

# *The Last Word*

an opera in one act



*Music by*  
CRAIG CARNAHAN

*Libretto by*  
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## **Cast:**

Dusty Augenblick, *soprano*, a 40-something woman  
Rusty Augenblick, *baritone*, a 40-something man; married to Dusty

## **Orchestra:**

Piano  
Upright bass  
Drum set

## **Setting:**

The opera takes place in the *Last Chance Bar*, a middle-class nightclub in a middle-class neighborhood in a middle-class community in the middle of the USA. Except for middle-aged spouses Dusty and Rusty Augenblick and the musicians of the house band, the room is deserted. A bar is situated down-stage left; a small stage for the band is located upstage-right; the space in between is dotted with cocktail tables and chairs.

The timeframe is the middle of October, 1962. TV airwaves are dominated by frothy, feel-good sitcoms like *My Three Sons* and *The Beverly Hillbillies*. But the real story that's gripping the nation is the rapidly escalating Cold War. The alarming ramifications of the Cuban missile crisis has US citizens scurrying to build air raid shelters in their basements as the populace grapples with the reality of life—and death—in the Nuclear Age.

The opera begins in a prolonged and uncomfortable silence.

As the lights come up, Dusty and Rusty are seated at separate tables near each other. They are dressed-up, as if planning to celebrate a special occasion, but their clothing is a bit tired, a bit worn. Rusty is engrossed in a newspaper bearing the ominous headline **ARMAGEDDON!**. He is oblivious to Dusty who sits idly by, growing increasingly frustrated with each moment Rusty continues to ignore her.

While the members of the band are getting situated, the pianist is busy behind the bar. He turns-on the neon "*Open*" sign that hangs overhead, then grabs several glasses and bottles of liquor. As he moves to his spot on stage he motions for Dusty to help herself to the contents of the bar.

After pouring herself a drink, Dusty returns to her table near Rusty's—getting settled with an energetic flourish designed to get his attention. It has little effect.

*Music begins.*

After several more unsuccessful attempts to catch Rusty's eye, Dusty lets out a frustrated "Ahem!" that startles the band and elicits the desired reaction from Rusty. Somewhat embarrassed by her outburst, Dusty is at a loss for words so, after several moments of uncomfortable silence, the band resumes playing and Rusty returns to his newspaper.

DUSTY:       Why don't you say something?  
                  What are you thinking?

RUSTY:       I'm going through old thoughts.

DUSTY:       Why don't you say something?

RUSTY:       I don't want to think about it!

DUSTY:       This is the *Last Chance Bar*. At the end of the No-Passing Zone.  
                  We ought to think of something to say.

RUSTY:       What can you think of?

DUSTY:       They say the world will end tonight.

RUSTY:       They say! They say! They're always saying!

DUSTY:       Can't you think of anything to say?  
                  In the beginning was some sort of Word.

RUSTY:       I can think of nothing...  
                  In fact, I am thinking of nothing.

DUSTY:       Tonight, tonight! That's what they say.

RUSTY:       They say! They say!  
                  The world ends some night for all of us.  
                  How many nights already have we been through it?

DUSTY:       They've gotten the Word. Explosions begin in half an hour.  
                  It's in the papers. It's in the cards.  
                  Rapid transit has already ceased.  
                  That's the latest Word.

RUSTY:       What Word?

DUSTY:       Latest Word.

RUSTY: Whose Word?

DUSTY: How should one look? What should one wear?

RUSTY: Is it the Last Word or the First Commandment?  
The Second Coming? Or the Third Degree?

DUSTY: I do hope it won't be messy.

RUSTY: I hope it's a damn good show!

DUSTY: They say the world will  
end it all.

But we'll have a fire tonight.

But we'll have a bang tonight.

They say! They say!  
They're always saying.

They say the world  
will end us all  
in one swell foop!

RUSTY: They say the world will  
end it all and leave us in  
the soup.

It may be cold tomorrow.

We may be smoke tomorrow.

They say the world will end  
tonight.

They say the world  
will end us all  
in one swell foop!

DUSTY: I forgot to collect the laundry.  
I forgot to put out the garbage.

