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GEORGE RUSSELL
NEA JAZZ MASTER (1990)

Interviewees: George Russell (June 23, 1923 – July 27, 2009) and Alice Russell
[note: Alice joins the interview at tape 4, on May 5, 2004]
Interviewer: Bob Daughtry with recording engineer Katea Stitt
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Daughtry: I'm Bob Daughtry. It's Monday, May 3rd, 2004. We're here in Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts, at the home of George Russell. This is for the Smithsonian Jazz Oral History Program. Katea Stitt is engineering.

George, How are you feeling today?

Russell: Not bad.

Daughtry: Thank you for having us here in your home. It's a very lovely home that you and Alice have here.

Russell: You're welcome, quite welcome.

Daughtry: Very – a wonderful vibe. Feels good in here.

I want to talk about, today, the early years. You were born, I believe, in June of 1923. June 23rd, I believe, 1923?

Russell: That's correct.

Daughtry: And that was in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Russell: It was.

Daughtry: What were those early years like, that you recall? I'm talking about those years from beginning to walk up until just before going to school. Do you remember much about that?

Russell: Oh sure. I remember as a child going to a school, Hoffman School, in Cincinnati, which was about a mile away from my home, walking that mile to school, and in kindergarten, kissing the girls first. That's what I did first. As time passed, with a few dirty looks from the teacher, I had to correct that.

What I remember is my mother, who – my adopted mother – was busy as a nurse. She was the first black nurse to be working for a white doctor. She used to have to board me to people who somehow – families who boarded musicians. That means that during the hours I was there, I was hearing some musicians who probably just got off of the steamboats that stopped at Cincinnati, coming up from St. Louis and coming down even further from New Orleans. They practiced at some of the places that I was occupying. That struck a bell in me. They stayed with me. I was intrigued by that and decided, that's what I want to do and that's what I want to be.

Cincinnati was a musical town, both in its jazz and in its classical way. My next-door neighbor was Jimmy Mundy. No-one really realized what a powerful man Jimmy Mundy was, in terms of his writing. I think he left Cincinnati with an evangelist. One of the rich white evangelists took him to play alto, and he just spiraled up, finally getting to the level where he wrote for Paul Whiteman. I think a very great song that he wrote – I can't think of the name of it right now, but it'll come – he wrote for Benny Goodman. When he came to Cincinnati – when he came back to Cincinnati – I should say, when he passed through Cincinnati, he would first have to hear his mother scream, because that's what she did all the time when he passed through. Then he'd put on his bedroom slippers and walk up the street to the main street, in his robe and his bedroom slippers.

Daughtry: He would actually put his robe and his bedroom slippers on and walk up the street?

Russell: Yeah. That's right.

Daughtry: What was he doing while he was doing this? Was this connected to the evangelist thing that you mentioned earlier?

Russell: No, I think that's more connected to his ego. He became very successful. He was a model for what I wanted to be. Once in New York I visited him way up in the 130s

in the rich colored neighborhoods, where Ellington and others on that level lived. I was floored when his French maid opened the door. He was something.

Daughtry: As a youngster, did you ever have the opportunity to interact with him?

Russell: I had opportunity, but my mother wouldn't let me out. She thought I was too young to go to a dawn dance where a battle of music between Ellington and Basie was happening. So I really missed out on that. But I didn't need it. I was determined then to be a musician. He had a great influence on me, and he told my mother, "George is – you got to let him become a musician." She loved music. So it was no problem.

I became dysfunctional in terms of common education. There's only one subject I passed in, and that was a subject that dealt with the political . . .

Daughtry: You mean like history or social studies?

Russell: Social studies, mostly. Because when I realize the state I was in, state of being on the lowest rung, I saw no reason for that, especially with the talented people of race who lived in my town: Andrew Johnson, Fats Waller.

I sang with Fats Waller. It's an embarrassment. It was at the YMCA. They had a thing, and Fats was playing. I sang some song with him. It seemed extremely corny to me, and it was, but it was Fats.

Art Tatum. Art Tatum used to practice in a hall, or I should say a – what would you call it? – a certain kind of a building that housed quite a lot of people. He had relatives in . . .

Daughtry: A rooming house? Because he was from Ohio too, I think, Art Tatum. Toledo, was it? Or one of those towns?

Russell: I don't know exactly what it was, but he used to come to Cincinnati a lot. Because he was on WLW in Cincinnati – WLW radio – you could hear him on the radio, but I had the extra pleasure of hearing him practicing, because he had relatives living in these domiciles.

Daughtry: Rooming house or whatever. What was that like, hearing him practice?

Russell: It was . . .

Daughtry: You were just a little boy then.

Russell: Yeah, but oh my goodness. I really was – it's breathtaking, really breathtaking. I had no choice, in that, although I detested Cincinnati, I loved the environment I was in.

Daughtry: In those days – thinking about something you said a bit earlier – in those days – and we should sort of set the stage. In every city where musicians went, there were black folks who usually opened up their homes to musicians. We take for granted now, someone goes somewhere, they go to a hotel. But in those days, if it wasn't for that network of families and of people all over this country, wherever musicians traveled to, who opened up their homes, who fixed meals for these. So those were gathering points, and you were – your mother was dropping you off in a place where that was happening. So you were right in the middle of all of that, people like Fats Waller and Art Tatum.

Russell: Right in the middle.

Daughtry: What was Fats Waller's voice like? Do you remember how that affected you as a kid?

Russell: He played with me. I don't know how he stood it, but he understood. This little Boy Scout with the Boy Scout uniform on, singing some song that I'd like to forget.

Daughtry: Do you remember how old you were at the time?

Russell: I'd say about 12.

Daughtry: Okay, all right. You said Boy Scouts. So that all fits in.

Russell: I did realize, even then, that this is corny. So I rebelled in school. I rebelled against everything it stood for, except of course in – what would you call it? the current . . .

Daughtry: Social studies?

Russell: Social studies, right, current social studies.

Daughtry: Current events, then.

Russell: And eventually was – when I got to high school, I think at the second year I got expelled for wearing high drape pants and shirts that oh so mellow.

Daughtry: So you were dressing kind of fly.

Russell: Yeah. I think that's because I – one of the great writers of our time said about being a writer, if you want to be a writer, go out and live life. That was . . .

Daughtry: It sounds like something Hemingway would have said.

Russell: It's Hemingway. It was Hemingway. That's what Hemingway said. I said, if he can say that and do that, I'm going to do that. I quit school. But not long after that I got a scholarship to Wilberforce University to play drums. I had become a drummer, because I joined the Boy Scouts, and that's what I could play.

Daughtry: So you had already been playing the drums. Did you have a little drum kit?

Russell: Yeah.

Daughtry: Who gave you your first drum kit? Do you happen to remember?

Russell: My mother bought a secondhand snare drum and bass drum, to the displeasure of the immediate neighbors. But they didn't seem to mind too much. They knew.

Daughtry: Jimmy Mundy, he ever hear you playing the drums or see you being percussive on surfaces or anything like that?

Russell: No, he didn't.

Daughtry: I was just wondering how he made that conclusion, that you have to let this boy play music. Was it just because of your interest in wanting to be around?

Russell: Um-hmm. But he never heard me play. Or he may have, and I may have forgotten that he heard me play. But he said it with such authority to my mother that she, who was in favor of it, let me do that.

Daughtry: I asked you who gave you your drum kit, because I was just interested in, what was the family structure for you? Did you have any brothers or sisters or cousins who were around a lot?

Russell: I can't say that. No. My mother had friends that we used to visit every – in St. Louis – visit every year. They were musical too, and St. Louis was a musical city. But in those days, everybody was your aunt.

Daughtry: Any kind of an extended family.

Russell: So my Aunt Nannie in St. Louis, what she was good at was cooking biscuits.

Daughtry: Well that's important, though.

What did they call you, George?

Russell: They called me everything.

Daughtry: Because we have the formal names, but the childhood names are always interesting.

Russell: One of my names was Kelly, because we played basketball and we played baseball, and I'd throw the baseball out of the park. So they called me Long George Kelly.

Daughtry: Long George Kelly. Now that name came from the kids, some of the kids?

Russell: Kids, yeah, the other players.

Daughtry: What about your mom? Did she have a name for you, a little special name, a little affectionate name?

Russell: George Allen. That was the name. Never George. Just George Allen.

Daughtry: George Allen, okay. And any of the other extended family have any names for you, other than your given name?

Russell: No, I don't think so.

Daughtry: George Allen. "George Allen, come in the house."

Russell: Yeah, that's right. Never "George." "George Allen."

Daughtry: I've heard that – and we'll talk about this in a moment, but I wanted to explore this side first – I've heard that your adopted parents – was your mother a registered nurse, and father was a chef on the railroad?

Russell: Absolutely, and a good chef. Uncle Joe. That's what they called him.

Daughtry: That's what they called him. And did you call him Uncle Joe, or Daddy, or what?

Russell: No, Daddy. He loved the horses. He played the horses when he'd come home off a trip. He'd just run upstairs. He loved cards. We – he and I would play cards together.

Daughtry: I bet that was something that was useful for you on the road at some point, knowing how to play cards.

Russell: I was never a card player much, but my dad was. He was well respected by his fellow workers, white and black. He was one heck of a chef cook. He took me on tours with him at an early age and dressed me up with a ice cream package that I'd put on and go through the train and sell ice cream. People would say – they thought it was cute. That's when I was around 8 or 9. I'd have a chef's cap on.

Daughtry: I bet you made a few little tips and everything, huh?

Russell: Yeah.

Daughtry: That's very interesting. The railroad is a very important part of black American culture. It's not as much anymore, of course, but back in the day, particularly the early part of the century, on up until about the first half of the century, that was the dominant form of transportation. The kids today don't realize that all these superhighways system didn't exist, the cars were not as prevalent as they are now, and air travel was in its infancy. So that was the dominant form of transportation. Of course many musicians have celebrated the railroad in music and stories. So I'll bet that was really a lot of fun for you as a youngster. What were you, 9, 10 years old? Or were you a little bit older? About what age was that?

Russell: It was a dream come true. He'd take me on the road. When we – let's say from Cincinnati to Pittsburgh. It was a very beautiful passage, because it went through the mountains and ended up at the men's resting place, what they called the men's domicile, which was for sleeping and . . .

Daughtry: Layovers and that kind of thing.

Russell: . . . laying over the next day. I'd be in bed with my dad and felt what it's like to travel on that level.

Daughtry: Out there overnight and seeing things.

Russell: I was fascinated by it. But it – one day on one of the trips I decided to get a little adventurous. While the train was going, I stood in the middle, where it connects, one car connects with another.

Daughtry: Between cars.

Russell: Opened the door and stuck my head out. That kind of – he said, "I'll never take you on a trip again."

Daughtry: That could have been dangerous.

Russell: I was willing to take that chance.

Daughtry: Bet that was a rush.

Russell: He was – when I think back on my mother and my father, they were great people. They unfortunately didn't have a happy marriage. I think I was the neutralizing force between them. They needed a neutralizing force.

Daughtry: What did you call your mother? Just Momma, or Mom?

Russell: Yeah, Mother or Mom.

Daughtry: So no real – no other children close to your age living in the house – in the immediate house where you grew up at?

Russell: My mother was – she had a big heart, and she would take in sometimes members of our family, who lived in St. Louis. We considered the family in St. Louis as part of our family. So Aunt Nannie and the rest of them – Sara – they had five children. Aunt Nannie was the mother. The father was dead. As I said, she cooked great biscuits. I didn't know that they weren't in the family. I thought, well, they're aunts. So some of them my mother would take in at various times. It was nice, because I appreciated, when I look back on it, growing up and having a child's time, rather than being told early on that I was adopted. I didn't find out I was adopted until the World War II and got papers from the Army where you had to . . .

Daughtry: Fill the papers out?

Russell: They had to know your correct age, at least. That was a sad day for my mother and me, but I told her, "You're my mom. You're going to be my mom." But as I say, I'm very happy that I didn't – I had 17 years to be a normal child. She would take in kids from off the street, and they appreciated it too. Some of those kids were in the St. Louis family. They were – they'd either called my mother Cousin Bess, or – they were in the family.

Daughtry: I guess people don't realize today that adoption now, in the early part of the twenty-first century, doesn't carry the same meaning that it may have carried back in the last century, particularly back in the early part of the century. I'm not making a particular statement in saying that, except to say that sometimes – and this of course holds true today – depending on how information comes out, it can be information that's difficult for people to handle sometimes, and in the case of children, other children can be cruel sometimes. I know that while there's no one way to overarch all of that, in many instances we have heard, either through stories or books or the retelling of experiences, that oftentimes the issue of adoption would not be broached with children, sometimes at all, or until there was an event in which they found out about it.

Russell: Yeah. I'm for that.

Daughtry: As you said, you had the opportunity to have a – what felt like a very normal – what was in fact a very normal childhood.

Russell: Absolutely. I had a cousin, and she would tell me – because she said that she felt that she was adopted and that she felt that we both were adopted. So she knew early on. But I remember that it sort of – her telling me that sort of put a – dumped cold water on – just for a while, just the thought of that. Then I had to accept it, when the Army – when World War II came along.

Daughtry: But the fact was, you were – you felt love, you had a wonderful time as a child, and it wasn't an issue for you during that time, certainly.

Russell: Yeah. My mother was a very strong person.

Daughtry: Did you ever meet your actual biological parents?

Russell: No.

Daughtry: Is there any desire on your part to meet them?

Russell: That's it. There wasn't any desire, because I had a mother, and I didn't like to think that I didn't have a mother. So there was no feeling of – negative feeling about that. Once in a while, but eventually I realized that my biological mother was in a position too. She was born into a wealthy family who owned a town or something in Kentucky.

Daughtry: Owned a town, did you say? Wow.

Russell: Yeah. Her father owned a town. That's not very far out from slavery.

Daughtry: Owing a town?

Russell: We're back nearly to slavery. But this guy owned a town. Back then, there would be – it was a great kind of a negativism connected with having a baby out of wedlock. I – at first I was angry about her. But as I grew older I realized she was in a jail too. She was caught in a situation where very affluent negroes considered it a crime for their daughter to be pregnant and have to marry out of wedlock to a white – I later learned my biological father was a teacher at one of the great music. Here's where I . . .

Daughtry: Music school?

Russell: Right near Wilberforce, in Ohio.

Daughtry: Oberlin?

Russell: Oberlin. The records show that he was a professor of music at Oberlin.

Daughtry: Is that right? That's interesting. You never had any contact, but yet you are a great musician. That has been your life. And early on – I think you said earlier, you knew at a very young age you wanted to do music.

Russell: The day the principal called me in to high school to tell me that they were kicking me out of school, and I had to go to a psychiatrist for wearing high draped pants and what – as the song goes, "high draped parts and sheets that are oh so mellow." [*sic*: He wears high draped pants. Stripes are really yellow. But when he starts in to love me, he is so fine and mellow."]

Daughtry: Oh yeah, Billie Holiday.

Russell: My Uncle Joe passed away – had passed away for months before me getting kicked out of school. During the dialog between the principal of the school and myself, he said, "And furthermore, your father asked how you were doing in school." I said, "My father?" "Yes, yes, your father. He's living in" – what's the name of that city, near Cincinnati, on the high river? He was in – he was a music teacher in one of these schools. He had asked how I was doing in school, and I guess the principal said, "He's rotten. We got to get rid of him."

Daughtry: So he had been inquiring about you. You're talking about your biological father now. Interesting. So when he said to you, your father asked about you . . .

Russell: It was a shock. That was a big shock. I said, "My father's been dead for" however much time it was. It wasn't much. A year or so. He looked at me. He looked at me in shock too, because he realized that . . .

Daughtry: You didn't know.

Russell: . . . he had come across an affair that was looked down on in those days. But, from that day on, I accepted my plight.

Going to – being commissioned to come to Wilberforce to play drums was a big boost in my life, and not have to pay tuition.

Daughtry: How old were you then?

Russell: I had to be somewhere around 17, going on 18. Maybe a little earlier.

Daughtry: So you must have been not too far from the war at that point, World War II.

Russell: That was a time when I felt a cross between loneliness and abandonment and self-caring too, at the same time. I realized that you're out here, you're in this world, you didn't ask to be in it, and you're going to have to be the captain of your ship.

Daughtry: So you were away from home for the first – that was essentially – am I correct, with the exception of the trip with your father, Uncle Joe, kind of the first time you had been away from home? Did your parents travel at all?

Russell: My mother, as I said, in the early days traveled every year to Cincinnati [*sic*: St. Louis] to visit the extended family.

Daughtry: In the Cincinnati [St. Louis] area?

Russell: Yeah, in the Cincinnati [St. Louis] area. Aunt Nannie, and Ion, who was deaf and dumb. I used to . . .

Daughtry: I'm sorry. Say the name again. Aunt Nannie and who?

Russell: Ion was the name. She was mute and deaf. Five daughters. Aunt Nannie had her – the father had died. That was really home. I really believed that. Aunt Nannie was Aunt Nannie.

Daughtry: And that Cousin Bess was family.

Russell: And that she and my mother were good friends, because that's where we stayed when we went to St. Louis. Now that had – another period of life was coming to me, knowing that I was adopted, knowing that I had a father somewhere, a white father, knowing that I had to make the most of it and be self supporting.

Daughtry: I want to come back to that point where you are right now in just a moment. But there's one thing I had been thinking about that I certainly want to ask you about regarding your early part and the roots of that early part. It appears that your mother had people in St. Louis.

Russell: Um-hmm.

Daughtry: Where else were her people from? Was that where she was from? Or was she from Cincinnati?

Russell: She was from St. Louis.

Daughtry: She was from St. Louis. Okay. And what about your father, Uncle Joe? Where was he from? Where were his people from?

Russell: I going to say Waylock, Texas, or something like that, because they did – he lived – he was near Marietta, Georgia. That was – his home was near Marietta. But the correct name of that I found – a few months ago I found the name and didn't write it down. So I can't give you exactly correct. But I know that Marietta was a town that we visited when he'd take me down there. Even as a kid I didn't feel comfortable down there.

Daughtry: Based on the . . .

Russell: Just the way it looked, the redness in the soil.

Daughtry: Red clay.

Russell: Yeah, the redness in the soil.

Daughtry: How about the folks? Now we're talking Deep South. What was that like in terms of the negroes, the whites that were there?

Russell: I went down with the Wilberforce Singers, and that's where I got my full taste of what the South was like in those days. I never had to look up at a trolley and see the whole trolley, white, and then a few seats in the back, blacks. The big shock to me was going on a train down there with my mother. The train was fine leaving Cincinnati. We

had a nice seat. Got to some place in Tennessee and had to get off the train and sit in the back.

Daughtry: Had to change cars, but you weren't changing trains.

Russell: Yeah. We had to – my mother and I had to – my beautiful mother, who graduated from college and – was it Meharra?

Daughtry: Meharry? Down there in Tennessee.

Russell: Yeah. It must have been Meharry.

Daughtry: Nashville, I think.

Russell: As a bona fide nurse. She was of German ancestry, kind of. Her mother was German. She was nearly white.

Daughtry: So she was mixed also.

Russell: She was a tough lady. She was tough.

Daughtry: What was your mother's first name?

Russell: Bessie.

Daughtry: What was her maiden name. Do you . . . ?

Russell: I haven't pronounced it in years. Bessie – I can't give you the correct name right now.

Daughtry: She had some German ancestry, huh?

Russell: Um-hmm.

Daughtry: Tough-minded woman.

Russell: Stern. I mean, stern, and with all of the traits of the German mind. Tough in a way of – she was tough.

Daughtry: Sounds like she had the positive German attributes in terms of her mental acuity and all. Did she have any kind of a visible reaction that you, as a youngster,

discerned when you all were getting off the train and going to the back. Did she react in any kind of way that you recall?

Russell: No, she didn't. She didn't say a word. She just . . .

Daughtry: Kind of stoic?

Russell: Stoic and not wanting me to get involved. It's like being slapped in the head or something. We look on that now as a terrible ignorant God-awful stupid way to see life. She did too, but she wouldn't – she was in a mood to beat up the whole bunch of them, and she could do it, engineer and everybody.

Daughtry: You mentioned that you were – one of your trips you were with the Wilberforce Singers. You were drumming, playing the drums for them?

Russell: Yeah. That's when I got the taste of what the South then was really like, especially when we – we sang in – I remember we sang in small churches, in black churches in the swamps. I remember asking one man, who you couldn't tell if he was black or white, where we stayed – I remember asking him, "What is God?" He said, "God is big." Someone asked him, "How do you make a living here?" He went out into the field, came back with a rattler in his hand. "This is how I make my living." He extracted from the snake the . . .

Daughtry: The skin with the rattle on it.

Russell: Yeah.

Daughtry: Did he – what did he do with those? He sell them? Or was he a mojo worker?

Russell: I don't think – I think he had a way of going into the snake's mouth and drawing something out of the snake.

Daughtry: Getting the venom? Milk the snake, as they say?

Russell: Yeah, and putting the snake back in the woods. Needless to say, I didn't take a walk in the woods.

Daughtry: Sounds like he was a mojo man.

Russell: But he was a preacher. Looked more like a Latino than black.

Daughtry: Wilberforce was a church school, if I'm not mistaken.

Russell: Wilberforce is a university.

Daughtry: Um-hmm. I think it was church-based, originally.

Russell: One part is a church, the other's state. It's state run and church run.

Daughtry: It came to be called Central State, because of the state part. Aside from the fact that you got a scholarship, was there a reason you went there? Did you spend a lot of time in . . . ?

Russell: Got a scholarship. It's funny, because on the night I was to go up – I got a scholarship first. I didn't get a scholarship at first, but I had saved some money to go to Wilberforce, after missing two years of school or something, after being kicked out of a big 4,000-people school in Cincinnati, where I was told I'd never be a musician, by the teacher. The night before, my mother and I went up. I managed to get in a game with guys who were playing – we had a gig – and lost all my money. Lost every bit of it.

