

Adversity? Sparklehorse Leader Lives With It

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Mark Linkous will be playing guitar in a wheelchair when his band, Sparklehorse, plays the Khyber Pass on Memorial Day. But he'll take it. He's happy to be alive.

The Bremono Bluff, Va.-based Linkous wrote, sang, produced and played almost all the instruments on Vivadixiesubmarinetransmissionpilot (Capitol), Sparklehorse's strangely pretty, arty, imaginative debut, which he says he conceived as a pop version of Tom Waits' Swordfishtrombones. He was touring England with the band in January when he mixed prescribed antidepressant drugs with Valium he took to combat jet lag. After passing out in his London hotel room, Linkous was found unconscious by a maid 14 hours later, his legs pinned under him.

Linkous was paralyzed, and a condition called rhabdomyolysis led to complications that attacked his internal organs. After arrival at St. Mary's Hospital, he had a cardiac arrest and says he was dead for two minutes before being revived.

Linkous was on dialysis for a month, and had seven operations before regaining movement in his legs. With no health insurance, he was lucky to be in England: Its national health plan picked up the bill.

"I was blacked out through all of it," Linkous says, calling from Minneapolis, where Sparklehorse was opening for Cracker. "My first memory was of seeing my wife. She flew over right away. And David [Lowery, the Cracker leader who guests on Viva . . .] came, too. When I realized I might never walk again, I was scared [to death]."

Linkous did not sustain any permanent kidney damage, and full recovery is expected in a year. For now, he still uses a wheelchair, partly to minimize the pain. "It's like somebody's stabbing me in the foot all day long," he said. "Other than that, I'm all right."

Once his current tour with Cracker is done, Linkous plans to rehab at home in Bremono Bluff, where he shares a rented house on a 1,200-acre farm with his wife, Teresa, two horses, three dogs, two salamanders and a cat. Ironically, he has a track on the Sweet Relief II tribute album to his wheelchair-bound buddy Vic Chestnutt, due in July. He's been writing new songs, but hasn't yet addressed his predicament directly. "It's like Vic said," he adds dryly. "There aren't too many words that rhyme with wheelchair."

"It's a little depressing, the situation I'm in. But my wife helps a lot with the depression. And since this happened, I try to keep my eyes open and be more perceptive to things that are beautiful."

Sparklehorse at the Khyber Pass Pub, 56 S. Second St., at 9 p.m. Monday. Tickets: \$6. Phone: 215-440-9683.