

Autumn music special - Sparklehorse

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Why the long face?

Under the mysterious moniker of Sparklehorse, Mark Linkous has made some of the most beguiling music around. Why then, asks Doug Johnstone, does he struggle with his place in the world.

It's been five years since alt.country troubadour Sparklehorse last released a record, the atmospheric genius of *It's a Wonderful Life*. Instead of bearing a grudge for the delay, we should be grateful Mark Linkous (for Sparklehorse is he) ever got round to releasing anything again, because the man was in such a state of disenchantment with the world.

'I fell into a really bad depression and became a really serious recluse for at least three years,' admits Linkous frankly. 'I liked coming up with songs and playing them, but I totally lost interested in recording. I was just in a fucking vortex, unable to do anything.'

And the trigger that helped Linkous start digging his way out of this hole? The rather unlikely figure of DJ Danger Mouse, the man responsible for the infamous *Grey Album* and the world-dominating pop of Gnarls Barkley.

'People around me were trying to get me out of this hole I was in,' says Linkous. 'So they'd send me records that they thought I would find intriguing, and I really loved that *Grey Album*, I thought it was just fucking wicked.'

Linkous' management put the two together, and it transpired that Danger Mouse was a long-time Sparklehorse fan. The pair started collaborating in Linkous' extremely remote North Carolina studio, and the end result was the amazing new album, *Dreamt for Light Years in the Belly of a Mountain*.

'I would play him tracks, and he'd grab a guitar track from the verse of one song, put it into his computer and fuck with it, then put it in the chorus of another song and it sounded really great,' Linkous says, adding with a chuckle: 'He's the Jimi Hendrix of the laptop.'

The resultant record mixes the weird, crackly, downhome atmosphere of Sparklehorse's last two records with a new electronica edge reminiscent of Radiohead's more experimental leanings, while also somehow returning to the skewed pop aesthetic of his astonishing debut, 1995's *Vivadixiesubmarinetransmissionplot*.

'It's definitely more diverse than records I've done before,' says Linkous. 'It's ended up more pop than I expected, which is weird, because normally it's hard for me to do pop songs. I always imagine being embarrassed by them in five years' time.'

Linkous has plans for a number of collaborations (including another Danger Mouse one, this time under the Dangerhorse moniker) and a covers record, so it seems he's well and truly got the recording bug again.

'Yeah, I hope so,' he says ruefully. 'I just need to stay busy and not get in that fucking hole again.'

King Tut's, Glasgow, Wed 4 Oct; Liquid Room, Edinburgh, Thu 19 Oct.