



Serpent Newsletter

P.O. Box 954 Mundelein, Illinois 60060 USA

Newsletter for Serpent Enthusiasts

September 27, 2006

A Note from the Editor

After a couple of larger than usual newsletter issues over the last year, this edition seems rather light weight. There was some need to economize the number of pages due to shortage of funds, resulting in turn from a lack of recent donations from readers. The usual sections are still here, but the number of entries was vetted and those appearing were shortened somewhat. With so many exciting things happening in the serpent universe, I hope that the Spring issue can be back to normal size (or better), but that will depend primarily on readers putting those checks in the mail.

Doug Yeo has been getting deluged with spam emails, and has cancelled one of his primary email addresses, yeo@basstrombone.org. If you are already a regular correspondent with Doug, he will have given you other contact information; otherwise it is recommended that future online correspondence be done via the contact form on his website, www.yeodoug.com/contact.html. Please honor his request!

I have done something this issue that I have wanted to do for a while now, but never remembered until it was too late...produce a custom postage stamp for mailing the newsletter, bearing an image of serpent significance. While I have insisted, ever since becoming editor, that the newsletter be self sustaining (at least for printing and mailing expenses), I have chipped in to cover the extra charges associated with such special stamps. Unfortunately, I can only have them made for use in the USA, so those distributed by Nigel in Europe will not bear such postage. To readers elsewhere, please take a look at your mailing envelope before you throw it away!

Finally, I learned recently that serpent maker David Harding's wife had passed away in late Spring. I had met Erica on two occasions, and I know that we all would like to extend best wishes and condolences to David.

Paul Schmidt

Workshops

- 2007 Serpentarium

Nigel Nathan has announced the preliminary details of the next Serpentarium. It will be held over the late Spring Break Holiday (Whitsun Weekend) from May 25 through 28. Andy Lamb at Oxford has generously agreed to host this time, so we will give Nigel a break for a change and simultaneously try out a new, more centralized location. Phil Humphries of the London Serpent Trio and Mellstock Band will once again lead the workshop. The Bate Collection of Musical Instruments (Museum) will be the actual hosting location, with Faculty of Music rooms available for meetings, rehearsals and practice, and seminar rooms will be available for public displays. The Bate Collection Room and Gallery will also be used for a reception and possibly other parts of the event. The Holywell Music Room is also being made available for the gala concert, if needed.

Unlike previous Serpentariums in Cape Cornwall, but like the earlier ones in Lacock, lodging and accommodations will be in different locations around town, as arranged by the participants. A list of Bed & Breakfast establishments is included below, and as this will be a holiday weekend, those thinking of attending are encouraged to schedule such accommodations as early as possible. Andy has provided his contact details for those wishing to learn more about the event or to obtain an updated list of accommodations:

Andy Lamb, Bate Collection, Faculty of Music, University of Oxford, St. Aldate's, Oxford, OX1 1DB, phone +44 (0)1865 286261, email andrew.lamb@music.ox.ac.uk, website www.bate.ox.ac.uk

The registration fee for the Serpentarium is expected to be £30 (cheques and bankers orders may be made payable to 'University of Oxford'. People coming from outside the UK are asked to contact Andy to discuss alternate payment options. There may also be cash fees due at time of arrival to cover incidental costs (beer!).

Serpent Newsletter

Some Accommodations, in approximate order of increasing cost per night

Central Backpackers (hostel), 13 Park End Street, Oxford, OX1 1HH, www.centralbackpackers.co.uk

