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SPARE CHANGE

Sparklehorse's vague poetry.
By Maya Singer

I try to make music that sounds the way those early Wim Wenders road movies look," declares Mark Linkous, frontman and presiding genius of Sparklehorse. As an example, he cites "All Night Home," off the band's second full-length album, *Good Morning Spider* (Capitol). Like Wenders' *Kings of the Road*, the song contemplates the suggestive expanse of the American highway, calling up its remote silences.

"Shining motorcycle/We're gonna drive/All night home," Linkous sings in his soft Southern drawl over the delicate chiming of his guitar and the slowest drumbeat imaginable. "We're gonna drive/All night home."

"I find it really difficult to tell a story straight," he admits, "so my songs have these specific starting points, but they end up pretty vague and poetic." Other starting points for tracks on *Spider* include the onset of the muggy Virginia summer ("Painbirds"); a girl Linkous hung out with when he was in an L.A. punk band ("Maria's Little Elbows"); and a line from the Gospel of John, "Every hair on your head is counted," metamorphosed into the tender ode "Hundreds of Sparrows."



Good Morning Spider
man Mark Linkous

"I didn't want the album to have just one mood or to be about any one thing. Only two songs on the album—'Pig' and 'Saint Mary'—have anything to do with it," Linkous insists. *It is a cardiac arrest triggered by an accidental mix of prescription antidepressants and Valium in a London hotel bathroom in 1996, while he was touring for Sparklehorse's first album, Vivadixiesubmarinetransmissionpiot.* The incident left him clinically dead for three minutes and he convalesced at a London hospital for several months, but Linkous maintains that people overestimate the event's influence on *Spider*.

"Like, everyone assumes [the song] 'Come On In' is about the accident, but I wrote that song before recording *Vivadixie*, and I wrote it about my dog."

Such misunderstandings are one of a few topics that reveal the curmudgeon within the otherwise taciturn, sweet-natured Linkous. Rounding out his list are overzealous press, American "alternative" radio and hit-single-minded record company executives. His stubborn disposition pays artistic dividends, however.

"I've been trying to move away from traditional song structures," he says. "I'm really into stuff that's electronic yet really organic—pure sound. Like those little moments on the album—" Linkous pauses, distracted by a passing motorcycle.

"British," he mumbles, listening to the motor. "Pretty rare." Motorcycles are a fitting passion for Linkous, equal parts engineering, grace and abandon. When he picks up the thread of the conversation, he seems to have returned to thoughts of highways as he describes the ephemeral soundscape of "Box of Stars."

"And I like the idea of...evoking a story in 20 seconds. 'Box of Stars'—that's about the desert, about waking up out west in the middle of nowhere and being all alone...." ★