

## Serpent Newsletter

P.O. Box 954 Mundelein, Illinois 60060 USA

Newsletter for Serpent Enthusiasts

September 27, 1997

### A Note from the Editor

We all like to share our favorite war stories and revisit close calls, and I am no exception. I happen to be a bit of a severe storm 'enthusiast', collecting meteorological books and videos on thunderstorms, tornados, hurricanes, etc. While living in Kansas (in the early 1960s), I came close to seeing real tornados. While working in Texas on and off over the last few years, I have been within a few miles of tornados but never in sight of one. While living in Florida, I did sight some waterspouts out in the ocean. But...while I was playing the serpent in England this last May, an 'F1' twister paid a visit to my place here in Illinois. Luckily for me, F1's are not strong enough to flatten houses, but they can and do take down trees, and they took the grove that made up the front of my property, and made a mess of the roofing.

Other than the irony of being in the wrong place for my chance to see a real live tornado, the rational part of my brain has been sitting back watching while the emotional part repeats this story every chance it gets to anyone who will listen. My rational self then, on each occasion, chastises the other half for wishing to see destructive weather phenomena in the first place, and reminding how lucky I was that it was a wimpy F1 instead of the equally popular F2 or F3 that we hear about in the papers after they have flattened houses or entire trailer parks.

Well, after insurance money plus a few thousand dollars of my own money, and an entire summer's labor, the trees are cut up and hauled away. The large holes left by the departure of root clusters formerly belonging to mature trees have been filled with dirt and grass grown. The roof is repaired but looking kind of patchy. And, I still find myself fascinated by these storms in spite of the close call.

Moving on to other things, I want to thank all who responded to my previous request for email addresses. If you have not already done so, please submit your email address to both Nigel Nathan

and myself, at the email addresses listed in the *About the Organization* section.

As predicted in the last issue, we are coming up short for money to print this issue. The account has only been this bare on one previous occasion, so please take a moment and send us a check if you haven't done so in the last couple of years.

Paul Schmidt

### New Materials

- Cliff Bevan has released his latest publication of collected works for serpent *Felix Mendelssohn - Bartholdy: Complete Ophicleide, Serpent, Bass Horn & Tuba Parts*. Mendelssohn seems to have specified the serpent and its successors more often than any other composer, and the affected works, all of them included in this volume, continue as staples of modern orchestral literature. This 44 page volume will prove useful to the serpentist wishing to learn just which lines were intended for members of the serpent family. Players of other instruments, as well as the lay-musician with an historic bent, will also find the volume of interest, if only as a reference work. Editorial notes include helpful profiles and histories for each of the included works.

Having consulted numerous editions prior to compilation of this edition, Cliff points out where differences occur between original editions, but has included only his preference and has not denoted these editorialized areas. For this reason, as well as the deliberate omission of rehearsal marks, measure numbers, etc; this volume should not be used for actual performance or rehearsal purposes.

The included excerpts are from the following works: *Elijah*, *Festival Song: To the Artist*, *Overture for Full Wind Band*, *Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage*, *St. Paul*, *Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Wedding March*, *Dance of the Clowns*, and *Funeral March*. Except for the editor's notes, the actual excerpts are noted in the originally published German, so some readers might not recognize the names of the pieces at first glance through the pages.

To order this volume (£6.50 or \$10 U.S.), or request information on any of numerous other serpent related items, write to Piccolo Press, 10 Clifton Terrace, Winchester, SO22 5BJ, England.

- The Music Gallery has recently announced several serpent related items to their collection. These include coffee mugs, t-shirts, sweat shirts, etc. Co-proprietor Anita Boorman is an excellent artist, and her illustrations of serpents adorn the products of this husband & wife company. The mug is white with black pictures of church and military serpents, the t-shirt (available in 5 sizes) is white with a black military serpent, and the sweat shirt is grey with the same picture as the t-shirt (also in 5 sizes). Write for the current catalog: Music Gallery, 317-319 Charminster Road, Bournemouth, Dorset BH8 9QP, England. Phone & fax 01202- 518932 (from the States dial 011-44-120-251-8932).

