

Serpent Newsletter

P.O. Box 954 Mundelein, Illinois 60060 USA

Newsletter for Serpent Enthusiasts

April 1, 2019

A Note from the Editor

We seem to be setting up a cycle, with the April 2018 edition being rather light for content, then the September 2018 edition being more substantial, and now this April 2019 edition being lighter than I would like. I hope this is not a trend! Still, I am pleased that this time there is nevertheless a decent amount of material to justify the printing and distribution costs. We have some worthwhile new materials, the upcoming Serpentarium, plus the usual performances and miscellaneous tidbits. A rare instrument buying opportunity is also presented.

As usual, please continue sending in any information on past or future performances, sightings, related videos and audio recordings, music and book publications, etc.

And your generous subscription donations are always needed appreciated. Please consider when you last sent in a contribution and send another!

Paul Schmidt

Workshops

● Serpentarium 2019

The biennial Serpentarium, to take place on May 25-27, 2019 in the new location of Dorchester, Dorset, England, is rapidly approaching. Included will be massed group sessions led by Phil Humphries, plus opportunities to play in smaller ensembles, and our aim is to stimulate enthusiasm for the instrument whilst having fun. PDF's of the music will be available in advance, and Phil is working on including some new arrangements of tunes from the Thomas Hardy

manuscripts; he has already completed five new arrangements of *Dorset Tunes*. Hardy is Dorset's famous author who mentions the serpent on a number of occasions in his novels.

The venue will be The Durnovaria Band Hall, Kings Road, Dorchester, DT1 1NH, Saturday May 25th starting at 10:30 AM through Monday the 27th concluding at 6:00 PM. A reception and playing session is also arranged for Friday evening (May 24) from 6:00 PM for those who can make it. A visit to Thomas Hardy's Cottage, with a look around and playing session, has also been organized.



Durnovaria Band Hall, Dorchester

Tea/coffee and a light lunch will be provided Saturday through Monday. You will be required to organize your own bed and breakfast and evening meal (local pub). There are a number of bed and breakfast establishments/hotels and guest houses in Dorchester (the nearest is only a five minute walk); a list can be forwarded by email for those interested in attending. Dorchester also has many pubs, restaurants and Bistros throughout the town.

Dorchester is accessible by car, with plenty of free roadside parking near the venue, plus direct coach/bus or rail travel from London, and the nearest airports are Bournemouth, Bristol and Exeter.

The event fee is £150 per person, and an option to pay using PayPal is available. Phil's email address is serpent.phil@btinternet.com.



Thomas Hardy Cottage

Getting Serpents

Here is the list of Serpent makers who have made themselves known to us. Many instruments are available through dealers, and all makers will deal directly with individual customers.

Christopher Monk Instruments
(c/o Nicholas Perry)
224 North Street
Luton
LU2 7QN
England

Phone: +44 (0)1582 457 992
<nicholasperry.instruments@gmail.com>
(see Christopher Monk Instruments website URL at lower right)
(serpents, early cimbasso, bass horns)

David Harding
The Early Music Shop
Salts Mill, Victoria Road
Saltaire
West Yorkshire BD18 3LA
England
Phone: +44 (0) 1274 288 100
<www.earlymusicshop.com>
(resin serpents)

Serpents Ribo
(c/o Pierre Ribo)
Rue Van Oost, 40
1030 Bruxelles
Belgium
Phone: 0032 497 574 496
<pierre.ribo@>souslesplatanes.be>
(Serpents)

Kaiser Serpents
http://www.kaiserserpents.com
(fiberglass serpents after Baudouin)

Serpentones Lopez
Juan Lopez Romero, maker
http://serpenton.com/
(wooden serpents & cornetti)

Wessex Tubas
Jonathan Hodgetts (UK)
Andy Loree (USA)
www.wessex-tubas.co.uk
www.wessex-tubas.com
(ophicleides, quinticlavés)

S Berger Serpents
Stephan Berger & Erna Suter
Atelier de Cuir
Les Prailats 18
CH-2336 Les Bois
Switzerland
Phone: 0041 (0) 32 961 1188
<www.serpents.ch>
<sberger@serpents.ch>
(serpents, both wood and carbon fiber, serpent cases, accessories)
[formerly Wetterberger serpents]

Christopher Monk Instruments
(c/o Jeremy West)
+44 (0)1388 526999
<www.jeremywest.co.uk/christopher-monk-instruments.html>
<hmcornett@gmail.com>
(Cornetti)

