

# Stephen Malkmus

The former Pavement frontman and Jicks member talks bike lanes, baseball and his band's new release, "Sparkle Hard"

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Nobody was trying to keep Californians out of Oregon back when Stephen Malkmus got here (or at least, no more than usual). The Stockton native and former Pavement frontman has called Portland home since before the turn of the century, and his very local band the Jicks – Malkmus, bassist Joanna Bolme, guitarist/keyboardist Mike Clark and drummer Jake Morris – has been together almost as long (give or take a drummer: Morris was preceded by Sleater-Kinney's Janet Weiss, as well as the Decemberists' John Moen).

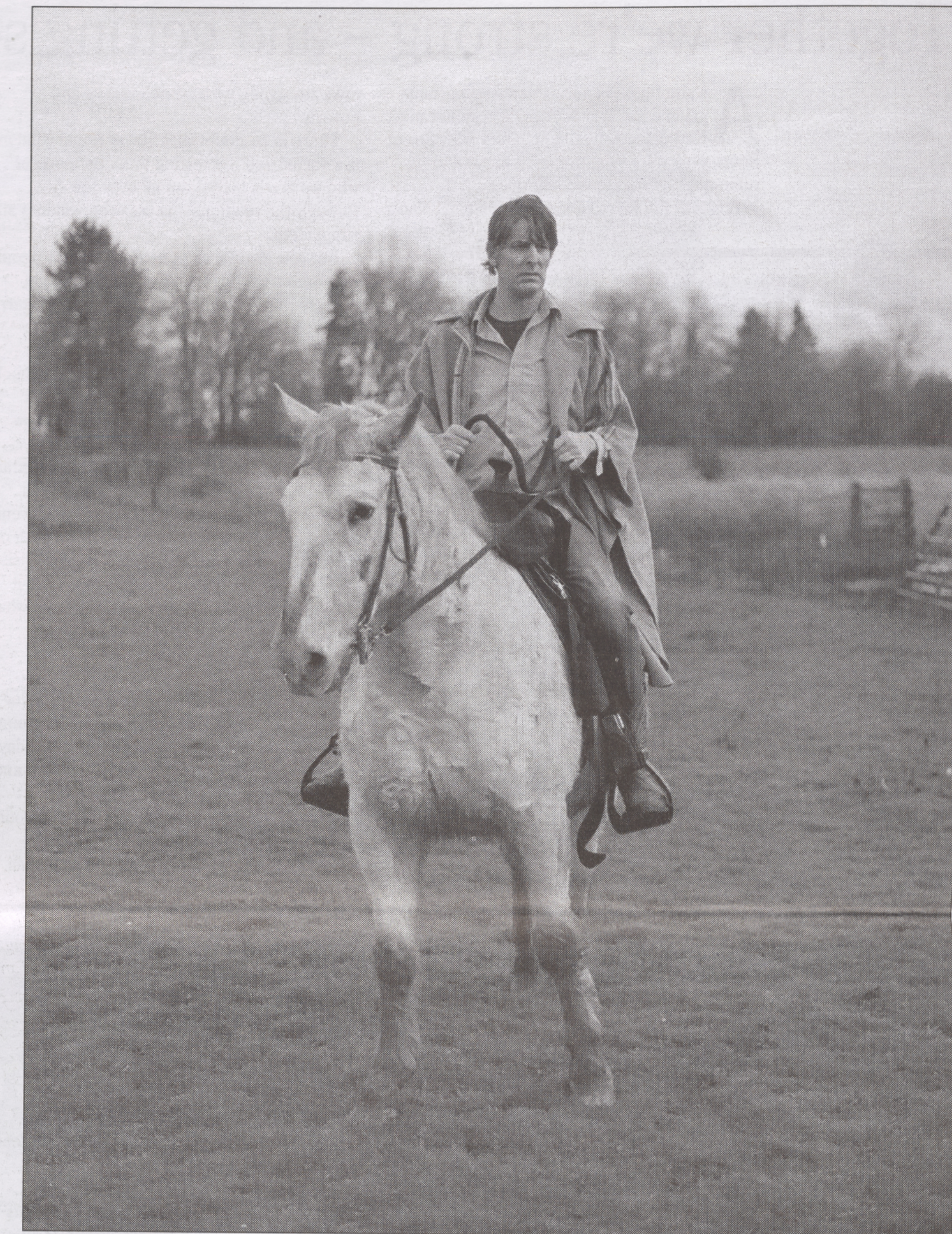
"Sparkle Hard," the band's seventh record (and first since 2014), came out May 18. Produced in Portland by first-time collaborator (and Decemberist) Chris Funk, its 11 tracks offer everything you want from Malkmus and the Jicks: glib sincerity, guitar jams, seemingly effortless turns of both phrase and melody, more guitar jams. And also a bunch of things you didn't know you wanted: auto-tune, a country-tinged duet with Sonic Youth's Kim Gordon, a surfy anthem inspired by both Portland bike culture and the death of Freddie Gray.

Street Roots caught up with Malkmus during a busy day of national media interviews (one ran long when the subject of fantasy baseball came up) and shuttling his kids (he and his wife, artist/sculptor Jessica Jackson Hutchins, have two) around Portland's East Side.

**Jason Cohen:** *What brought you to Portland originally?*

**Stephen Malkmus:** I don't know. I'm from the West Coast, as you know. I lived in New York. All I had was a futon and some paperback books and whatever clothes I had amassed. And free CDs from Matador. I was working pretty hard those first six years, and was just having fun being a 20-something. But then my parents – they live in Idaho – they were like, "We don't have room for your stuff. Come get it."

So I drove across the country in this Acura Legend I inherited from my grandmother. Loaded it up with what I had, and thought, I'm just going to go to



*Stephen Malkmus on his horse for the video, "Sparkle Hard: The Movie."*

PHOTO BY GIOVANNI DUCA

Portland. I didn't know anybody. I played some shows here (with Pavement). They were cool. I liked the bookstore Powell's, and uh, that's all I really knew. I guess. I liked the coffee and the rain. That's novel to like, a Los Angeles person, to have this kind of industrial-looking, bricky, rainy, black coffee and cloudy skies and pine trees town. I didn't expect to stay here that long. That happens to a lot of people.

**J.C.:** *Do you think you'd be able to move here now?*

**S.M.:** I don't know. It's becoming a place a little like Los Angeles and New York. When you're in your 20s you don't mind doing service jobs that have kind of a low ceiling. You can survive, but then when you get up into your 30s, you start to get crushed by the city. Maybe you want some stability, maybe you want a family. You get crunched out of the town. Portland didn't seem to be that way when I first moved

here. But then again, neither did Greenpoint. It's a different kind of crisis than homelessness, but people do get pushed out in the same way.

**J.C.:** *Family is one reason why you're still here, but also the band, right? It seems like there is something about the Jicks that thrives on being a steady group.*

**S.M.:** Well, when we do play, yeah. I mean, they're good at music. That's why I stick with them. And they stick with me, so they must like my songs. It's not like a 24-7 job, so there's room for them to do (other projects). Mike's actually been doing some accounting work lately. He got his degree just at the time when I think accounting is going to become irrelevant, because of automation and AI. But he says you still need that human touch.

This is a thing I'm always interested in

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