Daughtry: Card game.

Russell: Yeah.

Daughtry: So then . . .

Russell: The guys I played with, they had a lot of soul. So they saw to it that I got the money back, and I went up to Wilberforce the next day. They already had a good drummer. So I then spent one semester there and went back, but I did manage to play drums there a little bit, that they had heard. About five months later they called me, because the drummer they had hired in my place was terrible. So they wanted me. Ernie Wilkins and all those guys were there. It was wonderful. The band was hot.

Daughtry: Okay. So you were being seen by some pretty important folks. You were on view.

Russell: Yeah. It's amazing how many people went to Wilberforce. A tenor player, plays rough tenor, and he's a rough man.

Daughtry: Let me think.

Russell: Big fat guy. I met him on the road a lot.

Daughtry: I want to say Ben Webster, but Ben wasn't a big fat guy in those days. Big fat guy? It sounds like he should have been in Basie's band. I'm blank right now. But a lot of people went through that school.

You – it's sort of setting the stage, but also going back. I'm seeing a kid who's seeing the riverboat bands. Those bands used to have some good drummers. Who were some of the bands that – can you recall any of the bands that you used to see coming up the river there?

Russell: I used to know the name of the drummer, because I was only interested in the drummer.

Daughtry: Okay, see – was – what's his name? He always – did he play a calliope?

Russell: It wasn't Slim. It was . . .

Daughtry: I'm thinking of the bandleader, early '20s, but I think he was still playing. Fate Marable. Was . . . ?

Russell: Fate Marable, yeah. That rings a bell.

Daughtry: He went for a long time. I think even Armstrong was with him for a very short period of time.

Russell: Really?

Daughtry: But those bands – we have to back up again. We have the railroad, and then the other dominant mode of transportation were the rivers. The Ohio River was like a main street. Then here you are living in – I think Cincinnati's called the Queen City or something?

Russell: The Queen City.

Daughtry: Okay, and that has to do with being on the . . .

Russell: I remember that the drummer, who – he was really slick and really sharp, and I could understand him falling for my – what was she? – my – she wasn't my sister, but my cousin. She came from the St. Louis family. He fell for her. They were at my house, the drummer and her.

Fate Marable was – did he play drums?

Daughtry: You know what I'm thinking? He played some version of the piano and something called a calliope, which is some kind of organ? Is that . . . ?

Russell: That early he played?

Daughtry: I just remember him more as a bandleader who played for a long time, because when I was looking back at that era, I know he was playing in the late teens and he was still playing by the late '20s and early '30s. It was pretty much fading out then, the whole thing on the river, but he was like an institution. There were others, but that's the one name that I remember.

Russell: I remember that they stayed at my house, some people in that band. We welcomed them. One of them went with Sara, my cousin.

Daughtry: Caught his eye, huh?

Russell: That's what I loved about – I loved the way that they looked as much as the way they played.

Daughtry: You're talking about people coming from somewhere else and bring a little bit of that with them. I'll bet that was a lot of fun. Those were big times.

Russell: Absolutely. I believe they came up from New Orleans to St. Louis and then to Cincinnati and to Pittsburgh, and then back.

Daughtry: That makes sense, because the Ohio River comes in right there at St. Louis. That makes sense. Those big old paddlewheel boats.

Speaking of girls, what about girls and adolescent George, girls and you when you became an adolescent, when your hormones started to kick in?

Russell: Oh, I can't get into that. That was a trip. I didn't know anything. That's all I have to say. I knew nothing about nothing in terms of that. But I learned what I know from women, not from men. I know what I know from women.

The first woman that ever taught me something, she was a prostitute, a runaway prostitute, a kid whose father was a professor at some school in New York. She had run away from home, because I guess he was molesting her, a white girl. She was dancing in Chicago in the Loop. She was taking off her clothes dancing. I fell for her. She taught a little something. She got me going. I didn't stay with her for long, but I really have a lot of respect for the women that took me on and told me what to do.

Stitt: Do you want me to leave the room?

Russell: Are you ready to leave? They told me what to do.

That was a time when I was sleeping in the – I was in Chicago. I had left Cincinnati after Benny Carter. I played drums with Benny, because he came through. It was wartime, and there weren't very many drummers around. He hired me. I was with the band about four or five months, before he got to New York. In New York – from New York we were going to Washington. He called me into his boudoir. He said, "George, I hate to tell you this, but I hired another drummer." To tell you the truth, I was tired of carrying those drums around. So it was a downer. It was a shock. I said, "Who did you hire?" He said, "Max Roach." I said, oh yeah. Yeah, right. You hired a drummer, all right.

Daughtry: So you hooked up with Benny in Chicago? That was – or . . . ?

Russell: In Cincinnati.

Daughtry: In Cincinnati.

Russell: Yeah, I think it was in Cincinnati,

Daughtry: So what? Did he come through and needed a drummer?

Russell: He came through, and he needed a drummer. I could play well enough to play his music and do a little reading.

Daughtry: He was something, a nasty musician, trumpet player, alto player, a great writer, a great arranger.

Russell: Right. He was all those things.

Daughtry: How was he as a bandleader? In terms of, were the guys on time for the gigs? If he called a rehearsal, did they show up like they were supposed to? How did . . . ?

Russell: The guys were on time mostly. I can remember in Pittsburgh not being on time, because my roommate, J. J. Johnson, had a little package of something that was too much, tore my head off, and his. We both ended up being late for that hit at the Paradise Theater or something, in Chicago. We both came in – when we came in, his singer's boyfriend was playing drums.

Daughtry: Your drums.

Russell: Yeah, playing my drums. I said, I bet I won't be playing with this band long. The bass player, Curley Russell, looked up at us, J. J. and I, and just shook his head, because the tempo's like this and we're in . . .

Daughtry: You're somewhere else.

Russell: Well, what's it worth? Iraq. That's where we – we were a wreck in Iraq, really.

Daughtry: I think somebody wrote a song. I don't know if it was Fletcher Henderson or who.

Russell: But that was ordained to happen. That sent me back to Cincinnati . . .

Daughtry: After Max Roach replaced you.

Russell: Yeah – where I started then to get be a serious writer. I remember then moving to Chicago, because Cincinnati was a vicious town. An incident where Spaulding Givens, who was Art Tatum's – related to Art Tatum. Piano player. Had a little trio at a beer joint downtown in Cincinnati. A guy was passing through, white fellow who played bass. We didn't have a bass player. So we hired him. The second night, two men were standing in the back of this place. When we got finished – Fitz was the fellows name, the bass player – we couldn't find him. So we packed up and went home. Fitz was staying at my – with me and my mother. At 4 o'clock in the morning, there's a knock on the door. His face was a mass of blood, just horrible. He said, "I kept telling them" – this is strange – "I kept telling them I was black. I kept telling them I was black." He said, "They didn't believe it." He's white, of course. "They kept on beating me and beating me, and they would threaten to throw me in the river."

Daughtry: Why?

Russell: The next night, we contacted the head of – the mayor of Cincinnati at that time was a very light-skinned black person. He said he would do something about it. We contacted the head of the NAACP in Cincinnati. They were supposed to do something about it. Nobody did anything about it.

Daughtry: Why were they beating him? Why did they beat him up?

Russell: Because he was white, playing with a black.

Daughtry: These were – who – these guys were white or they were black?

Russell: These guys are white detectives.

Daughtry: Detectives! Okay. I thought you were getting ready to say some organized crime.

Russell: These were detectives.

Daughtry: Oh.

Russell: White detectives.

Daughtry: No wonder. So this town was really corrupt in a whole different way.

Russell: Yeah. He kept telling them, "I'm black."

Daughtry: They knew you were black, but they didn't believe him.

Russell: Yeah, they accepted me as black, because I hadn't been out of the hospital there for too many weeks, having gotten kicked out of the hospital, because a nurse came on to me in bed. By luck, they had had a new head of the hospital whose home was Mississippi.

Daughtry: So she was a white nurse.

Russell: Yeah. There were situations coming up. Fitz – the next night, Fitz played with us, because we had let the officials know what had happened. The same two motherfuckers walked in – excuse me – the same two. We – I think we were ready to take them on and die for Fitz. They stood at the back for a while, and then they – they must have been afraid to get fired, at least. That's the least of what would happen to them, I would hope. But I just – Cincinnati became ugly to me. I hated it then. I really couldn't stand it.

Daughtry: So that was part of your motivation to get away from Cincinnati. This was the period right after you had left Benny Carter, when they replaced you with Max Roach. You had gone back, and you were playing there.

Russell: Right.

Daughtry: You said Spaulding Givens, he had a little place.

Russell: Spaulding did have a place. He got hired at a school in – up near – up here somewhere, out in the country.

Daughtry: Music school, you mean? Music school, or regular university? I always think of Berklee being up this way.

Russell: I think it was way up in New Hampshire.

Daughtry: Well, it'll come to me.

Stitt: Is Tanglewood up in the Berkshires. Isn't that Tanglewood?

Daughtry: I think that is Tanglewood, yeah.

Stitt: Because Interlochen's in Michigan. So it would be . . .

Russell: The Berkshires sounds like where he was.

Daughtry: He later became Nadi Qamar, right?

Russell: Nadi. He still is Nadi.

Daughtry: I was going to ask you. I hadn't heard. So he's still with us. I'm glad to hear that.

Russell: He's 90-some years old. He lives on a farm in Minnesota or something.

Daughtry: Is that right? That's great.

Russell: He has two children that he had in the early part of his 90s.

Daughtry: Wow. It's probably because of him that they invented Viagra. I don't mean to say he used it, but I'm saying, trying to duplicate that kind of virility.

Russell: Yeah, I'll tell him.

Daughtry: That's great.

That corruption, Louis Armstrong talked about it. Miles Davis talked about it. So many musicians have had to deal with that, and it's affected the careers of so many musicians. Sometimes you say, I wonder what would have happened if Louis hadn't had to spend so much time out of America, because he was ducking the gangsters? Or in your case, if you had been able to stay in Cincinnati a little longer? Of course we can only speculate. But it's just – it's amazing, and that's an element that not a lot has been written about, the gangster element and the corrupt police element around the music. Just tried to hold the

music back, tried to milk it for all it's worth. It just is – and of course you went to Chicago, where that was also an element to be reckoned with as well, right?

Russell: You can say that.

Daughtry: I wish people could see your face now, when you said that.

Russell: Yes sir. You'd be walking down the street. By that time I had sensed – I had developed a really sharp sense of when I was being cased. They would be two guys in a car, wearing hats, and they'd be moving slowly behind you. When you'd go to cross the street, they'd pull up in front of you and ask, what's your nationality? I was always Spanish and Irish. I couldn't speak a word of either one of those.

Daughtry: No brogue and . . .

Russell: But by that time I was with the kid who – the girl who taught me a lot, and was in her – she must have been 19 or 20, but had the experience of a 40- or 50-year-old woman. I hope she made it, because she was – she had a lot of character and goodness in her. I feel that way about . . .

Daughtry: You say you learned a lot from her

Russell: . . . the women I've know in my life.

But down South, I got very angry at just – I said, if I get out of here, I'm never coming back. With the Wilberforce Singers, we had to drive pretty far to get out of – where were we? I think we were in Georgia. We – there were six of us in the car, singers: one woman who came from Canada, another woman who came from someplace else. We were driving along. There was a kind of stop sign in the middle of the road. There are these guys, chain gang, chained together. The professor who conducted us and traveled with us, and it was his car, was partly blind. So he didn't see the sign, and he ran over the sign. The guy – one man – kid, very good looking, looked like he came from a Latino family – he said, "Prof" – he called him Prof. Prof was driving the car. He said, "Get the fuck out of here. Get out of here. Put your foot on the gas." And he did. He was half blind, but he did. They were shooting at us.

Daughtry: What! They shot at you! The sheriffs, the people.

Russell: They were shooting at us.

Daughtry: Wow. It's a good thing they didn't catch you.

Russell: Yeah. On that same trip, we did get into Maryland. A car passed us in a hurry, open car. Then about three or four miles up the road, we saw this car do a flip-flop. It was kids in the car. So we called up and told the police about it. But we left. I said, I'm out of here. I'm never coming back.

Daughtry: What was the repertoire of the singers? Was it sort of like the Fisk Jubilee Singers? Or was it a more modern version of that?

Russell: No, they sang – sometimes they would sing Bach. But then we would get down to business and sing black music, sing the black folk music.

Daughtry: But sometimes they would sing Bach, huh?

Russell: Sometimes, and doing it well.

Daughtry: How long were you at Wilberforce?

Russell: They called me up – the Army called me up. I was nearing 18. I was at Wilberforce once, and then I left, worked for six months, got myself together, and went back to Wilberforce, and then I was there for two years, not exactly going to school, because Wilberforce was a place that attracted people from Cincinnati, gangsters. Most of the guys at Wilberforce were studying business. They took the business course. Later on, most of them became slicks.

Daughtry: Hustlers. You said something interesting. One of the conflicting things I've heard was that your tuberculosis – I'll tell you two things I've heard. One was that your tuberculosis was discovered on a physical when you tried to enlist in the Army, and the other was that it was picked up, diagnosed in a physical, when you were drafted. Now you just said you were called up. Does that mean you were drafted?

Russell: Yeah, I was drafted.

Daughtry: Okay. So that clears that up. You didn't enlist.

Russell: No. I enlisted once they . . .

Daughtry: Again I wish we had a camera.

Russell: In a way it's true. I enlisted romantically to become a Marine from purely ridiculous reasons, purely ridiculous.

Daughtry: The macho. Are we back to the girls again, kissing the girls and all of that good stuff?

Russell: Yeah. I wanted that suit.

Daughtry: I understand. Be all you can be, huh?

Russell: Macho. Big fool, fool, fool, and thank goodness I had contacted tuberculosis, which enabled me to spend six months in a private room overlooking very nice grounds and try to get life together and to learn music. That was mostly due to a young man named Harold Gaston, who was – they were – there was a family of Africans, the Gaston family. Harold played bass with the school band at Withrow, the high school I was kicked out of. He was . . .

Daughtry: Hmm. He was from Cincinnati.

Russell: He was very appreciated. He played bass. His brother was a very – had won prizes as an artist. His mother and father – a sad story. They all died of tuberculosis, one at a time, a family of four people. The irony is that when Ellington's bass player, the first one who really played the bass . . .

Daughtry: Jimmy Blanton?

Russell: Yeah, Blanton, who soloed on bass. Blanton died six months – not six months. Very soon after Blanton died, Ellington sent . . .

Daughtry: For Harold Gaston?

Russell: Yeah, sent for Gaston. Gaston was an all-around musician. He taught me how to write, in the hospital, because I remember coming back. We played – when we went to Cincinnati, or we passed through – the band that J. J. played with, Benny Carter – we passed back through Cincinnati, and I got a chance to see Gaston. He had already begun to get – lose weight.

Daughtry: Oh wow, deteriorate.

Russell: Yeah. It's just incredible. Their deaths were just months apart, Gaston and Blanton. Then who did he hire? Did he hire Mingus?

Daughtry: No, that was before Mingus. I can see him, but I can't think. It was before Aaron Bell. I'll think of it before we finish, because that was around '41, '42. I

remember, because I always think about Jimmy Blanton and Charlie Christian dying around the same time. Then now you mention Harold Gaston as well.

Russell: Yeah, Gaston was in there.

Daughtry: Wow, that's such a shame. The whole family, huh?

Russell: Yeah, the whole family, just one by one, passed out of existence. Actually, the last brother lost his mind.

Daughtry: That was a terrible thing, t.b., during that whole period. That was a real scourge as an illness. It pretty much was brought under control in the coming decade or so, with a big push. People don't really think about it much, about how many people that died from it. And it wasn't anything new. That had been going on since the nineteenth century, of course. There's been a resurgence recently.

What sanitarium was that that you were in for six months?

Russell: That was the Branch in Cincinnati. The Branch in Cincinnati, I was there for six months, learning how to write music. When I left – when I went in, I didn't know how to write music. Gaston got me started. Without a piano, I wrote a first composition that some people in Columbus paid a little money for.

Daughtry: Is that right? So you hadn't written anything before this?

Russell: No, I hadn't written anything.

Daughtry: Neither Wilberforce or . . . ?

Russell: No.

Daughtry: Wow, that's . . .

Russell: Because they wouldn't teach me at Wilberforce, for some reason. So Gaston got me started. It didn't take much there for me to realize that I'm not a drummer. I don't like carrying drums around. The best thing I can do is write music.

Daughtry: So you were dealing with melody, harmony, how to harmonize and thinking about key structure.

Russell: That's what this book is all about.

Daughtry: Wow, those were the first stages. That could almost be the germ of the idea, huh, the very early stages of it?

Russell: It was the germ, and it is the germ of a very impressive idea, because it covers all music. One scale covers all of music. It was written, and it can be written. That was possible after this head of the hospital in Cincinnati, the Branch Hospital, after I was – me and few other guys, including Gaston, were discharged because we protested the segregation thing at the lunch hall, and also because he happened to – or heard about an incident where . . .

Daughtry: You can speak freely.

Stitt: Remember, I'm a musician's daughter. There's not a whole lot I haven't . . .

Daughtry: Yeah, and she's a very liberated woman.

Stitt: Exactly.

Russell: Yeah, well this is another liberated woman who they caught with my – kissing her breasts. She had opened her – she's a nurse from Kentucky. He couldn't take that.

Daughtry: I bet he couldn't.

Russell: He couldn't take that. So they – he said, "If you're well enough to do this, you're well enough to be on the streets." Well, I wasn't well enough to be out in the street.

Daughtry: In fact you were doing it to try to get well.

Russell: Gaston wasn't well enough to be discharged.

Daughtry: But they unceremoniously ushered you out.

Russell: So that was the six months. I left. I went to Chicago. Slept in the streets a little bit. I finally ran into a very sweet guy, Foster, a dancer, Foster – it'll come to me. Anyway, this guy had a studio, because he went with – Foster Johnson – he went with a woman who – what do you call a head of a . . .?

Stitt: A brothel?

Daughtry: Madame?

Russell: Yeah, brothel is more like it. What?

Daughtry: Madame?

Russell: Madame. She was the madame in Chicago.

Daughtry: The madame.

Russell: The madame.

Daughtry: So he had a studio.

Russell: I had a studio because of Foster, but Foster – the grounds of studios were owned by some white guy, and he had complained that white women – Foster was getting white women in this studio. So he went down. But until then, I'd stay with him, or I'd sleep in the lobby of the hotel, 53rd [Street] and Cottage Grove [Avenue], which I ended up writing music for that hotel, for its opening. That's another funny story. The opening of this nightclub.

Stitt: I know what you're talking about. I can't think of it. It's famous.

Russell: Yeah. It was owned by gangsters. I stayed up four nights. I still had not gotten out of the hospital, been discharged from the hospital.

Daughtry: But you hadn't healed.

Russell: I was still, actually, ill, and I'd stayed up four nights writing this opening for Earl Hines and the orchestra. What happened is, it got to the night before the club opened, and the dancers hadn't practiced yet. Nothing had happened. They put on this music, and it was awful, 100% awful. The head of the club, he didn't say anything, but the boys were standing around, looking. Suddenly somebody in the band said, "What key is this in?" The fellow who had done the copying had put the wrong key signature in. When they played it, it sounded wonderful. It really sounded wonderful. So that – and it ended up getting a review in the *Chicago Tribune,* being an excellent opening, excellent week, and excellent music. So I managed to – from that I could stay in a hotel room, in some room they used that was available, that they didn't rent out. Three of us stayed. It was me, Little Diz, and Little Bird. We stayed in that room. We ate, because we went to the drugstore I'd just left. I'm not going to tell you the drugstore, but it was a drugstore, a big drugstore. Along – the chef was way back here. It was a long, long drugstore, big. So it would have been impossible for the chef to have seen us. He'd give us the bill. We'd go back and buy some chewing gum and walk out. That went on for months, until one night

he caught it. But he, in his heart of hearts, he was a nice guy. He said, "I should call the police." That would have meant Cook, Cook County.

Daughtry: Oh boy. Not a good place to be. Cook County Jail.

Russell: So, a lot of stories. I'm tell you.

Daughtry: I'm telling you. Now, Little Diz, trumpet player.

Russell: Um-hmm.

Daughtry: Webster Young? Or . . . ?

Russell: I think both of those kids died early.

Daughtry: Little Bird. Who were they calling Little Bird?

Russell: They called him Little Bird?

Daughtry: Jimmy Heath? Or are these just guys out of Chicago who had those names?

Russell: He's out of Chicago. I don't know if he ever . . .

Daughtry: Expanded.

Russell: I don't know what they did in New York, because we – when we got off the bus – we took the bus from Chicago to New York. When we got off the bus, we had $5 between us. But we stayed in the hotel right behind the theater.

Stitt and **Daughtry:** Was that the Theresa? Hotel Theresa?

Russell: The Theresa, yeah.

Daughtry: Up in Harlem.

Russell: We stayed in the Theresa. I guess that's the name of the hotel.

Daughtry: Yeah, the Hotel Theresa.

Russell: Yeah, stayed in the Theresa, three of us. It was summertime. The other two guys said, "We found a room, but there's no windows." I said, "You got it."

Daughtry: Sounds familiar, huh?

Russell: I slept – it's summertime, so I slept in the – where the mayor's house is in Chicago.

Daughtry: I don't know where that is.

