

01/11/2006



Mark Linkous is Sparklehorse, the melancholic, thought-provoking and sometimes just plain weird American purveyors of lo-fi spookiness. He might not be the most recognisable name in the music industry, but he's been honoured by working with some of the best such as Radiohead's Thom Yorke, PJ Harvey, The Flaming Lips, Dangermouse and Tom Waits.

He hooked up with LeftLion for an oddly serious conversation about bears, near-death experiences and depression to promote his new album Dreamt for Lightyears in the Belly of a Mountain and tour, which parks at the Rescue Rooms in early October.

**You've been quiet recently. What have you been up to?**

For three years I think I just lost interest in recording. I like singing, I like coming up with songs, playing and singing them and that having that just be the end of it. I don't know why but I lost interest in the actual recording of the songs.

**What got you back in the swing of things?**

I think not being able to pay my rent was the first thing. I had to get a record out. But really I think people around me were trying to help me by sending me music that they thought I might find inspirational or from people I might want to collaborate with. Someone sent me the Grey Album from Dangermouse. I really liked that I'd been listening to some later period Beatles stuff anyway and I liked some of the slower sparser hip hop stuff so I got in touch and he ended up being a Sparklehorse fan. He came to my studio and we worked for a couple of weeks and I really liked what came from that. I think when you dig yourself in a hole mentally a little confidence can really go a long way. The music that came out of the sessions is what brought me back. Just believing that I could make what I considered interesting music again.

**Will you be guesting with Gnarl Barkley, then?**

Maybe if I'm asked. I'm definitely going to work more with Dangermouse. We're going to start in a few months. More of a collaboration, probably called DangerHorse or something.

**Some of your lyrics are strange. Where do you get these ideas from? Are you a mentalist?**

It's easier for me to communicate metaphorically than to have a dialogue. It also leaves it open for people to interpret the lyrics themselves and apply them to themselves. Through the years, people tell me that my records have helped them through some bad times.

Some of them are influenced by dreams, some by facts that I've read. For instance there's a line in Babies on the Sun which says 'a ship full of horses was going down at sea.' That line relates to a part of the ocean where captains of ships had to throw horses overboard to lighten their load. That's a true fact. That part of the ocean is called Horse Latitude because of that. Some ideas come from nature and where I lived. I walked out my front door one day and was trapped because there was a bear in my truck going through the trash. Knowing there's a seven foot creature outside that could rip my head off is exciting. I killed a rattlesnake the other day. I don't like rattlesnakes. I was going to get revenge and make a belt out of it....



**So what actually happened on the Radiohead tour (He passed out in a London hotel room for fourteen hours with his legs pinned under his body, nearly crippling himself)?**

I don't remember it. It just ended up being a three-month stay in a London hospital. I was in a wheelchair for about six months after that and I had to wear braces on my legs because they had to operate on them so many times. I'll always have to wear the braces now because the muscles in my legs have gone... they had to take them out.

**You worked with the Flaming Lips on a track called Go. What was that like?**

I had toured with them as a duo, with the drummer I used to play with. We shared the same bus and played a little mini set. They came up to where I was putting a record together of Daniel Johnston songs. I was trying to get bands to cover his songs for this album. Go has always been one of my favourite Daniel Johnston songs and that second verse I just imagined Wayne singing, because the lyrics seemed like something he might like.

**Kurt Cobain used to wear a T-shirt designed by you...**

Yeah. I think it was the cover of Hi How Are You.

**So what is a Sparklehorse then?**

It came from not being able to think of a band name and writing names on scraps of paper, putting them together and trying to find something that you don't hate.

**What was it like working with Thom Yorke to cover Pink Floyd's Wish You Were Here?**

I thought Thom would just know that song, by heart. I always loved it, it's my favourite Pink Floyd song. It was a rock-radio staple here in the United States for a while. He'd heard of it but he didn't know it, or the lyrics, that was kinda strange. I was honoured to have Thom appear on anything that I did.

**What about PJ Harvey?**

I opened up for her and we became friends. I asked her if she'd appear on my next album and she said yeah, if she could. I booked some time in Spain, in Barcelona and we did a recording session there with Polly (PJ) and Adrian from Portishead. I had this fantastic band, me, my drummer, Polly, Adrian and John Parish.

**...and Tom Waits. He doesn't usually work with anyone. How did you manage that?**

I have no idea! Apparently he had my first album at his house and his kids stole it. I never knew whether they liked it or hated it but I sent him another copy and wrote him a little note. Then the time came for me to call him on the telephone and I was so nervous.... But thankfully he wanted to do it.

**Have you ever been to Nottingham before?**

Yeah, I can't remember a lot about it, but I'll probably recognise the venue.

**Did you get on the drink while you were here?**

Erm... no. I'll make sure I do this time though.

**You'd better. Have you heard of Robin Hood?**

Sure have. Is Sherwood Forest a real place? Kevin Costner? I haven't seen his version but I love Errol Flynn.

*Sparklehorse play at The Rescue Rooms on Tuesday 3 October 2006. Their new album Dreamt for Lightyears in the Belly of a Mountain is out now.*