

The Newsletter for U S

United Serpents

Number 2

November 1986

Editor: Craig Kridel

UNITED SERPENTS MEET AT AMHERST:

MONK INSPIRES; PROCTOR DELIGHTS

It is hard to find words to convey the exhilaration experienced by participants at the first International Meeting of US. The focal point of the event and the source of delight was Christopher Monk whose pixish wit and unfailing good-naturedness was appreciated not only by the serpentists but by all the other workshop participants. I sensed the week would be special when some of US (Christopher, Simon Proctor and myself) walked in the dining area on the first afternoon, and the entire group of workshop students and faculty began applauding. They sensed the specialness of Christopher's presence, and we all came to realize how true this omen would be.

The week's teaching began with a suprising statement as Christopher welcomed us to the first serpent class of the 20th century. I had assumed there were many similar workshops in England, but we learned no one could recall a previous instance when more than four serpentists had come together. Unfortunately, our first notes-- what was suppose to be an octave scale played by 9 (later 11) serpents-- did not inspire confidence. Composer Simon Proctor, standing nearby and looking forward to the world premiere of his "Amherst Suite for Eight Serpents" in a mere four days, should have been in tears from the cacaphony. In fact, it's a wonder Simon did not return to England after that first day because, as we learned, the only serpentists he had ever heard before were members of the London Serpent Trio. August 4th served as Simon's introduction to the amateur serpent player.

cont. on Page 2

SERPENT WORKSHOP SCHEDULED FOR ENGLAND,

JULY 1987

Andrew Van Der Beek, member of the London Serpent Trio and artistic director of the London Wind Consort, has scheduled a serpent workshop as part of his Gloucestershire Early Music Summer Program. The dates are scheduled for July 19-25, 1987, and Christopher Monk has agreed to serve as "Dean of Serpent Studies." Running concurrently with the serpent gathering will be a Renaissance dance week directed by Jane Gingell (of Timedance). The dance course is expected to attract a variety of Renaissance instrumentalists. Most participants bring their own tents and camp (free of charge); in addition, the surrounding area offers many local farmhouses and "bed & breakfast" establishments.

The following week of Andrew's program (July 26- August 1) will concentrate on the Monteverdi Vespers under the conductorship of Harry Christopher (who will later record the work with his "Sixteen Choir and Orchestra").

This serpent workshop was partly inspired by the success of the Amherst Workshop and sounds equally, if not more, wonderful. I strongly urge all American and Canadian serpentists to consider attending. I will be receiving more information from Andrew within the next few months and will forward material immediately to anyone interested. Specific details will be printed in our April newsletter. Tuition, board and room (camping) is a mere £ 95.

cont. from page 1--

Yet, through the course of the week Christopher performed his teaching magic and day by day the serpents became more united with a focussed sound, refined intonation, and sense of ensemble. By Friday, the group was sight-reading complicated duets and was prepared to debut the "Amherst Suite" as well.

Christopher inspired US at all levels-- John Weber, Robert Wagenknecht and myself, who were trying to refine tone and use of accidentals; Connie Palmer and Tra Wagenknecht, accomplished tenor serpentists who were making the difficult transition to the serpent; Peter Citkowitz, who had never seen a serpent before that week and who performed magnificently at the weekend concert; and the advanced members of the group, Phil Palmer and Steve Silverstein. (Doug Kirk and Dick Fuller joined the group later in the week.) Christopher's care was reciprocated by our devotion. For example, Steve Silverstein, a faculty member at the workshop with many professional responsibilities, worked through the night so he could join the serpent class each morning at 9:00 a.m.

Throughout the week our composer-in-residence, Simon, delighted all of us with his wit and many talents as a pianist conductor and lexicographer (for which he is listed in the Guinness Book of World Records). Simon's credentials are as impressive as his wit. Simon studied at the Royal Academy of Music and has written a variety of works for orchestra, voices, woodwinds, brass and piano (as well as supplying several works for the London Serpent Trio and the London Ophicleide Ensemble). His music has been performed throughout Britain, Europe and North America and has been featured on radio and television in England and Spain. Simon has given piano recitals in England and Germany.

