

Remembering Mark Linkous

posted on March 23rd, 2012 by Justin Pansacola



It was almost exactly two years ago that the music world lost Mark Linkous, better known as Sparklehorse. Under this name, he worked with everyone from Danger Mouse to Thom Yorke and even filmmaker David Lynch. It's not so simple to describe what he sounded like, but it was easy to describe how his music felt: Often peaceful, but with a heavy underlying pain. When we lost Linkous, it brought to mind the old adage that all artists suffer for their work. Sometimes that's a romanticized notion, as if darkness in music is actually an exciting flavor, but when we lose an artist of Linkous' talent, it reminds us that some artists suffer more than others.

In a eulogy written by Emily Haines of Metric, she said his music made us feel as though we were "stones on a river bed." It's an apt image, one that's both tumultuous and peaceful, but still buried underwater. His music could sound like classic 90s alternative with driving riffs, but with a lo-fi fuzz that gave it distance as on the songs "Happy Man" or "Pig," or he could bring it down to unparalleled intimate levels as on "It's A Wonderful Life." A lot of singer-songwriters sing in a sort of breathy, quiet tone, but Linkous sang in levels below whispering. It was weak, like a faint radio signal, but it conveyed more heart than any amount of hollering.

He always seemed to live near the edge of tragedy. An accidental overdose in the 90's left him wheelchair bound for months, which became fodder for his album *Good Morning Spider*, a well received and often troubled album about the climb toward happiness, the fragility of our lives and the kicking of loneliness, all wrapped up in catchy, mellow melodies. It was as soothing as sadness could get.

One way to judge an artist's talent is by the opinion his peers have of him. If that is in anyway reflected by the sheer amount of collaborations Linkous had, then it's safe to say he was pretty well respected. Even before his collaboration with Danger Mouse and David Lynch on the album *Dark Night of the Soul*, which featured mind-blowing all-stars on each track, he was already hammering things out with veterans like Tom Waits. His talent didn't go unrecognized.

Still, it all came to an end just two years ago. He was the type of artist who felt like he made music because he had to – because there was no other way to beat back the darkness. It was the kind of too-real core that made his music both thrilling and uncomfortable, in the same way some Elliott Smith songs are now haunting to listen to. Mark Linkous deserves to be remembered as a reminder that there's a cost to making music and that tortured suffering shouldn't be a requirement. But even above all that, he was another great songwriter lost to us, and a unique mind that couldn't be spared.