



Dynamic Maximum Tension
Darcy James Argue's Secret Society (Nonesuch)
by Keith Hoffman

With the release of *Infernal Machines* in 2009, Vancouver-born Darcy James Argue, then 33, announced himself the *enfant terrible* of North American music. But the artistic success of his Secret Society debut, nominated for both a Grammy and Canadian Juno, was many years in the making. With his fourth release, *Dynamic Maximum Tension*, Argue, now 48, thanks many of the wide-ranging influences who have helped shape his slightly off-kilter, always inventive and challenging approach to making large ensemble music.

Argue told Martin Johnson (author of the album's liner notes) that it felt like "our culture today is headed in a profoundly dystopian direction." The answer to this problem from this archetypal modernist? Use a largely outmoded musical format, the big band, to revisit and honor past creators who once instilled us with optimism for the boundless future.

One Argue hero, philosopher-futurist Buckminster Fuller, lies behind the title track. Fuller's "dymaxion" design concept summed up his approach to most everything he did: energy efficiency, or maximum gain from minimum input. And apparently Fuller loved to go stomping at the Savoy, hence another tribute, the tune "Single-Cell Jitterbug".

Trumpeter and teacher Laurie Frink was an original member of the Secret Society, as was her devoted protégé, Nadjé Noordhuis. "All In" is dedicated to Frink (who died in 2013) and features an excellent solo from Noordhuis. "Your Enemies Are Asleep" is a beautiful and profound blues, dedicated to the Ukrainian people and trumpeter Ingrid Jensen just kills in her solo turn.

The centerpiece of this compelling and ambitious album is the massive "Tensile Curves", which comes in at almost 35 minutes. Argue takes the concept of Ellington's 1937 masterwork "Diminuendo and Crescendo in Blue" and applies it to tempo. The piece starts with a blaring trumpet blast and fast, crashing drums. Then, with each successive section of the suite, the tempo slows, the sound broadens. Near the end, guest violinist Sara Caswell executes a powerful and moving cadenza on the rare Hardanger d'amore.

Remarkable in its ambition, scope and sheer length, this is Argue's crowning achievement to date.

For more info visit nonesuch.com. Argue's album release concerts are at The Jazz Gallery Sep. 13-16. See Calendar.