The culminating August 8th concert did not disappoint anyone. A torrential rainstorm began 20 minutes before the concert, yet over 200 workshop faculty and students traipsed through the rain to hear US perform. The introductory selections by the Saturday Serpent Society of Richmond, Virginia received enthusiastic applause, and Christopher's ongoing concert commentary elicited much delight. The performance of Saint-Saens' "Tortoises" and "The Elephant" from "The Carnival of the Animals" provided a witty and whimsical side to the concert. Indeed, the audience wanted to laugh, and we provided materials for them to laugh with and not at US.

Of course, the concert concluded with the "Amherst Suite." Yet, an unusual phenomenon occurred as reported by a University of Massachusetts Theatre professor. After the opening measures of the Suite, attentive silence swept through the audience. Those attending realized this was a serious piece of music and that they were witnessing an event that had never occurred this century if in any century. (I have yet to locate an eight-part work for serpent.) True, there were a few rough measures throughout the work. But flawless first and last movements and a beautiful third movement solo by Christopher provoked minutes of cheering and a greatly demanded encore. Something magical had happened, and the 11 of US savoured each and every moment.



Christopher

A NEW PUBLICATION BY CHRISTOPHERMONK

The Serpent Player by Christopher Monk
W. Susses: Chiltern Music, 1986. 76 p.

Table of Contents:Introduction

Title pages

Initial Advice: Froehlich

The Trill: Schiltz

Scales

General exercise patterns

The Appoggiatura

Ornaments and Graces

Special exercises

Simple studies

Progressive studies

Popular operatic excerpts

Advanced studies: Allegretto-

Caprice

Six little airs for two

Two duets

Eight progressive duets

Eight duets from operas

Six "duo concertans"

Duet: Romanza

Andante con variazioni a due

Christopher kindly dedicated this collection to the 1st International Meeting of US. The Serpent Player is a God-send to the aspiring player for it not only pulls together the appropriate exercises, etc., but it also includes literature at different levels that would please any audience. The 76 page compendium is sold for a mere \$12.00 with an additional \$3.00 for 1st class trans-Atlantic mail. Since the transfer of dollars into pounds is quite cumbersome, Christopher suggests payment in currency. The Serpent Player may be purchased from: Christopher Monk; Stock Farm House; Churt, Farnham; Surrey GU10 2LS England.

CONCERT NEWS

Serpent Concert, coordinated by United Serpents and sponsored by Amherst Early Music, Inc.

Friday, August 8, 1986, 5:15 p.m.

Buckley Recital Hall, Amherst College, Amherst, MA

O Christe, Morgensterne	Bartholomaeus
Suite from the Water	Handel/Palmer
Music, selections	

performed by SSS, Saturday Serpent Society of Richmond Virginia: Philip Palmer, Therese Wagenknecht, Connie Palmer, Robert Wagenknecht

Two pieces from	Camille Saint-Saens
The Carnival of	arr. Lionel Lethbridge
the Animals	

Tortoises

The Elephant

performed by United Serpents

The Amherst Suite	Simon Proctor
-------------------	---------------

Pomposo

Tempo di waltz

Allegro con moto

Lento sostenuto

Allegro con brio

The Amherst Suite was commissioned by United Serpents for performance at the 1986 Early Music at Amherst Workshop.

conducted by Simon Proctor; performed by United Serpents: Peter Citkowitz, Richard Fuller, Doug Kirk, Craig Kridel, Christopher Monk, Connie Palmer, Philip Palmer, Steven Silverstein, Therese Wagenknecht, Robert Wagenknecht, John Weber.

Original instruments:

Bandovin, c. 1810 played by Christopher Monk; Tabard Lyon, early 19th Century (on loan from the Kingman Collection, Newark Museum) played by Peter Citkowitz.

The concert was recorded professionally by Michael Hesse Productions: audio tape- \$10; video-tape (specify format)- \$30; audio and video tapes: \$35.00. Michael Hesse Productions; 200 W. 15th St., Apt. 8D; New York, New York 10011.

