

## MORNING BECOMES ECLECTIC



## David Lynch and Danger Mouse

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Host: Jason Bentley

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Director **David Lynch** and **Danger Mouse** (aka Brian Burton) sat down with Morning Becomes Eclectic host Jason Bentley to talk together for the first time about their collaboration on *Dark Night of the Soul*. The conversation was so enlightening that we decided to offer the session as part of KCRW's half-hour show the *Politics of Culture* at 2:30pm, but before we do, we'll hear a highlight on *Morning Becomes Eclectic* at the top of the 11o'clock hour.

**MBE Interview Jason Bentley with Danger Mouse and David Lynch**

**JB:** *Dark Night of the Soul* sees an official release in July, the album from Danger Mouse and Sparkle Horse has been getting some airplay for some time on KCRW, I guess we had a bootleg or something since last year. We are joined now by Danger Mouse and David Lynch in studio. Hello gentleman.

**DL:** How you doing Jason?

**JB:** Good to see you. Thank you for stopping by KCRW.

**DM:** Thanks for having us.

**JB:** So, we were all saddened by the news of the passing of Mark Linkous, who was Sparklehorse, as well as Vic Chestnutt, who was a collaborator on this record. But I do want to start with you, Danger Mouse, and just the origins of this project, because I remember talking to you quite a few years ago and you referred to this collaboration at that time, and this was maybe three or four years ago now. So tell us how this got started.

**DM:** It was really simple. Mark and I were working on his last album. And basically we got to a point where he was playing me a song that he had come up with on his guitar and he was humming it and singing it and I thought it was really, really beautiful, and couldn't wait to start working on it. So we started working on it musically together, and we took a couple of turns here and there, but when it came time to sing it, all bets were off. He was like, "I can't sing that." It just wasn't in the right range for him or the way he wanted it to be sung for it to sound good. He had a very particular way that he felt comfortable with his voice and that wasn't it.

Even though the music was really something he was excited about and he would love to hear *somebody* sing it. And that's really where the idea came from where I said to him, "Does this happen much" and he said, "Well sometimes" and it's like well I do that all the time, I work on music all the time where I don't sing on it, why don't we do this together, why don't we try it that way. And he just lit up, kind of like he'd never thought to do something like that really. Let's do it, let's try that.

It was because that song was so good, that song turned out to be "Just War." It was just an early demo for that, so it didn't obviously get finished by Mark himself, but the melody and things were there and Gruff from Super Furry Animals came in and did the vocals for it. That's how it started. He and I became really good friends, more so than having done a lot of music, it's just we became good friends when we did work together, so we looked forward to having an excuse to mess around again.

**JB:** Take us back to first meeting him. How long ago did you first start working together?

**DM:** I first met him in 2005. I talked to him on the telephone. I had met his manager at a music conference just randomly on the street. She gave him *The Grey Album* back in 2004, I think it would have been. And I just got a phone call about six months later. I was running around with the Gorillaz guys doing some promotional stuff, and I got a phone call from him. And I was really a big fan, so I wanted to sound all cool on the phone I guess. And it was really a quick conversation and when I got off the phone I had agreed to come out to him and mess around with some music because he was in a rut, he said, so he sent me some music to listen to. It had been four years since he'd done his last record or something like that so I just went out there to give him a little boost, I guess or something like that. And he picked me up from the airport and that was it. We just hung out and made music some of the time. But that was it.

**JB:** I read somewhere you describing creating a director's role within music. So I wonder on this project in particular, *Dark Night of the Soul*, did it open up to feel like a very filmic project at a certain point.

**DM:** I said that a while ago and it was not exactly that; it got twisted as things do. I was asked a question about whose career I kind of wanted, I guess, like what musician. I said I didn't. I said if anything it would be closer to something like film directors, they are who I kind of look towards in that kind of way. Because I don't want the people I work with thinking I'm this person who's going to tell them exactly what to do and all that kind of stuff because that's not the way it works.

But with this record, it was a little bit of both because there was a lot of traveling to Miami or Portland or New York to go meet with one singer to do one thing, you know it was very business-y, and that was after the music was actually already created. So it was kind of both sides of things. But I definitely wasn't as in control as I would imagine most directors are. You just try to kind of work with people who you know are going to be good – or maybe that's what directors do too, I don't know – but you pick a bunch of good people and it's probably going to work out pretty good.

**JB:** There's an interesting group of collaborators on this record. I wonder if you thought of them as fulfilling roles that you had devised with Mark as you wrote the music.

