

DYNAMIC MAXIMUM TENSION

DARCY JAMES ARGUE'S SECRET SOCIETY

Produced by Alan Ferber, Brian Montgomery, and Darcy James Argue
Session Producer: Alan Ferber
Production Assistants: Eliana Fishbeyn and Martina Liviero
Recorded and Mixed by Brian Montgomery
Assistant Engineers: Ben Miller and Michael Hickey

Recorded at Power Station at BerkleeNYC Studio C, New York, NY
from August 29–September 2, 2022.

Mixed at Soundview Studio, White Plains, NY.

Mastered by Randy Merrill at Sterling Sound, Edgewater, NJ, from May 30–31, 2023.

Design and Illustration by Lawrence Azerrad

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SYNERGETIC PATRONS

Michael Good
JoAnn Close

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Dave Dieken
Caitlin Steele

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Dynamic Maximum Tension is dedicated to George Wein.

CO-CONSPIRATORS

Dave Pietro	piccolo, flute, alto flute, soprano sax, alto sax
Rob Wilkerson	flute, clarinet, soprano sax, alto sax
Sam Sadigursky	clarinet, tenor sax
John Ellis	clarinet, bass clarinet, tenor sax
Carl Maraghi	clarinet, bass clarinet, baritone sax
Seneca Black	trumpet & flugelhorn
Liesl Whitaker	trumpet & flugelhorn
Matt Holman	trumpet & flugelhorn
Nadje Noordhuis	trumpet & flugelhorn
Ingrid Jensen	trumpet & flugelhorn on <i>Dymaxion</i> , <i>Ebonite</i> , <i>Last Waltz for Levon</i> , <i>Winged Beasts</i> , <i>Your Enemies Are Asleep</i> , <i>Ferromagnetic</i> , <i>Single-Cell Jitterbug</i> , and <i>Mae West: Advice</i>
Brandon Lee	trumpet & flugelhorn on <i>All In</i> , <i>Codebreaker</i> , and <i>Tensile Curves</i>
Mike Fahie	trombone
Ryan Koberle	trombone
Jacob Garchik	trombone
Jennifer Wharton	bass trombone & tuba
Sebastian Noelle	acoustic & electric guitar
Adam Birnbaum	acoustic & electric piano
Matt Clohesy	contrabass & electric bass
Jon Wilkan	drum set & cajón
Sara Caswell	violin & Hardanger d'amore on <i>Tensile Curves</i>
Cécile McLorin Salvant	voice on <i>Mae West: Advice</i>
Darcy James Argue	composer, conductor, ringleader

All compositions by Darcy James Argue, except "Mae West: Advice" by Darcy James Argue (music) and Paisley Rekdal (lyrics).
Published by Cercopitheque Music (BMI). "Mae West: Advice" published by Cercopitheque Music & Paisley Rekdal.
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DISC I

1 DYMAXION FOR BUCKMINSTER FULLER

Solo: Carl Maraghi baritone sax

2 ALL IN FOR LAURIE FRINK

Solo: Nadje Noordhuis trumpet
Commissioned by the Orquestra Jazz de Matosinhos.

3 EBONITE

Solo: Dave Pietro soprano sax
Commissioned by the Hard Rubber New Music Society
with the support of the Canada Council for the Arts.

4 LAST WALTZ FOR LEVON FOR LEVON HELM

Solos: Mike Fahie trombone
Matt Clohesy electric bass
Commissioned by the Danish Radio Big Band.

5 WINGÈD BEASTS FOR BOB BROOKMEYER

Solos: Ryan Koberle trombone
Carl Maraghi baritone sax
Commissioned by New England Conservatory
in honor of its 150th Anniversary Celebration.

6 YOUR ENEMIES ARE ASLEEP IN SOLIDARITY WITH THE PEOPLE OF UKRAINE AND THE UKRAINIAN DIASPORA

Solos: Matt Clohesy contrabass
Ingrid Jensen trumpet

Based on "Nich yaka misyachna" by
Mykhailo Starytsky (lyrics) and
Vasyl Ovchynnikov (music).

Commissioned by the
Canadian National Jazz Orchestra.
Commission fee donated to United Help Ukraine.

Special thanks to Alex Pryodny for
contributing research and context.

DISC II

1 CODEBREAKER FOR ALAN TURING

Solo: Rob Wilkerson alto sax
Commissioned by the West Point Jazz Knights.

2 FERROMAGNETIC

Solo: Matt Holman trumpet

3 SINGLE-CELL JITTERBUG

FOR BUCKMINSTER FULLER
AND CAB CALLOWAY

Solo: Sebastian Noelle guitar
Commissioned by NYO Jazz.

