

'Nature Calls'

Sparklehorse by John Russell
Real Groove, September 1998

Mark Linkous, more commonly referred to in music circles as Sparklehorse, is the type of songwriter that King Missile would term, 'a sensitive artist'. He's extremely softly spoken, has an air of once wounded fragility about him, and when the mood hits, Linkous's mental faculties all but crumble. The day before Real Groove spoke with Linkous he was suffering from a severe migraine and depression, a result of a mishap two years ago, when he overdosed on Valium and collapsed in a London hotel room while on tour promoting Sparklehorse's debut album, Vivadixiesubmarinetransmissionplot. He lay unconscious for over 14 hours with his legs pinned beneath him, and subsequently spent 12 weeks in hospital and several months in a wheelchair.

Following the accident, Linkous opted for, "a very simplistic way of living." Today, he lives with his wife in Dillwyn, Virginia, where they own a seven acre property in the middle of a 400 acre pine tree farm. There are no clocks in the house and the pace of life is ideal, says Linkous. He wrote and recorded Sparklehorse's recently released second album, Good Morning Spider in the studio he built out back, and when not tinkering with things musical, Linkous spends an increasing amount of time, "working on my new tractor...I think it's a dud." Linkous was sitting outside, "watching a beautiful orange sunset," when Real Groove called...

It surprised me that you're doing interviews for this record, I'd heard that you've become very anti-media?

"No, I'm not anti the media, but I find it hard sometimes because having to do interviews does take away form the enjoyment of releasing a new record. I did try and say no to doing any interviews, but it doesn't work like that, the record company seem to be able to manoeuvre things around to how they want them."

Do you feel like some of your interviews have gotten too personal in the past?

"Sometimes journalists get a little over-analytical about things and dwell on my being in the hospital or depression, I feel like it's been written about enough already."

But there's no denying you've talked very freely in the past about your accident and your depression.

"In a way I was open to talking about things like that because I have fans, some of them are young and I thought maybe it would be inspirational to people - when I was in hospital I got so many letters from people about how the first record really affected them - so I thought for a while that by not hiding things, some people who like Sparklehorse might be inspired to get their shit together also. But unfortunately it became a morbid curiosity thing."

Has your new environment helped keep your head together?

"It's perfect for me here, it's so quiet and peaceful, it's a very simplistic way of living. I think I could live in the mountains and just shoot rabbits...that's all anybody really needs. In this day and age, people are tied down to so many belongings and possessions, it seems like people are getting further and further away from nature."

Not wanting to sound New Age or anything, but things are moving so fast nowadays that there's more of a chance people will forget their spiritual connection to the earth.

"I really believe that... I also try to be careful and not come across in a hippy way about saying that, but it seems like the majority of people are losing their spirituality, I think because they just get caught up in the pressures of day to day life and survival. It's like this wheel that keeps going and going."

What are your techniques to combat that, aside from shifting to the middle of a tree farm?

"You have to be totally true to yourself, no matter how small an issue something may seem, you have to be true. When the first Sparklehorse album came out, we were asked to play on a French television show. Of course the record company wanted us to play the single, 'Rainmaker', but I really wanted to play 'Spirit Ditch'. I called the producer of the television show and he considered it, but it was a political boo-boo, so I finally gave in and played 'Rainmaker'. And I still believe I gave up a little bit of my integrity when I did that. The only way to change anything is to stand up for your beliefs because at the end of it all, all you have left is your integrity."

Since you almost died two years ago, has that experience increased your appreciation and/or enjoyment of living?

"At times I have really enjoyed life. My experiences in the last couple of years have verified why I am here on the earth, it's to make records. I don't know how many more I'll make, but I think that's the biggest reason why I am here."

You could be here to repair tractors.

"I don't think I'm good enough at fixing tractors for it to be my life's mission. Actually, when I was outside working on the tractor just before, I saw the wildest looking ant that I've ever seen, it was really big and it was bright red, and from watching the nature channel I was able to determine what kind of ant it was... that was kinda exciting."

Surely television would seem like a pollutant where you're living.

"Oh yeah, and it's so easy to get sucked into shows where you're just wasting your time, television is so hypnotic. Last night I was watching network TV for a couple of hours and I can't believe how violent it is. There's advertisements for tapes called Banned From Television, of people actually getting killed, you can order snuff tapes off of network TV. There's not a whole lot out there on mainstream television that is any good, it's like music, you have to dig to find the good stuff."