Russell: It's along the river. I slept there for two or three nights. I knew that – as far as bathrooms was concerned, I went to hotels that had really good bathrooms. If you were dressed, you'd get through it. Did that for a while and moved in with Skippy Williams, who played with Ellington, because he said – I had taken in – one night I went to Dayton, Ohio, when I was living in Cincinnati, to hear Ellington. That's after Wilberforce. After the concert – not many people showed up, but Ellington was opening the next night in Cincinnati. So – this is during the war – we took the – I took the same train back that had the Ellington people in it, sitting beside Betty Roché.

Stitt: Who is she?

Daughtry: The vocalist. "'A' Train Betty."

Russell: Betty Roché. When we got to Cincinnati, it turned out that the hotels were filled. So I took in four of the guys myself, Ray Nance, [Al] Hibbler, Skippy, somebody else. Skippy was – Skippy's a very light-skinned guy. Did you know Skippy?

Daughtry: No.

Russell: He must have been a sub, because not many people know about him.

Daughtry: I'm going to have to go back and research him, Ellington bands.

Russell: A sub for Ellington.

Daughtry: So you kept that tradition going of putting up the musicians.

Russell: Yeah. My mother was working on a job where she would stay over a few nights.

Daughtry: You were – I guess you were about . . .

Russell: So Skippy said – and Ray. I love Ray – Skippy said, "If you're ever in New York, look us up." That's what I did. I looked him up.

I had one piece that I sold all the bands, all of them.

Daughtry: With different names.

Russell: Yeah. I sold – you know, the piece was good. So it – they knew I could write. I lived on that piece. I stayed in a room with Skippy.

Daughtry: This is before Benny Carter now? After Wilberforce?

Russell: This was after Benny . . .

Daughtry: Oh, it's after Benny.

Russell: . . . and it's moving into the bebop era.

Daughtry: Okay.

Russell: Max was with the band. He introduced me to all the bands. This was after he had taken my place and everything. Skippy had had – I don't want to say this, because this is unresolved, but – I've got to keep out of this, because this is too heavy.

Daughtry: Let me ask you about that song that you put different names on.

Russell: Yeah, I sold it to Benny first. It was called *New World.*

Daughtry: Okay, and was that the – I wanted to ask you about the song when you were in the sanitarium. What was the name of that?

Russell: New World.

Daughtry: Okay. So we're seeing the extension of that, right on down.

Russell: Right on down. Even Dizzy heard *New World* and said, "I want you to write something for me. I need an introduction." That turned out to be what he played on his first concert at Carnegie Hall. Alice will know.

Daughtry: That's a title with social consciousness. Carnegie Hall.

Russell: It featured Chano Pozo.

Daughtry: I know you all did the *Cubana Be, Cubana Bop* later.

Russell: That's it.

Daughtry: Okay. So he incorporated that into . . .

Russell: He incorporated . . .

Daughtry: Was that the introduction we're talking about?

Russell: Yeah, I wrote the . . .

Daughtry: Or the 16-bars that he did?

Russell: I wrote the introduction.

Daughtry: Right.

Russell: Then I didn't push the other thing I've used to live on, to Dizzy. I wrote him a good fresh introduction, and I wrote the ending.

Daughtry: And then he does the next 16 bars after the introduction, right?

Russell: Yeah.

Daughtry: Okay. And I was wondering, was that what you were talking about?

Russell: Yeah, and then after that, it was all mine, after he – Chano – I suggested to Dizzy in a bus going up from New York to Boston that he should have Chano come out and his "yanyow" thing.

Daughtry: [Daughtry sings.] Yeah, his chant.

Russell: [Russell sings.] He did that. But Dizzy hadn't thought of doing that. I told him, have him put on his jungle outfit. He came out in this theater downtown here, this music hall . . .

Daughtry: In Boston here?

Stitt: The Strand?

Russell: The music hall here in Boston.

Stitt: Oh, Massey. Not Massey?

Russell: Yeah.

Daughtry: Not here. No, that's in Toronto. Umm . . .

Stitt: Oh, that's right.

Daughtry: Only thing I can think of is a club.

Stitt: The Strand Theater.

Russell: Where the Boston Symphony Orchestra plays. You know. That's easily – that's easy to see.

Daughtry: Alzheimer's.

Russell: These things – we haven't thought about these things, and they are way at the back of the mind. If we sit here now for ten minutes, we'll get it.

Daughtry: It will come to us at some point.

Russell: I can – it's not Carnegie Hall. Carnegie Hall was the big performance, the first performance of the piece. The next night . . .

Daughtry: Symphony Hall is where?

Stitt: Oh, it's something like . . .

Daughtry: Something like that. All I can think of is that club that they're always talking about. But you're talking about a hall, right?

Stitt: No, it's called Symphony something.

Russell: Symphony Hall. That's all.

Stitt: Is that it?

Russell: I think it's Symphony Hall in Boston. Symphony Hall, yeah. So, the night after he opened at Carnegie Hall as the first jazz . . .

Daughtry: Modal composition.

Russell: . . . artist to do that, to play at that place, we went in a bus to Boston, and Symphony Hall was the next. Chano came out in his jungle stuff. Brothers were all sitting in the front. They started laughing.

Daughtry: How did you all communicate with Chano? Because he couldn't speak any English, from what I understand.

Russell: We didn't communicate. You had to prepare yourself for a serious conversation, okay? A very serious conversation, especially if it involved money.

Daughtry: So I get the sense it was confrontational.

Russell: Yes, confrontational is a good way to put it.

Daughtry: Gil Fuller was involved with you guys a little bit also?

Russell: He got involved after I had lost the score to *Cubana Be, Cubana Bop.*

Daughtry: You lost the score?

Russell: I lost the score. I left the score in a taxicab.

Daughtry: That's a legendary story.

Russell: I'll tell you that he did a wonderful job. I know of no-one else who could do that.

Daughtry: You lost the score in a taxicab?

Russell: Yeah.

Daughtry: In New York.

Russell: Yeah.

Daughtry: Wow.

Russell: I left it in a taxi.

Daughtry: That must have been devastating.

Russell: It was devastating.

Daughtry: So you talked to Gil about what was in the score, because you had done it. And then what? You guys started putting it back together, re-creating it?

Russell: I think he had the recording, and from the recording he made – from the recording of the Carnegie Hall thing, the guys had the music. They already had the music. It's just the score that got lost. He had time. He had a lot of time then to listen.

Daughtry: Put it back together.

Russell: Put it back together.

Daughtry: That '47. Let's pull – can we pull back for a second? It's my understanding you got sick again, and this time you were in the hospital for a much longer time. You said six months the first time.

Russell: 15 months.

Daughtry: 15 months? Now, what period are we talking about?

Russell: As I said, I went to New York. I went through all of this – I was in the hospital – when was that? That had to be – I'm not so sure, but I know it was 15 months. It had to be from . . .

Daughtry: I don't want to put words in your mouth.

Russell: No, do. Go ahead.

Daughtry: The dates . . .

Russell: Put words in my mouth.

Daughtry: No, I don't want to do that, but the dates I've seen most often aren't specific, but they usually say '45 into '46, which would make sense, since it's 15 months. It's certainly longer than a year. We know you were with Benny in '44. Then we know you were with Diz in '47.

Russell: Yeah, that's it.

Daughtry: So it's kind of like a – you had never really healed. You had been ushered out of the hospital, you and Gaston and others.

Russell: No . . .

Daughtry: The first time.

Russell: The first time. The second . . .

[recording interrupted; it resumes in mid-sentence]

. . . fashion this kind of an interview? Do you think about areas and dates?

Daughtry: Yeah. So I looked at – I thought about the fact – first thing is, I went back and I just started reading everything that I had that people had written about you. I noticed that there were a lot of gaps. Then, when I looked more closely, I realized that a lot of these people had gotten their information from the same source. For example, there were a number of people – I can't tell you specifically who without going back and looking – but there are a number of people who said that you had been diagnosed with tuberculosis when you had tried to enlist in the Marines.

Russell: That's right.

Daughtry: But you were actually drafted. So I could see where they were perpetuating that story. Of course that happens. That happens a lot. I remember it happened with Miles, like in terms of his birthday. Someone had written that he was born May 25th, and everybody perpetuated that. I remember once I was doing a show, and I said his birthday was May 26th. This guy called me up and told me how long he had been listening to jazz – white guy, you know, and was a nice guy. I knew him – but I should correct that, because it wasn't fair to Miles. I said, no, his birthday was the 26th. It was on the 26th. So when I went back on the mic, I told people how I had met Cicely Tyson. She was reading some copy for me on a play that I was fortunate enough to be the producer of. We were recording it for a promo. The copy read, "The blacks are coming, the blacks are coming," the play by [Jean] Genet called *The Blacks.* So the copy says, "The blacks are coming, the blacks are coming. On Thursday, May 26th, the preview . . . ." We were doing it at the Kennedy Center. So this is where she and I were. She had come in for a play a few months earlier. I knew she was going to be there. I went over. So when she started reading the copy, she said, "On Thursday May . . . ." She stopped. She said, "Oh, Miles's birthday. I got to remember to get him something." Now I knew, if anyone knew when Miles's birthday was, it was Cicely Tyson, just like if Alice says something about you, I got to go with it. I mean, if anyone knows George Russell, it's Alice.

So I told this story. I got all these phone calls and everything. Some people – most people understood, but a few people said, "But it's in the *Encyclopedia of Jazz.*" I said, "Well, I'm sorry, but they're wrong." Then finally, when Miles's autobiography came out, and

the first page, he says, “I was born May 26, 1926,” blah blah blah blah blah. So, for the doubters . . .

So that’s what’s good about this, is, people will hear. You’ve been very clear. There’s some things you don’t remember. They happen. “I can’t necessarily tell you what date,” you will say. But what I decided to do is, as I read everything, I just decided to think in terms of the eras and what I was interested in, and from over the years, off and on, some of my musician friends have talked to me about different things, one of them, who right now had another musician friend who has a son who’s adopted. This son is giving him – the guy’s name is Fred Foss. I don’t know if you know Fred.

Stitt: Oh yeah.

Daughtry: You know Fred, alto player and very fine musician. His son is adopted. He recently found out. He’s taken Fred’s – this is second-hand, but I can – I think the information’s pretty accurate – in addition to the fact that he’s really going off about this, the young man is also bi-polar. I think he’s about 13 or 14. So now he’s become obsessed with this one . . .

[recording interrupted]

I’m Bob Daughtry. This is tape two on Monday, May 3rd, 2004. We are in Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts, at the home of George Russell. This is for the Smithsonian Jazz Oral History Project. Katea Stitt is engineering.

The 1940s were . . .

Russell: Exciting.

Daughtry: . . . exciting and an important time for you, weren’t they?

Russell: Yeah, I suppose so. I think so.

Daughtry: The Benny Carter experience seems to have not hampered you in any way, but rather to have strengthened you. A lot of people would have been upset to have the boss call them in and have him say, “I’m replacing you.” But you took that and re-energized yourself.

Russell: I think I’ve always felt a something directed me in life – a – call it spirit or intuition. I follow my impulses. Sometimes it can seem that it’s against you, but it never really is. I think going through life and experiencing it is a way to grow stronger. I can’t

say I'm able to keep that before my eyes and my ordinary life constantly, but I think I have a place to turn to when things get rough.

Daughtry: Is that a spiritual place? Or just a personal reservoir of strength? Is there a way to characterize it? I'm curious.

Russell: It's serious in the sense that I do believe in forces with no restriction. I believe that there are forces that can guide us through a lifetime. Everything that I've done that I thought was, at the time, terrible, turned out to be something that saved my life. So I salute that thing and try desperately to keep that in mind. That's for sure.

Daughtry: When you were hospitalized the second time, George, were you able to spend that time with the music as you had the first time? The first time I recall you talking about Harold Gaston.

Russell: That's the only thing. Yeah. That's the only thing I could depend on. I know that when I entered the hospital, I had been coughing up blood for two or three days and coughed more severely when I got to the hospital, so severely that they gave me last rites, for which I declined and asked the priest to leave me alone, because I felt that – I felt this need to be alone with whatever was guiding me. I kept thinking about what Miles had told me. I asked him, what would he want? What's his aim in life? He said he wanted to learn all the changes. That was at a time when Miles was doing nothing but playing changes. So I figured, with a fever of 103 or -4, that what he meant is that he wanted to find a new way to express himself. Later on, it – when my health had – was on the upside, I was able to tell him – show him, actually, because after a few months of bed rest, it is possible to get a release for a few hours. I met in his apartment and showed him modes.

Daughtry: Whereas before, he had been talking about – when he said changes, chord changes.

Russell: Yeah. So I just showed him how modes work. A mode is simply a scale begun and ended on the beginning note, whatever note.

Daughtry: How did he – do you recall any . . .

Russell: I had a piano. He had a piano. I just showed how each tone of a chord is a basis for a different mode of that chord. So a-b-c, a-d-e-g, a and b is a major scale. D-e-f-g-a-b-c, d-e-f-g-a, b, and c, d again is the second mode of a major scale, dorian. I felt that he was looking for a simpler way. It took him a long time, but he – when I got out of the hospital, he had begun to play in a modal fashion, which relieved him of having to think about the notes in the chord.

Daughtry: And to just run down every single chord alley.

Russell: Modes – chords are modes, and modes are chords. Modes are a simple way to express – for example, a D-minor mode would be d-e-f-g-a, b, and c, would not have to think – doublethink of the other tones in the mode. You just – just expressing the mode that way simplified it. He was getting into blowing in a way that called on him for too much. He was looking for compositions that had – would have expressed the notes in the chord. He wasn't thinking about the chord being a mode, if you understand what I mean. He wasn't thinking about the chord as a mode.

Daughtry: As an open vehicle.

Russell: As an open vehicle, just sitting there waiting. He was thinking of – oh gee, I have to D7, D, F#, A, and C, and E. I have to get all of these in.

Daughtry: And if he's not thinking of it that way, he's battling the pull of the tonic in those various chords, and that's making his life doubly difficult. You must have been ready to leap about on the bed. I'm not trying to take you back to the hospital, but I just had this flash when you were talking about this. You must have been ready to leap up out the bed at some point and said, "This is it. This is it. I got to go talk to these guys. I'm ready to leave now."

Russell: I had a lot to think about, and that took me away from thinking about my physical condition, because my physical condition . . .

Daughtry: Not dwell on it.

Russell: Not dwell on it, absolutely. Take a weight, and along with that, developing a positive feeling that is healing. The book I've got downstairs is wonderful. A lot of people have that book.

Daughtry: What is it? Which book?

Russell: It has a picture that looks something like you.

Daughtry: Oh yeah. Must be the Buddha!

Stitt: Of a man, you mean?

Russell: Yeah. He's a doctor.

Stitt: He's a man. Dr. Weill. W-e-i-l-l.

Russell: Dr. Weill, yeah.

Daughtry: Oh, so you know who he's talking about.

Stitt: Yeah, Andrew Weill. He has several books.

Russell: Andrew Weill. I suggest it highly.

Daughtry: The healing feeling. We talked earlier, and I'm sort of going back to it a little bit – we're going to of course talk extensively about *The Lydian.* You're going to talking about *The Lydian.* I'm not going to sit here with the master and try to talk about *The Lydian.* But . . .

Russell: Well, the master may not be able to convey anything to you about it.

Daughtry: I think you'll elucidate a lot for us. I read somewhere – I don't remember what the source was – that you had arranged some songs for Charlie Ventura, for Artie Shaw, for Claude Thornhill. I remember thinking at one point – and please correctly me if I'm wrong, and I probably am – I remember thinking at one point, oh those were probably just paying gigs. But then, Claude Thornhill made some interesting music.

Russell: I know it.

Daughtry: I'm thinking now, probably one of the reasons I was attracted to his music was because you were – had a hand not only in a lot of the specific pieces, but probably helped open up his thinking.

Russell: That's Gil Evans. Gil is completely, I think – I think he opened Claude up, although Claude was already – had a style. I think that style Gil enriched.

Daughtry: With his arranging talents. Was that immediately – when you were writing those songs, was that sort of around the same time – just prior to you – I hate to deal with this in a linear fashion, but I'm just trying to get the question out. Where was that in relation to when you hooked up with Dizzy and you guys were doing Symphony Hall?

Russell: I don't know if I ever – Gil was a master of color, of taking chords and using them as colors. I wasn't – I was probably more concerned about the type of melody I would have. I wasn't – when you think of Gil, you see colors, because that's what he was good at. His orchestration is absolutely beautiful, because he cares about orchestration. So I wasn't advanced enough to have his orchestrational gifts. That's what it really was.

Also, he was a man who had the art of – seeing life through his eyes was a very beautiful thing. He's a beautiful man. That's all I can say.

Daughtry: What was that like? We've heard about those gatherings at his apartment, and you hear all these different musicians' names: Bird, Gerry Mulligan, you, and Miles. What was that? Share some of that. That must have – boy, that was too bad that was before videotape.

Russell: If you walked in, like I did, to his apartment, which is on 55th Street in a basement of the big hotel there, one room, a cat named Becky, a genius woman, incredible pianist, and a wild one. Her name will come to me soon.

Daughtry: Anyone we know?

Russell: She was sensational. I think everybody had a little taste of her. She didn't mind. That was a sanctuary, that place. When you walked in there, you were in a different slice of life. You were in Gil's hands. I remember walking in and being disillusioned. I said, "You know, Gil, I think I'm going to have to drive a taxi." He said, "If you want to drive a taxi, drive a taxi." Boom, like that.

Daughtry: Don't talk about it, huh?

Russell: "If you want to drive a taxi, drive a taxi." In other words, if that's what you want to be, go ahead and do it. But don't spill any of your negative thinking on me. Don't you know who you are? All of those things were being said in just, "If you want to drive a taxi, drive a taxi." He taught me a lesson.

One night there was no money. Mulligan was there, and Gil. There was a band at the Apollo. I said, let's – I talked to the leader of that band and asked him about you and would he like to play some of your music. He had said that people in his band – it was a Southern band, anyway. Came from the South – he said the guys in the band wanted – really wanted to play some music that we, the five of us who made up the bulk of that whole period – they want to play some of the music written. So Mulligan and I stayed up all night. Actually, that's not true. Mulligan didn't stay up all night, but I stayed up all night and Gil stayed up all night, working on it. Next day, we went to the Apollo, Gil and I. I think we left with about $150 or something.

Daughtry: That's a great amount of money for that time.

Russell: Yeah, which got us through the hard spell. Mulligan – Gil said about Mulligan that – he said, "You see how he works?"

Daughtry: That's funny. From my distance, I always liked him and appreciated his mannerisms. I mean, I don't – obviously didn't know the man, but in the different interviews I saw, he seemed like an interesting character.

Russell: Gil was an influence on a lot of people, especially Miles. That's – again, it's that we could be – live a life that could have a slice of it coming from Gil, is amazing. There's that something that leads you to a positive view. It is real.

Daughtry: You and Bird must have talked about some of the things that you were thinking about and writing about. Of course he was perhaps the master of the flatted fifth, and here you are, thinking about your . . .

Russell: Everybody – Bird used to sleep in that place a lot.

Daughtry: You're thinking about the raised fourth, and he's the flatted fifth master.

Russell: I wish I could think of the girl's name. She was amazing.

Daughtry: You said she was a piano player?

Russell: She was an excellent pianist who played Bach as well as Bud Powell.

Daughtry: Black, white, what?

Russell: She was amazing.

Daughtry: Black, white?

Russell: Sylvia. Sylvia Goldberg was her name.

Daughtry: Sylvia Goldberg.

Russell: She was – she gave us a lot.

Daughtry: Oh, we need the camera again.

Russell: Gave us a lot. Kept the doctors busy.

Daughtry: Smithsonian, you're going to have to include a camera with these things. Oh boy. I heard that.

Russell: She'd cuss like a sailor, but she had a beautiful soul, really, and a great love for Gil and people who were in that thing. I think she felt – she must have been an abused child. She went with some people who wouldn't be good for her. I don't know if she's alive or not. But she was something. Sit down and play Stravinsky. We used to be – Gil used to insist that we go up to Juilliard to hear one of the people there – I don't know what you call them – who prepare for a concert with a higher-level person. Gil would insist that we go up and listen to that.

Daughtry: The preparation for the rehearsal.

Russell: Yeah, that person put it together for, like, Hindemith, maybe. Gil, Miles, some people you don't know, but Mulligan, we'd all walk up to Juilliard. Those were great, great days. I was lucky enough, because I lived on Park Avenue then. A lady had taken a liking to me.

Daughtry: I was going to say, that's a pretty high-rent neighborhood, George, especially then.

Russell: Actually, her husband too.

Daughtry: Oh boy. We're bringing a video tomorrow. I love those little . . .

Russell: There again, there's that thing that when I could have been – I stayed in the Bowery for a little while. John Lewis rescued me from that. Somewhere along the line, I met this woman. She's very interested in the arts, gave money to the arts, lived on Park Avenue, and had mental problems. I think I have lived the life.

Daughtry: Oh, a fabulous life, I'd say. You have met a lot of – all the people we've talked about in the last part of this conversation, these were all from the '40s, Bird and Mulligan and of course Gil Evans and Miles.

Russell: I hear that Elvin is sick.

Stitt: He is gravely ill.

Russell: He's very sick, isn't he? Because what I heard is he said he wants to go out on the drums. What a drummer!

Daughtry: Yes, what a drummer, hell of a drummer.

Russell: Do we have this on him?

Stitt: We did it last year.

Daughtry: That's great. I'm glad to hear that.

Russell: That's good.

[recording interrupted]

Daughtry: I'm Bob Daughtry. It's Tuesday, May 5th, 2004. We're in Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts. This is for the Smithsonian Jazz Oral History Project, Katea Stitt is engineering. We're here with Mr. George Russell, and this is tape 2 continued.

George, how are you today?

Russell: Pretty well.

Daughtry: You're looking very well.

Russell: You too.

Daughtry: Got that twinkle in your eye.

