

GEN KEN MONTGOMERY

CHOP SHOP



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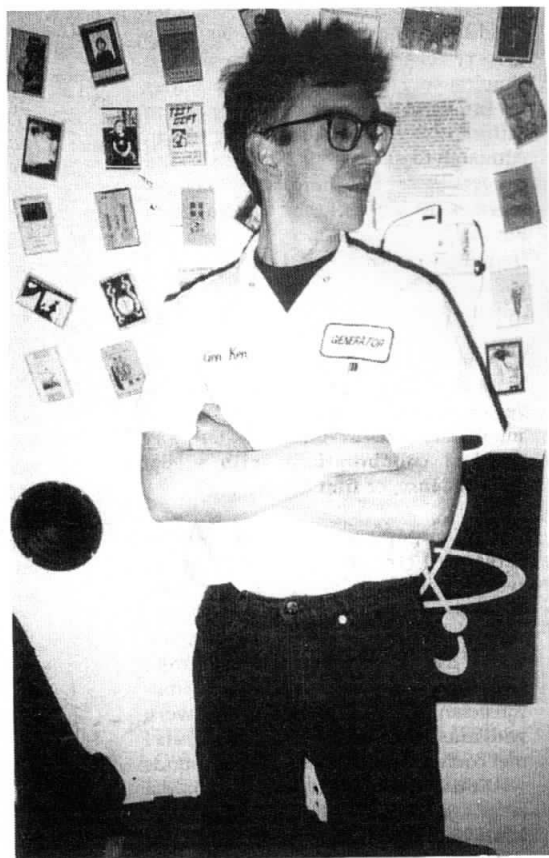
## GEN KEN MONTGOMERY

**How did you first become interested in doing music? How did you become involved with cassettes and the related network?**

**Ken Montgomery:** I had been interested in doing music and sound long before I began to make my own. I began to study filmmaking, but quickly discovered I was approaching it with the soundtrack already in my mind; so I left film school and began working on soundtracks without the film. I liked the idea that I could make music without musical training, so with some sound advice from Charles Cohen, who first introduced me to synthesizers, I was on my way. After experimenting with tape manipulation and electronic sounds on a porta studio, I made a cassette called "Gen Ken & Equipment" and sent it to a few friends and magazines. That was in 1980, when the "network" wasn't very defined. It was a bit of an extension of mail art which for me wasn't very defined either. I liked the post and often sent postcards or objects through the mail sometimes randomly when I found curious addresses. So when I made a cassette I did the same thing.

**When you begin to work on a piece, what sort of working process do you go through?**

**Ken Montgomery:** I've almost always worked with the sounds first, finding sounds that interest me and develop them into a structure. Many times the atmosphere the sounds evoke suggest the next sound and direction evolves. From these elements of chance and experiments, trance or will continue the piece. I'm often inspired to work in a new setting. I like to use other people's studios to explore the unfamiliar. By changing instruments, sound materials, locations, and studios I keep myself entertained and inspired.



Gen Ken at GENERATOR

**Do you ever score your music, or chart it with a structure for instance while composing it, or does it evolve while you are working on the piece?**

**Ken Montgomery:** I've never felt a need, interest, or ability to score my music. For my first live performances I painstakingly noted ever change and setting for a 25 minute piece. As detailed as it was, it had many open spaces for improvisation. After performing it once I never performed it again and wouldn't want to. Although I have never attempted to score a piece again, I relate my work with Cassette Concerts as a means of notation. This came from my work with Conrad Schnitzler. Conrad began recording

separate music and sound lines on separate cassettes which he would mix and process in live settings. Later he developed his composing so there would be groups of cassettes that were constructed to be played simultaneously. He encouraged others to interpret them by mixing them differently and/or processing them. Although these Cassette Concerts sound differently every time, they always retain a recognizable musical identity. For non-tradition sounds with complex frequency this is about as close as I would get to notation without delving into mathematics and tedium.

**You have worked with a variety of artists. What are your feelings regarding collaborations with other musicians? Have you ever done any musical collaborations with visual artists, dance, or film ?**

**Ken Montgomery:** I've always been as interested in collaborations as in working alone. One of my earliest cassettes was called "Collaborations", where each track was with a different artist. Every piece was very different from the others. Since I was a non-musician, I found it difficult to work with musicians because most musicians I met couldn't understand making sounds without the "traditional musical language". So most of my collaborations have been with other non-musicians; dancers, filmmakers, or people who were creative and could just jump into the world of sound.

