

Serpent Newsletter

P.O. Box 954 Mundelein, Illinois 60060 USA

Newsletter for Serpent Enthusiasts

September 27, 2005

A Note from the Editor

The Fall issue of the newsletter always seems to surprise me, sneaking up from the lull of Summer. I fully expected that this would be a small issue, but when I surveyed the articles and tidbits that arrived since April, there is no shortage for an edition of healthy size.

Doug Yeo wants you to know about his new email address, which is yeo@basstrombone.org, and about his new home recording project. For the latter, please refer to the New Materials section....I don't want to spoil the surprise right up front.

Cliff Bevan has a new website for his publishing endeavors, www.piccolopress.info, and yes, it does end with 'info' as opposed to com, org, etc. Cliff may also be reached by email at cliff@piccolopress.info.

I have put together a brief article on the neglected subject of 'monstre' ophicleides, and I hope you find it interesting; comments and constructive criticisms on this are welcome.

Don't forget to send money. Enjoy.

Paul Schmidt

New Materials

- Release of Michel Godard's new serpent CD, Rabih Abou Khalil's *Song for Sad Women* on the Enja label, has been delayed until February of 2006 according to the manufacturer. Michel previously wrote that on this recording he plays only serpent and no tuba. Michel has recently written to say that he has another CD coming out soon, *Les Cousins Germains*, on the Italian label CAMJazz. There will be two serpent and marimba duets on this album.

- Film composer Bernard Herrmann's score for the classic 1959 movie *Journey to the Center of the Earth* includes serpent, and happily the part was actually performed on the correct instrument by Herrmann regular Don Cristlieb. The soundtrack CD is available from Verese Sarabande # VSD-5849, and the movie is also available on video. The Serpent is very audible as a sound effect in several scenes; DVD chapter 29 (at 1 hour 34 minutes) *The Mushroom Forest* (as iguana/dimetrodon), chapter 36 (1:55) *The Way Up*, and chapter 38 (2:00) *Monsters & Earthquakes* (this last scene has the most serpent playing, whenever the giant red lizard menaces the company). The movie starred James Mason, Pat Boone, and was directed by Henry Levin.

- Harry Woodhouse published his book *The Serpent* in mid-2003, and he writes that the initial printing has sold out. He has just ordered another printing, and will happily send you a copy if you contact him at harry@woodhou.freeseve.co.uk. Harry reminds us that this is a 31 page lighthearted account of the serpent's history and use. It costs £4 plus postage.

- It's a mystery how he does it, but Chris Gutteridge has turned up another movie that includes the serpent, Ken Russell's 1971 *The Devils*. Based on Aldous Huxley's book *The Devils of Loudun*, the film stars Oliver Reed and Vanessa Redgrave, and tells the true story of the famous exorcisms at the Ursuline convent in the French town of Loudun. Cardinal Richelieu and King Louis XIII wish to break the ability of any independent towns to defend themselves against their influence, but Loudun is run by strong church leader Father Grandier, who opposes Richelieu's plans. Agents of the cardinal conspire to frame Grandier as a witch and have him executed. The politics of 17th century France are central to the story, which is handled by the film makers as a mixture of drama, horror, camp and comedy. Peter Maxwell Davies provided incidental music with a modern flavor, but all scenes that have music making in them feature David Munrow and The Early Music Consort of London. George Lawn, who played

in the on-screen band, has provided the information that serpentist and serpent maker Christopher Monk was also in the band, albeit under a cloak and unrecognizable. The serpent is very audible and sometimes visible in two scenes; (at about 6 minutes into the film) with a walking band playing the *Dies Irae* as Oliver Reed's character Father Grandier leads a funeral procession through town, and (at about 1 hour 30 minutes) during Grandier's execution.

- Doug Yeo has produced a marvelous recording of Cliff Bevan's infamous arrangement of the Tchaikovsky *1812 Overture*. This was basically a home project using computer multi-track software, and it overlays 26 different serpent performances into the whole. Doug uses his Keith Rogers built Monk serpent and the Christopher Monk built contrabass serpent "George". The tracks consist of eight solo serpent parts, eight tutti serpent parts, 10 contrabass serpent parts, plus recorded church bells and three batteries of real cannon. Doug did this as a labor of love, and as a gift for Cliff. Cliff has given permission for the recording to be available free on Doug's website at www.yeodoug.com/1812.html as an MP3 download of about 8.2MB. Doug realizes that no performance can rival the original performance in London in 1990, but for the first time all notes can be heard clearly, and the real cannon and bells, while certainly without the charm of party balloons and pins, really kick the overall sound up several notches.



