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OBITUARY

Mark Linkous dies at 47; singer-songwriter of Sparklehorse

The multi-instrumentalist, acclaimed for his innovative work and dreamy sound, committed suicide Saturday. He recorded with Tom Waits and Danger Mouse, and toured with Radiohead in the 1990s.

By Valerie J. Nelson

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Mark Linkous, a reclusive singer-songwriter who recorded as the virtual one-man band Sparklehorse, known for an often haunting and dreamy alternative-pop sound, committed suicide Saturday in Knoxville, Tenn. He was 47.

"It is with great sadness that we share the news that our dear friend and family member, Mark Linkous, took his own life," his family announced on his website.

His publicist, Shelby Meade, confirmed that he had used a gun.

Linkous had long struggled with depression and almost died in 1996 in a drug-related incident that briefly left him paralyzed. Subsequently, he had several leg surgeries and wore leg braces to walk.

Sparklehorse's 1996 debut album, "Vivadixiesubmarinetransmissionplot," was particularly popular with the British media, who "fell for the haunting mix of low-fi rural rock, dream-time pop and inward-looking imagery," pop music writer Steve Hochman said in 1999 in *The Times*.

Produced with the help of David Lowery of the rock band Cracker, the album scored an alternative-radio hit with the single "Someday I Will Treat You Good."

Often compared to Neil Young, Linkous was a guitarist and multi-instrumentalist who worked with a number of vintage instruments and odd noisemakers. He played almost everything on recordings but would perform with a band.

In the mid-1990s, Sparklehorse was invited to join Radiohead's tour, which took Linkous to the London hotel where he almost died.

His second album, "Good Morning Spider," reflected his recovery. It includes the elegiac "Saint Mary," named for the hospital where he spent months; and "Pig," written when "I was mad that I can't have my old body back," he said in 1999.

Linkous was born in 1962 in Richmond, Va., into a coal-mining family and left home with his guitar as a teen.

After spending several years in struggling bands in New York and Los Angeles, he was about to give up when he heard a recording by the low-tech Tom Waits.

"I wanted to make pop music as interesting as Waits' blues," Linkous said. He returned home to try to "make just great music."

In a Virginia farmhouse, he started experimenting with unusual sounds -- singing through toilet paper rolls or recording with a washing machine running. Later, he moved to a small North Carolina town in the Smoky Mountains.

"I love his songs," said Waits, who would end up recording with Linkous. "It's like opening your eyes underwater at the bottom of a stream. You go, 'Jesus, look what's down here.' I feel like I'm hearing what is between radio stations with him."

Five years elapsed between the release of another acclaimed Sparklehorse album, "It's a Wonderful Life," and 2006's "Dreamt for Light Years in the Belly of a Mountain," on which he collaborated with Brian Burton, a musician and producer better known as Danger Mouse.

The reason for the delay was depression: "It was this vortex I couldn't climb out of," Linkous told The Times in 2007.

Linkous is survived by his wife, Teresa; mother, Gloria Hughes Thacker; father, Frederick Linkous; and brothers Paul and Daniel.

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