We had – we covered some very good ground yesterday, your early days, growing up as a youngster, your family, your early years out in the world. We ended up pretty much toward the late '40s. Of course we may think of something that takes us back into the '20s or '30s, but I'm picking up from that point of the late '40s, if we can. There was *Cubana Be, Cubana Bop.* It was a two-movement suite, I believe. Many have said, and I believe it's accurate, that it was the first modal composition in jazz. There was – you wrote the introduction for the piece, as well as the entire piece. Dizzy added a 16-bar section, I believe, right after the introduction. Then the brilliant Chano Pozo comes to the fore, and he essentially links the two movements. A fabulous piece, 1947, September 1947, I believe, is the date that is given for that.

The next milestone that has come up many times is *A Bird in Igor's Yard.* I sometimes think it should have been called, "Charlie Parker and Stravinsky Do the Lydian." But at any rate, tell us about the *Bird in Igor's Yard.*

Russell: That goes a long way back. It was for a – of course a bandleader who played clarinet. You might have to help me there.

Daughtry: Buddy DeFranco.

Russell: Buddy DeFranco. Buddy – the first thing I did – maybe the first thing I did wrong is to take the piece to Paul – oh boy. No, it wasn't Paul Whiteman. A very successful . . .

Daughtry: Bandleader.

Russell: . . . bandleader.

Daughtry: Artie Shaw, maybe?

Russell: No, Artie was in my corner, all the way. But on that level. Benny Goodman.

Daughtry: Okay, all right, very successful.

Russell: It was Benny Goodman. Benny – I think I – yeah, I must have had a tape of the piece. For him it was a little too out, I would say. He was very nice, but he didn't buy. But the piece was recorded anyway with Buddy DeFranco and first heard 20 years later.

Daughtry: Why did they take so long to release it? What's your feeling about it?

Russell: It was an unusual piece, not something that was just for beginners, a jazz appreciation group. It wasn't meant for that. It was a heavy piece.

Daughtry: So is it – would you say it's an example of the record company deciding what we should and shouldn't hear?

Russell: Sure, absolutely. It took letters from a Dutch person who – I don't remember his name, but he didn't give up. He never gave it up. He kept writing to the record company and saying, this should be out, it's ridiculous. It was 20 years from its finish to its being accepted.

Daughtry: You were – the recording date itself was '49. So you were pretty much well into, maybe in the middle of – you tell me. I don't – but you were well into *The Lydian,* the formalizing of the concept at that point. Then you actually had it completed and got it published. When was that? Was that the early '50s?

Russell: I have to think first where I got the money to publish it. That's sort of an unbelievable – a hard to believe story that actually happened. A fellow named Buckwheat – his first name was actually – we called him Buckwheat, but his first name was – I don't really remember that. But he was traveling with a group, very successful group of the day. Hmm. It was a pop group. They were at the top of . . .

Daughtry: A singing group? Gee, there's so many groups. When I start thinking of that time frame, the Dominos and the Ink Spots. The Mills Brothers were older.

Russell: This group came out of a college.

Daughtry: Popular? Did they make it big on a popular market? They did well on the hit parade?

Russell: Yeah, they were in that. Now and then they'll do a replay of that group.

Daughtry: I wish I was home. I could start pulling all my books off the library.

Russell: Anyway, its founder was Dave Guard. He founded this group. Alice would know. I'm sure she would know.

Daughtry: We may have to drag her back in here. But you say he was instrumental in your getting it published?

Russell: Buckwheat was the bass player with this group. The group had its own little small . . .

Daughtry: . . . band and everything?

Russell: Yeah.

Daughtry: It's not the Orioles.

Russell: No, no. These are really American – kind of folk music, very folk music. Kingston Trio. Jesus, that took a long time.

Daughtry: The Kingston Trio. That's okay.

Russell: Kingston Trio. Dave Guard was the founder of the Kingston Trio. Buckwheat was – he played – I think they had – certainly they had a bass player, because Buckwheat was playing bass, but they couldn't have had more than maybe another guitar player. Buckwheat was fascinated. He fell in love with the . . .

Daughtry: *Concept.*

Russell: . . . *Concept.* Even at that time, when it certainly wasn't totally pulled together yet, he was fascinated.

Daughtry: So did you . . . ?

Russell: I just want to say that Buckwheat told Dave Guard about the *Concept.* Dave Guard was knocked out too. So, if you're familiar with them, the Kingston Trio was very, very popular at that – top of the list.

Daughtry: I do remember that they were popular, yes.

Russell: One day – I had been working on the book, wanting to find the money to get it published. One day I opened the door to my house in the Village, a little apartment down there, picked up an envelope, a check for $5,000 from Dave Guard. "Bon apertif" or something like that, all the best. He used it to construct a method for guitar playing *Lydian Chromatic Concept,* fingering. He – it put him to work on fingering, which lasts even now. It's advertised in certain music things even today, even with Dave Guard being dead for years. He died – he and his family moved to Australia for fear of nuclear . . .

Daughtry: Holocaust, a nuclear holocaust.

Russell: For fear of being nuclearly bombed out. It seems that while he was down there, something happened. He got a disease and died a young man. Buckwheat didn't have much more luck either. He was – his tongue was cut out.

Daughtry: What! So he died. Did he live after that?

Russell: He didn't die right away, but I know . . .

Daughtry: Who did he make mad? This sounds like some Mafia stuff.

Russell: It wasn't Mafia. It was, I think, a . . .

Daughtry: . . . jealous husband? It was a crime of passion there, or . . .

Russell: Those people lived daringly. So I think it was just some extra-strong substance, where – as the movie *Joe* – did you ever see a movie called *Joe*?

Daughtry: With Peter Boyle? Yeah, I saw that.

Russell: As Joe would put it, they were having an orgee.

Daughtry: And they were preverted. Preverts and orgees. That's quite a movie. You should see it if you ever get a chance.

Russell: Bucky, he – what can I tell you?

Daughtry: I forgot that, about orgees. Wow. Back in those days, the fear of being nuked was pretty incredible.

Russell: I have to ask you a question that occurred to me. I'm telling these things. If they get out, is there a problem? Would there be a problem with, say, some of the relatives of these people I'm talking about?

Stitt: Let me turn the . . .

[recording interrupted]

Russell: He had to learn how to talk again.

Daughtry: So we have a situation where you open your door one day, there's an envelope, and in it is a check from Dave Guard for $5,000, which, back then, fast forwarding to today, that would be like $50,000, $100,000. That was a lot of money. I got excited when you mentioned it. I can imagine how you must have been at that time, particularly since it meant the bringing to fruition – of at least the first stage of fruition – your life work, your dream.

Russell: I was able to do that with that money.

Daughtry: I've seen a date of '53 as the first publishing of *The Lydian.*

Russell: Yeah.

Daughtry: So that coincides with that time.

Russell: Yeah. Eventually Buckwheat recovered. He was extremely embarrassed by it. I think – well, he certainly learned a lesson. But he also passed away young. So all those people, somehow they died young.

Daughtry: You were still managing, at this point, to not drive the cab.

Russell: Yeah, absolutely.

Daughtry: You were still taking Gil's advice and sticking with your musical pursuits.

Russell: A lot of that is creditable to Juanita, my first wife.

Daughtry: When had you gotten married?

Russell: 19- – I could call her up.

Daughtry: Alice would know.

Russell: She's funny. She's really funny, a sweet woman. Spent the last ten years now of looking after Jimmy Giuffre.

Daughtry: She is now married to Jimmy Giuffre.

Russell: She married Jimmy. That's been about 15 years ago.

Daughtry: What was Juanita's name?

Russell: Odjenar.

Daughtry: That's what that means.

Russell: Odjenar.

Daughtry: O-d-e-j-e-n-a-r, I think. I always wondered what that – that's the title of a tune.

Russell: I know. I titled it.

Daughtry: Well yes, but I always wondered – I wonder what Odjenar means?

Russell: If you want, I can call her, and she'll fill the book with things.

Daughtry: We may do some followup reference. So the late '40s, maybe? How did you all meet?

Russell: Dizzy.

Daughtry: Oh yeah? While you were with Dizzy, through Dizzy?

Russell: They used to make some stuff called – some god-awful stuff – that men, I think mostly black men like us, put on our face to – and it smelled.

Daughtry: Magic Shave?

Russell: Yeah. It was awful. I was living with John Lewis in Jamaica, New York, out in a nice neighborhood in Jamaica, because he saw in me talent and he wanted to enrich that and see. So when I was living on the Bowery, he said, "I can't let you live like this."

Daughtry: That's a friend.

Russell: Yeah, a sweetheart. So I was out there. Dizzy lived close by. John was playing with Dizzy's band at the time, John Lewis was. He'd come home after a gig and run his head into the wall, right into the wall. He was so . . .

Daughtry: Frustrated?

Russell: Yeah, because he wasn't a clown. John was very serious.

Daughtry: Dizzy liked to clown around.

Russell: He wasn't given to these spontaneous ideas that Dizzy – like Dizzy. For example, John had left, going to New York. I was taking a bath, in the bathroom. The bell rang or something. Somehow I got the door open, and it was Dizzy. I'm in the bathtub. Dizzy's coming in, and I have all this . . .

Daughtry: Magic Shave.

Russell: Yeah, Magic, so called Magic. The place was smelling awful. He had a girl with him, and it was Juanita. He said, "Come. I want you to meet." Takes me in the bathroom. I'm naked.

Daughtry: Brings her right in, first time in.

Russell: "This is my arranger," he'd say.

Daughtry: What did he call you? His what?

Russell: Arranger.

Daughtry: Arranger. What did that mean?

[recording interrupted]

Here you are in the bathtub with this Magic Shave on, the house is stinking, and in walks Dizzy with Juanita and says, "This is my arranger."

Russell: Yeah.

Daughtry: Okay. Take us from there. What happened?

Russell: She said, uh-hmm. They left, but she made an impression on me. Six months later or so I called her at her home in Jamaica, with her mother, her father – a Philippine father – and the grandmother, who was an extremely suspicious lady and overseer. I said, "I'd like to take you out to dinner." That did it. I think a month or two after that we got married, against Grandma's best wishes. I was – as I said, I was living with John at the time. She was working at New York Life. She had a steady job at New York Life. That was okay. We had to – the first thing we did was get an expensive – too expensive for us – we got a house overlooking the river and all that, Hudson River. That lasted for about two weeks. The money wasn't there. So we moved to a hotel one block from her New York Life building down at 23rd Street, so that when she'd go to work, she'd just roll out of bed and roll into work. But she was late every day.

Daughtry: Only a block away.

Russell: So we got married. It was kind of a thing where I said – that happened for about a year. She worked. I didn't have anything. I worked at this.

Daughtry: *Lydian,* the *Concept.*

Russell: Yeah, and I told her that at one point she wouldn't have to work anymore, that this is going to make it.

Daughtry: Oh boy.

Russell: She went along. It was – she kept her job, and then she moved to an awful job, reading newspapers and having to check on certain companies that wanted their name in the paper. I forget what they call that, but certain people want their names – they want you to see and preserve their names when their names appeared in the paper.

Daughtry: So she changed jobs and was doing that.

Russell: Yeah.

Daughtry: I see. How long were you all together?

Russell: Hmm.

Daughtry: Give or take?

Russell: About 10 or 15 years?

Daughtry: You had any children?

Russell: No. But she's a lifesaver. She – I can really say that, because I remember she – I taught her how to copy music.

Daughtry: Ah, a valuable thing to know.

Russell: Mingus had done something. She copied it, and they were rehearsing it, getting ready to record it. He knocked on my door to say that it was all wrong. So I had to stay up one night there . . .

Daughtry: This was something she had done for him?

Russell: Yeah. She had prepared it, but it wasn't right.

Daughtry: At least you didn't have to physically fight him, huh?

Russell: She hadn't done it right.

Daughtry: At least you didn't have to physically fight him, because that's the kind of thing he'd fight people about.

Russell: It would have to be with Mingus, because he's a maniac. He was very – fairly nice about it. He wasn't – he could have been very . . .

Daughtry: Could have been Mingus. So you ended up getting it corrected.

Russell: Yeah, and I also did that – Gil gave her one of the tunes on one of his great albums, and it wasn't quite right. I had to stay up all night to do it.

Daughtry: Let me ask you a question about that, in fairness to remembering her and everything. Lots of times, when copyists make mistakes, it has to do with the communication, because the writer hasn't been as clear in the notation. They've even been sloppy. Did you find that that was the case? Or was she just not as competent as she should have been?

Russell: I think it's – she didn't quite understand certain parts of the music.

Daughtry: In terms of what? The notation? The symbols? Or what are we talking about?

Russell: Probably a mixture of all those things.

Daughtry: Okay. You're being real diplomatic. Did she get better at it?

Russell: Yeah, she did.

Daughtry: Right on.

Russell: We married, I think it had to be in '53, up until the – the next big event in my life was the School of Jazz.

Daughtry: In Lenox?

Russell: In Lenox.

Daughtry: That was at the end of the '50s, '58, '59?

Russell: Yeah.

Daughtry: You taught there, right?

Russell: That was the start of us breaking up. She met Jimmy.

Daughtry: You were – I guess you had to relocate in order to do that.

Russell: I didn't have to relocate. I could – we – this is after the seminar was over. We did relocate then, when I moved back to our house in Greenwich Village. She moved to a place uptown with Jimmy.

Daughtry: The Lenox School, that's here in Massachusetts, isn't it?

Russell: Yeah.

Daughtry: That's what I was referring to. When you – you were in New York when you got that gig. Was that Gunther Schuller? Who was running the Lenox School?

Russell: John Lewis got it together. John Lewis. Gunther was connected with the classical side of that. It wasn't the School of Jazz. He was connected with the so-called classical doings at that place.

Daughtry: What did you teach?

Russell: *Concept.*

Daughtry: Right on. How long were you there?

Russell: That wasn't a thing that had to do with a length of time to be there, because it's summer. You have summer. It was over.

Daughtry: So like a semester. I guess that's . . .

Russell: Something.

Daughtry: I see.

Russell: My classes – the students were Ornette Coleman . . .

Daughtry: Don Cherry.

Russell: . . . Don Cherry, a bass player. I guess it's Heath.

Daughtry: Percy Heath.

Russell: Percy Heath, a drummer, one of the Heaths.

Daughtry: Tootie Heath? Albert.

Russell: Yeah. A bunch of people from Indiana.

Daughtry: Dave Baker.

Russell: Dave Baker, and people who had played with Baker's band in Indiana, some good, good players. That tenor player is wonderful. If anyone who says white people can't play jazz, he . . .

Daughtry: Proved that wrong, huh?

Russell: He was just a natural player. A little out and a little in. He joined the Army. I haven't heard about him.

Daughtry: Since then. There were a couple of recordings produced from that period by Ornette and Don Cherry.

Russell: Definitely. Ornette – we all recognized him as a super talent who was capable of changing the art of jazz, and it was him. I have three levels of tonal gravity, vertical, horizontal, and supra-vertical. I had vertical and horizontal, but when I heard Ornette, it opened the door to supra-vertical, all and everything, because he was something.

Daughtry: I remember you were talking about chords and the *Concept.* You were making an analogy. You were saying how the chords were like paths or streets down in a particular direction, and you were saying how Coleman Hawkins would go down certain – every one, Lester Young would only stop at certain ones, the big ones. You sort of likened it to small towns and cities. You said John Coltrane would come through like a rocket. Then you said Ornette was like a rocket who never landed.

Russell: Never came down. That's my – it's in a book. It's in your book. It's a chart, the river trip, river trip analogy of vertical tonal gravity or these various levels.

Daughtry: The book that we're talking about – I'll add in here – is George Russell's *Lydian Chromatic Concept of Tonal Organization,* volume I, *The Art and Science of Tonal Gravity,* copyright 2001.

I'd like to remind you of something Ornette said about you. He said – and this was in reference when asked about the *Lydian Chromatic Concept* – he said it surpasses any musical knowledge I've been exposed to.

Russell: That's what he says, yeah.

Daughtry: That's in a book also. That's quite a compliment, coming from one that we all know is at the very top in terms of concept and all of that.

Russell: It's based on a Lydian chromatic scale, and that's the scale. You can't – that's the whole palette of equal temperament. So all scales are in the Lydian chromatic scale, including the major scale. All scales are in it. In the major scale, it immediately brought in 7 other major scales. So you have the ordinary major scale, but then you have the Lydian augmented major, Lydian diminished major, diminished major with a flat seventh, and on up. So you have a group of major chords. It's only for those who can think big. It is huge. It covers all of music. That's why that book has Coltrane in it, but it also has Bach, and it also has Ravel. It shows that Ravel wasn't using a major scale. It shows a little bit of Stravinsky's piece, shows what he's actually doing. So look at it this way: for 400 years there had been attempts. That's the river trip.

Daughtry: 400 years there's been attempts . . .

Russell: There have, there was – for 400 years, music theory has tried to come up with something that explained music beyond Bach. This is the only one that does it.

Daughtry: It seemed that for a long time, they got very caught up in just the major and minor scales.

Russell: Yeah. It got to be a – that's because it was not founded on anything except superficial something. "Oh, I like that F in a C-major scale. I like it. It sounds good." That's all it was. That's the only reason they had it, because it was laying there, and it sounds good. They had no objective view of it. So, what I did is a ladder of fifths and built up to this magnificent all-in-one scale. All scales are within the Lydian chromatic scale.

Daughtry: I had mentioned yesterday, in talking about the scales and all that, about the fifth and the fourth, the augmented fourth and the flatted fifth. I was looking at the scale and remembering what you had been telling me and looking at the fact that that fourth note is the F, and of course that's the basis for the Lydian and just reminding myself of there. It's funny, because if they would only teach that to kids in school. They teach kids the so-fa system, which is the do-re-mi, and if they . . .

Russell: ii-V-I.

Daughtry: Yeah, and if they would simply – so they build in that dead end almost, right then and there. If they would open their minds up a little bit, that's the time to do it. That's the time to do it and help them to understand and extend their thinking beyond this . . .

Russell: This is a mind opener. This is the mind opener.

Daughtry: Yes it is. So the Lenox, you were teaching the *Lydian,* and you had some tremendous students who – that must have been a lot of fun for you.

Russell: Fun?

Daughtry: It was a challenge too, I bet.

Russell: No, that was a gift. Ornette played a meaningful role in his playing, because it was that that showed me how to include all that I – I had come up with a scale that could do all and everything.

Daughtry: You talk about equal temperament. It just occurred to me, and maybe this is not appropriate, but Ornette, here's a guy who challenges the whole thing of the tempered

scale and all of that. So yes, challenge. That must have really been a challenge as well as . . .

Russell: I don't deal with anything except equal temperament. So I'm not into certain forms of music that mess with temperament.

Daughtry: Go outside the laws. Yeah. There's some chaos involved there, when you do that.

Russell: Well, it just doesn't interest me.

Daughtry: You said that was the next big event in your life. But I thought there was an event that occurred in the mid-'50s with the *Jazz Workshop* stuff that was a pretty big event for you also, with Bill Evans and Art Farmer and some of your earlier students.

Russell: That was purely the goodness of a young man who Victor had the good luck to hire as their director of jazz. Yesterday I remembered his name. Today I'm not so good. But it will come. He had been adopted by the then head of RCA, who had discovered him in an orphanage, but a grown man, young man. He adopted him and made him – I shouldn't forget this name, but – made him the head of jazz. Jack Lewis. Yeah, it was Jack Lewis. Jack opened up the door to everybody. He recorded all and everybody, when he could. Hal McKusick was putting his group together, with Milt Hinton. I turned him on to Bill Evans and wrote for the group. That made – I wrote about 12 different songs. That became my principal contribution to jazz at that time.

Daughtry: It was mid-'50s.

Russell: It got rave reviews from everybody.

Daughtry: Hal McKusick, Barry Galbraith, Art Farmer.

Russell: Yeah. Jack – that was because, before that, McKusick had made a record and had two of my songs on it. Jack was impressed and said, "I'm going to . . ." – what he did is, RCA Victor studios were a half block from where we lived, Juanita and I, a hotel. The next step was the Bowery. We lived in one room for two years, two or three years. I invited Jack to lunch. He came up, and he had lunch. He said, "I'm going to do something I don't do often. I'm going to give you" x amount of "dollars to move out of there and get yourselves straight." He did. Things like that are really beautiful.

RCA hated him, because he'd come to work. First thing he'd do is light up, and the place would be smelling of pot and stuff.

Daughtry: He was a bon vivant, huh?

Russell: He was a card. So they – I forget – the father who adopted him died, to the everlasting joy of the people who hated him. So they could take Jack down. They did, Christmas. They waited until Christmas, and they said, "You're out," the guys who wore the straight ties and the . . .

Daughtry: The suits. They call them suits. The corporate treasury. Now that *Jazz Workshop,* that was the mid-'50s, '55, '56. What had been happening for you between the time you had gotten married, which I think you said was around '53 and that point? Just maintaining? Or any . . . ?

Russell: Yeah, just writing at every opportunity. We got a – we managed to get a hotel in that one room upstairs. I remember one day a singer came to town. She had wanted me to do some arranging for her for a record. A very beautiful singer. But it was one of those Sundays in New York, summertime Sundays, when the city is really quiet and you try to think of what to do. She had a guy with her, a singer. I couldn't think of anything to do, because he didn't speak very much. So I said, "Let's take the Staten Island ferry." So Juanita and I and what's-her-name – I'll get that too – we went down and took the Staten Island ferry over and back. The guy didn't talk very much. So I said – when we got through with the ride, I said, "Let's go back home," because he looked like a banker. That's what he looked like, like a business banker. So I said, "What do you do?" "I play piano." You know what happened next.

Daughtry: You all started talking.

Russell: He sat down at the piano, and I felt like jumping up and saying hallelujah. It was Bill Evans.

