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When I talk to other Sparks fans, I always get tongue tied when they tell me their favorite Sparks song or record or live show or time period or outfit, because I love them all! Everyone who knows me knows my favorite band, and there is no #2. My appreciation for the Mael brothers has matured over time just like a good wine.

1973 or 4? **Saw Sparks at local community college in Newtown Pennsylvania - I took these photos:**



1974 **Also saw Sparks in Philadelphia at Tower Theater.**

1977-79 **Despite being into Punk I listened to “*The Number One Song in Heaven*”**

1980 **Had my girlfriend in Germany mail me a copy of “*Terminal Jive*” (Unfortunately it never arrived)**

1981 **Joined SPARKS FAN CLUB**

That's Ulrike!
(some girl that girl)



80's **Saw Sparks at The Bottom Line and The Ritz**

1982 Played in a noisy pop band with Michael Zodorozny (Crash Course in Science). KMZ. We played original music however once, just once, we played 2 songs by Sparks. We opened a set with “*This Town Ain’t Big Enough For The Both of Us*” followed by “*Amateur Hour*”. (I have a recording of this.)



1985 Saw Sparks open for Rick Springfield at Jones Beach, NY and Ron did a striptease to the amazement of teeny boppers there to see Rick.

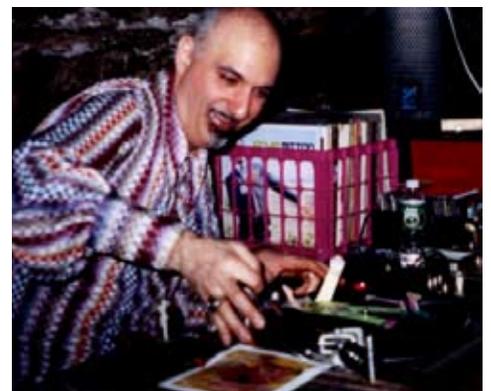
1990 While purging my record collection of music I had listened to in the 70s I kept ALL of my Sparks records. This was the beginning of knowing that I was a bigger Sparks fan than even I knew.

1995 Answered a trivia question on the radio and won a pre-release 7 inch of “*When Do I Get To Sing My Way*” and was instantly cured of depression



1996 In a profound display of mutual appreciation I hugged the DJ in a bar in Vienna after he played “*The Ghost of Liberace*”.

1997? Talked DJ Fabio into playing ONLY SPARKS for 3 hours on his “*Strength Through Failure*” show on the great free-form radio station WFMU

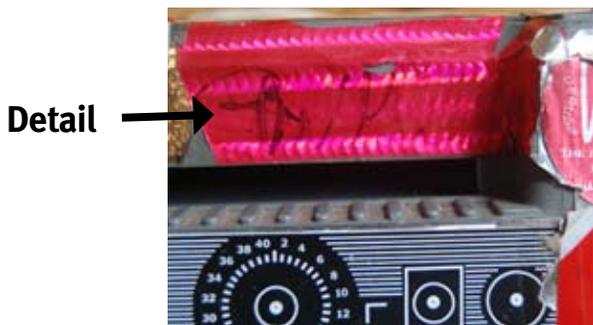


1998 The best Christmas gift ever! Thought I heard Sparks playing in a Taxi on Christmas Day in New York City. Very excited. Turns out it was coming from a CD player in my luggage. But the excitement was there (for a moment) nevertheless. I ALWAYS play "Thank God It's Not Christmas" on Christmas Day!

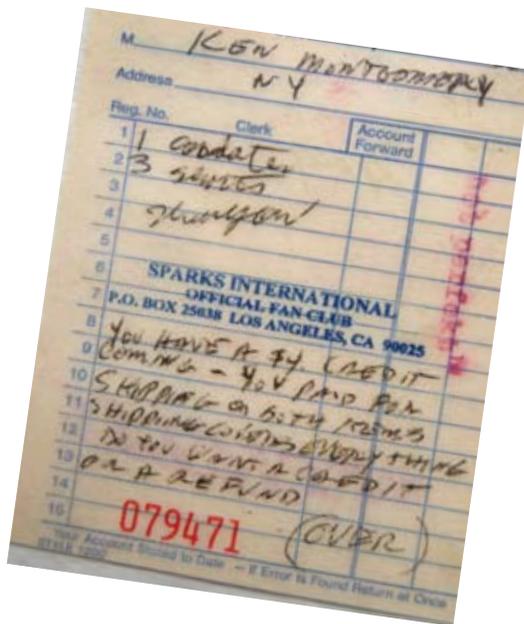
2000 Flew from New York City to Los Angeles to see Sparks perform "Balls" at The Key Club. Brought the Official Laminator and had Ron & Russell autograph it. (see www.MinistryofLamination.com). I also had them sign my passport.



