



Serpent Newsletter

P.O. Box 954 Mundelein, Illinois 60060 USA

Newsletter for Serpent Enthusiasts

April 1, 2005

A Note from the Editor

This issue of the Serpent Newsletter marks the 13th full year of publication, which has some kind of significance. The Spring edition always has the release date of April 1, which besides being April Fool's Day is also the anniversary of the debut of the London Serpent Trio. And of course, the major serpent event of modern times was the Serpent Celebration that took place on the 13th of July, 1990. So, according to modern math, we transpose the date to the year and then carry the 1. *Yeah.*

Looking back at the first issue, I can make an attempt to sum up the news. Nigel Nathan was named as UK Representative, the Newsletter got a PO Box and bank account, and the newsletter assumed a regular publication schedule (as distinguished from the earlier Newsletter for United Serpents). It was announced that the Amherst Serpent Workshop, an event previously scheduled to occur every three years, was henceforth cancelled in favor of what ended up being the biennial Serpentarium in England. I started my regular plea for more monetary contributions. The process of converting the mailing list established by Craig Kridel to the current one was begun. There was a report on Christopher Monk's memorial celebration by his daughter Philippa Lunn. The 'Where Serpents Gather' column was announced, as was the promise of maintaining a list of known serpent and ophicleide makers in each issue. The Serpent Discography project was started as an active effort, and continued this way in the newsletter until it was later moved to the Serpent Website. This was the first and last issue to be published in loose leaf style. I hardly seems like so many years could have passed by, but the dates don't lie. I have enjoyed putting together every issue, and hope to continue for many years.

The newsletter editorial office has been updated to DSL high speed internet, giving an speed improvement of 100 times over the old dial-up connection. However, this somehow rendered the old fax machine incapable of reliable operation, so it has been retired. For this reason, there is no longer a fax number for the office and all communication must be done

by voice, mail or email. If you have something you need to send and these other choices are not suitable in your situation, please call to arrange a special point in time when the DSL can be off and the fax machine on.

The Serpent Website has not been sitting unattended. Many small changes have taken place, with the most recent being updates to the discography and another new recipe. Don't forget to send money. Enjoy.

Paul Schmidt

Where Serpent Gather

- The Indiana Brass Band is an organization dedicated to applying the music technology of the 1830's, an underrepresented part of American musical history. The band has an offshoot ensemble that consists of keyed bugles, quiticlaves, ophicleides, cornepeans, trombones, natural horns and early piston valve horns plus percussion. They have a special fondness for the music of Francis Johnson, an early band leader in Philadelphia. For more information, refer to <http://wildcatband.com/keyed.html>, or phone Bruno Pino at 724-397-2814 in Home, Pennsylvania.
- The Boston Symphony's Summer 2005 season at Tanglewood will include a performance of Bernard Henrik Crusell's arrangement (c. 1818) of *Beethoven's Septet, Op. 20*. The instrumentation is flute, E-flat clarinet, two B-flat clarinets, two bassoons, serpent, two E-flat horns, E-flat trumpet and bass trombone. The arrangement is published by Southern Music, edited by their director of publications Mark Rogers. The piece will be played by students of the Tanglewood Music Center, and Doug Yeo will play the serpent part, possibly on 'George' to give the 16 foot sound the original had with a string bass.

- The Chorus Pro Musica's performance of the Berlioz *Roméo et Juliette* on February 26, 2005, under the direction of Jeffrey Rink, was praised in the Boston Phoenix (March 3 issue) review by Richard Buell, "...whenever there was transparency, elegance, or warmth to be had, that's what we got.....if the period style orchestra often sounded one rehearsal short of real security, there was compensation in such moments as seeing and hearing Douglas Yeo play a real ophicleide – beautifully."
- There are reports that America's oldest Civil War band, Wisconsin's First Brigade Band, will be participating in the Historic Brass Society's Early Brass Festival in 2006. The band is looking forward to experiencing instruments that make their own enviable collection of antiques look young by comparison, and also anticipate putting on their own presentations for the edification and enjoyment of the festival participants. Newsletter editor Paul Schmidt, the most recent addition to the FBB, is trying to figure out how to play in the band and also fully participate on serpent and ophicleide with the keyed brass folks. Along with other guest groups/organizations, 2006 looks to be a very exciting year for the EBF.
- Doug Yeo will be presenting a paper at the Great American Brass Band Festival in Danville, Kentucky on June 10. His subject will be serpent and ophicleide in early brass bands. Doug writes that this is a "very interesting subject with lots of great material out there, including the US Marine Band archives. I'll also play *O Ruddier Than the Cherry* on ophicleide with the Athena Brass Band immediately after I give my paper....I'll be using the arrangement made by John Cranmer for the Early Victorian Brass Band (see HBS Vol. 4, P. 261)".



