

Serpent Newsletter

P.O. Box 954 Mundelein, Illinois 60060 USA

Newsletter for Serpent Enthusiasts

April 1, 2013

A Note from the Editor

I'm happy to present another large issue of this newsletter, made possible by the unprecedented number of recordings presented for review, plus a goodly number of workshops, interesting photos and illustrations and other news.

Regarding the ongoing issue of whether this newsletter will go all-electronic, for the time being we will retain the status quo. European distribution will remain electronic via emailed PDFs, while distribution in the rest of the world will continue with mailed hardcopies. This is of course contingent on subscriptions and other donations continuing to come in faster than printing and postage costs exhaust the funds.

Paul Schmidt

Workshops

● Edinburgh Serpentarium 2013

All known and suspected serpentists (and players of the English Bass Horn, Ophimonocleide, Chromatic Bass Horn, and Ophicleide) are invited to participate in the 2013 Serpentarium which will take place in and near Edinburgh in May 2013. This workshop will include playing sessions, an opportunity to examine the 24 serpent-family instruments (including the 'Anaconda', the original contrabass serpent) and 10 ophicleides in the Reid Concert Hall Museum of Instruments (Edinburgh University Collection of Historic Musical Instruments). Not to mention the eating and drinking in good company! The playing sessions will take place in Carlops, a few miles outside Edinburgh, where Murray and Patsy Campbell have their home. Accommodation is available at reasonable prices in the area. Accommodation is also available in Edinburgh. The dates

will be May 24-27, 2013, and a website has been established with the latest information, Web URL: www.homepages.ed.ac.uk/am

The provisional schedule of events is:

Friday 24th May

- Afternoon: arrive in Carlops; transport can be provided from Edinburgh Waverley station by arrangement (buses from the airport go directly to Waverley)
- Evening: small group playing sessions, supper

Saturday 25th May

- All day: group practice led by Phil Humphries
- Evening: dinner at Allan Ramsay pub

Sunday 26th May

- Morning: small group playing sessions, lunch
- Afternoon: visit to the Reid Concert Hall Museum of Instruments
- Evening: concert given by *Les Meslanges* (including Volny Hostiou, serpent) at St Cecilia's Hall, Edinburgh

Monday 27th May

- Morning: opportunity for individual lessons with Phil Humphries or Volny Hostiou; small group playing sessions, lunch
- Afternoon: group practice led by Phil Humphries
- Evening: informal concert in Carlops

Tuesday 28th May

- Morning: depart, transport can be provided to Edinburgh Waverley station by arrangement

For further information about the schedule and events, email Arnold Myers at A.Myers@ed.ac.uk. To book for the Serpentarium, and for details of accommodation, please e-mail Murray Campbell at D.M.Campbell@ed.ac.uk. A fee of £177.00 is payable which will cover group tuition and individual lessons, entrance to the concert at St Cecilia's Hall, informal meals (Friday supper, Saturday lunch, Sunday lunch; Monday tea), and other refreshments. Payment by PayPal is preferred. Participants pay directly for travel, accommodation, dinner at Allan Ramsay pub.

● Vintage Band Festival

The 3rd Vintage Band Festival will take place in Northfield, Minnesota on August 1 - 4, 2013. This international music festival is a four-day celebration featuring 30 bands from across the United States and abroad with 100 concerts showcasing a variety of genres, heritage influences and period-style performances. Events begin at noon each day. There are performances on the hour and every half hour at various venues throughout the town well into the evening. In observation of the 150th anniversary of the Civil War, there will be a Battle of the Bands, with *SIX* Civil War era brass bands participating, on the banks of the Cannon River. Northfield is about a 40 minute drive south of Minneapolis/St. Paul, and with much to see and do in and around the town, this is a great place to bring the family for a combination family vacation, band festival and Early Brass conference (see below).

While the schedule and performers are not final until the start of the festival, here is a partial list of brass groups that will be participating, in no particular order. Matterhorn Alphorns, Schell's Hobo Band, Eine Kleine Dorfmusik Kapelle (Austria), Drachenfelderer Musikanten (Germany), Kentucky Baroque Trumpets, Ehnstedts Brass Band (Stockholm Home Guard), Medevi Brunnsockerster (Swedish Brass Band), Dodworth Saxhorn Band, Buffalo Bill's Wild West Cowboy Band (Frontier Brigade Band), Independent Silver Band, Copper Street Quintet, Hypnotic Brass Ensemble, 26th North Carolina Regimental Band (Civil War brass band), 1st Brigade Band (Civil War brass band), Newberry's Victorian Cornet Band, Jack Brass Band,



Kenny Carr and the Tigers Trombone Shout Band, Lake Wobegon Brass Band, Century Brass Band, Klezmerica, Mariachi mi Tierra, The Brass Messengers (Balkan Eclectic), Ameriikan Poijat (Finnish brass band). Most concerts take place outdoors (so bring folding lawn chairs and sun hats), with alternate indoor venues in case of inclement weather. Concert locations are scattered around the downtown area in parks within easy walking distance.

There is no fee for the festival and all concerts are free to the public. For more information, go to vintagebandfestival.org/festival.

Previously, a feature of the festival was the Roving Ophecleides ("you never know where they will appear!"). As a result, one of the promotions this year is an alternate festival name, *River City Biennial Ophecleide [sic] Masters Gathering*. See for yourself at vintagebandfestival.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/Ophecleide-Masters-poster.jpg



● Early Brass Festival

Once again, the Historic Brass Society is holding its annual Early Brass Festival in conjunction with the highly successful Vintage Brass Festival in picturesque Northfield, MN, August 1-4, 2013. This will be our third collaboration and we're looking forward to another fine festival with bands of all types from many parts of the United States as well as from Sweden and Austria. The EBF lectures and presentations will take place in the mornings, and then the HBS members adjourn to enjoy the band festival in the afternoons and evenings. Although the band festival is free, see the HBS website www.historicbrass.org about details of any registration or fees for the lecture/presentations.

New Materials

In the September 2012 issue of this newsletter, eight CDs old and new, featuring Michel Godard on tuba and/or serpent, were mentioned but not reviewed. In the meantime, most of these recordings have been obtained for review, and three others have also been added. This is certainly a record number of CD reviews for one edition of this newsletter.

● *Magalitico 5tet*; digital recording featuring Gavino Murgia on soprano saxophone, flute, vocals and Michel Godard on tuba and serpent. MegaSound label, unknown catalog number. Obtained from Amazon as an MP3 digital download; no physical CDs located anywhere, possibly never have been published as a CD.



