

Ladder to the Moon (2010)

Michael Daugherty

Ladder to the Moon is inspired by the urban landscapes of American artist Georgia O’Keeffe (1887-1968), who lived and painted in Manhattan before moving to New Mexico in 1934. From 1925–1930, O’Keeffe created over twenty New York paintings of newly constructed skyscrapers, such as the Radiator Building and the Shelton Hotel. Like experimental photographers of the era, such as Alfred Stieglitz, O’Keeffe discovered a different reality in the form of skyscrapers, simultaneously realistic and abstract. Although Stieglitz (her husband at the time) claimed it was an impossible idea for a woman to paint New York, O’Keeffe went on to create some of her finest work during this time, motivated by her own conviction that ‘one can’t paint New York as it is, but rather as it is felt.’ *Ladder to the Moon* is a musical tribute to the art of O’Keeffe, recreating the feeling of skyscrapers and cityscapes in Manhattan of the 1930s.

I. *Night, New York* is my musical perspective on skyscrapers as seen by O’Keeffe from an elevated height in New York at night; she often painted from her high-rise apartment on the thirteenth floor of the Shelton Hotel. Like her paintings, which featured only one or two buildings in the calm of the night, the music of this movement is intimate. Soulful woodwind melodies rise in dark soaring spirals to evoke a nocturnal view. A violin plays repeated *pizzicato* (plucked) and *arco* (bowed) patterns, providing a counterpoint like the visual rhythm of hundreds of brightly-lit windows on a skyscraper seen from afar.

II. *Looking Up* offers another musical perspective on skyscrapers, as seen from below. In 1927, O’Keeffe painted the Radiator Building, looking from the ground up and leading the eye upward on a ladder of vision. In this movement I have composed a ladder of sound, featuring virtuosic and expressive music for the violin in ascending vertical lines. Meanwhile the ensemble is structured in complex light and dark patterns, like the moon reflecting off the side of the building. A reflective slow section features tremolo violin, double bass harmonics, bowed vibraphone, and musical flights of fancy heard in the clarinet. All instruments combine to suggest the rising spirit of the American skyscraper: an inspiring flight heavenward.”

—Michael Daugherty

The world premiere of *Ladder to the Moon* was on November 23, 2011 in the Cromwell and Beland Concerts, West Building, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

Michael Daugherty (born 1954, Cedar Rapids, Iowa) is the son of a dance-band drummer and the oldest of five brothers, all professional musicians. He studied music composition at the University of North Texas, the Manhattan School of Music, and Yale University where he received his doctorate in 1986. His teachers included Jacob Druckman, Earle Brown, Roger Reynolds, and Bernard Rands. He studied computer music at Pierre Boulez’s IRCAM in Paris, collaborated with jazz arranger Gil Evans in New York, and pursued further studies with composer Gyorgy Ligeti in Hamburg, Germany. During the summer of 1981, Daugherty was composition fellow at Tanglewood where he studied with Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Mario Davidovsky. It was at Tanglewood that Daugherty met the composer/conductor Leonard Bernstein.

Daugherty first came to international attention when the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, conducted by David Zinman, performed his *Metropolis Symphony* at Carnegie Hall in 1994. Since that time, Daugherty’s music has entered the orchestral, band, and chamber music repertory and made him, according to the League of American Orchestras, one of the ten most performed living American composers. His music is rich with cultural and political 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. Daugherty has been hailed by *The Times* (London) as “a master icon maker” with a “maverick imagination, fearless structural sense and meticulous ear.” Daugherty’s

music is published by Peermusic Classical, and since 2005, by Boosey and Hawkes. His music can be heard on the Albany, Argo, Delos, Equilibrium, Naxos, Klavier, and Nonesuch labels.

Daugherty has been the Composer-in-Residence with the Louisville Symphony Orchestra (2000), Detroit Symphony Orchestra (1999–2003), Colorado Symphony Orchestra (2001–02), Cabrillo Festival of Contemporary Music (2001–2004, 2006–2008, 2011–2014), Westshore Symphony Orchestra (2005–2006), Eugene Symphony (2006), Pacific Symphony (2009–2010), the Henry Mancini Summer Institute (2006), Music from Angel Fire Chamber Music Festival (2006), New Century Chamber Orchestra (2014), and Albany Symphony (2015).

Daugherty has received numerous fellowships, awards, and distinctions for his music. He received a Fulbright Fellowship (1977), the Goddard Lieberson Fellowship from the American Academy of Arts and Letters (1991), and fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts (1992), and the Guggenheim Foundation (1996). Awards include the Kennedy Center Friedheim Award (1989) for his compositions *Snap!* and *Blue Like an Orange*, the Stoeger Prize from the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center (2000), the Composer's Award from the Lancaster Symphony Orchestra (2005), and the A.I. DuPont Award from the Delaware Symphony Orchestra (2007). In 2007, Daugherty was named Outstanding Classical Composer at the Detroit Music Awards and received the American Bandmaster's Association Ostwald Award for his composition *Raise the Roof* for timpani and symphonic band. In the same year he received three Grammy Awards, including Best Classical Contemporary Composition for the Nashville Symphony's Naxos recording of *Metropolis Symphony* and *Deus ex Machina*.

After teaching music composition from 1986–1990 at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music, Daugherty joined the School of Music at the University of Michigan in 1991 where he is Professor of Composition.

Additional information is available at www.michaeldaugherty.net.