

**JAZZ IN THE**

**Orquestra Jazz de Matosinhos**

**George Russell**

**SPACE AGE**

Orquestra Jazz de Matosinhos

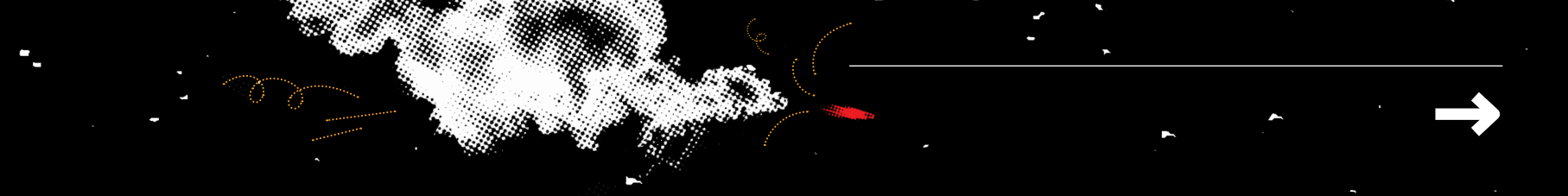
# JAZZ IN THE SPACE AGE



George Russell



On October 4th, 1957, the Soviet Union launched Sputnik, the first object placed by humanity in orbit around a celestial body, thus inaugurating the era of the space race. Inevitably, composers were also inspired by the new adventurous spirit that this era seemed to contain. In 1960, George Russell and a group of jazz stars recorded *Jazz in the Space Age*, a historic record already featuring some ideas from the composer's revolutionary *Lydian Chromatic Concept of Tonal Organization*. But what does this music do anyway? Everything. It gravitates. It draws us in, it pushes us away. It allows us to wander around, perhaps looking at this nearby planet, intersecting with a star, perhaps deviating from a meteorite at high speed. Russell wrote the score for *Jazz In the Space Age* and intentionally left a space open for free improvisation – he fixed the satellites in orbits and the imagination of his celestial bodies did the rest. He brought the universe with all its possibilities and mysteries into the music. A cosmos that could seem infinite to us, just like music. Sixty years later we allow ourselves to gravitate to this score, today with other celestial bodies that gaze upon this music through its unique cosmic dust.



George Russell (1923-2009) had a winding formative career, from playing drums in a school context to becoming a central figure in jazz teaching at the New England Conservatory starting in 1969 and continuing for decades. However, back in 1941, tuberculosis took him to hospital for six months, and there he met another patient who gave him the fundamentals of harmony and arrangements. He played with Benny Carter's band, but would be replaced by Max Roach, leading him to give up the drums. Already in New York, he was attending musicians' meetings at Gil Evans' house, which included figures such as Miles Davis, Gerry Mulligan, Max Roach, Johnny Carisi and, at times, Charlie Parker.

His talents as an arranger and his originality then began to reveal themselves: in 1947 Dizzy Gillespie's orchestra played his double Cuban composition *Be/Cubano Bop*, the first ever fusion between Cuban Afro rhythms and jazz.

To talk about the composer, we mustn't leave out the theoretical side. George Russell developed the *Lydian Chromatic Concept of Tonal Organization*, the result of reflections and experiences begun in the 1940s, with a first restricted edition in 1953 - and successive re-editions added in 1959, 1964 and 2001. It is common to say that it is the only musical treatise born in jazz - and even if it is not the only one today, it is certainly the most original and complete, the one that is at the origin of all the theories that followed it. But what really matters,

in the context of this album, is to understand in what sense Russell's thought has shaped his music and that of several of the most influential composers and soloists ever (names like Miles Davis, Bill Evans, John Coltrane and Ornette Coleman, for example), and how it is fundamental to the emergence of such central objects as Miles Davis' album *Kind of Blue* - simply the most successful jazz album ever.

Russell's impetus for his research is said to have been the answer he received from Miles Davis to a question of his own: What would be Miles' great musical goal?; "I want to learn all the changes". Since Miles had already mastered all the chord progressions, Russell interpreted the answer as a desire to discover a new way of playing on harmonic structures. Another

hospitalization contributed to George Russell's concentration on his studies, and between 1950 and 1953 he created his influential theory, fuelled also by classes with the German composer Stefan Wolpe, professor of several jazz musicians of that time.