This 2009 album's ten tracks are squarely in the easy jazz genre, and are dominated by Murgia's saxophone solos underlaid by Godard's bass lines, with accordion and percussion accompaniment. The first track is *Surreal Building*, a driving syncopated saxophone improvisation that is well complemented by the busy tuba line. *Pane Pintau* is a more down tempo, soulful number where the sax is in its lower range, the tuba lays down a walking ground-type line, and the vibraphone gets a nice solo as played by Franck Tortiller. Next is *Arkètipo*, a vocal *a cappella* solo where Murgia gets to show off his phenomenal scat throat singing skills; this is a thrilling and mesmerizing number. *Old Memory* immediately brought to mind the first disc of the double album that was *Chicago VII* back in the mid-1970s, straight and easy jazz and very agreeable; Gavino joins in with some throat singing late in the track. Next up is *Song for Elena*, which begins with a very lightly played accordion solo by Luciano Biondini, joined later by a saxophone in ballad style.

Adarre is a return to the style of the first track, with driving and syncopated writing. *Luna Antica* is the only track to feature Godard's serpent, beginning as a serpent solo, then with light background cymbals and brushes, and finally joined by the other players at the end. *Scomposition* gives drummer Pietro Iodice his first chance to solo before being joined by a very busy improvisation between the other players. The ninth track is an up tempo tuba solo titled *Blue Tuba* that consists of short improvisations connected by the returning chorus. The album ends with *Sonora*, a track that begins with an organ-like accordion solo before segueing into a bouncy tuba dominated line before ultimately fading to nothing. While this recording has relatively little serpent playing on it, it remains a very enjoyable and accessible jazz album.

- *Le Sonnet Oublié*; CD recording with Roberto Martinelli on soprano and alto saxophones, Francesco D'Auria on percussion and Michel Godard on tuba, electric bass and

serpent. Music Center Lissone #BA 301 CD; submitted for review by Michel Godard. Amazon and other online sources list limited copies available.

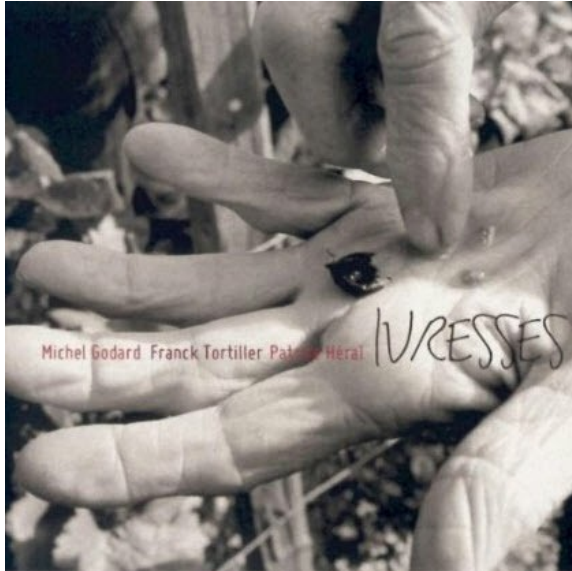
This 2010 collaboration consists of nine gentle tracks of saxophone over a bass line with percussion. Opening with the dream-like title selection *Le Sonnet Oublié*, the three performers combine the ground electric bass line with serpent and sax solos; there also seems to be a guitar in the mix, but this is actually played on the higher register of the electric bass, as confirmed by an email from Godard. He also uses a 'looper' device that allows him to layer multiple parts on the bass before adding the serpent on top of it. Up next, *Anicca* is a beautiful ballad with entrancing ground electric bass line overlaid by moody alto sax and quiet brushes and chimes. *Les Tendres* is more energetic, with a funky tuba and bold sax solos. *Terra Iontana* begins with a solo tuba and soon morphs into an avant garde improvisation that reminds of Miles Davis in hard bop mode. *Sur l'échelle des spheres* is a serpent solo that begins soulfully but soon transitions to the format established earlier in the album, electric bass and sax.



Samademi gives Godard a chance to demonstrate some of his trademark virtuoso tuba jazz improvisations against a snazzy drum set and a sax that periodically steps in on a sort of chorus. *Une Amore* is a breathy and melancholy sax and tuba duet which sets the scene nicely for the following track, *Ferma l'ali*, the second serpent solo on the album; here again it seems that Godard is overdubbing electric bass to accompany himself, but after a while the serpent disappears and the sax takes over the solo. The closing track, *In Paradisum*, showcases an unusual percussion instrument, the hang, which is a sort of small oriental-sounding finger-struck steel drum (although it is in fact a modern invention out of Switzerland). About half way through, Godard adds a nice serpent solo on top of his electric bass line, and finally the sax joins in for the conclusion. From a serpent music standpoint, this is a worthy addition with three tracks

featuring the instrument. From a more general perspective, this is a very pleasant easy listening jazz album.

- *Ivresses*; CD recording with Franck Tortiller on vibraphone and marimba, Patrice Héral on percussion, voice, and synthesizer, and Michel Godard on tuba, electric bass and serpent. Yellow Bird #7718. Obtained from Amazon.



The CD subtitle is “Music and Rituals of Wine”, the packaging is a red-wine-colored liner, the French word *ivresses* means intoxication or drunkenness, and the liner notes wax poetic on the ‘vectors’ between wine and music. The three performers spent a week holed up in an abbey in the wine country of central France, in the company of a wine expert, sampling the product and exploring their impressions in musical terms. The opening track, *Si Dolce E’l Tormento* is a long fuzzy dreamlike selection for solo serpent with vocalise, and is very effective in setting the mood of the album. *Autres Voluptes* is next with a fine marimba solo underlaid by a ground bass line performed by Godard on electric bass. The eponymous *Invresses* is a serpent solo with vibraphone accompaniment, and this showcases Godard’s virtuosity on the instrument. *Deker* seems to be about a hangover due to overindulgence in the vine, with its busy marimba and pained vocalizations by Patrice Héral. *Il Vino Solitario* is a short spoken poem without music, and it leads into *In Vino* with its high vocalise and sense of somebody’s buzz after a few glasses.

Syrax is a busy duet for tuba and marimba that goes all over the place, and Godard is at his best here with both fine tuba playing and imaginative improvisations. *A Monk’s Clavelin*, written by Godard, is another serpent solo, albeit a very brief one. This is followed by *Bourguignone*, a chance for Franck Tortiller to show his chops with a lengthy vibraphone solo with sparse electric bass accompaniment. *Sons, Voix, Midi Rouge Et Carignan* is seven minutes of spoken word in French (non-French speakers will have to guess at what is being said, other than that it probably involves wine), with

some clangorous sounds that may or may not be noises from a winemaking facility; there is a serpent cameo lasting just a few seconds at the end of the track. *Dommages* returns to jazz with a breezy marimba solo over a bouncy electric bass line. The album concludes with *In Paradisum*, a related yet very different treatment of the solo that ended the *Le Sonnet Oublié* CD, this time with entirely different instrumentation. This is an unusual recording that, except for the spoken tracks, works well as mood music, and this seems to at least be part of what the artists were aiming for. It also has some nice exposed serpent solos.