YHA Oxford, 2A Botley Road, OX2 0AB, Tel. 00 44 (0)1865 242288

Beaumont Guest House, 234 Abingdon Rd, OX1 4SP, Tel. 00 44 (0)1865 241767

Cornerways Guest House, 282 Abingdon Rd, OX1 4TA, Tel. 00 44 (0)1865 240135

Falcon Private Hotel, 88/90 Abingdon Rd, OX1 4PX, Tel. 00 44 (0)1865 511122

Green Gables, 326 Abingdon Rd, OX1 4TE, Tel. 00 44 (0)1865 725870

Homelea Guest House, 356 Abingdon Rd, OX1 4TQ, Tel. 00 44 (0)1865 245150

Lakeside Guest House, 118 Abingdon Rd, OX1 4PZ, Tel. 00 44 (0)1865 244725

Newton House, 82-84 Abingdon Rd, OX1 4PL, Tel. 00 44 (0)1865 240561

Sportsview Guest House, 106-110 Abingdon Rd, OX1 4PX, Tel. 00 44 (0)1865 244268

Whitehouse View, Whitehouse Road, OX1 4PA, Tel. 00 44 (0)1865 721626

The Ridings, 280 Abingdon Rd, OX1 4TA, Tel. 00 44 (0)1865 248364

Head of the River, Folly Bridge, St. Aldates, OX1 4LB, Tel. 00 44 (0)1865 721600

Victoria Hotel, 180 Abingdon Rd, OX1 4RA, Tel. 00 44 (0)1865 724536

Oxford Spires Four Pillars Hotel, Abingdon Rd, OX1 4PS, Tel. 00 44 (0)1865 324324

Randolph Hotel, Beaumont St, OX1 2LN, Tel. 00 44 (0)0870 400 8200

Apartments in Oxford, St. Thomas Mews, 58 St. Thomas Street, Oxford, OX1 1JP, www.oxstay.co.uk

● Report on the Early Brass Festival

The 22nd annual Early Brass festival was held in conjunction with the meeting of the International Society for the Promotion and Investigation of Wind Music (IGEB), and was held in Northfield, Minnesota, from July 27 -31. The joint meeting was held simultaneously with the Vintage Band Music Festival that was hosted by the City of Northfield, Carleton College and St. Olaf College. The entire event was organized and chaired by St. Olaf faculty member Paul Niemisto. Also officiating were Northfield mayor Lee Lansing, IGEB president Dr. Bernhard Habla, and Historic Brass Society president Jeff Nussbaum.

Serpentists and ophicleidists attending included Paul Schmidt, John Weber, Erhard Schwartz, Jay Krush and Clark Wolf. However, unlike normal EBF gatherings, there were no organized or scheduled playing sessions or informal

concerts in which these individuals could get together to play and talk shop. Only Jay and Erhard had serpent and/or ophicleide playing opportunities as part of the concerts held by their respective groups, The Chestnut Brass Company and Passion des Cuivres. Paul Schmidt did have playing situations on over-the-shoulder bass Saxhorn as part of the First Brigade Band.

The joint event consisted of 37 lectures, 22 formal concerts, 16 restaurant mini-concerts, and four church services that included vintage brass music. Guest bands playing vintage brass instruments and/or 19th Century brass music included the 26th North Carolina Regiment Band, Ameriikan Poijjat Finnish Brass Band, Chestnut Brass Company, Dodworth Saxhorn Band, Newberry's Victorian Cornet Band, Passion des Cuivres, and the First Brigade Band. Other brass bands taking part in the festival included the Brassworks Band, Chatfield Brass Band, Faribault Bandshell Brass Band, and Sheldon Theatre Brass Band. In addition to the above, several community bands with conventional mixed instrumentation included Carlisle Town Band, Fridley City Band, Lake Wobegon Brass Band, and North Star Cinema Orchestra. Finally, several other groups from the Northfield area and elsewhere performed, including Craig Ebel's Dyversco Polka Band, Dolce Wind Quintet, Flariboneba, Original German Band of New Ulm, Rocky Mountain Swiss Alhorn Trio, and the Windworks Wind Quintet.

The overall concept of the joint festivals required attendees and participants to choose between lectures and concerts, as all four days of the event were packed morning until evening with unbroken series of both types. Compounding the difficulties in choosing how to spend one's time was the overlapping concert schedule, which had concerts starting at half-hour intervals in different venues. This made it impossible for festival participants to attend more than a small fraction of the overall event. Luckily, some guest groups were scheduled to play up to four concerts each during the festival, so there were enhanced opportunities to attend at least one concert per group.

