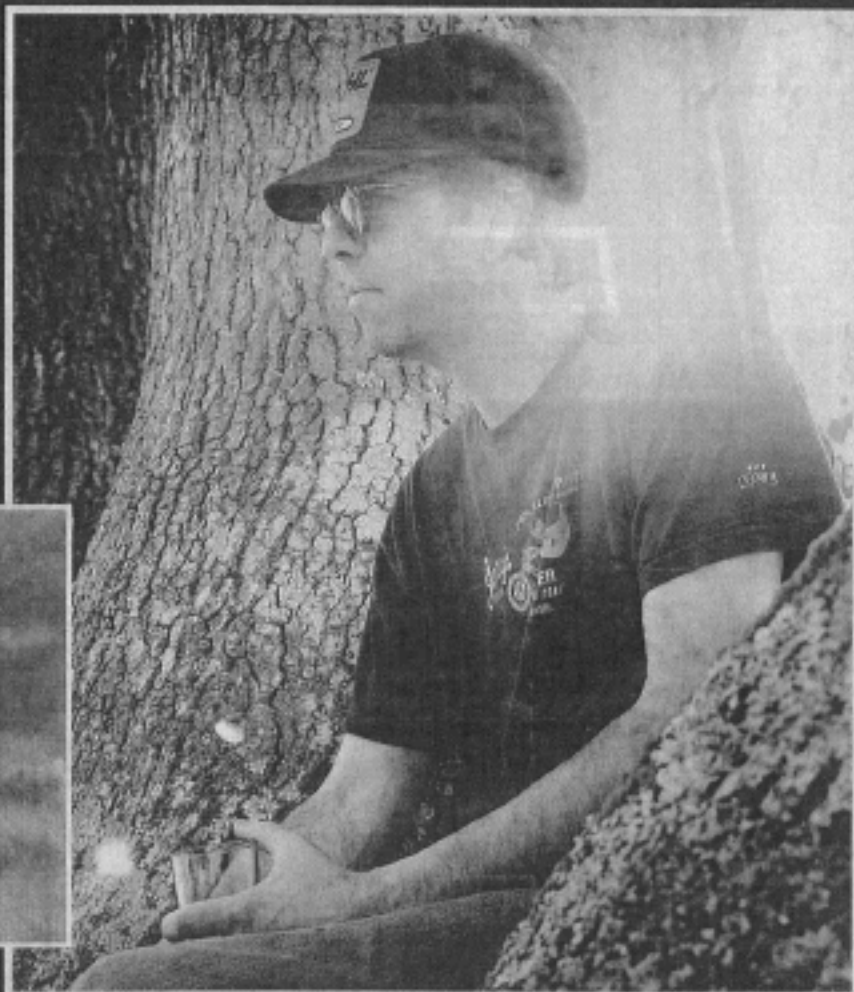


SPARKLEHORSE'S Mark Linkous talks to Thomas McKenna about his new album and a wonderful life on his farm in Virginia



Simply wonderful!

Belfast,
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SPARKLEHORSE release their excellent new album *'It's A Wonderful Life'* on Monday, before arriving at Belfast's Empire Music Hall as part of a four-date Irish tour at the end of the month.

The follow-up to 1998's critically acclaimed *'Good Morning Spider'* features collaborations with Tom Waits, PJ Harvey and Nina Persson of The Cardigans, and overall is a gentler melodic, much more subdued affair than its predecessors with no big, brash rock outs.

"I think it's the most cohesive album I've ever done," says Mark Linkous, the primary driving force behind Sparklehorse.

"I ended up erasing all the up tempo pop songs and hard rock songs for this album. It seemed that everything that's on it is what I do best.

"I know a lot of people will miss the rocking out stuff but I thought I was pretty pathetic at rocking out anyway."

Anyone who's heard 'Rainmaker', 'Happy Pig' or 'Someday I'll Treat You Good' would tend to

disagree, but *'It's A Wonderful Life's'* vivid imagery, delivered in Linkous' distinct cracked tones, is so enchanting you'd be a fool to complain.

It's the sound of Linkous embracing nature again after being hauled back from the brink — a lethal cocktail of anti-depressants and Valium nearly claimed the Sparklehorse frontman, confining him to a wheelchair for more than a year.

Now Linkous is ready to saddle up the 'Horse and hit the road, and fans can expect something a little different in the live arena.

"I think it'll be a bit of a treat bringing the new songs for people to hear, and I'm not too crazy about doing the older songs unless we can do something new and interesting to them."

A series of short films to accompany each track on the al-

bum have also been produced, including contributions from Jason Lytle of Grandaddy, Jonathan Donohue of Mercury Rev and Will Oldham, aka Bonnie Prince Billy.

"I wanted to do something with Will Oldham for the album but we never got the opportunity to get it together," explains Mark.

"But they're doing little films along with other filmmakers for the album, and it's going to be broadcast on the Sundance Channel in the US."

The films will also be broadcast at the Edinburgh Festival on Monday, coinciding with the release of *'It's A Wonderful Life'*.

Mark has lived on his isolated farm in Enon, Virginia for the past three years, making music and riding his motorcycles.

Undoubtedly this rural residency has played a significant part in the crafting of *'It's A*

Wonderful Life', and you can't help feel that it's the small things in life that Mark Linkous enjoys tuning into.

"I lived in New York and Los Angeles but I like living where I am because a lot of things get filtered out, I'm not really affected by hype at all," explains Mark.

"Eventually things get to me that are worthy — it's good having that isolation."

Some of this record was recorded in Barcelona and Brooklyn but I don't think there are any city elements to it.

"I don't consciously write about anything in particular, not even nature, but this album's about trying to find something everyday where you'll say 'I'm glad I was alive to see that!'"

"It may be as simple as an ant creeping into a hole or a little kid's smile, that's what makes it a wonderful life."

● Sparklehorse play The Empire Music Hall, Belfast on June 27 with Ed Harcourt and Gemma Hayes. Tickets £10.

'It's A Wonderful Life' is out on Monday on Parlophone.

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