Daughtry: The introspective one. He was truly that way. Who was the singer? You've really got me curious now. We have singers we associate you with, but obviously we're not talking about any of them.

Russell: I can't remember her name.

Daughtry: Okay. It'll come to you. So you guys must have had a grand time at that point. He was soaking . . .

Russell: Juanita at that time was – okay. When Jack gave me the album, I took that money and moved – we moved – Juanita and I moved out and moved to the place in the Village. This must have – yeah, okay. Juanita had to be there, in the room with Bill, the

one-room apartment. She had to be a part of it. But when I moved out, it was with Juanita too, but she didn't stay long, because she and Jimmy had a thing. We still . . .

Daughtry: How's she doing herself?

Russell: She's a fighter. She really – she's a marvelous woman.

Daughtry: She's been taking care of Jimmy all these years.

Russell: Taking care of – he's had – what's this damn crippling disease that men get?

Daughtry: Parkinson's or one of those syndromes?

Russell: Parkinson's. That's what he had.

Daughtry: I think that's what Alice has said. That's terrible, especially for someone who used his hands.

Russell: He can't make any kind of sense. We go up there every – Alice and I go up every Christmas, at least.

Daughtry: That's really nice.

Russell: They're good friends, Alice and Juanita. Juanita's in the family. She's just great. So this is – as time goes on, eventually Bill had a terrible life.

Daughtry: You – if I'm not mistaken, when Miles was looking for a piano player, you recommended Bill to him, didn't you?

Russell: Yes I did. I took Barry Galbraith, a great guitar player, and Bill, put them in the car, a – those German cars. What were they called? Little small cars. We went over . . .

Daughtry: Volkswagens?

Russell: Yeah – went over to a club in Brooklyn, hot club. Miles had told me that he was looking for a piano player, he said, "because these guys – my band are messing me up," missing airplanes and stuff.

Daughtry: He was having a lot of problems with that at that point, and he had cleaned up his act.

Russell: And he was looking for a new way to play. Bill already had that new way, the modal approach. The band was a great band, but with Philly Joe in – I never – I sat in with him once. It's like, wow, the energy was just amazing, but Philly Joe was missing planes. There's a fat kid that played . . .

Daughtry: Played what? What instrument are you talking about?

Russell: Played tenor.

Daughtry: Tenor?

Russell: Yeah.

Daughtry: I thought you meant Cannonball, but . . .

Russell: Cannonball. That's who I'm talking about.

Daughtry: Oh okay, alto, yeah.

Russell: The piano player was . . .

Daughtry: Red [Garland].

Russell: . . . Red, who I loved. I loved Red. He didn't – I guess he was pulling too many missed planes.

Daughtry: Yeah, I was going to say, he had this thing as well.

Russell: Bass player was excellent.

Daughtry: A youngster.

Russell: So, at intermission, Miles gave Bill Red's chair.

Daughtry: Wow, right at intermission.

Russell: Yeah.

Daughtry: That's the way it goes down lots of times.

Russell: It was beautiful. At the end Miles told Bill – he said, "You're going with us on Saturday to Philadelphia." That's the way it happened. I forget the name of the club out there.

Daughtry: Yeah, I was trying to think of what clubs were out in Brooklyn during that time. The only one I can think of, I'm sure isn't the one, is there used to be a club out there called the Blue Coronet that I always liked. But you'll think of it. When you do, we'll fill it in somewhere, not necessarily on the tape.

Russell: Bed-Stuy.

Daughtry: Bed-Stuy?

Russell: Yeah, that's where it was.

Daughtry: Wow, that was historic. Bill was happy, wasn't he?

Russell: You couldn't tell about Bill. That was one thing.

Daughtry: Was he deadpan? Or stoic? Or just so low-key that . . . ? How would you characterize it?

Russell: I think he was maybe a bit uncomfortable, because he was out of his element. He wasn't used to . . .

Daughtry: The club scene and a lot of black guys, Miles.

Russell: He wasn't used to the likes of Red and . . .

Daughtry: . . . Philly.

Russell: Yeah, Cannonball.

Daughtry: He sure played beautifully in that group though. Man, that was one of the great groups of all time.

Russell: It had to be, because the records they made with Bill are still the best-selling records.

Daughtry: Oh yes, *Kind of Blue,* no doubt about it. That whole period though, Miles was just playing so well, with all his groups, and then the change in the sound was something

that everybody could really appreciate. Speaking of that, you were – you had to be either writing the music for, or it was definitely in your head, for *Jazz in the Space Age.*

Russell: I had to write something.

Daughtry: Because we're talking about – that was around that same period, wasn't it? '58, '59, around the time of *Kind of Blue* and all that?

Russell: Um-hmm.

Daughtry: You had Jon Hendricks and Coltrane. Who were some of the other people in that?

Russell: A big bunch of guys.

Daughtry: It was a big band. "Think you can lick it, get to the wicket, buy your ticket." I'll always remember that rap. "New York, New York, a city so nice, they had to name it twice." That Jon Hendricks is a character.

Russell: Jon is, yeah. Now we're going to see what the – what did they call it? Everything now is this – you know like these ten things they use.

Daughtry: Like what, recording or multi-tracking? What are we . . .? Overdubbing?

Russell: D. P baby is where we're going. Oh, CDs.

Daughtry: Digital. Digital age.

Russell: That's where we want to go.

Daughtry: That whole period was prefiguring the digital age, really, if you think about it, because music was at such a high level. We talk about *Milestones, Kind of Blue,* the kind of stuff you guys did at the Jazz Workshop, *Concerto for Billy the Kid, Milestones,* all of that, *So What, Manhattan* out of *New York, New York,* all the different things that were happening, *Giant Steps.* When you think about it, the music wasn't going to get any faster or more complex at a certain point. That's what I mean when I say, that was definitely *Ezz-thetics,* your album *Ezz-thetics,* that thing, you and Dolphy and Don Ellis and Steve Swallow, all you all did, Dave Baker, *Round Midnight* and *Nardis* and all of those tunes, *Lydian.* You all were prefiguring – they had to invent some machines to try to compete with that at a certain point.

Russell: I'm not one to look back. I always search for newness. So I'm stuck on that, stuck there.

[recording interrupted]

Daughtry: How do you see yourself as an artist and music's role for you, here and now?

Russell: I don't know whether I'm an artist or – I know that if I write music – I don't know if this makes you an artist or not, but I like to have depth to – add depth to whatever I'm writing, and it has to mean something. Maybe it – some people, it wouldn't have a meaning, but with most of my music, I make sure that I see it as moving and being deep. The buck stops there.

Daughtry: That's inspiring, because music can do so many things. It can make you feel things. It can stir something inside you. There's that old saying about music to soothe the savage breast or beast. I can't remember which one it is.

Stitt: Beast.

Daughtry: Is it the beast? All right. I remember Albert Ayler said, "Music is the healing force of the universe." Coltrane saying he thought music could change the way people think. It seems to me that you're speaking about similar kinds of things in your own way.

Russell: You can see it. If you watch those late-night shows on channel 68, you see big fat black men singing spirituals and white women standing next to them, wherever they managed to pull that off. You can see the whole auditorium doing this, blacks, whites, green, whatever. The only thing is, when they have this show – it's on Saturday nights, 68 in here, they have made up songs, they've made saleable at prices. So, on the bottom, it's Time-Life. Time-Life is the most fucking ridiculous really horrible bunch of assholes. So it's really interesting to watch this surge of religion coming on, white, black, green, and whatever. Everybody's having a good time. The whole audience is moving like that, like we like to move.

Daughtry: A collective wave of euphoria.

Russell: But they're selling their product, and the product is produced by one of the worst companies in the world, a really – a country that's a real bunch of people. I used all my cussing words today, but a bunch of people that really . . .

Daughtry: That's the quota, huh?

Russell: Yeah – are really hypocrites. I don't know whether you can identify race with that or – however you think of it, Time-Life is not a charitable – they don't do anything without wanting money.

Daughtry: The profit motive.

Russell: Yeah. We call it other things too, but I don't want to go there.

Daughtry: But your music speaks to a lot of the higher themes. *Listen to the Silence.* What will we hear if we listen to the silence?

Russell: You'll hear yourself, your – all aspects of yourself. You'll hear the noise that that little bird out there is making. This is a great place to listen to the silence, night or day. If you close your eyes and see yourself and be yourself, ecoutez le silence. That was performed, that piece, for the first time in the oldest church in Norway. It was a time – wartime, when there were battles in America about kids going off to war. What was it?

Stitt: Vietnam?

Russell: Yeah. Remember that terrible riot in Chicago? Alice was in it. She knows about it. That composition was written during the last war, my way of trying to do the right thing.

Daughtry: As you said earlier, you want your music to have meaning, depth.

Russell: Yeah, it has to.

Daughtry: It's certainly there. The orchestral introduction is incredible in that piece of music, in my opinion. The whole extended work is – and I'm speaking now about the recording, but I also know that it is a living work that continues, particularly . . .

Russell: There wasn't a dry eye in the house after it was over.

Daughtry: The oldest church in Norway.

Russell: Oldest church in Norway, yeah.

Daughtry: That must have been phenomenal.

Russell: That's where the song *Listen to the Silence* comes in. [Russell sings a rhythmic line.]

Daughtry: [Daughtry sings.] There's so many wonderful variations that I've heard of it. I'm speaking now about that introductory part to the whole extended work. You kind of use that as a signature, don't you? Maybe signature's the wrong word, but I noticed you'll do two or three tunes and then you might step up to the microphone, and the band will play that as you are talking to the audience. It's hard, because I'm always trying to listen to that particular group's variation of it and what you're saying, at the same time. I don't want to miss either one. That's the only thing about a live performance. It's like, am I going to listen to George, or am I going to listen to the band? Can I listen to both of them? It's – oh man, it's – but the extended work itself I've listened to many times. The title, personally for me, and this is how – the depth that I got from it. *Listen to the Silence.* When you do, you'll hear yourself, and intuitively, you know that you're always right, if you listen to yourself, that is to say, by extension, if you'll do the right thing. Of course, that's a wonderful thing, to listen to the silence, because you get in tune with yourself. Certainly the possibility for getting in tune is there. Let me put it that way. Have you considered returning to that piece at all? Or any part of that piece, particularly the part we're talking about?

Russell: I would like to. I'd do it every week, if I could.

Daughtry: I could listen to it every week.

Russell: But they don't – I gave it to a so-called head of our voice departments at New England Conservatory. They don't – it doesn't register with them, not at all.

Daughtry: That's ludicrous.

Russell: That – the whole piece is taken from newspapers. It's taken from the Russian communist cruelty to their own people, who resisted their politics. It's for the – ecoutez le silence, listen to the silence, listen to what you did back there in slavery, listen to your sins, listen.

Daughtry: Listen to what the cosmos . . .

Russell: It's a strong piece.

Daughtry: Yes, it is.

Russell: It deals with, in Vietnam, the people who were locked up and had excrement thrown down on them, as well as lye. In a cage. They were in cages. All of this was solid, but the top was locked and open, so that they could drop anything down on these people. The people in the Soviet Union that rejected communism fought it like hell, the same

kind of thing that – I just got – I was at a point where I got fed up with the cruelty in the world.

Daughtry: Yeah, frustrating.

Russell: It's still there.

Daughtry: And I don't know what to do about it. It's frustrating. You want to do something, if you're any kind of a human.

Russell: Yeah, there's got to be . . .

Daughtry: I'm Bob Daughtry. We're here with George Russell. Today is Wednesday, May 5th, 2004. This is for the Smithsonian Jazz Oral History Project. It's tape 3. Kotea Stitt is engineering.

George, how are you feeling today?

Russell: Very well, thank you.

Daughtry: You look well. I'm wondering what your secret is.

Russell: I just live a long time.

Daughtry: You really are looking well today.

Russell: Thanks.

Daughtry: We were just talking about – when we left off, we were talking about *Listen to the Silence* and in part how that had come about and about the Vietnam War and about man's inhumanity to man. It struck me that inhumanity may have been one of the real concerns that you had back in the early '60s when you moved from the United States. Was that – was it the political, social kinds of things that were bothering you and on your mind?

Russell: More or less, political, social. Things were turning in the '60s. In music, it was turning into a – turning toward a way of expressing music just absolutely with no law.

Daughtry: What do you mean?

Russell: One young man asked me, back there. He said, "I want to learn to play, but I don't want to know any rules about playing. I don't want to." That really expressed the

way music was headed and considered. Jazz music was considered to have no laws, to have no – actually, no form, and just playing totally from your feelings, whether it's pounding on the piano or tearing up the piano. There was a lack of structure there. It became *the* way to get heard and be a part of the music of that time. I didn't believe – I believed that everything on earth and in the atmosphere and in the – any kind of sphere you take – has to have laws there, that it's not law that keeps it from being yourself. That's not really a law. It's having a pot full of little laws that stand in the way. The big laws, you need. Nobody was thinking that way. I was after the big laws.

As a result, I moved out of America, because there was no chance at this time of me feeling able to take in the music of the day then, because the music was absolutely without law.

Daughtry: At this point, you had made a series of records for Riverside, like, I think, *The Outer View, Stratusphunk,* and several others, *Eszz-thetics.* They seemd to have been well received critically. Had you managed to make any money doing those records?

Russell: Sure. The record company, they're liable to have to pay me, and they did.

Daughtry: But at this point there was a kind of a disillusionment with what was going on in terms of the music scene, what seemed to be emphasized, a lot of musicians coming up who were trying to imitate some of the certain things that other musicians like Coltrane was doing, but who didn't have really the bona fides to do that.

Russell: It was on the level of . . .

Daughtry: Chaos.

Russell: . . . chaos, complete chaos. You'd have people that never held a horn in their mouth coming to you and saying, "Just show me how to play. I don't want to know anything about music. Just, how do you get sounds out of this?" So I said, I can't – and furthermore, they – on a political side, there was a movement into supposedly a free society, but at that time, to me the communists didn't have a free society. It was – festivals and everything were promoted by communists in Russia. I didn't – I didn't join in on that thing.

Daughtry: What made you decide on Sweden?

Russell: Sweden was neutral and has always been neutral and always will be neutral.

Daughtry: Wasn't communist or capitalist.

Russell: No, not at all. They usually – it's their style to stay away from things that would identify them with this or that way.

Daughtry: I'm told that when you arrived there, you weren't in the best of health. Is that accurate?

Russell: Um-hmm. I wasn't.

Daughtry: What had happened to you?

Russell: I had – as you know, had tuberculosis. It hadn't – what happened was – this is going back a long way. I'm just taking a little time – what happened was, a botched operation at New York University Hospital, dealing with my stomach. The doctor had said, "I'm going to" – he said, "Usually I wouldn't do this, but I'm going to release you," because what had happened, George Wein had invited my group to partake in one of his round-the-world extravaganzas. I wanted to go. I went in a wheelchair. It was – I had had an operation, and the doctor was probably an alcoholic, because he left some things in my stomach. They left some of their – so I guess you could say I wasn't feeling too well. But very shortly after – during the tour, I decided – actually, I wrote to a nightclub in Sweden, and they gave me a date for me getting a band together – small band. That's what – when I finished with George Wein, and I remember it was the bottom of Italy there, I went off to Stockholm. They welcomed me very heartily.

Daughtry: So you were well received there.

Russell: I was well received. I stayed a long time. A man named Bosse Broberg was the head of the jazz system of the time. He took care of all the jazz music. He just took his hat off. They recorded everything I ever did.

Daughtry: While you were over . . .?

Russell: Yeah. It took two or three years.

Daughtry: Had Bosse been familiar with your work before you arrived?

Russell: Yeah, he must have.

Daughtry: Or he got to know you shortly after that?

Russell: Yeah, he got the money to give me for anything I wanted to do. He's still alive today, and we're still friends. Got a letter from him downstairs.

Daughtry: I notice in your book, which has just come out here in 2004, George Russell's *Lydian Chromatic Concept of Tonal Organization,* and it's also titled volume I, *The Art and Science of Tonal Gravity,* I noticed that on roman numeral page xiii, you – that was the first acknowledgement, down toward the bottom of a whole group of people. You thanked and acknowledged Bosse Broberg for really just looking out for you in Sweden there.

Russell: Yes, he did.

Daughtry: It seems that he was a good friend and a big part of your time there.

Russell: He still is.

Daughtry: Oh, he's still with us. That's good to know.

Russell: He's still working, but he's not working with Swedish Radio now. He has his own orchestra. He may be some kind of adviser to them, but he doesn't have – he was in command of the Swedish Radio Jazz Orchestra and jazz concerts and everything.

Daughtry: Did he play himself? Was he a musician?

Russell: He's a terrific trumpet player.

Daughtry: Oh, okay. So is he playing on some of those many things that you recorded? Or some of them, when you were in Sweden?

Russell: He's on the later ones, yeah, because he didn't – he put his instrument a good time.

Daughtry: Had to get his nerve up and get ready for you, huh?

So you met him shortly after arriving, not too long after arriving there?

Russell: Yes, I did, because they had already had their bands. Some of the people maybe weren't too happy to – some of the musicians maybe weren't too happy over Bosse's excitement for me. They may have felt threatened or something. But Bosse saw it through, and we did a lot of work together, including *Listen to the Silence* for Norwegian Radio. That's what that was for. But I lived in Sweden. I lived in Norway too. I think I – I think it was the right move to make.

Daughtry: You arrived in ’64 in Sweden. You did have one gig lined up. You met Bosse and obviously other people as well. The *Concept* – first of all, when George Russell goes anywhere, the *Concept* is right there with him.

Russell: The *Concept* goes with him.

Daughtry: You accept George, you accept the *Concept.*

Russell: Right.

Daughtry: I’m wondering, though, were there parts of the *Concept* – even though*The Concept* must really be taken as a whole, were there parts of the *Concept* that the musicians seemed to grasp more quickly than others and that they gravitated to? That’s probably kind of a tough question, but give it some thought for a second, because I’m just curious about some of those dynamics that may have taken place at this time.

Russell: I’ll just use one. I know it was on – there was a festival in Norway. I don’t know whether they still have it, Norwegian jazz festival. It comes out of Oslo, but the festival site is up into a more mountainous and very dramatic side of Norway, very beautiful, just clear water and . . .

Daughtry: It sounds like an inspiring venue.

Russell: Mountains that went up to the sky.

Daughtry: That sounds lovely.

Russell: It was funny, but when you get to Norway, one of the very first things they do is, they say, oh, we want you to see something. You go with them. They take you up to a mountain that’s like maybe two miles high. Then they take you out to a rock that juts out of the mountain, all to test your manhood.

Daughtry: Your sense of adventure and fearlessness, huh? That’s interesting.

Russell: I remember one day going to this – the woman I was going with at the time. Her sister had married, and this fellow took me up to one of those mountains. Everything was fine. We drove up. Then we walked out on this ledge. Then he decided to walk down, instead of we’d drive back. Let me – I kept noticing that he wasn’t walking straight. He was walking with his hands on – his hands were touching the mountainside.

Daughtry: Oh, okay. So he was using his hands to steady himself.

Russell: Touching the mountainside. The reason he had to walk down that way, sideways, with his hands touching, was because there was an 1800 foot drop.

Daughtry: Was he on a ledge?

Russell: An 1800 foot drop going down. He grew up in that country, and they're used to that. But I kept looking, and the space between the mountain and you was narrowing.

Daughtry: So it was a ledge kind of situation.

Russell: So it's not only . . .

Daughtry: He was going sideways, you say.

Russell: You had to go sideways to get down the mountain that way. That meant that you were looking down 1800 feet.

Daughtry: Did he go all the way down like this?

Russell: No. The reason he didn't is because it didn't take me long to say, hey, you got it, uh-uh, no.

Daughtry: Because you started out with him when he decided to go. Okay. I didn't get that at first.

Russell: I had to say an end – I wrote a song about it, a tune called *Pillarguri.*

Daughtry: That's what that's about. I knew that was a name of something, but – what does that mean, or what is it the name of?

Russell: Pillarguri was – when Swedes invaded Norway, the Norwegian army had posted this woman to be a lookout. This is where she stood, on top of this . . .

Daughtry: At Pillarguri?

Russell: . . . at Pillarguri. She stood on top of the mountain, so that when – was it the Swedes? It may have not been the Swedes. Maybe it was – no, I don't think it was the Germans that they were warring with. But it seems to me more likely that they would have been Swedes.

Daughtry: The area has a history of a lot of internecine . . .

Russell: She was to give a warning when these people came in that district. She did, and the Norwegians captured the Swedes and made slaves of them.

Daughtry: So this is a place of history.

Russell: *Trip to Pillarguri.* That's – I had to call it, because . . .

Daughtry: *Trip to Pillarguri.*

Russell: . . . I got cold feet. You don't know what it's like to be up there . . .

Daughtry: 1800 feet.

Russell: . . . and this guy's a mountaineer. He's a doctor too. Would have needed a doctor. He had the guts – to him – he must have done this a lot of times, because he was very careful. You had to be very careful with your steps. See a space about – this is the mountain, and you've got a space.

Daughtry: Not very wide.

Russell: Not very wide. It's about two feet, and then nothing.

Daughtry: Drop, sheer drop.

Russell: Sheer drop. So it wasn't exactly my cup of tea.

Daughtry: Now, you call it *Trip to Pillarguri*? Let's take a little tangent here for a second. When you wrote the song and you titled it, what aspect of *Lydian* did you emphasize and to achieve what objective in terms of making that meaningful as a title?

Russell: I probably had to have an emotional agenda. Most of the things I write, I like to first make an agenda of what kind of emotions I want to portray.

Daughtry: What were they in this case? You just sort of told us, but I'm asking you to sort of double back and underscore them for us now.

Russell: Yeah, I would just – because I don't remember the piece too much.

Daughtry: Being on the edge, maybe?