UNITED SERPENTS ARCHIVES ARE FORMED

US became somewhat more united this past September when Robert and Therese Wagenknecht volunteered to assist with the development of the archives. Both are professional librarians and have already provided invaluable assistance.

The bibliographic entries continue to grow in number, and we are slowly obtaining copies of the various sources. Obtaining musical scores will be difficult. The David Whitwell text identifies over one hundred works alone for which we've sent off to the Bibliotheque Nationale for six. (Note: Whitwell is a new bibliographic entry and must be considered a seminal work for any serpentist. David Whitwell. Band music of the French revolution. Tutzing: Verlegt Bei Hans Schnedier, 1979.)

We do really need your help. At a later date we will update and identify fugitive materials from the serpent bibliography. Now, we seek four types of contributions.

- 1.) further citations for the serpent discography.
- 2.) slides (identified sources) of paintings, woodcuts, museum instruments, etc., of serpents. We will subsidize the cost of slide duplication.
- 3.) photographs, prints or slides of contemporary serpentists. We want to begin documenting the modern movement. We hope all serpentists will send a "formal" picture of themselves with serpent in hand (dated, etc.).
- 4.) announcements of modern performances (which will be included in the Concert section of the newsletter).

As the archives begin to accumulate materials we see ourselves serving as a lending library. We cannot duplicate materials since we will not own copyrights. Please help US. Send materials to Craig Kridel; 927 Daly St., D-5; Columbia, S.C. 29208.



Simon Proctor with the Tabard Lyon upright serpent (from the Kingman Collection, Newark Museum)

AMHERST WORKSHOP PRESS RELEASE

The following is the official Amherst Workshop press release. I believe it will be included in upcoming issues of the T.U.B.A. Journal, the International Trumpet Guild journal and the Brass Bulletin. An article by Kenneth Wollitz has appeared in the November issue of the American Recorder. I have included the release for those members of US who do not receive these journals. (It does include additional facts and descriptions.) I do want to add that Valerie Horst, Director of the Amherst Early Music Workshop, has invited US back. I believe a serpent workshop at Amherst will be held once every three years.

cont. on Page 5

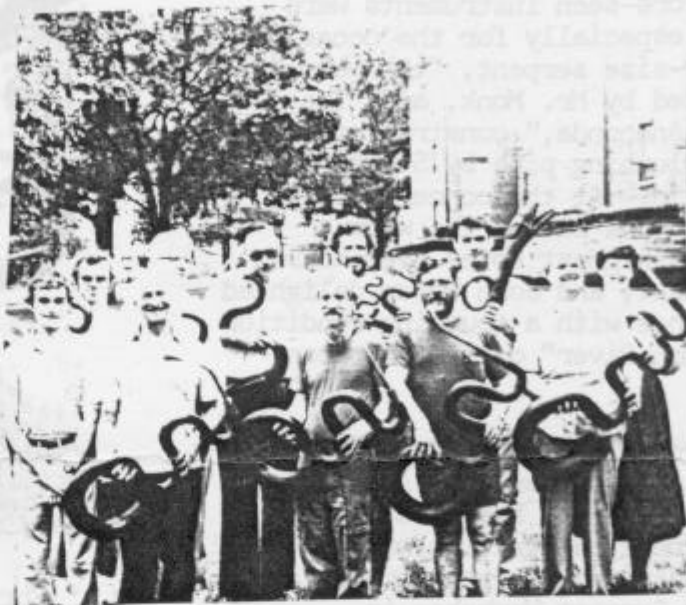
cont. from page 4--

One Step for Intonation;

