

Mark Linkous, Forever Sparkling



On January 9, 2003, I had the honor of speaking with Mark Linkous. While I held Sparklehorse in high regard back then – and still do today – I came away from the interview with even more respect for the man behind the songs.

Gracious, kind and careful – particularly in choosing his words – Linkous was a plus, not a minus, to the world he sadly left two days ago. On a personal level, he assured me that it is possible to get un-jaded by the music industry.

“In the late ’80s, I was living out on the West Coast and pretty disillusioned about trying to be successful and making a career in music,” he imparted. “I was in Los Angeles, in the center of all the things I didn’t want to be involved in in the music business, and I was really discouraged about the whole thing. At about that time, I heard Daniel [Johnston]’s music and Tom Waits’ *Rain Dogs*. And hearing those two at that time pretty much saved me as far as having any energy ... it just saved me. I was ready to give up, there was nothing out there that was making me feel inspired.”

Below is the related, albeit short, article, online for the first time in remembrance of the already-missed Mark Linkous.

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Hailed by Nirvana, Sonic Youth and many others, off-kilter singer/songwriter Daniel Johnston links with Sparklehorse mastermind Mark Linkous for *Fear Yourself* (Gammon), on which the latter musician is credited as a featured guest throughout. Johnston, who was diagnosed mentally ill and saw his cult popularity fueled by a 1985 MTV special on Austin, TX, has teamed in the past with Jad Fair of Half Japanese and Paul Leary of the Butthole Surfers.

Fear Yourself contains 12 tracks: “Now,” “Syrup of Tears,” “Mountain Top,” “Love Enchanted,” “Must,” “Fish,” “The Power of Love,” “Forever,” “Love Not Dead,” “You Hurt Me,” “Wish” and “Living It for the Moment.”

“I’ve wanted to work with Daniel for ages,” Linkous tells *ICE*, “but I had some friends who knew him and were sort of discouraging it. So I got my mother to call his mother, Maybelle, and they hit it off. They still write all the time, letting each other know how their boys are doing.”

He continues, “I was never really happy with the other albums he had done with people. I didn’t want to make an avant-garde art record with him, or something that was patronizing in any way. I wanted to make something that was respectful, that was serious about what a great songwriter he is.”

Johnston traveled to Linkous’s studio in Richmond, VA, where the two settled in with eight organs, multiple pianos and guitars. Linkous invited his brother and sister and others to provide backup on some songs.

According to Linkous, “I just wanted to tape him, get him playing piano and singing – me and my engineer did all the overdubs and orchestration. Because his [Johnston’s] timing is not normal, it was hard to play to or follow him. But if we had chopped it up with Pro Tools, it would’ve ruined it. All the hesitations, the parts where you hear his brain trying to work or get to his fingers, I left that all in.”

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