**DM:** It wasn't that premeditated or thought out. I wish I could say we had this great vision and all that kind of stuff. I think we just went with what felt good for as long as we could and got as many cool people that we liked to be on the album as we could, and it just so happens that Mark and I -- and the people we chose -- like kind of darker, depressing kind of music, what it seems to be to other people, kind of a melancholy thing, and the subject matters reflect that and just similar kind of taste I guess with the people on here. I don't think anybody on here we thought was going to be some kind of a loose cannon in any kind of way outside of the realm of what we liked ourselves and what we liked about them. So we got some really amazing results from everybody.

**JB:** Well one of your collaborators is here with us. It's filmmaker David Lynch. David, describe how you first got connected to this project.

**DL:** My assistant, Mindy, came to me one day and says "Danger Mouse wants to see you." And I said, "Whoa, wait a minute, what would he want to see me about?" And so, next thing I know, Danger Mouse is coming up to my house and he sits down with me and I think I got him a coffee and he starts talking about this idea. And I really

like this idea, this concept he had, that I would listen to the music -- not for a video, but for still images. And I'd see what come into my mind just listening to the music, and then do three or four photographs. Number one, I love photography, two, I love this concept of just whatever comes. And so I thought, "yeah, this is a really good way to go." And then I joked and I said "I thought you were coming up here because you wanted me to sing on this thing" and he said "No no no, I do", but he was like being real polite. And so one thing led to another, and not only did a get to do the photographs, but I got to sing on two tracks.

**DM:** And I was just kind of being polite at first, but I think after a second of saying that, because I didn't know how I was getting my way out of it; this was my first time meeting you. So I was like I don't know if you're a crazy old man, I don't know what's going on, I have no idea. But as we talked a little bit, you explained that you'd sung in the "Inland Empire" stuff; I think I remember you mentioning that. I had heard it, but I didn't know that was your voice. So I went back home, listened to it again. I knew I had heard it and liked it, but I didn't ever think to put two and two together that it was your voice, because I knew you had done music before, but I'd never heard you sing before.

So at first I was thrown off a little bit, but then when I heard it, it was...and Mark, of course, when I told Mark, Mark knew 100 percent; he already knew that you sang and everything else. But I didn't want to tell Mark that I was going to meet with David because Mark was a huge, huge, huge fan and I didn't want to disappoint him if David didn't do it. Because Mark, obviously we're joking about, but he is a very sensitive person so you kind of have to watch what you say and I was like "Oh, I'll wait until it's for sure, I'll wait until it's absolutely certain," before I went back to him.

**JB:** David, did this afford you an opportunity to do something very new for you? And how did you approach the photography.

**DL:** Exactly the way Danger Mouse said. I have a music studio, and so Dean is the engineer, Big Dean Hurley is the engineer, and Dean and I work on music together. But anyway, Dean put on the tracks and I don't think there were singers on all of them. Danger Mouse had been working, he said, for three years, but I listened to maybe some tracks just instrumental and some tracks with lyrics. Just closed my eyes, write on a yellow pad what comes in. And eventually got these images and Danger Mouse organized this whole shoot; we had a crew, like shooting a film. We went all over the place trying to get these four photographs for each song and so I looked at it like...these photographs would never have existed if it wasn't for Danger Mouse and Sparklehorse; it was really beautiful and we had a great time doing them.

**JB:** You know, there's a beautiful companion piece -- the **book**, which came out. And when that originally came out, it was accompanied by two CD-R's, correct? Like blank discs.

**DM:** There was one. There was one CD-R that came in the back of it. I can't get into too many of the details about the legalities of exactly what happened, but since there were two very strong elements the goal would have been to have them both coincide with each other, both through a book and through a gallery which is something that we eventually put together and got to show. It just happened that the music being released, and the book and the gallery thing didn't work out in the right time. They didn't for a lot of reasons. I wish they had and through my wishing they had, I guess that's why the CD-R was in there and was blank. That's about as much as I can say.

We had a goal; we didn't quite get there, but I think we were all really happy when the book came out; we were happy when the gallery was there and we were all certainly proud of the music and I think that the album coming out will kind of see it -- finally all the way through.

**JB:** You know, it's interesting because you came on the scene originally with the Grey Album, making such a splash. That was this kind of illicit bootleg thing -- a mash-up thing that combined two separate things -- the Beatles and Jay-Z -- and I wonder if that experience gave you any fortitude or confidence in sort of holding your ground on how you see things as you were challenged with, perhaps, the release of this album, *Dark Night of the Soul*.

