



## Sparklehorse's Linkous says it's lonely being a one-man band

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By Joshua Klein

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Recording as Sparklehorse affords Mark Linkous autonomy and anonymity.

But life as Sparklehorse's sole creative visionary - and sole permanent member - can still get a little lonely.

"I usually record and play everything myself," says Virginia native and current North Carolina resident Linkous, with his slow drawl. "But sometimes I envy proper bands and having people around you as cushioning. I'm reading that Beatles book that just came out, 'Recording the Beatles.' I'm so envious. Everyone in the band was so creative. It was a team."

Lest one forget, the Beatles' recording career lasted just seven years. But Linkous took nearly that long to release the latest Sparklehorse disc, "Dreamt for Light Years in the Belly of a Mountain," his fourth album overall and first since 2001.

"Well, that wasn't intentional," Linkous mutters, somewhat ruefully. "This record was so hard to get together. I had songs that I had written during the recording of the last album ("It's a Wonderful Life") that I didn't put on that record. They were pop songs, and every time I tried to include an obvious guitar pop song on that record it just stuck out. My goal was to not have much guitar on that record and have things orchestrated. Therefore, I had these pop songs left over, but I always knew my next record would be pretty poppy.

"That was scary," he continues. "I can do slowed-down, sparse ballad stuff, but making pop music can easily sound trite and pedestrian if you're not really careful. And there's only so much you can do with a traditional structure of a pop song, songs that are verse-chorus-bridge and then the end."

Not that "pop music" is the first thing that comes to mind when you listen to "Mountain," which splits the difference between the weird rock of Linkous' friends in the Flaming Lips and the more mysterious sounds of Lips spin-off Mercury Rev. In fact, Sparklehorse can be pretty bleak, something Linkous concedes but defends.

"There are a lot of people that really matter to me who tell me these are records that got them through a really (bad) time," he relates. "People hear these songs and say, well, they feel exactly how I feel. I feel awful, I'm going through this terrible time, and this music helps me.

"For a while there, people might have been drawn to come see Sparklehorse because they were waiting for me to fall off the stage or something," says Linkous, who nearly was paralyzed by a 1996 drug overdose. "I'm still not sure if that's not true. But I've got such a good band now, and every show, every performance is not teetering on the edge of disaster all the time."

After a long stint of relative inactivity, Sparklehorse is back on the road, which means Linkous had to get himself a new band.

"I often change bands with each record release, so the only person I had ever played with in this new touring version of Sparklehorse is the drummer. I've known him for 20 years, and he's played on all my records. The bass player is new, and the keyboard player is new. We'd never met face to face before they just showed up in North Carolina at my studio to rehearse for about ten days, and then we went to Europe. That tour was great. Almost all the shows were sold out. I really felt like it had been too long and that people had forgotten about me and moved on and all these shows would be empty."

Though buoyed by the reaction, Linkous still is nervous about getting back on the stage .

"I never really told anyone that I can be an entertainer," he says, modestly. "I still don't think I'm very good. I have musician friends like Wayne Coyne (of the Flaming Lips) and Polly (PJ) Harvey, and it's like they have a switch. For a while I just hung out with Polly, and I had never seen her perform. Then I saw her and it scared me! I had known her as this polite, proper British girl, and she turned into this rock and roll animal."

Linkous chuckles. "That'd be nice to just flip a switch like that."

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