

The Newsletter for U S

United Serpents

Number 5
Spring 1990
Editor: Craig Kridel

United Serpents
P. O. Box 8915
Columbia, SC 29202; USA

Serpent Celebration 1590-1990 London, July 13th

Time is drawing near to the big day, the 400th anniversary of the serpent. Christopher Monk continues to coordinate the various efforts of the Serpent Celebration-- the serpent workshop at Stock Farm House from July 7 to July 13; a performance at the London Zoo on July 11; and the formal concert at St. John's Smith Square on July 13. Places are still available for the workshop and, of course, there is an open call for all serpentists to attend the July 13th concert. Christopher is handling all aspects of the workshop. His new telephone number is (0428) 605991; address remains the same: Christopher Monk, Stock Farm House; Churt, Farnham; Surrey GU10 2LS; United Kingdom.

I cannot underscore the significance of a serpent workshop. I have attended two and have been astonished by the progress of all the participants. If one really wants to learn the serpent, the week-long workshop is the only way. I ask you all to support Christopher and the Serpent Celebration-- come to the workshop and the St. John's performance. *And this is it!* No international serpent events are scheduled for the next few years.

The Birthing of George, April 23, 1990

Vital Statistics:

carved from solid wood; 10 cubic feet required; built up from 21 sections; 34' 9.75" of glued joint; walls .25" thick; weight "in the white"-- 18 lb; length of wooden body-- 12'6.75"; overall width-- 33.5"; standing height-- 65.5"; will be covered with approximately 24 sq. ft of pigskin; the first contra-bass serpent made in 150 years; only the second known to exist; tallest serpent ever. Called George to distinguish it from the 1840 Anaconda and because it first came to life on St. George's Day. *George will be introduced to the public at the Serpent Celebration. And where will George go?*



Christopher and George (before George)



24 of the 26 members of the United Serpents Grande Band (l-r, Ron Davis, Paul Schmidt, Donald Beyer, Tom Law, Claude Engli, Alan Lumsden, Cliff Bevan, Andrew van der Beek, Dick Fuller, Robert Wagenknecht, Hokum W. Jeebs, Terry Pierce, Ken Kreitner, Connie Palmer, John Weber, Christopher Monk, Phil Humphries, Phil Palmer, Ralph Dudgeon, Robert Dulake, Tra Wagenknecht, Tom Zajac, Craig Kridel, Dennis James [missing: Ben Peck, Steve Silverstein])

A Serpentist's Creed

an excerpt from an interview with Christopher Monk; Dean Olscher, interviewer; aired on National Public Radio's "The Morning Show," October 27, 1989.

"... I have as an historian a far greater regard for my ancestors so I cannot believe that for three hundred years they would have made regular use of an instrument that had nothing but stupidity about it. And the more you look at the music, the more you become aware that there is a great deal of beauty of sound there."

New Serpent Recordings:

Nimbus NI 5175

Berlioz, Grande symphonie funebre et triomphale

The Wallace Collection; serpentist: Stephen Wick

Accent ACC 8860 D

Harmonie und Janitscharenmusik Octophoros; serpentist: Andrew van der Beek

Label la Lichere LLL 37

Le Chant du Serpent

Michel Godard; serpentist: Michel Godard

[available c/o Organisation Soulies Fremaux; 174-178 Rue de Fontenay; 94300 Vincennes; France]

The First International Serpent Festival: University of South Carolina, 1989

It was a year not to be missed-- 1989, the 399th anniversary of the serpent. Thus, in recognition of Canon Edme Guillaume's 1590 contribution to the musical world and in anticipation of the events of the 400th anniversary, the first serpent festival was held from October 20-22 with 26 serpentists from Canada, England and the United States descending upon Columbia, South Carolina for this three day, four performance event.

While many serpent concerts and celebrations have occurred in recent years, the Festival sought to present the instrument in the most comprehensive manner thus far, demonstrating its various musical traditions in secular, sacred, orchestral, military and chamber music.

The Friday evening concert permitted

American performers to display their talents and progress of playing that has occurred in this country during the past five years. Two American ensembles, the Saturday Serpent Society of Richmond, VA and the American Serpent Players of New York, NY performed repertoire ranging from 16th century dances to 20th century popular music. Highlights of the concert included virtuosic playing on keyed bugle by Ralph Dudgeon of Courtland, NY, and two world premiere performances: P.D.Q. Bach's "O, Serpent" [discovered for the Festival by Professor Peter Schickele] played by the London Serpent Trio and Simon Proctor's "Snake in the Glass for glass armonica and serpent" performed by Craig Kridel of Columbia, SC and armonica virtuoso Dennis James of Columbus, OH with the composer accompanying on the



London Serpent Trio member Clifford Bevan thanking Alan Lumsden

harpichord. In addition, U.S.C. tuba professor Ronald Davis, performing on the American Anaconda, presented a heart-warming interpretation of a favorite from the Anaconda literature, "Annie Laurie." The concert concluded with the University of South Carolina's Fanfare Francaise performing selections from the late 18th century French military band repertoire.

