

Jerry Douglas *The Set*

Jerry Douglas's *The Set* serves as both an entry point and a milestone for an elite musician who has defied categorization throughout his exceptional career. For his first album in seven years, Douglas has curated several reimagined favorites from his catalog alongside new, original songs from his fellow musicians in The Jerry Douglas Band. In addition to Douglas, the band's lineup includes Daniel Kimbro on bass, Christian Sedelmyer on fiddle, and Mike Seal on guitar. Seal, the newest member, came on board in 2016. "This is the longest time I have had one set of musicians on stage, and they really know these tunes inside and out. We are able to have more fun with them because we know them so well," Douglas said.

"I chose these songs for *The Set* because people respond strongly and positively to these songs," Douglas continued. "I truly care what the listener thinks, and I let that direct me. I want the audience to understand what is being said musically. I do not want to run off from them, with chops or musical ideas that may leave them in the dust. I want to take them with me. That has always been my way of playing".

The preeminent resophonic guitarist of the modern era, Jerry Douglas has enchanted music fans at innumerable festivals and concerts, as a leader of The Jerry Douglas Band and The Earls of Leicester, as a solo artist, and as a member of Alison Krauss & Union Station. He has been awarded sixteen GRAMMY trophies, most recently as a producer of Molly Tuttle & Golden Highway's 2022 and 2023 bluegrass albums.

The Set opens with "Gone to Fortingall/Wired to the Moon," originally heard on the BBC's *Transatlantic Sessions* television program. Fittingly, Douglas holds (with Aly Bain) the role of co-musical director of the series; the band of the same name features a stunning array of roots musicians. Following the group's sold-out appearances at Glasgow's Celtic Connections Festival each year, Douglas and Bain lead the troupe on a tour through Scotland, England, and Ireland. With the recordings from these concerts, The Sessions promptly release a live album, available only at venues during the remainder of the tour, allowing viewers and fans to recapture the magical moments they saw on stage. In a similar manner, *The Set* mirrors what you might hear at a Jerry Douglas Band show, almost like a companion piece to the concert.

"From Ankara to Ismir," the collection's oldest song, was first recorded for Douglas's album *Changing Channels* (1987 MCA Master Series) and again on *Skip, Hop, and Wobble* (1993 Sugar Hill Records), a collaborative album with Russ Barenberg and Edgar Meyer. Douglas recorded the initial version on lap steel; this time, the Dobro is given a prominent role. "I think it makes more sense, according to the original story I made up before I wrote the song. I create these little vignettes, to have something in my mind to write. Not just to scatter everywhere, but to write in a specific 'subject matter,' even though there are no words there. Then the tune can be about something, and the listener can have a sense of where it came from."

Some time ago Douglas and his band worked up an instrumental version of George Harrison's "While My Guitar Gently Weeps," a song that Douglas said he had known forever. When he performed it in London during a Transatlantic Sessions tour, Eric Clapton joined him onstage for a reunion of sorts. Clapton previously appeared on Douglas' album, *Traveler* (Koch 2012), lending his vocal to R&B artist Chris Kenner's "Something You Got." In addition, Douglas has appeared at four of Clapton's Crossroads Guitar Festivals (2004, 2010, 2019, and 2023) and produced a recording session for Clapton at London's hallowed Abbey Road Studios. Speaking about his own band's version of the Beatles classic, Douglas said, "I love how easy it was to play the song; it just lays perfectly for the Dobro. It gives you all the latitude needed to play the whole song from end to end, in different octaves. That melody always got me, and once I finally tried to play it, I thought, 'Wow! I can't believe I haven't recorded this before.'"

As a session musician with an estimated two thousand studio albums and tracks to his credit, Douglas is an unrivaled master of versatility. He has graced projects of a multitude of artists, from Phish to Ralph Stanley, Alison Krauss to Ray Charles, and James Taylor to Johnny Mathis. He received another musical education as the father of four kids, all with varying musical tastes, all sharing favorite artists with Dad. Those wide-ranging influences can be heard on new versions of "Something You Got," with Douglas taking lead vocals, and jazz guitarist Mike Stern's "What Might Have Been," featuring Aoife O'Donovan.

Douglas also turned to his bandmates for material, including Mike Seal's "Renee," Christian Sedelmyer's "Deacon Waltz," and Daniel Kimbro's "Loyston." In addition, the four musicians collaborated on "The Fifth Season," a concerto commissioned by the FreshGrass Foundation. *The Set* concludes with two instrumentals, "Pushed Too Far" and "Sir Aly B." Douglas noted, "When people leave a show, they have a certain song in their head. And we always play 'Sir Aly B' as the encore. That's the last thing people hear, so I wanted that to be so on *The Set*, as well."

For the album's cover art, Douglas enlisted a close friend, the contemporary master painter William Matthews, after they spent some time together in Scotland. "Willy had watercolor paintings all over his room that he had started, and I had never watched anybody paint like that," Douglas recalled. "I was trying to figure out, 'How does this equate to what I'm doing in my music?' Creating my own landscape, putting color on—it all relates the same. What he came up with was extraordinary and it reminded me of a beautiful place in Scotland that I love so much. When I saw his painting, it brought the entire record more into focus for me."

Asked about listening to *The Set* now, Douglas added, "I am proud of it. I have left no stone unturned. I have been producing records for a long time, so I fully put that producer hat on for this project. Usually, I prefer instrumentalists to have free rein in whatever they do. It is the way they speak. But for this one, all participants were doing the right thing anyway. When anybody offered an idea, we chased it down to the end. I feel like it is truly complete. I am very happy with the outcome of this whole experience."