

As part of an on going series about the late, great Mark Linkous from Sparklehorse, we got the opportunity to have a chat with Nina Persson, from The Cardigans, about working with Mark Linkous on projects such as Sparklehorse's *It's A Wonderful Life*, and *Dark Night Of The Soul* albums, as well as her own *A Camp*.

MTT: How did you begin working with Mark Linkous?

NP: I think it was in 1998, I was already a huge Sparklehorse fan and Mark invited me to come to their show in Lund, near Malmö where I lived. I was gonna go anyway, of course, but it was such a big thing for me that he invited me! He must have read somewhere that I loved his music. I went, cried at the show, and got to meet him afterwards. I had made some *A Camp* recordings, so I gave him a cassette. A bit later he told me that he and his wife Teresa loved the music, he asked me to come



MTT: Mark Linkous has said in interviews that he was a little apprehensive about getting other people to work on *It's A Wonderful Life* with him. Did this cause any issues during recording that album?

NP: Well, not really, he seemed quite sure of what he wanted when I came to Tarbox to record my vocals. He was working with Dave Friedmann as a producer, maybe it helped him to have a producer around when guest musicians came.

MTT: I've heard that when Mark Linkous first flew to Barcelona to work with you on *It's A Wonderful Life*, all his gear was held at customs for a while. Can you tell us this story?

NP: Hm, I actually never met him in Barcelona, I don't know this story! But I'm curious, what's it about?

*Editors note: During an on air interview with Mark Linkous on the radio program Mornings Become Eclectic in 2001, Mark Linkous states what when he first flew to Barcelona to work with Nina on *It's A Wonderful Life*, his luggage and gear was held at customs for days with no explanation. When he finally went to pick it up, he was told it was held because a cat was nursing her kittens on his luggage.*

MTT: Can you tell us a little bit about working with Mark Linkous on the *A Camp* sessions?

NP: Once he agreed to do it, we spoke on the phone a few times before the actual recordings began and he would suddenly be almost apologetic, he said he was afraid he would destroy my songs and not do the right thing. I had to assure him that I wanted just what he is and what he does. He would fall back into that occasionally throughout the sessions, but I think he felt alright about it in general and I think that's how we got close - early on we dealt with the issue of his self doubts and his concerns and I also got to early on learn to read him and to talk to him on a very honest level, and that was helpful to me too, I had had some years of making very effective hit records so I thrived in that emotional state. At the time, it was the perfect recording environment for me. And musically, things really took a new form, Mark was very particular about sounds and tempos and the way all musicians played, as a singer I liked the way he worked, he was very sweet and encouraging in the way he advised me. We had a lot of fun, we would take a lot of breaks and listen to music and we all drank and smoked a lot back then, so we just... hung out and talked a lot.

MTT: I've heard that at first, Mark Linkous felt the *A Camp* demo you gave him was actually a finished album, and he didn't want to work on it because he already thought it was good enough. How did you convince him to finally work on it with you?

NP: Oh, I almost answered that question already... Well, yes, it was recorded to become an album, but it had been a while since we'd done it and I wasn't happy with it, it sounded too generic and clean and that wasn't how I felt about the songs. I really asked Mark to help me because I was in a rut about it and I needed help to make the songs more organic and human sounding. I guess I convinced him by telling him this! The recordings sounded... good, and since he hadn't produced anybody else before really, he couldn't at first see what his job would be.

MTT: Mark Linkous has compared your songs on the first *A Camp* record to Jimmy Webb. How do you feel about this comparison?

NP: Oh, I don't know that I ever heard him say that, but it's of course amazing to hear that, Jimmy Webb is an amazing songwriter, I love the songs he wrote for Glen Campbell. The songs for *A Camp* are written by me and Niclas Frisk, my *A Camp* partner, so it's a lot of his songwriting in there too. Mark loved emotional pop songs, and so do I, and it makes me so happy to know that he liked what I do.

MTT: What was the recording process of Dark Night Of The Soul like? Did all of the artists meet in the studio, or was it kind of a long distance thing? Did you co-write Daddy's Gone?

NP: I hadn't seen Mark for a long time when that project came about, he had written the song and asked me to sing it. I flew to North Carolina and we recorded in his studio there, it was just us two. I stayed with him in the house on top of the hill and I'm so happy I got to do that, it was the last time I saw him.

MTT: Did you ever so any work at Mark Linkous's Static King studio, and if so can you tell us a little bit about it?

NP: Yes, we did some work on the A Camp album there. It was so beautiful, in a field behind his and Teresas house, a little cottage with his signature kind of recording gear, duck taped keyboards and surrounded by a forest of retired italian motorcycles. I can't remember exactly what work we did there, I more remember the visit. I stayed with them, we wrote the song "elephant" and rode motorcycles.

MTT: What are some of your favorite memories of Mark Linkous?

NP: Oh, many... But I will always remember the last time I saw him, we talked a lot and he was clearly struggling, right then he was doing pretty good, he was off meds and he was trying to get things working. He told me some stories about ghosts and he showed me a plot of land where he wanted to build a house if he got some money. He was terrible with eating, he just didn't eat if Theresa was not around. I like to eat, so I had to ask him for food, so he drove me to a subway and he himself went into the next door gas station to but some... devil dogs I think they're called, the weird american sponge cake snack. And I loved when we listened to music together. And when we (me and my manager) asked him what his producer rate was, he just sent us a picture of a new Moto Guzzi that he wanted to buy, that was funny. I have lots of stories! I loved him a lot.

MTT: The last A Camp album came out in 2009, 8 years after the first album. Have you been working on anything new for A Camp?

NP: No, since the last A Camp record I had a baby and I'm still in that zone.

MTT: You're also a part of The Cake Sale collective. Is anything new happening with that?

NP: Not as far as I know! I think it was a one-off thing.

MTT: In November 2011, Magnus Sveningsson hinted that a new Cardigans album was in the works. Can you tell us anything about this?

NP: Not a record, but we're gonna do something, we're gonna perform the record "Gran Turismo" live next summer, in festivals.

MTT: Is there anything else you'd like us to know?

NP: No, I think that's it! Well, my son's name is Nils Oskar Linkous Larson, Teresa has blessed the choice and she's Nils' honorary aunt. And Mark's his honorary uncle.

By Ben Simbirski