Bill Broom's contrabass Squarpent "Sylvester"

Workshops

- Nigel Nathan reports that he still has some room for the upcoming Serpentarium on May 27 - 30 in Cornwall. If you are interested in attending, please contact Nigel (see 'About the Organization').
- Michel Godard will do a serpent workshop in Périgueux, France, from July 4 through 12, on French church music from the 17th Century. He will be working with singers and organ players according to "improvisation sur le livre", and all the combinations possible with the serpent. This same style is used in Michel's new CD, reviewed in the 'New Materials' section of this newsletter. The workshop is in collaboration with the Centre de Musique Ancienne de Versailles. For more information, contact École Britten, 3 Ruw de Varsovgie, F 24000 Périgueux, France. ecole-britten@wanadoo.fr or visit <http://michelgodard.fanspace.com>
- The Historic Brass Society's 21st annual Early Brass Festival will take place on July 8-10, 2005 at Bennington College, Bennington, Vermont. The special theme will be *19th Century Brass: A World of Transition*. There will of course be the usual lectures, informal playing sessions and concerts. See www.historicbrass.org for more information.

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@btpenworld.com

(serpents & historical oboes)

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

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

Phone: +44 (0)1865 863673

• Build an experimental serpent from plans via www.serpentwebsite.com

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

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

(ophicleides, bass horns)

NEW!

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

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

Derek Farnell
82 Crumpsall Lane
Manchester M8 5SG
England

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



Paul Schmidt trying out Scott Hall's "Book Serpent"

New Materials

- *MFA Highlights: Musical Instruments*, softcover book by Darcy Kuronen. MFA (Museum of Fine Arts) Publications, Boston, 2004, www.mfa-publications.org, obtained from Amazon.

The *MFA Highlights* series is published to give the public a view of the various holdings of Boston's Museum of Fine Arts, and this volume *Musical Instruments* is the latest. Darcy Kuronen is the curator of musical instruments at the museum, and he has edited a beautiful snapshot into the collection. The text is written with an easy and informative style, but it is the pictures that really stand out. The photographs are mostly by the museum's staff, although some are apparently scans of historic documents. The clarity these photos offer allows the reader to easily see many details of instrument construction.

The book is divided into chapters for Percussion, Wind, String and Keyboard instruments, with an average of 30 pages devoted to each type. In the Wind Instrument section, for example, there are Bulgarian kavalas, Peruvian antaras, Sioux flutes, Costa Rican effigy ocarinas, European recorders, Turkish oboes, Northumbrian bagpipes, Japanese shos, and many others including serpents and keyed brasses. It is nice to note that the commentary on such instruments is well informed, free of inaccurate statements, and of an

overall positive flavor. This will be a nice addition to the bookshelf of any musical instrument enthusiast.

- *Une Messe Pour La Saint-Michel & Tous Les Saints Anges (A Mass for Saint Michel & All Holy Angels)*, CD recording featuring Michel Godard on serpent, Freddy Eichelberger on organ, with the Ensemble Vocal Ludus Modalis. Alpha #514, obtained from www.alpha-prod.com (also available from Amazon France).

Organist Freddy Eichelberger has organized an "improvised" performance to relive the experience of what a Gallican celebration of Mass might have been like in the 17th century. He has attempted to arrange it so that the experience will not be unrealistically polished, but is rather closer to a normal, every day level of musical practice in a church that is good but perhaps not of the first order. Still, this hypothetical church has a fine organ and is able to afford a decent organist. Furthermore, it has available to it a quality group of singers and a resident serpentist who knows his stuff.