Almondbury's All Saints church - original home of the of the Anaconda

- Thanks to a tip from Phil Humphries during the serpentarium, we now know about two more movies that include some serpent. The 1997 'Channel Four Films' movie of Thomas Hardy's *The Woodlanders*, including Phil playing as part of The Mellstock Band, stars Rufus Sewell and Emily Woof, and is directed by Phil Agland. The serpent is audible but not visible in two brief scenes; at about 19 minutes into the film during the dinner party at Giles' home (DVD chapter 3) playing *Enrico*, and at about 46 minutes at the post-honeymoon party (DVD chapter 7) playing *Redolia Polka*. This video is available in Europe and the States. The other title is *Casanova*, a 2005 BBC production starring Peter O'Toole with David Tennant and

Laura Fraser, and directed by Sheree Folkson. The serpent is present in one scene at about 35 minutes into the film during the first of the three episodes (it was a TV mini-series). A brief glimpse of that scene appears at the start of the second episode. Unfortunately the ball room scenes elsewhere in the film use modern instruments. The video is available only in the UK as BBC/Warner Vision International #5046678370-2, and it is PAL Region 2 only, making it incompatible with TVs elsewhere. Thanks to Nigel Nathan for obtaining a copy to verify the presence of serpent.

- Doug Yeo wrote to say that Cliff Bevan recorded the ophicleide parts for a recent recording by the Grimethorpe Colliery Band. Cliff also emailed to say that the CD is titled *The History of Brass Band Music: The Early Years 1850-1920*, with the famous band being directed by Elgar Howarth. This is not to be confused with the other similarly named CDs in this series. Cliff plays on the first two tracks, *Yorkshire Waltzes* by Enderby Jackson, where the ophicleide is the only instrument playing the bass part, and Paul Jean-Jacques Lacombe's *Quadrille*, arranged by Arban. In the later, the bass part is played by both the ophicleide and an E flat tuba; the two instruments are sometime in unison, at other times divisi. The CD is on the Doyen label, # DOY CD162, and is available from the Grimethorpe website (www.grimethorpeband.com) and from Doyen's distributor World of Brass (www.worldofbrass.com). Cliff adds that these are pieces of historical significance, not previously recorded, and it is great that they are realized now by such a fine band; for those outside the brass band arena, Grimethorpe is the band that played in the movie *Brassed Off*.

- As previously mentioned in this newsletter, Doug Yeo's edition of the *Divertimento in B flat*, attributed to Haydn, has been published by Sarastro Music in London (# SAR0110.2). This work, variously attributed to Haydn, Pleyel and others, also goes by the name *Chorale St. Antoni*, as it includes that tune as its second movement. The divertimento is well known among serpentists for being a recognizable and popular classical work that counts the serpent in its cast of specified instruments; the music is scored for two oboes, two horns, three bassoons and serpent. This is both a performing edition and a scholarly one, and includes both a full score and parts in clear computer set layout. Doug includes an incredible ten pages of notes, detailing his sources, the issue of original authorship, performance notes, and itemized notes on the fine points of this edition. The overall layout is excellent and the music very readable, with my only quibble being the noticeable small distortions of the printing, due most likely to the originals being printed by inkjet printer....a common issue with micropublishers. Sarastro Music, PO Box 17096, London, SW15 1ZT, England, email (info@sarastro.com), website (www.sarastro.com) reviewed by Paul Schmidt

Getting Serpents

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

Christopher Monk
Instruments
(Keith & Kathryn Rogers)
Perkwood
Station Road
Yaxham
Norfolk NR19 1RD
England

Phone & fax:
+44 (0)1362 691198
www.jeremywest.co.uk/ cmi.html
<ktwoagain@btopenworld.com>

(serpents & historical oboes)

[for cornetts, contact Jeremy West at
<j.west@ic.ac.uk>]

David Harding
56 Netherton Road
Appleton
ABINGDON
Oxon. OX13 5JZ
England

Phone: +44 (0)1865 863673

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

Robb Stewart Brass Instruments
140 E. Santa Clara St. #18
Arcadia, CA 91006
USA

Phone: 626-447-1904
<oldbrass@altrionet.com>

(ophicleides, bass horns)

Nicholas Perry
20 Queen Street
St. Albans
Hertfordshire AL3 4PJ
England

Phone: +44 (0)1727 866080
(early cimbasso, bass horns)

Derek Farnell
82 Crumpsall Lane
Manchester M8 5SG
England

Phone: +44 (0)1617 407778
(ophicleides)

Matthias Wetter
Musikinstrumentenbau
CH-8475 Ossingen
Switzerland

Phone: 49 (0) 5231 73184
<wetter.m@bluewin.ch>
(he speaks no English)

(alphorns and serpents)



Paul Schmidt playing ophicleide with the 1st Brigade Band

Workshops

- *Report on the 2005 Serpentarium*

The 2005 Serpentarium was held from Friday, May 27, through Monday, June 30, 2005 at Boswedden House, Cape Cornwall, England. Hosting again was Nigel Nathan and his partner Thelma Giffiths.