- *Elijah 1846*; CD recording by the Gabrieli Consort & Players, Gabrieli Young Singers Scheme, Wroclaw Philharmonic Choir, under the direction of Paul McCreeh. Featuring vocalists Rosemary Joshua, soprano, Sarah Connolly, mezzo-soprano, Jonty Ward, boy soprano, Robert Murray, tenor, Simon Keenlyside, baritone (Elijah). Also featuring Nick Perry, Phil Humphries and Carl Woodcroft, serpents, Stephen Wick and Andrew Kershaw, ophicleides, and Tony George, contrabass ‘monstre’ ophicleide. Winged Lion/Signum Classics #SIGCD 300. Obtained from Amazon UK.



The April 2009 issue of this newsletter included mention of a concert on October 18, 2008 in Birmingham, England, of the first recreation of the 1846 premiere performance of Mendelssohn’s *Elijah*. That recreated premiere was by the group Ex Cathedra under the direction of Jeffrey Skidmore, and it was recorded and later broadcast on May 8, 2009 on BBC radio. Those enthused people who were forewarned and who were able to connect audio recorders to their radios ended up with the ability to listen again. This reviewer, being in the States, was able to make a digital recording of the streaming audio on the BBC website, and the resulting pair of burned CDs have been played many times since then. Besides being a great performance, it was also important to serpent enthusiasts due to it being the only place where one can hear a contrabass, or *monstre*, ophicleide in action. The fact this this is also a piece of music actually written to call

for the instrument, and the instrument is clearly audible in many places, makes it doubly important. The monster is also the only playable example in the world, being a reproduction by Robb Steward, owned and loaned by Ron Johnson of New York state. Unfortunately, this is not a commercially available recording.

Then in the September 2011 of this newsletter was mention of another recreated *Elijah* 1846 premiere, this time in August 28, 2011 in London's Royal Albert Hall as part of the BBC Proms. This time the chorus was huge at 440 performers, and the orchestra was also beefed up, including three serpents, two ophicleides, and again the *monstre* came over from the States to be played by Tony George. This time the forces were kept together for a few days to record for Signum Records, and the resulting 2-CD set is the subject of this review.

First, the forces assembled for this performance were massive. The credits paragraph above mentions three choruses, but actually the Gabrieli Young Singers Scheme is a joining of Chetham's Chamber Choir, North East Youth Chorale, Taplow Youth Choir and Ulster Youth Chamber Choir. Also, there are additional vocal soloists, Susan Gilmour Bailey and Emily Rowley Jones, sopranos, Lucy Ballard and Ruth Gibbins, mezzo-sopranos, Samuel Boden and Richard Rowntree, tenors, Robert Davies and William Gaunt, basses. Lucy Ballard is the only soloist who performed in both the October 2008 recreation as well as this performance. The combined vocal forces on the recording number 293 in the chorus, 45 violins, 20 violas, 16 cellos, 10 string basses, 4 flutes, 5 oboes, 4 clarinets, 4 bassoons, 4 horns, 4 English slide trumpets, 3 trombones, the aforementioned 3 serpents and 3 ophicleides, 2 tympanists, and organ, for 129 instrumentalists, totaling 421 musicians not counting the director, then add kids for 440.

The recording was made from August 29 through September 1, 2011, in Watford Colosseum, a large space with appropriate acoustics for making a recording, but no organ.

In an email, serpent maker and serpentist on the recording Nick Perry confirmed that there was no organ present when the orchestra and chorus was being recorded. Other reviews of this album state that the organ heard here was the one in Birmingham Town Hall, the location of the actual *Elijah* premiere, and this was recorded at a later date to synchronize with the main recording made earlier. The CD booklet notes do not specifically mention this, other than stating that the organ was recorded in Birmingham Town Hall on February 26, 2012. Probably as a result of this post-production legerdemain, the organ's sound and presence is also huge, and contribute to making this recording almost overpowering in certain sections. Indeed, when the CDs arrived in the mail from England, and the first one was popped into the car stereo on the way home from the post office, the fortississimo at the end of the opening chorus promptly sent the speakers to meet their maker, costing your faithful reviewer a small chunk of change to replace them. But that's another story.

From the outset, this performance is so massive and powerful that it certainly exceeds any other committed to a commercial recording. Even for many other masterworks this would seem an excess, but for such an intentionally outsized composition as *Elijah* it seems fitting. Here is the Old Testament prophet given his full glory. When the chorus is unleashed it sounds like humanity singing, and when the orchestra lets loose it is breathtaking.

There are some quibbles. A soprano soloist (the CD booklet does not define who is singing on the various tracks, but presumably this is Rosemary Joshua) and a tenor soloist (same uncertainty here), while they have appropriate vocal styles, occasionally allow their vibratos to get out of control until their sound degenerates into ugliness; happily this blemish is an infrequent one. The boy soprano who gives the famous "weather report" leading up to one of the miracles, has an altogether unintelligible diction, diminishing his otherwise beautiful sound; one hopes that old Elijah could make out the original boy's reports more

"Wedding Party in the Suburbs of Paris"
by Alphonse Cornet (1890)



clearly. The organ at times really does become overwhelming in the mix against the orchestra, and more than once drowns out even what should be powerful blasts from the massed brasses. Here is one place where the Ex Cathedra recording outshines the new one; it is much harder to hear the ophicleides and more importantly the monster ophicleide when the organ sound is so obese. As Elijah, Simon Keenlyside is just fine, if slightly less prophet-like in the weight of his vocal presence than was James Rutherford in the Ex Cathedra performance.

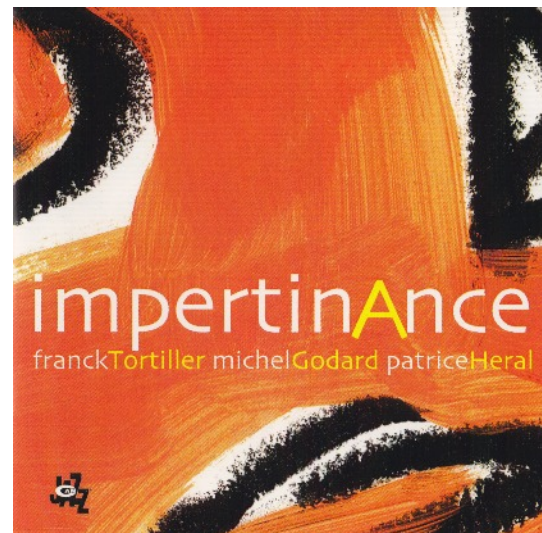
Apparently the performers had fun in the concert and recording for the CD. Along with a couple other reports, emails were received from Phil Humphries and Nick Perry about their experiences. In the CD booklet are photographs of the recording sessions and the preceding rehearsal, and in one of them Tony George can be seen with serpent in hand. Nick wrote, "It is Tony you can see behind me in the serpent section. He had just come over to join in during his bars rest in the rehearsal and he did not do any serpent playing during the actual recording. The serpents did get to play all the time that the vocal basses were singing which was great fun, and the three of us did decide to use original three-keyed English military serpents." Phil played his 1840 serpent by Francis Pretty, Nick used his unmarked 19th century original, and Carl used a Millhouse serpent borrowed from the Bate Collection at Oxford, courtesy of curator Andrew Lamb. Phil wrote, "All the [serpent] instruments had three keys which came in very handy, especially for the E and D major sections! [We] had a good blow which included 21 out of the 41 sections in the oratorio. The contrabass ophicleide, the only [playable] one in the world, was kindly lent by Ron Johnson.....the other two ophicleides were a C by Muller [made between] 1840 ~ 1850 and a Bb by Gautrot 1870." Besides the use of the *monstre* ophicleide, another curiosity here is the use of a large set of tower drums, huge and pitched lower than normal, included as part of the Victorian enthusiasm for big bass instruments.



