



AMERICAN CLASSICS



MICHAEL DAUGHERTY

Blue Electra

Last Dance at the Surf
To the New World

Anne Akiko Meyers, Violin
Albany Symphony
David Alan Miller

Michael
DAUGHERTY
(b. 1954)

Blue Electra for violin and orchestra (2022) **26:21**

- | | | |
|---|------------------------------|------|
| ❶ | I. Courage (1928) | 7:22 |
| ❷ | II. Paris (1932) | 3:30 |
| ❸ | III. From an Airplane (1921) | 5:36 |
| ❹ | IV. Last Flight (1937) | 9:53 |

Anne Akiko Meyers, Violin

❺ **Last Dance at the Surf** for orchestra (2021) **16:07**

To the New World for orchestra (2019) **19:08**

Audio excerpts: U.S. President John F. Kennedy (1917–1963) speaks at Rice University, 12 September 1962; Countdown and launch of Apollo 11, as announced by NASA Public Affairs Officer Jack King, on 16 July 1969 at NASA's Kennedy Space Center in Florida ❻, Commentary spoken by astronaut Neil Armstrong (1930–2012) during the first moon landing, 20 July 1969 ❼

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| ❻ | I. Moonrise | 6:49 |
| ❼ | II. One Small Step | 4:18 |
| ❽ | III. Splashdown | 8:01 |

Elissa Johnston, Soprano obbligato

Michael Daugherty (b. 1954)

Blue Electra • Last Dance at the Surf • To the New World

Blue Electra (2022) for violin and orchestra was commissioned by and written for violinist Anne Akiko Meyers, who premiered the violin concerto with the National Symphony Orchestra conducted by Gianandrea Noseda at The Kennedy Center on 10 November 2022.

Blue Electra is inspired by the sensational life and mysterious disappearance of aviation pioneer Amelia Earhart (1897–1937), who vanished without a trace while flying her “Electra” airplane over the Pacific Ocean. Celebrated worldwide as “Queen of the Air,” she also advocated for women’s rights, was an aviation professor at Purdue University, and was the author of three books and poems.

The concerto is in four movements. The first movement, *Courage (1928)*, is a musical reflection on a poem written by Amelia Earhart before her first transatlantic flight across the Atlantic:

*Courage is the price that Life exacts
for granting peace,
The soul that knows it not, knows no release
From little things;*

*Knows not the livid loneliness of fear,
Nor mountain heights where bitter joy can hear
The sound of wings.*

After her pioneering flight as the first woman to fly nonstop solo across the Atlantic, Amelia Earhart received the Legion of Honor from the French Government. In the second movement, *Paris (1932)*, I imagine Earhart as a guest of honor celebrating at a high-society “Hot Jazz” soirée in Paris.

The third movement, *From an Airplane (1921)*, is a musical rumination on a poem written by a young Amelia Earhart, dreaming of the day she will be in the pilot seat of an airplane as it spirals through the clouds:

*Even the watchful, purple hills
That hold the lake
Could not see so well as I
The stain of evening
Creeping from its heart
Nor the round, yellow eyes of the hamlet
Growing filmy with mists.*

The fourth movement, *Last Flight (1937)*, refers to Amelia Earhart’s attempt to become the first woman to fly around the world in her “Electra” airplane. Running out of fuel on the last leg of her flight, Earhart and her airplane disappeared somewhere over the Pacific.

Last Dance at the Surf (2021) for orchestra was commissioned for the 75th Iowa All-State Music Festival. The Iowa All-State Orchestra, conducted by Rebecca Burkhardt, gave the world premiere at the festival in Ames, Iowa, on 20 November 2021.

One of my favorite road trips in Iowa is a drive to the majestic Surf Ballroom in the small resort town of Clear Lake, around 140 miles northwest of Cedar Rapids, my boyhood hometown. Opening in 1934, many of America’s most famous swing, jazz, and rock ‘n’ roll bands have performed at “The Surf” for generations of music lovers, dancing the night away on the immense hardwood floor.

The Surf is also remembered as the place where young rock ‘n’ roll stars Buddy Holly, Ritchie Valens, and The Big Bopper gave their last performances of the Winter Dance Party tour on the evening of 2 February 1959. They died hours later in a charter plane crash caused by severe winter weather. This tragedy is often called ‘the day the music died.’ But did it really?

In memory of the three rock 'n' roll legends who perished in February 1959, and in celebration of the Surf Ballroom being declared a National Historic Landmark in January 2021, I have composed a one-movement dance symphony entitled *Last Dance at the Surf*.