- Natural horn virtuoso Richard Seraphinoff has recently recorded a CD entitled *Cornucopia: French Chamber Music for Horn and Strings*. This is part of Indiana University's Early Music Institute series "Focus", catalog number Focus 942. Included are Frederic Duvernoy's *Quartet No. 2 in D minor*, Louis-Francois Dauprat's *Quintet No. 1 in F major Op. 6*, and Antonin Reicha's *Grand Quintet in E major Op. 106*. Both the soloist and chamber ensemble do an excellent job, and the performances are riveting. Contact Richard Seraphinoff at 812-333-0167 or by email at <seraphin@indiana.edu>.



CHRISTOPHER MONK

## Getting Serpents

Here is the list of Serpent makers who have made themselves known to us. In the case of Monk and Harding instruments, there are numerous dealers who are able to order from the makers, and might even have some in stock. All four makers will also deal directly with individual customers.

**Christopher Monk**  
*Instruments (Jeremy West)*  
 1 Friendly Place  
 Lewisham Road  
 London SE13 7QS  
 England  
 Phone: +44(0)181 694 1030 \*  
 FAX: +44(0)181 692 3223 \*  
 Web: [www.pavilion.co.uk/paulnieman/CMi](http://www.pavilion.co.uk/paulnieman/CMi)

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

\* NOTE: Do NOT use the old phone numbers 694-8784 or 325- 7301! Using them will make the new owners of those phones unhappy.

**Robb Stewart**  
*Brass Instruments*  
 140 E. Santa Clara St. #18  
 Arcadia, CA 91006  
 USA  
 Phone: 818-447-1904  
 (ophicleides, serpents)

**Derek Farnell**  
 82 Crumpsall Lane  
 Manchester M8 5SG  
 England  
 Phone:  
 (0)161-740-7778  
 (ophicleides, etc.)

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## Where Serpents Gather

- Nigel Nathan writes that he has been keeping busy with West Gallery music, including a two day workshop late this summer. In July, he also played serpent for a performance of Mendelssohn's 5th Symphony *Reformation* by the Reading University Chamber orchestra. Nigel played a D serpent borrowed from Christopher Monk Instruments.

- Bernard Fourtet conducted classes on serpent as part of the 19th International Course of Early Music, held at Daroca, Spain from August 3 through 10. Instruction included principles of performance, intonation, fingerings, homogeneous timbre, etc.

- The much anticipated performances of the Proctor Serpent Concerto with the Boston Pops orchestra came off successfully. Robert Wagenknecht submitted the following report.

I can't say for sure, but it is quite likely that double historical firsts occurred in Boston's Symphony Hall the evening of May 19, 1997 -- a member of the Boston Symphony Orchestra/Boston Pops not only played the serpent in concert with the Boston Pops, but played in the capacity of soloist. Douglas Yeo, the Boston Symphony Orchestra's bass trombonist since 1985, resplendent in nineteenth century formal garb,

performed Simon Proctor's *Serpent Concerto*, John Williams conducting (see photo on page 4). The piece, completed in December, 1987, was first performed in 1989 by Alan Lumsden (to whom it was dedicated) in Columbia, South Carolina. The program notes, provided by Doug, describe Simon's work as "the most substantial piece ever written for the serpent, exploring the complete tonal range and technique of the instrument in an accessible style encompassing jazz, minimalism, and unabashed romanticism." Doug's obvious delight in performing was infectious and was shared by the audience. Simon was present and shared a bow. Other serpentists in attendance who gathered backstage to congratulate Doug and Simon included Craig Kridel, who was instrumental in arranging the event, Carle Kopecky and Therese and Robert Wagenknecht. The concert was repeated the following evening.

While the concert was not covered by Boston music critics, the Boston Globe newspaper ran a nice piece. Doug reports that John Williams was delighted with both the serpent and with the piece, and that the audiences were rapt, smiling the whole time. The concerts were attended by about 4000 people, most of whom had probably never heard, or perhaps even seen, the serpent before. Doug writes "It was SO MUCH FUN - each night, as I got to the last page, I was thinking, 'Darn, it's going to be over soon!' A nice feeling to have at the end of a concerto, for sure!"

- Doug will also be performing the *Serpent Concerto* late this year with the Boston Classical Orchestra, as part of that group's 1997-1998 season. The performances will be Friday, December 5 and Sunday the 7th at the historic Faneuil Hall in Boston. Directed by Harry Ellis Dickson, Doug will also perform on trombone in William Grant Still's *Romance for Trombone and Orchestra*. Phone 617-423-3883 for tickets and information.

