

## Serpent Newsletter

P.O. Box 954 Mundelein, Illinois 60060 USA

Newsletter for Serpent Enthusiasts

September 27, 2020

### A Note from the Editor

This is the second edition of this newsletter to be published during the protracted COVID-19 pandemic. When the April 2020 issue was written under these conditions, things looked very alarming but predictions were for a duration of only a few months. It is now more apparent that this will not be over very soon, and many are pinning their hopes for return to normalcy on a vaccine. It is much too early to predict how that will work out, and when, but my thoughts remain hopeful that all of you are all keeping well.

This edition is skewed in its balance of content from what usually appears in these pages; some of that is due to COVID-19 and some is just happenstance. Of course, fewer readers have written in to tell about their serpent gatherings, and there is somewhat less in the miscellaneous *More Exciting News* column. But interesting things are still happening, and some musicians are finding creative ways to keep active musically. I am also pleased to be able to report a rich set of new recordings.

As usual, please continue sending in any information on past or future performances, sightings, related videos and audio recordings, music and book publications, etc. While I manage to discover many tidbits on my own, this newsletter could not happen without so many readers contributing, often regularly. Don't be shy.....if you have anything that might be of interest, send it this way.

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

Paul Schmidt

### Workshops

#### ● Carlops Serpentarium

The plan was to have the next Serpentarium take place back in Carlops, near Edinburgh, Scotland, in May of 2021. However, organizers Murray Campbell and Arnold Myers wrote that after much deliberation, it does not make sense to schedule an international gathering at this time, with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic still making things uncertain. In addition to the normal concerns about gatherings of more than a few people in a room, the fact is that many participants must travel internationally to attend, and it is not even certain whether such travel will be allowed, or at least practical, soon enough to make reasonable travel reservations.

So, the 2021 Serpentarium is being rescheduled to take place during the usual late-May weekend in 2022, with the location remaining in Carlops. It has not yet been determined whether this will affect the timing of subsequent Serpentariums.

● As noted in the previous edition of this newsletter, because of the COVID-19 situation the next *Serpent Journey* event has been postponed to 2021. Michel Godard wrote that the next one will take place in Saingnelegier in Switzerland next April 15 to 18. The teachers will be Michel, Patrick Wibart, Volny Hostiou, and David Hostiou. Ihab Radwan will be a special guest for the final concert and a workshop on modal music. Please check the Berger website [www.serpents.ch](http://www.serpents.ch) for updates.

### New Materials

● *Les Messes retrouvées de Jehan Titelouze – Hymne, Magnificat & Pièces d'orgue, Volume 2*; 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, Christiane Bopp and Arnaud Brétécher on sackbuts, François Ménissier on organ and Volny Hostiou on serpent. Paraty # 100273. Available from Amazon France; copy used for review obtained from Volny Hostiou. This CD is the second volume of a pair that began with Volume 1, which was reviewed in this newsletter in the April 2019 edition.



Jean (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 Simplicis Corde* and *Missa Cantate* 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 the earlier CD being Volume 1 of that set and including the *Missa In Ecclesia* and *Missa Cantate*.

This album, as was done in the first volume, follows the *in alternatim* tradition, both for the overall structure as well as within the sections, with *Missa Sex Vocum Simplicis Corde* appearing first, followed by the organ composition *Magnificat Quinti Toni*, which is performed with its movements alternating with episodes of plainchant, and then likewise the *Missa Quatuor Vocum Votiva* is followed by the organ piece *Annue Christe*, 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, three or 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.

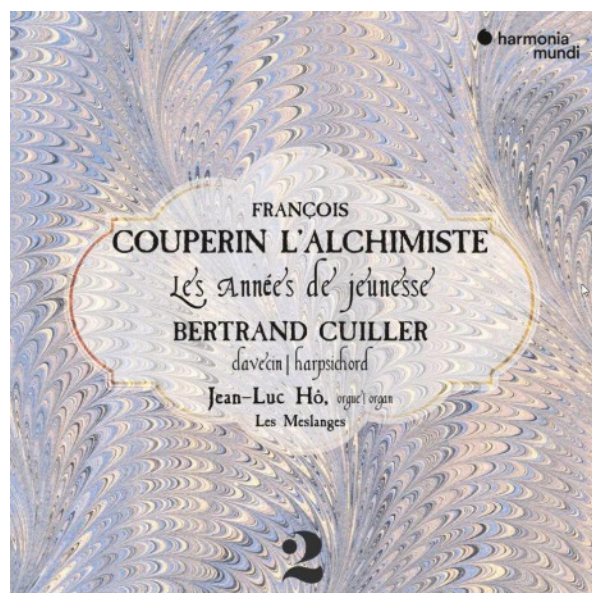
Of the two organ selections, the first is listed as *Magnificat Quinti Toni*, and alternates Titelouze's *Magnificat Quinti Toni pour toucher sur l'orgue* with vocal verses from Jean de Bournonville's *Octo Cantica Divae Mariae Virginis*. The second is listed as *Annue Christe*, and alternates Titelouze's *Hymnes de l'Eglise pour toucher sur l'orgue* with plainchant verses *Salva Redemptor* and *Sit tibi Jesu*.

As observed in Volume 1, 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 do not directly mention which churches were used for the recording, although two 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, located in the small town of Champcueil south of Paris. The two-page photo of the Ensemble Les Meslanges recording session clearly shows the altar of *Notre Dame de Paris*, thus identifying that as the acoustic space. 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 first mass *Missa Sex Vocum Simplicis Corde*, and also performs as the lower voice along with the plainchant verses on the two organ sections; serpent is not used on the second mass *Missa Quatuor Vocum Votiva*, where the accompaniment is just a viola da gamba quartet.