Early arrivals on Thursday were Shirley Hopkins-Civil, Paul Schmidt, Christopher Baines and his wife Clare. Nigel joined this quartet for dinner and the obligatory beers at the excellent Wellington Hotel in nearby St. Just-in-Penwith.

On Friday morning, Paul, Shirley, Chris and Clare visited two nearby historical tin mines. Fortunately, the famous 165 year old Levant Beam Engine, a restored walking beam steam engine formerly used for pumping at one of the mines, was operating that day. The mine also had the apparently bottomless shafts exposed behind gratings, and the group had fun peering down the 1740 foot deep holes. After lunch at the adjoining Geavor mine, all returned to Boswedden House for the start of the Serpentarium.

Present at this year's event were Chris Gutteridge, Chris Baines, John Weber (USA), Michele Lomas, Murray and Patsy Campbell, Nigel Nathan, Paul Schmidt (USA), Phil Humphries, Shirley Hopkins-Civil, and Wik Bohdanowicz; Keith Rogers had expected to attend but sent his regrets. Also in attendance were non-combatants Clare Baines, Michael and Adam Lomas, Thelma and Alana Griffiths, Anita Boorman (with Phil), and Anja Spackman (with Wik). There were no participants from the continent this year.

In the evening, Phil lead the players in readings of *With Cat-Like-Tread* from *The Pirates of Penzance*, a nod to the proximity of that town, Handel's *March in Scipio*, *British Grenadiers*, and *Old Father Thames*, all four arranged for serpents by Cliff Bevan.

Saturday morning, after a wonderful home cooked breakfast, the group started to work on more substantial pieces. These included Simon Proctor's *Amherst Suite* and Bucalosi's *Hunting Scene* (arr. John Weber). Lunch followed, and participants took walks along the cliffs over the Atlantic Ocean to aid the digestion. Phil, John and Paul met early after the walk to read through Phil's arrangement of the *West Side Story* suite, which includes *I Feel Pretty*, *Maria*, and *Officer Krupke*.

The afternoon session introduced the Bevan arrangement of the *1812 Overture* for eight serpents. As a sort of pre-dinner aperitif, the group read through more of Bevan's *Marches for 4* book, including *El Abanico*, *Bridal Chorus from Lohengrin*, *British Grenadiers*, *Entry of the Gipsies from The Two Pigeons*, *Entry of the Toreadors*, and *Huntsmen's Chorus from Der Freischutz*. After a fine dinner, Ferrabosco's *Di Sei Bassi* was tried, followed by some trio and quartet playing with seven participants



*“O Serpent” players, L-R:
Doug Yeo, Craig Kridel, Steve Silverstein*

dividing into separate rooms. A lengthy session of beer drinking and serpent shop talk and the spontaneous singing of Monty Python and Tom Lehrer songs followed until about midnight. Thanks to Nigel for bringing in, from the village, a small keg of Cornish Blonde Ale accompanied by two large kegs of Cornish Knocker Ale.

On Sunday, after breakfast, the group warmed up with *Teddy Bear’s Picnic*, after which serious rehearsal of the *Amherst Suite* and *Old Father Thames* commenced. After lunch and more local scenic walks, concert rehearsal continued until the evening’s beer relaxation. At mid-day, with fine clear weather outside, the participants gathered on the lawn for the traditional group photo. Later on, Murray and Patsy had to depart due to other commitments.

Monday morning, the players ran a final rehearsal of the concert. After lunch, the large dining hall swelled with local residents who had been drawn in by various enticements courtesy of Nigel (he never said what those were). For this crowd, the players performed the traditional Grand Final Concert. The program was *Baby Elephant Walk, 1812 Overture, Teddy Bear’s Picnic, Old Father Thames, Hunting Scene, Amherst Suite*, with an encore of *With Cat-Like Tread*. If there had been a proscenium, flowers might have been thrown onto it.

Several players needed to depart, so those participants staying over the night either went to the cliffs for a picnic dinner, or walked into the village for the excellent steaks for which the Wellington is justly famous. Naturally, the remaining beer was consumed later on that evening, and another successful Serpentarium came to a close.

by Paul Schmidt

- *Report on the 2005 Early Brass Festival*

The Historic Brass Society’s 21st Annual Early Brass Festival: 19th Century Brass: A World of Transition, was

held at Bennington College in Bennington, Vermont, from July 8 through 10, 2005, in cooperation with Amherst Early Music. We were awash in serpents and ophicleides!

