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### Lucky Dragon no. 5 - a New Music Drama

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# Lucky Dragon Number Five: A Music Drama

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation  
with Distinction

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I was commissioned in the summer of 2018 by the singer and librettist Daniel Neer to collaborate on a piece entitled *Lucky Dragon No. 5*. It was to be roughly an hour long, and was scored for baritone voice and percussion quartet. Daniel Neer is a librettist, lyricist, playwright and poet with interests ranging from vocal chamber music, art song and choral projects to music-theatre, contemporary opera, multimedia and interdisciplinary works. He is the librettist of the new American chamber opera *Independence Eve*, with music by Sidney Marquez Boquiren, which received its world premiere with UrbanArias at the Signature Theatre in Arlington, Virginia in June 2017. Daniel comes to Otterbein every year for residency. Each year he gives a recital, works with vocal students from both the classical and musical theatre sides, and works with composers on writing for vocals. I was presenting my monodrama *Grey: The Uncut Forest* at one of these sessions, when Daniel first asked if I would be interested in collaborating on a piece. We discussed several different topics ranging from mental illness to traffic patterns. However, we finally decided on a topic: *Lucky Dragon No. 5*.

*Lucky Dragon no. 5* was a fishing boat that was caught in the fallout of United States weapons testing off the coast of Japan in 1954. Although U.S. officials stated that the boat was a safe distance away, the explosion itself was fifty times stronger than anticipated. Fallout coagulated in the form of ash clouds that coated every surface with a snow-like substance.

Not only did the crew suffer substantially from this error, they were also shamed and separated by their friends and peers. Families would no longer support or communicate with their loved ones as they believed that being affected made the victims toxic to the people around them. This left the crew who made it to land's final days lonely and painful.

The piece is broken up into seven movements entitled:

- I. Before
- II. Flash

III. Roar

IV. Cloud

V. Ash

VI. Sickness

VII. After

The storyline follows a man, who historically did not exist, but represents the crew as a whole. He desires to break from the norm of his everyday life to pursue a life at sea. The text is beautiful, and is deeply moving. Daniel wrote the text as a series of haiku. The uneven syllabic pattern made it difficult to set to music, which helped me grow immensely as a composer by using different methods to set the text.

*I. Before*, is the prologue of the piece. Since the movements are somewhat fragmented from one another, it is abstract in concept. I used this opportunity to create a world in which this storyline could grow. I wanted to create a sense of suspended animation in the first few seconds to disorient the listener and create interest from the get-go. I did this by using a compositional technique called *phase shifting*. This technique was made popular by minimalist composer Steve Reich. It begins with a repeated measure of eighth notes (in this case, a bar of 8/8. As the music progresses other instruments enter playing the same bar, but offset by one beat. When in full effect, this gives a great feeling of musical static which serves as a blank canvas in which I could create a world.

Another aspect from the first movement I wanted to reflect in the music was the narrator's constant sense of wandering. I accomplished this by constantly changing the meter, tonal center, and type of instruments that were playing.

41

nor-mal Sleep-i - ly liv - ing my life not rea-ly a

#### EX.1 USING OBSCURE RHYTHMS TO CREATE A “WANDERING” FEEL

II. *Flash* is where we are first introduced to the *Pika-Don* (the Japanese word for hydrogen bombs, directly translating as *Flash-Boom*). I wanted to focus less on the more bombastic features of a nuclear explosion, and more on a microscopic level. I watched many lectures on how hydrogen bombs worked to get a better understanding of how to represent it in music. I used a variety of different percussion instruments in non-traditional ways. I was really attracted to the ominous sounds of warning sirens. I wanted to replicate them, but WWII era air raid sirens were slightly out of my budget. I did this by using yarn mallets on tubular bells. The brassy sounds sustained over a large period of time made a great replacement.

Tubular Bells w/ yarn mallets

#### EX.2; USING EXTENDED TECHNIQUES TO EMULATE AN AIR RAID SIREN

*IV. Cloud* is a movement that deals with the radioactive ash that coated the boat after the explosion. In Matashichi Oishi's book *The Day the Sun Rose in the West*, the way he describes it is incredibly eerie and unsettling. I tried to make the music depict this heightened sense of anxiety in a variety of ways. I used varying time signatures and heavily syncopated music to make the downbeat very vague.