- Want a chance to meet with players of other oddball bass wind instruments? Consider attending the Contra-bassoon festival in Las Vegas, January 5 though 8, 1998. Serpentists are welcome! The event is being coordinated by Mark Trinko, and he may be reached by email at <KUUP84A@prodigy.com> or via his toll-free phone number 800-270-2616. Mark needs to finalize plans, so contact him soon if you are interested.

## About the Organization

The Serpent Newsletter is a not-for-profit publication dedicated to communication between the Serpent enthusiasts of the world. The newsletter provides a forum for all pertinent information of interest to Serpentists and players of related instruments, and a real effort is made to avoid bias and give a fair and uncolored coverage to persons, instruments, and events.

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

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NEW!

NEW!

## Workshops

- The Lacock Serpentarium came off as planned from Friday May 16 through Sunday the 18th, at the home of London Serpent Trio member Andrew van der Beek. Participants began arriving around noon on Friday, and the last arrived Saturday morning. Paul Schmidt and John Weber, having just settled into a local bed & breakfast after their flight from Chicago, were delighted to find Sue Bradley, recently arrived from Australia, also staying in the same house. Near the official starting time of 6 PM, this trio walked through beautiful downtown Lacock (all of 1 block in length) to Andrew's historic house, finding several

other lost souls meandering to the door almost simultaneously. Before long, a small group playing session had convened in an upstairs room cleared for the purpose. Late in the evening, the assembly moved *en masse* over the garden footbridge to The George pub for a few pints.

Saturday, the whole lot of 17 serpentists gathered for a day of playing sessions, talk, instruction and camaraderie. The attendees included Christopher Baines, Geoffrey Bass, Matthew Bettenson, Cliff Bevan (London Serpent Trio), Wiktor Bohdanowicz, Sue Bradley (Australia), Murray Campbell (Scotland), Tom Dibley, Thomas Fox, Sydney Hemsley, Phil Humphries (LST), Christian Korner (Germany), Nigel Nathan, Paul Schmidt (USA), Andrew van der Beek (LST), German Vidal (Argentina), John Weber (USA).

Cliff Bevan produced a recent arrangement for massed serpents, and a smaller group of eight players convened in the afternoon to read through it. Twice during the day, groups of three or four players met in various rooms for more intimate playing and the chance to really work out technical problems, share fingerings, and get to know each other better. Naturally, we finished the day sampling English beer at The George.

During the course of the weekend, BBC presenter Ivan Hewitt and producer Geraldine Marshall of Radio 3's "Music Matters" show spent time interviewing participants and recording individuals as well as group sessions. The edited show was aired on Saturday, May 31.

*Below, L-R: Doug Yeo, Simon Proctor, John Williams after performance of the Serpent Concerto in May.*



Sunday morning saw the players continuing the regimen from Saturday. In the afternoon, after a wonderful lunch in the garden, everyone gathered under the baton of Cliff Bevan in Andrew's front yard under the massive hedge for the purpose of reading music for massed serpents. At one point, while Cliff was conducting a sectional of the lowest voices, trying to get a strong coherent pedal note, a profound low rumble filled the air and for a moment it seemed as if a miracle had occurred. Seconds later, a C-130 Hercules propeller driven cargo plane thundered low overhead, towards its apparent landing at a nearby airfield.

One interesting addition to the event was the unveiling of anaconda George II, owned by Matthew Bettenson. This is the second contra-bass church style serpent to be built by the Christopher Monk workshops. The original George was built by Christopher himself during 1989 and 1990, and was commissioned by Phil Palmer. George II was built by Keith Rogers, and although the woodwork is a exact copy of George, there remain a few differences. Most noticeable is the more elaborate metal trim on the newer instrument, but perhaps more profound are it's direct acting keys, requiring the player to push the keys to open the holes. Matthew has shimmed the key levers to keep the pads rather close over the holes when open, and he has adjusted these clearances to suit the way he feels the instrument works best. Overall, the sound and playing characteristics leave the Georges as two distinctly different instruments, rather than two examples of a single type. Where does this leave the anaconda world? - the original one in the collection at Edinburgh, the PVC drain pipe creation of Steve Silverstein, George and George II. Where will it all end?