This recording is a fine example of serpent accompaniment of plainchant, with Volny's playing strong yet delicate, and should be welcome in the recording library of anyone interested in the serpent.

As noted previously in the April 2019 edition, portions of the rehearsal and recording sessions may be seen on YouTube at the following URLs:  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=jgE5Lq69MEI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jgE5Lq69MEI)  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=SEawG8kphtM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SEawG8kphtM)

● *François Couperin L'Alchimiste, 2. Les Années de Jeunesse (F. Couperin the Alchemist, Volume 2 - The Years of Youth/The Early Years)*; 3-CD recording featuring harpsichordist Bertrand Cuiller, organist Jean-Luc Ho, and male vocal quartet drawn from Ensemble Les Meslanges, directed by Thomas Van Essen and Volny Hostiou, with Volny Hostiou on serpent. Harmonia Mundi # 902377.79. Available from Amazon (search for *Couperin: Complete Works for Harpsichord Vol.2*); copy used for review obtained from Volny Hostiou.



French harpsichordist virtuoso Bertrand Cuiller set out to record an imaginary music journey in the company of composer François Couperin, with his complete works for harpsichord forming its central core. Volume 1 (not reviewed in this newsletters) was subtitled 'A miniature theatre of the world', and showed the composer as a stage director, with his notable theatricality showcased. In this new Volume 2, Cuiller takes the listener along to look backwards at Couperin's early years. Here we can hear that Couperin was not confined to harpsichord alone, and indeed included the participation of additional performers in his works. Cuiller has selected two 'ordres' in G and D from his *First Book* of *Pièces de Clavecin* to represent the composer's early solo harpsichord explorations, and then invites guest performer Jean-Luc Ho to perform the two organ masses in a version incorporating plainchant *in alternatim*, according to the practice of the day. Joining the organ for the plainchant are the male members of Ensemble Les Meslanges, with co-director Volny Hostiou on serpent.

Young François succeeded his father Charles as organist at the Church of Saint-Gervais, as his father had succeeded his own brother Louis in the same post, and it had become a matter of pride that this position should remain in the Couperin family. In 1690, to help ensure financial security for his own growing family, François decided to publish the organ works that he had been composing during his teens, and asked famed organist and composer Michel-Richard de Lalande to endorse them. Lalande judged the two organ masses to be worthy of being presented to the public. As the cost of having the scores engraved was prohibitive, the young Couperin determined to copy them by hand per order, and he stipulated that these masses were intended to be played *in alternatim* with the plainchant during the *Kyrie*, *Gloria*, *Sanctus*, and *Agnus Dei* sections. Couperin planned that copies of his mass would be seen by connoisseurs, and in 1693 this self-promotion helped get him the position of organist at the Royal Chapel, succeeding his mentor Jacques-Denis Thomelin in the position. The post was

apportioned between Couperin and three other organists, each serving for one quarter of the year, and meanwhile he continued to retain his position at the Church of Saint-Gervais, while also becoming a favorite harpsichord teacher to the royal children. Eventually, due in part to the advancing age of his royal patron, Couperin found himself with more time available to prepare and publish his harpsichord pieces.

The two organ masses are quite different from one another, although they both require the *in alternatim* treatment with plainchant verses. *Messe 'à l'usage ordinaire des Paroisses'* (*Messe des Paroisses/Parish Mass*) uses the Gregorian plainchant melody *Cunctipotens genitor Deus*, while *Messe 'propre pour les couvents de religieux et religieuses'* (*Messe des Couvents/Convents Mass*) uses the 'newly composed' (at Couperin's time) melodic plainchant by Paul Damance; the latter mass is presented on this CD set both in its entirety and as a suite.

Volny's serpent is very clearly heard playing throughout the plainchant.

The three keyboard instruments heard on this set are a harpsichord by Philippe Humeau (2014), itself a copy of a French harpsichord by Antoine Vater (Paris 1738), an historic organ (1662) in the chapel Notre-Dame de Juvigny, and another historic organ by Jean-Boizard (1714) at the Abbey of Saint-Michel-en-Thiérache.

While this large volume is not rich with serpent playing, there remain the many short plainchant verses with Volny's fine serpent accompaniment, being an excellent example of the serpent in its original vocation. The acoustics are appropriate, and keyboard performances are excellent, and the singing on the verses if what we have come to expect from Ensemble Les Meslanges.



● *Ravel: Valse, Rapsodie Espagnole; Attahir: Adh-Dhohr*; CD recording featuring Orchestre National de Lille, directed by Alexandre Bloch; Patrick Wibart, solo serpent. Alpha Classics #ALPHA 562. Obtained from Amazon.



This new recording was announced soon after the world premiere of Benjamin Attahir's serpent concerto *Adh-Dhohr*, with Patrick Wibart performing the solo. In director Bloch's words, "this piece, which puts the spotlight on every single desk in the orchestra, deserved to be heard outside of the concert hall, we simply had to record it", *et voila*, this CD appeared soon after. This concerto is actually the second piece in a cycle of five, composed around the Salah, the Muslim daily prayer recitations, and was commissioned by the orchestra during the period when Attahir was composer in residence with them.

The concerto is inspired by a 'moment of peak experience, radiating in concentric circles'. It is a long, single movement with several internal subdivisions and recapitulations. It relies on the exacting realization of complex rhythms, and the balance between the various instruments, especially between the two horns and the serpent with its calls, which are intended to represent the calls to prayer of a muezzin from a minaret of a mosque. However, the surrounding composition is diverse and generally does not evoke the simple wailing calls of such a vocalist, although there are specific exceptions to this where the opposite is true. The director is quoted in the liner notes that he feels this concerto is Ravel-esque, and certainly this can be heard in many of the textures. He wrote, "The concerto's score is very transparent, in a way that induces performers to play exactly what is written, without altering a thing – just as in Ravel or Debussy, Berlioz too. All these composers write very precisely what they want from the orchestra in order to obtain a specific tone color". Overall, the piece is frantically busy one moment, and then serene and meditative the next.