The complexity of George Russell's ideas makes his study somewhat unreachable to a layman in music theory and difficult even for the instrumentalist who is not dedicated to improvisation or composition. In short, Russell starts from the analysis of music that preceded him, both in jazz (especially soloists like Lester Young, Coleman Hawkins and Charlie Parker) and in classical tradition (he analyses excerpts from Ravel or Bach in the 2001 edition of the book), and suggests a method contrary to the formatted thought of the Western musician: the

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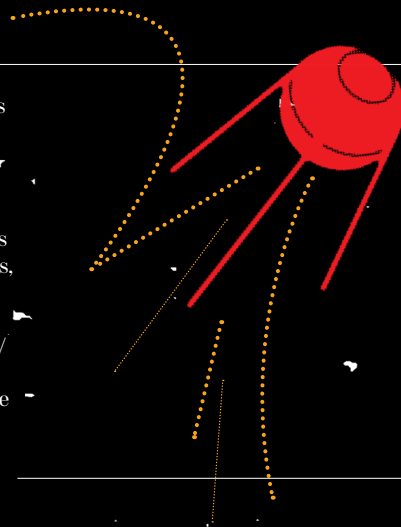
basis of music is not a scale from which to build chord sequences, but rather, on the basis of the chord, different scales can be used, with sequential levels of dissonance up to total chromaticity (use of all 12 notes of an octave). The primary scale is the so-called Lydian mode, offering a stability from which tensions and resolutions may (or may not) be created. What happens with the use of a major scale as a basis is that it already entails a direction, already implies tensions and resolutions, and therefore constrains the improviser/composer. The Lydian mode, on the other hand, peacefully overlaps with a major chord, without imposing tensions and resolutions - as happens with the Doric mode on a minor chord. Hoping not to have alienated the less patient reader from these notes with the theories of music, we conclude this section by saying

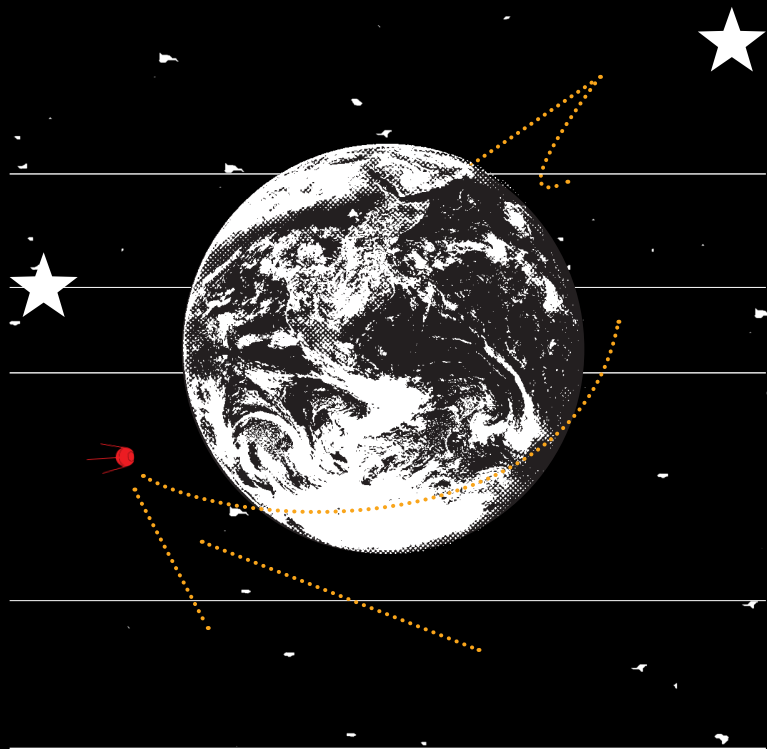
that this is only the initial foundation for George Russell's proposals, which, in fact, extend to variants of this Lydian mode, including blues scales and the traditional major and minor ones, to the point of allowing for the overlapping of different harmonic layers and for reaching different densities according to the choices of the improviser/composer.

To a greater or lesser degree, and sometimes with other nomenclatures, George Russell's proposals are still the basis for much of the improvisation techniques that are taught in jazz schools today. In his time, they marked a revolution in the musical thought of jazz (with foundations in the previous practice of great improvisers) and were particularly important when embraced by exceptional musicians such as Bill Evans, Miles Davis (both in the modal and electrical phases) or

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Ornette Coleman. Anyone who knows the music of these three figures will know that we are speaking of very different, sometimes even apparently contradictory, languages. The scope of Russell's study is such that it allows for a connection to all these languages, without imposing any restrictions, instead allowing for the most varied degrees of approach to improvisation/composition on chord progressions. In any case, this theory has been more naturally associated with a current of jazz that was born as its direct consequence: modal jazz.





