

KEN VANDERMARK

Ken Vandermark was born on September 22, 1964 in Warwick, Rhode Island and began playing trumpet in the fourth grade, switching to the tenor saxophone as a junior in high school. Since 1982, he has been seriously exploring the possibilities of new improvised music.

During the years 1986-1989, he lived in Boston and was a leader of the trio Lombard Street. During this period, he began studying the bass clarinet. In the Fall of 1989, he moved to Chicago and is now working with a variety of improvising ensembles including: the Vandermark Five, the DKV Trio, the Chicago Bridge Unit, the Sound In Action Trio, Cinghiale, Witches and Devils, the Signal To Noise Unit and the Payne, Vida, Vandermark Trio.

He added the Bb clarinet to his instrumental arsenal during 1992. Ken was selected as one of the "Chicagoans of the Year in the Arts: 1994" by the Chicago Tribune (January 1, 1995) for his work with the Vandermark Quartet. His group, the Vandermark Five, was selected for inclusion in the sound aspect of the "Art in Chicago: 1945-1995" exhibition held at the Museum of Contemporary Art in that city from November 16, 1996 through March 23, 1997. In addition to these Chicago groups, Ken has been fortunate enough to have worked with some of the most highly respected national and international improvising musicians in the world, such as Fred Anderson, Johannes Bauer, Peter Brotzmann, Axel Dorner, Georg Graewe, Mats Gustafsson, Thomas Lehn, Paul Lovens, Paul Lytton, Joe McPhee, Joe Morris, Raymond Strid, and Wolter Wierbos.

Aside from the various schools of improvised music influenced by the history of jazz, Ken's music has been greatly informed by sources like "Mississippi" Fred McDowell, James Brown, John Cage, Captain Beefheart, Meshuggah, Gyorgy Ligeti, Funkadelic, and various traditional musics from around the world.

Since the beginning of 1996, he and writer John Corbett have acted as co-organizers of the "Empty Bottle Wednesday Night Jazz Series" concerts that continue to bring improvisers from Chicago, North America, and Europe to audiences on a weekly basis. In conjunction with the series, they have also presented two international jazz festivals (in May 1997 and 1998) at the Empty Bottle, and were selected as "Best Underground Music Promoters" by Chicago's New City (September 25, 1997). New City also selected Ken as one of its "Music 45", a list of Chicagoans having the greatest impact on the nation's music industry, in 1998 and 1999. He placed first in the January, 1999 Cadence Reader's Poll as the musician receiving the greatest number of individual nominations for best recordings released in 1998, and was picked by Down Beat magazine in June as one of the "25 For the Future", the most significant improvising musicians under the age of 40 performing today. Also in 1999, Ken became a committee member for the "New Music-New Millennium Series" put together by Michael Orlove of the Chicago Cultural Center. In the summer of that year, he was accorded the rare and high honor of becoming the only musician selected as a 1999 MacArthur Fellow. We are extremely enthused about the opportunity to become involved with such a prolific, hard-working, and diverse talent. In addition to providing national representation for The DKV Trio and The Vandermark Five, we will also be working on other special projects with Ken including this summer's very rare North American tour of the Brotzmann Chicago Tentet (now a twelve-piece), featuring improvisational jazz luminaries from Chicago and around the world, including Peter Brotzmann, Mats Gustafsson, Mars Williams, Toshinori Kondo, Hamid Drake, Joe McPhee, Fred Lonberg-Holm, William Parker, Michael Zerang, Kent Kessler, Jeb Bishop, and Ken himself. We'll have more news on these June and July dates as it becomes available.

Vandermark 5

Ken Vandermark (reeds) formed the Vandermark 5 in the Spring of 1996 as an outlet for compositional and improvisational ideas he'd developed over years of work with such renowned bands as the NRG

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Ensemble, the Peter Brotzmann Chicago Tentet, the AALY Trio, the Vandermark Quartet, the Steel Wool Trio, Cinghiale, Steam, the Barrage Double trio, The Sound in Action Trio, and Tripleplay. Looking for a combo with the capability to sound like a large ensemble, he chose four exceptional musicians who have years of performance experience with different kinds of improvised music to join him on the project: Jeb Bishop (trombone/guitar), Kent Kessler (bass), Tim Mulvenna (drums), and Dave Rempis (alto/tenor saxophone) (Mars Williams was replaced by Dave Rempis in March of 1998). The range of instrumentation and stylistic potential contained in this unit has allowed Vandermark to write charts that run the gamut of musical possibilities, incorporating elements of jazz history, contemporary composition, funk, rock, and traditional music from around the world into the ensemble's material. The focus remains, however, an improvisation, and he has allowed ample room for the members of the group to interpret and reinterpret his writing with their spontaneous ideas.