The mass is structured as an alternatim, wherein the organ and singers take turns with the sections, never performing simultaneously. The mass used here is based on both historical sources and material written for the recording. The singers follow a written plainchant, with the serpent either doubling or noodling around as a counter melody. Likewise, the singers sometimes improvise counterpoint while the serpent maintains the melody in *sur le livre* manner. The organist also has his opportunities to embellish the source material. All the while, it is clear that all participants are listening to, influencing, and being likewise influenced by the others.

The small male choir (three singers are listed, and with reverberation it is impossible to detect whether there might be more) sounds appropriate to the setting of the church at Juvigny-sur-Marne, and the historic organ of Jehan de Villers and Jacques Carouge has a fine colorful sonority. Michel Godard's serpent both complements the voices and stands out when required. This recording is an excellent example of the serpent in its original useage.

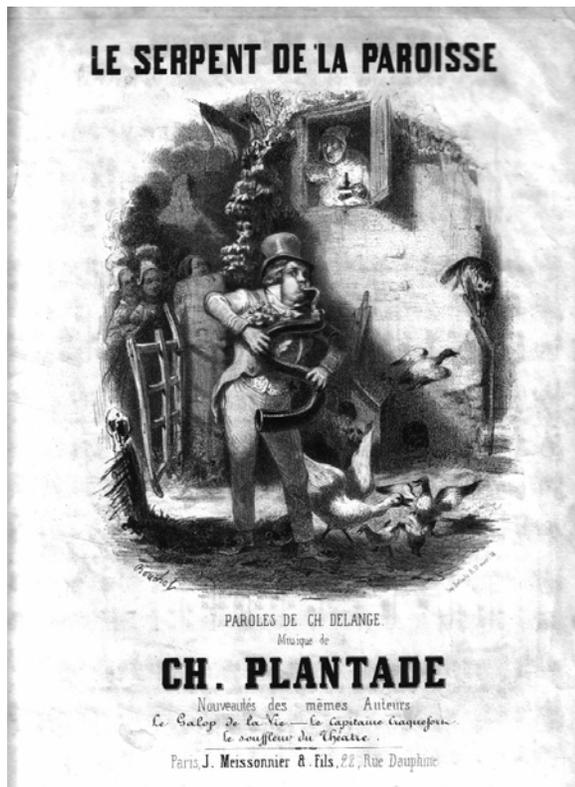
- Doug Yeo's edition of the *Divertimento #1 in B flat (St. Antoni)*, attributed to Haydn, has just been released in print by Sarastro Music. Doug has retained the original serpent part in this edition, and has also provided a welcome nine page introduction in which he covers the sources used, the authorship dispute (Haydn or Pleyel or someone else) and performance suggestions. Doug writes that this is the edition that will be used by Boston's Handel & Haydn Society in their April performance that will also include the Brahms Haydn Variations and Requiem. The catalog number is SAR 0110. Sarastro Music, PO Box 17096, London, SW15 1ZT, England, info@sarastro.com, www.sarastro.com.

- *Trio Rouge*, CD recording featuring Michel Godard on serpent and tuba, Vincent Courtois on cello, and Lucilla Galeazzi's vocals. 2004. Intuition #INT 3353 2, info@intuition-music.com, www.intuition-music.com. Obtained from Amazon.

The unusual collaboration between voice, cello and tuba/serpent that is the group Trio Rouge was 'discovered' during the Talos Jazz Festival in 2000, and the present recording is the result. This is a sparse sounding group with an intensity that suits the combination of traditional and contemporary songs. The older songs include two famous anti-facist anthems of the resistance, *Bella Ciao* and *Gorizia*, and all songs have a Mediterranean flavor that ranges from gypsy dance to ballad. The non-traditional tracks are all written by the group, and some are inspired by the adjacent traditional ones.

