mark: Was she raised in the country?

Becky: Yeah, she would talk about how you would walk and you wouldn't see people for miles...

Mark: Oh right.

Becky: ...and I suppose also the folklore of Iceland...

Mark: ...yeah fairies...

Becky: Yeah, definitely

Mark: Well, I guess it does as far as nature and animal references, a lot of times until an album comes out and people start asking me about it I'm not even aware of how many animal and nature references there are because I'm so in the middle of it all the time, so a lot of that's unintentional, because it literally happens, it's a product of my environment, y'know, with bears being outside my house for real, and rattlesnakes and things like that. I don't know, if I lived in the city, sometimes I wish I had an apartment in New York or London or somewhere where I could just be around people more, because sometimes it's dangerous to be a recluse – that's one of the reasons it took five years since my last record. I don't know if I could write very well about... some people write about other people and can write literally, but I'm just not very good at writing literally about relationships and things that much, it's easier for me to write metaphorically and poetic, and hopefully it's easier for people that way to apply lyrics to their own lives, y'know if they're not so specific.