*Well, at least the Lacock event ended at The George, where all good serpentariums should.*

- On April 29, 1998, a serpent lecture/demonstration will be given by Gary Stewart, a professional instrument conservator. The event will be held at 7:30 PM in Boston's Museum of Fine Arts, and will examine the history and construction of several serpents and related instruments drawn from the museum's collection. Doug Yeo will also participate, addressing their playing characteristics. Admission will be free, but seating will be limited to 50 persons. For more information, contact Museum of Fine Arts

Musical Instruments Collection curator Darcy Kuronen, email <DKuronen@mfa.org>.

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### ● Report of the 13th Annual Early Brass Festival

This year, what is commonly called the Amherst Early Brass Festival was held in Indiana University, Bloomington. This was a grand experiment by the board of the Historic Brass Society to see if the event could and should be moved around the country or kept at Amherst. In addition to the change of locations, the weekend event was held two weeks earlier than usual on July 11-13. While attendance was not quite up to the normal level, overall this was a successful festival, and participants seemed uniformly enthusiastic about the changes. Note that the festival is currently expected to be back at Amherst next year.

On Friday night, participants met at Sweeney Lecture Hall for registration and orientation. This was followed by a short concert of music from 17th century Italy by Frescobaldi, Kapsberger and Uccellini, performed by Kiri Tollaksen on cornetto and Robert Utterback on harpsichord. Afterwards, John Ericson gave a presentation *Heinrich Staelzel and Early Valved Horn Technique*. John's focus was on the related events of the first two decades of the 1800's, and just why Staelzel decided to develop the his valve. He also offered that Staelzel and Bluhmel were the primary co-inventors of the modern valve, with Bluhmel intending a means for facilitating instant crook changes for playing in different keys, while Staelzel desired a chromatic instrument to enable new music to be written utilizing the new capabilities. To support his assertions, John presented several letters by and about the inventors, regarding their intentions.

The evening concluded with the participants gathering into groups of related instruments for playing sessions. Paul Schmidt was the only serpentist there, so the cornetts and sackbuts welcomed the serpent into their gatherings. L.K. Greenwich, a keyed bugle player, did not bring an instrument, and ophicleide player Carole Nowicke showed up on Saturday with her instrument, but by that time had nobody to play with. This festival has had good years and bad years for 19th century brass players, and we should bear in mind that a better time is had if more players come with instruments!

Saturday morning after coffee, Joe Utley talked about the *First Valve Half-tone Brass Instruments: An Early Phase of Development*. This did not refer to the earliest valve instruments in the way that Joe Ericson did, but rather to instruments which had their valve tubing so arranged that the first valve lowered the pitch by a half tone, as opposed the whole tone one expects from the first valve these days. The discussion focused on the applications of 1st and 2nd valves (often the only ones on the instruments) on horns built in Germany between 1830 and 1840. Joe presented graphical charts showing this valve usage in light of 110 museum examples, in terms of country of origin, type of instrument, date of manufacture, number of valves, city of manufacture, etc. Afterwards, Stewart Carter gave a slide presentation called *The Early Trombones in the Shrine to Music Museum Collection*. He noted that there are around 300 trombones in the collection, and he mentioned four very unique pre-1800 examples.

After informal playing sessions and lunch, Lisa Emrich gave a natural horn recital in the Ford Recital Hall, highlighting the music and career of Jacques-Francois Gallay. After a break, Peter Hoekje gave his lecture *Dimensional Factors Affecting Cornetto Playing Response*, dealing with the physics of conical brass instruments and explaining why some cornetto idiosyncrasies are what they are. Following the lecture was the annual business meeting of the Historic Brass Society; discussed was the possible continuation of holding the festival in diverse locations on alternate years, including the possibility of meeting at the Shrine to Music Museum.