The image shows three staves of musical notation for Vibraphone (Vib.). Each staff begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The first staff features a sequence of quarter notes on a single pitch, with a final measure containing a half note. The second staff uses eighth notes with frequent rests, creating a syncopated feel. The third staff consists of quarter notes with various accidentals (sharps and naturals) and rests, further emphasizing the syncopated and ambiguous rhythmic structure.

### EX.3, USING SYNCOPATED RHYTHMS TO BLUR THE LINES AND SUSPEND THE LISTENER

The collaboration with Daniel was a very interesting experience. As a composer, this was my first experience working with a professional musician. While he was extremely gracious, I put extra pressure on myself to put out a great product in a timely manner. With this added anxiety however, I hit writer's block a few times during this process. While frustrating at the time, it proved to be useful as I found several ways to work through my creative drought. One method I used heavily was improvisation. I would sit down at a piano and turn on a recording device and improvise (sometimes up to a half an hour). After the session, I would listen back to the recordings and transcribe ideas that I liked. I would then move away from the piano and work on how I would want to orchestrate within the context of a percussion ensemble. Another method I would use was to play around with theoretical concepts. At the height of my

experimentation, that involved using a predetermined set of intervals to come up with a set of pitches that I would use to compose. The opening figure of *I. Before* uses this technique. I also used already perfected methods like serialism and phase shifting to further develop my piece. I would use these methods in tandem to maximum effect. This can be seen in the first few bars of *I. Before*. I used a repeated series of pitches that I deterred by making a tone row. I also used phase shifting by moving each not ahead by one beat. When all three parts are being played together, it makes a cloudy, nebulous sound.

The image shows a musical score for four instruments: Vibraphone (Vib.), Maracas (Mar.), Glockenspiel (Glock.), and Timpani (Timp.). The score is in 4/4 time and features a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The Vibraphone part consists of five measures. The first measure is labeled "An example of the un-phased music" and contains a sequence of eighth notes: G#4, A4, B4, C#5, B4, A4, G#4. The second measure is labeled "The same set of pitches, but phased 1 beat" and contains the same sequence of notes, but shifted one beat later. The Maracas part has a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes and rests. The Glockenspiel part has a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The Timpani part is silent.

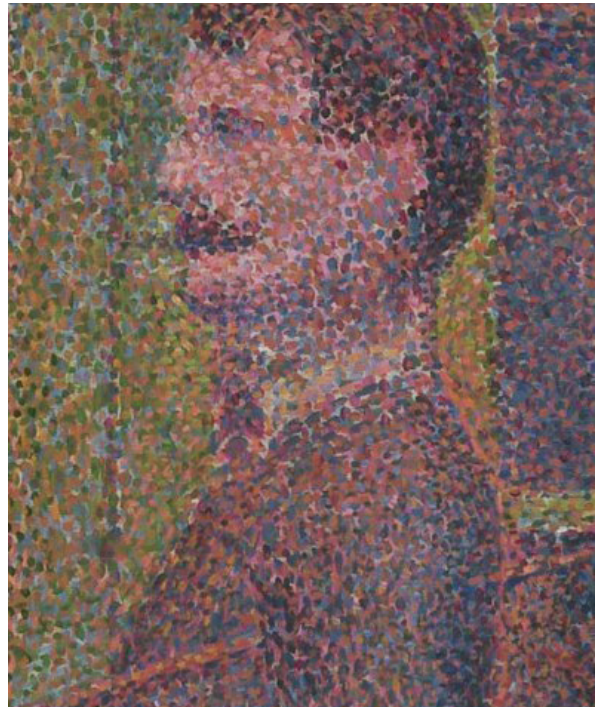
#### EX. 4 PHASE SHIFTING USED IN MVT.1 *BEFORE*

This piece is about 50% complete to date. and I look forward to completing the piece within the coming months. Due to the time constraint of my recital, I had decided to focus on finishing three movements, and to put my creative power towards different aspects of my recital. However, with the recent developments, I have put some energy towards the work, and I am hoping to complete it by the fall. Currently, I am working on movement *VI. Sickness*. Like any other of the movements, I do a lot of experimenting deciding with what type of sonic world I want to create. This mainly is playing the troupe of percussion instruments I have collected over the years in non-traditional ways to find unique sounds that help project my vision. I am also very stimulated by visual mediums to help me expand on my ideas. For this particular movement, I had a particular



fascination with pointillism, especially the painting *Parade de Cirque* by the French artist Georges Seurat. This particular style of art really resonated with me, as the hazy texture of the piece reflects the radioactive dust that poisoned the crew members. As a musical technique, I would split the melodic parts between the four percussionist. The combination of all four lines made for a great collage of different sounds.

