

“There’s a Heaven and, There’s a Star For You” A Farewell to Mark Linkous, Known to the World as Sparklehorse

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By Dylan Samson



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“A horse, a horse, a kingdom, for a horse. Rattling on, magnetic, fields. Yes I did use up, the last box, of sparklers. Before they went bad, got wet or decayed. Homecoming queen, Homecoming Queen.”

When I first heard these years 4 years ago, I was amazed. I did not know why at the time, but those lyrics, as strange as they

are, had a more profound effect on me than any had before. They were powerful and revealing without really saying anything. They were full of emotion and sorrow without talking about a sad subject. I could not fully comprehend the song at the time, but I instantly fell in love with it. This was my first experience with the music of Mark Linkous, the artist known to most of the world as Sparklehorse. Since then, I have become a huge fan of the music of Sparklehorse, have come to view Linkous as a personal hero

I learned that he committed suicide on Monday morning.

Linkous shot himself in the heart Saturday, March 6th, in the alleyway outside of a friend’s house in Knoxville Tenn. Police responded quickly to the call, and paramedics pronounced him dead on the scene.

Linkous, born in Arlington Virginia in 1962, had been an active musician since the early 80’s. He had moved to New York City after graduating high school, where he co-founded the band The Dancing Hoods. The band released a self titled EP, which was followed by the album *12 Jealous Roses*, one year later. The record was well received in the New York indie scene, and gave way to a follow-up album, *Hallelujah Anyway*, in 1988. *Hallelujah Anyway* became a minor hit on college radio stations and was even featured on MTV. The band moved to LA later that year in hopes of commercial success, but broke up before



Mark at work.

releasing any more music. Disillusioned with the LA music system, Linkous moved back to Virginia. Here he began recording music under the name Sparklehorse.

In 1996, Linkous went on a tour of England with Radiohead to support his first Sparklehorse album *Vivadixiesubmarinetransmissionplot*. On this tour, Linkous overdosed on a mixture of Valium and antidepressants in his hotel room. He collapsed unconscious, pinning his legs beneath him for almost 14 hours. The potassium build up in his legs almost rendered him wheelchair bound for the rest of his life, and caused his heart to stop when the paramedics lifted him off the floor. He was rushed to Saint Mary’s hospital where several surgeries kept him from losing his legs, but kept him wheelchair bound for 6 months. He never fully regained all the strength in his legs.

Following his release from the hospital, Linkous returned to work as Sparklehorse, releasing the album *Good Morning Spider*, in 1998. The album was widely acclaimed by critics and fans, and is regarded as hallmark indie/lo-fi/dream rock album of the 1990s. Many of the songs deal with his recovery following his accident, and the depression he fell into following it. The song Saint Mary is dedicated to the nurses who helped him through his 6 month recovery in the hospital of the same name.

In 2001, Linkous recorded and released his third album under the Sparklehorse moniker, titled *It’s A Wonderful Life*. Keeping the lo-fi/dream rock feel of the past two Sparklehorse releases, the album was the first to not be recorded in Linkous’ home studio, with Linkous playing all the parts. Recording in a commercial studio, *It’s A Wonderful Life* featured guest appearances by high profile artists such as PJ Harvey, Dave Fridmann, Tom Waits, Nina Persson, and Vic Chestnut. Like the two albums before it, *It’s A Wonderful Life* was well received by critics and fans.



Following his hospitalization, Linkous struggled with depression for many years. He dealt with this depression during the recording of *Good Morning Spider* and *It’s A Wonderful Life*. But following the release of these two albums, Linkous slipped further into depression. To help pull him out of it, some of Linkous’ friends played him new music they thought might inspire him to make new music. The album that he said got him back into the studio was the Dangermouse mash up album *The Grey Album*. Linkous invited Danger Mouse to play on some new recordings that would turn into the next Sparklehorse release, *Dreamt For Light Years in the Belly of a Mountain*. This began a partnership between the two artists that lasted until the end of Linkous’ life.

Dreamt For Light Years in the Belly of a Mountain, was recorded between 2001 and 2006, and released in 2006. It was the final solo Sparklehorse release before Linkous’ death, and featured contributions from Danger Mouse, Stephen Drozd, Dave Fridmann, and Tom Waits. The album got overall positive reviews and was well received by fans.

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Following some minor touring to support *Dreamt For Light Years*, Linkous began recording new material with Danger Mouse. The pair recorded many instrumental tracks together over the course of a few years. They sent these tracks out to artists and asked them to write lyrics and sing over the music. The resulting product became what is known today as *Danger Mouse and Sparklehorse Present: Dark Night of the Soul*. The album features vocals by The Flaming Lips, Gruff Rhys, Jason Lytle, Julian Casablancas, Black Francis, Iggy Pop, David Lynch, James Mercer, Mark Linkous, Nina Persson, Suzanne Vega, and Vic Chestnut. David Lynch also contributed a series of photographs to accompany the music. The album’s release was blocked however, when EMI sued Danger Mouse over undisclosed legal disputes. The Thursday before Linkous’ death, Danger Mouse announced that the disputes had been settled and that the album now had a tentative summer release.

After following Linkous’ music and career for four years, I think I can now accurately vocalize why the song Homecoming Queen had such a profound affect on me. Even though the lyrics are largely unimportant, when Mark Linkous sings them, it seems as if the world fades away. He sings softly and sweetly, almost as if he is confiding in you. He lets down all walls with his music, leaving himself completely vulnerable. Very few musicians can do this,

so when one comes along it is worth it to take note. When one of these musicians dies, it is essential to mourn them. In the case of Mark Linkous, a soul who had suffered for so long, there are two appropriate quotes that come to mind. The first is from his song *Chaos of the Galaxy/Happy Man* and states “All is to be a happy man.” I know I speak for all his fans when I say that, in death, I hope he has finally become one. The second is from his song *Hey, Joe*, and should be said to whatever part of Mark still lingers on this world, “There’s a heaven and, there’s a star for you.”

Farewell Mark.