As for the authenticity of this recording, comments by director McCreesh made in the CD booklet, and other interviews found online, state that the music used here was basically the same as the revised modern edition, with the

main focus of authenticity being in the large ensemble and the appropriate historical instrumentation. Contrast this with the approach taken by Ex Cathedra which prepared their own recreation of the original 1846 score by expanding on a copy of the score that Mendelssohn had personally marked up before the premiere in order to provide an organ part at the request of Henry Gauntlett, a famous organist of the time and composer of the Christmas hymn *Once in Royal David's City*, who had wished to join in on the concert (Mendelssohn had not originally written a part for the organ). Unless the listener is a student of the fine points of the composition, the differences will seem minor.

Elijah as a composition is a testament to Mendelssohn's understanding of the artistic possibilities of the emerging English choral society tradition, and is also full of rousing orchestrations, furious choruses, and beautiful and moving arias. This reviewer has heard no other version to top this performance of it. This CD also offers an unparalleled archive of massed early brass playing.

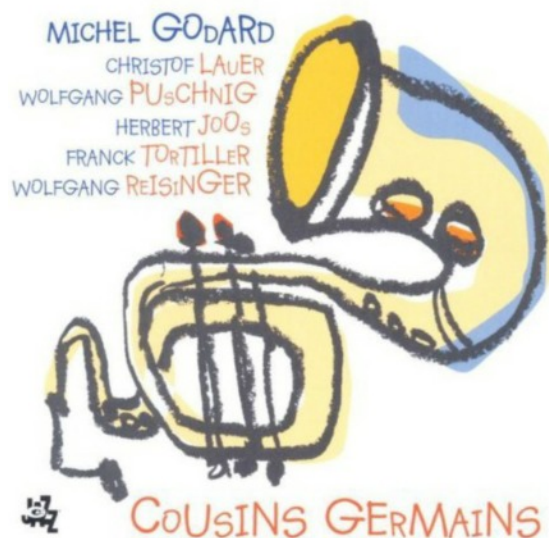


● *ImpertinAnce*; CD recording with Franck Tortiller on vibraphone, Patrice Héral on percussion, vocals and electronic sampling, and Michel Godard on tuba and serpent. CamJazz #CAMJ 7792-OD. Obtained from Amazon.

This 2005 recording is by the same trio that made the previously reviewed CD *Ivresses*. Once again it is first a showcase for mallet percussion virtuoso Franck Tortiller, with a strong second being Michel Godard's amazing improvisational skills. The CD, with its intentionally misspelled title, has very slight documentation in its case or booklet, so any specific intention or theme is not stated in words. However, the music generally falls into the category of a lengthy free form jazz improvisation, and the joy of the performers is evident in the result. The baker's dozen tracks on the album span a range of styles and tempi, and words fail when it comes to describing the music and differentiating one track from another. But each track does have its own unique texture within the realm of possibilities

available to three such instrument types. Since this is a serpent-centric review, it will suffice to mention that Godard uses his tuba on ten of the selections but does play serpent solos on the other three, *Luiza Blanca*, *Archangelica*, and *Serpent et Sonnaillies*.

- *Cousins Germaines*; CD recording with Franck Tortiller on vibraphone and marimba, Christof Lauer on soprano and tenor saxophone, Wolfgang Puschnig on alto saxophone and flute, Herbert Joos on trumpet and flugelhorn, Wolfgang Reisinger on drums, and Michel Godard on tuba and serpent. CamJazz #CAMJ7770-OD. Obtained from Amazon.

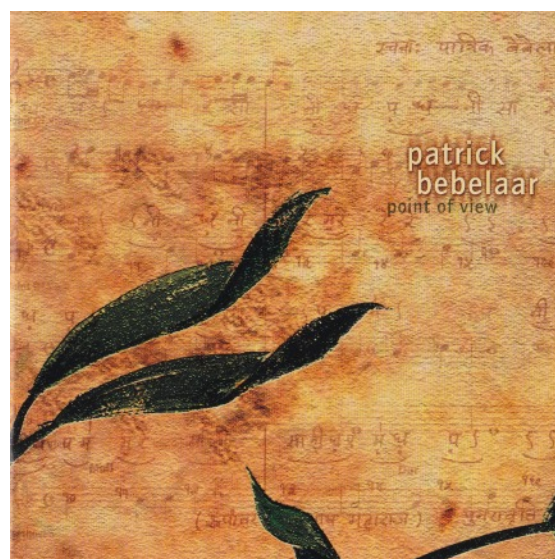


In this more recent 2010 recording, Michel Godard is collaborating with a large ensemble. According to the CD booklet notes, this is Godard's production, calling together his German friends skilled in jazz improvisation, and doing so with a larger group while avoiding becoming overwhelming. The result is closer to a full sized jazz combo with a fuller texture than the other Godard CDs reviewed here. The album opens with the dreamy moderato *Visite*, featuring Lauer's soprano sax over Godard's ground bass on tuba. In *Nutty's Cousin*, Godard and Lauer kick things off with crazy licks before the rest of the band jumps in, including a nice marimba solo by Tortiller. After a reprise of the previous number comes *Sur l'échelle des Sphères*, which appears to be multiple flute parts and a flute & flugelhorn duet over a syncopated tuba ground, a very entrancing track. *Luna Nera* begins with a marimba solo that is joined later by Godard's soulful and mournful serpent. *Cross Culture* is an opportunity to show off Puschnig's scat vocal modulated flute improvisation that morphs into a hard driving chorus of saxophones and trumpet.

Up next is *Pastorale*, snarky cymbal rolls offset by a muted trumpet and tuba duet, joined after a while by marimba riffs. *Deep Memories* commences with a tuba solo modulated by Godard's singing through the horn and simultaneously produced multiphonics before expanding to a wild group improvisation. *Le Feu et l'eau*, or "Fire and Water", again

has a ground tuba line with a wailing tenor sax in its higher range, set off by syncopated pings from the vibraphone. *Beautiful Love* is a serpent and marimba duet from the outset, and this attractive and laid back piece remains just the simple duet throughout. The album concludes with *Alla Ciaccona*, a breathy flugelhorn solo in the lower register that sounds at first like a flute, underlaid by marimba and building to an all-out festival of collaborative improvisation that concludes with just Godard playing his tuba as if it were a didgeridoo. This is an accessible improvisational jazz recording that is well executed by all band members, and should be well received by anyone who enjoys jazz combos of this sort. As a serpent recording, it contains several extended sequences that show off Godard's virtuosity.