Saturday afternoon provided one of the more unusual opportunities ever presented to serpentdom. The twenty six members of the United Serpents Grande Band went to the University of South Carolina football game, and in a display of "collegiate Americana" at its finest, the Grande Band had the honor of performing after the national anthem and immediately before the entrance of the football teams. 65000 Carolina fans were treated to a stirring rendition of the Carolina classic--"Under the Boardwalk"-- by the largest gathering of serpentists since 1790 (accompanied by the U.S.C. Marching Band).

As unique as the afternoon proved, participants and audience members were not disappointed by the events of Saturday evening. Andrew van der Beek and six USC wind musicians performed a feldpartite by Haydn. This was followed by van der Beek and Christopher Monk and the USC Graduate Vocal Ensemble demonstrating the serpent's original function-- accompanying a choir for plainsong-- in this case, repertoire from an 18th century French mass. The newly composed concerti followed. Alan Lumsden performed Simon Proctor's "Serpent Concerto" and van der Beek, Monk, and Clifford Bevan presented Robert Steadman's "The Year of the Serpent." Both concerti were accompanied by the U.S.C. Chamber Orchestra, Donald Portnoy, conductor. The concert ended with what is becoming a serpent tradition-- a large group performance of "The Tortoises" and "The Elephant" from Saint-Saens' "Carnival of the Animals."

Following the third international



United Serpents Grande Band at the University of South Carolina

meeting of US on Sunday morning, the festival concluded with an afternoon solo concert by the London Serpent Trio and, as a Festival finale, a large band performance of Simon Proctor's "The Amherst Suite for Eight Serpents" [written for the 1986 First International Meeting of US held at the Amherst Early Music Festival].

Serpent enthusiasts are now awaiting the week-long workshop, coordinated by Christopher Monk, and the 400th Birthday Party, scheduled for Friday the 13th of July, 1990, in London.

The First International Serpent Festival, sponsored by the University of South Carolina and coordinated by United Serpents (with support from the South Carolina Arts Commission-- an act of true bravery as recognized by anyone who has sought support for the arts), received recognition in *USA Today* and on National Public Radio's "The Morning Edition" and "Performance Today." South Carolina Education Radio is currently editing a one hour, national radio broadcast for N.P.R.

Used Instruments:

none on the market
(to our knowledge, that is)

Recent Publications of Interest:

an interview with Michel Godard, "The Song of the Serpent or, The obsession of Michel Godard," *Brass Bulletin* 68, 1989.

in press: "Historical Study on the Serpent" by Philip Palmer, *Historic Brass Society Journal*, Vol. 2, Fall, 1990 [subscription part of annual dues, \$15 US/Canada; \$20 foreign; Historic Brass Society; 148 W. 23rd St, #2A; New York, NY 10011]





Claude Engli (Robb Stewart copper serpent, 1988),
Alan Lumsden (Forveille, 1821), Clifford Bevan
(Christopher Monk serpent covered with python
skin, 1987)



members of the American Serpent Players (l-r, Benjamin Peck, Steven Silverstein, Thomas Zajac, Terry Pierce)



The Newsletter for U S

United Serpents

Number 5a (domestic edition)
Winter 1991
Editor: Craig Kridel

United Serpents
P. O. Box 8915
Columbia, SC 29202; USA

Serpent Workshop Planned for August at Amherst Early Music Festival

Christopher Monk will conduct a one-week workshop, August 4-10, 1991 at the Amherst Early Music Festival, Amherst College, Amherst, MA. The Amherst Festival has become the major summer meeting grounds for amateur and professional early musicians with approximately 40 faculty and 200 students participating each of the two weeks. The Festival will be preceded by the Early Brass Festival (August 2-4).

This event (unlike the last American event, the International Serpent Festival) will focus upon instruction and ensemble playing. I strongly encourage beginning and intermediate serpentists to attend. Participants of past workshops displayed the magic of Christopher's teaching: novices who at week's beginning could not play an octave concluded past workshops by performing large ensemble works; intermediates became adept as ensemble players; and advanced players by week's end were conquering the solo literature. I am convinced that a one week workshop equals 2-4 years of individual practice. There will be many opportunities for advanced play at the 1991 Workshop since 6 members of the American contingent to the Serpent Celebration have already expressed their intention to participate.

Amherst workshop fees and housing costs are approximately \$275 for room and board and approximately \$275 for tuition. Page 2 contains a form for more information; Amherst registration materials will be sent in the late spring. This is the only North American event for awhile; the next gathering is scheduled at Amherst for August 1994.

Domestic Sale of United Serpent Teeshirts

A limited number of US teeshirts have been produced, and we will be accepting orders until February 15th. Orders will be shipped on March 1. There will be future opportunities to order shirts once an administrative process is organized for international sales. This might take some time-- so order now while supply lasts.

Christopher Monk's report of the Serpent Celebration in London (July 13, 1990) will be published in the annual newsletter, No. 6, scheduled to be released in Spring 1991. As a "news flash": 57 serpentists performed for a packed house at St. John Smith's Square.