Had Ron & Russell sign my passport. Tammy signed it too!



2000 Bought a stockpile of Plagiarism boxer shorts, the most sensible promotional item ever!

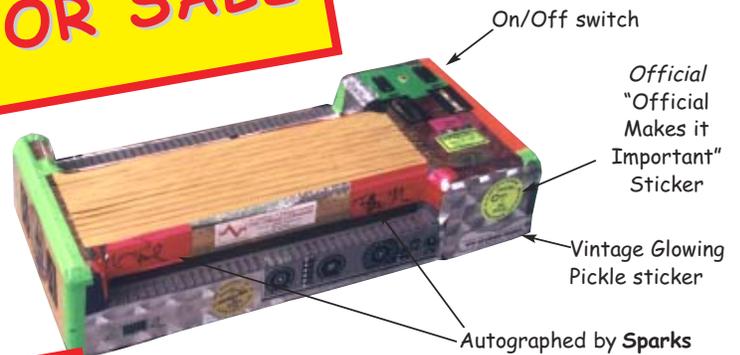


2001 Egnekn's Daughter records "Those Mysteries" for Sparks Tribute CD
 KMZ records "Moon Over Kentucky" for Sparks Tribute CD



Mp3 of these 2 tracks available upon request

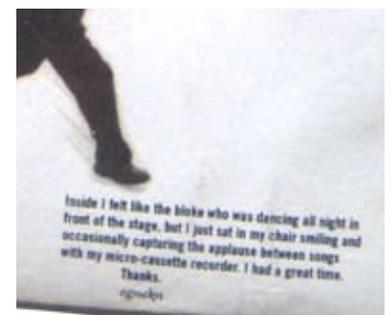
2002 Exhibited the laminator at GAS, a New York City art gallery.
 Ron & Russell's autographs help boost the price of my laminator.



US \$10,000.00

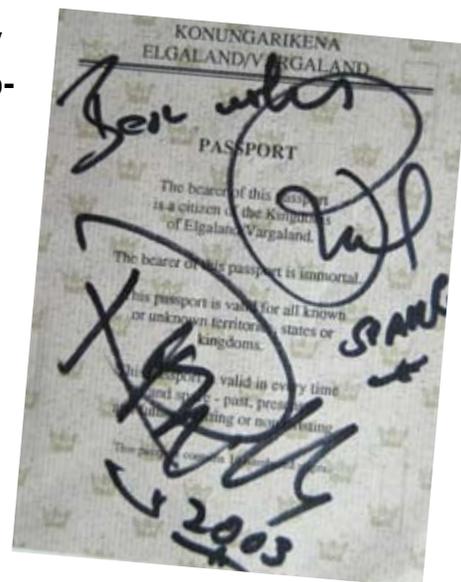


2002 Flew from New York City to London to hear the premiere of Spark's *Lil Beethoven* at Royal Festival Hall. I recorded the banter between the songs and made a limited edition CDR (2 copies).



2003

Sparks in New York City. Ron and Russell sign my passport for the 2nd time! Pus I have Russel auto-graph my 8-Track of *Propaganda*.



2004

Talked DJ Fabio into playing only Sparks (again!) for 3 hours on his “Strength Through Failure” show on radio station WFMU

[Playlist for Strength Through Failure with Fabio - February 20, 2003](#)

Playlist for Strength Through Failure with Fabio - February 20, 2003 ... Sparks, This Town Aint Big Enough for the Both of Us, A Cute Candidate ... www.wfmu.org/playlists/shows/6684 - [Cached](#)

[Past Special Programs on WFMU](#)

on Strength Through Failure with Fabio Sparks Uber-fan, collector and general Sparks "Go-to" guy Ken Montgomery will be In for a third installment of Sparks ... www.wfmu.org/upcoming/past/13 - [Cached](#)

[Playlist for Strength Through Failure with Fabio - May 29, 2008](#)

May 29, 2008 ... The Sparks show was phenominal. I recommend checking out the archive. ... Fabio I think you should just slip this artist a rufi. ... www.wfmu.org/playlists/shows/27403 - [Cached](#) - [Similar](#)

2007

Wrote an essay “On Silence & Sparks” published by *The New York Foundation For Arts* about my favorite composers — John Cage and Ron & Russell Mael.

