The Lydian Chromatic Concept is one of the two most splendid books about music; the other is My Musical Language by Olivier Messiaen. Though I’m considered a contemporary music composer, if I dare categorize myself as an artist, I’ve been strongly influenced by the Lydian Concept, which is not simply a musical method—we might call it a philosophy of music, or we might call it poetry. —Toru Takemitsu

“George enlightened me about a different way of playing music, an analytical way which enabled me to go on learning about music on my own.” —Jan Garbarek

“The simple melody was an experiment inspired by an evening Miles had spent with . . . George Russell who at the time was working on his . . . Lydian Chromatic Concept . . . Miles was fascinated by Russell’s approach. Here was a means for breaking free from tonal clichés while maintaining some amount of restraint. Shortly after his evening with Russell, Miles recorded his new composition demonstrating Russell’s basic principles.” —Eric Nisenson, Round About Midnight: A Portrait of Miles Davis

“Consider the circumstances. Miles took his musicians into the studio for the first of two sessions for Kind of Blue in March, 1959. At the time modal jazz . . . was not an entirely new idea. . . . Originally, the idea for this kind of playing was the concept of composer George Russell.” —Robert Palmer, liner notes for Kind of Blue

“One of the decisive forces in the development of modern jazz.” —Francis Davis, Philadelphia Inquirer

“George Russell is the Duke Ellington of our generation.” —Gilles Anquetil, Le Nouvel Observateur

“One of the greatest composer/ bandleaders in jazz, not presently, but in an all-time sense.” —Jack Cooke, Wired

was born in Cincinnati in 1923, the adopted son of a registered nurse and a chef on the R&O Railroad. He began playing drums with the Boy Scout Drum and Bugle Corps and eventually received a scholarship to Wilberforce University where he joined the Collegians, whose list of alumni include Coleman Hawkins, Benny Carter, Fletcher Henderson, Ben Webster, Cootie Williams, Ernie Wilkins and Frank Foster. But his most valuable musical education came in 1941, when, in attempting to enlist in the Marines, he was diagnosed with tuberculosis, spending six months in the hospital where he was taught the fundamentals of harmony by a fellow patient. From the hospital he sold his first work, “New World,” to Benny Carter. He joined Benny Carter’s Band, but was replaced by Max Roach—after Russell heard Roach, he decided to give up drumming. He moved to New York where he was part of a group of musicians who gathered in the basement apartment of Gil Evans. The circle included Miles Davis, Gerry Mulligan, Max Roach, Johnny Carisi and, on occasion, Charlie Parker. It was a remark made by Miles Davis when George asked him his musical aim which set Russell on the course which has been his life. Miles said he “wanted to learn all the changes.” Since Miles obviously knew all the changes, Russell surmised that what he meant was he wanted to learn a new way to relate to chords. This began a quest for Russell, and again hospitalized for sixteen months, he began to develop his Lydian Chromatic Concept of Tonal Organization. First published in 1953, the Lydian Concept is credited with opening the way into modal music, as demonstrated by Miles in his seminal Kind of Blue recording, and with formulating many of the ideas now used in jazz education. Using the Lydian Scale as the primary scale of Western music, the Lydian Chromatic Concept introduced the idea of chord/scale unity. It was the first theory to explore the vertical relationship between chords and scales, and was the only original theory to come from jazz.

The legendary work is now available in a final, greatly expanded edition.
The year nineteen fifty-nine witnessed a revolution in jazz, the effects of which are still being sorted out by factions of composers and performers. Three important record albums made that year were Miles Davis’s *Kind of Blue* (the best-selling jazz record of all time), John Coltrane’s *Giant Steps*, and George Russell’s *New York, New York*. These albums share two common threads: the appearance of John Coltrane in each and the overarching influence of the musical theories of George Russell.

Russell’s Lydian Chromatic Concept, first described in a self-published pamphlet in 1953, marks a radical expansion of the harmonic language for both composition and analysis and also marks an abandonment of the major-minor system that dominated Western music for over 350 years. Radical as that may seem, the theory is more than one person’s eccentricity, having considerable precedent in the work of Ravel, Scriabin, Debussy, and in some of the learned works of Bach. His work stands head-to-head with Arnold Schoenberg’s “liberation” of the twelve-tone scale, the polytonal work of Stravinsky, and the ethnic-scale explorations of Bartók and Kodály.

For searchers like Miles and Coltrane and Bill Evans, and many in the generations that followed them, Russell’s theories provided a harmonic background and a path for further exploration. If you’ve listened to jazz during the last fifty years, you’ve heard a good deal of George Russell’s ideas.

The Lydian Chromatic Concept of Tonal Organization, Russell’s major theoretical writing, was expanded several times since its first appearance in 1953. Here it is in its fourth and final edition.