



Sparklehorse's

# Mark Linkous

**A** word of advice to anyone visiting Mark Linkous' house for the first time: Watch out for the horses. There are two of them in the field out back, and they don't always keep to themselves. Recently, when *Musician* was chatting with Linkous on the phone to get a progress report on his band Sparklehorse's second album, he interrupted his own sentence to observe laconically, "Oh, one of my horses is coming in." Right into the house? "Yeah." Might that not present a problem? Linkous considered the question for a moment, then answered, "No, as long as he doesn't eat my breakfast."

Between the horses, three dogs, and two cats, it's amazing that Mark gets much work done. Yet work he does, principally in the home studio he's set up in the second-story double bedroom of his rented farmhouse in rural Virginia. Four tracks on Sparklehorse's *Vivadixesubmarinetranmissionplot* (Capitol), were recorded in this room, which Linkous has dubbed Static King. This time around, Linkous wants to do the whole album here; at press time, he's about half done, and so far he's succeeded in his aim.

The four homebrewed tracks on *Vivadixie* were recorded on a TASCAM Portastudio 688 eight-track cassette machine that Linkous had borrowed from Cracker's David Lowery. But last year, with the help of some advance money from his record company, Linkous purchased a TASCAM DA-88 and DA-38, giving him a total of 16 digital tracks to work with. He also acquired a TASCAM MT-30 MkII DAT machine for mixdown purposes, and a Mackle CR 1604 console.

# home studio

by mac randall photographs by lisa pearl

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Among Static King's other tape machines are a **Marantz** portable cassette deck ⑤, which is used principally for field recordings; these often end up in the **Akai S900** sampler ⑥ for further manipulation. A recent country fair gave Mark plenty of sampling fodder: "They had a bunch of old steam-powered tractors and farm machinery there. I recorded them on the Marantz, then brought the tape home, sampled it, and used the sounds to

build percussion tracks."

Linkous' studio is also home to several relatively familiar keyboards, including a **Casio SK-1** (not shown) and a **Yamaha PortaSound PSS-480** ⑦, which runs a **Roland Dr. Synth** module ⑧, and an ancient **Casio** ⑨ he bought at a thrift shop for fifty cents.

Far more exotic is an ancient **Gibson Vanguard** guitar amp (not shown), with a belt-driven echo unit mounted on the back. "That

amp belonged to a preacher; I got it at an auction that a guy had in his trailer. The echo unit's called the Adineko Memory System, made by a company called Tel-Ray Electronics. You can put your finger on the wheel and manually slow down the echo—sounds *beautiful*. I told a buddy at a music store about it, and he'd heard of them, and he told me that I should never open up this round metal canister that's attached to it because there's some sort of toxic material inside." Apparently, good tone can literally be deadly.

Static King's other amps are more commonplace: a new purple **Vox AC30** ⑩, two Sixties **Ampegs**—a **Reverberocket** and a **Gemini IV**—a **Sears Silvertone 2x12**, and a **Boss Mascot MA-1**, used mainly for vocals. Linkous' guitars, which also didn't make it into our photo, include a 1960 **Gibson ES 330**, a late-Seventies **ES 335**, and a **Fender Squier Strat**. His bass is also a **Fender Squier**, while for acoustic guitar tracks he switches to a Forties **Gibson Southerner**. Rounding out the guitar gear are a **Dunlop RotoVibe** and **Boss PN-2 Tremolo/Pan, Turbo Overdrive**, and **Analog Delay** pedals; another recent acquisition is a **DOD VoFex** vocal effects processor. For percussives, Linkous generally makes do with an **Alesis SR-16** drum machine, but at the moment, sets of **Gretsch** acoustic and **Roland** electronic drums occupy the studio floor for the ongoing album sessions.

The rest of Linkous' studio setup is fairly basic. Outboard gear consists of a **Furman PL-8** power conditioner ⑪, three **Alesis** units—a **3630** compressor ⑫, a **QuadraVerb** ⑬, and a **MidiVerb** ⑭—along with an **ADA Ampulator** ⑮. A **Hafler Transnova P-3000** ⑯ is the power amp of choice, a set of **Yamaha NS-10Ms** ⑰ serve as the main monitors, and a **TL Audio VI1** eight-channel tube interface ⑱ keeps the tracks sounding warm. "I think it's only intended to be used for tracking, but I like to use it twice, to sort of squash things." The Static King mic collection includes two **Shure SM57s**, an **Audix OM-1**, and an **AKG C414**, along with countless "shitty mics," found at various gun shows, trailer-park auctions, and landfills.

And the violin ⑲? It's an old German instrument," Linkous deadpans. "I bought it for \$20 out of the trunk of a crack dealer's car. In a blizzard. Really!"

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