**DM:** Well... I think it's just -- I guess at the time, it was just too late. It was just where... you have an idea, you convince all these people to do something and you don't want to look like a jackass. You want to see it through all the way, at least on the creative side of things. If the monetary element doesn't work out, you gotta hope you're involved with people who aren't gonna go at your throat for it. And not one person on my side, on the creative side, said anything about that and I knew that that was going to be the big sacrifice, more than anything. And I was fortunate to be around and working with a bunch of people with that, on the creative side, anyway -- not necessarily the label side -- the creative side, that weren't that worried about that. And I think that we all saw that through all the way and, as long as I do that, that's more who I'm worried about than anything else.

**JB:** Will there be a more official release that includes the book and the finished CD now?

**DM:** No. I think the book, the way it happened -- the book was out -- we luckily went through them. We did 5,000 copies of them and they're all gone and they went pretty good. The gallery certainly helped. The gallery was up for a few months and that was great.

**JB:** Will that continue at all?

**DM:** Yeah, we did another one in Miami for Art Basel this past December, I think it was...I'll just say Winter, how about that? And there's going to be a new one in New York around the release time in July. So, that might be the last one, there might be another one, I don't know, we'll see. I didn't know that we were going to do three in the beginning, so who knows? The only thing that's in the plans right now is just this next one. It'll be great, because it's New York -- I'm sure there'll be a lot of people who will get to see it who haven't seen it and hear the music along with it the way we kind of thought it would work.

**JB:** Let's delve into the album a little bit. I'd love for you to tell us a story about your interaction with any of these players -- Julian Casablancas, Frank Black, James Mercer...I'm curious if the James Mercer sessions were the first glimpse of what then became Broken Bells.

**DM:** No. Everybody assumes that, but it wasn't just because of the time -- the way stuff worked out with the timing of it. As David was saying, when I first gave him the majority of the record, there was about -- maybe out of the 13 songs -- there was maybe four or five that weren't finished and one in particular I was hoping to get James on, but I was already working with James on Broken Bells. About halfway through the sessions for Broken Bells, we were finishing up the album, we were almost done and Mark had come out to L.A. to put the last finishing touches on it and James happened to be here too, because they overlapped. So he recorded his part on that song then and he also did some backing vocals on "Just War."

There were a couple of things. I don't want to get too long-winded. I had to convince Julian to be on the record. I had to convince people a lot. He first had the track that we gave him, the song "Little Girl," and I didn't know Julian -- we had common friends but I didn't really know him. And generally, everybody on here, either I knew them decently or Mark knew them. I didn't really know Julian, but I still really wanted him on the record. I just couldn't think of anyone else being on this song.

So I sent it to him and we got in touch with each other and he sent me back a demo of him just sitting in his room, I guess, with a little dictaphone and he just sang a little melody over the top of it and then sent it back to me and goes, "Here's this little thing I did." And I was like, "This is great. Why don't we figure out this and if we need a studio or anything, I'll come to you or you come to me" and he was like, "I don't think I can do it." He liked it. He just hadn't started on his solo record yet -- I don't really know what was going on -- but he just said he didn't think he could do it and I was heartbroken because this was one of the last songs. I didn't want to bother him, I told him "It's fine, no big deal," and then it became a big deal to me a couple of months later. I started badgering him a little bit -- it's just so good, the melody and everything is so good. I guess I could give it to someone else to sing this melody and get all these people involved, but I don't know...I guess somehow I convinced him and I went to New York and I think I said, "I coming to New York and if you can find it in you to try this out..." So we went there and we worked within the studio; first time I met him is when I went there to work and get him to record this song and... he pulled out the guitar, we took a couple days and we recorded the song that way... and I think he was happy with it, you know. He's very easy to work with.

**JB:** David tell us a little about your recordings as a singer on this record, your experiences.

**DL:** Well, it's the same thing. When you listen to a track, ideas start coming. So sometimes Danger Mouse asks for ideas for the visual ideas, you know, and then lyric ideas, and it just pops out of the music... so that's what popped

out. And I'm not really a musician or a singer, but I love music ... I just love it. And I love musicians. But these things just came out of the music that Sparklehorse and Danger Mouse made.

