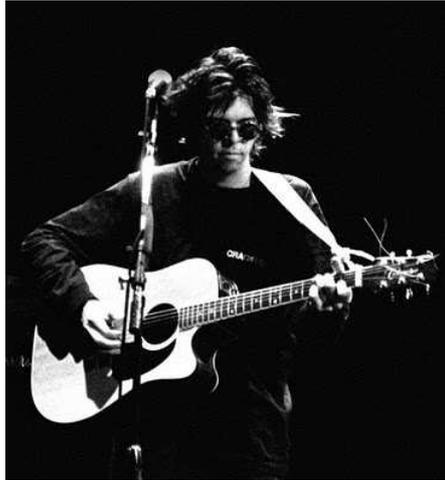


Thursday, March 11, 2010

## R.I.P. MARK LINKOUS



*The IRT was very saddened to hear the news surrounding the suicide of Sparklehorse mastermind Mark Linkous. As a tribute to this challenging, masterful and complex songwriter whose troubles with the music industry should not go unnoticed (particularly in the case of the **Dark Night of the Soul** debacle), here is the exclusive and revealing interview we ran with Mr. Linkous in 2006 by our friend and contributor Damien Napoli while Linkous was doing press for his the last Sparklehorse album, **Dreamt for Light Years in the Belly of a Mountain**. We hope you enjoy. Rest in peace, Mark. -Ed.*

**Sparklehorse: Riding Through the Fields**  
By Damien Napoli

Musicians (the good ones at least), have an uncanny knack of emerging from the ether every once in a blue moon, Presidency, or if you're Wooden Wand, menstrual cycle, and consistently bring something to the table. Mark Linkous is one such man (horse). Every couple of years, he swings on by, whips up Southern gothic tales steeped in archaic prose and sadness, and doesn't leave the stereo till sometime the year after. He's been doing this you see, since 1995, when *Vivadixiesubmarinetransmissionplot* reared its bi-polarized head. It was a beautiful, jangled mess with one hoof stuck in the mid 80's fuzzed out alternative scene, and one in the sublime lo-fi sweetness of *Sherbert*-era Alex Chilton. And as time has gone by, Mark has brought more of the same. Although he has gone through some rough patches in his experience, he has never backed away from conveying to the listener his strife. *Dreamt For Light Years in the Belly of A Mountain* (Astralwerks) his latest statement, proves that in spades. Working with an inspired and motley cast with 2 dots on top of the s (Tom Waits, Dave Fridmann, Dangermouse, Fennesz) Mark has really outdone himself. I recently had the chance to speak with the former Dancing Hood (Allmusicoogle it)

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Stop looking at this movable type and read on!!!!!!!

**IRT: What were your days like living in Bellmore? How did you meet the guys in Dancing Hoods?**

**Linkous:** I hung around with some guys in Virginia that were from New York. One of my friends from high school, his older brother who still lived there played drums. I wanted to move to New York, or England or somewhere, kind of when the punk rock thing was really happening. So I graduated from high school, moved to LI and started playing with some guys. I worked at a couple of different record distributors. There was one in Bellmore called Dutch East India Trading, I also worked in Hollis, Queens at Important.

**IRT: After the 1st Dancing Hoods LP, the band moved to California. Did living through the process of trying to make it in a plastic Metropolis like LA make you yearn for the singular approach to your music and way of life in a place like Static King in Virginia?**

**LINKOUS:** Oh yea, I mean, I don't want to diss it too bad. I guess I didn't have a very good time in LA, but a lot of it was really my fault. I just ended up in a bad place. I got kind of lonely out there, being such a big city.

**IRT: How did the 1st ideas come about in terms of the Sparklehorse project, where did they gel from?**

**LINKOUS:** I guess for as long as I have been playing guitar, when four tracks 1st came out, in LA I'd always have a little closet in whatever apartment I lived in. I would just sorta hide out in there and make these little songs. After LA, I moved back to Virginia. I had met David

Lowery from Camper (Van Beethoven), and he had just moved to Richmond. David and I just started hanging out a little bit. I didn't know anything about recording and he had an old cassette 8 track. A Tascam 688 or something, really only seven tracks worked. I set it up in a farmhouse on a big plantation way out in the country we rented, and had that 7 track in one of the rooms. I would record a lot of the times late at night or really early in the morning. I would record really quietly, most of the time with headphones so I wouldn't wake anyone up. A lot of that is how Sparklehorse was born.

**IRT: This album is has a lot of continuing themes between it & *It's A Wonderful Life*. I loved how you meshed the songs that appeared on versions of the last LP & *The Gold Day EP*. Was this LP conceived from the same sessions?**

**LINKOUS:** Some tracks like "Morning Hollow", the one that Tom Waits plays piano on, that was a leftover song. I wouldn't say left over, cause I just didn't include it proper on the last LP. It would have been slow song overkill. I really like that song a lot so that's why I put it on.

**IRT: There is a deep sense of loss throughout your work. Does most of the imagery come from experience, or one of the dream states you conjure up?**

**LINKOUS:** I think there has always been a certain amount of mortality in my records, but more so in the newest one. Since the last record, after 9/11 and all of that, I have lost a lot of people around me. There has even been a quadruple murder not too long ago, some friends. There was always that element in the records; I guess it's really prevalent in this record because it's true.