The serpent appeared only once during the event, as part of the Chestnut Brass Company's Sunday concert. The ophicleide appeared in all of the Passion des Cuives concerts and the Chestnut concerts. The Chestnut programs also included keyed bugle and quinticlave. Erhard Schwartz showed off his custom made ophicleide, allowing other attending ophicleide players to give it a quick test blow.

Most concerts were scheduled to take place out of doors in the downtown Northfield area. While the weather was clear, the temperatures hovered in the high 90s (°F), 32 - 37 °C, with high humidity. Many performers were dressed in heavy Victorian era costumes, and players usually found themselves sopping wet from perspiration by the end of their first selection. While it is safe to say that none of the groups were at their best under these conditions, the playing overall remained very good, and concert attendance was excellent.



Strange music on the green. Wind instruments of Queen Elizabeth's day and a modern bass horn played by an odd trio at a rehearsal for the royal command horse show at Aldershot, England (original caption to photo from many years ago - source and date of old news clipping unknown)

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.

(United Kingdom & European continent)

Nigel Nathan
Boswedden House
Cape Cornwall
St. Just-in-Penwith
PENZANCE
Cornwall TR19 7NJ
England

Phone & Fax: +44 (0)1736 788733
email:
<serpents@boswedden.org.uk>

(USA, Canada, other countries, Editor, Treasurer)

Paul Schmidt, editor
Dick George, treasurer

Serpent Newsletter
P.O. Box 954
Mundelein, IL 60060
USA

phone (no fax): 847-356-7865
email: <ocleide@earthlink.net>
webpage: www.serpentwebsite.com

Suggested minimum contribution for non-European subscribers is \$15 for 4 issues (2 years); these subscriptions are by voluntary contributions, not formal subscriptions, but those who manage to receive the newsletter without contributions are doing so entirely at the discretion of the regional representative. Rates for the UK are £5 for 2 years, for Europe £6 or 10 Euros; in these cases the handling of subscriptions is more formal.

Where Serpents Gather

- Erhard Schwartz, besides his notable performances mentioned in the Workshops section of this newsletter, writes about his ophicleide performances in September with the Staatsphilharmonie Rheinland-Pflaz, broadcast on the Deutschlandradio Kultur. The programs included three pieces by the American Romantic composer Anton Philip Heinrich (composer of the notorious Concerto for Kent Bugle), as well as numbers of short ophicleide solos. The Heinrich titles were *Manitou Mysteries, or The Voice of the great Spirit, The Wildwood Spirit's Chant, and The War of the Elements and the Thundering of Niagra*.
- On July 25, Doug Yeo gave a demonstration of serpent, ophicleide and buccin at Tanglewood, the Summer festival home of the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Part of the annual Tanglewood on Parade event, a day of concerts and activities featuring the BSO, the Tanglewood Music Center and the Boston University Tanglewood Institute, Doug's demonstration was titled, *The Low Brass World of Hector Berlioz: Serpent, Ophicleide and Buccin*. A group of 300 assembled in front of the Tanglewood Theatre as Doug described and played each of the three instruments, notable for having been included in Berlioz's *Messe Solennelle*. Doug played his Monk Workshop serpent, his Roehn ophicleide in C, and his Sautermeister buccin, demonstrating chant, excerpts from Berlioz's works, and *La Marseillaise* which was played on each instrument so listeners could readily compare tone and timbre.

- Wik Bohdanowicz wrote to tell about his Mayday activities this last Spring....

The Jack in the Green is a remnant of the Beltane festival, the "Old Religion" before these upstart middle-eastern ideas such as Christianity came along. Last year we took the Jack around Southwark and across the Wobbly bridge over the Thames to St. Paul's. I expect I'm the first person to play the Serpent on this bridge (or even outside St Paul's for a quite a while). There are other Mayday traditions; we are always up before dawn and go to a ceremony in the village of Standon. At dawn the puddingstone is decorated with a garland of flowers, it has a tune played to it and the Morris dance around it. Someone then walks round handing out sprigs of May (Hawthorn) while singing about the Summer starting. The Morris then all process down to The Star, dance outside it until the landlord opens up and then we pile in for a beer.