4 TENSILE CURVES FOR DUKE ELLINGTON

Solos: Jon Wilkan drum set
Sam Sadigursky clarinet
Jacob Garchik trombone
Brandon Lee flugelhorn
John Ellis tenor sax
Adam Birnbaum piano
Sara Caswell Hardanger d'amore

Commissioned by the Hard Rubber New Music Society with the support
of the Canada Council for the Arts and the Newport Jazz Festival.

5 MAE WEST: ADVICE FOR MAE WEST

FEATURING
CÉCILE McLORIN SALVANT, VOICE

Solo: Ingrid Jensen trumpet

Lyrics by Paisley Rekdal, based on her original poem.
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Commissioned by Michael Good and JoAnn Close.



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WITH REMARKABLY ELEGANT AND STRIKINGLY CONTEMPORARY MUSIC,

Darcy James Argue has done, if not the impossible, then the highly improbable. He has mounted an effective resistance to what he calls the museumification of jazz by utilizing one of its most time-honored forms, the big band. Argue's ensemble, Secret Society, has built intelligently on the legacies of the modern jazz orchestra, including cornerstone figures like Bob Brookmeyer, Thad Jones, Gil Evans, and Maria Schneider, to create stunning music that is equally contemporary and classic.

Secret Society makes music that is topical and unabashedly political. Two of its prior recordings are thematic: *Brooklyn Babylon* addresses urban change and evolution, and *Real Enemies* interrogates the politics of fear. On this new recording, Secret Society addresses a myriad of Argue's most fervent interests and pays homage to key figures in his life. It's over 100 minutes of potent, intricate, and sonically diverse music.

Of the music's inspirations, Argue said, "It feels like our culture today is headed in a profoundly dystopian direction — authoritarianism and disinformation metastasizing thanks to The Algorithm, the gig economy becoming the entire economy, OpenAI replacing human creative work. Either that, or the future is supposed to be all this janky, scammy bullshit: crypto, the metaverse, NFTs. By engaging with figures like Buckminster Fuller, Alan Turing, and Mae West, I was trying to connect to a more optimistic time, trying to reclaim a sense of agency, trying to rekindle my faith in our ability to grab the future and shape it ourselves."

Many of the songs on *Dynamic Maximum Tension* are dedicated to key influences on Argue. The most complex of these is "Tensile Curves," which was originally commissioned by the Vancouver-based Hard Rubber Orchestra. It is a response to, and recasting of, the brilliance of Duke Ellington's famous "Diminuendo and Crescendo in Blue." The original Ellington rendition from 1937 begins loudly and gradually becomes softer. Here, the piece begins with a bright fanfare, and transitions into progressively slower and slower tempos. The first transition leads into Sam Sadigursky's lyrical, warm clarinet solo. It's followed by introspective solos by trombonist Jacob Garchik, flugelhornist Brandon Lee, saxophonist John Ellis, pianist Adam Birnbaum, and special guest, violinist Sara Caswell; for her solo cadenza, she plays the unique Hardanger d'amore, a ten-stringed instrument with great resonance. Caswell also used the Hardanger to play the Miles Davis parts in a concert performance of *Sketches of Spain*, the legendary trumpeter's collaboration with Gil Evans and one of the foundational works of contemporary orchestral jazz.

Another key composition is "Codebreaker," a dedication to Alan Turing, the British mathematician and computer scientist who broke the presumed unbreakable Nazi Enigma code, doing perhaps more than any other individual to facilitate Hitler's defeat. Outed as gay after the war and convicted of gross indecency by the British government, he was subjected to hormonal treatment that rendered him impotent and depressed, and he took his life in 1954. His hypothetical model, the Turing machine, was the template for modern computing and AI. Commissioned by the West Point Jazz Knights, "Codebreaker" is a rousing and concise piece highlighted by a probing alto saxophone solo from Rob Wilkerson.

Argue's affection for rebels who buck convention and change the landscape with their ideas made "Mae West: Advice" almost inevitable. West, who may be best remembered for her ribald sense of humor and witty remarks, was an iconoclast who, despite running afoul of conventional mores, had an immensely successful career in Vaudeville, Broadway, and Hollywood. For his portrait of West, Argue collaborates again with vocalist, composer, visual artist, and visionary Cécile McLorin Salvant — they first worked together on her song cycle *Ogresse*, which premiered at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, toured through major concert halls, and is being adapted into an animated film. Here, she sings lyrics adapted from a poem by Paisley Rekdal, who imagines aphorisms West might have said. The wry presentation is enlivened by an insightful trumpet solo by Ingrid Jensen.