The serpent gets good exposure here, with soulful lines that weave in and out of the vocal part. Michel Godard does a fine job with the serpent, and also with the tuba on the more driven selections. Lucilla Galeazzi's voice has many colors, suiting the hard boiled war songs, the more tender ballads and even the half spoken style required by the more contemporary compositions. In most cases, Vincent Courtois restrains his cello to the background, but here and there it steps forward.

This recording is not really a jazz album, even though it is on a jazz label. It really fits into a more folk oriented genre, with considerable emotion and meaning. Very nice.



- Simon Proctor's *Serpent Concerto* has finally been published by Southern Music. It comes in two versions, the original one (SU510) and the more generic *Lyrical Concerto* (SU527). Both versions are in Simon's reduction for piano accompaniment, although they do include the optional part for the cupped bells. The price for the original is listed as \$17.50 (US), while the generic version goes for \$20; presumably the extra cost is due to the alternate treble clef solo part that comes with it.

- *Berlioz: Benvenuto Cellini*; 2005 CD recording of the complete opera. French National Orchestra; Radio France Chorus, John Nelson directing; Virgin Classics #7243 5 45706 2 9. Obtained from Amazon.com.

Very loosely based on the autobiography of the Renaissance sculptor and goldsmith, the libretto for *Benvenuto Cellini* was accepted for production by the Paris Opéra in 1836. Berlioz completed the score early in 1837. This score is now referred to as "Paris 1." Berlioz created a "Paris 2" edition at the insistence of the Paris Opéra after a disastrous opening night. In 1852 Franz Liszt staged a much reduced version in German at Weimar (the "Weimar" edition). The present recording is almost entirely drawn from "Paris 1" with some corrections from "Paris 2", and a few innovations from the Weimar score, most notably the introduction to the Finale of Act I. All of the versions of the score are from the *New Berlioz Edition* (1996) by Hugh Macdonald who also provided the excellent liner notes for the recording.

The original run of the opera only lasted for four performances, the last with a replacement in the role of Cellini. It would not be seen again in France until a 1913 production at the *Théâtre des Champs-Élysées* in Paris. It would not return to the Paris Opéra itself until 1972. Liszt's 1852 Weimar production led to a single performance at London's Covent Garden in 1853, with Berlioz on the podium and Queen Victoria in the audience, which was nevertheless soundly booed by the audience and withdrawn from further performances. In spite of its difficult beginnings the work is again being performed and recorded. The overture remains a mainstay of the modern orchestral literature, as does *Le Carnaval Romain* which Berlioz composed from the materials of *Benvenuto Cellini* in 1844.

Berlioz had originally submitted the libretto to the Paris Opéra-Comique, which rejected it. The eventual acceptance of the libretto by the Paris Opéra is likely the reason for the inclusion of the exciting Roman carnival scene that ends Act I. The more spectacle, the better in Grand Opera! The Finale to Act I includes a "play within a play" derived from the *Commedia dell'arte*, the "Pantomime of King Midas", or "The Ass's Ears." The two valets Harlequin and Pierrot each "sing" a solo in mime. Harlequin's "song" is a beautiful English horn solo with harp and string accompaniment. Pierrot's offering is a more raucous ophicleide solo. The



The Indiana Brass Band's keyed brass ensemble

crowd at the carnival politely applauds the beauty and refinement of Harlequin's solo but shows great enthusiasm for the grotesquery of Pierrot's offering. Harelquin is rewarded with a single coin, while Pierrot is showered with them. The scene serves to illustrate the composer's estimation of the public as a pack of philistines. Quoting from page 16 of the liner notes:

“The ophicleide, a heavy brass instrument, is prominent throughout, and in Pierrot's solo Berlioz ridiculed the ludicrous effect of giving such instruments a melodic solo, an abuse he had suffered at Musard's popular concerts.”

The ophicleide solo is in the middle to high register of the instrument and is played superbly by the unnamed player. In the orchestration of the score, the ophicleide creates moods ranging from comic in the solo to solemn and even sinister in under-scoring the action. A partial transcription of the ophicleide solo can be found in the second edition of Clifford Bevan's *The Tuba Family* (2000) on pp 343 - 4.