- *Point of View*; CD recording with Patrick Bebelaar on piano, Frank Kroll on saxophones, Pandit Prakash Maharaj on tabla, Pandit Vikash Maharaj on sarrod, Subhash Maharaj on tamboura, and Michel Godard on tuba and serpent. DML Records #CD 017; review copy provided by Michel Godard upon request when no CDs seemed to be available for purchase. Amazon and other online sources have this album available as an MP3 download.

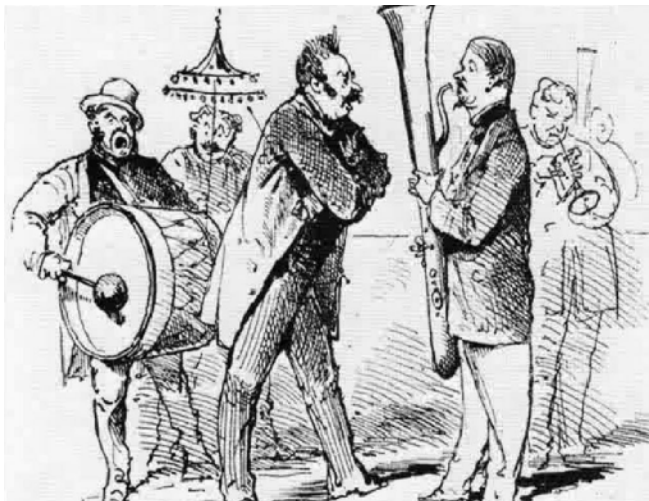


This album has been around for nearly a decade, being recorded in 2003 and released in 2004, which explains the difficulty in finding a CD copy of it now. This is a live recording of a 45 minute concert of a single composition by jazz pianist Patrick Bebelaar, commissioned by the Internationale Bachakademie Stuttgart for the recurring Europäisches Musikfest 2002. The festival rules dictated that all music written for that event be tied in some way to Beethoven, and in Bebelaar's odd way he wrote a motif based on a contrary motion to the motif of the 2nd movement of the great composer's 7th Symphony, then wrote seven variations on his new theme and orchestrated the piece largely for traditional Indian instruments. The theme and its first expansion are referred to as *Point of View 1*, which occupies track 1. In the subsequent variations that follow, functionally titled *Point of View 2* through *Point of*

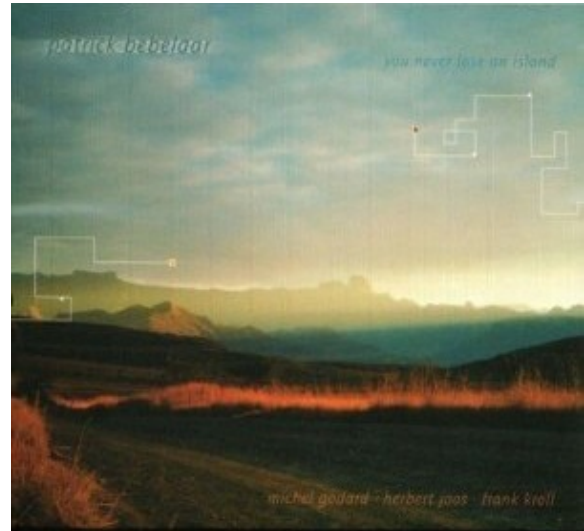
View 8, each taking up its own track, the structure first places the Indian instruments and styles against the western instruments and styles, before finally changing to an attitude that brings them together.

The original theme is introduced quietly on Bebelaar's solo piano before being joined by the sarrod, and instrument of guitar size that is related to the sitar. By the time the third point of view is reached, the sarrod expands upon the theme and is augmented by the eastern rhythms played on the tabla, a small finger drum. Through this the piano is still heard, often in the bass register but with a dull muted quality resulting from the long strings being muffled by the player's hand. In the fifth point of view, the tabla player demonstrates the tradition followed by his fellows in the past, namely that the complex rhythms were taught and passed on by means of spoken nonsense vocalization similar to scat singing, but without pitch changes. One can hear alternations of the rhythm in the player's voice and then the drum copying it. The CD booklet notes that 'tabla' translates as 'twaddle' in English, a reference to the spoken sounds often heard in conjunction with playing of the drum. The next variation is almost exclusively a piano solo with minimalist percussion backup. In the seventh variation the serpent finally shows up, enjoying a nearly eight minute solo overlaid by the faint high pitched drone of the tamboura. This is the only track with serpent, as Godard uses the tuba elsewhere, although he does not appear on all tracks. Track 8 has the last variation, which is also the most western sounding in terms of tonality, although the rhythm is probably the most overtly eastern. The album concludes with a 15 minute long selection, a *Raja*, or complex form of traditional Indian music that evokes a mood. The CD booklet does not indicate whether this last selection is part of the main composition or rather more of a long encore at the end of the concert.

This is an agreeable recording if you are open to the wide variety of styles found in 'world music', and especially if you have a fondness for eastern musical styles. The faint association with Beethoven is certainly strained to the point of being meaningless. As a serpent recording, it has only the one relevant track, but that is a good one.



- *You Never Lose An Island*; CD recording with Patrick Bebelaar on piano, Herbert Joos on trumpet, cornet and flugelhorn, Frank Kroll on soprano saxophone, clarinet and bass clarinet, and Michel Godard on tuba and serpent. DML Records #CD-015. Obtained used from Amazon UK Marketplace.



Another older recording that was somehow overlooked by this newsletter a decade ago when it was released, this is another project of pianist Bebelaar. This one is a more conventional, albeit still *avant garde*, outing when compared to *Point of View*. It opens with what is probably the single longest track on any jazz recording at nearly 45 minutes duration, the eponymous *You Never Lose An Island*. This track begins with some improvisations on Godard's solo tuba, including some vocalizing through the horn, multiphonics, didgeridoo effects and extreme swings in range; this 9 minute subsection is subtitled *Leaving*. The next subsection is *Arriving*, also about 9 minutes long and owing a lot to klezmer folk music traditions, with the piano and tuba laying down a driving line while the saxophone wails overhead on what might more traditionally be the fiddle part. There follows a mellow passage with wandering muted cornet before the style returns to the more up tempo klezmer feel. Up next is the *Morning Light* subsection with its lonely soprano sax solo, which alternates between clangorous sounding multiphonics, wide yips and yelps, and more melodic passages. Godard's tuba finally joins the sax, duplicating every move a few octaves below, then the sax is replaced by a busy walking piano accompaniment to a rambunctious tuba solo and then all players get crazy in a dissonant full bore assault. After 9 minutes of that, the next subsection is *Drowning*, a moaning (and maybe drowning!) tuba improvisation over a repeating piano line. The waterlogged tuba is suddenly rescued and the full band celebrates with a passionate return to the earlier klezmer hora. The final subsection of the piece is titled *Keep Holding*, and it segues from the previous theme into an extremely hollow flugelhorn solo on top of a melancholy piano, after which the saxophone doubles the flugel and Godard's tuba sneaks in with a progressively more assertive

line that slowly threatens to become the solo voice. This was recorded before a live audience and their applause is captured at the conclusion.

