



DAVE DOUGLAS QUINTET • TIME TRAVEL

JON IRABAGON • MATT MITCHELL • LINDA OH • RUDY ROYSTON

The title *Time Travel* might suggest that Dave Douglas is drawn toward futurism, sci-fi fantasy and the like. On one level, sure: music-making is the ultimate intangible, a point of departure, as the late Andrew Hill put it, but toward what? Some among Douglas's 37 or so previous releases—*The Infinite*, *Stargazer*, *Constellations*, *Charms of the Night Sky*, his 1993 debut *Parallel Worlds*—hint in their titles at cosmic concerns, celestial imaginings, maybe questions of existential purpose.

"I was really interested in what David Toomey wrote in his book *The New Time Travelers*," Douglas says. "How the concept of time travel has been around a long time, and how it is evident in the way we think and the way we create: backwards, forwards, all directions at once, beyond the speed of light, rearranging our understanding of cause and effect."

Yet even if Douglas is eyeing the beyond, he has always thought of his music "in the context of the world," as he puts it. This could mean the political world or something more deeply personal. In 2012 he released *Be Still* as a response to the passing of his mother, Emily. It was the trumpeter's first record to feature a vocalist — Aoife O'Donovan of the modern bluegrass band Crooked Still — and it also introduced a new quintet lineup with saxophonist Jon Irabagon, pianist Matt Mitchell, bassist Linda Oh and drummer Rudy Royston. On the *Be Still* tour, the quintet played some of O'Donovan's lilting original songs as well as a batch of Douglas instrumentals recorded during the *Be Still* sessions but intended for later release.

Even with the identical personnel (sans O'Donovan), *Time Travel* is its own statement, not a "volume two" of *Be Still*. Douglas points out: "It was really about writing for these players, this band concept. For years a lot of musicians I know, myself included, have tried to move away from theme-solos-theme structures. Of course, sometimes that's just the best way to play a tune. But it's also interesting to find the more collective and through-composed approaches. So a lot of the tunes on this record deal with how to get to something richer as a band, rather than just take turns soloing on a form. We want to find something that's in between soloing and trading and playing together."

Produced by Dave Douglas

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Recorded & mixed by Joe Ferla

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In 2013 Douglas, traveling forward in time, will turn 50. He recorded *Parallel Worlds*, he remembers, just a week before his 30th birthday. (It's just been reissued in a boxed set of Douglas's early recordings for Soul Note.) Since then there's been music for string group, brass band, trumpet-guitar-drums trio, accordion-and-violin group, tuba-and-cello group, big band, sextet with trombone, quintet with Fender Rhodes, electric sextet with DJ and the list goes on. There's been a duet album with Martial Solal, a long playing relationship with John Zorn, a co-led group with Joe Lovano, a memorable run with the SFJazz Collective and an ongoing collaboration with the great Misha Mengelberg and Han Bennink. There've been homages to Booker Little, Wayne Shorter and Mary Lou Williams. The preponderant focus is original writing: Douglas's library of compositions grows each year, but he's also addressed music by everyone from Anton Webern to Hank Williams, Kurt Weill to Rufus Wainwright.

To Douglas, the Time Travel quintet is more than just a new chapter in his own story. The strength of the quintet, he argues, is a testament to the health of the current jazz scene. "There are so many great young musicians with distinctive personalities," he says. "They're not this homunculus that's been complained about – the music school graduate who plays with no feeling and knows all the scales. It's not turning into that. It's turning into a really rich environment of growth and inspiration in the music."

That richness is evident from the first hard-swinging minutes of "Bridge to Nowhere," a tune with a bridge that does in fact go nowhere. "The blowing form is just three bars," Douglas notes. "Time Travel" introduces a shifting, more ambiguous rhythmic feel, a "push and pull" as Douglas calls it, generating another kind of fire and connective energy in the group.

"Law of Historical Memory" takes its title from a Spanish law enacted in late 2007 that deals with justice and reconciliation in the wake of the Franco dictatorship. Slow and brooding, the piece leaves room for soloing, but on the foundation of a strict, fully notated harmonic pattern.

The mood brightens with the country-boppish "Beware of Doug." While Douglas was teaching at Banff in western Canada, an old and apparently harmless cougar would sometimes wander into town. The locals named him Doug. Apart from honoring this scruffy large animal, the tune also manages to feature the whole band in a vivid way.

The slower, spacious "Little Feet," propelled by Oh's steady ostinato lines, is "very roughly based on a children's hymn," Douglas remarks, "but it's turned inside out and backwards. Each of the solos is on different material but it's all peripherally related." Mitchell's flight inspires a detour into burning double-time swing.

"Garden State" is named for Douglas's native New Jersey, hence its quick pace and dense construction, its distinctly East Coast ferocity. "The Pigeon and the Pie" winds down on a more contemplative note, with fluid pedal-point harmony and a long, beautifully realized dynamic arc. "That one struck me like a folk tune," says Douglas. "Some of those piano lines sort of function like banjo lines. If you've ever seen a magpie, they're these really big, raucous, noisy birds. I saw one standing next to a pigeon, which was really small in comparison. It was a pretty astounding difference in category. Or a good name for a pub." Maybe they'd be good bandmates.

Douglas's 50th birthday present will be to tour this project in all 50 states, and the fact that he'll be using subs on some gigs only proves again that the jazz scene is strong. "What strikes me is how busy all these people are, every single person I call. I can name probably 12 young piano players who sound great and are keen to do it, though they are also in demand with their own groups. I think that's great. It makes my job harder, but it's made me reflect on how much the music I wrote for the record comes out of this period of incredible creativity."

David R. Adler • New York, January 2013