The multihyphenate Buckminster Fuller (architect, theorist, philosopher, writer, inventor, and futurist, just to name a few of his specialties) has had a profound influence on the universe of Secret Society. "Dymaxion," Fuller's personal brand, is a portmanteau of the album's title. In the early 2010s, there was a Bucky-inspired group, the Dymaxion Quartet, which included saxophonist Mark Small, a member of an early edition of Secret Society. In addition, Argue imagines Fuller and Cab Calloway in the same frame on the exuberant "Single-Cell Jitterbug," which features a stirring guitar solo by Sebastian Noelle. The piece is named for a Fuller folding sculpture of eight triangles and six squares. Fuller used to go jitterbugging at the Savoy Ballroom, so, perhaps as a counterfactual, Argue supposes that he danced to the music of Calloway, who first used the term "jitterbug" around the same time.

"Ebonite" was inspired by Argentinian chacarera: a folk dance where the rhythms have a fascinating metrical ambiguity. The title substance is a hard rubber, often from Argentina, that was used for everything from saxophone mouthpieces to hockey pucks; the piece is a co-commission from the Canada Council for the Arts and, appropriately, the Hard Rubber New Music Society. The piece features a soprano sax solo by Dave Pietro that navigates the intricacies of the rhythm before stretching out languorously.

The dark, menacing "Ferromagnetic," was written in anger by Argue in response to Erik Prince's Blackwater mercenaries massacring civilians in Baghdad's Nisour Square. It represents a dark side of mid-20th century technological progress, the rise of the military-industrial complex — more specifically, it's about the rise of private armies, like Prince's Blackwater in the 2000s and Yevgeny Prigozhin's Wagner Group today. Trumpeter Matt Holman's solo offers an air of both rippling resistance and reasoned rebuttal to voice outrage and hope.

Secret Society has drawn its following from all over the musical landscape, both those firmly within jazz city limits and constituencies well outside of it. While waiting to attend a show in Brooklyn many years ago, I heard my line neighbors discussing their plans to attend different performances of Wagner's Ring Cycle; a few months later, different line neighbors were comparing Radiohead tours. "Last Waltz for Levon" is dedicated to the drummer of the legendary rock/Americana group, The Band. Argue has long admired Helm's playing and sympathized with the drummer, who felt that the Martin Scorsese documentary *The Last Waltz* presented an unbalanced portrait of the ensemble. The arrangement of "Last Waltz for Levon" was inspired by Allen Toussaint's arrangements for The Band on their classic live album *Rock of Ages*. Toward the end of Matt Clohesy's bass solo, the band references Toussaint's spin on The Band's "The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down."

"Your Enemies Are Asleep" is a dedication to the people of Ukraine and their fight against the tyrannical invasion from Russia. It is based on a line from the 19th-century Ukrainian poem "Nich yaka misyachna." The poem was set to music by Vasyl Ovchynnikov, a bandura player who was arrested and disappeared during the Stalinist purges of the 1930s. It is highlighted by solos from Jensen and Clohesy.

Laurie Frink (1951–2013) was a pioneering trumpeter who played in bands led by Benny Goodman and Gerry Mulligan before becoming a mentor for dozens of young musicians; she appears on the first Secret Society recording, *Infernal Machines*. Frink is the dedicatee for "All In," a piece written in her memory after she died of cancer of the bile duct at age 61. This elegant composition features a trumpet solo by Nadje Noordhuis, a former student of Frink's and a custodian of her legacy.

Of all of the greats who are celebrated on this recording, none can match the sway that Bob Brookmeyer, the great trombonist, arranger, and educator, had on Argue. The proudly taciturn Brookmeyer might seem like an unusual choice for the theme of optimism, but Argue, who studied with Brookmeyer at the New England Conservatory of Music, saw a different side of the man. The bandleader wrote, "People think of records like *Gloomy Sunday and Other Bright Moments* or the archly-named *Make Me Smile*, so their image of him is based on that. But when I knew him, Bob was in a good place, emotionally — warm and kind and generous. His late career is filled with music that reflects this turn: 'Celebration Suite,' 'Tah-DUM!', 'Dance for Life,' et cetera."

"Winged Beasts," which was commissioned by NEC for its 150th anniversary, offers a richly detailed portrait. The expansive solos by trombonist Ryan Keberle and baritone saxophonist Carl Maraghi deftly recall the great recordings made by Brookmeyer and Gerry Mulligan.

"I wouldn't be a composer if it weren't for Bob," says Argue. "Winged Beasts" reflects the enduring lessons he taught me about musical architecture, design, and making the most of your materials."

In many ways that's one of the major takeaways from this diverse set of music. Not only is the sound of Secret Society becoming inimitable: exquisitely detailed, finely wrought harmonies in the service of muscular rhythms and versatile, wide-ranging styles. But this overarching theme may be Argue's most urgent yet. In an era of manufactured insufficiency, he contends in many different ways that we have what we need. We need not be distracted by contentions that we lack necessities. Each of these celebrated greats looked outward fearlessly, and this music is a clarion call to do likewise.

— Martin Johnson