*Rouen earthenware tile fragment at the Carnavalet Museum*

*thanks to Bernard Fourtet*

As for the serpent performance, naturally Patrick Wibart plays exquisitely, and this is certainly a showcase performance for a difficult piece played to perfection by a virtuoso of a very difficult instrument. The orchestra is also fine, executing their difficult parts in precise lockstep and with considerable musicality. The recording is technically excellent. If this reviewer has any qualms, it was not with the music but rather with a written statement by director

Bloch in the liner notes, indicating that he was apparently under the impression that the idea of a serpent concerto was a new, original one, not done previously, which readers of this newsletter know is not the case.

This review has thus far sidestepped that fact that only half of the album consists of the serpent concerto. There are in fact very nice performances of Ravel's *La Valse*, M.72 and his *Rapsodie Espagnole*, M.54 to be heard here, but this review is not about them.



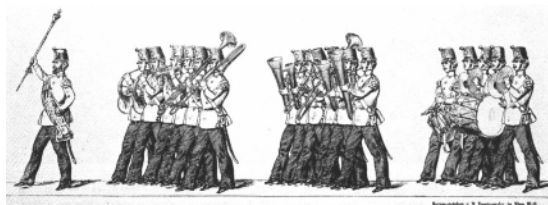
*Interior sketch of the chapel of Notre Dame de Lorette, watercolor by architect Louis-Hippolyte Lebas, Paris; Carnavalet Museum*

*thanks to Bernard Fourtet*

- While only tangentially related to serpents, readers may wish to consider checking out another book by Alex Weir of Edinburgh, a professional musician and amateur author of short novels and even shorter stories, *Bovosapien*. Weir's other published book is *Embracing the Ophicleide*, already reviewed in this newsletter, and he uses the meager proceeds from sale of his books, via Amazon for the Kindle and compatible e-readers, to fund his plan to purchase an ophicleide. As with the other book, Weir's stories are offbeat and original, and fun to read without wearing out their welcome. The teaser for *Bovosapien* reads, "Something strange is happening in the cowshed.....When Cumbrian dairy farmer Dai Morgan goes down to start his daily milking session, the last thing he expects is for one of his cows to start talking to him. After recovering from the surprise, the farmer sees an opportunity to make money and goes to the press with his story. Unfortunately for him, he doesn't predict that other people would have an interest in his sentient bovine, including the military, who want her as a research project, and the fast-food giants who want her dead. Gina the cow's life becomes a battle for survival." It gets even more interesting than that, and Weir does not go for predictable story lines. You might wish to purchase this enjoyable book and help support a potential new ophicleidist.

- The early 19th century music reference book *The Instrumental Director* by Ezekiel Goodale [1780-1828] is now available as a reprint of the 1836 edition in a leatherbound volume from an overseas print-on-demand

service. It can be ordered through Abe Books at [abebooks.com](http://abebooks.com) at roughly \$30US per copy. The original synopsis was, "containing rules for all musical instruments in common use, laid down in a plain and concise manner to which is added a variety of instrumental musick of the richest and most popular kind extant". The publisher's description is, "Leatherbound edition, Language: English, Leather Binding on Spine and Corners with Golden leaf printing on spine. Reprinted from 1836 edition. No changes have been made to the original text. This is NOT a retyped or an OCR'd reprint. Illustrations, Index, if any, are included in black and white. Each page is checked manually before printing."



## 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  
<[nicholaserry.instruments@gmail.com](mailto:nicholaserry.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](http://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](mailto:pierre.ribo@souslesplatanes.be)>  
(*Serpents*)

**NEW!**

3D printable serpent designs by Mark Witkowski after examples at the Bate Collection, Oxford; request files from [m.witkowski@imperial.ac.uk](mailto:m.witkowski@imperial.ac.uk) or [Dittes3Dserpent@aqltd.co.uk](mailto:Dittes3Dserpent@aqltd.co.uk)

Serpentones Lopez  
Juan Lopez Romera, maker  
<http://serponton.com/>  
(*wooden serpents & cornetti*)

Wessex Tubas  
Jonathan Hodgetts (UK)  
Andy Loree (USA)  
[www.wessex-tubas.co.uk](http://www.wessex-tubas.co.uk)  
[www.wessex-tubas.com](http://www.wessex-tubas.com)  
(*ophicleides, quinticlavens*)

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](http://www.serpents.ch)>  
<[sberger@serpents.ch](mailto:sberger@serpents.ch)>

(*serpents, both wood and carbon fiber, serpent cases, accessories*)  
[formerly Wetterberger serpents]

Christopher Monk Instruments  
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+44 (0)1388 526999  
<[www.jeremywest.co.uk/christopher-monk-instruments.html](http://www.jeremywest.co.uk/christopher-monk-instruments.html)>  
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<[info@samgoble.com](mailto:info@samgoble.com)>  
(*cornett and serpent mouthpieces*)

Build an experimental serpent from plans via  
<[www.serpentwebsite.com](http://www.serpentwebsite.com)>

## In Memoriam: Christopher Baines

Long time serpentist, early music enthusiast and fixture at the biennial Serpentariums, Christopher Baines passed away on April 7, 2020 at the age of 96; he was born 1923. Christopher was born into a musical family. His oldest brother Anthony was trained as a chemist but went on to be bassoonist with the London Philharmonic, writing many books on music and musical instruments, and serving as the first curator of the Bate Collection in Oxford. His middle brother Francis was a double-bass player and composer and founder of the Jaye Consort of viols. His sister, Eularia Clarke, was a religious artist who, had she lived longer (she died in 1970), would probably have been much better known today. They were a talented family.