After suitable refreshment the procession carries on down the road until we reach The Bell where similar things happen. After a while some starts singing traditional songs for the festival and we join in. We used to go on to The Heron but it's closed. It was fortunate that this year Mayday fell on a bank holiday. Normally I go to work after this. This year it was down to Deptford.

● Doug Yeo will give a lecture/demonstration on the serpent as part of the Yale Center for British Art's exhibition, *Art and Music in Britain: Four Encounters, 1730-1900*. Doug's demonstration will take place on Tuesday, December 12, 2006 at 12:30 PM as part of the Center's "Art in Context" series. As part of his talk, Yale will display its superb military serpent (by D'Almaine & Co., London, mid 19th Century). The Exhibition's audio guide will include Handel's *March from Scipio* as played by Doug and Craig Kridel on Doug's CD, *Le Monde du Serpent*. The Exhibition and Doug's demonstration are free and open to the public; for more information, visit www.yale.edu/ycba.

● On October 20, J. Randal Guptill will give a recital titled, *Charming the Serpent*, at 4:00 PM in Perkins Library, Rare Book Room, Duke University, in Durham, North Carolina. The recital is free and open to the public, although there is limited reserved parking in front of Duke Chapel. For more information, contact ethomps@duke.edu, 919-660-3333.



*Wik Bohdanowicz, Mayday at Fowlers Troop
May 2, 2006 (photo by Sarah Crofts)*

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 (by EMS Bradford-
order here)

The Early Music Shop
38 Manningham Lane
Bradford
West Yorkshire BD1 3EA
England
Phone: (44) 01274 393753
<www.e-m-s.com>
<sales@earlyms.demon.co.uk>

David Harding (information only, not
for ordering)

56 Netherton Road
Appleton
ABINGDON
Oxon. OX13 5JZ
England

<david@chimeracrafts.fsnet.co.uk>
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
224 North Street
Luton
LU2 7QN
England



Phone: +44 (0)1582 457 992
(*early cimballo, 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: 0041 (0) 5231 73184
<wetter.m@bluewin.ch>
<www.wetter-instrumente.ch>
(communication in English may
be difficult)

(*alphorns and serpents*)

New Materials

● The Chestnut Brass Company has released a new CD titled *Distant Dancing*, a self published album that is available online (e.g. Amazon). The CD is published without an obvious publisher name and without catalog number, so the title is the only identifier.

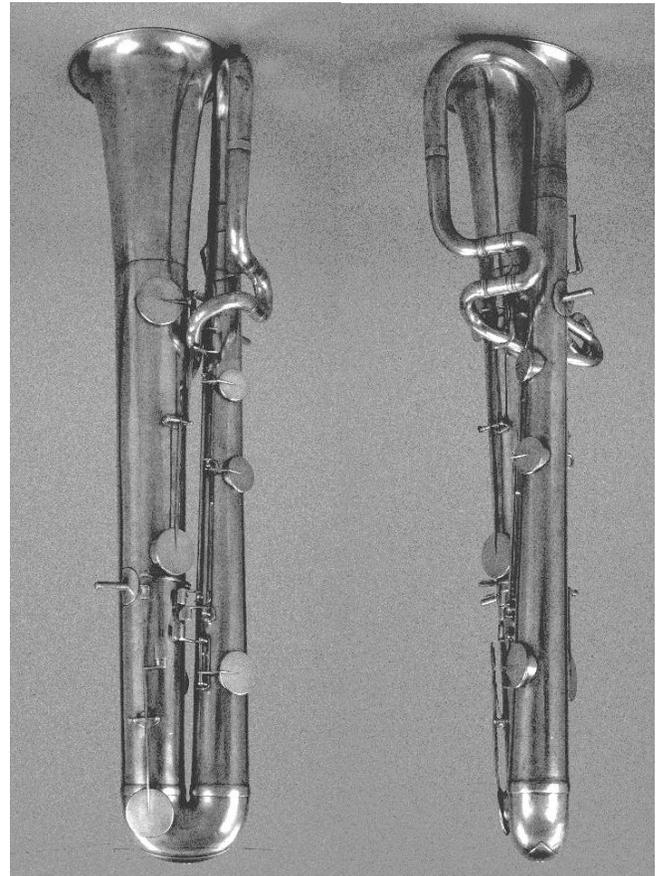
In concert, the quintet performs both on modern instruments and on their historical predecessors from cornetts and sackbuts, through keyed bugles and ophicleides, and the almost modern 19th century valved instruments. Many of the CBC's recent CDs concentrate on