Sam Goble Historical Mouthpieces
phone: +44 (0) 77 8056 4370
<www.samgoble.com>
<info@samgoble.com>
(cornett and serpent mouthpieces)

Build an experimental serpent
from plans via
<www.serpentwebsite.com>

New Materials

● *Les Messes retrouvées de Jehan Titelouze – Hymne, Magnificat & Pièces d'orgue, Volume 1*; CD recording featuring vocalists Ensemble Les Meslanges, directed by Thomas Van Essen and Volny Hostiou, with Eva Godard and Sarah Dubus on cornetts, Claire McIntyre, Abel Rohrbach, Christiane Bopp and Arnaud Brétécher on sackbuts, François Ménissier on organ and Volny Hostiou on serpent. Paraty # 918174. Available from Amazon France; copy used for review obtained from Volny Hostiou.

Jehan (Jehan) Titelouze was a 17th Century French poet, organist and composer from Rouen. Although working in the early Baroque period, his compositional style was more rooted in that of the Renaissance. He is considered to be the founder of the French school of organ composition. His surviving works were all solo organ compositions, at least until 2016 when musicologist Laurent Guillo located four musical mass settings by the composer in the Fels Library of the Catholic University of Paris. Two of the masses, *Missa In Ecclesia* and *Missa Votiva*, are written in four parts, while the other two, *Missa Simpliciter* and *Missa Cantata* are in six parts. The Les Meslanges ensemble under the co-direction of Thomas Van Essen and Volny Hostiou decided to recreate the four masses in a set of two CD albums, with this CD being Volume 1 of that set.



This album, as well as the planned second volume, follow the *in alternatim* tradition, both for the overall structure as well as within the sections, with *Missa Sex Vocum Cantata* appearing first, followed by the organ composition *Pange Lingua*, which is performed with its movements alternating with episodes of plainchant, and then likewise the *Missa Quatuor Vocum in Ecclesia* is followed by the organ piece *Magnificat Secundi Toni*, again *in alternatim* with plainchant verses.

Les Meslanges is a small ensemble comprised of seven vocalists, and from the associated videos (see below) they perform spread around between the instrumentalists comprised of two cornetts, four sackbuts, and serpent; the

organ is not used along with the voices. Since the masses are written for an *a cappella* ensemble, there are no explicit instrumental parts or basso continuo part; the music directors have elected to use the instruments with the voices in *colla parte*, in other words with the instrumentalists reading the vocal parts. This approach is both simple and effective.

Of the two organ selections, the first is listed as *Pange Lingua*, and alternates Titelouze's *Hymnes de l'Eglise pour toucher sur l'orgue* with vocal verses from Jean de Bournonville's *Octo cantica Virginis matris quae vulgo magnificat dicuntur, cum hymnis communioribus penè totius anni, quibus additae sunt Diei Dominicae & natalis Domini vesperae*. The second is listed as *Magnificat Secundi Toni*, and alternates Titelouze's *Le Magnificat ou Cantique de la Vierge pour toucher sur l'orgue suivant les huit tons de l'Eglise* with vocal verses from Jean de Bournonville's *Octo cantica Divae Mariae Virginis, quorum initium est Magnificat, secundum octo modos, seu tonos in templis decantari solitos singula quaternis vocibus Constantia*.



A photograph published in *L'Illustration* (March 12, 1898, p. 200) includes a man holding an ophicleide. The caption reads "Brocanteurs emportant leur butin," or, loosely translated, "Junk dealers taking their loot"

Thanks to Will Kimball

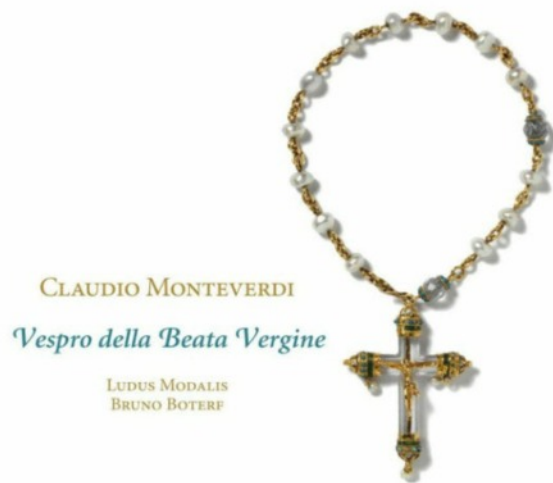
The recording technique used for this CD, along with the acoustics of the chapel, provides a wash of sound that envelopes the listener. The CD liner notes are not clear on which chapel was used for the recording, although several pages are given to description of the organ, which is identified as *L'orgue de Champcueil*, a modern instrument of the Franco-Flemish school by Orgues-Thomas and built from pipes of older instruments. From the organ builder's website, the instrument's location was given as *Église Notre*