Funny all 3 are from LA!

NYFA New York Foundation for the Arts

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Ken Montgomery on *Silence and Sparks*

Sparks performing at Bucks County Community College, Pennsylvania (1974)
Photo by Ken Montgomery

When I was seventeen I had a job shelving books at the local community college library. One day, after what seemed like a deafening eternity, I noticed the word SILENCE printed on one of the spines. Somehow the stillness of the library slammed up against the noise in my head and by chance I pulled the book out, checked it out, and never returned it. I couldn't return it. (Back then there wasn't a chance in hell of finding a book by John Cage at the local mall.) In *Silence* I read Cage's "Lecture on Nothing," and in the process became conscious of listening—to the humming of the refrigerator, to the hissing of the radiator, to the moths hovering around the porch light. *Silence* provided me with the tools to entertain myself by tuning in to the sublime concert that is everyday life.

- 2008** Flew from New York City to London to see SPARKS SPECTACULAR. Had a show at a gallery and was asked to make a Lamination Ritual performance at the opening but told them I preferred to make the performance on the last day of the show so I could coordinate my travel to London to catch a SPARKS SPECTACULAR concert! At the Woofers & Tweeters concert I found myself backstage standing next to Russel and although I was flying back to New York the next day to do a 3 hour radio program on WFMU about the SPARKS SPECTACULAR I somehow couldn't think of a word to say to Russell so I ended up just chatting with one of Russell's journalist friends.
- 2008** Taught Sound Art at DAAP College of Art in Cincinnati, Ohio. The DAAP art library has a huge collection of vintage Snow Globes displayed. Thought of Ron.
- 2009** Flew from New York City to LA just to see Sparks perform "*Kimono My House*" at UCLA.
- 2010** Sent a copy of *The Seduction of Ingar Bergman* to WFMU's program director Brian Turner just after it was aired on Swedish radio.

References: Please feel free to contact the following artists and nice people.
Just mention Sparks.

Brain Turner

Program Director of WFMU, Jersey City, NJ
<bt@wfmu.org>

Fabio Roberti

DJ at WFMU, filmmaker and owner of Earwax record store in Brooklyn, NY
<sharpe@panix.com>

James Thirlwell -

aka Foetus - Composer, rockstar, artist extraordinaire
<jgthirlwell@gmail.com>

Michael Zodorozny

Artist, member of Crash Course in Science
<MikeZod@earthlink.net>

Mark Harris -Artist, Director College of Art in Cincinnati, Ohio
<harrismk@ucmail.uc.edu>

Career Highlights

I met a guy named Gary at a bar in New York who told me he drove all the way from Ohio to see Sparks. I asked him to write that onto a napkin and then laminated the napkin.



Upon seeing postcards from the Richard Avedon photo session (featured on *Introducing Sparks*) an 18 year old girl named Rifka exclaimed "I don't know who they are but I love them!"



One of my favorite quotes from Ron:



One of my favorite orders:

(8631)

OFFICIAL

Date 1/15 2030

M. KEN MONTGOMERY
Address NY

Reg. No.	Clerk	Account Forward
1	codder	
2	3 shirts	
3		
4	shampoo	
5		
6	SPARKS INTERNATIONAL OFFICIAL FAN CLUB	
7	P.O. BOX 25038 LOS ANGELES, CA 90025	
8	YOU HAVE A \$4. CREDIT	
9	COMING - YOU PAID FOR	
10	SHIPPING ON BOTH ITEMS	
11	SHIPPING COSTS EVERYTHING -	
12	DO YOU WANT A CREDIT	
13	OR A REFUND	
14	079471 (OVER)	
15	Your Account Stated to Date - If Error is Found Return at Once STYLE 1200	

My Sparks watch:



Sparks Special on WFMU 2003

Wake Up America!

