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SPARKLEHORSE

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A NINE TIMES INTERVIEW WITH MARK LINKOUS

SPARKLEHORSE

I'm not sure when I first met Mark Linkous. It was quite a few years ago when my friends Steve Schick and Chip Jones hooked up with Mark and his brother Matt to form Johnson Family. Later they became Salt Chunk Mary. Using this information against me, Kelly, the editor of this little magazine, talked me into "interviewing" Mark about his new band Sparklehorse. He graciously agreed and on the afternoon of September 11th Mr. Linkous dropped by the Plan 9 warehouse to chat. We plopped ourselves down among the mountains of used records and half built CD-racks, just a couple of Virgos with a passion for Dodge Chargers and nothing better to do. Mark rolled himself a smoke, I pressed the record button and asked about the band's name...

Linkous: I just sweated my brain so hard putting two words together and just came up with two words that sounded good together and I guess it could loosely be used as a metaphor for a motorcycle.

Trinko: Yeah, well, Johnson Family and Salt Chunk Mary had a literary source. You only do one song from those days, right?

Linkous: Well, yeah. "Someday I'll Treat You Right."

Trinko: I still have copies of those demos you guys recorded in our basement.

Linkous: I think my writing has changed since then. It's sparser.

Trinko: But you still have full, heavy songs like "Tears On Fresh Fruit."

Linkous: Yeah, I like those releases. Build up tension, then let it go.

Trinko: So, how is your Charger? (a '68)

Linkous: It's good. It just keeps running better and better.

Trinko: You ought to take it out to Richmond Dragway and race it.

Linkous: I was supposed to go down last Friday. Bob (Rupe) wanted me to go.

Trinko: Yeah, he talked me into going. It was street night, so I raced my Charger ('70).

Linkous: Did you? How'd you do?

Trinko: Lousy. But what the hell.

Linkous: It must have been fun waiting for the Christmas tree to hit green.

Trinko: Yeah, it was cool. We got to see a Camaro burst into flames on the starting line.

Linkous: Alright!

Trinko: You'd dig it. You should go. Are you guys going on a big tour?

Linkous: Well, you know those advance tapes Capitol is sending out? I think a lot of bands have been getting them and really liking it. So, the guys in Radiohead got a hold of it and want us to come over to open for them for about a week.

Trinko: England?

Linkous: Yeah, England and Scotland. We leave on Halloween. I can't wait. I've never been over there. I especially want to get some motorcycle leathers over there. They're so cheap.

Trinko: You still have your bike then?

Linkous: Oh, Yeah. It's down at the warehouse now. In fact, I got a new helmet and clear float bowls for my carburetor for my birthday.

Trinko: How was New York this past weekend?

Linkous: It was great. We got our picture and a great little review in the Village Voice. Out of 400 bands playing the CMJ Festival just a few got write ups and a picture. It's funny, David (Lowery) said he got off the train at Penn Station, bought a Village Voice, stuck it under his arm, plopped it down on the bed in his hotel room and went to brush his teeth or something. Then he came out and it had landed open to the page with our picture on it. So a lot of people turned out for the show. They had people lined up around the block that couldn't get in.

Trinko: Excellent. Did you do the cover art yourself?

Linkous: Yeah. I took all the pictures on the cover. They fucked it up three times trying to "design" it. I told them I wanted the pictures

laid out like film. The designers kept screwing with it, and after the third time they said "Well, if we do it like he wants it it'll look like film." So they finally got it right.

Trinko: You took a really long time to record the album, didn't you?

Linkous: Yeah. I guess it started three or four years ago at the house on David's 8-track.

Trinko: I heard some of your tapes nearly two years ago. It was like nothing I'd heard you do before. And those songs aren't even on the new album.

Linkous: There is so much stuff that was dropped or re-recorded or remixed. I guess that was one of the advantages of doing it at Sound of Music, cause John and David were just starting to take over and we did a lot of late night sessions. A lot of it got recorded on David's 8-track at my house, too. It's David's machine. He did demos for Camper Van Beethoven on that machine. I think Timbuk 3 used it. Now Bryan Harvey has it.

Trinko: So David Lowery is credited as David Charles on the record?

Linkous: Yeah, I think the cat got let out of the bag in New York, 'cause he got on stage and did "All Her Favorite Fruit" with us. I love that song so much I wanted the band to do it just like Camper's version. Then David just said, "Well, just play it like you would if it were one of your songs."

Trinko: It turned out quite well. What else do you think folks ought to know?

Linkous: We could let 'em know who's in the band.

Trinko: Ah, good idea.

Linkous: OK, Paul Watson plays banjo, coronet, lap steel and electric guitar. Scott Minor plays drums, chord organ and banjo. Johnny Hott plays Wurlitzer organ, a homemade

theremin, sings backup through an auctioneer's bull horn, television set, Casio, and some new percussion instrument he invented; a kind of new age little metal ball with a contact mic taped right on to it. And he plays a Fisher-Price record player with circus records and stuff on it. Sometimes he just lets the needle ride on the turntable so it sounds like we're on vinyl. And Scott Fitzsimmons, he plays stand up bass. I guess that's it.

Trinko: For "850 Double Pumper Holley" did Bob know you were taping him?

