

Hotshots



It's a pleasure just to be walking into a bar with Mark Linkous. The first time his band Sparklehorse toured here, in 1996, the maverick, hugely talented singer/songwriter was performing in a wheelchair – the scary result of a drug overdose, whereby he passed

out in a hotel room with his legs folded beneath him, cutting off the flow of blood and bringing Linkous close to amputation and death. You might think this experience would have illicited some form of sympathy when Sparklehorse played with the likes of

critters

Radiohead and Cracker in the States. You'd be wrong.

It was painful – more mentally than physically, Linkous sighs in lugubrious Midwestern tones. 'Audiences in the United States particularly couldn't seem to deal with it. In fact, they just hated us.

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The Virginian band's new album, 'Good Morning Spider', completely negates the 'new country' tag the band picked up in '96. (I never understood

that in the first place. For years, I've been trying to make the pop equivalent of Tom Waits records. Tricky and Portishead are bigger influences than any roots-rock. I listen to "Angels with Dirty Faces" and "George Jones' Greatest Hits" back to back.) And it is an even more involving, striking and thrillingly articulate record than their 'Vivadixiesubmarinetransmissionplot' debut. Linkous puts it down to the 'critters': he lives in the Virginian countryside with two horses, four dogs and two cats called Jimmy Stewart and Robert Mitchum.

Mind you, if 'Good Morning Spider' is half as successful as it deserves to be, Mark Linkous probably won't notice. 'I didn't even know how much the last one sold till someone told me yesterday. Tom Waits calls me at home – so why should I care?' *Garry Mulholland*
'Good Morning Spider' is released on Mon 20 on Parlophone. Sparklehorse play Hackney Empire on Wed 22. music starts on page 110