My dance symphony starts with woodblocks and pizzicato strings, playing a five-note rhythmic groove reminiscent of a Buddy Holly guitar riff. This groove is repeated in various transformations throughout the composition and provides counterpoint to the main theme, a syncopated ascending melody played in unison by the woodwinds. The main theme goes through elaborate rhythmic and timbral developments, followed by a rousing "rockabilly" section.

A second lyrical theme is introduced as a slow dance, with cantabile muted trumpets, woodwinds, and violins swooning over hushed lower strings and trombones. The opening theme abruptly returns in a high-energy fugue "goin' faster than a roller coaster," and then dramatically transforms into a majestic chorale in slow motion. A solo horn cadenza transitions into a final slow dance, kaleidoscopically unraveling the main theme through elaborate counterpoint punctuated by the sound of sleigh bells.

The first coda is a recapitulation of all the previous themes, unfolding with great fanfare but interrupted by foreboding minor chords, a premonition that destiny is just around the corner. A slow, wistful second coda announces that the last dance has begun. Three final chords resonate: although the dance is over, the music and memories of the Surf Ballroom live on.

To the New World (2019) for orchestra was composed to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Apollo 11 mission and astronaut Neil Armstrong's first walk on the Moon on 20 July 1969. The Pacific Symphony, under the direction of Jean-Marie Zeitouni, commissioned and premiered the work at the Renée and Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall in Costa Mesa, California, on 11 April 2019.

On 12 September 1962, President John F. Kennedy's famous speech, "We choose to go the Moon!" launched America's race to become the first country to land a human on the Moon. On 16 July 1969, a massive Saturn V rocket propelled the crew of Apollo 11 – Neil Armstrong, Buzz Aldrin, and Michael Collins – from the Kennedy Space Center in Florida into outer space.

Like the rocket, which separated into three stages after lift-off, and the spacecraft, which was divided into three modules, my 19-minute composition is in three movements.

In the first movement, *Moonrise*, I create music that evokes the sense of awe and trepidation that the Apollo 11 astronauts might have felt as they traveled to the new world. The Apollo 11 mission crew commander Neil Armstrong played euphonium during his college days, and was a lifelong music enthusiast. Armstrong brought cassette tape recordings of his favorite music, including Antonín Dvořák's *Ninth Symphony*, subtitled "From the New World", for his historic trip to the Moon. In a tip of the hat to Neil Armstrong, I interweave musical fragments and chords from the second movement of Dvořák's *Ninth Symphony* and add a solo euphonium to the brass section. I also intertwine ominous, dissonant cluster chords and atonal punctuations into the musical fabric to remind us of this perilous mission's dangers ahead and uncertainties.

On 20 July, with only 25 seconds of fuel left, Neil Armstrong landed the "Eagle" lunar module on the Moon's surface in an area known as the Sea of Tranquility. The second movement, *One Small Step*, is inspired by his memorable words, beamed back to Earth as he became the first human to walk on the surface of the Moon: "That's one small step for man; one giant leap for mankind." I have rhythmically translated this iconic phrase into a repeated, syncopated rhythmic pattern (ostinato) that is first heard in the marimba. Neil Armstrong was a big fan of the theremin: a microtonal electronic musical instrument often used in 1950s science fiction film soundtracks and exotic popular music. To evoke the sound of a theremin, I feature an amplified soprano vocalist singing eerie, wordless, *glissando*-like melodies as part of the orchestral texture.

After completing their mission on the Moon, the astronauts returned in a Command Module streaking into the Earth's atmosphere at a speed of 25,000 miles per hour. They safely splashed down into the Pacific Ocean on 24 July 1969, and were greeted to a hero's welcome around the world. In *Splashdown*, the third and final movement, I celebrate the return of Apollo 11 in a dance rhythm composed in a recurring musical motif of eleven beats. This motif, first heard in the double basses and cellos, moves at lightning speed through the strings, woodwinds, brass and percussion of the orchestra. I also create polyrhythms by superimposing the eleven-beat motif over a four-beat pulse. To heighten suspense, I feature flexatones that create strange glissando effects in the percussion section. A spirited coda brings our celebration of the historic first landing on the Moon and "a giant leap for mankind" to a rousing conclusion. But before the final triumphant chord, the soprano obbligato, glockenspiel, harp, and celeste softly perform an ascending scale as I imagine the three astronauts glancing back at the Moon one last time.

Michael Daugherty



Amelia Earhart in her "Electra" airplane before departing from Oakland, California, on her ill-fated attempt to become the first woman to fly around the world. Running out of fuel on the last leg of her flight, Earhart and her airplane disappeared somewhere over the Pacific. (1937)
Photo: Library of Congress, Washington D.C., USA.