Dame de l'Assomption de la Très Sainte Vierge, a church in the town of *Saulx les Chartreux*, on the south side of Paris. The singing and playing is excellent, with a fine blend and high performance standards. Of particular interest to readers of this newsletter, Volny Hostiou's serpent playing is very fine, and also is quite present in the mix. The serpent is heard on the bass part throughout the two masses, and also performs as the tenor voice along with the plainchant verses on the two organ sections, except for track 9, the plainchant *Verbum caro, panem verum*, where it plays the bass part.

This recording is a fine example of serpent accompaniment of plainchant, and should be welcome in the recording library of anyone interested in the serpent.

Portions of the rehearsal and recording sessions may be seen on YouTube at the following URLs:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=jgE5Lq69MEI and
www.youtube.com/watch?v=SEawG8kphtM

- *Claudio Monteverdi - Vespro della Beata Vergine*; CD recording (2 CD set) featuring the vocal ensemble Ludus Modalis directed by Bruno Boterf, with accompaniment by organ, harpsichord, bass sackbut, bass viol, and Volny Hostiou on bass cornett. Ramée # 1702. Obtained from Amazon.



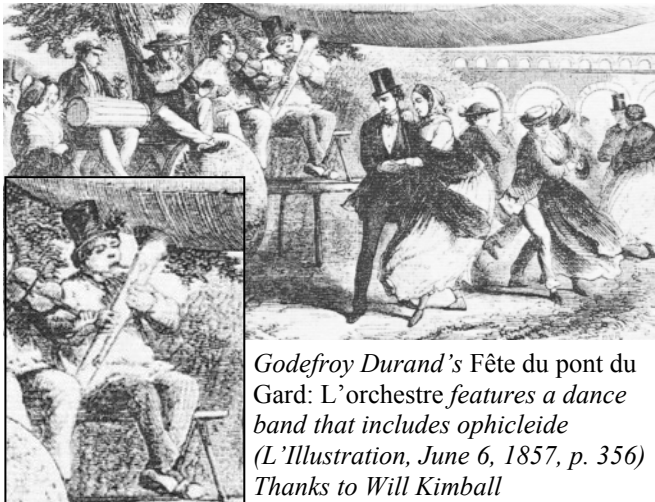
While this new CD is not strictly a serpent recording, it is included here due to the presence of the rare bass cornetto in the accompaniment, and that instrument's controversial association with the serpent. And of course, serpent virtuoso Volny Hostiou is doing the honors as the performer of part.

Monteverdi's *Vespro della Beata Vergine* (*Vespers of 1610*) is such a well-known piece that it seems pointless to describe it here. However, most listeners are familiar with the more common version that includes full instrumental accompaniment, while there remains the more obscure version without concertato instruments, the subject of this recording. As such, on listening it almost seems to be a different piece, as we are accustomed to the famous opening *Deus, in adiutorium meum intende* with its flamboyant

instrumentals after the opening recitative, and here get only the 9 second vocal before moving smartly along. We may observe that half of the movements are quite familiar, while the alternating *antiphona* seem like something new. It is certainly a more intimate and lighter piece when contrasted with the 'normal' version.

This recording was done in 2017 at the Church of Saint Cybar, Pranzac, France. While Ludus Modalis has an indefinite number of singers, in this instance 13 vocalists were performing. Anne-Marie Blondel is the organist, Jean-Luc Ho uses two harpsichords, one with gut strings and another with brass strings. Franck Poitrineau is on bass sackbut, and Mélusine de Pas plays bass viol.