Christopher was the much-loved baby of the family. Despite his later dark looks, as a child he had an angelic halo of golden curls. At the age of four, he was left unattended in the nursery, and his jumper caught fire on an unguarded electric heater and was well ablaze before his mother returned, leaving him with a severely burned lower face and scarring him for life. Nevertheless, his mother commented on how, during his painful convalescence, he would stoically sing along with her in a very sweet voice.



*Christopher Baines plays his Military Serpent in the home of Andrew van der Beek during the 2001 Serpentarium in Lacock*

During the war, Christopher worked for an engineering research firm at Shoreham-on Sea, Sussex for the Air Ministry. He studied at Oxford to be a mathematician, and became a biometric researcher and agricultural statistician, working during his career at several research establishments in Aberdeen, London and finally near Bristol where he was researching cultivation of fruit trees.



Like his brothers, Christopher was a versatile musician and he could play a number of wind instruments (not all of them well) but his main instruments were horn and flute, and of course he enjoyed playing the serpent. An amateur musician all his life, he was also active in The Galpin Society.

It was his love of music that introduced him to his future wife. During the years soon after the war, Christopher's niece Rachel would study violin at his home, and her teacher would come over from Burford to give the lessons, bringing along her daughter Clare. It would take almost twenty years before Christopher and Clare married while already in their 40s. They had no children.

They later lived in Bristol while he worked there studying fruit trees until his retirement, when they returned to Clare's family house in Burford in the Cotswolds, about twenty miles from Oxford. Christopher was an avid gardener and was a curator and keen supporter of the Burford museum which deals with local history. He was also very interested in geology and had a collection of rocks and stones.

Christopher was an easy man to like, a gentle and quiet soul often content to let Clare do the talking, popular and always involved in various projects until age caught up with him. He bought a computer in his 80s and taught himself how to use it. Due to failing health, they moved in 2012 to a retirement home in Hailey, near Witney, Oxfordshire and celebrated fifty happy years together. He died peacefully in his sleep, preceded by Clare in 2017.

The text above was edited and paraphrased from two sources; Christopher's grand-niece Rebecca Sherlaw-Johnson's eulogy for him, and a detailed letter she sent to this newsletter. When COVID-19 subsides and larger gatherings of people are again permitted, she plans to organize a memorial event in his honor, and is collecting names of friends to contact when that time draws near. To preserve the privacy of her contact information, any newsletter readers who wish to contact her to be added to her list should contact this newsletter via the email address in the *About the Organization* section, and her email address will be provided.



## Where Serpents Gather

- As with most musical groups, the Spokane Symphony orchestra in Washington state has had to be on hiatus due to COVID-19, but that has not stopped them from producing a set of videos titled *The Social Distance Diaries* featuring their various members. Our friends Helen and Leonard Byrne are both in the orchestra, she being Assistant Principal Cello and he being Principle Tuba, and they contributed their own bit of musical whimsy, performing J.S. Bach's *Minuet* from *Cello Suite No. 1* on various diverse instruments. Their video can be seen at

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FUmhousZEik> or by searching for *The Social Distance Diaries #8: Helen and Leonard Byrne*.



*COVID Brass, Nick Byrne and Scott Kinmont, ophicleides*

- Nick Byrne in Australia wrote, "No real news as there is little music happening here in Sydney thanks to our modern plague. We try and stay in shape with a small quartet we call *COVID Brass*, comprised of two ophicleides (myself & Scott Kinmont) and two cornets/trumpets, which occasionally performs on Saturday in a small local bandstand. It is nice to play in a group and we haven't been evicted yet. Otherwise I enclose a couple of interesting articles that may help you with content. The first is the program for the appearance of the 'monster Ophicleide' in Australia in 1863, and the second an extract from the mid-19th Century English satire/humor publication *Punch*. Our planned Keyed-Brass convention, scheduled for 2021 in the EU, looks like it will be pushed out to 2022 for all the obvious reasons related to health & travel. We are fully committed to its realization and have an incredible line-up of artists; it's just a matter of timing and confirming venue."

- Phil Humphries wrote, "The London Serpent Trio met for the first time in six months. We set up in Richmond Park and played for an hour and went for a nice lunch. It was just wonderful to be able to get together again. On another note, I've just finished my latest serpent multi-track musical selection, *Hungarian Rhapsody No 2* by Franz Liszt, with a slide show and have uploaded it to YouTube. Anita's photos were taken alongside the Devil's brook here in Dewlish". View the video at <https://youtu.be/y0VKWpc8BIk> or by searching for *Hungarian Rhapsody No 2* by Franz Liszt arr. and multi-tracked by Phil Humphries.



*The London Serpent Trio practice social distancing (L-R) Nick Perry, Phil Humphries and Andy Kershaw*

- There is another multi-track in eight parts of Phil's arrangement of *Crown Imperial* by William Walton, at [www.youtube.com/embed/hkoqBaYU3CM](http://www.youtube.com/embed/hkoqBaYU3CM) or by searching for *Crown Imperial by William Walton for serpent octet arr. and multi-tracked by Phil Humphries*.

- Along the same lines as Nick and Phil's efforts to keep serpent/ophicleide playing going during the pandemic, Paul Schmidt joined about a dozen other musicians on September 13 in Downers Grove, Illinois (a suburb of Chicago) for a socially distanced afternoon of outdoor sightreading of a diverse collection of music, the players drawn from two area early music ensembles. Paul used both his favorite Monk serpent and his newly completed 3D printed serpent after Dittes (see the 3D Printed Serpent article). The music making was so inspiring that the next door neighbors were inspired to join us with their chainsaw and wood chipper, drowning out the bad notes but depriving more distant residents from getting the full impact of the playing.



