

**Interview: Sparklehorse**

**Sparklehorse return in June with a stunning new album called "It's A Wonderful Life". Mark Linkous chatted to Atomic Duster from his farm-cum-recording studio in Virginia. This wasn't the order we asked the questions in, but what the hell. We like to be different.**

**AD: Do the folk at Capitol ever say to you "Whoa! Hold on. That's just a little TOO weird for us to put out", or do you have pretty much free reign over artistic matters?**

ML: It seems like...it has been getting worse and worse at Capitol. I used to be not only just left alone but also inspired by people that I worked with. You can only go so long and do so many albums being a "cult figure" or someone that the critics like, so yeah, they do want "radio records". I don't refuse to co-operate out of just being a...brat...I just refuse to contribute to the music industry — especially in America — unless I can do it with something that I feel is good. It would be so easy just to record a dumb pop song and it would of course be a single....and I really don't think that the world needs that kind of stuff. The music industry's so bad here in America, there's so many bands that I like, for example Granddaddy, Mercury Rev, Flaming Lips, Pavement, who are just much bigger in England. There's nobody over here willing to take a risk as they're all too scared of losing their jobs. England is a lot more accepting. I can't wait to play at your V2001 festival this year. I'm really looking forward to that.

**AD: Ok, the new album is called "It's A Wonderful Life". How tongue in cheek should we be taking that?**

ML: Well, I've always thought it's best not to take yourself too seriously, so there's a little bit of irony in there and little bit that's not. I already had the song, and people kept telling me that's what it should be called. Originally it was called "King Of Nails" but it was decided that was too dark.

**AD: You've commented before that you were a big Tom Waits fan. How was the experience of working with him on this album and why did he inspire you as much as he did?**

ML: Well, there probably wouldn't BE Sparklehorse music if it wasn't for Tom Waits. I was living in Los Angeles ready to give up on music, and I was in a van when they had this guest DJ spot and he was playing this music that kind of... kept me from walking into the sea. Working with him still seems like a movie to me. He worked on a few songs...one of them's a hidden track at the end, and I had recorded "Dog Door" but it was a sort of different construction and I couldn't write the lyrics for it. The formula of the song was so unusual, so he wrote the words.

**AD: That hidden track is amazing. What's it called and why wasn't it credited?**

ML: It's called "Morning Hollow". It's just really slow and open and it just seemed like enough songs were contained within the body of the record with that feel. It wasn't too much at the end. It was hidden away because I like it too much to use it as a B-side. And it wasn't given a credit because it wouldn't be secret then, would it?

**AD: Erm....no. Bloody good answer. Moving on, I've often thought your record sleeves were very reminiscent of the Pixies. Were they an influence on you or is it just a coincidence?**

ML: Yes. I pretty much missed all of the eighties and got into the Pixies just

afterwards. They were one of the very few eighties bands that I liked...and also Frank Black's first two solo records, so yeah, they were an inspiration too.

**AD: Apparently before you became Sparklehorse, you were in a band that played "300 year old folk tunes". Did you see that as a necessary step towards what you wanted to achieve and why?**

ML: Yes, because it was again when I was living in Los Angeles and had pretty much given up on any goals I had musically. Then I came back to Virginia and just started playing with people in their living rooms — one of them which was 300 year old Irish songs, and it was just the simple experience of sitting around a living room playing music acoustically. The atmosphere just carries on or dies somewhere and that's all that matters. You're just able to appreciate it more.

**AD: You seem to be able to play an impressive array of musical instruments. Do you have an insatiable desire to learn one every time you've conquered another?**

ML: Ohh, I haven't "conquered" any! God, no. I know enough to get by and I guess I get a lot of time because I do a lot of work in my home studio. It can take forever sometimes. I use a lot of electrical tape on keyboards and so on.

**AD: Finally, what's your ultimate ambition for Sparklehorse?**

ML: I guess just maybe to open up some doors for a different kind of music... whether it be me or Flaming Lips or Mercury Rev or whoever. It's just a case of letting people hear them. I know that, because I have eighteen and twenty three year old stepbrothers who, of course, like Limp Bizkit and all that, but they also like Grandaddy and Flaming Lips and that's only because I made them CDs... otherwise they would never have heard of them.

**So there you go. If you've never heard Sparklehorse, you'd be well advised to invest in "It's A Wonderful Life" (or, for that matter, either of its predecessors, - the oddly titled "Vivadixiesubmarinetransmissionplot" or "Good Morning Spider"), such is the beauty and splendour of this particular album. You can read my review of it under our albums' section this month.**

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