RUSTY: Forced to vacate! Everything must go!  
Out of respect for the memory of the about to be deceased this place of  
business is closed for inventory.

DUSTY: *(wistfully)* Elsie Wallingford was planning to get married again.

RUSTY: Joe Jumper just got a new job with the telephone company.

DUSTY: Aunt Clara was expecting us for Easter.

RUSTY: *(suddenly sentimental)* Why did I never go to Bangkok?

Temple bells ting.... Gongs go bong!  
There she'll be, waiting for me  
Under the sighing Siamese moon...

DUSTY: You cannot go away.

RUSTY: Very well. Very well.

DUSTY: You cannot go away.

RUSTY: Goodbye. Goodbye. Goodbye.

DUSTY: Why can't we think of anything to say?

RUSTY: Several stars in close proximity appear to embrace a single system but wider stretch the spaces to shoot between. Tolerance is only that narrow space between the moving body and the outer wall.

DUSTY: What is the matter with everybody?

RUSTY: They have followed the blind leader to the very end of the game. What can we do now about our history both private and political?

DUSTY: It's all so terribly unfair.  
Why do we have to have war – or peace?

RUSTY: Are there enough phoenixes handy at the airport to accommodate all the weeping and the vexed?

DUSTY: O Hercules! O Miss America! Save us!

RUSTY: Quick, General, quick! Will there be time?

DUSTY: Come back, Virgin Mary. Come back.

RUSTY: Noah! Where is our home?

*(warmly)* Temple bells ting....Gongs go bong!  
There she'll be, waiting for me.  
Under the sighing Siamese moon.

DUSTY: Shall I go and start packing?  
They say the world will end tonight.

RUSTY: You cannot go away.

DUSTY: Very well. Very well.

RUSTY: You cannot go away.

DUSTY: Goodbye.  
Do we have anything to declare?

I remember my brother's very first  
shave. I remember the fortune  
teller's promise.

I remember the world I was  
going to win...!

DUSTY: O remember....remember...

RUSTY: Remember, O man, that thou art dust!

DUSTY: What a terrible thing to say!

RUSTY: Bong! Bong! There she'll be, waiting for me  
Under the sighing Siamese moon....

DUSTY: O once my lover, my once darling hubby.  
I never knew when it really ended.  
You never said a word.  
It simply ended.

RUSTY: Did we ever say anything worth remembering?

DUSTY: Did I ever express what I really felt?

RUSTY: Did I ever say what I really thought?

DUSTY: What were all the things we never said to each other?

RUSTY: I don't want to think about it.

DUSTY: No matter how many dresses I buy,  
no matter how many diets I try,  
no matter how often I change my hair,  
no matter how often I say a prayer.  
O once my lover where did you fly?

RUSTY: Man, this colloid! This angleworm.

DUSTY: O aluminum love my plastic dove,  
come coo in the wood with me!  
Come coo, coo, coo, coo coo coo.

RUSTY: Cock-a-diddle-doo, cock-a-diddle-doo, to what? To who?

DUSTY: O aluminum love, my plastic dove.  
Come coo in an old-fashioned tree.

RUSTY: Cock-a-diddle-doo, cock-a-diddle-doo, to what? To who?

DUSTY: There's a short circuit in the electric blanket.

RUSTY: There's a split in the joint account.

DUSTY: Think of Mrs. Winterberg. She had a full life.

RUSTY: Think of Mr. Innerburn. He died young.

DUSTY: I wanted children and a hawthorn tree.

RUSTY: They say the world will end tonight.

DUSTY: Did we ever get together? Beget together?  
And where have we got to now?

RUSTY: The time has come to go with time.  
Time to part, time to depart.  
Time for being far apart:  
Goodnight, my dear, goodnight.  
We have come to the end of our rope together,  
End of the rope at the end of the road.  
Time to be hung on the farewell tree:  
Goodnight, my dear, goodnight.

DUSTY: O Time! Time! Go away!  
Time! Time! Come to me!  
Stop! Stop! Hurry! Hurry up!  
Please come back again.

RUSTY: Goodnight my Dusty, goodnight.

DUSTY: O aluminum love my plastic dove,  
come back to the wood with me!