**JB:** Did you have any back and forth on developing the songs?

**DL:** No, I finished doing the two, I think. I don't know if we sent them both at the same time but?

**DM:** No, just the one at first.

**DL:** Just on, just one.

**DM:** Yeah, the *Dark Night of the Soul* was the first one you sent.

**DL:** Right, and then Danger Mouse, I guess, did some more work on the tracks...

**DM:** Yeah me and Mark both did, a little bit yeah.

**DL:** And it became much better, much nicer. And so there was some back and forth, I guess.

**DM:** Yeah just a little stuff, you'd just want to make sure "is this O.K.?" and it's a weird one to do when you're doing music that way because you want, when you're collaborating with that many people involved, of course I'll still have in my head exactly the way I think it should sound but you want people to be happy and then something that somebody else wants to do with it, I have to think to myself, "well that's not going to mess the song up." I'd rather hear it a little bit like this, but then again they sang on the song or Mark would think this way and just you know ... luckily when all was said and done we were all happy with it and it was fine, there's nothing else I would, nothing I would change about it.

**DL:** This song "Star Eyes," it was real simple, like a child's thing, real pure, and then they went and wrecked it, and added a bunch of other stuff. (laughter)

**DM:** Yeah, we, we, we made it really big...

**DL:** I said, "Guys, could you please? Could you please? Can we go to the original?" They said "Yeah, yeah, yeah, sure, sure" and so it's back to that.

**DM:** It happens; that happens a lot. With Mark and myself I know we talk about it all the time. This thing where you kind of... you listen to the demo, or not even to call it a demo because obviously it was finished, but you have to know when to stop and when to go on and had David been there when we were in the studio deciding to do this or do that or get the arranger, we may not even have done it. But you know, it was Mark and I, we were the main ones going back and forth with stuff and anytime we did stuff with people, we would always send it back. Whenever we would edit things you know, we would send it back just to see, because they're all musicians themselves too, you know, and so you want their opinion on things, and that's just, it's definitely a normal process. I've done that same thing myself a bunch of times, where we've added something and gone right back to the demo...

**DL:** You've got to give it a shot you know.

**DM:** Or ... well, I hate to call it a demo. You go to the original, the original thing that you thought was finished.

**DL:** Idea..

**DM:** Yeah, the original idea, absolutely. And you just go, "well it just adds a little bit more charm to it..." than the other."

**JB:** Danger Mouse earlier you downplayed the idea of you as a director in the music world but sitting now with the both of you as renowned producer and renowned director, I just wonder about the role reversal here - observations on what each of you do so well. Danger Mouse, it does sound like you have this ability in communicating with artists to be sensitive, to press them when you need to press them and to really help to work on a concept until it feels finished. And that's such a skill and obviously you're very successful at it. I guess to simplify the question, would you ever direct a film?

**DM:** I wanted to direct films before I wanted to make music. When I moved to Athens, Georgia everybody was doing music and I started to see that music was an art form - I never really looked at music like that, I looked at it much more as entertainment growing up and I didn't understand why anybody would ever do anything that wasn't going to be some big, huge deal. I figured everybody who made any music - that's what they were trying to do - and it didn't interest me really. I loved it but it didn't interest me as far as making it was concerned.

But I discovered film as art before I discovered music was art so I wanted to make films but, very quickly, I realized I could probably get something presentable much quicker with music than I could with films, you know this is in 1994, '95. So, the digital video thing wasn't really going so much then - not on the level where a college kid who has got no money can do anything with.

And the music was immediate. I mean, I knew people who had instruments. You could go play music wherever you needed to. I just got into it that way. So, I think I always look and think about stuff visually - and I guess that's a long answer to your question. But, yeah I definitely have thought about it in that way. But, I definitely don't mean to say it in any kind of way that makes it seem trivial like, "Oh, I'll just to decide to go do that, because as soon as I decide to I will." Even though part of me thinks that, I don't want to make it sound as though - it doesn't mean it's going to be good. You know? It's the idea of it. It'd be great. I think it would. Or maybe it would drive me crazy and I'd ruin everything if I tried that. So I don't know. But I definitely have thought about it and I think I have a lot more stuff I want to do musically before I really commit to something like that because it would have to be a full commitment. And people would probably be pretty harsh to me.

**DL:** I would be. (Laughter)

**DM:** Yeah exactly. Like, "What do you think you're doing? Go back over there. Go back in..."

**DL:** No, I'd just encourage him.

**JB:** Well, listen, I'd love to close with some thoughts about Mark Linkous, I know a lot of our listeners are...

**DL:** That would be real good, yeah...

**JB:** ...interested in how you've dealt with this. You know tragedy affects us all, but maybe if you have a few thoughts about Mark Linkous before we close.

