

Mark Linkous of Sparklehorse Commits Suicide in North Knoxville

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Mark Linkous, the singer/songwriter who led the critically acclaimed band Sparklehorse since the mid-1990s, shot himself to death in a North Knoxville alley on Saturday afternoon, March 6, according to police. He was 47.

Linkous had moved to Knoxville, where his Sparklehorse bandmate Scott Minor has been living for the last couple of years, and was planning to open a recording studio.

Linkous had been suffering from “personal problems,” according to Lt. Greg Hoskins of the Knoxville Police Department, and told friends he was taking a walk. An eyewitness saw him in an alley off of Irwin Street with a rifle and called police at 1:20 p.m. The witness saw Linkous shoot himself. Hoskins says Linkous was dead at the scene.

Linkous, who grew up in Virginia and later lived in New York and North Carolina, recorded four albums of dark, country-tinged pop between 1996 and 2006 with Sparklehorse. The early albums *Vivadixiesubmarinetransmissionplot* (1996) and *Good Morning Spider* (1998) featured folk music filtered through lo-fi rock and distortion. The later albums *It's a Wonderful Life* (2001) and *Dreamt for Light Years in the Belly of a Mountain* (2006) were moodier and more atmospheric.

Linkous' main partner in Sparklehorse was Scott Minor, who has kept a low profile since moving here and opening his Elk Gang studio, where local artists the Black Lillies and Jill Andrews recorded their 2009 CDs.

“I was over at Scott's on a daily basis, so I got to know Mark over there,” says Cruz Contreras, of the Black Lillies. “He made a great impression on me, and I was thrilled to get to know him. This is definitely a tragedy for a lot of people. Right away, when I first met him, he was this mysterious rock star, but he was a really gentle spirit. He had a cool patience to him, and he was very supportive and very complimentary to us. That meant a lot to us, coming from him.”

Last year, Linkous collaborated with the producer Danger Mouse on *Dark Night of the Soul*, a collection of songs with a different guest vocalist—Iggy Pop, movie director David Lynch, Suzanne Vega, Julian Casablancas of the Strokes, Vic Chesnutt—on each track. He also released an album with the Austrian electronic composer Christian Fennesz, *In the Fishtank*. Linkous performed with Fennesz at the Big Ears festival in Knoxville in February 2009. AC Entertainment's Ashley Capps, who organized Big Ears, said on the Knox Blab message board that Linkous had been interested in moving to Knoxville since the festival.

“He had actually moved there,” wrote his manager, Shelby Meade, in an e-mail on Monday. “The studio was moved there on Friday. He loved Knoxville and was happy with all the friends and support he found there.”

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