

Depressed for success



Sparklehorse are anything but good-time rock and rollers. But the success of their latest music, as well as the support and friendship of Radiohead, has brought better times to their songwriter Mark Linkous

Anyone who's heard the vivid despatches from the soul that made up last year's acclaimed Sparklehorse album, *Vivadixiesubmarinetransmissionplot*, will know songwriter Mark Linkous takes his music more seriously than most. Every twist of his surreal tales and every bleakly distorted vocal reflects his intense perspective on life. No wonder then, that the Sparklehorse live experience is not akin to a rabble-rousing pop gig. And when pun-

ters yell at the band to rock out or cheer up, Linkous isn't amused. "I was so bad on the Mazzy Star tour a couple of months ago," he admits. "I was depressed and mean to the audiences in Europe, and then Mazzy Star asked me to play in the US, which was even worse. So I wanted to do this tour, I guess, by way of an apology."

In London, Sparklehorse headline, but in the last few weeks the band have supported Radiohead in Europe for the umpteenth time. That band are such firm Linkous fans that Radiohead guitarist Jonny Greenwood is handling their lightshow. At the mention of Radiohead, Mark's voice lights up. "Jonny's great! And the band are good kissers," he adds, with a mysterious chuckle.

Since the 1996 British tour, Sparklehorse have gone through a few changes. Two new members joined just two weeks before the tour began in Europe. Andrew Hall, previously of Camper Van Beethoven and Cracker, is now the bass player, while Australian

Sophie Michalitsianos contributes guitar and cello. "The next record is going to have more strings and cellos, special Olympics-style strings. I didn't want them to be majestic, I wanted them to be a little twisted, to get away from this country thing going on. I would rather there be more strings than a pedal steel guitar. If I had toured with another one of those it would have been too much."

And is life in general better now, Mark? "Well, I've found a shrink that I like, that is smarter than me," he confides. "I would judge everything by its state of decay, just be overwhelmed by those thoughts. I would be sitting, staring at my wood stove, thinking that in 200 years' time it was going to be rust. I would have my dog on my lap, thinking he was going to die someday."

But now he is in a more positive frame of mind and is looking forward to playing smaller venues than those Radiohead inhabit these days. "It's hard to convey intimacy to 6,000 people a night," he sighs. "I am not an entertainer. I don't wanna give in and play the headbanging songs. I want to get something across that is fragile and pretty."

Sparklehorse play Islington Union Chapel (0171-226 3750) 21 Nov

**Independent
15 Nov 1997**