The album continues with *Will We Meet Again*, an eight minute piano romp sans accompaniment. The next track is a *Tango*, also realized on solo piano, another eight minutes, although this time a muted trumpet joins after a while, followed by the tuba taking a turn; the second half of this track becomes gradually more avant garde and dissonant while retaining the overarching tango style. *Maïenlied (Song of May)* begins with an off the wall bass clarinet solo that uses what must be all the tricks and effects possible on that instrument. Just as the instrument has expanded into multiphonics, it becomes apparent that one of the parallel lines is Godard's serpent, and soon the newcomer has taken the lead part; there is about four minutes of serpent playing on this track. The album concludes with the Celtic influenced dance *Pos Pregatz Mi* which nonetheless remembers that it is on an avant garde jazz recording and soon returns to its root. Before long it sounds like Miles Davis has taken up tuba and saxophone, and it makes for interesting listening. After five minutes of this, the concert comes to its conclusion and the recording ends with a long period of applause. This is a worthwhile modern jazz recording, although there is not much serpent exposure when compared to most other CDs reviewed here.

- *Une Promenade Musicale Pays d'Auge* was a CD mentioned in the previous newsletter, but it turned out to be impossible to locate a copy. After inquiring of Michel Godard, the reply was that this was not a commercially released recording. Accordingly, no further attempt was made to obtain a copy and review it for these pages.

- *Le Desir*; CD recording featuring Laurent Vadrot on euphonium and ophicleide, Marc Girardot on ophicleide, and Sébastien Jaudon on piano. No catalog number listed. Obtained from Feeling Musique in Paris, www.feelingmusique.com



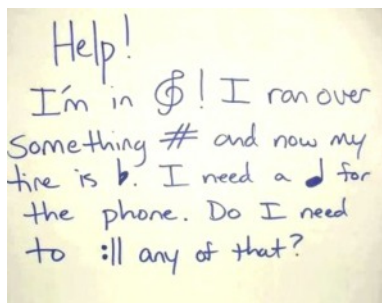
This CD was recently released, perhaps within the last year or so. Although commercially available, its distribution is very limited. Recorded in the auditorium of the Pierre Bénite School of Music in July of 2010, it is primarily a solo euphonium recording, with three tracks where the ophicleide is featured instead. Laurent Vadrot comes from a family of artists; his father was a saxophonist, his maternal grandfather the renowned stonemason, engraver and sculptor Maxine Descombin, his siblings are all musicians or painters. Laurent himself was added to this family mixture as a pianist, later adding the bass saxhorn on which he obtained a first prize at the Conservatoire de Lyon. He studied with Mel Culbertson, Brian Bowman, Roger Bobo, Pierre Dutot and others. Studies completed, he advanced to the euphonium and added the ophicleide. His *desire* in this recording was to bring together original pieces for euphonium and ophicleide written in the 19th century.



Vadrot begins this album with *Solo de concurso, Op. 34* by Spanish clarinetist Miguel Yuste, which he performs on the euphonium. This seven minute virtuosic selection, originally written for bassoon but later adapted for euphonium by the composer, allows the soloist to demonstrate technical agility and his ability to cover extremes of range. Next is Eduardo Boccalari's *Fantasia di concerto – Sounds of the Riviera*, a nearly 10 minute showcase in bolero rhythm that spans expressive melodies and fast technical passages. The composer was also known as being a guest director of the Sousa Band, and the overall style of this piece brings to mind the colorful cornet solos that would have been features in that band and others of the period. Vadrot brings out his Bb Gautrot ophicleide for the next track, the *Introduction et Polonaise, Op.30* of French flautist Jules Demersseman, a well-known solo for this instrument that shows both its melodic and technical capabilities. A characteristic of this recording is its willingness to present the ophicleide in a raw way that allows the listener to remember the crankiness that

can be part of any performance on a primitive keyed brass instrument. The ophicleide tends to have inconsistencies of timbre and intonation that a performer may overcome to one degree or another, and Vadrot's performance on the instrument is proficient but at the same time he allows his listener to know that this is a recording of both euphonium and ophicleide, and he does not make them indistinguishable. Vadrot shows his technical abilities and those of the ophicleide without making the instrument sound like a euphonium.

The euphonium returns with *Introduction et Adagio* by Belgian composer Guillaume Lekeu, originally written for tenor tuba and piano. Vadrot plays the new arrangement for euphonium by Henry Howey, with accompanist Jaudon playing his own rearranged version of the piano part. This piece is a slow and gentle piece of lyrical nature. Next, Vadrot is back on ophicleide, joined here by well-known ophicleidist Marc Girardot in an unaccompanied duet, *Romance de Zampa for Two Bass Ophicleides* by Louis de Brucq, part of a collection of 20 such pieces. Intonation is a more noticeable issue on this track, although the overall effect is pleasant and it is a rare thing to see an ophicleide duet on a commercial recording, or ANY recording for that matter. Following is another euphonium solo by Demersseman, *Fantaisie sur "Le Désir" de Beethoven*, originally written in collaboration with Adolphe Sax to showcase new valved brass instruments. This the shortest of the euphonium pieces on the album at just under five minutes, and is in the time honored there and variations form, starting with the slow melody and gradually advancing through progressively more rigorous technical passages; Vadrot does a nice job of getting around on the instrument.



The two ophicleides are back next in another duet by Louis de Brucq, *Romance de Marie*, part of the same set of pieces as the earlier duet, and is apparently based on the theme of an aria from an opera popular at the time. Again, while this is a pleasant and worthy piece, it also serves to draw attention to the 'ophicleidedness' inherent in the bottom range of the instrument. Where a modern conical bored brass instrument will have a fairly even timbre across its range, including a well behaved and velvety low range, the ophicleide tends to get gruff and woofy when the right hand keys are required to be open, and intonation down there can be a challenge, and on some instruments all but impossible. The album ends with Amilcare Ponchielli's *Concerto per flicorno basso e banda, Op. 155*, possibly better known by its English title of *Concerto for baritone horn and band*.

Written in the style of the music of Rossini's Italian operas and being in the theme and variations format, it requires great virtuosity from the soloist. Vadrot has a pleasant *bel canto* sound in the opening theme, and again shows his ability to rapidly get around on the euphonium in the later variations.

Special acknowledgement is due to the sensitive and adept piano accompaniment provided by Sébastien Jaudon on this album. He is well known as a specialist in providing piano accompaniment for vocalists, and divides his time between chamber music, accompanying opera, backing up singers, and teaching as professor of accompaniment at the Paris Conservatoire.

