

'Musician's musician' Linkous memorialized after suicide

By Kristen Letsinger

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He'd traveled the world, drawing a bevy of admirers while playing with his band Sparklehorse. But guitarist Mark Linkous spent his final moments right here in Knoxville.

The man who'd played with such diverse performers as Radiohead and Danger Mouse killed himself Saturday afternoon in an alley outside a North Knoxville house.

"He was one of those artists who was a real musician's musician," said Ashley Capps, president of music promotion company AC Entertainment. "How many people can say that Tom Waits was a guest on your record? Other artists had a very deep appreciation of his work. It's very sad that none of the things he was working on will come to fruition."

Capps called him a "unique artist with a very intimate but powerful vision that really tugged on the heartstrings of his fans."

According to a Knoxville Police Department report, Linkous was moving in with friend and Sparklehorse drummer Scott Minor at a home on Irwin Street off Broadway. He got a text message Saturday afternoon with bad news.

Minor, along with friend Ray Burton, told police that Linkous said he was going for a walk. He had been drinking, they said.

Linkous, who performed last year at the inaugural Big Ears Festival in Knoxville, was then seen walking down an alley between Irwin and Stewart streets.

Neighbor Joe Gasser told police he saw the guitarist shoot himself in the chest with a rifle, according to the report. Minor and Burton heard the shot and found Linkous lying in the alley with the rifle in his lap. Police arrived about 1:20 p.m.

The Virginia native's family posted a statement about his death on the Sparklehorse Web site Saturday.

"It is with great sadness that we share the news that our dear friend and family member, Mark Linkous, took his own life today," they said. "We are thankful for his time with us and will hold him forever in our hearts. May his journey be peaceful, happy and free. There's a heaven and there's a star for you."

Cruz Contreras, leader of the Black Lillies and formerly of Robinella and the CCstringband, called the death "tragic, terrible news."

"I was thrilled to be getting to know him," Contreras said Monday. "I thought it was a great thing for Knoxville that he was moving here."

Contreras became friends with Minor in 2008 and recorded the Black Lillies' debut album at Minor's home studio. Linkous was a regular visitor. While he said he did not know Linkous that well, he did know that he was going through some personal problems.

Contreras said Linkous' group was working on a new album, but he didn't know how much of it had been completed.

In England, Colin Greenwood of Radiohead paid tribute on the band's Web site.

"He and his band toured with us in Europe, at the start of OK Computer, and they were great every night. His first two records were very important to me, and I carried his music from the tour into my life, and my friends' lives too. He was softly spoken, with an Old South courtesy I hadn't heard before ... Mark wrote and played some beautiful music, and we're lucky to have it. Rest in Peace."

Kristen Letsinger may be reached at 865-342-6432. Writer Wayne Bledsoe contributed to this report.



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