Sparks Special on the Airwaves (Fabio's Show)

Thurs Jan 30, 2003 12 -3pm WFMU.org

Some might think of Sparks as that band from the 70s and others might think of them as that band from the 80s. They might try to remember the name of their hit song, but they won't remember the title. Or it's possible they never heard of Sparks. That's if you live in America. But if they live in England, Germany, France, The Netherlands, Belgium, Australia or Japan then they might know Sparks as that new band with the whacky lyrics. The titles of the Sparks songs alone are clever enough to demand attention. Under the name Sparks Ron and Russel Mael have been churning out eclectic quirky pop songs with long titles since the late 60s - and they are still at it.

They premiered their masterpiece Lil' Beethoven at the Royal Festival Hall in London on October 18, 2002 and I was there (along with many notable music dignitaries for the brother's heavily anticipated return to the stage). My guest appearance on WFMU airwaves gave a first hand report of that show and the songs on Lil' Beethoven their new CD which they played live with great fanfare —from track 1 to track 9 — in the same order as on the CD. As a guest on DJ Fabio's Irritainment Through Failure I played unreleased outtakes from vintage Sparks LPs from the 60s, 70s, 80s, and 90s, pre-vintaged demos for Half Nelson (their original band name) going back to the psychedelic 60s, promotional radio advertisements for marketing the Sparks brand, and lo-fi recordings I covertly recorded of applause and banter from between the songs during their show at the Royal Festival Hall in London. Unbelievably, when they do make it into the charts (not in America of course), people still think they're a new band!

"Stop Me If You've Heard This Before" — Ron & Russel Mael

I think we made minor radiophonic broadcast history with the Sparks Special on WFMU . Has there ever been a radio station in the US or possibly in the whole world that devoted 3 hours to exclusively listening and talking about Sparks? I doubt it.

"I Don't Even Know, What I Don't Even Know" Those Mysteries — Ron & Russel Mael

On the Sparks Special on WFMU I played selections from Lil' Beethoven, unreleased outtakes from vintage Sparks LPs from the 70s, 80s, and 90s, pre-vintages demo recordings from before Half Nelson going back to the psychedelic 60s, promotional radio advertisements for marketing Sparks, and live lo-fi recordings of the gaps between their songs at their concert at the Royal Festival Hall in London in 2002. On the air I suggested the hypothesis that I may be the biggest Sparks fan in New York City and possibly the world. Not wanting to offend anyone, I will already state that I could be wrong about this. (but I don't think so.)

Sparks - My Story

I first heard Sparks on the radio when Propaganda came out in the early seventies. I heard the title track and "At Home At Work At Play" on the radio and ran out to buy it the next day. Then I bought Kimono My House and A Woofer in A Tweeters Clothing. In 1974 or maybe 75 Sparks played at the local community college in my hometown in Pennsylvania. I was there with my camera and shot black & white photos which I developed and printed and I still have to this day. I continued buying their records whenever they were released. I saw them again at The Tower Theater in Philadelphia sometime in the late 70s. I liked everything I heard although sometimes it took a while to appreciate some of their records at first. Like a good wine they got better with time.

In 1982 I met Michael Zodorozny (from the legendary band Crash Course In Science) and we formed a band called KMZ. Michael was the first person I knew who shared my enthusiasm for Sparks. KMZ performed at the Pyramid Club in New York City in the early 80s. Michael played distorted keyboards and we sang and made noise over distorted rhythms, sequencers, homemade electronics, screechy violin and more noise. We wore costumes and makeup and projected slides onto sets designed for us by Greg Reeves, each show had a unique varied theme. When KMZ played at the Love Club in Philadelphia we did covers of "This Town Ain't Big Enough For The Both of Us" and "Amateur Hour" from Kimono My House — played back-to-back — just like on the album. I saw Sparks at the Ritz in New York City in the middle around 1985 and I remember being totally amused at the end when Russell came out for final encore with a stuffed animal and sang a ballad with it. Also around this time I saw Sparks at Jones Beach

opening up for Rick Springfield. It was hilarious because the audience was mostly young girls, many of them accompanied by their mothers. Ron came out in front of his keyboard and awkwardly performed a strip tease (down to boxer shorts!). Cracked me up!