Arriving Friday afternoon at the Commons on the college campus, we were given a printed program for the weekend. As our President, Jeff Nussbaum, put it “everything is correct except the locations.” It made no difference, as this was an excellent meeting which began for us at later that afternoon with the presentation of the first paper by Susan Kinne, *Francis Harvey ‘Saxie’ Pike*. Pike was a fifer and drum major with the Manchester (NH) Cornet Band before and after the Civil War, and leader of several Federal bands during the war. He was well known for his very tall hat and his five foot long baton, which, during one parade, he threw into the air, twirling over a high American flag, catching it without missing a step. Bob Eliason, one of our ophicleidists as well as tubist, then presented a program, *Presentation E-Flat Keyed Bugles from the Nineteenth Century*, showing pictures of several of these bugles and the engravings on each. He discussed to whom and why these quite elaborately decorated instruments were presented. The last speaker in this group was Jari Villanueva discussing and playing bugle calls used during the Civil War. He ended with the playing of *Taps*.

After dinner in the college cafeteria – the food was plentiful and delicious – we walked to the other end of campus to a small auditorium where Jari Villanueva and his The Federal City Brass Band gave a concert of mid-nineteenth century music with Ralph Dudgeon on keyed bugle as soloist.

Saturday morning’s events began with a paper/recital by Ralph Dudgeon. Ralph overcame technical difficulties with his PowerPoint presentation to tell us about keyed bugle construction and performed several works on keyed bugle with Edward Moore, a colleague from SUNY Cortland, at the piano. Following was Licia Sirch of Milan, Italy, an inveterate picture taker throughout the festival, who presented a paper on Ponchielli’s heretofore largely unknown music for band, using the computer to present several musical excerpts of his compositions.

Afterwards, those of us playing in the Festival Brass Band met in a large hall for rehearsal. After finding instruments for everyone – Henry “Dr. Hank” Meredith, our conductor, having brought a van full, really full, of 19th century brass instruments for those who did not bring one – we launched into run-throughs of Sousa’s *The Thunderer*, followed by *The Universal Judgment* by Camille De Nardis. Most but not all of the parts for this were in Dr. Hank’s arrangement, but all fit together. Glorious!

Suddenly it was lunch time which was bolted down to get to the paper sessions. The first was given by Robert (BAHB) Civiletti, *Historic Journey of the Tongue-Controlled Embouchure*. He demonstrated his very high playing technique. Don Johnson then gave a talk on *The History of the J. W. Pepper Company from 1875-1900*.

At mid-afternoon, the serpent and ophicleide players met for an informal playing session. A large room at the Commons was commandeered for this gathering of six serpents and two ophicleides. The serpentists were Leonard Byrne, Brian Cardell, Laura Conrad, Robert Wagenknecht, Tra Wagenknecht, and John Weber. Ophicleide players were Bob Eliason and Jon Hall. Several people had brought suitable music, so we played and played until the paper session began in the late afternoon. That session began with a lecture/performance by Eb cornetist, Kenneth Austin. He was accompanied by Richard Cherry who served very well indeed as the Festival pianist. Doug Hedwig and Richard Cherry then presented a lecture/program, *The Posthorn in Art Music of the 18th and 19th centuries*, using several different instruments.

After dinner Flora Newberry and her Newberry's Victorian Cornet Band gave a concert. Guest conductor for several numbers was Henry Meredith in top hat and formal coat. Highlights were the use of an echo cornet in *The Indian Question* by Calixa Lavalée and a B flat cornet duet, *Fly Little Bird* by Franz Abt. At the conclusion of the concert we all adjourned to the College Café for the annual pizza party. Lots of pizza, lots of beer, wine, soft drinks, and much conversation consumed the rest of the evening.

Sunday morning we heard papers by Stewart Carter speaking on makers' construction techniques concerning the cornetto in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. X-rays of the "kerfs" and "nicks" which helped in bending the wood were most interesting. He was followed by Sabine Klaus talking about *German-American Relationships -- Immigration and Trade Factors in American Brass Instruments during the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries*.

After Klaus's presentation, Jeff Nussbaum held an H. B. S. membership meeting. A special presentation gave us lots of information on the 2006 Early Brass Festival to be held in Northfield, Minnesota, from Thursday, July 27 through Wednesday, August 2. It will be a joint conference held by the International Society for the Promotion and Investigation of Wind Band Music and the Historic Brass Society. The theme of the conference will be *Music Away from Home: Wind Music as Cultural Identification*. A special trip to the National Music Museum in Vermillion, South Dakota is planned.

We then moved to the large hall for the final rehearsal of the Festival Brass Band before this afternoon's concluding concert. Some of those who attended the first rehearsal were no longer there and others had come. Again there was time for one run through of our music before lunch.