**Regarding the cassette network, could you try and pin point what you see as both the positive and negative aspects?**

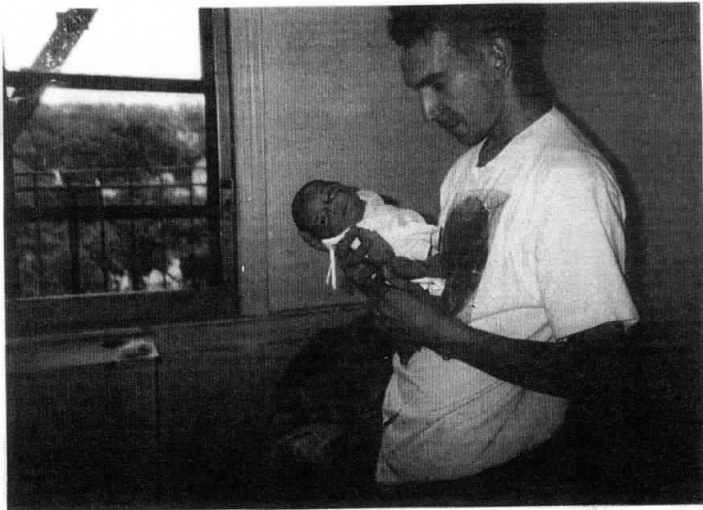
**Ken Montgomery:** It's great that people are realizing that everyone is an artist and so it's progress that everyone makes a cassette and a painting too, but the down point is that there are people who are extremely creative and inspiring and there are people who are just beginning to develop their ideas and sometimes it is hard to tell them apart on the surface. It seems that as the network expanded, the overall quality of music digressed. Not that there aren't great things being done, it is just that it has become harder and harder to locate it amongst the mediocre.

**Being involved with both Generations Unlimited and Generator you have been exposed to at least a slice of the business end of music. Do you think this helped or hindered your own audio work ?**

**Ken Montgomery:** Certainly the commitment to producing and presenting music has taken away from my time to create music. I wouldn't want to work on music all the time. When the feeling is right music comes very quickly for me, so I like to have gaps of time to develop ideas on an inner level then let it fall out intuitively. None of my projects have been very business-like as I've always had as my motivation certain ideals that seem to exclude any possibility of a real "business". Whenever they progress to the point where I must make a decision for the survival of the "business", I usually go with my original ideals which means I abandon the project. I'm not against business or art, but they have never gone together for me.



Gen Ken with Monty Cantsin (Istvan Kantor)



"MAKE LIFE NOT ART"

What future projects are you working on now?

**Ken Montgomery:** Besides planning exhibitions for Generator 547, I have ideas about a new record, a concert hall for one person, new novelties and skipping out of New York City to watch it crumble from a small creative hideout like the The Funny Farm or The Incubator or some newly created space in the middle of nowhere that nobody, or almost nobody will hear of, and that would be very refreshing for me.

With your music, is there any kind of aesthetic philosophy you might have towards it?

**Ken Montgomery:** No.

With experimental, alternative, or these other categories which are tagged on to unconventional types of music, do you have any ideas or suggestions about ways to have more people exposed to it, or possibly giving the general public a sort of "in" with it all?

**Ken Montgomery:** College radio has had an important part in exposing people to unconventional music. I got interested in avant-garde music by flipping the dials to college stations and since they were usually so weak, I got earfulls of oscillating static too. But

here in New York City there is very little radio left that takes chances outside of WFMU, which is located in New Jersey and sometimes impossible to receive. I opened up Generator in downtown Manhattan to give the general public the chance to walk in off the street and experience new music. That's why I wouldn't carry "sellable" familiar music just to pay the rent. I wanted people to hear the strangest music in the world as they walked in the door. I would say this was successful in that I met many people who were not at all into this music, who became curious and after hearing some recordings decided to take a tape home. I wonder how many of them went on to find other alternative musics? I've always been more interested in exposing the uninitiated to new music than to keep it amongst a closed circle of freaks. Keep in mind that people are usually first attracted to music that is a little different and later to music that is very different. If you play something too extreme in the beginning you may lose them. It is a hard job and sometimes I wonder why anyone would want to do it.

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