modern instruments or on a single period in brass evolution. It has not been since the album *Pastime With Good Company* (Crystal Records CD 562) that the group has released a recording that features whole gamut of brass instrument development. Happily, *Distant Dancing* is such an album, and it is a worthy addition to any historic brass enthusiast's record collection.

As the title suggests, this CD features dance related selections. The album begins with a trio of selections performed on modern instruments, including two by Irving Berlin. Next is the eponymous *Distant Dancing*, commissioned by the CBC from Richard Peaslee, a composer best known for jazz and theater dance music. This is a major work in the 'world music' genre, defying conventional form until it veers unexpectedly into known dance forms such as the jig or tango. The next four selections are performed on early brasses from the Renaissance and Baroque eras, including cornetts, sackbuts, natural trumpets, natural horn and percussion. There follows a set of three dances by African American composers of the early 1800s (e.g. Francis Johnson), and performed here on 19th century instruments including E-flat and B-flat keyed bugles, a quinticlave, a trombone and an ophicleide. For an entire album of this music, listen to another CBC release, *Music of Francis Johnson and Contemporaries* (Music Masters MMD6-0236 F).

The third historic brass set features a full Saxhorn band consisting of E-flat and B-flat sopranos, E-flat alto, B-flat baritone/bass and E-flat contrabass. Having completed their tour of older brasses, the CBC returns to modern instruments for two brief dances, and concludes with another major CBC commissioned composition in four movements, *Steps* by Warren Benson.

- Nigel Nathan writes that he discovered some serpent activity on a DVD of some 1960's animations of Gerard Hoffnung cartoons. The animation is based on Hoffnung's original humorous drawings. Britain's first animation studio, Halas and Batchelor, produced the cartoons in conjunction with the BBC. 3 minutes and 50 seconds into *The Symphony Orchestra*, there is an hilarious serpent sequence. This short feature is basically an animated version of Gerard Hoffnung's popular book of musical whimsy of the same title. The DVD is Blue Dolphin BDVD 2009, available in the UK in PAL format only. A bit of Googling has turned up what appears to be the same cartoon in an NTSC formatted DVD, part of 150 Cartoon Classics from Mill Creek Entertainment (available from Amazon, etc.) The Blue Dolphin DVD also includes a one-hour TV production of Gilbert & Sullivan's *Ruddigore*, the first animated work based on G&S, and the first operetta to be made into a cartoon. The music and voices are from the D'Oyle Carte Opera Company performances. There are some services that will convert PAL formatted DVDs to NTSC. If DVDs such as this one appeal to you, email this newsletter for more information.



Contrabass 'Monstre' ophicleide with 8 keys and a Stoezel valve, designed by Jullien Tollot and made by Halary, ca. 1858

More Exciting News

- Randy Cabell has written to say that his email address has changed. The old Visuallink has gone the way of the Edsel, and his new address is RCabell@TheLodgeOnSlateRidge.com. Randy has been doing lots of excellent work with new published versions of old band books and other interesting things. There is too much to list here, but if you would like to hear more about his work and what is now available, send him a message.
- Regarding the articles on Monstre Ophicleides in the last two issues of this newsletter, Wolf-Dieter Rase has written to advise that the University of Leipzig dropped Karl Marx from its name in 1991, for obvious reasons.
- While on the subject of Monstre Ophicleides, Clark Wolf emailed to mention that the Paris Musée de la Musique holds an instrument, catalog number E.393, which is the "ophicleide contrebasse" made by Tollot & Halary and described by Cliff Bevan in his book *The Tuba Family*. Instead of the usual normally-open key at the bell, which