**IRT: There seems also a way of returning to the past, not in a nostalgic sense, almost like a simpler way of looking at the world. Do you feel we need to go back to a localized way of life to make it in the future?**

**LINKOUS:** Well.. I really dwelt on that a lot. After 9/11 a lot of shit happened. It really fucked me up and I really did think it was the end of the world and no one else knew it but me. I started reading the Bible, "Revelations", and in a way I thought for a long time that everything need to just stop and just start over you know, start with a clean slate.

**IRT: A clean slate would be a start. The world is so industrialized these days. It's like our food and services travel more than we do.**

**LINKOUS:** Oh yea. There is also not a whole lot of mystery and intrigue in things anymore. I loved ordering a record, waiting a few weeks for it to come and just the anticipation. And finally getting the LP just reading every word, you know just living with the album.

**IRT: The tangibility and also the ritualistic properties of a record are totally lost on this generation. How do you feel about the new media age then do you see any positive changes helping your music or just music in general?**

**LINKOUS:** Well I think it probably helps bands that otherwise wouldn't have a chance at all making a living doing music. You know the way labels are these days, it must be really hard to get a contract. I guess that's one of the advantages is the progress now is the availability of obscure things, especially music. I felt really strongly about the artwork on this record just being such good artwork that people would wanna go out and buy it instead of just downloading it. I have been happier with this artwork on this record than any other record so far.

**IRT: A lot of tendencies in your music bring up Pagan or Wicca imagery. Would you consider yourself spiritual in those realms, or do you follow your own path?**

**LINKOUS:** I don't know. I went through the last 5 years or so..... went through sort of... I needed some kind of spiritual anchor, whether it was traditional religion or something. I guess if nothing else, just your relationship with nature, you know. If you just know yourself in the world and know you are just part of everything.

**IRT: Humans have totally lost that intuition. Again, it's the modern age I guess that just brings upon that. We are so ingrained by the society that is built around that we don't even take a step back. It's just a very awkward time.**

**LINKOUS:** Yea I believe that. I was convinced for a while that the Earth had just had it with us and it was really in a defense mechanism. I felt it was trying to fling us off like parasites.

**IRT: Throughout the work, you seem to have a deep affinity for animals. Do you feel a close bond with them, even more so than humans?**

**LINKOUS:** Yea, a lot of times. I guess it's a lot easier to lose your inhibitions and be affectionate with no reserve.

**IRT: On this album, did Dave Fridmann work on it extensively? Or was it more with the stuff from the earlier sessions?**

**LINKOUS:** There were some later sessions that we did. Um "It's Not So Hard" and "Knives Of Summertime". Some of the basic tracks, especially the stuff that Steven of The Flaming Lips played drums on down at Tarbox Studios.

**IRT: What about Dangermouse, he did some mixing on the album?**

**LINKOUS:** Yea mixing, and we recorded and co produced about 4 songs.

**IRT: How did you connect with him? I know you worked on the Dangerdoom album, you played some bass on it right?**

**LINKOUS:** Right. Someone sent me *The Grey Album* like a year or so ago. I finally got around listening to it, and I thought it was amazing. I was talking to my manager about other people I would wanna collaborate with. And I asked her who he was and she gave me the lowdown. I didn't know at all that he was in demand as he is. Anyway we started talking, and I articulated to him the aesthetic I was going for with this record. I wanted to bring more electronic stuff in, and push it as much as *Kid A* or *Amnesiac*, but I wanted it to have choruses. I wanted it to push the electronic end, but still be really strong traditionally constructed pop songs.

**IRT: You also worked with Fennesz.**

LINKOUS: Yea.

**IRT: Did he help you apply that aesthetic as well?**

**LINKOUS:** Well there's not a whole lot on this record, but him and I are gonna do another record on our own. We did a thing together in Geneva that got recorded and filmed. Dangermouse and I are also gonna do another project together.

**IRT: What do you enjoy so much about fractured sounds?**

**LINKOUS:** I guess it's just the aspect of the sound that's alien to the ear. I have always been intrigued by like what a satellite sounds like on the inside, or how satellites trying to talk to each other. I don't what the allure to the aged fractured thing is, but it has always been appealing to me. The aesthetic of it is really intriguing.

**IRT: In terms of being on Astralwerks how's your relationship with Capitol? Do you feel that Astralwerks is a good fit for you? Capitol really didn't do a great job of getting your name out there; in America at least. I know that EMI handles you well in the UK but here they really didn't know what to do with you.**

**LINKOUS:** Yea, that sums it up. I guess I was lucky in that they sort of just left me alone. This record was a really long time coming, and I think they would have preferred to have it a while ago, and I would have preferred to have it a while ago, I just wasn't really able to work for a long time. When I finally did hand it in, I didn't hear from them for sometime, and I was really nervous. And I didn't know that much about Astralwerks, but now after meeting them and knowing what I know now, it's a great thing. I've never really had eight people in a room enthusiastic and happy to have something to do with Sparklehorse.

**IRT: What's the touring situation like?**

**LINKOUS:** We're doing a couple of gigs in the States, then we are going to Europe for a while, like a seven week tour.

**IRT: Thanks for talking.**

**LINKOUS:** You're welcome. Take care.