The Vandermark 5 has always concentrated on live performance as a means to hone its skills and has played regularly since its inception (of special importance is their ongoing Tuesday night series at the Empty Bottle in Chicago that began in November of 1996). 1998 was especially productive, with a two-week tour of Eastern America in the fall and two International Festivals within four months (Rive de Gier, France and Mainz, Germany). The band's work has been documented on four CD's so far, with a fifth to be released in June of 1999. It's second studio CD, Target or Flag, was picked as the best record of 1998 by Cadence Magazine (Jan 1999) "Reader's Poll".

The Vandermark 5's music has been called "the most consistently exciting stuff I've heard by any small U.S. band since the Art Ensemble of Chicago" (Cadence Magazine, June 1997).

DKV Trio

The DKV Trio has been called "the best working band in Chicago jazz" (Chicago Reader, Jan 31, 1997), and is one of the premier free-improv units in the United States. Unlike many groups that use this approach, DKV improvises using "song structures" (many of their pieces sound like they are based on written material), and it focuses on intensive explorations of different kinds of rhythm (moving from "free time" to serious grooves). Hamid Drake (drums), Kent Kessler (bass), and Ken Vandermark (reeds) also incorporate influences from other cultures (African, Greek, Middle Eastern) and non-jazz styles (funk, late 20th Century composition, delta blues) into their music. Formed in the summer of 1994, this trio has developed a unique and amazing rapport through regular performances, playing with unbelievable focus as they intuitively create strong musical forms through their special use of melody, rhythm and sound. The band will sometimes incorporate the compositions of Don Cherry into their spontaneous music, using his pieces as another one of their sonic resources. Since its inception, the DKV Trio has also performed as a quartet with Fred Anderson, Peter Brotzmann, Georg Graewe, Mats Gustafsson, Joe Morris, and Peter van Bergen.

The Members of the DKV Trio:

Hamid Drake is one of the most in-demand contemporary jazz drummers in the world today. He has had long standing associations with Peter Brotzmann, Fred Anderson, George Grawe, Bill Laswell, and Pharaoh Sanders (among others) and has worked extensively with Don Cherry from 1978 until Cherry's passing in 1995. Aside from his work with improvised music, Hamid has performed and recorded with a number of reggae ensembles, such as the I-Tals, the Heptones, and Africassa. Mr. Drake has performed in clubs, concert halls, and festivals all over the globe and his work has been recorded on dozens of classic recordings.

Kent Kessler is probably the most important bassist living in Chicago today, performing with a huge array of visiting musicians (Peter Brotzmann, Georg Graewe, Mats Gustafsson, Joe Morris, and Joe McPhee, to name a few) as well as regularly working with some of the most recognized ensembles playing in the city (Vandermark Five, NRG Ensemble, DKV Trio, Jeb Bishop Trio). Kent can be heard on the Vandermark Five recordings on Atavistic: NRG Ensemble on ECM, Quinnah, Delmark, and Atavistic: FJF's CD, Blowhard, the Georg Graewe Quartet CD, Melodie Und Rhythms (with Hamid Drake and Frank Gratkowski), and A Meeting in Chicago (with Joe McPhee and Ken Vandermark) on

Okka Disk. Mr. Kessler has performed at some of the most prestigious jazz festivals in the world, including the Tampere Jazz Happening, the Nickelsdorf Jazz Festival, the Ulricksburg Jazz Festival, and the Vancouver Jazz Festival.

Ken Vandermark has been a significant part of the Chicago improvised music scene since 1992 when the Vandermark Quartet was formed (the group, which also included Kent Kessler, was selected for their contributions to music as "Chicagoans of the Year in the Arts: 1994" by the Chicago Tribune Jan. 1, 1995)). Since then, Ken has led some of the best new jazz groups to come out of the city: the Vandermark Five, Steam, Cinghiale, Signal to Noise Unit, the Sound in Action Trio, and the Chicago Bridge Unit. With John Corbett he has helped organize the "Empty Bottle Jazz Series" which has put on weekly concerts and two international festivals since January of 1996. Like Mr. Kessler, Ken has been fortunate enough to work with some of the best improvisers in the world and has performed at a number of international jazz festivals.