*A socially distanced Paul Schmidt joins invisible friends from two Chicago area early music bands, Monk serpent in hand, 3D printed serpent on ground photo by Mark Dawson*

## 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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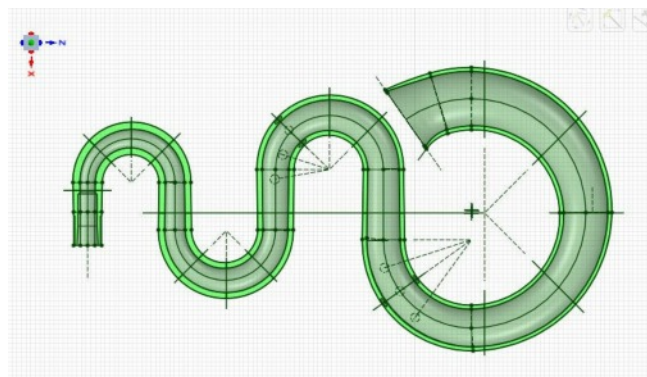
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## Adventures and Explorations with 3D Serpents, Part 2

My second 3D printed serpent

by Paul Schmidt

In early 2020, being tipped off by Mark Jones, I purchased a 3D printed serpent made by Paul Dorsey in New Jersey, who had followed the plans by Mark Witkowski (Imperial College London) for replicating the anonymous serpent at Oxford's Bate Collection, catalog #504. I covered this instrument in my article in the April 2020 edition of this newsletter. This piqued my interest, and I recalled my brief exposure to another Witkowski-designed 3D printed serpent



during my visit to The Bate in May of 2019, prior to attending the Serpentarium. That instrument was modeled after another original serpent in the collection, catalog #500, the “Dittes”. About the process of measuring this instrument, Mark Witkowski wrote, “The Dittes [3D printable] serpent model is based on original measurements and observations made directly from the historical instrument held in the Bate Collection. [That] instrument is a high quality *serpent d'Église* (Church Serpent) with six finger tone holes dating from the late 18th Century, carved from walnut wood and covered in fine leather. The instrument has a brass collar at the bocal receiver engraved with ‘Dittes a Strasbourg’, there are brass rings and evidence of stabilizing stays along the center length. The original instrument is in a good playable condition and shows only very minor deterioration with age.”



*3D printed bocal (in plastic bag) and serpent parts immediately after completion of printing. Mouthpiece parts are not shown*

“Measurement of the exterior of the instrument started with laying it flat on a sheet of ruled graph paper, and gently and carefully tracing around the edges. This gives a good impression of the overall size and shape. The outline is well described by four straight sections separating three 180° semi-circular sections of increasing size. The bell section completed with a 90° circular segment of greater radius and then a 215° circular section of still larger radius, to end at the bell opening. All with continuously expanding external diameter. Precise measurements of the external diameter were taken at the junctions between sections with a digital micrometer and calipers. Positions and sizes of the tone holes and the bocal and its receiver socket were recorded, and all the data tabulated for use in the design stage.”

“Accurate measurements of the bore of any serpent in the absence of an industrial size CT-scan or at least an X-Ray image are always going to be a challenge. Once the Dittes external diameter data was plotted it was clear that the instrument is not a true conical section externally, although this is not obvious from visual inspection, and that the bore cannot be a simple cone either. Taking the measurable evidence into account the instrument bore is modeled as a

conical section of about 1.2m [about 4 feet] (just before the first right hand finger hole), followed by a gentle expanding flair extending to the bell opening. Wall thickness varies from just over 10mm [0.4”] at the entry to 6mm [0.24”] along the flare until it tapers at the bell end. Interestingly, after the design was completed and printed some X-Ray images of the Dittes taken for Christopher Monk sometime in the 1970s were located, and it was possible to confirm that the actual bore shape is as predicted.”

“The instrument and bocal were modeled using the DesignSpark CAD tool. The body of the instrument is split into 20 parts which are optimized for home making on a consumer 3D printer using plastic filament. Total print time is about 200 hours. The bocal insertion depth is adjustable over a short length as with the original. An adapter kit for the bocal extends this adjustment to make fine tuning to A=440 easier. Traditional and “modern” style mouthpiece designs are also available to print. When compared to the original at the Bate, the sound and playing characteristics were pleasingly similar.”

The earlier article included a brief story by François Spaltenstein, who had printed and assembled his own copy of the Dittes serpent. It looked like it would probably be a better serpent reproduction than my first example, not only because it was based on a presumably better original, but because it was a more mature 3D printable design, incorporating some improvements resulting from lessons learned on the design of #504. I wrote to Bate curator Andy Lamb and also to Mark Witkowski, inquiring about the 3D printing files for #500, and received the set of approximately 30 computer files plus a PDF instruction manual for printing and assembly. I asked Paul Dorsey to print an example for me, but I never heard back from him.

