

Evans had met George Russell during his tenure with Lucy Reed. Russell's first impression of Evans was negative ("this is going to be like pulling teeth all day"), but when he secretly heard Evans play, he completely changed his mind. Russell was then developing his magnum opus, the treatise *Lydian Chromatic Concept of Tonal Organization*, in which he exposed that the Lydian mode was more compatible with tonality than the major scale used in most music. This new concept was ground-breaking in jazz, and would soon influence musicians like Miles Davis. Evans, who had already been acquainted with these ideas before, began to work with him in 1956.



By this time, RCA Victor had begun a series of recordings called *Jazz Workshop*, and soon Russell, through the intervention of McKustic and Jack Lewis, was granted his own record date. Then, Russell assembled trumpeter Art Farmer, guitarist Barry Galbraith, bassist Milt Hinton and Evans for three recording dates, along with rehearsal sessions. In these, only the bassist was given a written part, while the rest were left, and, according to Farmer, "took the parts at home and tried to come to terms with them". The album took a year to do, and it was successful enough to enable Russell to escape his penurious lifestyle. Evans performed a notable solo in "Concerto for Billy the Kid".

In September 1956, producer Orrin Keepnews was convinced to record the reluctant Evans by a demo tape Mundell Lowe played to him over the phone. The result was his debut album, *New Jazz Conceptions*, featuring the original versions of "Waltz for Debby", and "Five". This album began Evans' relationship with Riverside Records. Although a critical success that gained positive reviews in *Down Beat* and *Metronome* magazines, *New Jazz Conceptions* was initially a financial failure, selling only 800 copies the first year. "Five" was for some time Evans' trio farewell tune during performances. After releasing the album, Evans spent much time studying Bach scores to improve his technique.

In 1957, Russell was one of six musicians (three jazz, three classical composers) commissioned by Brandeis University to write a piece for their Festival of the Creative Arts in the context of the first experiments in third stream jazz. Russell wrote a suite for orchestra, "All About Rosie", which featured Bill Evans among other soloists. "All About Rosie" has been cited as one of the few convincing examples of composed polyphony in jazz. A week before the festival, the piece was previewed in TV, and Evans' performance was deemed "legendary" in jazz circles. During the festival performance, in June 6, Evans became acquainted with Chuck Israels, who would become his bassist years later. During the Brandeis Festival, guitarist Joe Puma invited Evans to play on the album *Joe Puma/Jazz*.



While George Russell was very active as a free-thinking composer, arranger, and bandleader, his biggest effect upon jazz was in the quieter role of theorist. His great contribution, apparently the first by a jazz musician to general music theory, was a book with the intimidating title *The Lydian Chromatic Concept of Tonal Organization*, where he concocted a concept of playing jazz based on scales rather than chord changes. Published in 1953, Russell's theories directly paved the way for the modal revolutions of Miles Davis and John Coltrane -- and Russell even took credit for the theory behind Michael Jackson's huge hit "Wanna Be Startin' Somethin'," which uses the Lydian scale (no, he didn't ask for royalties). Russell's stylistic reach in his own compositions eventually became omnivorous, embracing bop, gospel, blues, rock, funk, contemporary classical elements, electronic music, and African rhythms in his ambitious extended works -- most apparent in his large-scale 1983 suite for an enlarged big band, *The African Game*. Like his colleague Gil Evans, Russell never stopped growing, but his work is not nearly as well-known as that of Evans, being more difficult to grasp and, in any case, not as well documented by U.S. record labels.

Russell's first instrument was the drums, which he played in the Boy Scout Drum and Bugle Corps and at local clubs when he was in high school. At 19, he was hospitalized with tuberculosis, but he used the enforced inactivity to learn the craft of arranging from a fellow patient. Once back on his feet, he played with Benny Carter, but after being replaced on drums by Max Roach, Russell began to zero in on composing and arranging. He moved to New York to join the crowd of young firebrands who gathered in Gil Evans' "salon," and he was actually invited to play drums in Charlie Parker's band. But once again, he fell ill, finding himself in a Bronx hospital for 16 months (1945-1946), where he began to formulate the ideas for the Lydian Concept. Upon his recovery, Russell leaped into the embryonic fusion of bebop and Afro-Cuban rhythms by writing "Cubana Be" and "Cubana Bop," which the Dizzy Gillespie big band recorded in 1947. He contributed arrangements to Claude Thornhill and Artie Shaw in the late '40s and wrote the first (and not the last) speculative scenario of a meeting between Charlie Parker and Igor Stravinsky, "A Bird in Igor's Yard," recorded by Buddy De Franco.

The RCA Victor Jazz Workshop While working on his Lydian theories, Russell dropped out of active music-making for a while, working at a sales counter in Macy's when his book was published. But when he resumed composing in 1956, he had established himself as an influential force in jazz. Russell's connection with

Gunther Schuller resulted in the commission of "All About Rosie" for the 1957 Brandeis University jazz festival, and he also taught at the Lenox School of Jazz that Schuller co-founded. He formed a rehearsal sextet in the mid-'50s that became known as the George Russell Smalltet, with Art Farmer, Bill Evans, Hal McKusick, Barry Galbraith, and various drummers and bassists. Their 1956 recording *Jazz Workshop* (RCA Victor) became a landmark of its time, and Russell continued to record intriguing LPs for Decca in the late '50s and Riverside in the early '60s. Another key album from this period, *Ezz-Thetics*, featured two important progressive players, Eric Dolphy and Don Ellis.

Electronic Sonata for Souls Loved by Nature - 1980 Finding the American jazz scene too confining for his music, Russell left for Europe in 1963, living in Sweden for five years. From his new base, he toured Scandinavia with a new sextet of European players and received numerous commissions -- including a ballet based on *Othello*, a mass, and the orchestral suite *Electronic Sonata for Souls Loved by Nature*: 1980. Upon his return to the U.S. in 1969, he joined the faculty of the New England Conservatory of Music, where Schuller had started a jazz department, and this gave him a secure base from which to tour occasionally with his own groups. Russell stopped composing from 1972 to 1978 in order to finish a second volume on the *Lydian Chromatic Concept*. He led a 19-piece big band at the Village Vanguard for six weeks in 1978, played the Newport Jazz Festival when it was based in New York City, and made tours of Italy, the U.S. West Coast, and England in the '80s.

So What Russell's most imposing latter-day commissions included "An American Trilogy" and the monumental three-hour work "Time Line" for symphony orchestra, jazz ensembles, rock groups, choir, and dancers. In addition to *The African Game* and *So What* on Blue Note, Russell made recordings for Soul Note in the '70s and '80s and Label Bleu in the '90s, while continuing to teach at the New England Conservatory and leading his Living Time Orchestra big band into the 21st century. In 2005 George Russell & the Living Time Orchestra's *The 80th Birthday Concert*, released on the Concept label, celebrated the legendary octogenarian's contributions to the art of jazz with performances of some of his most groundbreaking extended compositions and arrangements. George Russell died in Boston on July 27, 2009 of complications from Alzheimer's disease; he was 86 years old.

JAZZ IN THE SPACE AGE

George Russell And His Orchestra featuring Bill Evans

- 1 Chromatic Universe - Part 1 3:33
 - 2 Dimensions 13:11
 - 3 Chromatic Universe - Part 2 3:47
 - 4 The Lydiot 10:04
 - 5 Waltz From Outer Space 6:59
 - 6 Chromatic Universe - Part 3 4:55
- Total Time 42:291

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