In the afternoon, Charlotte Leonard held a special sight reading session for *Trombones, Cornetts and Voices in 17th Century German Music*. Proficient singers drawn from the students at the university were accompanied by the brass participants and several spare players who were drafted as extra choir members and soloists. The music, primarily by Hammerschmitt, was from as-yet unpublished editions by Charlotte, and was musically very satisfying. After dinner, several natural horn players gave a concert *19th Century Music for Horns* in Auer Concert Hall. The first third of this excellent program included *Romance* for horn and piano by Carl Oestreich (Kristin Thelander, horn), *"Auf dem Strom" for tenor, Horn & Piano* by Franz Schubert (the wonderful tenor Alan Bennett and Richard Seraphinoff, horn), *Solo No. 4 for Horn & Piano* by

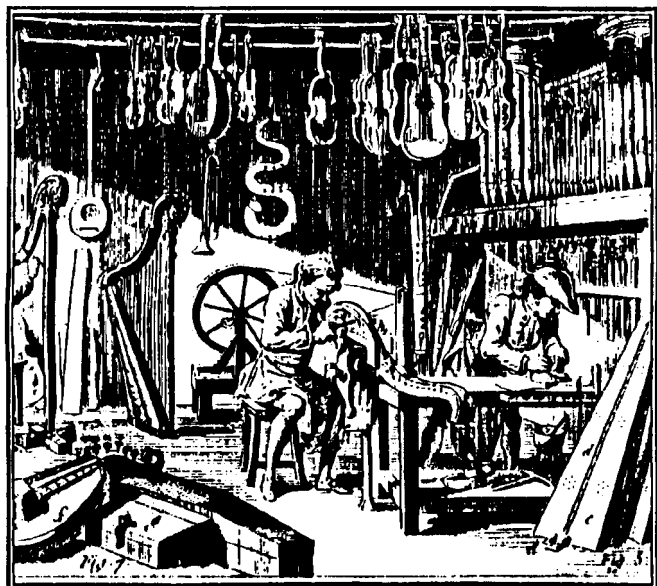
Jacques-Francois Gallay (Johnny Pherigo, horn). The next third consisted of three numbers performed on horn by Jeff Snedeker; *Romance Op. 36* (Saint-Saens), *Goodbye to a Friend* (Snedeker), and *Larghetto from 'Six Pieces'* (Gounod). The final third had the horn soloists form a quartet to perform the *Grand Quartet Op. 26 for Horns in Different Keys* by Gallay. Excellent local pianist Donald Livingston accompanied throughout the program, as well as for other programs during the festival. It should be noted that all concerts during the festival were open to, and attended by members of the public. It was not clear whether the influence of Richard Seraphinoff, a professor at the university, had any influence on the propensity of horns on the various programs, but all agreed that seldom does one hear so much excellent and enjoyable playing on this rarely heard instrument.

There was supposed to be the traditional pizza party after the concert, but it turned out that it was against university regulations to have beer in any of the locations available to festival participants, so everyone was given hurried directions to a local watering hole in downtown Bloomington. This, at least, turned out to be the renowned Red Lion pub, familiar to a great many musicians who passed through Bloomington during their college days. But there was no food, and definitely no pizza, so hopefully this minor disappointment will not be repeated in other alternate locations in years to come!

Sunday morning began with more group playing sessions dedicated to preparations for the evening gala concert. These were followed by Thomas Huener's presentation *Tromba Emblematica: The Rhetorical Role of the Trumpet in the Works of J.S. Bach*. Afterwards, Robert Barclay, in town to conduct his natural trumpet making workshop the following week, talked about *Running a Natural Trumpet-Making Workshop*. After describing the process that a typical workshop participant goes through to make an instrument, Robert made several points regarding his convictions on 'truth in advertising' on recordings that feature 'natural trumpets', ie; the finger hole question. He summed this up with a series of humorous slides presenting parodies of record jackets, showing they way they should really appear if finger-holed trumpets were used by the players.

After lunch, groups made final preparations for the gala concert, which took place in Auer Concert Hall. First on the program was an octet of natural trumpets

performing *Funf Trompetenaufzuge*. Next was a pair of natural horns plus a third player on valved horn (natural horn with valve attachment) playing *Quartet No. 3* by Bedrich Dionys Weber. This was followed by the cornetts and sackbuts, directed by Orum Stringer, performing *Benedicam Dominum a 10* and *Surrexit Pastor Bonus a 10* by Giovanni Gabrieli, and *Sinfonie: La Ramana a 8 (1610)* by Lodovico Grossi da Viadana. Also playing with this ensemble were Paul Schmidt on serpent and Daniel Heiman on lyzard (tenor zink). This miraculous performance (it was miraculous that we got through the pieces without having to stop...there were some tense moments in there) was followed by Jeff Snedeker and Donald Livingston performing *Romance from Bianca e Fernando* by Vincenzo Bellini, as arranged by Gallay. Finally the program ended with a quartet of natural trumpets plus organ performing the allegro from *Sinfonia* by Giuseppe Torelli. After the concert, many players reconvened for additional playing sessions.