Russell: I would say it would be edgy. I finally found out that – during one, two, or three trips like this, to this part of Norway, that it was like a custom to take the guest on these trips.

Daughtry: Out to the edge, huh?

Russell: So if you ever have to go, and they say, "Oh, come on. I want to show you something."

Daughtry: So it's very low key. You have no idea you're getting ready to tiptoe on the edge of the world, huh?

I always wondered what that tune signified, *Pillarguri.* Interesting, very interesting.

Russell: It means swiftly surrendering back to good sense, and get the hell out there.

Daughtry: I like that. Get me the hell out of here.

Russell: He kept moving on, until the space got about that big. When I saw the space narrowing, that's when I – I said, um, you got it.

Daughtry: That's when your good sense kicked in.

We were talking about Norway. One of other people who is in that dedication, I think right under Bosse – and I may be mispronouncing it – Marit Jerstad?

Russell: Marit was a girl I went with.

Daughtry: You called her the heart and soul of Norway in your dedication. That's very nice.

Russell: Yeah. She was a very strong woman. She introduced me to a man most people may not know, but, Gurdjieff. I don't know if you've heard of Gurdjieff.

Daughtry: Tangerding? I saw a name that reminds me of. Is that Goetz? Or is that someone else? Gurdjieff, did you say?

Russell: Gurdjieff.

Daughtry: Was he a Scandinavian also?

Russell: No.

Daughtry: A German, or a . . . ?

Russell: No, he was from the area we're fighting today. What is it?

Daughtry: Middle East, there? Persia, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan?

Russell: In that neighborhood.

Daughtry: I see. Gurdjieff? Is that how you . . . ?

Russell: Gurdjieff – G-u-r-d-j-i-e-f. There's a lot of books.

Daughtry: So Marit introduced you to him?

Russell: Yeah.

Daughtry: What was . . . ?

Russell: She actually started the Gurdjieff Foundation in Oslo.

Daughtry: So this was another person that you knew.

Russell: One woman who had worked with Gurdjieff lived in London. She – her name is Miss [Brenda] Tripp. She is 95 or 96 these days. She would come from London to Oslo.

Daughtry: Her name is Miss Tripp?

Russell: Marit started the Gurdjieff Foundation in Norway. She also was instrumental in getting the Norwegian television to hear my music and play it.

Daughtry: You did a number of things on Norwegian television and radio, right?

Russell: Yeah. One was a ballet, *Othello.*

Daughtry: You were there in Europe about five years. I know that you had been a guest conductor not only on Norwegian radio, Danish radio, Swedish radio, German, Italian radio, Finnish radio.

Russell: Yeah, that's true.

Daughtry: That is quite an accomplishment. There are not many people – in fact there are very few people who can say that. I don't know if many people really realize that. The radio in those countries is state run. Usually there is someone who is appointed who conducts the orchestra, an artistic person. For them to bring in someone else, first of all is unusual – not unprecedented, but unusual – and then on top of that an American, a young American, originally out of Cincinnati, who just arrived there. He didn't come with any notoriety, per se. You weren't a "big star." But you had this concept that has for the last 50 years compelled all of us, this *Lydian Chromatic Concept.* By the time you left there, in a half a decade, you had been the guest conductor for Finnish, Danish, Norwegian, Swedish, Italian, German radio.

Russell: All of them.

Daughtry: You must get great enjoyment the rare times – and I've known you for a few years. You're not one to look back – but when a person like me kind of stops you for a second and asks you to just tell me a little bit about that – I'm looking at you now, and I can see that in thinking about some of these things for what may be the first time in a while, you're remembering some of them very fondly. That had to be a very exciting time, and I wish you would just talk a little more about it, because it is extremely interesting.

Russell: It was. It was an exciting time and an exciting environment, being in an environment that's really, first of all, safe, and multiply evolved, because they're old, go back a long way.

Daughtry: Old civilization, old society, very developed in terms of the mores and the social ways. That had to be tremendously exciting, George, hundreds and hundreds of people in these wonderful old concert halls standing and cheering you, wanting to talk to you afterwards, receptions, adulation, adoration, articles in the paper about you. That must have made you feel really fantastic. I'm feeling very good just thinking about it.

Russell: You're right, because that's the first time I experienced being a man, in a way, being someone who accounts for something. It fortified my whole being, being in that environment.

Daughtry: And rightly so. *The Lydian Chromatic Concept of Tonal Organization* is not just a jazz theory. I want to say that here. We're going to talk about that increasingly. This is a theory that applies to Western music. I think people recognize – the folks in Europe recognize that. You must have felt for the first time that when people were coming to you and wanting to talk to you about it, that there wasn't any hidden agenda, that people were appreciative of the art, of the science involved, of the work that must have come from doing this.

Russell: As I said, I had gotten a small group of young musicians together between Stockholm and Norway. But before that, I should say, at one of the Norwegian festivals I heard some musicians who never had been out of Norway play, sort of late-night play. I could have been on 125th Street in New York. That's the way they played.

Daughtry: Is that right? Okay. They had the real jazz feeling, the urban.

Russell: Yeah. They were incredible. It was Jan Garbarek . . .

Daughtry: Okay. I was going to ask you about him.

Russell: Jan Garbarek . . .

Daughtry: Terje . . .

Russell: Terje Rypdal.

Daughtry: Rypdal. Is that his name? How do you pronounce his last name?

Russell: Terje Rypdal.

Daughtry: They're both Norwegian, aren't they?

Russell: Guitar player.

Daughtry: Are they both Norwegian?

Russell: Yeah, but then the drummer was beautiful. I can't think of his name right now.

Daughtry: We'll remember his name in a minute.

Russell: Drummer and bass player.

Daughtry: But you heard them playing, and they had the feeling.

Russell: Yeah. I got them all. They all became members of my group. Not – they didn't just stay in Norway. They moved to Stockholm and did things in Stockholm. When I'd go to Italy or something, they'd go. Finally, they were signed over to a company that only specialized in jazz.

Daughtry: ECM Records. Manfred Eichner or something.

Russell: Yeah. Manfred Eicher. That's right. I felt robbed, because he took all the people. He had heard my group. He made an offer that to me, it didn't make any sense. But that group became world travelers for a number of years.

Daughtry: And still are.

Here's one thing that Jan Garbarek had to say about you. He said, "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."

Russell: Yeah, he'd never studied music – that's funny – except the *Concept.*

Daughtry: He's a great musician who many people appreciate.

Russell: He is something.

Daughtry: And many people don't realize his real creative efforts came out of studying with you, once you took him under your wing.

Russell: Well, he had something before he met me. As I said, when I heard him, he was playing like Trane. I thought, how could this little kid here in Norway . . .

Daughtry: Half a world away.

Russell: . . . be – sound like Coltrane. But the *Concept* he embraced.

Daughtry: Yeah, I think obviously he had talent, raw talent, but it really opened him up. He has always, even today, been a very interesting player to hear. He's got a record out now. I'm trying to think of the name of it. But the larger point I want to make is that I continue to find his approach interesting. One of the reasons I find it interesting is because his explorations are open, and the songs he writes are open. That's obviously the influence of *Lydian,* which he is still working and developing to this day. Now I don't know – I can't say that that's all that he does, that's the only thing that he brings to it, but it's made a big difference.

Russell: He's never been – how can I put it? – he's never been quiet about his association with me. He's always . . .

Daughtry: He's very proud of it.

Russell: Yeah. He's always been very positive about that and very lovely to say . . .

Daughtry: Very positive, very complimentary.

Russell: . . . "George is my first teacher."

Daughtry: Yes, he has – you're quite right about that. I've heard some interviews that he's done, and your name has come up in both of the two I've heard.

Russell: He's a sweetheart. When I met them, the two or three kids in the band were going with nice women. They all married. He's married. He has kids. It's funny how people . . .

Daughtry: That's part of your legacy out there, George, Jan and Terje.

Russell: Terje's a little wacky, but he's something. He was very popular in this rock . . .

Daughtry: Milieu?

Russell: This rock way of playing. He was at the top of rock guitar playing. Lives on a farm in Norway. I've lost touch with the boys. I see them now and then. But they do – the Norwegians and Swedes do recognize the contribution to the music in general and the players.

Daughtry: I would say also the Finns, who are Scandinavian as well; the Swedes, as you mentioned; the Germans; the Italians. Ands of course later on, and we'll get to that, or we can even talk about it now. You had an association with Giovanni Bonandrini.

Russell: Yeah, that's right, unfortunately.

Daughtry: Who put out some wonderful records.

Russell: What?

Daughtry: He put out some wonderful, wonderful records. I don't know about the business side of it, but . . .

Russell: I don't know about the business side either.

Daughtry: But many of us were very appreciative of the people, like yourself for example, that *Listen to the Silence* and some of that music that we were seeing coming out, because you couldn't find labels that wanted to present that music and allow the

artist – it seemed that he allowed the artist to present their music in the way that they wanted. The business side of it though is of course very, very tough.

There's some other people who you dedicate to in the beginning of your book. I don't know how to pronounce their last name, a Charlotte – I don't know how to pronounce her last name. It starts with a T. Tangerding or something? Charlotte Tangerding and Goetz Tangerding. Am I pronouncing those any . . . ?

Russell: They're German. I had a student at the Conservatory. I had a German student, Goetz Tangerding. His mother was a wonderful woman, Charlotte Tangerding. She'd say – you walk in and then she's say her name. She'd say, "Tangerding, Tangerding, Tangerding."

Daughtry: Sounds like a character. She and Goetz are dedicated. You specifically dedicate to them also in the acknowledgements. Not dedicate, but you acknowledge them in your acknowledgement page.

Russell: Unfortunately they both are no longer with us. We'd try to visit. We tried two or three times to visit her – that worked out all right – visit her in her 80s.

Daughtry: And who or what is Wekstiftung? Here. I'm going to show you, because I'm probably not pronouncing – I know I'm not pronouncing it correctly. But this is another. "The late Goetz Tangerding and" what is this name here?

Russell: Oh, that's a company she owned.

Daughtry: Okay. How do you pronounce it?

Russell: Sven would be good at this.

Stitt: A German name?

Daughtry: Yeah, with a W.

Russell: This – it's a factory.

Stitt: Werkstiftung.

Daughtry: I wasn't that far off. So, what kind of company was it? Was it recording or production or a record?

Russell: No, this was a serious – I don't know what they made. Machines. It's a heavy duty. It was on that level.

Daughtry: I was curious, because you acknowledged them on that page also.

Russell: I did, because Charlotte had helped me get the band started, because I made a record and I did use Goetz on that record. But in playing the record, the solo he took, it didn't measure up. So I got – took a very talented player – I can't even think of his name now. But you would know him – to sub, and we redubbed with him taking it. But that put a bad feeling between Goetz and I, and not necessarily – Charlotte didn't take it that way. She wasn't a woman to – even if it were her son, she understood. Goetz was her life.

Daughtry: Now they're no longer with us, you said.

Russell: Unfortunately he came down with a frightful disease that took him away. Alice and I visited her for the last time when we were in Germany. She took us down to his grave, sort of with a look on her face that, "I'm next."

Daughtry: We were talking about recordings and about the music of course as we work our way through your time in Europe during the '60s. Late in the '60s I recall two recordings. Actually, I recall them from the early '70s, when I encountered them, but I believe they're from the late '60s. One is called *The Othello Ballet Suite* and the other is called *Electronic Sonata for Souls Loved by Nature.* Those are incredible recordings and very, very important in music, in world music. Can you tell us a little bit about them, what was behind them, the inspiration for them, and any reminiscences that you care to share with us? I think both of them were on the Flying Dutchman label. Is that correct?

Russell: You know, you can't keep track of what label it's on, because one label keeps selling to another label.

Daughtry: They originally appeared, though, on the Flying Dutchman label. I'm pretty sure about that.

Russell: Giovanni – it should have been on Giovanni's label.

Daughtry: It did appear on his label also, in the '80s. But the original recording was on Flying Dutchman in the late '60s.

Russell: Really?

Daughtry: Yeah. But tell us a little bit about the recordings themselves – about the music, I should say.

Russell: *Electronic Sonata* was done with the help of Swedish Radio. Swedish Radio opened their electronic music studio to me to just choose any sound that I wanted. Having done that, it was easy to build an actual non-electronic music around the electronic itself. I think at the time electronic music was beginning to make some kind of noise in jazz.

Daughtry: That's right. About that time, yes.

Russell: I had the people and the opportunity to use Norwegian music studios to put that together. I thought, well, someday I'll be able to use this. About *Othello, Othello* sort of speaks for itself. Again, not Swedish Radio but the other radio . . .

Daughtry: Norwegian?

Russell: Norwegian Radio. Marit thought that I should make a ballet. There happened to be a choreographer from New York. He had some sort of a reputation. I got him and some other players. I think Stan was on that.

Daughtry: On trumpet?

Russell: Um-hmm. Do you remember?

Daughtry: I don't remember the personnel. Maybe I'll try to check that before we finish, though. In fact, I want to point out, I said with certainty earlier that the recordings were on Flying Dutchman, but I want to thank my learned engineer, who just informed me that *Electronic Sonata* ended up on Strata-East label, Stanley Cowell and Charles Tolliver's label.

Russell: Whose label?

Daughtry: Strata-East. Stanley Cowell, the piano player who did a couple of things with you, and Charles Tolliver. They were the co-owners of the label at the time. So that was probably right around 1970 when it came out. It was apparently one of the early things.

Russell: That's interesting.

Daughtry: I do believe – I hope I'm still right – I do believe I'm still right about *Othello.* It's not about being right, but just accurate for posterity. I believe *Othello Ballet* was Flying Dutchman.

Russell: It was, yeah.

Daughtry: Those – I tell you. Those were recordings that we were all buzzing about and speculating on. I personally enjoyed the way that you integrated the electronics with the music. They didn't seem separate and at odds with one another.

Russell: I don't remember using electronic on *Othello.*

Daughtry: I don't think you did either. But I'm speaking of the *Electronic* . . .

Russell: But on that same album is me playing the oldest organ in – the memory isn't working today – not Sweden, but . . .

Daughtry: Norway.

Russell: Norway. I do know that the Norwegian t.v. paid for the presentation of *Othello,* using this fellow from New York as a choreographer. He used some people that – what is the – do you remember the – any of the New York people in dance?

Daughtry: Choreographers at the time?

Russell: Yeah.

Daughtry: I guess the one that always comes to mind immediately is Alvin Ailey and also Arthur Mitchell.

Russell: This one man came from the Alvin Ailey . . .

Daughtry: Dance troup?

Russell: Yeah.

Daughtry: Okay. Arthur Mitchell. Gee. There are a couple of others.

Stitt: In the late '60s?

Daughtry: Yeah, right at the end of the '60s, '68, '69.

Russell: We got the top . . .

Daughtry: Louis Johnson.

Russell: One of those people made *Othello* with us.

Daughtry: We'll look it up. The records, I think, were well received. Many people were talking about the unusual nature of both records, the *Electronic Sonata* for the use of the electronics and what that meant to a lot of people. There was a lot of debate and discussion about that at the time. What was your thinking with regard to the whole idea of integrating electronics into the music, your philosophy perhaps?

Russell: You want to get – I want to take music to a place it's never been. Any time I sit down, I want to take music to a place it hasn't visited before. So . . .

Daughtry: That was another opportunity. Again at the end of the '60s, you were – we find you returning to the United States. As I understand it, Gunther Schuller contacted you.

Russell: Yeah, he did.

Daughtry: There was a newly formed jazz department at the New England Conservatory of Music?

Russell: Yeah, that was 1949, I think.

Daughtry: 1969?

Russell: '49. 1969? No, no. It had to be 1949.

Stitt: That's the summer. You all talked about it yesterday, the summer workshop that you did.

Russell: Wait a minute.

Stitt: Gunther Schuller was head of the classical there, but not the jazz.

Russell: I could be wrong, but . . .

Daughtry: You're probably thinking about a different association with Gunther. But I mean when you came to the New England Conservatory of Music to begin teaching. That was '69, I believe.

Russell: '69, yeah.

Daughtry: Was Gunther the president of the Conservatory at the time?

Russell: Sure was.

Daughtry: So – the department had just been formed? Is that my understanding?

Russell: Um-hmm.

Daughtry: So that must have been exciting. It kind of meant that you were coming in on the ground floor for a new part of the organization. The organization was pretty old, but there was a new part of it that they were bringing in, and you were coming in at the same time? Is that correct?

Russell: I guess you're right. I'm not clear on whether they had a jazz program before I was there, but there was a jazz program after.

Daughtry: One of – I've heard from several different sources, and I've read also as well, that it was newly formed. I've never seen any specific dates, but it was newly formed, and Gunther Schuller wanted you to be a part of it. Of course you and he had an association that went back 20 years before that, at least.

Russell: I met Gunther at John Lewis's 20 years before that. Our association wasn't proven until '69. He did send a telegram. It was my time to return to America.

Daughtry: Were you still married at this point, when you returned to America?

Russell: No. No, I wasn't.

Daughtry: So your return to the scene was as a – you were turning in your expatriate card, coming back as s single musician who had just had a fantastic experience and had been guest conductor of Finnish national radio, Danish national radio, Norwegian national radio, Swedish national radio, Italian and German national radio.

Russell: Did a concert with a very modern composer – the modern composer at the time. I shouldn't start this at this time in the morning.

Daughtry: European?

Russell: Yeah, German. What's his name? Stockhausen.

Daughtry: Karl-Heinz Stockhausen?

Russell: Yeah. We did a – for Danish radio they hired my sextet to be part of two symphony orchestras at once. There must have been 150 musicians on stage doing

Stockhausen's latest work, and in the intermission featuring George Russell's sextet. It was really out there.

Daughtry: I bet.

Russell: That was done at the Tivoli in Denmark.

Daughtry: At the Tivoli in Denmark, okay, for Danish national radio.

Russell: Yeah. What's the big town in Denmark, the biggest?

Daughtry: Copenhagen.

Russell: Copenhagen.

Daughtry: This finds us pretty much at the beginning of the '70s, and to set the stage a little bit . . .

Russell: Incidentally, Stockenhausen and I became pretty good friends.

Daughtry: How did you find him? Tell us a little bit about him, I mean, just in terms of any remembrance that you may have.

Russell: I had – I knew a few girls. Stockhausen loves women. So I introduced him to this one luscious lady. From then on, he took off. Europe was very exciting, my experience in Europe.

Daughtry: I think that anyone listening to this has to stop and reflect. All these different state radio orchestras, symphonies and orchestras that you more than once were guest conductor of, very impressive.

Russell: On the other hand, I did miss the – at that time, the garbage in the street and the shakedowns.

Daughtry: The urban wildfire of America.

Stitt: The grit.

Russell: It's strange, but you kind of miss it, because things have quieted in the other part of the world, where I was, but still interesting, but with the Vietnamese War – the war in Vietnam and the kids – some of the best singers came to Sweden and Norway. Their

concerts were very touching at that time. There was definitely an anti-American feeling over there about the Vietnam War. So I decided to come back.

Daughtry: Obviously, this was the center of the political upheaval in terms of demonstrations, even though you had them in Europe and that feeling, but here was the epicenter of it. It was going on. Kent State in 1970. You know, music on this side at that time was kind of at a standstill in many places. It never stops.

Russell: Well, not really.

Daughtry: The music never stops, but there was a lot – there was a kind of a void feeling among a lot of people.

Russell: There were certain things that rescued that. One was "Brother, brother, brother."

Stitt: Marvin Gaye?

Russell: Yeah.

Daughtry: It's like a – I liken it to a plant. Did you ever see a plant that's – the leaves are dying and falling off, but it's still growing furiously at the top?

Russell: Maybe.

Daughtry: The music, there were many things strong and vibrant and powerful about the music at that point. At the same time, John Coltrane had passed, and then in a very short period of a few years you had the passing of a lot of musicians of all categories, like Jimi Hendrix, for example, just across the musical spectrum. In jazz, the mysterious death of Albert Ayler, Louis Armstrong passing.

Russell: Jimi Hendrix is still around, isn't he?

Daughtry: Oh no. He – Jimi Hendrix died in 1970. Mysterious death of Albert Ayler, found floating in the East River, Louis Armstrong passed a year later. Duke Ellington was dead within a few years. But at the same time, as you just mentioned, Marvin Gaye, Stevie Wonder . . .

Russell: But we still have Motown.

Daughtry: . . . were coming to the fore very strong. You were coming back. This label that we were talking about with respect to *Electronic Sonata* – I was very happy to see Strata-East putting out a lot of recordings, and very interesting recordings. Your

recording, for example. Max Roach had a recording out with his M'Boom Re:Percussion ensemble.

But politically, of course, the country was still in turmoil. The Vietnam War was going on and had not been resolved, even though the American administration had changed from Democratic to Republican, and promises had been made that it would be resolved. You had a commissioned work that first appeared at Kongsberg in Norway, *Listen to the Silence.* It was later released as a recording. I believe, and I hope you'll talk to us a little bit and tell us a little bit about – I believe that in a lot of the writing for that music, you were thinking about what was happening in Vietnam, as well as the American Indian. Is that . . . ?

Russell: I'm thinking of what's happening in Iraq.

Daughtry: Right now, here in 2004.

Russell: Yeah. I'm only certain about one thing, that somebody had to go in after 9/11. Somebody had to, and Bush did, and I credit him for that. I know . . .

Daughtry: Have you written anything?

Russell: I know I'd get an argument from a lot of people about that, but the man got the Army together and went in and went and got the right – dug him out of a hole – the right cause of some of this. The man's a disease.

Daughtry: You're talking about Saddam Hussein?