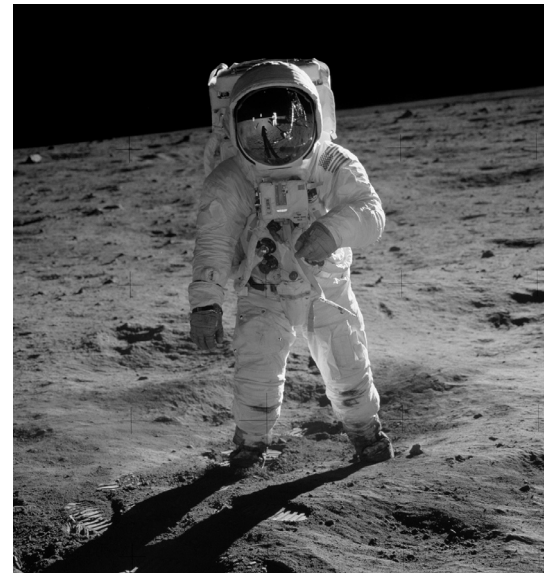
Rock 'n roll legend Buddy Holly (1959)
Photo: Public Domain



The Surf Ballroom, where Buddy Holly played his final concert in Clear Lake, Iowa on 2 February 1959, just hours before his tragic death in a private plane crash
Photo: Michael Daugherty



Astronaut Neil Armstrong, commander of the Apollo 11 mission and the first human to walk on the surface of the moon on 20 July 1969
Photo: NASA



"It's one small step for man,
one giant leap for mankind."
Photo: NASA

Michael Daugherty



Photo: Yopie Prins

Multiple GRAMMY Award-winning composer Michael Daugherty is one of the most commissioned, performed and recorded composers on the international concert music scene today. His music is rich with cultural allusions and bears the stamp of classic modernism, with colliding tonalities and blocks of sound; at the same time, his melodies can be eloquent and stirring. Hailed by *The Times* (London) as “a master icon maker” with a “maverick imagination, fearless structural sense, and meticulous ear,” Daugherty’s unique musical style combines elements of American popular culture, art, literature and history resulting in a diverse and captivating body of work that is enthusiastically performed by orchestras, wind ensembles and performers around the world. His music, recorded by Naxos over the last two decades, has received six GRAMMY Awards, including Best Contemporary Classical Composition in 2011 for *Deus ex Machina* for piano and orchestra (8.559635) and in 2017 for *Tales of Hemingway* for cello and orchestra (8.559798). Born in 1954 in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, Daugherty is the son of a dance band drummer and the oldest of five brothers, all professional musicians. As a young man, Daugherty studied composition with many of the preeminent composers of the 20th century including Jacob Druckman, Earle Brown, Bernard Rands and Roger Reynolds at Yale (1980–1982), Pierre Boulez at IRCAM in Paris and Betsy Jolas at the Paris Conservatory (1979), and György Ligeti in Hamburg (1982–1984). Daugherty was also an assistant to jazz arranger Gil Evans in New York from 1980–1982. Since 1991, Daugherty has been professor of composition at the University of Michigan School of Music, Theatre & Dance, where he is a mentor to many of

today’s most talented young composers. He is also a frequent guest of professional orchestras, festivals, universities and conservatories around the world. Daugherty’s music is published by Peermusic Classical/Faber Music, Boosey & Hawkes and Michael Daugherty Music.

www.michaeldaugherty.net

Anne Akiko Meyers



Photo: Ayaka Sano

Anne Akiko Meyers is one of the world's most esteemed violinists, and a muse of today's foremost composers, conductors, orchestras, and presenters. She has commissioned, premiered, and recorded violin works that have been performed around the world, including Michael Daugherty's *Blue Electra*, which premiered in 2022 with Gianandrea Noseda and the National Symphony Orchestra at The Kennedy Center. In 2024 she received a GRAMMY Award for her live recording of Arturo Márquez's *Fandango* with Gustavo Dudamel and the Los Angeles Philharmonic. She has worked closely with some of the most prominent composers of the last half century, including Mason Bates, John Corigliano and Philip Glass, and has appeared on *The Tonight Show* with Johnny Carson, *Evening At Pops* with John Williams and *CBS Sunday Morning*, among others. Anne Akiko Meyers attended the Colburn School of Performing Arts and The Juilliard School, working closely with Dorothy DeLay. She has received the Avery Fisher Career Grant and an Honorary Doctorate from the Colburn School, and serves on the board of trustees of The Juilliard School. She performs on the 1741 "Vieuxtemps" Guarneri "del Gesù".