The recording consists of three compact discs priced as two. The musical, technical, and scholarly quality is excellent. The ophicleide solo itself is brief, but it is wonderful to hear it as it was originally intended in Berlioz's orchestration throughout over three hours of music. - *Mark Jacobs*

Mark Eliot Jacobs is principal trombone with the Rogue Valley Symphony and instructor in low brass at Southern Oregon University in Ashland, Oregon. He also plays ophicleide, serpent, and English bass horn.

- Southern Music has not only published the Proctor *Serpent Concerto*, but has also now released Beethoven's *Grand Serenade Op. 20*, arranged by Bernhard Henrick Crusell and edited by R. Mark Rogers (RMR9), which includes the historical serpent part.

- In April, Michel Godard's serpent can also be heard on another new CD release, Rabih Abou Khalil's *Song for Sad Women* on the Enja label. Michel writes that on this recording he plays only serpent and no tuba. The album catalog number is not known at the time of this writing.

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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More Exciting News

- *Pipers*, the leading magazine for wind players in Japan, published a two part interview with Doug Yeo in late 2004. The first installment focused on historic brasses, and the December issue continued with the focus on trombone. The interview was conducted by Saeki Shigeki, the leading ophicleide player in Japan. There are reportedly no revelations in the article, and the photos are fairly stock, but it's good to see the enthusiasm for our instruments is alive in that island nation.

- On the same note, the British publication *Brass Herald* ran a recent article titled *Exploring the Serpent and Ophicleide*, by Douglas Yeo. The one pager includes a photo of Doug taken during a presentation at the National Music Museum, captioned as being taken at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, plus a stock photo of the London Serpent Trio and an engraving of Jean Prospere with the Monstre Ophicleide (from the *Illustrated London News*, June 24, 1843, page 442). The text itself is quite brief, giving an overview of the history and playing characteristics of the serpent and ophicleide. Still, a nice addition to the list of published articles on our favorite instrument.

- A paper on the ophicleide has been discovered in the archives of Duke University, titled *The Ophicleide*, by David M. Boldt. The URL is www.duke.edu/~dmb9/archive/ophicleide.pdf and it requires Adobe Acrobat to read. The 21

page document was apparently written by a student to satisfy the requirements of a music course, and is an uneven mix of informed excerpts from authoritative sources combined with odd bits of less reliable factoids that have been apparently gleaned from various web sources. The first half of the paper is useful, while the later parts are of lower quality. Still, interested readers might find it worthwhile to download and peruse.

- An interesting website devoted to unusual musical instruments has surfaced at www.oddmusic.com/gallery/. Many odd instruments are listed along with photos, sound clips and links. The serpent's listing is taken almost verbatim from the Serpent Website, while the ophicleide was briefly listed but was missing at the time of this writing. Readers can email the site administrator to suggest other instruments, add or correct information, etc.

- The sixth known contrabass serpent has been constructed in Penistone, England, by Bill Broom. He writes, "Following the saint theme the name Sylvester was chosen. Most of the construction work was completed in late December 2003. There are two saints Sylvester, whose days are celebrated on the 26th of November and the 31st of December. The latter Sylvester is supposed to have cured Roman Emperor Constantine of leprosy by baptizing him." Bill simplified the Serpent Website's construction plans for "Patrick", the contrabass Squarpent, to suit his level of woodworking skills and available workshop equipment. With the exception of an electric drill, all work was done by hand. The three main tube sections were made up per the plans, although the method of joining the plywood trapezoids was different from the plans, and the tone holes were cut before assembling them into the tube sections. Instead of having four equal sized trapezoids per tube section, each section used two identical trapezoids plus two slightly wider ones, assembled along with wooden trim strips into a sort of "I-beam" cross section. This avoided the need for milling the edges of the trapezoids to join them, but resulted in slight ridges at each corner. The keys are similar to those described in the plans, but use layers of modeling foam attached with carpet tape in place of weather stripping and leather; they are also direct acting without linkages, but still rely on rubber band springs. Bill made the decision to arrange the tubing sections in-line, as opposed to in a fold-back pattern like that used for Patrick.

