

Sparklehorse's Good Life

Tom Waits, PJ Harvey guest on third album

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"I got very weary talking about that. From now on, I tell people that it was an elaborate marketing scam." So says Sparklehorse's Mark Linkous of a 1996 incident in which an ill-advised pill combination cause a collapse that nearly killed him. The story became something of a chemical triumph of the spirit tale, so thoroughly reported that it nearly eclipsed the arrival of Sparklehorse's superb second selection of rural gothic soundscapes, *Good Morning Spider*, one of 1999's finest releases.

Two years later, Linkous has another Sparklehorse album in the can, the ironically titled *It's a Wonderful Life*, and this time the music may get the opportunity to breathe without tabloid intrusion.

"The mood is, I don't know, similar to Lou Reed's *Berlin* or Smog's *Red Apple Falls*," Linkous says. "The two rock songs on it are intentionally too abrasive for American radio and the instrumentation of the pop songs are with mellotrons and French horns instead of guitars. If I'm going to contribute to modern rock, it has to be in an interesting manner. There is the balance of new and well worn in that there are sounds originating from a laptop right in there with a string quartet that was recorded with a microphone that I found at the landfill. [It] makes everything sound like it was recorded in the hull of a sinking ship a long time ago."

Linkous has also brought a handful of guests including PJ Harvey and Tom Waits into the fold for *It's a Wonderful Life*. "I imagine for this LP it will be 'What was it like working with insert famous person here?'," he says of the line of questioning that will likely replace queries about "the incident." "Well it wasn't actually the famous PJ Harvey, but a local banjo player, Phil J. Harvey. And not Tom Waits, but his cousin, Ron Waits who plays 'keys' and works down at Target," he jokes. "Well, Ron, played on two songs. He would have played on more but he couldn't get the time off work."

Waits co-wrote "Dog Door" with Linkous and lends his inimitable growl to the track. The collaboration was a departure for Linkous who wrote all the material for Sparklehorse's debut, *vivadixiesubmarinetransmissionplot* and shared a lone co-write with Cracker's David Lowery on "Sick of Goodbyes" from *Spider*. Nina Persson of the Cardigans also lends her voice to a trio of songs.

Though Linkous does the lion's share of the Sparklehorse instrumentation (including guitar, mellotron, Wurlitzer, etc.), Scott Minor, who drummed with Linkous on tour and on *Spider* makes a return appearance. "He plays drums, chamberlain, harmonium, orchestron and makes samples on a Mac G4 that sound like prairie dogs eating ice cream or what you might imagine it would sound like inside a satellite crashed into the ocean," Linkous says.

Linkous says a touring unit will travel to Europe in June and July with a U.S. jaunt to follow in August. The lineup will include Minor, along with Margret White on bass, sampler and violin; Alan Weatherhead on lap steel and

guitar, Kendall Meade on keys and bass, "and just a hologram of me," Linkous says. "Oh shit! Don't print that last bit."

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