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**T**he proposal of the Orquestra Jazz de Matosinhos for the concert recorded here is a reinterpretation of the original *Jazz in the Space Age*, a seminal disc by George Russell edited by Decca in 1960. By this time, his first record *The Jazz Workshop* (1956) had already been released, revealing a writing inspired by the phrasing of the great soloists and manifesting the intention to create melodies as intense as if they had been the result of the moment. The composer's writing was soloistic, but there was naturally room for improvisation itself. But Russell created the sections for improvisation with resources unlike the usual ones: the structure did not need to be restricted to the traditional exposure - solos - re-exposure, and solos could be based on new chord sequences or *ostinatos* (continuously repeated bass lines). Here, as will

happen later in the album *Jazz in the Space Age*, the line separating the written parts from the improvised ones is very tenuous. Bill Evans, who played on both records, illustrated it by saying: "George composes things which sound improvised. You have to be deeply involved in jazz and understand all the elements to be able to do that".

This improvised character of written music brought an additional challenge into this project of the Orquestra Jazz de Matosinhos: in the absence of scores, a transcription of the arrangements was made by Telmo Marques, a work that required an interpretation that differentiated the written sections from those that were (and were also in this concert) improvised.

The music on the album has the form of a suite with a recurring theme, presented in the three parts of "Chromatic Universe". In "Dimensions", we hear a sequence

of solos for the first time that provides us with a characteristic sound derived from the ideas of the *Lydian Chromatic Concept*. Despite the space naturally reserved for individual expression by soloists, Telmo Marques' transcription departs from recorded solos to suggest, for example, the use of the so-called "Lydian Diminished scale", a symmetrical eight-note scale that was already made known by Olivier Messiaen in his treatise *Technique de mon langage musical* (1944). Originally featuring pianists Bill Evans and Paul Bley, the arrangements explore the dialogues between the two pianos on several occasions, but also include solos of various winds. The use of polymodality, that is, of different overlapping scales, has a very clear example in the theme "*The Lydian*" - the harmonized melody heard in the trumpets, a perfectly tonal riff, which is doubled by two trombones, but these play half tone and one tone above the first trumpet, all

simultaneously. Thus, a sequence that would sound completely harmonious gains much more suggestive contours.

The reinterpretation of a historical album, in concert and on this edition, may intrigue some of those who see OJM as an orchestra that favours - and it is true - composition and original arrangements. Or even those who think of jazz as a language that always demands future-oriented thought, often not realizing that this dogma can even keep them bound to certain pasts. More interesting will be thinking of this return to 1960 as a trip to the source of creativity that George Russell made available to the most advanced musicians of his time. The recording of this album - and particularly the solos of the guests João Paulo Esteves da Silva and José Diogo Martins, as well as of the soloists of OJM - makes it clear that this source is still fertile.

**Fernando Pires de Lima**

In memory of  
**Manuel Jorge Veloso**

Woodwinds  
**José Luís Rego**  
**João Guimarães**  
**Mário Santos**  
**José Pedro Coelho**  
**Rui Teixeira**

Trumpets  
**Luís Macedo**  
**Ricardo Formoso**  
**Rogério Ribeiro**

Trombones  
**Daniel Dias**  
**Xavier Sousa**  
**Gonçalo Dias**

Rhythm Section  
**Carlos Azevedo**  
(Fender Rhodes)  
**Eurico Costa**  
(guitar)  
**Demian Cabaud**  
(double bass)  
**Marcos Cavaleiro**  
(drums)

Recorded live  
and mixed by  
**Carlos Lopes**

Production  
**Pedro Guedes / OJM**  
Video  
**Alexandra Côrte-Real**

Casa da Música,  
November 30th 2019

Design  
**Dobra**

Supports

FOUNDER



INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT



PATRONS



SUPPORT



MEDIA PARTNERS



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# Orquestra Jazz de Matosinhos

Musical Direction

**Pedro Guedes**

Guest Soloists

**João Paulo Esteves da Silva** piano

**José Diogo Martins** piano

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## Jazz in The Space Age

[48:28]

### Side A

1. Chromatic Universe, Part 1
2. Dimensions
3. Chromatic Universe, Part 2

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### Side B

4. The Lydiot
5. Waltz from Outer Space
6. Chromatic Universe, Part 3

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Composition and arrangement by **George Russell**  
Transcription of the arrangement by **Telmo Marques**