In late August, I decided to move ahead with producing a copy of #500 on my own. Now, I have several fine ‘serious’ serpents by Monk and others, and have no intention of switching from them to 3D printed instruments. But I do

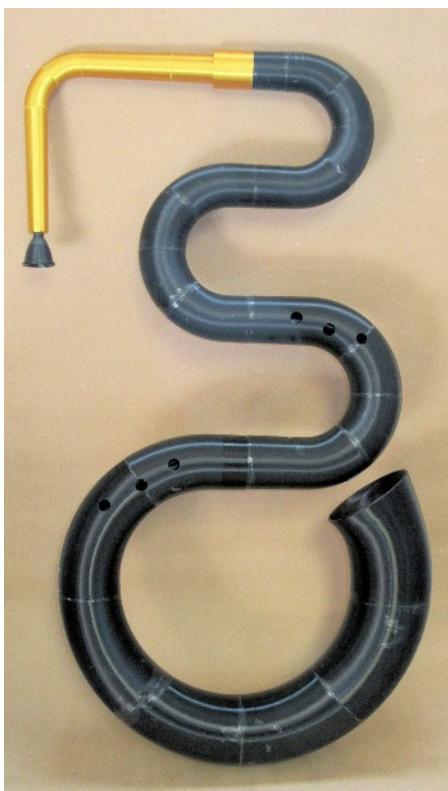


*Printed parts arranged in serpent shape, and the first few chemically welded parts have already been joined*

give a number presentations, lectures and classes for music students every year, and having some more good-playing serpents available at a low price is an attractive proposition, and in addition I was simply quite curious.



Not having a 3D printer, and being unsure if I would likely use one apart from the immediate need to print this serpent, I asked my brother, who owns two 3D printers, to assist me in this project. We agreed that if I bought enough plastic filament to feed his printers sufficiently to produce this serpent, he would print the many parts for me. I purchased three 1kg-weight spools of 1.75mm diameter plastic filament, of the PLA (polylactic acid) formulation. Two spools were in the black color, while the third spool was in a gold color, to approximate a polished brass color for the bocal and 'metal' band parts. These were all purchased from Amazon at just under \$30 each. The instructions recommended methyl dichloride as a suitable solvent for use in chemical welding of the parts, and as I had good success earlier with repairing my first serpent using SCIGrip brand's "Weld-On" #16 solvent, which is chemically comparable to the recommended methyl dichloride, I ordered a fresh tube of that product from Amazon for about \$13; I figure that the material expenses come to about \$103 for this serpent reproduction effort. Note that chemical welding of plastics using appropriate solvents is the strongest method of joining parts, short of using actual hardware to do the job. This process is much like using solvent to join sections of PVC plumbing pipe, which is something many people have experience with.

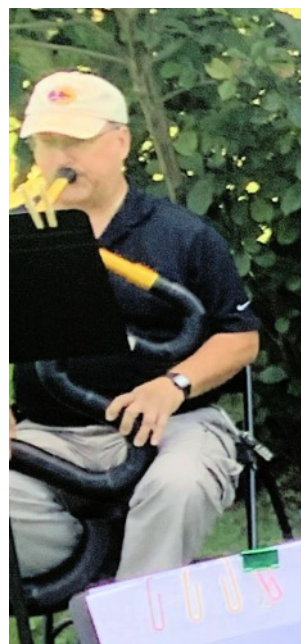


With both of my brother's 3D printers going nearly 24 hours a day (it was good that he works from his home office and is therefore near the machines most of the time, and most parts take many hours to print, so they can run overnight without losing much time) for about one week. With the 20 sections comprising the main body of the serpent, plus the 'metal' band section which is used for decoration at the small end of

the instrument, plus 5 more sections for the bocal, plus four additional sections for the two mouthpieces, the tally is 30 parts printed over roughly 200 hours. My brother noted that the power company's service to alert him if power consumption is unusual DID send a text message about unusually high power demand during this period; after all, both machines use multiple electric motors to position their print heads in three dimensions that are constantly changing, plus they have constantly operating electric heating elements to melt the plastic filament prior to it exiting the print nozzles, is an unintended expense. Note that Witkowski's design includes files for printing both a "classic church serpent" type mouthpiece as well as a more modern profile mouthpiece that is not too unlike a classic opicleide type, and each is comprised of two sections.

Rather than try to describe the printing process and subsequent assembly activity, I created a special documentary video which has been uploaded to YouTube at [youtu.be/pDgu9FIcWw](https://youtu.be/pDgu9FIcWw), or it can be found by searching for *Making a 3D Printed Serpent*. This is a very detailed "warts and all" video, and at the end I include a brief demonstration of the freshly completed instrument.

Since that time, in early September, I had the opportunity to try this instrument in ensemble, joining in an appropriately socially-distanced outdoor early music band event. I just pretended that it was one of my Monk instruments, and used the same playing technique and fingerings, and I was able to play it satisfactorily with the group. The others in the ensemble offered opinions that the new serpent sounded pretty good, although they all preferred the sound I get on my more traditionally made serpents.



*Paul Schmidt gives his 3D printed serpent its first trial in actual ensemble playing*

*photo by Mark Dawson*

Many years ago, I designed my 'Squarpen', an inexpensive and easy to make at home 'bass horn', which I hoped casually interested musicians, music students, and perhaps some beginner serpentists with low budgets might find

attractive as an introductory instrument. My own opinion is that this new 3D serpent plays about as well, or slightly better, than my Squarpent, although the outlay of material and time to assemble is still less for the Squarpent than a 3D printed serpent.

Print files for the 3D printable Dittes serpent are available on request to Mark Witkowski at [m.witkowski@imperial.ac.uk](mailto:m.witkowski@imperial.ac.uk), or alternately at [Dittes3Dserpent@aiqltd.co.uk](mailto:Dittes3Dserpent@aiqltd.co.uk). You can also download for free the 3D printer files and instructions for a copy of the Bate's anonymous serpent (#504) directly from the Bate collection website, [bate.ox.ac.uk](http://bate.ox.ac.uk).



