

The Skinny

Sparklehorse:

Dreaming For Light Years

Sometimes it's okay to be sad...

But it's not okay to sit in your house and do nothing for three years

Feature by Caroline Hurley.

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Since 1995 Mark Linkous has produced records as Sparklehorse - known almost as much a tragic back-story of drugs, depression and injury, this paints an even more intriguing backdrop to his particular strain of experimental alt-country, even with the upcoming fourth album, 'Dreamt For Light Years in the Belly of A Mountain', Sparklehorse is still something of a mystery. The Skinny got a rare chance to talk to Mark at home in his North Carolina studio...

It's been five years since the last Sparklehorse album, is this due to you being busy with other projects?

"Well, I stopped working altogether for a while; I had really bad depression for about three years and just couldn't do anything, so that's the main reason."

You're very candid about your experiences with depression...

"Well, it's easier than making up a bunch of stories (laughs) and besides, I don't like lying to people."

You returned to your own Static King Studio for much of this album, having recorded 'It's A Wonderful Life' elsewhere, why go back?

"Part of it was a product of having isolated myself; I became a complete recluse and lived like a hermit. Also, on 'It's A Wonderful Life', I worked in different studios because I wanted to learn other recording techniques and this was a chance to apply those."

Do you begin with a concept for an album before you begin, or are they collections of your most recent songs?

"For this album, I definitely had an idea; I knew I wanted to make more of a pop album. I had some songs that were written at the time of the previous album but they felt like anachronisms on that record, they didn't fit with the tone at all."

Working with Dangermouse at first doesn't seem the most obvious match, what was it that attracted you to his music?

"It was actually my manager, when I was really bad; he and other people would send me records to listen to, just to try to get me out of this hole. He sent me 'The Grey Album' [Dangermouse's mash up of The Beatles and Jay Z] and I just really loved it. So when I wanted to do an album of strong pop songs, he was really down with that."

Is that mainly the sort of music you're listening to now?

"Yeah, it is really, I like a lot of electronic stuff and some hip hop too, but the sparser the better; Kool Keith and the Dr Octagon stuff and I like Boards of Canada a lot."

I wanted to ask you about that line from Hi Fidelity, "which came first, the music or the misery?" Do you think that sad songs make people sad or do sad people listen to sad music?

"I think a lot of people prefer sad songs because it makes them feel like they're not so alone and maybe it can be a comfort, to say that being sad isn't such a bad thing, that sometimes it's okay to be sad.... But it's not okay to sit in your house and do nothing for three years (more laughing)."

I've heard people complain that you're good at writing rock songs, such as Happy Man, but you choose not to...

"(Laughing) Well, it's harder to write good rock songs, something that I wouldn't be embarrassed about in five years time. Pop songs are hard enough without trying to write a 'cool' rock song."

What are your plans for the future? Are you still ambitious with Sparklehorse?

"Yeah, I am still ambitious with Sparklehorse, I'm thinking of a covers album, probably seventies stuff like Blue Oyster Cult and Todd Rundgren. We're planning another project for December too, probably called Dangerhorse but it got bad for a while there, really bad financially, so for now I'm just thrilled to be able to get a record out and pay my rent again."