

## Mark Linkous's life was one Dark Night Of The Soul

The suicide of Sparklehorse's Mark Linkous means the loss of a prolific – if melancholic – musical talent. Rob Fitzpatrick pays tribute

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**Rob Fitzpatrick**

The Guardian, Saturday 13 March 2010

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Mark Linkous. Photograph: Antonio Olmos

The really upsetting thing about the sudden death of Mark Linkous was that it just wasn't much of a surprise. He always seemed precisely like the sort of person who would end up taking their own life in some terrible, wasteful way and there wasn't really anything anyone could do about it.

Linkous's debut album as [Sparklehorse](#), 1995's fantastically spare, inventively melodic *Vivadixiesubmarinetranmissionplot*, had only made it to track two before he was imagining his own demise. "The parasites will love you when you're dead," he sings, echoing the words of that other great songwriter lost to depression, Nick Drake, who, 26 years earlier, had sung of his own failure: "Don't you worry, they'll stand and stare when you're gone."

But Linkous was so overburdened with talent he had to die twice before the game was really up. The first time was in 1996. He was on tour in the UK with *Tindersticks* when he collapsed in his hotel room, folding his legs under him as he fell, after an overdose of alcohol, antidepressants, heroin and valium. It's worth considering quite how much pain you must be in to ingest those four substances to a point where you black out. When was found 14 hours later, and his limbs were unfurled, he suffered a heart attack and was technically dead for a few minutes. There followed six months in a wheelchair, seven rounds of surgery and a full two years on morphine. His legs never regained their strength. Then, last week, in an alley outside a friend's flat in Knoxville, Tennessee, he shot himself in the heart.

It's hard to think of a more violent, more desperately sad and distressing way for a person to end their own life. Yet, in the 14 years between his deaths, Linkous had been a successful and prolific musician – someone who had worked with PJ Harvey and Radiohead, who had created the wonderful art project [Dark Night Of The Soul](#) alongside David Lynch and Danger Mouse, who'd even got to write and record a song or two with his hero, Tom Waits.

A fan called Alex nailed it when he wrote on Rolling Stone's site that Linkous's songs were "about the quiet moments that followed the loud and terrible moments in your life". When you hear pieces such as *Apple Bed* or *Morning Hollow*, you hear a musician with an innate understanding of the power of restraint. Linkous knew the power of a whisper, how turning everything down just made you listen even harder.

At the time of his death he was recording with [Steve Albini](#). When he heard of his new friend's death, the producer – by some measure the least touchy-feely man in rock – wrote that Linkous was "as open, sincere and unaffected a person as I've ever encountered", a brief eulogy that somehow makes the situation even sadder.