lowers the pitch by a half-step, this odd instrument uses a Stoelzel valve in the bocal to affect the same result. The museum catalog lists Bruno Kampmann as the person who did the inventory on this unique specimen, and Bruno has advised this newsletter that the Stoelzel valve was the biggest one he has ever seen. The instrument has eight keys, and if not for the experiment of replacing the bell key with a valve, would have been a conventional 9-key example if you ignore the contrabass size. Cliff's book also mentions a Couturier contra in the same museum, "The last recorded contrabass seems to have been designed by Jullien Tollot with ten keys and one valve and made by Halary around 1858...." Bruno has indicated that he recalls no such instrument, and while the museum curator has been asked for more information on both contras, no reply has been received as of this writing.

- Michel Godard wrote to say that he has recently done a duo recording project with Gavino Murgia, a vocalist of amazing range and variation. The recording uses lots of serpent, and based on a recent radio broadcast featuring both of these fellows with Rabih Abou-Khalil, this new project should be a real ear opener. Michel has also done a nice serpent project with "les Musiciens de Louvre", including music he wrote for them on a text by Nancy Huston. They hope to do a recording of this work in 2007, and Michel promises to keep us informed about release dates on both recordings.

- Scott Hall emailed to say that he has built another 'book serpent', which he now prefers to call 'box serpents'. The instrument was made for Skip Freely, a retired radio astronomer from CalTech who plays trombone. Phil Holcomb is now the proud owner of #1, but Scott has made some changes in the evolution from that example to #2. Now in each octave, the simple 'open one hole at a time' fingering is adequate. Scott also added some metal fittings at the mouthpiece receiver, but has otherwise retained the layered plywood construction and box-like shape.

- Aaron Rynearson of Evanston, Wyoming, wrote to tell about his adventures in making woodwind instruments inspired by the various Squarpent projects. So far he has made some piccolo oboes in F and A, which remain works-in-progress while he refines the tone hole sizes, but they are basically done. They share the same general concept for simplified construction with the Squarpent, Box-O-Cleide and 'Patrick', being made from plywood with a square bore cross-section. He also expressed a desire to make larger examples on some online forums, and as a result was sent some old bassoon bocals. One can imagine that soon the Wyoming plains will ring with the sounds of Squarpoons and Bass-O-Cleides. He also is contemplating making another 'Patrick', modified to take a contrabassoon bocal and reed, and he's sure that it would definitely ROAR!

- "Dear Mr. Aubrook, I am enclosing a leaflet with some information about a very curious concert which is to take place at the Royal Festival Hall on the 13th November. One of the items on our programme is a piece for a collection of the oddest possible instrument [sic] written specially for us by Dr. Gordon Jacob and we are wondering whether it would be at all possible to borrow the contra-bass serpent which I believe you house." So begins a letter typed in London on August 25, 1956 by none other than Gerard Hoffnung. The recipient was E.W. Aubrook of The Tolson Memorial Museum in Huddersfield, England. The instrument in question was none other than The Anaconda (now in Edinburgh, Scotland). Four letters in this exchange, one sided since they are all by Hoffnung and once can only surmise the other half by reading between the lines, were recently re-discovered when they came into the possession of Andy Lamb at the Bate Collection, Oxford. One sided thought they be, they remain highly entertaining and amusing. Andy has obtained permission for the letters to appear in these pages or possibly on the website, but for the moment, a PDF scan of them is available by request to this newsletter.

Cliff Bevan has taken a look at the letters and writes, "My wife played harp in this concert and commented that during rehearsals of the orchestra (Morley College), when she used to sit next to Gerard Hoffnung, he would lay his tuba on the floor and from time to time change the angle of rest so as to produce distorted reflections of the players in its bell. Hoffnung lived across the road from my R.A.M. (Royal Academy of Music) composition professor, Howard Ferguson. He told me that often he would awaken in the night and hear distant, low sounds as his neighbor sat at the foot of his stairs playing his tuba."



Doug Yeo demonstrates the serpent as part of the Tanglewood On Parade Festival