RUSTY: Perhaps I should tell you (or try to) how little, how much it has meant.  
What I know (or think I know) and describe what I am (or I think so).  
We have reached the unfinished parallel track where a deeper tunnel begins and a bridge hasn't yet been built. And if I could go where I'd like to go, start a-new, experiment, what I would want to make and do and what I would be (or try to).

DUSTY: (*Ironically optimistic*) Possibly the best is yet to be.  
Cheer up, cheerio, cheri beri bim!  
Three cheers for every possibility.

RUSTY: When the night numbers stick on their ancient rounds and the morning never rises again, how will we act at the last minute ditch?  
And what will we have to say?

# The Last Word

James Broughton (1913-1999)

Craig Carnahan (b. 1951)

**A Gentle Swing** (♩ = ♪<sup>3</sup>♩) ♩ = 108

The musical score is arranged for five instruments: Dusty (soprano), Rusty (bass), Drum Set, Piano, and Double Bass. The tempo is marked as 'A Gentle Swing' with a note value of 108 beats per minute. The time signature is 4/4. The key signature has two flats (Bb and Eb). The score includes various musical notations such as triplets, accents, and dynamic markings like *mf* and *f*. The Drum Set part includes a 'Brushes' section and an 'ad lib.' section. The Piano part includes a 'pizz.' (pizzicato) section. The Double Bass part includes a 'pizz.' (pizzicato) section. The score is divided into two systems, with the second system starting at measure 5.

Dusty

Rusty

Drum Set

Piano

Double Bass

5

D. S.

Pno.

D.B.

Length: c. 60 minutes



9

D. S.

Pno.

D.B.

*mf*

*mf*

*mf*

13

D. S.

Pno.

D.B.

*f*

*f*

17

D. S.

Pno.

D.B.

*mf*

*mf*

*mf*

21

D. S.

Pno.

D.B.

Dusty returns to her table  
with a loud flourish.

Rusty and the trio react to Dusty's  
disruption, then settle back into their  
previous moods as the music continues.

25

D.

R.

D. S.

Pno.

D.B.

*f*

*Ahem!*

30

D. S.

Pno.

D.B.

35

D. S.

Pno.

D.B.

41

D. S.

Pno.

D.B.

rall.

mp

Quasi recitative, tempo and pacing ad lib.

46 *mp* *mf*

D. Why don't you say some-thing?

R.

Pno. *mf* 3

49 *mp* *mf*

D. What are you think-ing?

R.

Pno. >

52 ♩ = 108

D.

R. *mp* 3

I'm go-ing through old thoughts.

D. S.

Pno. *mp* 3 3

D.B.

121

D. *That's what they say.*

R. *f*

D. S. "They say." "They say." The world ends some

Pno.

D.B.

126

D.

R. *f*

D. S. night for all of us. How man-y nights al-read - y

Pno.

D.B. *f*



141

D. It's in the pa-pers. It's in the cards. Rap-id tran-sit has

R.

D. S.

Pno.

D.B.

148

D. al - read - y ceased.

R.

D. S. *mf*

Pno. *mf*

D.B. *mf*

283 Sustained ♩ = 72

283

D.

R.

D. S.

Pno.

D.B.

286

D.

R.

D. S.

Pno.

D.B.



289

D.

R.

D. S.

Pno.

D.B.

*mp*

*mp*

There she'll be \_\_\_\_\_ wait - ing for me. \_\_\_\_\_ Un - der the sigh - ing \_\_\_\_\_

292

D.

R.

D. S.

Pno.

D.B.

Si - a - mese moon... \_\_\_\_\_

296 *mp*

D. *mp* You can-not go a-way. — You can-not go a-way. —

R. *mp* Ver - y well. — Ver - <sup>3</sup>y well.

D. S.

Pno. *mp*

D.B. *mp*

299 *Freely*

D.

R. *p* Good-bye, *mf* good-bye, *mp* good - bye. —

D. S.

Pno. *p* *mf* *mp*

D.B. *mp*

308 *mp* *mf* ♩ = 132 Steady beat (no swing)

D. Why can't we think of an-y - thing to say?

R.