**DM:** Well...Gosh, it would be a little helpful if it was more of a dialogue. I don't want to just kind of just...go into stuff that's extremely personal when it comes to that kind of thing...

**JB:** Well, I'm curious about why on this project he couldn't voice it, you know. On one level I'm just curious where was the limit for him in not being able to sing these songs.

**DM:** That's a little different from what you were originally asking, I think this was a lot more technical and he's not that different with many other singers that have a certain range that they feel comfortable in. I think that's all it really, really was...

**JB:** Just range - just range?

**DM:** Yeah, I think that's really all it was for that. And I know that he - before he died - he was working on his newest album. But he also did have trouble with that because, you know, all the music was done and the only thing that wasn't done was the vocals. He always waits 'til the end to do all the vocals and he does them by himself. I've never seen him sing anything that was kept, you know. He'd just - would go in a room himself and record himself doing all the actual finished vocals for all his projects.

He was just, he was a very sensitive guy, you know. A lot of things that happened both to him in his life and also things around him, he took them all in and they all kind of stayed with him all the time, you know. He had a lot of...he's had a lot of pain in him a lot and it really made it worse because he always felt like those things affected

other people, you know. And he had a lot of people around him who really cared about him, and so that just made it even more difficult a lot of times for him.

When I heard about it, when I got the phone call, I kind of figured that's what the call was. You know, I don't really hear from his manager very often. And I guess he's - he was - he never told me his age, he just wouldn't. I would joke with him about it all the time. I've heard different things, even now. I think he was 47 or 48 or something like that, you know. But from the time I'd known him, you know, he always, he was always kind of up and down about stuff. But in the last year or so he had seemed to be doing better, but he knew he had lots of issues with depression and things like that. So, I think that with the music that he's left behind and everything and the people that he's influenced - which is a lot -- I always try to think in context of what he would want and everything. But he's just so humble about stuff I don't think he would want very much at all. I want to tell people all the time but I think of him cringing about any kind of huge or big deals made of things.

And the sadness of it kind of went away much quicker than I thought it would just because I think that he... in the people that he was close to, he kind of prepared them for the idea that maybe he would want to be here for a while or not want to be here for a while. And if you're going to be close to somebody who's like that you have to... that's a choice, you don't have to be friends with somebody like that. Or you can and you can just take that as part of who that person is. And I think it took me a while after the fact to realize that's just who he was.

I think it still was a very positive thing being able to work with him. And the original thing was just learning from him and wanting to figure how he does what he does and everything else. But then, it was difficult to work with him. And we only really did it because it was an excuse for us to kind of hang out. And he'd come out to LA and most of the week we wouldn't even work. You know, he'd tell his wife and everybody else, "Oh yeah, we're working." But we would just hang out and watch movies we wouldn't really do anything. Because it was difficult for us. He was a producer himself and he was very opinionated as well. And we - a lot of times - we did not agree on stuff. And when you only keep stuff you agree on then it takes years. But we enjoyed it. So it was definitely overall still very, very fortunate for me to have been able to be around him and learn from him.

**JB:** David, do you have any thoughts about Mark?

**DL:** I really loved Sparklehorse. He was a really good guy. That's one of the best parts of this is Danger Mouse and Sparklehorse. But Sparklehorse I just met...you know, he came out - I guess - I probably...

**DM:** I think like a year and a half...something like that...

**DL:** Something like that maybe. But he was the greatest...I would have really liked him to be a friend and to see him every time he would come out to LA. He'd sit with you and you'd get him some bourbon - and he's got this great southern accent - and tell stories. So comfortable sitting with this guy, just really great. And he and I both smoked cigarettes. But he smoked these cigarettes down to...they're about an eighth of an inch long - maybe a sixteenth of an inch long. It's basically all flame when he finishes. And I'd look at him and he'd be working this thing - I mean, the last bit, I think his fingers must have been, you know, like numb or something.

**JB:** I think they are yeah. The guitar fingers. So he probably doesn't feel it.

**DL:** Yah. He doesn't feel it.

**JB:** The callouses.

**DL:** But it was great to sit and talk with Sparklehorse. Really, a really good guy. Really good guy.

**JB:** Alright, well Danger Mouse and David Lynch - thank you for coming through, talking about the new project well, just just now available it's *Dark Night of the Soul*. Thanks a lot guys.

**DM:** Thank you.

**DL:** Thanks, Jason.