Did I mention I am also a big fan of John Cage? Yes, and he's also from LA. Anyway, time went by and as I got more involved in abstract noise and experimental music I slowly forgot about Sparks. In 1986 I started a record label for experimental music (Generations Unlimited) and opened a sound art gallery (Generator) which featured experimental music, folk noise and sound artists. During this time I got very far from pop n'rock. In 1990 when I moved the Generator from the East Village to Chelsea I sold off a large portion of my personal record collection. While sorting through all pop and rock records that I collected from the 70's and 80's. When I came across my Sparks albums I instinctively put them directly into the Keeper Pile. I couldn't get rid of a single one. This purging of records happened several times in my life. Another time I remember putting on a Sparks record that I hadn't heard in several years as I considered getting rid of it but as soon as the needle hit the groove I was immediately reminded that these priceless gems of songs instantly put a smile on my face. So despite being completely immersed in experimental music for years and losing interest in popular music I found that I still adored my Sparks collection. Plus the album covers were entertaining by themselves!

In 1992 after closing the Generator I spent time in the Pocono Mountains. During this sabbatical I was living without a stereo and experiencing "Silence", the kind John Cage spoke about. After about a year of listening without a stereo one day I spontaneously bought home an 8-Track player and a box of tapes that I acquired at a local yard sale for nearly nothing. Seventies rock came surging back into my life. I became an 8-Track enthusiast and entered 8 Track Heaven by recording 8 Track Magic, an endearing recording of a damaged 8 Track tape that played once then died. I channeled "The Four Stages of The 8 Track Mind" and submitted it to the zine called 8 Track Mind. Soon I found myself wanting to hear Sparks again, this time on 8 Track. Not seeing Sparks on 8 Tracks in my local Salvation Army or at yard sales I put out a request for them in 8 Track Mind. I was contacted by a few people who wrote to me saying that they owned Sparks on 8 Track but they couldn't part with them - which of course I understood very well. Eventually I did receive several Sparks 8 Tracks in the mail from people who apparently understood how much I liked Sparks and how much I wanted to hear Sparks on 8 Track for which I was very grateful - even if some of them didn't play.

In 1994 I started A.T.M.O.T.W. (Art is Throwing Money Out The Window) by releasing "The Sound of Lamination", a 7-inch record (on blue vinyl) using the last money left to me from John Cage's generous donations to the Generator Sound Art Gallery. Inspired by a dream it was a total pleasure for me to release this record because it was so far out from the mainstream. It was even far out for the experimental music world - kind of outside of alternative culture as well. Very outside. It was almost conceptual. On the record jacket I thanked the people who inspired me including John Cage and Sparks. I was amused and wondered if Sparks and John Cage were ever so near each other in the same sentence before "The Sound of Lamination".

In 1996 I struggled through a depressed winter. While sorting through old boxes of papers, journals and other crap and found an old copy of the Official Sparks Fan Club newsletter which I had subscribed to in the early 80s. It made me wonder what ever happened to Sparks. Did the fan club still exist? Were Sparks still making music? I wrote to Mary Martin (The Official Sparks Fan Club secretary) and got an immediate response and news of a new Sparks music on the horizon. Soon I received a notice in the mail for a trivia contest by Logic Records promoting a new Sparks CD! Yes a new Sparks CD! I was thrilled. I faxed in the correct answer (Q. What was the name of the band before they became Sparks A. Half Nelson) and I won! A seven inch single called "When Do I get To Sing My Way" arrived with news of an upcoming new Sparks CD. I fell in love with this new Sparks song! When I put the record on all my troubles seemed so far away. I'll never forget the feeling of just standing in front of the speakers and smiling while listening to that record. I'm not one for repeat playing but I played that song over and over and over again. It was a soothing mental massage. I didn't need therapy. I didn't need anything. I just needed to listen to more Sparks. I began rounding out my collection. Most of my Sparks records had been in storage but with renewed interest I got them all out and played one after the other. Sparks records made me smile and brought me out of a gloomy mood. I played "When Do I get To Sing My Way" everyday on my way out the door to help chase away demons. "When Do I get To Sing My Way" was like my own "Number One Song in Heaven"! It echoed in my head and kept me in good spirits for most of the day. I'd give myself another fix of it when I got home to make sure. I was cured! Well, at least it really did help me get through many hard days. I immediately bought the new CD Gratuitous Sax and Senseless Violins as soon as it was released. Gratuitous Sax and Senseless Violins was the first new CD from Sparks in years. I bought some merchandise from The Official Sparks Fan Club and even voluntarily redesigned the Official Sparks Merchandise Order Form to place my order. It was very therapeutic typing in all the Sparks merchandise and it gave me more time to appreciate Sparks. I was sold on Sparks though I guess I had already been sold on them for decades. Maybe I was re-sold.

