George Russell And His Orchestra feat. Bill Evans – Jazz In The Space Age (1960)



1. Chromatic Universe Part I (George Russell) 3:33 2. Dimensions (George Russell) 13:11 3. Chromatic Universe – Part Ii (George Russell) 3:47 4. The Lydiot (George Russell) 10:05 5. Waltz From Outer Space (George Russell) 6:59 6. Chromatic Universe -Part Iii (George Russell) 4:55 7. Introduction 1:42 8. Things New (George Russell) 7:58 9. Dance Class (Carla Bley) 3:38 10. Potting Shed (David Lahm) 4:34 11. Stratusphunk (George Russell) 6:34
George Russell - arranger, conductor Ernie Royal - trumpet Al Kiger - trumpet Marky Markowitz - trumpet Frank Rehak - trombone David Baker - trombone Bob Brookmeyer - valve trombone Jimmy Buffington - french horn Hal McKusick - alto saxophone Dave Young - tenor saxophone Sol Schlinger - baritone saxophone Bill Evans - piano Paul Bley - piano Barry Galbraith - guitar Howard Collins - guitar Milt Hinton - bass Don Lamond - drums Charlie Persip – drums

George Russell's third release as a leader combines two adventurous sessions. The first features two pianists, Bill Evans and Paul Bley, and a large ensemble including Ernie Royal, Dave Baker, Walt Levinsky, Barry Galbraith, Milt Hinton, and Don Lamond, among others. The three-part suite "Chromatic Universe" is an ambitious work which mixes free improvisation with written passages that have not only stood the test of time but still sound very fresh. "The Lydiot" focuses on the soloists, while incorporating elements from "Chromatic Universe" and other Russell compositions. The second session adds trumpeter Marky Markowitz, valve trombonist Bob Brookmeyer, alto saxophonist Hal McKusick, and drummer Charlie Persip to the earlier group, in the slow, somewhat mysterious "Waltz From Outer Space," which incorporates an Oriental-sounding theme, and "Dimensions," described by its composer as "a sequence of freely associated moods indigenous to jazz." Previously available as an LP and as a two-LP set combined with New York, NY, this CD represents some of George Russell's greatest achievements. ---Ken Dryden, AllMusic Review

The composer and pianist George Russell is certainly under-appreciated in the realm of modern jazz. His compositional theories concerning jazz music being played based on scales rather than chord changes (generally known as "modal jazz") was extremely influential to a particular group of adventurous musicians. The most well known example of Russell's theories in action is, of course, Kind Of Blue, but in addition to Miles Davis other musicians to popularize the style were Herbie Hancock, Freddie Hubbard, Wayne Shorter and John Coltrane.
george-russell-jazz-in-the-space-age-back-cover

On albums such as Jazz In The Space Age, Russell was putting his musical theories to the test in a very real world setting, with an exciting orchestra of talented players who were certainly on board with what he was trying to do. Bill Evans is the featured performer - even getting co-billing of sorts on the front cover - and if you're only familiar with his classic trio performances his playing here is quite a revelation. In contrast to his beautifully lyrical playing that has influenced generations of jazz pianists, Evans' playing here is often angular and adventurous. Evans' playing isn't the only treat here, however, as he is paired up with the underrated pianist Paul Bley and they are clearly pushing each other to creative heights. In "The Lydiot" (listen above), the song begins with the two players each taking solos (first Evans, then Bley), before they face off with each other in a series of 8 bar exchanges. It sounds as fresh and exciting today as it must have to listeners back then.

The album is divided between the longer tracks - the three-part "Chromatic Universe" suite and "The Lydiot" - and two shorter compositions, "Dimensions" and "Waltz From Outer Space," both of which retain an adventurous spirit despite their shortened playing times. While Russell would often play on his albums, he serves strictly as composer and bandleader on Jazz In The Space Age which may have added to the cohesiveness of the large group he assembled, maybe because he was able to focus on directing their playing without worrying about his own. The originality of these compositions may not be as apparent to the present-day listener as they once were (by now, the ideas behind them have been thouroughly embedded into jazz), but this album is highly recommended to those that like their modern jazz on the cutting edge. Nothing straight ahead here, just some fresh, vibrant and highly exciting jazz music that has brilliantly stood the test of time. ---thejazzrecord.com

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