After lunch we were treated to an outstanding performance by an ophicleidist who had just joined us, David Loucky, Professor of Trombone and Euphonium at Middle Tennessee State University. He was accompanied by Richard Cherry. Loucky played works by Giuseppe

Cappelli based on themes from operas by 19th century composers.

The concluding concert featured natural trumpets, solos by several of our paper/recital/concert presenters including David Loucky, and ending with the Festival Brass Band. Due to space limitations, the band stood to play its two numbers. David Loucky joined the ophicleides in the very small balcony above the main body of the band. Practically the whole audience got up to be a member of the band, but there was still sufficient audience left to offer rousing applause as *The Universal Judgment* ended the Festival. As this reporter left the building to return some instruments to the car, she stopped to talk to a local woman who had come out to hear the concert. Our concert-goer was overwhelmed. EBF was certainly welcome in Bennington as far as she was concerned.

After the concert concluded John Weber, Robert Wagenknecht, and David Loucky decided to stay and play ophicleide trios, so several of us were treated to an extra half hour of music making while Henry Meredith packed up his many instruments. John Weber and the Wagenknechts ended the day with dinner at a local restaurant and a stroll down one of the main streets to look at some of the artistically and fantastically decorated life-size moose highlighting Bennington's summer Moosefest.

submitted by Tra Wagenknecht

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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Serpentarium participants

*Back row, L-R: John Weber, Christopher Baines, Chris Gutteridge, Shirley Hopkins-Civil, Nigel Nathan, Michele Lomas
Front row, L-R: Murray Campbell, Paul Schmidt, Patsy Campbell, Phil Humphries, Wik Bohdonowicz*

Where Serpent Gather

- Nick Byrne in Australia writes that his recently launched website, www.ophicleide.com, has had over 13,000 hits since its inception last year. He is also well underway on his ophicleide recording project with Melba Recordings, an Australian label with international distribution that specializes in eclectic repertoire. The project will be in two parts, the first sessions being for ophicleide with piano accompaniment, and the later sessions being with chamber orchestra. Nick is hoping for all extant ophicleide solo music to be included, along with other representative works and showpiece transcriptions. The CD is due out in early 2006, so watch his website for news. Nick also premiered the Demerssemman *Introduction and Polonaise for Ophicleide and Strings* (1850?) at Angel Place on May 3 of this year, as part of the Sydney Symphony's Discovery series, a very significant event in the recent history of the instrument.
- On June 10, Doug Yeo presented a paper at the Great American Brass Band Festival History Conference, held in Danville, Kentucky. The conference featured papers on great brass soloists of the past, with Doug's focusing on the use of the serpent and ophicleide in brass bands, with particular attention given to the last great ophicleide player, namely Sam Hughes, whose performances with the

Cyfarthia Band of Wales are legendary. Following this lecture, participants adjourned outdoors for a lunchtime concert by the Athena Brass Band, directed by Anita Cocker Hunt. The band accompanied Doug, who played *O Ruddier Than the Cherry* from *Acis and Galatea*, in tribute to Sam Hughes who championed the piece as an ophicleide solo. Doug's arrangement of this piece is available directly from him (see A Note From the Editor for Doug's new email address).

- Erhard Schwartz wrote to pass on some ophicleide news from Germany. Back in 2003, Erhard and horn player Steffan Launer founded the ensemble 'Passion des Cuivres'. The group consists mainly of two cornets, French horn, trombone and ophicleide. After a month of hard work in preparing the group, the well known conductor Nikolaus Harnoncourt heard them, with the result that they received the "Harnoncourt Award" in February of this year. The group's website is located at www.passion-cuivres.com. In October of this year, Erhard will record with the Bayrischer Rundfunk under the baton of Harnoncourt, playing *Paradies und Peri* by Robert Schumann. Erhard also reports that he has now been playing his reproduction ophicleide for about one and a half years, and he sees no reason to ever play another ophicleide. It is very easy to play in different tunings from A-430 through 445 Hz, and intonation problems are minimal and easily dealt with.

Anyone interested in contacting the maker of Erhard's instrument may contact him at Erhard.Schwartz@t-online.de

- As part of the Boston Symphony's summer series at Tanglewood, a 'Tanglewood on Parade' event was held on July 25. This consisted of a full day's series of performances by Fellows of the Tanglewood Music Center and players of the Boston Symphony. Doug Yeo organized a harmonie ensemble to play Bernhard Heinrick Crusell's arrangement (c1800) of Beethoven's *Septet Op. 20*. The arrangement for 11 winds including serpent, long lost and retitled *Grand Serenade after the Septet, Op. 20*, was recently edited and published by Mark Rogers, director of publications for Southern Music Company. The performance in Seiji Ozawa Hall at Tanglewood was enthusiastically received by a capacity crowd.
- Craig Kridel, Steven Silverstein and Douglas Yeo will be participating in the annual New York "P.D.Q. Bach" concerts, scheduled for December 27 through 29 at Symphony Space. They will be performing *O Serpent*, written by P.D.Q. Bach and discovered by Peter Schickele for the 1989 Serpent Festival, where it was premiered by the original London Serpent Trio plus an ad-hoc group of three male singers. This promises to be a very unusual event in what will already be an off-the-wall series of concerts.
- Paul Schmidt has been performing on ophicleide as part of the summer concerts by The First Brigade Band, a civil war brass band. Director Dan Woolpert's arrangement of *Forgotten Foster for Ophicleide* was performed years ago by another player, using the band's own C ophicleide. With