In April of 1996 I was in a bar in Vienna at 3 am after a long night of laminating. The DJ played "The Ghost of Liberace" from Gratuitous Sax and Senseless Violins. I was surprised and elated to hear Sparks in public! I last time I heard Sparks in a bar was at Dicks in the East Village sometime in the 80s. I approached the DJ and asked him if he liked Sparks. I found out he was the owner of the bar as well as the DJ and he was either very drunk or he didn't understand me or maybe he was just as blissed out on hearing Sparks as I was because he just smiled and nodded his head. I said very emphatically, "We - like - Sparks". He nodded and smiled some more. We made meaningful eye contact for a long moment. I was so thrilled to be able to say "We like Sparks", because in the avant-garde circles I tend to spin in I rarely meet a soul who loves Sparks. If I'm lucky it would be "Yeah, I LIKE Sparks". Most people never heard of them or occasionally someone says maybe they remember one song from many years ago.

That's why I proposed to do the 2-hour radio show about Sparks on WFMU in 2003. Actually I began proposing in several years before but it wasn't until 2003 that I finally convinced DJ Fabio to invite me on the air with my Sparks collection. I have been a guest on WFMU before, but I usually had something to do with contemporary music, noise, electronic music and things like that. Fabio laughed when I told him I wanted to do a total Sparks show—he thought I was joking! I brought it up several times and at one point he told me he thought Sparks was a mindless excuse for a pop band. Of course then I knew he knew almost nothing about Sparks and that I just had to do this show. Fabio was one of those people who thought they had one LP out in the 70's and then maybe another disco record in the 80s and he vaguely remembered liking one song a long time ago. He didn't know they had 20 records out in illustrious career as pop stars. And each one on a different record label! Imagine! I knew he needed a Sparks re-education. So I told him I would blow his mind if he let me on his show. I'd prove that Sparks was one of the most clever and imaginative pop/rock bands from the States, so clever in fact that despite having over 18 records released, many on major labels, most people still haven't heard of them. Hardly anybody even knows they are from the the States.!

Well it took a few years to convince Fabio of Sparks super potential as a subject for his show. When I found out there was going to be a Sparks-o-Rama conference I thought I would try again. I organized a gathering of people at Galapagos Art Space in Williamsburg to watch 12 hours of Sparks videos to coincide with the Sparks-o-Rama conference taking place in LA so thought this would be the perfect time to have the Sparks Special on WFMU. I told him I would persist until he said yes and that I wouldn't do any other shows until he let me do a Sparks Special. Because he had a lot of respect for me in the past and had bought priceless records from me at Generator, and because I was unbelievably persistent, he finally consented.

I was pleased to find WFMU already had seven Sparks albums in their collection when I visited their library. But no one I met at the station had any idea that Sparks still existed, let alone that they were about to make a major comeback as tours were announced for Europe, Australia and Japan. We invited Sparks fans to call us on the show and I think we received 2 calls from people who actually knew about Sparks. One was from the Madeline who was an organizer of the Sparks-o-Rama conference and the other was from Frank, a gentleman who ONLY owns records by Sparks! Incidentally, he is now married to Madeline. The Sparks show on WFMU turned a lot of heads and opened a lot of ears to Sparks for people who had previously had no idea that Sparks existed or that they had been so prolific and brilliant for so many years.

And now fast forward to the year 2007. Since the Sparks Special on WFMU there has been a sequel to the Sparks show on Fabio's show, two Sparks tribute CDs — one by their fans (including 2 tracks from me) and another by Sparks themselves—several new Sparks CDs on several new labels, a Sparks concert in New York City at Summer Stage, a BBC special about Sparks and more. Today I can safely say Sparks are played consistently on WFMU and are known by most of the DJs at the station.

So it is with great enthusiasm that I say I love Sparks. They continue to make me happy.

Ken Montgomery 2007