One Giant Step for the Serpent

August 8, 1986 will be long remembered, if not in the annals of brass music, then certainly by all members of US, United Serpents, and all participants at the 1986 Early Music at Amherst Workshop. For August 8th was the finale of the week-long First International Meeting of United Serpents and the world premiere of "The Amherst Suite for Eight Serpents," composed and conducted by the Englishman, Simon Proctor, and performed by members of US. While the 11 serpentists had not conquered all chords in all keys, the performance assured the enthusiastic audience that the instrument can indeed be played quite beautifully. And when the serpent receives the attention of this young, gifted composer (who has composed other works for the London Serpent Trio and the London Ophicleide Ensemble), the results portray the wit and poignancy of an unjustly maligned instrument. There have been occasions when more serpents have gathered to play. Most notably, 50 serpentists participated at the August 14, 1790 performance of Gossec's "Te Deum." Yet, they all performed a single line. Proctor's 8 part "Amherst Suite" must be viewed as the most complex work ever written for the instrument.

The serpent, officially invented in France in 1590 to support the voices of the Catholic church choir, is the eternal "black sheep" of musical instruments. Made of wood and covered with black leather, it is the predecessor of no contemporary musical instrument. Loved and cursed by musicians of the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, the serpent became a symphonic and military band instrument as well as a church instrument. Handel, Haydn, Beethoven,



US

Wagner and Mendelssohn composed for the serpent. And while Handel's amusement upon first hearing the serpent led to the statement, "Aye, but that's not the serpent that seduced Eve," Hector Berlioz damned the instrument by saying: "The truly barbaric tone of this instrument would be much better suited for the bloody cult of the Druids than for that of the Catholic Church." Berlioz would have altered this view if he had heard the August 8th "Amherst Suite" performance.

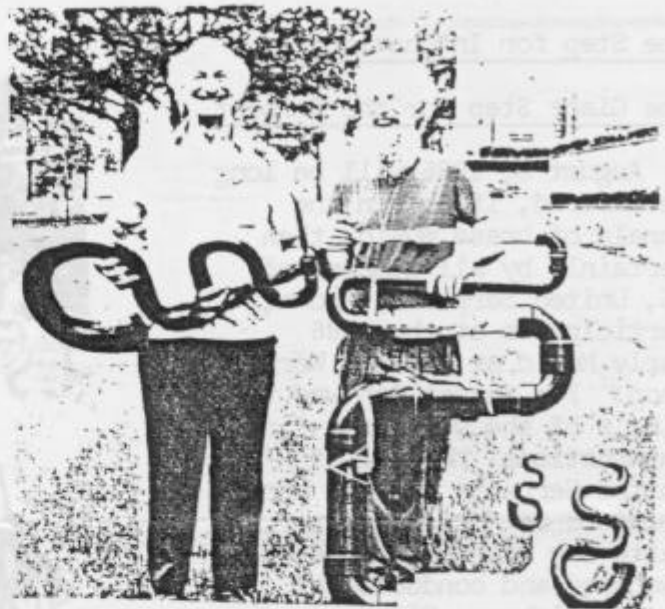
The week preceding the concert proved quite newsworthy and resulted in local newspaper coverage and national radio interviews by N.P.R. and N.B.C. The English "Saint" Christopher Monk, member of the London Serpent Trio and maker of cornetts and serpents, conducted the first serpent class of the 20th century. The revelatory and inspirational daily sessions included instruction in serpent history, technique and literature. Participants were able to examine and play original instruments, including a Bandovin (c. 1810) serpent owned by Mr. Monk and serpents by B. Pretty and Tabard Lyon (early 19th century) on loan from the Kingman Collection.