Early Brass Festival ophicleide participants, L-R: John Weber, Robert Wagenknecht, David Loucky

that player no longer playing with the band on a regular basis, the piece could not be programmed until this year. The arrangement is a medley of several tunes written in the composer's early career and mostly unfamiliar to modern audiences. Part of the group's outdoor concerts is a section demonstrating the various types of horns used during that period. The ophicleide starts this section, being introduced as an instrument that was fading away during the era of the great American conflict. Paul performs using his own B flat instrument, originally purchased from the band's founder decades ago.

- Doug Yeo, playing ophicleide, took part in a recording session for a soundtrack for a short film about band leader Francis Johnson (1792-1844). The film will be shown at the New York Historical Society in New York City as part of a forthcoming exhibition on slavery in New York state. Peter Bloom arranged several of Johnson's compositions, including *Recognition March*, *Johnson's March*, *Philadelphia Firemen's Cotillion* and *The Orphan's Cotillion*. The other performers were Peter Bloom on flute, Vincent Monaco on cornet, and Judy Bedford on bassoon. (editor's note: For more keyed brass music by Francis Johnson, look no further than The Chestnut Brass Company's CD *Music of Francis Johnson*.)

• The thirteenth annual serpent get-together in Henrico County, Virginia, occurred on Saturday, May 28, 2005. Connie Palmer was again our hostess. Also attending were Bob and Merrilee Pallansch, Rick and Iris Schwartz, Robert and Tra Wagenknecht, and Lloyd Farrar. We used a number of early instruments to read music of the Renaissance and of the late nineteenth century. Many of the latter were works available online from the Library of Congress. We had three serpents, one each soprano and alto recorders, a kortholt, two ophicleides, and one each nineteenth century Bb cornet and Eb valve trombone. Before our barbecue dinner Robert Wagenknecht toasted the memory of the father of these yearly meetings, Phil Palmer. Our dinner was completed with a story told by Merrilee Pallansch. On Sunday morning we enjoyed brunch at a local restaurant.

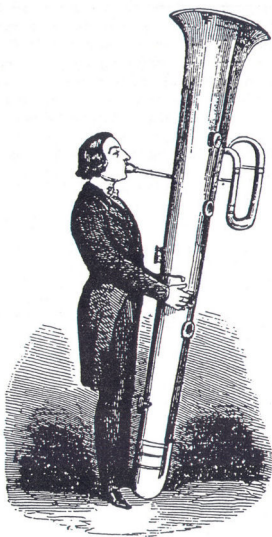
submitted by Tra Wagenknecht

- After attending the Serpentarium, Paul Schmidt spent several days on the continent before returning to England to visit with Simon Proctor. On Sunday, June 5, Simon was scheduled to play the piano accompaniments for a violin recital in the city of Maidstone. Simon suggested that Paul bring his serpent in case it might come in handy for a demonstration. The recital organizers readily agreed, and after the recital Paul gave a presentation on the serpent and played a couple tunes. Paul also demonstrated the Sqworm, which just happened to be in the case. The violinists were attentive and seemed to find this unexpected addition to their interest and enjoyment.

Monstre Ophicleides

by Paul Schmidt

I have long wondered about the accuracy of historical accounts of contrabass, or 'monstre', ophicleides. The only such instrument known to me was the Robb Stewart reproduction made for Phil Palmer, and I am lucky enough to have a small amount of experience playing that example. I have also heard of a duplicate instrument made for an owner unknown to me and unreported in serpent circles. I was aware that Robb had scaled up one of his reproductions in C, and had also used the bell from a modern tuba in its construction. So much for reproductions, but what did the original monstres look like, what key were they in, and how big were they really?



*Monstre ophicleides:
size comparison (L-R)
Prospère's Couturier in CC (?),
the MIM Monstre in E flat,
normal bass ophicleide*



The books all reprint a famous engraving of a monstre, often incorrectly labeled as a regular bass ophicleide. Doug Yeo helpfully pointed out that this depiction was originally printed in a newspaper article about a specific performance, and he provided a facsimile of the original engraving and article of Jean Prospère holding a Monstre as it appeared in the Illustrated London News, June 24, 1843 (see above). Further inquiries resulted in many statements questioning the key of that instrument and whether it was drawn accurately in terms of scale.