A few quibbles with this recording are worthy of noting here. Most significantly is the lack of a catalog number, a problem that many small publishers fall prey to; even the first recording produced by an agency should be given this important means of identifying it and avoiding confusion with any similarly named recordings that might appear. The other issue is that this CD has what this reviewer refers to as 'crickets', a high pitched artifact of digital audio compression that is not known to affect WAV or other uncompressed files, but which is common in MP3 files. Their presence here suggests that the original recording may have been done in such a format, or perhaps it is a result of the means employed for the editing process. But overall, Vadrot has produced a valuable addition to the recorded catalog of ophicleide recordings. Note that the CD booklet is in French; an English translation is available in a PDF file that when printed will produce an insert that fits the CD case, and this file may be downloaded from the link that is part of this recording's description on the Discography page of the Serpent Website, www.serpentwebsite.com.

● *Renaissance Goes Jazz – Live*; CD recording with Markus Becker on piano, the renaissance wind ensemble Capella de la Torre, Michel Godard on serpent, tuba and electric bass, directed from the shawm by Katharina Bäuml. Dreyer Gaido #CD 21075. Submitted for review by Michel Godard, available from all Amazon Europe websites but unavailable from Amazon USA.

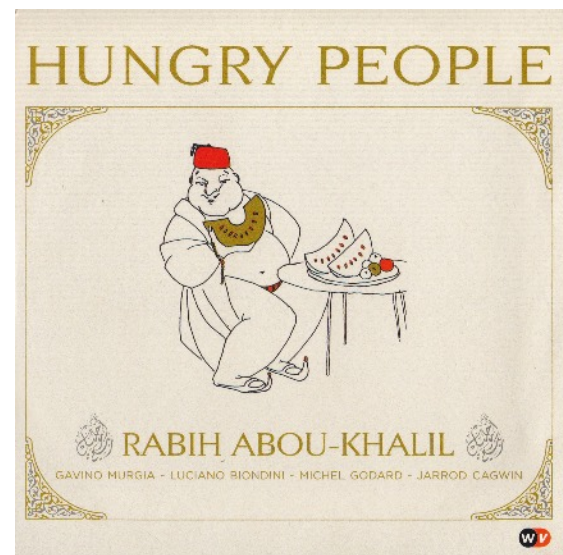


In spite of how it may seem from the multitude of jazz CDs featuring Michel Godard, he is no stranger to early music and classical music. This album is a recording of a live concert that placed a traditional Renaissance band on one side and Godard and a pianist on the other, then presented them collaborating in various ways with music both old and new. The first selection is *In splendoribus – Le miroir du temps*, an ancient theme in a mesmerizing modern setting arranged by Godard. The deep sounds of the Johannes Vogt's theorbo start as a solo, then a segue occurs to a duet between Vogt's lute and Godard's electric bass, and soon the sensuous oboe-like sound of Bäuml's shawn takes over and is joined by the full ensemble including long soloistic lines on Godard's serpent. Up next is a favorite *Pastime With Good Company* by King Henry VIII, proving once again that it always helps for composers to have a day job; the bass line here is played by Annette Hils on the bass dulcian. This is followed by a jazz number on piano that morphs into a Renaissance dance using only the band plus serpent, and featuring a ripping solo on shawn. The dance is titled *Rodrigo Martinez*, presumably after the famous Spanish nobleman, and is taken from the early Renaissance manuscript known as *Cancionero de Palacio*. Godard follows with his beautiful and melancholy composition for solo serpent, *A Trace of Grace*, also heard on the CD of that name; this is accompanied by lute and shawn.



The Renaissance band then returns with an anonymous dance, *Aria sopra la ciacconna*, supported by an entrancing ground bass line played on theorbo and featuring a busy duet on recorder and shawn that reminds of the tenor duet by Monteverdi, *Zefiro Torna*. The next selection is *Chi passa per sta strada*, also of unknown authorship, and while it starts like a straight forward instrumental version of the Spanish Renaissance classic, it soon turns into a modern jazz number, although retaining the same instrumentation plus piano. Following is Fabritio Caroso's *Bella Gioiosa*, a straight forward period dance played solely by the Renaissance band. The early music continues with a traditional *Passamezzo* that shows a weaving melody on shawn supported by an active serpent counterpoint that slowly transitions into a modern piece with jazzy divisions

on serpent and then piano. Another Godard composition that also appears on an eponymous CD, *Le sonnet oublié* follows and once again gives the serpent a nice melodic solo. And speaking earlier of *Zefiro Torna*, it is up next with the ground on theorbo while the duet is nicely realized by bass dulcian and serpent. Following the theme of the album, it seems to be a straight Renaissance treatment but then becomes infused with some jazz towards the end. Also from the *Cancionero de Palacio*, the dance *Pase el agoa* follows in a back and forth series of straight and jazz calls and answers. Godard takes to his tuba for an energetic set of avant garde improvisations in the second half of this piece. The CD concludes with a Godard modern composition titled *Ciacconna*, also realized on a tuba that often sounds like didgeridoo, with a very out-of-character set of riffs on shawn. But to send things out with the whole ensemble, this piece again undergoes a transmogrification into a joyful Renaissance jazz blend. This is a great recording, very accessible and enjoyable and well realized.



● *Hungry People*; CD recording with Rabihi Abou-Khalil on oud, Gavino Murgia on soprano saxophone, Luciano Biondini on accordion, Jarrod Cagwin on percussion, and Michel Godard on tuba, electric bass and serpent. Harmonia Mundi-World Village #479078. Submitted for review by Michel Godard. Available online from Amazon and store.hmusa.com and others.

Michel Godard has collaborated on other projects of Lebanese oud player Rabihi Abou-Khalil before, and the recordings that resulted have always been interesting. Literally beginning with the vocalized shrilling of a chicken on the Moroccan flavored *Shrilling Chicken*, Abou-Khalil's 'Mediterranean Quintet' leaves no doubt that this 2012 release will prove to be a high energy album, with his trademark middle-eastern driving syncopations. *When the Dog Bites* excites with Gavino Murgia's bass throat-singing scat vocalizations, matched on every note and pulse by Godard's tuba and flavored by Luciano Biondini's busy accordion. It is Abou-Khalil's oud playing that is prominent

on the more laid back *A Better Tomorrow*, along with some nice drum licks by Jarrod Cagwin. On *Banker's Banquet*, an up-tempo dance that makes it hard for this reviewer to type while the shoulders are twitching to the manic north African beat, the powerful tuba and drum line supports funky turns from each of the players. *Dreams of a Dying City* has a sinister, ominous feel that continues a slow crescendo until the end; Godard plays a lot of electric bass on this album, and the part is prominent here, but even on tracks where he plays tuba or serpent, his electric bass line is also there by overdubbing.