The original plan was to premiere the first three movements of the piece that I had completed during my senior recital. This was very exciting as Daniel Neer had agreed to come and perform this piece, and I was honored he would take time out of his busy schedule to come. I had even applied and been awarded a grant from the Student Research Fund to offset some of his costs. Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, my senior recital had to be cancelled. We have decided to put most of our efforts into a full scale premiere of the piece either in New York City or Central Ohio.



**EX. 5, A PORTION OF *PARADE DE CIRQUE* THAT DISPLAYS POINTILLISM**

## Works Cited

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## Acknowledgements

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I would also like to thank Dr. Robin Grote, the Distinction committee, and Otterbein University for letting me participate in the Distinction program with this project.

Thank you to Jim Bowling and Linda Kernohan for being on my committee, for reading my paper, and for listening to my ramblings.

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The biggest thank you goes out to Dr. Merkowitz. Her guidance and patience with me over the past four years has helped me partially realize my full potential, and has been instrumental in my development as a person. No amount of words could express how much I appreciate her.

# **Lucky Dragon no. 5**

**A new music drama**

**Music by Spencer Stern**

**Libretto by Daniel Neer**

## Instrumentation

### **Solo Baritone**

**Percussion I**, Vibraphone, Tom-Toms, Snare Drum, Triangle,

**Percussion II**, Marimba, Tubular Bells, Tom-Toms, Snare Drum, Triangle, Vibraphone,

**Percussion III**, Glockenspiel, Crotales, Bass Drum, Snare Drum, Temple Blocks

(5), Tom-Toms, Vibraphone, China Cymbal

**Percussion IV**, Timpani, Bass Drum, Snare Drum, Roto-Toms, Triangle, Tom-Toms,  
Gong, Mark Tree

# Lucky Dragon Number Five

Daniel Neer

Spencer Stern

$\text{♩} = 185$

Baritone Solo

Vibraphone

Marimba

Glockenspiel

Timpani

$\text{♩} = 185$

6

Bar. Solo

Vib.

Mar.

Glock.

Timp.

11

Bar. Solo

Vib.

Mar.

Glock.

Timp.

*p*

15

Bar. Solo

Vib.

Mar.

Glock.

Timp.

18

Bar. Solo

Vib.

Mar.

Glock.

Timp.

22

Bar. Solo

Vib.

Mar.

Glock.

Timp.

To Tub. B.

To Crot.

27

Slowly ♩ = 55

accel.

Bar. Solo

Vib.

Mar.

Once I wan-dered free

Tubular Bells

To Mar.

*f*

*p*

Slowly ♩ = 55

accel.

Glock.

Timp.

Crotales

To Glock.

Glockenspiel

*f*

*p*

33

Bar. Solo

Vib.

Mar.

Glock.

Timp.

Se-ven-teen and no

(Mid Tom)

Marimba

(Low Tom)

(B.D.)



37

Bar. Solo  
 wor - ries. The sun on my face Pain - ful - ly

Vib.

Mar.

Glock.

Timp.

41

Bar. Solo  
 nor-mal Sleep-i - ly liv - ing my life not rea-lly a -

Vib.

Mar.

Glock.

Timp.

45

Bar. Solo  
 wake

Vib.  
*mp*

Mar.  
*pp*

Glock.  
*mp*

Timp.

To Crot.

50 *sfz*  $\text{♩} = \text{♩}$

Bar. Solo

and then my fa-ther died I was the

Vib.

Mar.

Crot. *Crotales* 3  $\text{♩} = \text{♩}$

Timp.

56

Bar. Solo

man of the house.

Vib.

Mar.

Crot. 3 5

Timp. 3 5

60  $\text{♩} = \text{♩}$

Bar. Solo

Vib.

Mar.

Crot.  $\text{♩} = \text{♩}$

Timp.

63

Bar. Solo

slowly depress pedal

*pp*

It was time to work.

Vib.

Mar.

Crot.

Timp.

67

Bar. Solo

Vib.

Mar.

Crot.

Timp.

70

Bar. Solo

Fi - shing seemed care

Vib.

Mar.

Crot.

Timp.

73

Bar. Solo *free* A job on a tu-na boat.

Vib.

Mar.

Crot.

Timp.

3'19.4"
77.4.61
Hit 02

76

Dictated - In 1 ♩ = 55

Bar. Solo How hard could it be? We set sail at dawn. Lu-cky Drag-on

Vib.