Russell: Saddam. There was all of this kind of same thing in the changing over from the '60s into the '70s. The feeling about, you can do something, to go back to America, and maybe you can do something about what's going on. Can you wake people up? *What's Going On?* was a beautiful – it is the most beautiful piece I heard at the time. It remains that, because it talks about what is happening. *Listen to the Silence* talks about what was happening then. So I like to have, behind the music, a reason for the music. That's it.

Daughtry: What was happening with the *Lydian Concept* at this point? Were you – it's been a work in progress. It was being developed over time, and now you're teaching it. Were you teaching every day? Three days a week? What kind of schedule do you recall?

Russell: No, I wasn't teaching every day. Once a week.

Daughtry: Once a week, okay. So once a week you're preparing for students to come in and to impart this information about this very interesting and complex system, concept. What was going on with the *Lydian* and you? Where was it, and where were you?

Russell: It was growing more and more clear that it was the right way to go. It's not that complex.

Daughtry: We began to see the word "vertical form" around this time also. Was that a part of what you just said there in terms of . . . ?

Russell: I remember writing a composition, *Vertical Form,* largely because people didn't think in terms of vertical or horizontal.

Daughtry: People didn't think in terms of vertical or horizontal.

Russell: They didn't. There were no terms to describe that kind of playing at that time. So the *Concept* is the first theory to give things names and give certain behaviors names. You get one tenor player, and he plays vertically. You named him yesterday. The tenor player.

Daughtry: He plays vertically. The tenor player. When I think of the tenor player, I think of John Coltrane.

Russell: Well, Coltrane. Let's take Coltrane. Coltrane's manner of playing is vertical. Very rarely does he open up to horizonal and give the – an approaching tonic station a color, let people know where he's going. He doesn't play like that. He colors the chord of the moment. That's the way he plays. He's a unity with the chord of the moment. Essentially he's a unity with it. Lester Young is playing to an approaching chord, over – like over a bridge. That's why he is – he ends up having a behavior that's – musical behavior that's showing the listener where he's going. It travels. Coltrane doesn't travel. It's like him and the chord meet.

Daughtry: At rocket speed. I'm just remembering now, the other player I mentioned, and that may be who you are referring to, is Coleman Hawkins.

Russell: Coleman Hawkins was what I was trying to get you to say. Hawkins – Trane is a direct picture of Coleman Hawkins. He took it to another level, Trane, because he had the opportunity to be older than Coleman Hawkins. So he was even more so than Coleman Hawkins, vertical. He colored the chords, and he was a unity with the genre of the chord, right on through. That's one way to get down the chord steam. *Concept* used those terms. No other book did that. Still don't do it.

Now, what's left now, and where it's gone, is to the stratosphere. We're aimed at that, and we don't mind calling that a science. I sent one of these books to a man in London – in Norway – not Norway, Sweden. We were in Sweden a short time ago. I had sent this book. He kind of gave me a little look when I said – because I sent him the book, and I never heard from him. He was seeing us this day, taking us around the palace, the king's palace, musical palace, with rich carpeting and 18th-century pictures. And he also took us to lunch. They had appointed him to show us around, Alice and I. During lunch, I said, "Did you receive the book I gave you?" He said, "Yes, yes." "When I" – he said, "when I will have the minister of science here, we will show him your book." I got that as, it was like a dig, because my book is – the *Lydian Chromatic Concept, Art and Science of Tonal Gravity.* What he was saying to me, is that, yeah, I'll show it to the minister of science when he comes in. I said, "Aren't you being a little sarcastic?" He said, "Well, yes."

Daughtry: So he was telling you he only saw it one way, huh? He only saw it from that one perspective, huh?

Russell: He was making fun of it, because he wouldn't be used to thinking of music as a science. I was – the *Concept* is all about showing that music is a science, because it's gravity. Anything – a German, Kepler, said, any two things have gravity, any two things. If it's two, it's got gravity.

Daughtry: Just as any two notes are a chord, and the ear accepts the implication of a third, and we go from there.

Russell: So that Lydian chromatic scale – well, we can start with the major scale. Major scale, I know, because I was in the hospital and sat out in the parlor, tubercular hospital, defying all the cigarette smoke that was coming from the patients. They got t.b. and they're laying up and smoking their heads off.

Daughtry: Wow, that's horrendous, actually.

Russell: And I'm sitting there playing the major scale, c-d-e-f-g-a-b-c, and I'm saying, that's not a unity. That's going someplace. It's resolving to something, but it's not unity. It's not on the spot unity. I did that for three months, sitting in the solarium and playing. Finally, they started throwing rotten fruit at me. They didn't – rotten fruit. "Hey, stop that shit," and all of that. So I asked a very nice nun if there was any place in the building that had a nice piano. Fortunately, I lucked out. They had it, of course, in the library, and which one of them would use the library? Not likely, not likely proud to be going to the library. That's – that was wonderful, because I began to feel better and better and better having a place to go upstairs and play this major scale and Lydian scale over and say, the Lydian scale is a unity. It's one whole unity. It's not going anywhere. The major scale is going – it's like – the major scale comes from subjectivity. They heard the major scale,

they heard [Russell sings the scale, c-d-e-f, then g-a-b-c] and started making march music out of it, marching soldiers to war. I finally discovered the scientific, the science of what I was doing, that we're dealing with gravity, and I felt that any – you play two notes in the world, play two intervals – one interval of a fifth, and you get gravity. The lower note – I do this in class. I play an interval of a fifth and ask the class to sing the tonic. They always sing the lowest note. Then I add a fifth and ask them to sing. They sing the lowermost note. And it goes up like that. It never stops at f, this spiraling of fifths, intervals of fifths, doesn't stop there. If you carry it on up, the f, the note that makes the major scale a horizontal scale, is the 11th overtone. That's way up in the overtone series. So scientifically, I have to use science. But somehow . . .

Daughtry: Is the f an octave away from that 11th overtone? You said overtone.

Russell: Yeah.

Daughtry: You didn't say the 11th. Okay. All right.

Russell: The 11th overtone is very far from the tonic.

Daughtry: From the f.

Russell: Yeah.

Daughtry: So it was at that point in the hospital that you started thinking about chord-scale unity and about gravity.

Russell: And about gravity, and about Miles.

Daughtry: In your mind, were you calling it gravity at the time?

Russell: Um-hmm.

Daughtry: Okay, interesting.

Russell: Calling it gravity. For 400 years, the founding fathers of Western music omitted.

Daughtry: Why was that? Why was that that all of a sudden everything became diatonic, and all the focus was on the major scale and the minor scale, just those?

Russell: Well, they need marches to march people into the various wars that were happening. That's one answer.

Daughtry: That's a good answer, though, when you think about how the times can be manipulated. So that, the major scale and the minor, to the exclusion of everything else, became the order of the day. This word "diatonic" seemed to be elevated all of a sudden.

Russell: "Dia" means two, two tonics. The major scale is a two tonic scale, whatever two tonic means.

Daughtry: Then for the next 400 years . . .

Russell: They missed it.

Daughtry: . . . this is forgotten about, the other modes.

Russell: It fell on me, alone, to discover that they – their decision had no science to it at all. It was not an objective summation to come to. It was subjective. Somebody heard [Russell again sings an ascending major scale, dividing it in half] and said, oh, that sounds nice. That's the way it is. But oddly enough, some very good music has come out of the major scale. So you can't say it's – you can't put it down. You can accept it within – the major scale is within the Lydian scale. The Lydian scale keeps its stature as the foundation of a science. The major scale has no science and it fell on me, after 400 years of this and that person trying, but always coming up with some dildo answer. They've never been able to answer it scientifically. I've got a science.

Daughtry: Absolutely. You had something on a computer you wanted to show us.

Russell: Alice is going to play the difference between the scales, so you could hear it.

Daughtry: Why don't we listen to that now. This seems like it would be a good time to.

Russell: She said that she can do it with her computer. But I don't know if you can hear it.

Daughtry: I think Katea can start it, because she set it up for her. So I'm going to give her my mic. [computer sounds]

That brief excerpt that you just heard was on the computer here at Mr. Russell's house. However, you may go to lydianchromaticconcept.com, or georgerussell.com, either of those sites and hear this for yourself, as well as read the very interesting information about George Russell and his *Lydian Chromatic Concept of Tonal Organization.* Visit those sites.

George, I'd like to return to something that I want to apologize to you for overlooking. I sort of pushed past it. But in our conversations yesterday and the day before, you've spoken with much pride and love about your son Jock, who was born, I believe, in 1965 in Sweden. Tell us a little bit about Jock and his mother, if you will. We're dying to know.

Russell: Jock is a world traveler. That's one thing about him. He's very clever and very astute and very hip. He knows the world back and forth. He's traveled all over. So from swimming with the sharks in the Eastern Hemisphere to being married to a lovely lady in Stockholm. He's a traveler.

Daughtry: He lives in Stockholm?

Russell: Yeah.

Daughtry: So that's his base from where he travels.

Russell: Yeah. Clever. I think he has his own company, a filmmaking company. He's going to be a rich man.

Daughtry: Jock sounds like an interesting young man as well.

Russell: He is that.

Daughtry: A traveler. Very good. We were talking about the '70s, and we were talking about the *Concept* and how it evolved during the '70s. You were saying that it was something that continues to grow. By the end of that decade, you had ten years in, or a decade also, as a teacher, professor, at the New England Conservatory of Music, where you teach the *Lydian Chromatic Concept of Tonal Organization.* Some the recordings from the 1970s are quite noteworthy. We've already spoken about *Listen to the Silence,* but there was also *Living Time* in 1971 with Mr. Bill Evans, *Vertical Form VI,* later in the decade, a very important recording and one of my favorites, by the way. You had some live appearances as well. One that was particularly noteworthy was one that was recorded for posterity at the Village Vanguard in the '70s and produced as an album that contained some of the music from that set, as well as some music that had been recorded a few years before on Swedish radio with Sabu Martinez, in which you did *Cubana Be, Cubana Bop,* your seminal 1947 composition, and I might add again, the first modal composition in jazz. It was, ironically and coincidentally, the last recording for Mr. Martinez, who died shortly thereafter. He was performing the pivotal role that Chano Pozo had originally performed. *Cubana Be, Cubana Bop* is a two-movement suite. Chano's role, and in this case Sabu's role, had been to link the two suites with the Afro-Cuban rhythms that he played. Those were some tremendously interesting recordings. Among the people

on the recordings, Mr. Stanley Cowell, who we mentioned earlier, his record label put out your *Electronic Sonata for Souls Loved by Nature.* He appears on one or two of the tunes on there as well. I'm again speaking about *Live at the Vanguard.* But *Vertical Form VI* was a tremendously interesting recording also, and people still talk about *Living Time,* which you still perform, just right on up into the present years, which was in 1971 with the great Bill Evans, piano player, wonderful recording.

Russell: Thank you. What can I tell you?

Daughtry: Anything you care to, sir. I think – was Tony Williams on that recording? The drummer Tony Williams? Was he on the recording? I seem to recall he was on that recording. Maybe I'm wrong. Do you remember?

Russell: I don't know that I've ever heard of anybody.

Daughtry: I have to go back and look at that. For some – I don't know why I thought Tony Williams was on that. But that was – you're still performing *Living Time,* aren't you?

Russell: When we perform now, no, *Living Time* isn't included.

Daughtry: In your latest?

Russell: But the initial theme of *Living Time* we play wherever we go, because that's how we open it. We open the show with that. But we – the composition, the album, is much larger. So I don't know if you're talking about the . . .

Daughtry: I just meant thematically. I know you're not a man to look back, but I'm glad you clarified that for those who will hear this later.

Russell: We do use the first part of *Living Time* as an opener. We've rarely used the entire album.

Daughtry: Anything you want to mention about the '70s before I move on into the '80s?

Russell: I think you should move on.

Daughtry: There is one thing that I do want to bring up. You had said earlier, when I brought up Giovanni Bonandrini's name, who was the executive producer and owner of Soul Note and Black Saint, that the business side wasn't always as smooth. This – I heard this from musicians often, that there'll be a record that artistically is great, that critically is acclaimed, but they'll tell me that, "I wasn't happy with the business arrangements."

When I looked at your face when I was talking about the critical acclaim of the record, I got the sense that maybe other things could have been better. Care to comment on that a bit?

Russell: I have nothing to say about American recording companies, nothing good to say. So I'll just leave it at that.

Daughtry: What about some of the European labels? For example, you didn't sound too happy about ECM raiding your group for a couple of the players.

Russell: I didn't have to, because I don't have anything to do with ECM.

Daughtry: I got the sense that they thought they were getting a fantastic deal, but you didn't think it was such a great deal yourself.

Russell: No, I didn't. I'm all – I'm absolutely unable to give you any kind of information on my dealings with American labels.

Daughtry: Now Soul Note and Black Saint's case, they're not American labels, but many – a great many of the recordings are done in America. The recordings are done here, mixed here.

Russell: For one thing, Giovanni actually rescued American music, because no other companies were going for jazz. So he came in, and you have to give him credit for saving the music, because people, jazz was the last thing they thought of. But still . . .

Daughtry: One gets the sense – and then I'll move on – one gets the sense that while the economics may not always be so good, that the Europeans seem to care about the music, and I'm talking about the European companies now. But I never get that sense about the American companies. It always seems like it's business and nothing else. They seem openly, in many, many instances, because I've been angry about it, because of how I was perceiving the way that they were acting and reacting, that there's a contempt for the musician. But I always felt that Black Saint seemed to care about the music. Soul Note seemed to care about the music. When I talked to the musicians . . .

Russell: Giovanni cares about the music, period.

Daughtry: All right. For one who's interesting in delving further into those areas, one should understand that there's various segments of the industry. There's the creative side of it. There's the side of it that weds that with the public, gets it out to the public. And then there's the distribution side, as well. They're all different aspects of a very complicated coin.

Why don't we move on?

Russell: Yeah, but I was just going to say, these are not times when jazz is sought. Jazz is the last thing on the list in terms of getting to the public. People want to dance, and I can't blame them for that. To a certain extent, I write music that's danceable. You want to boogie, boogie.

Daughtry: Very much so.

Russell: I'm not anti-boogie. But there's a way to do that and still keep the quality high. What I care about in a recording, my recording, is to try to maintain a high quality and leave it with the listener to a kind of thing like he or she has traveled somewhere that they haven't been before.

Daughtry: That reminds me of something that Eric Nisenson, when he was talking about the *Lydian Concept.* He had mentioned your conversation with Miles. He went on to say that – and I'm quoting in the middle of it, but it doesn't change the context at all. The early part was, he discussed the conversation you had with Miles, in which Miles says that he wanted to learn all the changes, and you had said that you knew he knew the changes, so you went on to think that what he was really talking about was learning it, every aspect of the chords and going beyond that musically, as far as how he presented his music. Nisenson then says that, "Here was a means for breaking free from tonal clichés, while maintaining some amount of restraint." One definitely doesn't hear any clichés, and you're right, there's much to dance about, dance to, in your music.

Russell: That's nice to hear.

Daughtry: The '80s seemed to be a pretty good time for music and for you, musically. You had a number of recordings that came out in the '80s. Did you do many live performances during the decade of the '80s as well?

Russell: If I did, they were all in Europe. I must have.

Daughtry: There was one that I recall here in the Boston area, at Emmanuel Church was it? The *So What* – that's where the *So What* recording was made.

Russell: That was a band that was put together with a number of people from New England Conservatory, but also others out in the street, the streets of Boston. It was called *African Game.* I like to think that that's one of my best, because of its visits to different places and different feelings. It turned out very well. Bruce Lundvall has kept it a secret for many, many years. That secret's going to explode soon.

Daughtry: That's Bruce Lundvall of Blue Note Records?

Russell: Yeah.

Daughtry: It was a – I remember that it was a commission for about 25 musicians? There were two Grammy nominations that came forward, once the record actually came out itself. I think one was for best big band performance, and one was for best instrumental arrangement. It was a very fine record. The vertical form was prevalent, strong, throughout, the rhythmic aspect of it, as well as all of the orchestrations, a fantastic record.

Russell: I don't believe much in giveaways in terms of – that happen when people perform and it's an audience of all kinds of people that are hired as raiders. I think *African Game* deserved a Grammy, not just two recognitions. It deserved a Grammy, because what got the Grammy was not anywhere near what *African Game* is. I'm glad I'm giving you the high down and the lowdown. Okay?

Daughtry: I think you're absolutely right. It's interesting, because the '80s kind of started off with a focus on two people in the music, and the music's much bigger than that. But it was understandable that people were focusing on and excited about the return of Miles Davis, which at the time was a possible return. About a year later, in '81, he did actually get back into the music game, the business of making music, the art of making music. But the other person who many people feel unfairly received a lot of attention was the young unknown trumpet player out of New Orleans, Wynton Marsalis. The politics that were and are associated with that are still going on. But you're absolutely right. Many people, and I would be among many people when I say this, thought that *The African Game* should have won a Grammy, not only for the two categories it was nominated, but for one or two other categories as well. Unfortunately the music business and the business of music politics is an ugly game. There's no question about it.

You had a lot of wonderful recordings, though, in the 1980s, as I mentioned earlier. The recording that was subsequently titled *The New York Big Band: Live at the Village Vanguard* came out at the beginning of 1980. There was *Live in an American Time Spiral,* which was to me a fantastic recording. I always liked that, the tune *Time Spiral.* There's *Ezz-thetics* for Ezzard Charles, who was someone that you knew, a great heavyweight boxer. They don't talk too much about Ezzard Charles and Jersey Joe Walcott anymore, but they were – they had a lot to do with boxing remaining a vital sport at the time when they were both practicing their art, as well as science, of boxing. We haven't heard that tune from you in a long time, as I think about it, *Ezz-thetics,* or any thematic elements that I recognize as *Ezz-thetics.* Have I missed something somewhere along the line?

Russell: I'm not one to go back.

Daughtry: That's true.

Russell: I don't go backwards. I don't travel that way. I always want to grow, bigger, stronger, more interesting, and explore.

Daughtry: Some other recordings from the period: *Electronic Sonata* again, re-released this time by a person we've spoken of recently, Bonandrini on his Soul Note label; and a record made called *Live in Tokyo.*

Russell: That was done in Tokyo, live concert.

Daughtry: Also a concert called *The London Concert,* at the end of the decade, 1989.

Russell: Also not in America.

Daughtry: London, England.

Russell: The Barbican in London.

Daughtry: Both of those came in the early years in which your Living Time Orchestra, which goes back to I think the '70s – correct me if I'm wrong – had kind of evolved or developed into what was now being called the International Living Time Orchestra. You had been invited by the Contemporary Music Network of the British Council, I believe, to do a tour with some British and American musicians?

Russell: Yes, that's true.

Daughtry: Tell us about that. That's quite an honor.

Russell: Good players, the Brits. No problems in terms of psychological moods or anything. They're totally cooperative. Played their heads off. Still do. And a nice group of people. I have been out at times when the psychological makeup of one or two people was very unpleasant. Bandleaders know about that. I try to avoid that in my travels. And that's what I do. I travel. Not in America, but in every other place.

Daughtry: Hi. I'm Bob Daughtry. Today is Wednesday, May 5th, 2004, Cinco de Mayo. I'm here with George and Alice Russell for the Smithsonian Oral History Project. Katea Stitt is engineering. This is tape 4.

George, you're looking like you're hanging better that I am.

George Russell: That's a high compliment, for both of us.

Daughtry: Alice, how are you?

Alice Russell: Very well, Bob, thank you.

Daughtry: Thanks for joining us. We really do appreciate it.

Alice Russell: My pleasure.

Daughtry: How did you all meet?

Alice Russell: I was director of a community music school in St. Louis in the inner city in the mid-'70s. We had a longstanding relationship with the New England Conservatory for them to use our space to audition possible students for the Conservatory. One year the director of admissions, whose name was Bill Mahon, brought George with him to recruit for the jazz department. I found out later that George hated having to do this, wanted nothing to do with recruiting anything for the New England Conservatory, but we met and had dinner that evening and then began a kind of commuting relationship for the next year, until I moved to Boston.

Daughtry: That was what year?

Alice Russell: That would have – we met in '76. I moved to Boston in '77.

Daughtry: And you all are married now.

Alice Russell: Yes, for 27 years.

Daughtry: 27 years. Congratulations.

Alice Russell: Thank you.

Daughtry: In today's world that's fantastic. That really is.

We've been – we've covered a lot of territory so far, George. We're about to move into the '90s. I know that the '90s for all of us have been tremendously traumatic at times and very turbulent. The decade opened with the Gulf War, and it's just been crazy ever since. The economy is up and then it's down, and all of the stuff with the presidents. So politically, the times have been turbulent. Economically, they've been a roller coaster.

Socially, they've been the pastiche and the mish-mash of crazy things that they've always been, or it seems like in my lifetime. Musically, it's been both feast and famine. There have been some interesting and wonderful points, like a concert that you did for the New England Conservatory of Music in 1992, I believe it was, called *Timeline,* which was for the 125th anniversary of the Conservatory. Do you recall that?

George Russell: Of course. Yeah. Absolutely.

Daughtry: Tell us a little about that, how it was in your view.

George Russell: It's a multi-layered composition that I had the nerve to make it a three-hour-long composition involving music of all the times that the Conservatory was growing and the country was growing and getting in the essence of all and everything and emerging with a doable piece of music. It's three hours long.

Daughtry: I understand it was for symphony orchestra, for jazz orchestra, klezmer, a soloist.

George Russell: It was for all kinds of things, all of that.

Daughtry: Wow, that sounds really large, when you think of those different venues and see them in your mind.

Alice Russell: It was the first time that all of the departments in the Conservatory had ever done anything together as a project.

Daughtry: Is that right?

George Russell: And probably the last time.

