

SPARKLEHORSE*An Interview With Mark Linkous*

Junkmedia recently spoke with Mark Linkous, the creative force behind *Sparklehorse*, from his Static King home studio in rural North Carolina. The band's highly anticipated fourth album, *Dreamt for Light Years in the Belly of a Mountain*, drops Sept. 26th on Astralwerks. Linkous, in true Southern gentlemanly fashion, quietly and politely filled us in on how he's spent his five year hiatus, why he doesn't enjoy playing festivals in the U.S, and the lingering effects of his near death experience.

Junkmedia: When it came time to start writing and recording again, were you nervous about it, seeing as it's been five years since the last Sparklehorse album?

Mark Linkous: Yeah. Well, for awhile I still wrote, but I kind of lost interest in recording. So that's part of what

took so long since the last album.

Why's that?

I think its because I got really depressed and kind of didn't want to do anything for probably three years, including music.

So how had you been spending your time?

I've done a few projects in between the last record and this record, so it hasn't been completely stagnant the whole time. I produced a *Daniel Johnston* record and I did a thing over in Geneva with [Christian] *Fennesz* and...I guess that's it.

This album's recording process, is it similar to the way you've recorded your previous albums?

It's more like the first one [*Vivadixiesubmarinetransmissionplot*] and a little bit of the second one [*Good Morning Spider*] in that I recorded a lot of it at home alone and I played everything. I guess that's a byproduct of being super isolated and a recluse for a long time.

Do you feel you need that type of environment to fully realize the type of music you're trying to create?

Yeah, sometimes. It's bad though. I mean, it's good and bad. It's bad because you can just fall in a hole in your own head, y'know, unless there's people around to help you get out of it.

Do you think that you will continue to record this way in the future? In Static King or maybe go into a more commercial studio setting?

I've built up my studio to where I kind of know what I'm doing. There's nice gear here. The board that I mix on is probably one of the best sounding consoles in the country. But I do want to work at other places too, like I'm doing a collaboration with *Danger Mouse* in a couple months, more of a proper collaboration. We're gonna call it *DangerHorse* or something, but for that I don't know where we're gonna go. We're gonna go to some other studio so I don't have to be the engineer.

You worked with him [Danger Mouse] this time around and he seems to be everywhere now. What contributions did he make to the album? What songs did he work on?

Um, the first one ["Don't Take My Sunshine Away"], and "Mountains" and a little bit on the second song.

"Getting It All Wrong"?

Yeah.

I thought I heard a little bit of his influence on that one.

Yeah, at the end there.

You have a long list of tour dates lined up in the US and Europe. When it comes time to return to the "touring" life, doing press and publicity again, is it difficult to get back out there?

Yeah, it has been difficult in the past but I think I'm looking forward to it this time. I have a completely new touring band and, I don't know, I've sort of avoided the admiration of the audience for such a long time that I'm kind of looking forward to just having a good time this time.

You're playing *Austin City Limits* next month, which is a great festival.

Yeah.

Do you enjoy festivals?

No.

(Laughs) Why's that?

Usually, in the States, it's just too many drunk people and it's too loud because, ... it shouldn't be this way at Austin City Limits, but a lot of festivals that I have done in the States...they're just not very conscious of how loud... like sometimes I'm very quiet and y'know, Marilyn Manson could be playing on the next stage and it just negates Sparklehorse.

Are there any acts that you're looking forward to seeing there?

To be honest, I don't know who's playing. (Laughs)

I think the *the Flaming Lips* are playing.

Oh yeah? Well I'll definitely see them. I think *Gnarls Barkley* playing too.

Your European tour dates greatly outnumber the ones in the US. Is there a reason for that? Do you just enjoy playing there more or find that you're better received there?

Yeah, I was better received there from the start. So I guess that I've always done better there.

Why do you think that is?

I think that British and European audiences have more patience for more slow or atmospheric stuff. Sometimes, it seems like in the past as a rule you had to knock American audiences over the head. (Laughs) A lot of times they just didn't appreciate the subtlety. But it's been changing a little bit in the States.

How does your writing process take place? Does it take you awhile to fully flesh out the personality of a song or is it something that wakes you up in the middle of the night and you have to write it down?

No, it takes awhile. I guess in a fairly common way I sit around with an acoustic guitar and come up with the melody and the chord structure and then usually the last thing I do are lyrics and that takes a long time because I'm kind of picky about lyrics.

Do you have a favorite song on the new album?

I like the instrumental last one ["Dreamt for Light Years in the Belly of a Mountain."]

How did you come up with the title of the album [*Dreamt for Light Years in the Belly of a Mountain?*] The last song is of the same name.

I had recorded that song and it had another title and I just never was really satisfied with that and, I don't know, it just seemed appropriate for it to have the same name as the record.

What was the other title?

Maxine. It was named after my grandmother.

The track with Tom Waits, "Morning Hollow," is from the *It's A Wonderful Life* sessions. Why did you decide to put it on this album?

Because a lot of people didn't know that song and I thought it was just too good to remain obscure.

Is Tom Waits one of your inspirations?

Oh yeah.

He's someone that you'd want to continue working with? I know you've worked with so many great people...

Oh God I'd love to keep working with Tom. I'd love to have him be a guest vocalist for the DangerHorse thing. Or *Nina* [Perrson, whose album, *A Camp*, was produced by Linkous]. Or maybe *Beth* [Gibbons] from Portishead.

Is there anyone else that you'd like to work with in the future that you haven't had the chance to yet?

Well I did a thing with Fennesz but that was just a couple live shows; one in Switzerland and one in Paris, so I'd really like to do something, a recording, with Christian Fennesz.

Is it other musicians that inspire you to create? What is it that inspires you to keep wanting to do this after five years off?

Well, to be honest, lately it's been so I can live, just so I can pay the rent again. Cause without putting out a record for five years it got to be dire financial throes where I couldn't live. So that's my first goal – to pay the rent.

I know it's been several years since your accident [Linkous mixed Valium and anti-depressants, passed out in a hotel bathroom in London with his legs pinned under him for fourteen hours and required numerous surgeries and time spent in a wheelchair.] Does that experience still have lasting effects on you physically or mentally today?

I don't know how much mentally it affects me that I'm conscious of. Physically it still affects me because the operations that I had permanently damaged my legs. So I'll always have to wear braces on my legs.

I think I can understand to some degree, not having been in an accident to the extent of your own, but one that left me in a wheelchair. It stays with you but not as much as you thought it would when it's first happening.

Yeah.

I thought every day I would wake up and just be so happy to be alive. But that goes away. (Laughs)

Yeah, I know. I know. I know. It's ridiculous that it does.

Having to constantly hear "Look on the bright side, at least you'll walk again..."

Yeah I know. And I agree. You say to yourself, if I could just get back to where I was I would be so happy and then...I guess that's the trick after awhile, not letting it wear off.

Yet you find yourself still getting annoyed at the same things that annoyed you before, even though you said you never would...

Right. Yeah that's the trick (Laughs)

I'm looking forward to the show at the Bowery [Ballroom in NYC] next month. What can I expect?

Well it changes all the time, almost with every record - my touring band - and this band is totally new as well. The only person I've played with in my new touring band is the drummer and he is my best friend from a long way back, **Johnny Hott**. He played drums on the first and second album.

Who else will accompany you on this tour?

A guy from Jackson, Mississippi named **Chris Michaels** and a girl from Austin named **Paula Jean Brown**. She used to play with Giant Sand. And me. And that's it.

-photo by Tim Saccenti

By Christine Wright.

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