Mar.

Crot.

Timp.

Dictated - In 1 ♩ = 55

79

Bar. Solo Num-ber Five Pain-ted on the side.

Vib.

Mar.

Crot.

Timp.

82

Bar. Solo

The wind and the sea

Vib.

Mar.

Crot.

Timp.

84

Bar. Solo

Sur-round-ed by the de-ep

Vib.

Mar.

Crot.

Timp.

86

♩ = 115

Bar. Solo

blue.

Learn-ing how to fish.

Vib.

Mar.

Crot.

Timp.

Bar. Solo

Vib.

Mar.

Crot.

Cymbals

Cym.

attacca

attacca

attacca

attacca

attacca

# Lucky Dragon Number Five

## II. Flash

Daniel Neer

Spencer Stern

Calm ♩ = 65

Baritone Solo

Dark of night

Snare Drum

With brushes  
*pp*

To Tub. B.

Tubular Bells w/ yarn mallets

Snare Drum

With brushes  
*pp*

Snare Drum

With brushes  
*pp*

Crotales

10

Bar. Solo

In dreams I am a tu-na\_ Smar-ter\_ than the.

Tub. B.

To Vib.

Vibraphone

S. D.

S. D.

Crot.

To Roto-t.

17

Bar. Solo

rest I a-void the bait. Swim swi-ft-ly un-der the

Tub. B.

Vib.

S. D.

Roto-toms w/ yarn mallet

*mf*

*mp* *sfz*

Roto-toms w/ yarn mallet

22

Bar. Solo

nets. In-to the deep blue

Tub. B.

Vib.

S. D.

Roto-t.

To Tri.

To Tri.

To W.B.

To Tri.

28

Bar. Solo

Tub. B.

Vib.

S. D.

Tri.

Triangle

Triangle

Wood Blocks

Triangle

33

Bar. Solo

Pow-er-ful and fast. Pow-er-ful and fast.

Tri.

Tri.

W.B.

Tri.

(like an echo)

*sfz*



38

Bar. Solo

I would be a-wake at last No lon-ger

Tri.

Tri.

W.B.

Tri.

flexatone

44

Bar. Solo

nor-mal Then In-can-de - sence

Tri. To Tub. B. Tubular Bells (normal) *ff* On side w/ hard mallet *mp* 3

Tri. To Vib. Vibraphone *ff* *mp* 3

W.B. To Tri. Triangle *ff*

Tri. To Crot. Crotales *ff* To Gong Gong Side Scrape

52

Bar. Solo

Sli - cing through the floor-boards

Tub. B.

Vib.

Tri. Tom-toms

Gong To Gong Tom-toms

58

Bar. Solo

Pi-ka don! Flash boom! *mp* In - side my Eye-lids The

To Tri.

To Tri.

To Tub. B.

Tub. B.

Triangle *n* arco

Vib.

*n*

Tom-t.

Pi-ka don! *pp* *WB* *To Vib.*

Tom-t.

*pp* *To Crot.* Crotales

63

Bar. Solo

Pi-ka don! *pp* glow of a new day. All en-com-pas-sing *mf* All en-com-pas-sing The

(improvisatory)

Tri.

Vib.

Tom-t.

Vibraphone arco.

Crot.

72

Bar. Solo

bones in my hand. Ske - le - tal in orange, red, pink.

Tub. B.

Tubular Bells

Vib.

Vib.

Crot.

76

Bar. Solo

Not meant to be seen.

Tub. B.

Vib.

Vib.

Crot.

# Lucky Dragon Number Five

## IV. Cloud

Daniel Neer

Spencer Stern

♩ = 90

Baritone Solo

Vibraphone

Vibraphone

Vibraphone

Percussion

Half pedal

*p*

Ped. \* Ped. \* Ped. \* Ped. \* Ped. \* Ped. \*

Half pedal

*p*

Ped. \* Ped. // \* Ped. \* Ped. \* Ped. // \*

Half pedal

*p*

Ped. \* Ped. \* Ped. \* Ped. \* Ped. \* Ped. \*

♩ = 90

Bar. Solo

Vib.

Vib.

Vib.

Perc.

Bar. Solo

wood side of mallet, out of tempo from each other.

Vib.

wood side of mallet

Vib.

wood side of mallet

Vib.

Perc.

7 ♩ = 160

Bar. Solo

Baritone Solo staff with rests in 7/8 and 4/4 time signatures.

Vib.