Bill adds, "I am not a brass player and so I am struggling to master the instrument. I can obtain a fully chromatic range of notes just over two octaves from E-flat 1 to G3, but cannot necessarily hit the note I want at the appropriate time. Perhaps an experienced player might be able to extend the range down a tone or two. The fingerings differ from those in [the plan's] fingering chart."

Bill also wrote, "I had not realized when I decided to build a Squarpent that the original contrabass serpent

'Anaconda' ...had been made by Joseph and Richard Wood of Huddersfield. Built around 1840, 'Anaconda' was played at Almondbury Church. I work in Huddersfield, and when I drive to work, pass Almondbury Church. Almondbury would have been a separate village in the 19th Century, but has now been swallowed up by Huddersfield, being about two miles from the town center. The four manual 'Father Willis' pipe organ in Huddersfield Town Hall is still serviced and repaired by members of the Wood family. The local music shop still trades as 'Woods Music'.

Bill hopes to experiment further with other square bored instruments, perhaps a bassoon or curtal/dulcian or even a racket. He also had tentative plans to try a Box-O-Cleide, time permitting.

(Editor's note: I located Richard Wood, current proprietor of Woods Music in Huddersfield, and emailed him about the possible family connection. He wrote back, "My Great Great Grandfather, who died in 1884, did not have brothers who played brass. I have always been told he was not related to the serpent maker." Richard did offer to send a copy of his store's catalog, which features a picture of Almondbury Church.)

- Robb Stewart, who is known as both a fine brass instrument repair professional and as a craftsman who builds replicas of antique brasses, has written to update his profile. While he will continue to make replicas of other old horns, including ophicleides, he will no longer accept orders for metal serpents.

- Michel Godard emailed PDF files for two old serpent songs. One is *Le Serpent de la Paroisse*, tune by Charles Plantade and words by Charles Delange, published by J. Meissonnier & Fils, Paris. This is a comical song for one singer with piano accompaniment. The other is *Le Serpent du Village*, tune by A. Pilati and words by Julian and J.B. Vasseur, published by Alphonse Leduc, Paris. This is another lighthearted ditty, and the part alternates between singer and serpent; it seems that instead of an actual serpent player, the singer is supposed to vocalize on the syllable "Pou" in emulation of the serpent's sound. The cover page suggests a piano accompaniment, but it was not included in what Michel sent. Dou Yeo reported that he has previously obtained the first song from the archives of the Musee de Musique in Paris, and came close to including it on his serpent CD. Doug has a friend translate the lyrics to this selection, and that start out as:

At Bonneuil, near Falaise,
 If by chance, as you pass by there,
 As certainly as I live, I would be very happy, very satisfied,
 If you would surely say,
 "That's our Serpent(ist),
 You must see him with his instrument.
 He makes such a racket

When he blows into his instrument."

Pou, pou, pou...etc.

Yes, the demonic noise of the serpent, pou, pou, pou....

Gives the village great pleasure.

Etc.

Doug writes, "I've played through it and it's really nice. Someday I'll record it...."



J. Selmer's plywood serpent-inspired instrument



- Chris Gutteridge wrote to alert the readership that he has found another feature film that includes the serpent. The 1986 movie version of James Clavell's *Tai Pan*, directed by Daryl Duke and starring Bryan Brown and Joan Chen was released on DVD in 2004, and so is currently available to purchase. It is not a great film, but if you like Clavell's style of historical story telling, and can tolerate overly abridged costume dramas, it is a reasonable effort. Of primary significance to serpentists is the presence of the same in two important scenes. In DVD chapter 11 "Pay in Cash", where an auction is taking place on a beach in Hong Kong, a military band is providing the entertainment. Two serpents are very briefly visible, and audible thereafter playing *Soldier's Joy* and Beethoven's *Minuet in G*. It seems that the bass line in the former is played on serpent, and there is no doubt of its presence in the latter. In a later scene, DVD chapter 13 "The Ball", the same military band with two serpentists is playing but the bass line is clearly being played on a modern instrument. In no scene are the holders of the serpents obviously playing them, and in the ball the one player most visible is clearly not blowing.