Humorous illustration by Henri Gerbault  
(Original is in the Collection Jacquet)  
thanks to Michel Godard

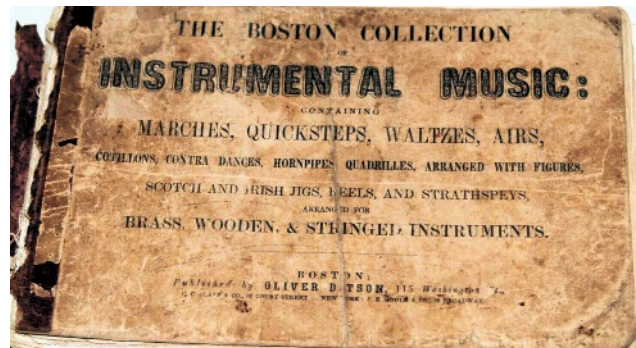
## More Exciting News

- The owner of a used church serpent made by Christopher Monk has written that he is prepared to sell the instrument for \$3000US. The instrument and its original Monk fiberboard case are located in Venice, CA. For more information, contact Tim Johnson at [timedjohnson@yahoo.com](mailto:timedjohnson@yahoo.com).



Church serpent, probably made by Christopher Monk,  
in hard fiber board case, for sale; see above

- The serpent and/or ophicleide keeps turning up on YouTube videos. The first one is called *She said that's a BASS? (Police Called)* and it can be viewed at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ag5WPNwILS0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ag5WPNwILS0); Doug Yeo makes a cameo on serpent at the 8:50-9:00 section. Up next is Francesco Gibellini playing an ophicleide in C by Schiller (one of the mystery Chinese brands of obscure western instruments) on all four parts, in virtual ophicleide quartet, of the French folksong *Ah! Vous dirai-je, Maman* (*Ah, Mother, If I Could Tell You*), which has the same melody as the nursery song *Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star*, which can be viewed at <https://youtu.be/6KN2M4-vJE4> or by searching for *Ophicleide Quartet - Ah! Vous dirai-je, Maman*. Richard Demy also performs in his virtual ensemble, performing *Tomorrow's Ahead* by Kohei Nishishita, viewable at [www.facebook.com/richard.demy/videos/10112749759821145](http://www.facebook.com/richard.demy/videos/10112749759821145) or by searching for *Richard Demy-ophicleide quartet*. Finally, Hans-Georg Gutternigg performs the Giulio Marco Bordogni *Etude No. 5* on ophicleide with piano accompaniment, viewable at <https://youtu.be/1GZ4QzPaxgY> or by searching for *Bordogni No. 5 - Ophikleide*.

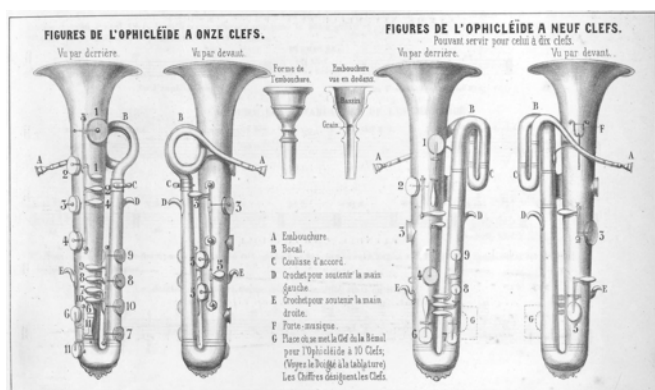


Excerpts from old band book, featuring an ophicleide part  
thanks to Mark Jones

- Scott Hall, who has designed and built a number of serpent inspired pieces of playable sculpture, wrote about his latest creation, "I've got three other wooden brasswind builds lately. These I call a 'Boarditone' horn, and you can see and hear it on YouTube at [https://youtu.be/hOmFI7K4q\\_Y](https://youtu.be/hOmFI7K4q_Y) or by searching for *Bb Boarditone Horn, Tromboard, Box Serpent Instrument* by Scott F. Hall; there's a description below the video. It's interesting because it does sound the natural harmonic series, unlike all of my prior boxed brasswinds. This ended up quickly spawning a couple of other versions. The first is a natural horn version which Robert Elias Levine



of RELBrassworks asked me for. It's got a bell added on which shifted the locations of the nodal vents. He basically wanted a boxed F-horn with vents; I managed to give him one in shorter tube-length C. He examines it in this YouTube video <https://youtu.be/UkRBkznUVT0>, which can also be found by searching for *Week With a Horn: Box Horn*. Second, Oscar Abella asked for a six-holed serpent version of my Boarditone, and I made it suitably black and likewise put the holes at 1/3rd and 2/3rds down the bore. Oscar's the principal tuba player in the Euskadiko Orkestra in Spain and likewise says he'll review it--he's particularly excited about this. It's taking a while to get there on the slow boat to Europe." While Oscar does not yet have a video on Scott's Boarditone, here is a brief video of him demonstrating his ophicleide skills <https://youtu.be/uLLHPlY7rw>, searchable as *Ophicleide Clip*.



1855 - Paris: Henri C. de Ploosen's *ophicleide method book*, *Nouvelle méthode d'opicléide*, is published. In addition to the image on the cover, a separate page features images diagramming the ophicleide and mouthpiece; public domain. thanks to Will Kimball

- From an unidentified edition of *Punch* comes this verse, under the heading of *Pomes* [sic]-thanks to Nick Byrne:

#### TO MY OPHICLEIDE

My bold Ophicleide is as good as it's bold,  
It gleams in the sun with the glitter of gold!  
'Twill grumble like thunder, 'twill coo like a dove,  
And frighten my foes, or will sing to my love!  
'Tis soothing and sweet, and it can't be denied,  
No tone is so fine as my bold Ophicleide.

'Tis stern and commanding, 'tis gleesome and bland,  
Superb as a solo, divine in a band:  
When windows are open in sweet summer night,  
How blithely I blow, to the neighbors' delight!  
And, if I feel weary, I just step inside,  
And drop off to sleep in my bold Ophicleide!