Vibraphone staff 1 with notes and dynamics *p* and *mf*.

Vib.

Vibraphone staff 2 with notes and dynamics *p* and *mf*.

Vib.

Vibraphone staff 3 with notes and dynamics *p* and *mf*.

♩ = 160

Perc.

Percussion staff with rests in 7/8 and 4/4 time signatures.

10

Bar. Solo

Baritone Solo staff with rests.

Vib.

Vibraphone staff 1 with notes.

Vib.

Vibraphone staff 2 with notes.

Vib.

Vibraphone staff 3 with notes.

Perc.

Percussion staff with rests.

13

Bar. Solo

Vib.

Vib.

Vib.

Perc.

sub. *f*

sub. *f*

sub. *f*

18

Bar. Solo

Vib.

Vib.

Vib.

Perc.

wood tip

*ff* 6 6 6 6 6 6 6 6

20 rit. . . . .

*mp*

Bar. Solo

The tu - na trem - bled

rit. . . . .

Perc.

22

Bar. Solo

Strewn a-cross the glow-ing deck.

Perc.

26

Bar. Solo

Glis-ten-ing bel-lies      Then a sha-dow came; \_\_\_\_\_ from the

stagger return to yarn side.

Vib.

stagger return to yarn side.

Vib.

stagger return to yarn side.

Vib.

Mark tree

Perc.

28

Bar. Solo

nos-trils of a beast.      it moved ov-er us.

To Tub. B.

Vib.

Vib.

Vib.

chyna cym

Bass drum

gong

Perc.



31

Spoken

The sky boiled and churned//  
And a presence turned the sky//  
to a dull orange-grey

Bar. Solo

Tub. B.

Tubular Bells

Vib.

Vib.

Perc.

33

Bar. Solo

Tub. B.

Vib.

Vib.

Perc.

36

Bar. Solo

a - gainst all rea - son co - ver - ing us all

mid tom To Vib. Vibraphone

Tub. B.

Ti - ka don!

Vib.

Vib.

Ti - ka don!

Perc.

To Crot.

40

Bar. Solo

Vib.

*p*

Vib.

Vib.

*p*

Crotales

*mp*

42

*p*

Bar. Solo

Musical staff for Baritone Solo, bass clef, showing a melodic line starting at measure 42 with a dynamic marking of *p*.

co-ver-ing us all

To Tub. B.

Vib.

Musical staff for Vibraphone, treble clef, featuring sixteenth-note patterns with a dynamic marking of *p* and a '6' above the notes.

Vib.

Musical staff for Vibraphone, treble clef, showing sustained notes with a dynamic marking of *p*.

Vib.

Musical staff for Vibraphone, treble clef, featuring sixteenth-note patterns with a dynamic marking of *p* and a '6' below the notes.

Crot.

Musical staff for Crotonal, treble clef, showing triplet patterns with a dynamic marking of *p* and a '3' above the notes. Includes the instruction 'To S. D.'

45

$\text{♩} = 70$

Bar. Solo

Musical staff for Baritone Solo, bass clef, showing a melodic line starting at measure 45 with a dynamic marking of *mp*.

The tu-na dark - ened

Vib.

Musical staff for Vibraphone, treble clef, showing sustained notes with a dynamic marking of *mp*.

Vib.

Musical staff for Vibraphone, treble clef, showing sustained notes with a dynamic marking of *mp*.

Vib.

Musical staff for Vibraphone, treble clef, showing rhythmic patterns with 'x' marks and a dynamic marking of *mp*. Includes the instruction 'Chyna (w/ brushes)'.

S. D.

Musical staff for Snare Drum, showing rhythmic patterns with a dynamic marking of *mp*. Includes the instruction 'Snare Drum (w/ brushes)'.

*mp*

48

Bar. Solo

Their skin turned du-ll and life- less\_\_

Vib.

Vib.

Vib.

S. D.

51

Bar. Solo

Gli-sten-ing no more

Tubular Bells

Vib.

Vib.

Vib.

(whispered)Ti-ka don

S. D.

(whispered)Ti-ka don.

Crotales

54

Bar. Solo

Improvise melody based on these notes <sup>11</sup>

And I felt so small

Tub. B.

To Vib.

Vibraphone arco

Vib.

Vib.

Crot.

58

Bar. Solo

Like a firefly who had  
flown

*pp* <sup>3</sup>

too close to the fi - re

Vib.

Sss

Vib.

Sss

Vib.

Crot.

gong w/ brush