Recently, I visited the Musical Instrument Museum (MIM) in Brussels, Belgium, which reportedly had some sort of large ophicleide in its collection, labeled as a monstre. Was this a 'real' monstre, or just a smaller instrument that was called monstre because of its snake head bell (similar to that on a buccin)? Furthermore, how big was it relative to the other examples, and what was its key? The curator kindly allowed me to photograph the instrument, graciously allowed me to reproduce the museum's official photo of same in this newsletter and the website, and finally produced a photocopy of the museum's catalog pages for this unique horn (MIM # 1248). Some odd features include the snake head bell, the

bocal which turns two and a half times around the two parallel branches that form the body of the instrument, the overall green paint finish, and the unconventional key arrangement for the nine tone holes.

To answer my questions about these monsters, I started with the MIM example. The catalog states that "The bass ophicleide in E flat that is the object of this article is a transposing instrument producing actual pitches a major sixth (9 half steps) below the written note, but whose scale limits itself customarily to the lowest written note (F#) or, - what sometimes occurs, when one treats it as a non-transposing instrument, notating the desired sound directly, - to (AA).... - Total standing length, from the opening of bell until the bottom of the bow, 1m48 (58.25)". The Monstre in E-flat should be producing a fundamental, not counting the bell note produced when the first key is closed, of E-flat (actually EE-flat, or the E-flat below the fourth ledger line below the bottom of the bass staff). To allow for 19th C tuning, this might be an E or even an F by modern standards.

Starting with only one known dimension, the catalog's statement that the measurement from the end of the bell to the bottom of the bow is 58.25", I scaled the detailed photos of the instrument that I took during my visit, and have been able to extrapolate the following dimensions:

Bottom bow to first hole (normally open) = 40.75"
 Bottom bow to top of second tube/down tube = 40.75"
 Bocal spiral, across diameter from bore centers, 8" each (total of 2.5 complete circles)
 Total spiral length, based on $(2 \pi r)$ per circle = 62.5"
 Bocal from end of spiral to mouthpiece receiver = 19"

Accumulated total bore to bell = 180.5"
 Accumulated total bore to first hole = 163"

Applying the formula:

$$F = S / (L * 2)$$

Where F is frequency in Hz
 S is the speed of sound at sea level, assuming 70°F (13526.5 inches/sec)
 L is the bore length in inches (this formula assumes an open end tube, not a closed/stopped tube)

Remembering that the measured tube length must be doubled in the calculation, since only a half-wavelength resides in the open ended resonating bore, the frequency with the first hole open should be approximately $13526.5/326 = 41.49\text{Hz}$, and the frequency with the first hole closed should be approximately $13526.5/361 = 37.46\text{Hz}$.

Assuming A = 440 and equal temperament, the frequency without the bell corresponds to a sharp E; I have not attempted to reconcile the bell note, as I am less sure of exactly where the bell ends acoustically in the oddly shaped

head. This puts the Monstre Ophicleide at a pitch corresponding to the assumptions based on the difference between historical and modern tunings, in other words at E flat. Also, errors in scaling the photograph may account for a slightly short bore length used for the calculations. As such, I conclude that this unique example of the ophicleide family is NOT mislabeled (as some have suggested) and is in fact a true E-flat Monstre.

As a sort of control for my calculation methodology, I have also scaled a photo of Robb Stewart's modern reproduction Monstre, also in E-flat. As I no longer have access to this instrument, I have used the only reliable object of known length that is close to the instrument in the photo, namely the top of my knee to the floor in my seated position. Based on this, I have extrapolated that the Stewart Monstre is 170.8" to the open first hole, or 194" to the end of the bell; because this instrument has such a large bell flare, the actual acoustic length is probably considerably shorter. The open hole length gives a fundamental of 39.6Hz, directly in between E-flat and E, assuming A=440. Since the Stewart instrument's pitch is known to be modern E flat, this reinforces both my methodology and my assumption that the MIM Monstre is high pitched, which is in accordance with other instruments of the period.