Regarding the bass cornetto played by Volny Hostiou for the recording, this is a modern reproduction made in 2012 by Roland Wilson. This newsletter included the following in the September 2009 edition, "Since some historical documents refer to the serpent being the 'bass of the cornett family' (a familial relationship almost universally dismissed by organologists, who place the serpent in a separate, albeit related, branch of the brass family), an assertion hitherto unprovable due to a total absence of any known examples, this scaled up tenor was produced to see how an instrument having a cornetto bore profile, finger hole layout and typical serpent's 8-foot bore length would compare with the actual serpent." Indeed, Doug Yeo performed on an earlier bass cornetto, also by the same maker, at the 2009 Early Brass Festival held at Connecticut College in New London, Connecticut, and Volny Hostiou has performed bass cornett previously on the earlier CD recording *Requiem pour Claude de Lorraine*, with Ensemble Entheos, directed by Benoît Damant, Entheos # CD005. Considerable research has taken place in the last decade regarding just what exactly were 'real' bass cornetts like, and were they closer to being just big cornetts or were they in fact one and the same with serpents, as was suggested by Marin Mersenne in his 1636 treatise? Musicologists including Wolfgang Köhler, Sabine Klaus, Doug Yeo, Craig Kridel and others have been trying to answer these questions, but that is not critical to appreciation of this album.



Godefroy Durand's Fête du pont du Gard: L'orchestre features a dance band that includes ophicleide (L'Illustration, June 6, 1857, p. 356)
Thanks to Will Kimball

As a 'serpent recording', this CD will of course provide none of that deep rich sound; a bass cornett, in its simply 'scaled up cornett' realization, has a very un-serpent sound, and it is not very easy to pick it out from the mix on this recording. And yet, here is a very well done performance of a classic that, as a bonus, includes a rare opportunity to hear an obscure relative of the serpent.

A brief YouTube video about this recording can be viewed at this URL www.youtube.com/watch?v=3AQOamkQhIA, or by searching for "MONTEVERDI // Vespro della Beata Vergine by Ludus Modalis & Bruno Boterf".

- The Historic Brass Society often commissions new compositions for early brass instruments. Some of them include parts for serpent and/or ophicleide. The sheet music may be downloaded from this webpage: www.historicbrass.org/features/commissioned-compositions, or by clicking 'Features' from the www.historicbrass.org website, then selecting 'Commissioned Compositions'. For each piece, click the subtitle text below the main title. The pieces include *Stony Creek* by Jonathan Miller (2 cornetti, 2 sackbuts and serpent), *Historic Fanfare* by Simon Proctor (1 keyed bugle or cornetto, 1 natural horn or alto sackbut, 1 vintage trombone or bass horn, 1 ophicleide, serpent or bass sackbut), and *Caduceus Mixtus for Serpent and Ophicleide* by Jaron Lanier (serpent & ophicleide duet). Feel free to download and use, observing any usage instructions that may be listed on the website.



*Gabe Stone plays
Serpent at the Hennage
Auditorium on
November 30, 2018*

Where Serpents Gather

- Exultation at Williamsburg

Members of *The Turnspit Dogs*, Gabe Stone, Cliff Williams, and Sue Tarr, presented a pre-holiday program at Hennage Auditorium in the Museums at Colonial Williamsburg on November 30, 2018. The title *Exultation* was perhaps inspired by the second verse of *O Come All Ye Faithful* which was sung by Gabe midway in the presentation.

Readings (from Charles Dickens, *The Virginia Gazette*, etc., by Cliff), guitars, violin, serpent, crumhorn, and voice, were used by the group throughout the afternoon. *Deck the Hall* was first up using two guitars (Gabe and Cliff) with Sue on violin.

Someone from the audience complained that Mary Cottrill, Manager of Museum Operations and Hennage Auditorium, who introduced the program and players, did not turn on the electric fireplace, something always done during programs at Hennage in cold weather. Turned out that the fireplace was choreographed into the program, as it went on, seemingly of its own accord, during Cliff's first reading when he spoke the words "good fire in the hall."

Serpent was front and center during *Ding Dong, Merrily, In the Field of Frost and Snow*, and *Quadrille* as used in Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*. After the latter Gabe talked about the serpent and its history. Gabe also played serpent in the closing numbers, *God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen*, and *Joy to the World*.

submitted by Therese Wagenknecht



Steve Ruckle on tenor serpent, Ryan Heseltine on natural horn, Katie McCaffrey on trombone, and Gabe Stone on serpent at the Hennage Auditorium, December 27, 2018

● A brass quartet presented an entertaining Christmas season concert in the Hennage Auditorium at Colonial Williamsburg on December 27, 2018. The performers were Steve Ruckle on trumpet, Ryan Heseltine on horn, Katie McCaffrey on trombone, and Gabe Stone on tuba (Gabe is Katie's teacher, and it was her first professional 'gig'). In addition to the modern instruments, the stage was strewn with assorted period brass instruments which would be used on various selections. At the start of the concert, the performers seemed to be missing, and an announcement was made asking if anyone in the audience might be able to play the instruments. Sitting in said audience, and struggling to keep their hands down, were Tra and Robert Wagenknecht, and Paul Schmidt.