Alice Russell: And probably the last time. It was extraordinary. There were people who had never spoken to each other before, who had been at the Conservatory for decades, who were forced to have to work together. So it actually turned out to be an amazingly sort of harmonious experience for everybody involved. At one time we had the symphony, the chorus, the jazz orchestra, the klezmer, some assorted other instruments, Jimmy Giuffee, Bob Moses, and others on stage at one time. It was an extraordinary event. Some of the critics panned it, and some of them just loved it, because they got what we were doing, the past 125 years of musical history.

Daughtry: It sounds like it was a huge – but good time, a very good time. A couple years later, just using the years as a signpost for the '90s, you did a re-orchestration of *Living*

Time that was commissioned by the Cité de la Musique and premiered by your orchestra with strings from the Paris Conservatoire Supérieur?

George Russell: Um-hmm. It was a composition, *Living Time,* the composition, and had – I was lucky to have a French player who had a style – had Bill Evans's style and could step in for Bill. He did a marvelous job. It's an excellent piece, probably not important in America, but the French went for it.

Daughtry: America's loss, really. America has overlooked so many things. I won't comment beyond that, but . . .

George Russell: No, go ahead.

Daughtry: It's the age-old – I don't want to call it a conundrum, but it's the age-old situation that's always existed, and that is that our artists are usually more fully appreciated by others, and in particular the Europeans. They know good music when they hear it. They know quality people when they see them. Both of those, I think, apply to you, Mr. Russell.

George Russell: Grazie, grazie mille.

Daughtry: Around mid-decade we have you doing *It's About Time.* The concept seemed to really be in terms of vertical form and Lydian and really just at a peak. Those are my words and my feelings. I'm very – that's one of my favorites, *It's About Time.*

George Russell: That's an honor, because you have a great sensibility and love for that kind of music.

Daughtry: It strikes me that that's an incredible title, considering everything that was going on in the world at that time. Of course, I'm speaking from a somewhat American-centric point of view, because I live here, but I'm thinking about all that was going on in America at the time. The Congress had changed, and there was this whole business of the Contract with America, and the Republicans were still very much on the attack with respect to Bill Clinton. The economy was soaring. Socially, there were all kind of things going on in this country, because the O. J. Simpson trial was taking place. So there was a tremendous divide among people. Race had become an issue because of that, again. It was just a good year after Michael Jackson's first big brush with the law. There were many, many other things going on across the country. So it was a turbulent period, and in the world as well. There were many things going on. The business with Iraq was very much happening, with the no-fly zone and the constant bombings. Africa was in great turmoil. We had just finished one of the worst holocaust, 800,000 people killed in Rwanda, which the world should still be – we should still be angry at ourselves about the

way we turned our backs on them. So there were all these things going on, and there are others I could mention, and you write this piece, *It's About Time.* So so much can be read.

George Russell: [said ironically:] And that helped a lot, right?

Daughtry: Yes.

George Russell: That helped straighten things out.

Daughtry: One of the functions of an artist is to make people think, and to allow us to move to our own conclusions, our own thoughts about things. So when people see a great work like this being performed, they'll come away with their own interpretation. That's going to happen invariably. We've been talking about that in various contexts this evening. But I'm just struck by the title, and I'm hoping you'll share with us some of your thoughts about why you titled it *It's About Time.*

George Russell: I'd reached a point in life when that title suited it. It was about time for various things to happen in the world and in regards to myself. That's it. It's about time. It fits a lot of situations.

Daughtry: It does. It truly does. Was that a commissioned piece?

George Russell: Yeah. It was again Bosse Broberg commissioned the Swedish orchestra to play that piece. It was premiered in Stockholm.

Alice Russell: It was a joint commission. The Arts Council of Great Britain was the other commissioner. So we premiered it in Stockholm and then took it to London to do it with the Living Time Orchestra. It was premiered, though, by the Swedish jazz orchestra. So it had two different performances for the premiere.

Daughtry: Alice, it strikes me, there have been many commissions for George's work over the years. I can't think of another artist – and I'm not talking about jazz artists now. I'm talking about in terms of music – who has gotten as many important commissions over the last 10 to 20 years as you have. And the interesting thing about it is, people don't really know about the commissions, one, because there's all this hype for the commercial side of the music. But am I correct that there really isn't anyone else who's gotten as many commissions as George has? Can you think of anyone, Alice?

Alice Russell: I'm really not conversant with that world other than how it pertains to George. I'm sure there have been. I would assume Bobby Brookmeyer gets a lot of commissions.

Daughtry: He does get some, yeah.

Alice Russell: He's hooked up into that world. I think George isn't really hooked up into that world in terms of going out and looking for things. But they have come to him, primarily, I think, because of him having lived in Europe and having developed a reputation there. But he is sought out. He hasn't been doing any commissions, so that he could get the books done. So he stopped doing any real writing a few years ago. But I'm sure there'll be other commissions in the future.

George Russell: That's true, isn't it? The commissions haven't really come from America.

Alice Russell: Several have. But most of them are European.

Daughtry: It think what's interesting, you're not plugged in, you're not actively seeking them, because you've been busy with very important things, your book, which has come out, and we've mentioned a few times, and we're going to talk about almost exclusively here in a moment, but yet important commissions have come your way, from like the [?McKem] Fund for the Library of Congress, the one I mentioned earlier, the Cité de la Musique. I think it's noteworthy when one considers that in the case of someone like Brookmeyer, for example, with all due respect to him, he's plugged into that world.

In 1997, just moving up a few years chronologically, you were elected as a foreign member to the Royal Swedish Academy of Music, a foreign member. I don't know if people realize how significant that truly is. They're not bringing in foreign members to their Academy of Music every day.

Alice Russell: Duke Ellington is a foreign member. I think it's Duke and Keith Jarrett, which is an odd choice in my opinion, but I think there are only three jazz – so-called jazz musicians, although I don't consider Duke and George actually jazz musicians. They are musicians. But I think those are the only three in the so-called jazz milieu.

George Russell: Stockhausen is a foreign member.

Alice Russell: Stockhausen and Boulez. Yeah, but I'm talking about jazz specifically.

George Russell: Who's the others?

Alice Russell: Boulez, Pierre Boulez.

Daughtry: Pierre Boulez, Karl-Heinz Stockhausen.

Alice Russell: Stockhausen. It's quite an impressive roster.

Daughtry: Well, it's quite an honor. Let me congratulate you belatedly. I think it's very important. Again, like the commissions, people don't know about these things. At that point, you were working on a book? Had you gotten back to working on a book?

George Russell: I must have been working on a book. That's all I've been working on for 30 years. I mean, it's not all I've been working on. I've been doing the commissions and stuff, but it's the main thing.

Daughtry: If anyone has picked up on this oral history right at this point, let me say that the book we're talking about is *The Lydian Chromatic Concept of Tonal Organization,* volume I: *The Art and Science of Tonal Gravity.* I want to read to you something that I found very interesting that Toru Takemitsu – I hope I'm pronouncing his name corrrectly – said. He said, "*The Lydian Chromatic Concept* is one of the two most splendid books about music." I'm going to jump down here. "Though I'm considered a contemporary music composer, if I dared categorize myself as an artist, I've been strongly influenced by the Lydian concept, which is not simply a music method. We might call it a philosophy of music, or we might call it poetry." I thought that was a beautiful and brilliant thing to say.

George Russell: Blessings to – my man. What's his name?

Daughtry: Takemitsu. Toru Takemitsu.

George Russell: Yeah, Takemitsu. He has vision. He did practically singlehanded all of the movie music that came out of Japan, all of it. That's no small job. So everything in the Japanese movies, it was Toru who not only did the music, but he did the sound. If a certain sound was needed, like an early morning sound and the people waking up, he directed that. He died much too young.

Alice Russell: He actually translated George's first book, the original *Lydian Chromatic Concept,* into Japanese for his own purposes. We found that out when we met him in Japan.

Daughtry: Is that right.

Alice Russell: Yeah. So he had done that probably in the '60s, and we met him 30 years later. He had actually requested the meeting with George when we went to Japan the first time. He became a good friend.

Daughtry: Someone who seems to agree with that, a gentleman that's been associated with you for close to 50 years – he's been a student of yours. He's played in groups that you've led – David Baker said, "The foremost theoretical contribution of our time, destined to become the most influential philosophy of the future." So he – philosophy, that word comes up again. I know we touched upon this yesterday. One of the things that we talked about was unity, in terms of a philosophical concept, and the unity that you want people to feel when they – and experience when they hear your music.

George Russell: That's right. It is a philosophy. What makes it a philosophy is its own science. It speaks to you. It actually is alive. It speaks to you. It's self-made. That means that it – by itself, it has evolved to this, becoming the great singular scale that controls and sees all kinds of music, that embraces all kinds of music. You had – people – you had the major-scale philosophy. That didn't do anything but create ii-V-I. It had its avoid notes. Very peculiar kind of a system. It was no system, actually. As I said, the *Concept* is self-made. It's alive. It's growing. Whereas the ordinary music had this, as I said, ii-V-I, I being the major scale. What about when you – what do you do with the note that is not the fifth, but the augmented fifth, but still it's a major with an augmented fifth? Well, you call it the augmented major scale. What about when there's a – it's a major chord, but it's diminished major, with the flat third in it? You call it a Lydian diminished major. Lydian flat-seventh major, one of the great sounds of northern Ireland, music like that. That's why the Irish can play the blues. Blues is not new to the Irish. So there are seven major chords that are major in every way. And it wouldn't be possible without the Lydian augmented – I mean the Lydian chromatic concept.

Daughtry: The Lydian augmented, the Lydian diminished, the Lydian flat seventh.

George Russell: Yeah, the Lydian chromatic.

Daughtry: The Lydian chromatic, of course, auxiliary augment.

George Russell: It goes up to seven major chords.

Daughtry: You have in your book – a wonderful chart in the back of this book that lays all of that out, so that . . .

George Russell: I sure do.

Daughtry: . . . an aspiring musician who wants to study this concept when he or she gets the book, this chart – it's called chart A – is absolutely perfect for a way to approach and to continue to study and keep in mind the different laws that you talk about. Hold that for a second. I want to jump to something and then come back. May I do that? Or did you want to make a point? Because I didn't want to cut you off.

George Russell: I was going to make a point, because I can't – I don't have glasses.

Daughtry: Please do. Okay. Did you need this?

George Russell: All of these have major chords.

Alice Russell: Right, Lydian major thirteenth.

George Russell: Yeah. Start here.

Alice Russell: I don't think we want to read them. We don't need to read all of them, because that wouldn't make much sense to someone just listening to this.

Daughtry: But anyone getting the book, the thing that will really resonate for them is that they can look at each of the Lydian scales and then see all the chord-scale unity that relates.

Alice Russell: That's right.

Daughtry: That's critically important, because a musician has to often change his or her way of thinking in order to really approach this properly. They've got to kind of, as the French say, coup de torchon, wipe the slate clean and approach this in a virginal sense.

Here's something I found particularly fascinating, George. I was reading through your book last night. I ran across the street last night, and I xeroxed this, so I'd actually have it in my hand and wouldn't have to thumb through the book. On page 52 you talk about the principle of tonal gravity. I hope you'll just touch upon this again. People can actually do their own lessons when they get the book, which I recommend that everybody do. But you start off, you say, "The one phenomenon that can be categorized as a higher law of *The Lydian Chromatic Concept of Tonal Organization* is tonal gravity." I want to jump down a little bit, because you alluded to this earlier. "As an objective-oriented principle, tonal gravity, in this manner, frees music from the subjective notions of right and wrong tones – clearing a path for the reunification of music with physics."

George Russell: It is the science.

Daughtry: That whole business of, when you're dealing with the major and the minor scale, you can easily get into a wrong note, wrong tone, whereas – and it's not going to happen overnight, but if one studies and applies oneself to the *Concept,* I think they'll come to understand the real gravity, if you will, of that phrase.

You guys – and this is addressed to both of you, because Alice, you've been very involved in some of the organization and the many things that are attendant to making a heavy project like a book work, and in addition to any book being a heavy project, when you have a heavy book, in terms of subject matter, all of that is just exponentially increased. What are some of the things that you'd like to say about this book, just in general terms? I've been talking about it, but I think people would be interested in, and Alice, you've been very close to it. You're not a musician, are you?

Alice Russell: I play, but I'm not a professional musician. No.

Daughtry: But certainly – let me just interject my own little editorial comment here. You seem like a musician in terms of your sensitivity and your knowledge about the music on a number of different levels. It is very impressive. That's why I thought I better ask. I've never seen you pick up an instrument. But I happen to personally believe one doesn't necessarily have to know how to play to be a musician.

Alice Russell: I agree.

Daughtry: A subject for another discussion, but . . .

Alice Russell: I think you're – I agree with that.

Daughtry: But I'm curious. I'd like for you to address this first, and then you, George, but as a person who's been close to the project for a long time now. Just freestyle a little bit, if you would, about this book and what you think it might mean to people.

Alice Russell: For me, it's the culmination of a life's work that I've been privileged to be a part of in some small way for almost three decades. It represents an enormous amount of sacrifice on George's part. I've never seen a human being so determined to do something and to do it thoroughly and right. It was nights and days of endless work with him sitting in that little studio working non-stop. When you say he's working on a book, people think, oh, maybe an hour or two a night in his spare time. This was literally 18-, 19-hour days, when he wasn't teaching, when we weren't touring, any other time – and when he wasn't getting some exercise that he needs to stay afloat – he was working on the book. So it has been an enormous burden and task for both of us. At some point, I never thought I would see the book be a reality. I felt it was going to be impossible to finally get it into shape to publish it. But things happened, and they moved very quickly when we did finally get it into shape, and now we have what I think is a beautiful book that is going to be the music theory for the 21st-century.

Daughtry: It is a good looking book, too. I have to say . . .

Alice Russell: Thank you. It costs us enough.

Daughtry: . . . I really like the way it looks.

George Russell: It's a good looking woman who got it together.

Daughtry: We agree

Alice Russell: We also had a beautiful editor, a guy, Scott Kuzowski, who edited the book – who's also a musician – who did the layout and did everything, I think, remarkably well.

George Russell: The cover means that it was like climbing this mountain. This is a mountain out in . . .

Alice Russell: Utah, a Minor White photograph. It's Utah, I believe.

George Russell: In Utah? Yeah. It – who's the . . .

Alice Russell: Miner White, a man that you knew, the photographer.

George Russell: Miner White, the great, great Miner White, took this picture. Scott and his wife did the cover. It's meant to be a – like climbing this peak to working on *The Concept.* I wouldn't be able to do it unless *The Concept* was feeding me. I mean, it feed me and directed me. It's alive. That means that gravity's alive. That's what it turns out to be. A fellow that works with me, we both came to the conclusion, that we're into – we're in the skies now, because there are things connected here to the science of – what do you call it?

Alice Russell: Tonal gravity?

George Russell: No, no.

Daughtry: Physics?

George Russell: Physics, yeah. And I didn't graduate from high school.

Daughtry: But you've certainly graduated from the university of cosmicology.

Up to this point we've been talking about the '90s, and we've fast-forwarded a bit to 2001 and, right now, 2004, which brings us current with the book. I want to mention

something that I think it important that it not be overlooked, in the late '90s, 1999, I had the . . .

George Russell: Can I interrupt?

Daughtry: Please do.

George Russell: Why don't we go and have dinner?

Daughtry: There won't be editing, right? That'll make anyone listening hungry. Soon, I hope.

Stitt: It will make them see that you have a – you've heavy, but you have a sense of humor.

George Russell: Think he's always driven by food.

Daughtry: He's driven by practical considerations.

George Russell: Where do the food be?

Daughtry: Where da food?

Alice Russell: Where my food at?

George Russell: Where the money?

Alice Russell: Anyhow, Bob was saying.

Daughtry: I was saying that I had the pleasure of meeting you, after talking to you on the phone for several years, at Tribeca, Manhattan Borough College, down in lower Manhattan, where you – where we did a live interview, first of all, in front of a couple hundred people, which was wonderful and very enlightening and stimulating for me. In addition to that, it was a historic concert that your International Living Time Orchestra performed later that evening. It was the first time that you had appeared in New York in 20 years. There was a tremendous level of excitement. I know, because I was there. I talked to people. There were – there may have been hundreds. I know for a fact that there were dozens, because I saw about 20 to 30 that I personally knew.

George Russell: Was that the Living Time Orchestra?

Daughtry: Yes.

George Russell: From London and all?

Daughtry: Yes, and there were dozens of musicians who not only came to the interview, because they were anxious to hear you talk about your *Concept,* which you did, and you demonstrated on a piano. It was absolutely superb. I loved it. And then the concert, which was fantastic, two nights later. Again, courtesy, or as part of the [?McKem] Fund commission for the Library of Congress, you performed at the Library of Congress auditorium, one of their music halls – Coolidge, I believe it is – in a sold-out, packed concert that was tremendously well received. Again you had your International Living Time Orchestra. Fantastic.

George Russell: Yeah. This was the music of the people.

Daughtry: We danced. We were moving out there in the audience. The great thing about that hall, there's not a bad sightline anywhere. I have said any number of times over the course of these four tapes, the International Living Time Orchestra – your musicians are from all over, aren't they?

George Russell: They're mostly from London.

Alice Russell: And the States. It's half and half. It's American, half British, with the occasional melancholy Dane, who's Palle Mikkelborg on trumpet.

Daughtry: Tiger Okoshi, a Japanese gentleman

Alice Russell: Yep, but from Boston, Tiger.

Daughtry: Japanese-American.

Alice Russell: Right. Andy Shepherd, the wonderful saxophonist from London

Daughtry: In the 21st-century, we've seen a completion of the book, again, *The Lydian Chromatic Concept of Tonal Organization,* volume I: *The Art and Science of Tonal Gravity.* That says to me that there's a volume II in our future.

George Russell: There is.

Daughtry: Tell us. Talk to us.

George Russell: Sometimes I feel like a – I was going to say, almost said, sometimes I feel like a motherless child, because I used that song in the school program that was three . . .

Alice Russell: Time Line?

George Russell: Time Line. I used . . .

Daughtry: Oh, okay. For the Conservatory

George Russell: I used – sometimes I used *Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child.* It was very touching. But I lost what I should have been . . .

Daughtry: If I talk, I'm sure you'll think of it, and then I want you to interrupt me.

George Russell: Put me back on track.

Alice Russell: Volume II.

Daughtry: I see that it says volume I: *The Art and Science.* Is there a volume II in our future?

George Russell: Oh yes. There is a volume II. It's the heart and soul – it puts all of this together and makes it possible to deal with it much easier and see the logic of it. As I said, there are hints that it's getting into physics and the stars.

Daughtry: It is beautiful. You say in your epilogue in the book, which begins on page 235, "The major scale and the Lydian scale represent opposing forces in nature."

[recording interrupted]

George, one thing I'd like to do, we've been talking about this book for several hours now, *The Lydian Chromatic Concept of Tonal Organization,* volume I: *The Art and Science of Tonal Gravity.* I would like to read a couple of things from the epilogue for anyone listening to this tape in the future, because I think it not only continues to underscore the *Concept* as we've talked about it – and we've talked about it politically, economically, socially. We've talked about it musically and in very – at times spoken of it in very technical musical terms – but I must stress that for anyone who is interested, they should get the book. I want to mention your website one more time. It's the lydianchromaticconcept.com and georgerussell.com. People can go to that as well and learn about you, about your music, find out how to get the book, volume I. In your epilogue, you say, "The major scale and the Lydian scale represent opposing forces in

nature, the active horizontal resolving force and the passive vertical unity force, respectively. It's not a matter of which is best, for both forces are present and functioning in all of nature." I'm going to skip down a bit. In a couple of paragraphs below that, you say, "When human consciousness allows itself to become blind to the second and third passive and neutralizing forces, the unrestrained active force alone rules life, and the Darwinian aspects of that condition become more and more apparent." Both of those speak to what has always been and what is very much prevalent now. In closing on my part – and I would like for you to say – make any comment or say anything that you wish to, you and/or Alice, this book salutes, as a true renaissance, the extraordinary era between the turn of the century through the mid-1980s, amidst all of its violence, psychological as well as physical, artistic innovation and recognition of levels of experience will continue to survive as the enabling factors in the evolution of all the arts. *The Lydian Chromatic Concept* is proud to be a creation of that fantastic era. In closing, I must say that, when I questioned the why of the more than 50 years spent in developing the *Concepy,* the most gratifying and sustaining thought lies in knowing that the highest aim of the *Concept* is to shed light on the way in which cosmic gravity manifests in the realm of musical sound, to leave no doubt that gravity, magnetism, is a conscious, living objective force. I hope this knowledge will light your way, inspiring and empowering your essence to express its truest, most unique self, not only musically, but also daring to venture into music's womb, that unseen, philo-spiritual world which is music's seminal source and a foundation connecting it and you to the stars. George Russell, Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts, June 6, 2000. Thank you, George and Alice.

Alice Russell: It's a pleasure, Bob. Thank you.

George Russell: You closed with grace, and you opened with grace, and you've been graceful all the way through. We're going to have to take a long time to come to the realization that there are words that we've spoken that evidently, if nature decides, can be heard a hundred years, two hundred years from now. That's a very high honor. Both Alice and I thank you and thank the powers that be. Give them my best. As I say, in a minute, as Don Cherry would say. Just to close, with Don Cherry, you know he was in Stockholm for a long time. His sister became famous, because she sang with a very popular group, rock group. So when Don found out that he was probably not going to survive very long, he moved in with his sister, who had a nice home somewhere. I don't know if it was northern Italy or what.

Alice Russell: It's his daughter.

George Russell: On the day that he felt that he was going to leave us, he went upstairs, dressed in his dressy suit, tie and everything, and came back down, grabbed her hand and left. That was it. He left in style. I like style. I wish I had more of it. Yeah, this is a heavy, heavy thing, man.

Now what do you want to do for dinner?

(transcribed and edited by Barry Kernfeld)