

## The Night I Met Mark Linkous...

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It was a real shame to hear of [Mark Linkous' death](#) at the weekend. At his peak, **Linkous** was a devastatingly brilliant songwriter – the first two **Sparklehorse** albums were inspirational, veering from heart-breaking folk melancholia to fuzzed-up alt.rock. Given I've only just got round to writing this, there's already loads of blogs out there who've highlighted Linkous' genius in a way that's negates me repeating it here – check out [Luke Lewis' blog over at NME.com](#) – so I thought instead I'd share the time that I met Mark Linkous.

On an unbelievably hot night in August 1999, me and some friends shook off the fear of our impending A-Level results by venturing up to London from Chelmsford to see **Sparklehorse** at The Garage. The problem was that none of us had tickets. Being relatively wet behind the ears at the extortionate levels of bending you over touts go to, we assumed we'd be able to get a ticket for £20 or so – still fairly steep, considering you could get 20 bottles of Budweiser (whooo hoo!) at The Globe pub in Chelmo for that. But, nope, the touts had other ideas, and we were informed by the Bald Bastard tout with no teeth who looks like Gollum (c'mon, you must've seen him at EVERY gig in London) that one ticket for **Sparklehorse** would set us back £80. That's 80 bottles of Budweiser – a whole summer of fun – he was asking us for. A little shocked, and with our bartering skills shot down by Bald Bastard's insistence, we decided to go to a pub and console ourselves with a drink instead. As we started walking towards Highbury Corner, though, who should we see gaily dandering along the road but **Mark Linkous. THE MARK LINKOUS!**

We excitedly surrounded him, regaling him with our torturous treatment at the hands of Bald Bastard, to which he expressed his disgust by exclaiming, "80 QUID?!" – hearing him say the word quid in his Virginia twang still gives me a chuckle now. Then, though, came an act of kindness that underlined Linkous as most definitely one of the good guys. "I've got an idea," he said, instructing us to follow him round to the back of The Garage. He knocked on the door and it swung open, a feisty security guard blocking the way. "Yes?" she said, which we took to mean, "err, I know you're in the band, but you went out a minute ago for a wander and now you've come back with 5 teenagers – WHAT THE FUCK?" "Can I get these guys in?" Mark pleaded. "But the list is full – they need to be on the list," she retorted. Then came the coup-de-fucking-grace. "But," said Mark, "these guys are my friends." She let us in! AND Mark Linkous, a most generous man we'd been in the company of for little over six minutes, just called us his friends!

We thanked Mark and took him to the bar to let us buy him a drink. "I'll just have a coke, please," he said. We knew what this meant – we'd read in the NME about his dalliances with drugs'n'booze, it meant he was clean, so we bought him a coke. Then, in an act of utter, utter cool, he pulled a big fat bottle of Jack Daniels from under his coat (that he was wearing a coat in what was the hottest fucking venue in the world on the hottest night of the 90s was also an act of cool) and poured it into the coke, disappearing into the crowd to get ready to play the gig.

What a fucking hero. RIP, **Mark Linkous** – a man I met for a total of 15 minutes, but who I was honoured to be called a friend of.