Once the real performers were on stage, they started off with a reading of *The First Noel* (with chorus of *Noel Noel*), followed by the *Coventry Carol*; for these selections, Steve played flugelhorn. Gabe also demonstrated the shofar. Up next was a selection that paired two *Cradle Songs*, one of

them by Isaac Watts, and here Steve and Gabe switched to tenor and bass serpents, respectively, and Ryan played a natural horn while Katie used an older narrow bore trombone. Next, Gabe switched to ophicleide while the other three players returned to their modern instruments, and they performed *O Tannenbaum*. The ensemble picked up a set of instruments dating from the early 1900s, and used them to good effect in *Deck the Hall*. Steve switched to piccolo trumpet, and versions of *Ding Dong Merrily On High* and *Angels We Have Heard On High* were performed.



Steve Ruckle on trumpet, Ryan Heseltine on French Horn, Katie McCaffrey on trombone, and Gabe Stone on ophicleide at the Hennage Auditorium, December 27, 2018

Returning to the serpents, natural horn and vintage trombone, the group then played *Lo How a Rose e'er Blooming*, and then picked up their modern horns for a selection that merged *The Three Kings* and *We Three Kings*. Selecting a set of early American instruments, they performed *Joy to the World*, after which they returned to the serpents, natural horn and old 'bone for *In Dulci Jubilo*. The players returned to modern brasses to conclude the concert with *Silent Night* and *We Wish You a Merry Christmas*. The capacity audience showed their appreciation for a fine concert, and afterwards the Wagenknechts and Paul had a nice chat with Gabe before finally he had to get back 'in character' for the afternoon's repeat of the same program.

by Paul Schmidt

● Gabe Stone wrote in with some updates. He was of course for many years a performer on serpent at Colonial Williamsburg, both as a strolling musician on the streets as well as in the period restaurants there. But due to changes made by the management, those performances are now a thing of the past. Gabe has a 'day job' as a band and music teacher in a high school, and is also an adjunct music teacher at the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg. One of his tasks at the college is directing the Early Music Ensemble, and he sent a photo of some members of that group. Gabe also now runs the Colonial Entertainers Guild, a booking agency representing performers of 18th-century music and living history interpretations.



Gabe Stone on serpent, Cliff Williams on guitar, and David Gardner on violin at Cathedral of the Sacred Heart

Gabe also plays with another early music group called the Turnspit Dogs, comprised of Gabe on serpent, David Gardner on violin, and Cliff Williams on guitar; they also all sing. On December 23, 2018, they gave a concert titled *Christmas Through the Ages* at the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart in Richmond, Virginia. David played baroque violin, renaissance Vielle, pochette (dancing master's kit violin), and gemshorn, while Cliff played baroque guitar, recorder, and gemshorn. Gabe played serpent, baroque guitar, gemshorn, crumhorn, and hurdy-gurdy. On February 16, 2019, they played for the Folklore Society of Greater Washington at the Seekers Church in Washington, D.C. The *More Exciting News* section of this newsletter mentions some videos of this group. Members of the Folklore Society fondly recalled first hearing serpent when Phil Humphries came over with The Mellstock Band some years ago, and they were eager to continue their serpent appreciations courtesy of Gabe Stone and his group.

More photos can be seen here:
www.colonialentertainers.com, on the 'Gallery' page.



*Members of the Early Music Ensemble at the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg
Daniel Cho plays serpent in the group*

Gabe also wrote, "Also, I will be playing serpent with the Shenandoah Valley Bach Festival Orchestra this June 15 at Eastern Mennonite University in Harrisonburg, VA, performing Haydn's *Die Schöpfung* (*The Creation*)."

In Memoriam: Hans Rudolf Ischer-Protzen

News was received in February of the death of Hans Rudolf Ischer-Protzen in early January 2019. "Hansruedi" was a subscriber to this newsletter, and was involved in music teaching in Switzerland. He was a serpent enthusiast, and worked with at least one student at the Bernese University of Art and Music. He wrote about his mentorship of one such student in 2006, and this was published in this newsletter in the April 2006 edition. Requests went out to family and associates, but no more information or photos were forthcoming.



