

# The Man From Mitch and Murray

A blog about the band Mitch and Murray (and other things)

## Cover-a-month-challenge (belated). November. Sparklehorse- “Spirit Ditch”.



Mark Linkous: Sadly missed.

I was talking on twitter the other day about the fact that it's hard to listen to Sparklehorse for me. A couple of years back I wrote a blog post about Mark Linkous' suicide, explaining precisely how much the band had meant to me and how much he'd be missed. I played a Sparklehorse tune at my next gig (first cover I'd done in years), the same one I'd used in order to work out how to use my brother's four track. Those four track recordings went on to be the basis of Mitch & Murray, so those records have a place in my heart forever. Nowadays when I listen to Sparklehorse it's like stumbling upon an old cassette recording of a long lost relative. I'd never felt like that about a musician before and probably didn't know how I felt until I'd heard that Linkous- a long term sufferer of depression and I believe drug addict- had shot himself through the heart. He'd just finished an album in collaboration with David Lynch and Dangermouse, along with a host of great talent, and I was waiting for the next album. And like a knock on the door or a telephone call, you know that you'll forget yourself and expect it- only to remember and realise it's never going to come.

I won't retread old ground as if you're reading this then you'll have probably read the other blog entries and tweets on the topic. If you've heard my music you can definitely hear the influence from Linkous in there. Of course, I can't carry off everything that he did. My falsetto doesn't crack in the same fragile way that his did. My guitars never quite shimmer as much. My lyrics don't quite capture the same desolation, perhaps because I reach at it too directly. Take this song, *Spirit Ditch*, for example. He culls one Neil Young lyric for himself ("woke up in a burned out basement") and constructs a surrealist masterpiece that draws in images of David

Lynch (“the owls have been talking to me”) and Bunuel/Dali (“the moon it writhes with such horse laughter/it’s dragging pianos to the ocean”). And despite the surrealism there’s still a haunting melancholy that delivers the message, or perhaps just the mood. The song is split by a desperate answerphone message from Linkous’ mother that remains haunting to this day, especially after his suicide.

The whole album follows suit. *Vivadixiesubmarinetransmissionplot* is an understated masterpiece (and I don’t use that word lightly). In fact, each album had its own direction, charm and sound. You can’t compare the minimalist, stripped down, almost aggressively bare production on the first album to the crackling vinyl of *It’s a Wonderful Life*, or the overt poppiness of *Dreamt for Lightyears In The Belly of a Mountain*, or even the warm tones of *Good Morning, Spider*. Each album has its own colour or tone.

*Vivadixie...* contains the bare bones of songs, even if there are overdubs. *Wicked Sisters* is like a grunge track without the dirty guitars; *Saturday* is the most beautiful piece of unheard music the world has ever had; the same could be said for *Sad and Beautiful World*, *Most Beautiful Widow in Town* and *Heart of Darkness*. *Tears on Fresh Fruit* tears a whole in you, whereas *Cow* lulls and stomps its way through a solid chunk of Neil Young-esque reflection. And that was just the start of his career.

I never attempt to improve on the originals, only do what I think might sound nice (even if it does end up a bit of a mess). In this cover I wanted to capture the drama of the second verse, with it’s almost hopeful opening line and it’s sorrowful end (“if I had a home I know it be in a slide trombone”). The song never climaxes but sways or rocks like an ocean, so I tried to push the delay and reverb up to 11, which Linkous doesn’t on the original. I let the guitars and vocals slip to the background as if they were overcome and drowned by the rest of the song. That was something that Linkous always verged on: some tracks threatened to engulf him entirely, but he remained there on the surface, barely holding on. The acoustic started as a guide track but remained once I felt it pinned things together nicely.

The noise in the background during the first 6 seconds is my living room clock. The answerphone message, in homage to Mark Linkous’ mum, is a call from Cash Generator asking me if I want to buy my old guitar pedals back (“*I want my records back...*”, odd coincidence that fits perfectly in time with the tempo of the song).

RIP Mark Linkous. RIP Sparklehorse.