- Back to Scott Hall, who wrote, "I've recently built a sea serpent-styled and octagonal tenor-bass horn pitched in the vicinity of Bb. The painter of zoomorphic details was Daria

"Dasha" Kudryasheva of Moscow, who I've collaborated with on a couple of finishes on other instruments. The dimensions are 24" x 16" x 2.125" and I think my bore length is running about 8 feet-ish (not quite the right length for Bb, but it works). The removable bocal is just six inches of cylindrical copper tubing; the nice flare was accomplished by adding on and sculpting epoxy putty. This horn is made of a three-layer sandwich of good plywood - the bore is therefore rectangular and flares out gradually within the shape from a 1/2" start onward, but of course, the width of the bore in the depth direction always remains 3/4". The sound is very good, though; perhaps a little quieter than my box serpents which have the square bore flaring in all directions from start to finish."

"The fingering is interesting. Basically, starting from the Bb low on the staff, it's all holes closed. For the next three diatonic notes upward, it's the lower three holes open, then the upper three holes open for the next three diatonic tones, then all holes closed again for the Bb on top of the staff. Going downward from Bb low on the staff, it's all holes shut for the first four notes, then the upper three holes open for the next three notes downward, and then all holes closed again the low Bb below the bass staff. For all pedal notes on down from there, it's all holes closed; it's all about lipping down. Overall, in playing I'm simply using each cluster of three fingerholes as a single large nodal vent, rather than having to use all six holes more individually and in combinations to obtain notes, as would be the case for an actual serpent instrument."



Scott Hall's zoomorphic Sea Serpent

- Swiss serpent maker Stephan Berger and serpentist Michel Godard appear in a 16 minute video interview, conducted by Valerie-Ann Wyss, which includes the usual description of what a serpent is, and discussions, demonstrations, a tour of the Berger workshop, and concluding with a brief performance in a local chapel; [www.canalalpha.ch/emissions/avisdepasseage/avis-de-passage-stephan-berger](http://www.canalalpha.ch/emissions/avisdepasseage/avis-de-passage-stephan-berger).

● Michel wrote about two new CDs that will soon be available. One is called *Ferma l'Ali*, with Anita Piscazzi reading poetry, accompanied by Michel on serpent; the label is Desuonatori Music, and hopefully it will be available in time for a review in the next issue of this newsletter. The other is *Risplendenti, Riversi* with vocals by Natasa Mirkovic, Michel on serpent and electric bass, joined by Luciano Biondini on accordion and Jarrod Cagwin on percussion. This is on the Dreyer-Gaido label; a copy has been pre-ordered with the intent of reviewing it.



Anita Piscazzi and Michel Godard, modeling special jewelry at a gathering to promote their new CD recording project *Ferma l'Ali*

● Mark Jones wrote, "I have my new Power Point presentation ready, entitled *You Play a What? ...The Musical Instrument OPHICLEIDE and its 19th Century use in the USA*. It tells the story of the use of the ophicleide in this country. It goes nicely with another Power Point presentation I have done, *Don't Tread on Me Snake...The Musical Instrument SERPENT and its use in Early America*. Now, when the pandemic is over, hopefully I'll get a chance to present these! At least with everything shut down, it gave me time to research and put together the ophicleide work."

Mark shared some snippets on American ophicleide use in Massachusetts from the 1840's, taken from the new presentation..... In Winchester, Massachusetts, the South Woburn Church choir was supplemented in its early years at times by instrumentalists, including: violin, violino (double bass), cello, flutes, & occasionally trombone, serpent, ophicleide, bassoon, clarinet, and bugle - as documented by their former choirmaster David Youngman's *The Congressional Church Choir* - which names all the singers and the instrumentalists (AMERICAN MUSIC - 'Music in Winchester, Massachusetts', a Community Portrait 1830-1925 by Knight, Autumn 1993).....And in another

Massachusetts ophicleide sighting, we see musical dealer Henry Presntiss of Boston in 1842 advertising ophecleides [sic] along with other early instruments, for sale.....we also see an original copy of the Boston Collection of Instrumental Music published in Boston, c.1844, and on the first page is the HYKSHOS MARCH, for 2 bugles, trombone AND ophicleide.

● Nick Byrne shared a scan of a small article in an Australian 1863 newspaper, which detailed a performance featuring a Monster Ophicleide. It is quite hard to read the text, but here goes: "The Monster OPHICLEIDE is the largest ever imported to this country, and its purity of tone will, it is anticipated, surprise and astonish all blowers, whether amateur or professionals. The SELECTIONS will include the works of the most popular masters. The following Eminent Artistes will appear. Mons. A NISHINI, first violin; Signor J. MELVINO, second violin; Herr STEELLNI, violoncello; Herr RAINFORDOLPHO, contra basso; Signor BLOWMO, cornetto; Mons. NORTONETTE, side drum; Herr LESLIONI, big drum and cymbals; The DISTIN(T) FAMILY (who not being here will not be there); and the celebrated artists Mdle. JETIY TREFFS."

"PROGRAMME – Introductory Overture (Grand Orchestra), Quartettes-Ventil Horns (Dis[h]tin Family), Prima Donna Waltz (Grand Orchestra), Solo Cornetto (Sig. Blowmo), Drum Polka (Grand Orchestra), Solo-Monster Ophicleide [Prosperini] (Herr Rainfordolpho), Grand Cavitini – Trab, Trab, Trab (Mdle. Jetiy Treffs), Belle Oriental Quadrilles (Grand Orchestra), concluding with God Save the Queen."

Anyone with insight into the above, as to what kind of put-on it was, is welcome to write to the editor of this newsletter.