## Quotes & Anecdotes

*"If I ever play the serpent again, it will be only after using a fixative on my dentures."* Reg Graham

The following was transcribed by Nigel Nathan from a difficult to read manuscript. An interesting submission, it has received minimal editing.

### ● Autobiography of a Serpentist

There have been six periods in my life so far.

First. In the second decade of the 20th Century my brother and I would toddle off to the Horniman Museum where I would glue my nose to a big glass case where lodged Serpents large; and one very large. What would they sound like, was in my thoughts then.

Second. I had read Willes' book on building an organ out of paper: pipes made of sugar paper, soaked in hot glue and would round a mandrel. They are as strong as iron and give a lovely diapason note. But the timbre of individual notes was not constant, so I abandoned organ building, as a school boy.

Third. Having an occasional spare moment, and space in an attic the fever gripped me: to make a serpent. Photographs were enlarged to scale; Paper from a Birmingham merchant; and 8 lbs. of glue: plaster of Paris. Finished: primed and red car paint flushed through.

Specifications: 8ft. long, 4" at bottom. 6 holes. Mouthpiece from a trombone, leading to a crook of 1/2" brass gaspiping.

Played: Church plainsong; magnifies male voices. In Ireland it shook the floorboards: Powerful but heavy!

Fourth. Decided to make a lighter model. True cone from mouth to bottom. Accompanied by Saxby, Carl Dolmetsch said 'the tone is good: now you must practice'. Played at Chester. Professor Conrad said it supplied a necessary need to mass recorder playing. He was kindly enthusiastic.

Fifth. Lost interest as medical work and studies become more strenuous. Qualification achieved, the serpent bug bit again. I bought a wooden serpent from Dr. Moeck. Seven holes, one key. It was easy to play, and thence forward I played in Ireland under the conduction of Philip Thorby for many years. I learned to give the brute a punch and to slightly anticipate an attack. They were glorious moments at Telenfechan (an adult school near Drogheda in N.E. Ireland), and the porridge was excellent. But I never saw the little people.

Sixth. Happy but sometimes a trifle melancholic at 88 these three beasties keep me company. Where will they go, only one is useful. The holes of my own make require large fingers - mine are now rheumatic. But my gorgeous Teddy Bear tells me to hope on:



"Chi Sa!" and get on with my studies. Occasionally a passerby may exclaim "What a loud fart. How rude!"

Reginald Graham

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## More Exciting News

- Sean Edward Dunn wishes to advise us about his webpage *The Serpent - A Death in the Classic Period*. It is a brief history of the instrument, and although not free of technical inaccuracies, remains a useful addition to related information on the Web.

<http://www.cs.wpi.edu/~skacore/music/serpent>

- Doug Yeo has a new area code, should you wish to reach him. Phone 781-861-1472, fax 781-674-2410, email <[yeo@yeodoug.com](mailto:yeo@yeodoug.com)>.

- In previous comments both here and in the Serpent Website, mention was made of significant serpent involvement in a BBC dramatization of *Sense and Sensibility*. This was incorrect; the serpent, played by Phil Humphries, appears in *Pride and Prejudice*, available on video.

- Keith Rogers has submitted the following opinion regarding performance etiquette on early brass instruments:

this newsletter, to promote the instrument; let us ensure that none of us with the best intentions but not the skill sets back the instrument's image in the public's mind.

- Early Music America wants to let you know about their website - <http://www.cwru.edu/orgs/ema>

- Since many serpentists are also tubists, here is an interesting webpage that has links to lots of other tuba related pages - <http://www.louisville.edu/%7Edrwald01/tubalinks>

- For those familiar with the teaching techniques of legendary tubist Arnold Jacobs, Windsong Press now has exclusive distribution on the entire set of Arnold's favorite teaching and demonstration devices, as well as the definitive biography and other printed material. Windsong Press, P.O. Box 146, Gurnee IL 60031, USA. Phone 847-223-4586, fax 847- 223-4580, email <[brianf@wwa.com](mailto:brianf@wwa.com)>, webpage [http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/windsong\\_press](http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/windsong_press) (note the underbar between windsong and press!)

