

## INTERVIEWS

# Vanguard online

## He loves Gavin Bryars and Robert Mitchum - not your everyday musician...

Mark Linkous makes space on the tour bus for **Ross McGibbon**



Mark Linkous is an interesting character. Responsible for a widely-spaced set of cult albums, he is in the habit of disappearing from view for years on end then popping up with another slab of something strange. His last tour in the UK was 2003, to support his last album, *It's A Wonderful Life*. Back then he was offering a dark picture of the world and had a quite depressing set of songs in his stage show, ruled by taped backing and a little lifeless. Today he is still the exceptionally tall figure of before but opens up a bit more about his music. He tells me that they won't be using backing tapes tonight since *"it's a better band"*!

The tour manager has asked me to stay off the topics of *"morbidity and things like that"* so I'm a bit concerned about the state of Mark's mind and I'm relieved to find the same quietly thoughtful, abashed giant of before. He has sent the tour manager out for the strongest cigarettes he can find and sits and pulls the filter off one to give that extra gasper pleasure. I wonder what he does on the tour bus between shows and I'm surprised to find he doesn't have a bag of favourite music, just favourite DVDs of TV shows. He's not a great fan of touring, he gets terrible nerves from his lack of confidence. The more I talk to him, the more surprised I am that he really thinks people don't like his music so much anymore and that he is past it. It's kind of weird this, when you hear him talk about his heroes (Johnny Cash for his attitude and Robert Mitchum in *Thunder Road* for the same reason); he honestly has little sense that there are fans who consider him to be a major original in the creative world. He talks about his awe when Tom Waits agreed to work with him. He'd heard that the growler had heard his album and liked it so he chanced his arm by sending a tape of a song he had no melody for yet and was amazed when Tom came back and asked to work with him. He is a real musical hero to Mark, leading him to new finds by recommendation. We find a mutual experience in

discovering Gavin Bryars' *Jesus Blood and Sinking Of The Titanic* through Waits' recommendation.



Thankfully, despite not believing that he had a fanbase, Mark does feel that his work is getting better as it goes along. I remember him telling me, in 2003, that he was going uptempo, pop and electronic by sending RAM to Portishead guru, Adrian for him to make input to it. Mark kept missing deadlines though, and in the end, had to get a record out in a more traditional style. Though this one is less out there and more loving. Once upon a time, as a child, Linkous had dreams of living in a palace off his recording royalties. Now he finds himself needing to get the product out every few years to make ends meet. He'd told me about his mountain home and being trapped there by bears a few years ago. Since then he's had to move for lack of rent, a shocker when you think of the regard some people hold him in. That's the cost of being a musician out of the mainstream mould. Instead of you meaning a little to a multitude, you mean a lot to a few and that doesn't pay the bills.