www.anneakikomeyers.com

Elissa Johnston



Photo: Shawn Blair

Elissa Johnston enjoys diving into repertoire ranging from Bach, Handel and Mozart to Messiaen, Carter and Reich. Recent highlights include Michael Daugherty's *To the New World* with the Albany Symphony, Peter Sellars' production of *Music to Accompany a Departure*, which opened the 2023 Salzburger Festspiele and the world premiere and recording of James MacMillan's *Fiat Lux* with the Pacific Symphony. She has frequently appeared as a soloist with the Los Angeles Master Chorale, and as a member of the ensemble also appeared in Peter Sellars' production of Di Lasso's *Lagrime di San Pietro*, including at the Salzburger Festspiele, Ravinia Festival, Melbourne International Arts Festival and the Auckland Arts Festival. Johnston can be seen in the Los Angeles Philharmonic Sound/Stage live capture recording of John Adams' *Grand Pianola Music* under Gustavo Dudamel at the Hollywood Bowl, and can be heard in recordings of Chinary Ung's *Aura* on Cambria, and *Spiral XII* on Bridge Records, Danny Elfman's *Serenada Schizophrana* on Sony BMG Masterworks, Jorge Liderman's *The Song of Songs* on Bridge Records, and on numerous film soundtracks.

Albany Symphony



Photo: Gary Gold

Founded in 1930, the Albany Symphony fulfills its mission by performing, commissioning, and recording the work of established and emerging American composers. Annual programming includes a nine-concert Classics Series; the annual American Music Festival, a capstone multi-day celebration of new music; a Family Series with costumed cast; and holiday and pops concerts, in collaboration with area youth performing arts groups. The orchestra's flagship education programs, Adopt-a-School and Meet the Maestro, bring musicians into classrooms for interactive music education, and Literacy-through-Songwriting, the orchestra's in-school composer residency program, works with students on songwriting, storytelling, improvisation, teamwork, and self-expression. Since the 1980s, the Albany Symphony has released more than 30 recordings on the New World Records, CRI, Albany Records, Argo, Naxos, and Decca (London) labels.

www.albanysymphony.com

David Alan Miller



GRAMMY Award-winning conductor David Alan Miller has established a reputation as one of the leading American conductors of his generation. Music director of the Albany Symphony since 1992, Miller has proven himself a creative and compelling orchestra builder and masterful interpreter of American contemporary music. Through commissioning and recording new works for orchestra alongside innovative educational and community outreach initiatives, he has reaffirmed the Albany Symphony's reputation as one of the nation's leading champions of American symphonic music and one of its most cutting-edge orchestras. From 1988 to 1992, David Alan Miller was associate conductor of the Los Angeles Philharmonic alongside music director André Previn, and from 1982 to 1988, he was music director of the New York Youth Symphony, earning considerable acclaim. In 2001, Miller won the ASCAP Morton Gould Award for Innovative Programming, and in 1999, ASCAP's first-ever Leonard Bernstein Award for Outstanding Educational Programming.



Composer Michael Daugherty, violin soloist Anne Akiko Meyers, and conductor David Alan Miller
after a performance of *Blue Electra* with the Albany Symphony Orchestra,
Troy Savings Bank Music Hall, Troy, New York, 24 April 2023 • Photo: Chris Shields

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(b. 1954)

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WORLD PREMIERE RECORDINGS

Albany Symphony

David Alan Miller

Recorded: 24 April 1-4 and 11-12 November (live) 5-8 2023
at the Troy Savings Bank Music Hall, Troy, New York, USA
Producers: Michael Daugherty, Silas Brown
Engineers: Silas Brown, Doran Schächter
Assistant engineer: Michael Schwartz
Editing and mastering: Silas Brown
Booklet notes: Michael Daugherty
Publisher: Michael Daugherty Music (BMI)
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Cover image: *Amelia Earhart leaning on propellers of her
Lockheed Electra (1937)*, courtesy of Purdue University
Libraries, Karnes Archives and Special Editions



AMERICAN CLASSICS

This recording showcases three new evocative works by GRAMMY Award-winning American composer Michael Daugherty, exploring the triumphs and tragedies of flight. *Blue Electra* is a dramatic violin concerto inspired by the sensational life and mysterious disappearance of aviation pioneer Amelia Earhart in 1937. *Last Dance at the Surf* is a one-movement dance symphony for orchestra that reflects upon rock 'n roll legend Buddy Holly's final performance in 1959 at the Surf Ballroom in Iowa and his tragic death in a plane crash just hours after his show. *To the New World* for orchestra celebrates the triumphant Apollo 11 moon mission in 1969 and Neil Armstrong's historic moonwalk. Under the baton of GRAMMY Award-winning conductor David Alan Miller, the Albany Symphony is joined by GRAMMY Award-winning violinist Anne Akiko Meyers, who performs *Blue Electra* with electrifying musicality and emotion.

www.naxos.com

Playing
Time:
61:54