Linkous: Yeah, he knew. We just asked him to describe his engine in the SuperBee. It's barely audible, but at the end you hear David very faintly in the background saying, "And what about your bass?," and Bob replies, "the same."

Trinko: You gonna leave your car flat black or paint it soon?

Linkous: I think if I do my next record as cheaply as I anticipate, I'll be able to get the rust fixed and get a nice shiny, glossy, black paint job.

Trinko: The flat black is mean, though. Very Mad Max.

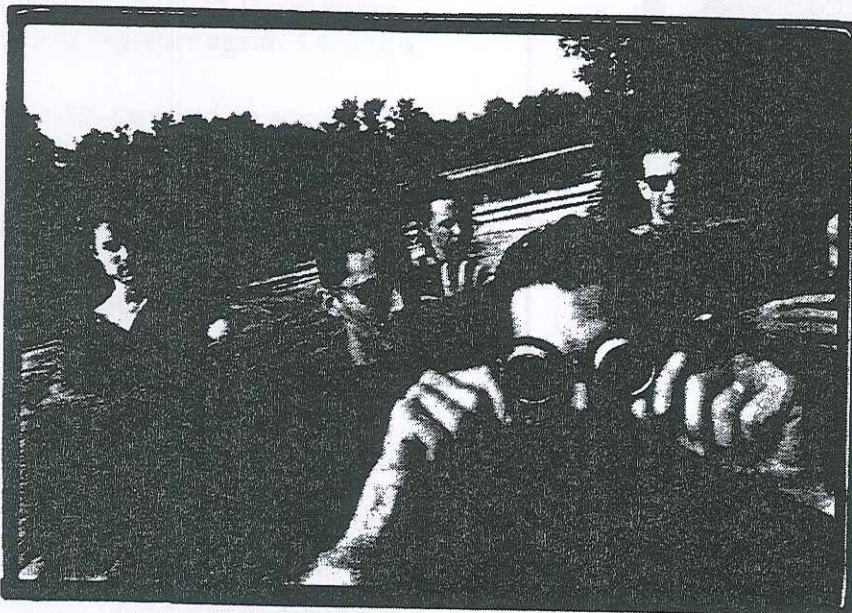
Linkous: Yeah, definitely. Very shark-like.

Trinko: So you're signed for another record, then?

Linkous: Yeah, in fact things kept getting screwed up and it was taking so long to get released, I started to wig out. I told my A & R guy at Capitol that I just wanted to start on my next record. So the president of the company said to give me an advance off the next record to buy equipment...which was totally cool...to get an advance for your second record before your first even comes out.

Trinko: Would you record it here or travel?

Linkous: Well, I bought the equipment with the intent of being able to deliver masterable DAT tapes out of my house. I can just keep doing it 'til I get it right. (Mark rolls another cigarette, but can't get it lit.)



Sparklehorse are: Scott Fitzsimmons, Scott Minor, Johnny Hott, Mark Linkous, and Paul Watson.

Trinko: Your Zippo crap out on you?

Linkous: I've got a particularly unpredictable Zippo.

Trinko: You can never tell when you're going to run out of fluid. After Europe, any tour plans?

Linkous: Well, I really want to play with *Guided By Voices*. We're up for this tour, but we'd be the third band, *Urge Overkill*, *Guided By Voices* and us. I would love to do that.

Trinko: Are you going to be doing anything on the new *Cracker* record?

Linkous: I don't know, although there's this one song that Dennis Herring played for me called "100 Flower Power Maximum." It's the most punk rock song I've heard since the *Damned*. It'll be on the new *Cracker* record. I thought my head was gonna pop off. It scared the shit out of my cat. I'm glad David and Dennis are working together again. They're a great team.

Trinko: Dennis Herring worked on some of your record, too.

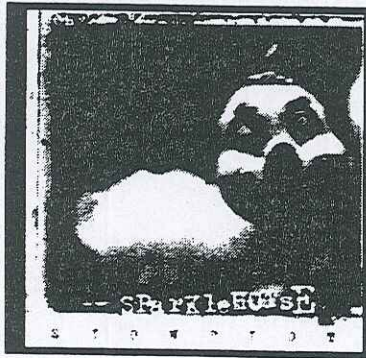
Linkous: Yeah, but it ended up sounding too good. But against what David and I did, it just didn't work. It sounded too good. So, I think some of Dennis' remixes will be on singles. *Slow River* is putting out. They're also putting the album out on vinyl. Got to have vinyl.

Trinko: Yeah, I'm not giving up my turntable. That Neil Young cover you sang with *Cracker* was recorded while you were their roadie, right?

Linkous: Yeah, that was pretty fun. Just get rowdy. I tried to light a speaker on fire. Don't ever try to light a speaker on fire. It emits the most toxic fumes. I think it changed something in my brain permanently.

Trinko: For better or for worse?

Linkous: I think better. I'm just a little bit more numb.

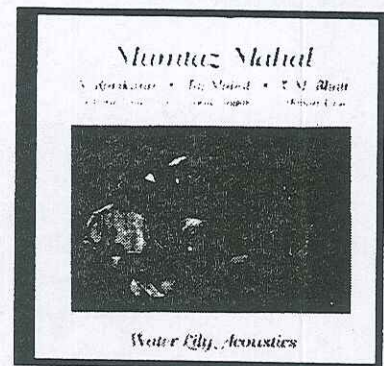


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