

◀Sparklehorse Singer Mark Linkous Remembered

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Heard on All Things Considered

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March 8, 2010 - ROBERT SIEGEL, host:

From NPR News, this is ALL THINGS CONSIDERED. I'm Robert Siegel.

MICHELE NORRIS, host:

And I'm Michele Norris.

The founder of the acclaimed alternative rock band Sparklehorse has died. Singer and multi-instrumentalist Mark Linkous committed suicide over the weekend.

Joel Rose has this appreciation.

Mr. JOEL ROSE (Journalist): Sparklehorse was Mark Linkous. He wrote all the songs, played almost all of the instruments, and manipulated his voice like it was just another layer in the mix.

Mr. MARK LINKOUS (Musician, Sparklehorse): I started at first trying to disguise my voice because I didn't like it. But now, I've gotten to really just use it as another instrument. Seems to make the proximity of a voice seem a lot closer to your ear.

(Soundbite of song, "It's a Wonderful Life")

Mr. LINKOUS: (Singing) I am the only one can ride that horse yonder.

Mr. ROSE: What the Virginia native's voice was saying was often surreal, yet the music drew the attention of indie rock giants Radiohead, who invited Sparklehorse to open for them in 1996. During the tour, Linkous overdosed on a cocktail of anti-depressants and other drugs. He actually died for several minutes and suffered permanent damage to his legs.

Still, Linkous's friend and collaborator Wayne Coyne, from the band the Flaming Lips, says that didn't stop him from recording and performing.

Mr. WAYNE COYNE (Musician, The Flaming Lips): He was always gentle and always pleasant, but what made it more pronounced for me is that I knew he was in pain. I knew he struggled all the time. I know he struggled to stand there and sing those gentle, crazy songs.

ROSE: Coyne and Linkous worked together on "Dark Night of the Soul," a music photography project involving Sparklehorse, D.J. Danger Mouse, filmmaker David Lynch and others.

(Soundbite of song, "Dark Night of the Soul")

Mr. LINKOUS: (Singing) Hey, I guess it's a matter of sensation.

ROSE: While Mark Linkous seemed happiest working on studio projects like this one, he told WHY?Y's FRESH AIR in 1999 that he also enjoyed performing before an audience.

Mr. LINKOUS: When they really appreciate the slow songs, when you can get 500, 200, 2,000 people to be totally silent, and they totally get it and it's not just like a social situation where everyone's going out to drink and talk and socialize. They're really there to listen to what's going on.

ROSE: Mark Linkous had almost finished a new album. He took his own life Saturday in Knoxville, Tennessee. He was 47 years old.

For NPR News, I'm Joel Rose.

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