The Turnspit Dogs perform for the Folklore Society of Greater Washington

About the Organization

The Serpent Newsletter is distributed according to two regions, each with its own representative. All financial contributions and new subscriptions should be sent to the proper regional representative. Announcements, editorial items, comments and photographs should be sent to the editorial address.

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Suggested minimum contribution for non-European subscribers is \$20 for 4 issues (2 years); these subscriptions are required for individuals, and institutions that manage to receive the newsletter without contributions are doing so entirely at the discretion of the regional representative. As of April 2012, all newsletters distributed in the European region are electronic, not printed, and there is no subscription charge. European region readers may choose a printed hardcopy option, in which case rates for UK subscribers are £5 for 2 years, for Europe £6 or 10 Euros. For the time being, newsletters distributed elsewhere remain in printed form. Non-UK/EU contributions may be made using PayPal, sent to the email address ocleide@earthlink.net

More Exciting News

- Ophicleidist Wesley Procópio performs the solo line from a piece of Brazilian *choro* music by Irineu de Almeida in the YouTube video titled, “Ophicleide Solo - Qualquer 'Cousa' de Irineu de Almeida. Interpretação de Wesley Procópio”, or by using the direct URL www.youtube.com/watch?v=HwGM83gSkik.



*Wesley Procópio
plays choro on
ophicleide*

- Australian jazz musician James Morrison can be seen on YouTube having a go at the ophicleide, the URL is www.youtube.com/watch?v=0uuus2cXzRY&feature=youtu.be, or search for “James Morrison au Festival Cuivree 2014 a Limoux”.



James Morrison tries out an ophicleide

- English Bass Horns for Sale

Craig Kridel writes, “I have finally realized that no individual should own five English bass horns and, thus, have decided to sell two fine-playing, replica instruments that I own. If anyone is interested in purchasing either a Robb Stewart, four-key English bass horn (large bell) or a J.C. Sherman, four-key English bass horn (modeled on instruments at the Historic Bethlehem, PA Moravian Museum), please email me at ckridel@gmail.com and I will send photos and details.”

- The Cambridge Symphony Orchestra performed Mendelssohn’s *Midsummer Night’s Dream* on June 16th, 2018 at Kresge Auditorium at MIT in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The orchestra’s low brass section prepared a demonstration on YouTube of an excerpt from the *Wedding March* in which they first use modern instrumentation, then the instruments Mendelssohn actually wrote for (including alto trombone and ophicleide), and finally period appropriate instrumentation. The ophicleide used in the video is a Gautrot 10-key in Bb, built in the 1860’s. It was fully restored by Jim Engele of Osmun music. The URL is www.youtube.com/watch?v=43O1Kn57ln0&feature=youtu.be, or you can search for “Midsummer Night’s Dream - low brass excerpts with ophicleide”.



The low brass section of the Cambridge Symphony Orchestra includes an ophicleide for the Mendelssohn performance

- The Turnspit Dogs can be seen performing on some YouTube videos. www.youtube.com/watch?v=twODzdz57-A and www.youtube.com/watch?v=WM9-f_3koyI shows their performance, as Part 1 and Part 2, for the Folklore Society of Greater Washington on February 26 (or search for “Turnspit Dogs- just the Music 2/16/19 Part 1” and “Turnspit Dogs- just the Music 2/16/19 Part 2”). Lots of fine playing and singing, and of course Gabe’s serpent is prominent.

- Just a reminder that, at least in the USA, there are chapters of the American Recorder Society in most areas that are usually open to having serpentists join them.

Gallery from the Serpent Photo Archives

This page is dedicated to a randomly selected set of photos from the Serpent Newsletter archives. Few, if any, of these have appeared in the newsletter previously.



Andrew van der Beek with The Anaconda during the Serpent Workshop at Christopher Monk's Stock Farm in 1990



Participants at the 1987 Beauchamp House serpent workshop



Postcard from Andre Bissonnet's early music shop, Paris



Keith Ryder plays serpent at Cantigny Park, near Chicago, with Col. Webb's Band of Musick on September 10, 2019



Dick George and John Weber play an ophicleide duet at Dick's house in Libertyville, Illinois, September 7, 2003



John Weber tries "Patrick" the contrabass Squarpent, 2003