D. S. Maracas *f*

Pno. *f*

D.B. pizz. *f*

697

D. S.

Pno.

D.B.

pizz.

703

Pno.

D.B.

*mf*

*f*

*mf*

3

Driving and energetic ♩ = 88

709

D.

R.

D. S.

Pno.

D.B.

*f*

Per - haps I could tell you \_\_\_\_\_

pizz.

*f*

*f*

714

D.

R.

(or try to) — how lit-tle, how much it has — meant, —

D. S.

Pno.

D.B.

— (or try to) — how lit-tle, how much it has — meant, —

719

D.

R.

— what I know (or think I know) and describe what I am

D. S.

Pno.

D.B.

— what I know (or think I know) and describe what I am

724

D.

R.

(or I think so). \_\_\_\_\_ And if I could

D. S.

Pno.

D.B.

724

D.

R.

(or I think so). \_\_\_\_\_ And if I could

D. S.

Pno.

D.B.

729

D.

R.

go where I'd like to go, start a-new, ex - per-i - ment, what I would want to make and do, and

D. S.

Pno.

D.B.

729

D.

R.

go where I'd like to go, start a-new, ex - per-i - ment, what I would want to make and do, and

D. S.

Pno.

D.B.

734

*f* Ironically optimistic

D. Pos-sib-ly the best is yet to be.

R. what I would be (or try to). —

D. S.

Pno.

D.B.

738

D. *Soprano*  
R. *Alto*  
D. S. *Tenor*  
Pno. *Piano*  
D.B. *Double Bass*

738

739

740

741

742

Cheer up! Cheer-i - o! Cher-i ber-i bim Three

*mf*

*mf*

*mf*

743

D. *f*

\_\_\_\_ cheers for \_\_\_\_ eve - ry \_\_\_\_ pos - si - bi - li - ty. \_\_\_\_

R.

D. S.

Pno. *f*

D.B. *f*

748

D.

R. *f*

When the night num-bers stick on their an-cient rounds \_\_\_\_ and the

D. S.

Pno.

D.B.



817 *f*

D. *f* Five, Four, Three, Two, One.

R. *f* Six, Five, Four, Three, Two, One.

D. S.

Pno. *f*

D.B. *f*

821 *ff* gliss. ad lib. Black-out

D. *ff* Bing - o!

R. *ff* gliss. ad lib. Bon - go!

D. S.

Pno. *ff* 3

D.B. *ff* 3

825

D. S.

*f*

Pno.

*f*

D.B.

*f*

829

D. S.

*mf*

Pno.

*mf*

D.B.

*mf*

833

D. S.

*mp* *p*

Pno.

*mp* *p*

D.B.

*mp* *p*

Dusty lights her cigarette lighter. She and Rusty are huddled together under a table.

837

Spoken: *mp*

D. It's cold in here.

R.

D. S.

Pno. *subito fff*

D.B.

Lights up half

♩ = 108

Dusty and Rusty regroup and move back to their respective tables. Dusty lights the votive candle on her table then returns to the bar to refresh her drink.

841

Brushes

D. S. *mf*

Pno. *mf*

D.B. *mf* pizz. 3

845  $\text{♩} = 72$

D. S. *f* *p*

Pno. *f* *p*

D.B. *f* *p* arco

849 *rall.* Reverently  $\text{♩} = 84$

D. S. *rall.*

Pno. *rall.* *mf*

D.B. *rall.*

854 Freely

D.  $\text{♩} = 84$

R. *mf* 3

Pno.


U-nit-ed Na-tions, have mer-cy up-on us!—

859 ♩ = 84

**Freely**  
*mf*

D.  Es-tee Lau-der, de-liv - er us!

R. 

Pno. 

866 ♩ = 84

D.  Sig-mund Freud, de - liv - er us!

R.  Gen-er-al Mot-ors, have mer-cy up-on us! — Have mer-cy up - on us!

Pno. 

872 *f*

D.  In the name of the Pres-i-dent, the Pope, and Hugh Hef-ner. A - men. —

R.  A-mer-i-can Ex - press — have mer-cy up - on us! A - men. —

Pno. 