cont. on page 6

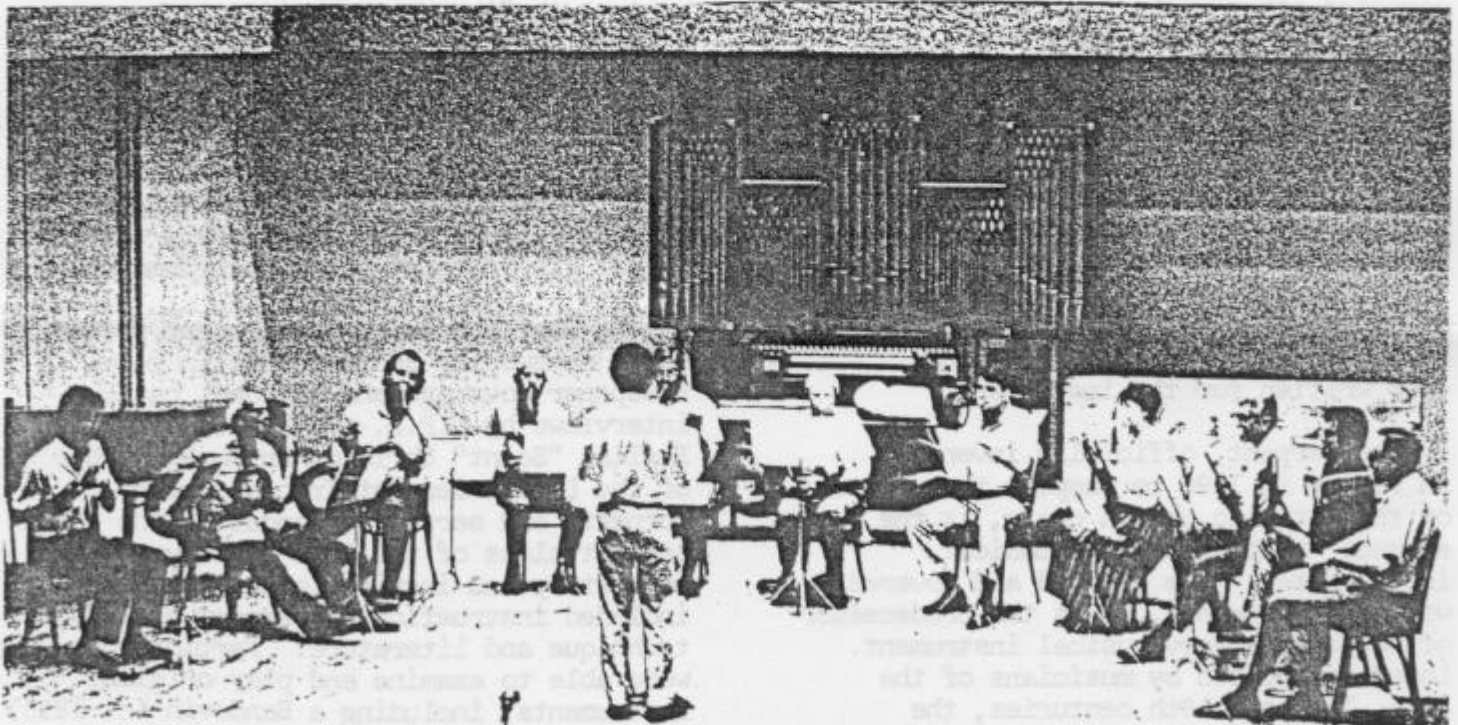
cont. from page 5--

the Newark Museum. In addition, two never-before-seen instruments were unveiled especially for the occasion-- a quarter-size serpent, "the worm," constructed by Mr. Monk, and "The American Anaconda," constructed from plastic plumbing pipe by Steven Silverstein. At the concert, Doug Kirk, with the aid of the worm, played the highest notes ever heard on a serpent, and John Weber delighted the audience with a touching rendition of "Old Man River" on the American Anaconda.

The event, coordinated by United Serpents and sponsored by Amherst Early Music, Inc., has already enjoyed great recognition within the international serpent world, and a similar Serpent Workshop in England has been scheduled for July, 1987. For more information about United Serpents, contact Craig Kridel; 927 Daly St., D-5; Columbia, S.C. 29205.



Chrisopher Monk and the Bandovin;
Steven Silverstein and The American
Anaconda, worm and tenor serpent



Simon Proctor conducting The Amherst Suite; members of US, l-r, D. Kirk, C. Monk, C. Kridel, S. Silverstein, R. Fuller, T. Wagenknecht, P. Citkowitz, C. Palmer, R. Wagenknecht, J. Weber, P. Palmer (photograph: C. Citkowitz)