



KEN MONTGOMERY IS A CAMERA eye. On *Beyond My Ken*, *The One-Sided Triangle*, and other solo titles listed in his catalog [available from Generator, 200 E. Third St., New York, NY 10009], the synthesist/violinist dollies down endless corridors and pans across deserted rooms in imaginary mansions. Analog synths tinkle like shivering chandeliers; drum machines suggest footsteps on a marble floor; an amplified violin, bowed with agonizing slowness, mimics the sound of a door groaning shut. It's a surreal, sepulchral world, where something is always about to happen, or has just happened. "I like to create a space for the mind to explore," he informs.

Although he studied violin from the age of eight until he was 15, Montgomery cites as formative influences Stockhausen, Cage, and other electronic avant-gardists he heard on late-night radio as a teenager in suburban Churchville, near Philadelphia. "I didn't even know what a synthesizer was," he recalls, "but those strange sounds really intrigued me. I used to go to see a local synthesist named Charles Cohen perform; I was fascinated, watching all those LEDs and lights. Once, he said to me, 'You know, you're so interested in electronic mu-

sic, you ought to play too.' I told him I wasn't a musician, and he told me that was ridiculous. I said I wanted to study film in college, and he asked me why I didn't just buy a camera and make some movies. Later, when I decided to drop out of film school at New York University, buy a synthesizer, and just start playing it, everything he said made a lot of sense."

Since embarking on his career as an "audio artist" in 1980, Montgomery has taken Cohen's approach to heart. He and frequent collaborator Conrad Schnitzler, a founding member of Tangerine Dream and Cluster, have given numerous cassette concerts in Europe—post-Cageian events designed to be performed "anywhere in the world, at any time, by anybody"—consisting of tapes containing single tracks of a larger composition which, when played simultaneously, create a rushing river of sound. As half of Montgomery & Myers, a duo formed with noisician David Myers, he tortures pitiable squeals and moans from his violin which are then deconstructed by Myers on an ominous-looking black box called the "feedback machine." And in solo improvisations, Montgomery calls forth a soundstorm, from hard bright timbres that bounce like hailstones to soft sonic sprinklings that glitter like powder on a ski slope. It's all done with a Korg MS-20, a Korg sequencer designed for the MS-20, a Roland TR-505 drum machine, an electric shaver, a twitching, convulsing Japanese toy robot amplified with contact mikes, and a battery of delay, distortion,

EQ, and noise gate pedals.

An indefatigable proponent of the notion that "art is no secret" in an age of pirate radio and Portastudios, Montgomery founded in 1987 Generations Unlimited, a populist label devoted entirely to that hi-tech folk form, electronic music. Last year, in New York City's East Village, he opened Generator Experimental Music Gallery, dedicated to the proposition that electronic music could appeal to the general public. Among many who have appeared in the tiny space are Boston's Ski-A-Delics, who play skis strung with amplified piano strings, Montgomery's "electronic guru" Charles Cohen, and Montgomery himself, performing "Because Why?," an experiment in controlled chaos conducted with synthesizer, shower curtain, tape loops, and yacking radios.

"For me," asserts Montgomery, "the imagination runs wild when an artist can free himself from the known and jump into the unknown. It can be sort of scary, but I've always been interested in jumping."

—Mark Dery



Ken Montgomery in action at Boston's Kingston Gallery (left), and taking a breather with collaborator and "noisician" David Myers.

