

ALIVE TALKS TO SPARKLEHORSE



Sparklehorse is the beautiful creation of one Mark Linkous, the multi-instrumentalist responsible for such classic albums as "Good Morning Spider", "It's A Wonderful Life" and the forthcoming masterpiece "Dreamt For Light Years In The Belly Of A Mountain". I got on the phone to Mark and started off by asking him where he was and what he could see

"I'm in the studio right now but there's no windows because it's in an old warehouse. It's kind of the ugliest building in town. They took this warehouse and put this fake facade on it, so it's got a dilapidated Swiss chalet front. This town is near Helen, Georgia and as a tourist attraction, they tried to turn it into a Swiss town looking village but they only got to my building then they gave up. It's kind of spooky and dilapidated."

Your new album features such guests as Steven Drozd of The Flaming Lips, Dangermouse and Tom Waits but without reading the credits, it's impossible to tell which tracks they're on. Every song on there is so definitely a Sparklehorse song.

"Good. Dangermouse worked on the first song and on "Mountains" and on the 2nd song but we're going to do a proper collaboration in December. I don't know what were going to call it, possibly Dangerhorse. Tom Waits played on "Morning Hollow". He played piano on it, it was recorded during the sessions for "It's A Wonderful Life" album but it wasn't included because it would have been a slow song overkill if it had.

Steven plays the drums on "It's Not So Hard" and it's two different drum takes. The left speaker is one drum take in mono and the right speaker is another take in mono. So there's 2 Stevens on there. I think he played drums on another track but I don't really listen back to it much. It makes me tired to hear it, except for the piano song."

I really loved the cover of Daniel Johnston's "Go" you did with The Flaming Lips for the Daniel Johnston tribute album. It seems like a perfect collaboration. The song begins sounding like classic Sparklehorse and by verse 2 it somehow sounds like classic Flaming Lips without missing a beat.

"Well, I had chosen that song because it was one of my favourite songs of Daniels and I'd done a tour with them and we all rode on the same bus and all knew each other. When it came up, I kept envisaging Wayne singing the 2nd verse. They're almost lyrics that Wayne would write. I always had the idea that I wanted Wayne to sing the 2nd verse so it was intentionally planned that way."

As Sparklehorse is pretty much just you in the studio, is the live line-up a band that's been with you for a while or does it change much?

"It always changes from album to album. For this album there's a totally new band, apart from the drummer Johnny who played on "Vivadixiesubmarinetransmissionplot" and "Good Morning Spider", he's been my best friend for a long time. And there's two other people I've not seen. A girl named Paula Jean Brown, who used to be in Giant Sand, on bass and singing. A fella named Chris Michael is playing keyboards and singing."

The first thing I ever heard by you was a version of Blake's poem "London", which I later found out was based on a rock version by The Fugs. How did you come to do that track, was it a love of Blake or The Fugs?

"In my first touring band, one of the guys was good friends with Tuli Kupferberg [beat generation poet, publisher, writer & co-founder of The Fugs]. We played that song in a band that played traditional Irish music. We played it quite different then"

One of the things about William Blake is the many different ways people appreciate him. People take his as a romantic poet or a surrealist or an engraver or a visionary. What do you get from Blake?

"I don't know, something about it seems so elegant. I really like his imagery. I was asked to do a Christmas single, it was on white vinyl and something about the imagery of chimney sweepers (in "London") just seemed right. I worked as one for a while before the 1st album came out. I had this Blake inspired vision that is was this really respectable job. The truth was far from it"

Speaking of London, I saw you play an amazing show at the Union Chapel in London just after the September 11th attacks. At the time most American acts were cancelling gigs and avoiding travelling or going BACK home, so I was really impressed that you still played and you had the collection bucket for the New York Fire Department.

"Yeah, they were dark times but I thought it was really important to play for people."

The new album has got the most fantastic cover artwork. It seems just right, that mixture of innocence, grandeur, nature and man.

"A guy from called Caligno Robert Fulconia did it. I had played an instore show in California and it was a poster advertising the show. This is from 4 or 5 years ago and I just always loved that image and planned on that being the album cover. He has a great way of listening to records and coming up with beautiful, appropriate imagery."

What have you been listening to lately?

"Boards Of Canada, Oval, Microstoria, Fennesz. I did a collaboration with them - Christian Fennesz and I. I listen to "The Grey Album" [Dangermouse's infamous Beatles/Jay-Z mash-up] a lot. That helped get me out of the slump I was in for a very long time."

It's funny because, as I said I couldn't tell which of your tracks he played on and I recently found out you played on his Dangerdoom album and I can't tell which of his tracks you played on. The Sparklehorse tracks sound like Sparklehorse and the Dangerdoom tracks sound like Dangermouse.

"I'm looking forward to doing a proper collaboration with him, not without specific ideas of what has to be done. I can't surrender control of Sparklehorse"

Interview by Ned Netherwood
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