*The MIM Monstre Ophicleide in E flat
Photo reprinted by permission from the
Musical Instrument Museum, Brussels*

Finally, I have revisited the Prospère engraving, described in the original newspaper article as being both accurately drawn, and representing an instrument measured to be 7 French *piéd* tall. This converts to roughly 90" from top of the bell to the bottom bow where it meets the floor. Scaling the drawing, this puts M. Prospère at about 5 feet and 9" standing height, adding confidence that the overall instrument height is correct as reported. Extrapolating the instrument's dimensions from the engraving, it comes to about 187" to the first hole, or about a D, assuming A=440. Applying the same assumptions about high pitch to this instrument, and taking it on faith that the engraving and historical accounts are accurate, this makes Prospère's Monstre look like an ophicleide in contrabass C, quite reasonable when considering that most normal bass ophicleides are pitched in C. *Note: Prospère's instrument was reportedly made specially for the Birmingham Festival of 1834 by the firm of Couturier in Lyon, France.* The Prospère Monstre, along with the MIM example, are truly some of the most unique brass instruments ever made; Berlioz called them 'extremely rare'. And, as both clearly are contrabass instruments, being pitched well below the normal bass ophicleides, they deserve the title 'Monstre'.

P.S. Who was this guy Prospère anyhow? A quick bit of research found that Jean Prospère Guivier first joined a French military band and later became a horn student at the Paris Conservatoire. In the 1830s he took up the ophicleide, playing with Jullien's orchestra, and a decade later moved to London. In 1853, Samuel Hughes took over the position Prospère had occupied in the orchestra, starting a new legacy as the leading light in English ophicleide playing for the next forty years.

More Exciting News

- Doug Yeo has written a series of articles published by the British publication *The Brass Herald* (www.thebrassherald.com); the series is part of their historical instrument section. As mentioned in the last edition of this newsletter, the first installment was titled *Exploring the Serpent and Ophicleide* (Issue 7, 2005). The latest in the May-July edition was titled *The Buccin: A Trombone With a Serious Bite* (Issue 8). The series will conclude with Doug's article *Some Clarity About the Cimbasso* in Issue 9. Photos and commentary on these articles can be found at Doug's website www.yeodoug.com.
- Randy Cabell wrote to tell about the recent purchase of five new reproduction OTS (Over-the-Shoulder) Saxhorns from Robb Stewart for use with the Stonewall Brigade Band, which Randy has sponsored so generously. The reproductions will be made in A=440 to make them compatible with modern instruments. The band does have several antique OTS horns, but they are in such poor condition that the band chose not to restore them.



*Robb Stewart's Monstre Ophicleide in E flat
As played by Paul Schmidt (note "George"
the contrabass serpent behind)*

- Laura Conrad missed the initial calling for serpent poetry, but was suddenly inspired to submit the following:

A young serpent player named Joan
Tried to teach her C serpent to moan.
As she blew in the top,
All she got was a pop.
So she went for a heart-rending groan.

- For sale: circa 1993 Monk serpent, like new, little use, great harmonic series, \$2000. Contact Alan Wieder at alanwieder@earthlink.net

- Michel Godard wrote that he is working in France with Serge Delmas, a maker of cornets, to manufacture a facsimile of a serpent from the Musée de la Musique. Michel feels that this is a very good original, albeit an anonymous one, probably from the 18th century. He plans to write about it once he has a chance to work with the completed instrument.
- On the subject of people who make serpents, Michel also mentioned that Matthias Wetter has made some examples recently. Matthias is a well known alphorn maker, and Michel estimates that he has made perhaps 7 or 8 serpents. Although the established serpent makers still provide their well known product, it is interesting to hear about another maker on the scene. It is also interesting that no other news of these instruments has been heard through the usual channels. Part of this may be that he reportedly cannot communicate in English, and the majority of serpent players worldwide are native to that language. Since Wetter is apparently not a one-off maker, his contact information has been added to the list of makers in the Getting Serpents section of this newsletter.
- The London Serpent Trio (LST) has stepped up their publicity efforts lately, moving from word-of-mouth advertising to more widespread tactics. These include new brochures and a revamped website, www.whitecottagewebsites.co.uk/lst/. Here may be seen photos and mini-biographies of the group and other useful information.
- While you are visiting Doug Yeo's *1812 Overture* webpage to download the MP3 file, don't forget to read the copious notes that he put together. He tells the story of how the piece came to be used for serpents, how it was first performed, its use since, and the odyssey he went through to make the recording. Also included are some special photos that do not appear elsewhere.
- A frequent lecturer at Boston's Museum of Fine Arts, Doug recently gave a lunchtime talk and demonstration of various forms of trombones in the museum's collection. Using the MFA's Tabard buccin as a jumping off point, Doug's talk also featured his playing instruments from his personal collection, including bass sackbut, a rare Conn BB flat contrabass trombone and his newly acquired Sautermeister buccin (c1825), recently restored by James Becker of Osmun Music in Arlington, Massachusetts.
- Early Music Chicago is a recently formed organization dedicated to coordinating the efforts of early musicians and groups in the greater Chicago area, a.k.a. "Chicagoland". Their large and growing website (<http://earlymusicchicago.org>) includes searchable pages on various early instruments, including serpent and ophicleide, and they have happily listed our newsletter, website and area serpentists, including Paul Schmidt.