- Scott Hall in Florida recently completed a novel serpent-inspired instrument he calls the "Book Serpent". Constructed from a laminate of several layers of thick 'hurricane' plywood and carved out with a router, it includes within its compact dimensions the complete 8 foot expanding bore. Scott did not base the finger hole positions or sizes on real serpents, instead placing the two groups at the 1/3 and 2/3 of the overall bore. Because this put them at tight bends in the bore, they were placed closer together within each group, necessitating smaller holes than the norm. Scott generously shipped the instrument to Paul Schmidt's home along the Illinois-Wisconsin border, where it was discovered under a pile of white stuff in the middle of a snow storm at 1AM. The instrument was taken through the usual paces over the next few days, with the following observations being made. It has a nice, round and resonant timbre very much like a real serpent. In its lower octave, it can be played on simple tunes using normal serpent fingering with lots of extra lip effort. In the next octave, the fingering departs from anything close to normal, this being due in part to the fact that it does not overblow at the octave; the finger hole positions, being even worse than on a real serpent, don't help things either. Still, the instrument remains chromatic through this two octave range, although gaps appear above that. This was a good effort by Scott, and might prove interesting if any future attempts can be made to more closely follow the proper serpent hole positions.

- While Scott Hall labors to create playable artwork loosely based on serpents and other instruments, there remains that group of odd experimenters that desire to fiddle around in their workshops, trying to approximate serpents and other old instruments. Most of these are failures, but sometimes an effort seems to come closer to the mark than the rest, and when this happens it deserves due notice. A

fellow named J. Selmer, who is apparently associated with a school in Vermont, has made a rough serpent out of plywood. Not a box like Scott Hall's, and not a square bored effort like the Squarpen, but a conical bored serpentine construct fabricated from laminations of thick plywood rails.

He writes, "When it comes to making things out of wood, I would be best described as a blacksmith. I'm willing to do things by hand, on cheap materials, and usually brute force my way through generally ridiculous projects. That's how I came up with the brilliant idea of carving a serpent out of plywood. (pause for laughter to die down...) Most wooden serpents were made in two halves and then glued together. I didn't have any wood of that size sitting around, and didn't want to pay for it, so I made mine in many more layers. The serpent is a conical instrument, with a 1/40 slope. To make the bell about 4 inches and the top about 2 inches, I used more and more layers rough cut with a jigsaw. I cut everything square to start with so there would be plenty of room to glue the halves. The carving in the inside was done mainly with [a] wood gouge. Once the inside of both halves was roughed out, I did some rough trimming on the outside with a jigsaw. Next, I glued pieces of 1/4" plywood along the body as required to make smaller steps. The bulk material on the outside was removed with a jigsaw. After that, coarse files and [a] small block plane were used to round out the body. Once the shaping was done, I cheated a bit and smoothed out some areas with wood filler. The bore is made from 3/4" and 1/2" copper pipe with a 90 degree elbow and reduction in the middle. I fit a piece of copper inside of the end to allow a small bore trombone mouthpiece to fit snugly.

Many of the originals seem to be wrapped in leather, but I decided on just using paint for this version. I wish I had more details on the finger holes, but mine are my best guess after looking at pictures of originals. I figure that I'll just learn to play the one I have, even if it differs from professional models. After drilling the holes, I undercut them with a round file, essentially countersinking the inside. As I mentioned before, this is not the traditional way that serpents were made. This is only the way my serpent was made. This project took me about a week. There are other serpents shown on the internet that are made from PVC, or square or octagonal wood sections. I feel that I have made a middle ground type of instrument. Even if the quality of sound or material is no better, I have achieved a closer appearance to the originals. Now I just have to learn to play it!"

Editor's note: I tried to contact the builder through the educational institution that originally listed this project on their website, but with no success. Based upon some dimensions and other details noted in the complete article, it appears that this instrument would play poorly compared to a real serpent. Still this remains one of the more elaborate methods I have seen for making a serpent inspired instrument at home. see photos in Page 7