Fish and Chips and Mushy Peas feels less middle Eastern and seems to have a more northern flavor, perhaps a bit Celtic, and Godard has nice syncopated tuba solo. *Hats and Cravats* is up next with its sinuous lines and sinister pulse, and the oud has a bigger part here alongside a nice dirty sounding tuba bass line. *When Frankie Shot Lara* would make for a nice movie soundtrack, some sort of clever heist film perhaps, and it features Murgia's wailing soprano sax and a fine oud solo. The sad and lyrical *If You Should Leave Me* is the first place on the album where Godard's serpent comes to the fore with a pensive solo. There is a lot of humor on this album, not the least of which is displayed by the final track *Shaving is Boring, Waxing is Painful*. The performers must need to get a good night's sleep before diving into the complex meters and delicious syncopations of this piece. While rather lean on serpent involvement, this album is a fun and enjoyable romp.

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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For Sale

Robert Eliason wrote that he has decided to sell some of his collection. People may contact him if interested in a serpent, Russian bassoon, bass horn or an 11-key ophicleide in C with case; photos are included here. Contact Bob Eliason, 12 Courtyard, Hanover, NH 03755, phone 603-643-8484, or email roberteliason@nhvt.net.



Bass horn, 3 keys, c. 1810 unsigned; bought at the Clifford Allanson Auction in 1981. Fully restored and playable.



Ophicleide in C, c 1840, unsigned; bought from Bill Gribbon, Greenfield, MA in 1975. Unrestored, but playable, needs some key and spring adjustment.



Russian bassoon, 3 keys, c. 1810, unsigned; bought from Tony Bingham, London in 1986. Unrestored, original condition.



Serpent, 4 keys, c. 1800, unsigned; bought at Southeby's Auction, NY in 1980. Some restoration by Gary Stewart at the National Music Museum.

Where Serpents Gather

● On December 19, 2012, three serpentists visited a fourth at Colonial Williamsburg in Virginia. Paul Schmidt, Robert and Tra Wagenknecht were having a between-the-holiday-gigs visit and Gabe Stone, Williamsburg's resident serpentist, was giving an evening concert at the DeWitt Wallace Decorative Arts Museum. The program was titled *Das Christkind & Le Devin Enfant*, and was performed by

Gabe on serpent, flute, bagpipes, percussion, mandolin, and pipe and tabor, and by David Gardner on violin, guitar, percussion and voice. The duo performed 15 selections, all old carols from Germany and France, with titles including *Ihr Kinderlein, Kommt* and *Il est né le devin enfant* and *Leise rieselt der schnee – Das lied Weihnachtsgruß* and *Un flambeau, Jeanette, Isabelle!* Gabe played serpent on seven of the songs, beginning with the *Ihr Kinderlein* number and including *Les anges dans nos campagnes* (Angels We Have Heard on High), *Noël nouvelet*, *In dulci jubilo* (Good Christian Men, Rejoice), and *Le Bransle de l'Official* (Ding Dong Merrily on High). Gabe played his Monk church serpent in D, and gave a fine performance that showed the instrument in a good light. Later on, the four serpentists enjoyed a seafood dinner at the historic Christiana Campbell's Tavern to catch up and talk 'shop'.



L-R: Gabe Stone, John Turner, David Gardner at Colonial Williamsburg, photo by Tra Wagenknecht

Then on December 21, 2012, at Hennage Auditorium in the Museums of Colonial Williamsburg, Gabe Stone and friends, Dr. John Turner and David Gardner, presented a happening using pochette (small pocket) mandolins, violins, and other travelling instruments. If you travelled on horseback, walked or whatever in those days before autos, trains, and planes, how did you get your musical instruments around? After all, you made your livelihood with those instruments and you played more than one. The audience in Williamsburg saw, heard, and heard about pochette and piccolo mandolins, walking stick flute, musette bagpipes, pochette violins, walking stick violin, pipe and tabor, bones, tenor serpent, and even a musical iPhone for the more contemporary, especially the young people in the audience. Gabe brought down the house with *The Rakes of Mallow* on his D serpent, and a rollicking rendition of *Ding Dong Merrily on High* on the tenor serpent, with accompaniment by his friends. On one of the many Christmas tunes played by the group, Gabe used what he called a "nano-recorder" (one piece, 3 and 9/16" long) which required great digital dexterity. Gabe also performed on pochette and piccolo mandolins, Baroque guitar, walking stick flute, musette bagpipes, and bones. Unfortunately with questions, answers, and lots of holiday music, time ran out before Gabe could use his soprano serpent, the "worm." Hopefully another time. With his work in the many venues of Colonial Williamsburg, Gabe Stone successfully brings the serpent to the attention of thousands of visitors.

submitted by Therese Wagenknecht

● Gabe may in fact be the world's busiest serpentist, given his almost daily performances at Colonial Williamsburg, but this role as musical history interpreter is not his only venue. He wrote to advise that he will be performing with Dr. Annie Stevens, professor of percussion at Christopher Newport university, on her faculty recital on April 29. They will be playing Jim Theobald's *The Serpent Dances*.

● Gary Nagels wrote about his recent adventures with the serpent. "I bought a good Monk serpent from John DeWolfe in Halifax. It turns out that he and I were in university together and he was a good friend of my brother. He had two serpents and I bought the one he had ordered from Nick Perry. I have done a few concerts so far and just before Christmas we did an advent mass in a cathedral here in Quebec City; three male voices and myself in a plainchant mass. It went very well and has lead to other concerts. In addition, the Ensemble de Nouvelle France will be doing a recording in the spring and I get to play the serpent on that as well. So far I've had a very good reaction from everyone on these concerts and am looking forward to having more chances to play."

"On another note I have started playing with a Choro band (traditional Brazilian swing music); very interesting. I'm playing the ophicleide (bass in counter melody, etc.) It seems they called it a 'figle' in Brazil, and apparently it was a popular instrument at the turn of the last century."

[Editor's note: There is a commercial CD titled *Choro (1906-1947)*, with Pixinguinha on flute and Irineu de Almeida on ophicleide; more details appear on the Serpent Website's discography webpage.]



- Another of our Canadian serpentists, Patricia Gauci, wrote, "I performed a solo recital of Cliff Bevan's *Variations On The Pesky Serpent* on 14 April, 2012 at Concordia University College in Edmonton Alberta, Canada. With Cliff's permission, I re-scored the piano accompaniment for concert band, and was supported in this recital by The Festival City Winds Intermediate Band."



(At the Lectern) Essoufflé. Out of breath!

- Not exactly an actual serpent performance, but P.D.Q. Bach's humorous round *O Serpent* was performed on December 1, 2012 on the *A Prairie Home Companion* radio show, at about a third of the way into the second hour after intermission. It started with three singers, who then segued to kazoos. This show is archived at <http://prairiehome.publicradio.org/programs/2012/12/01/>, so you can listen in Segment 3 at the 1:20:02 mark (when actually playing the audio clip, this appears on the timeline slider at about 80:15). The performers were a trio from the so-called *The Semi-Pro Musica Antiqua*, comprised of Peter Schickele himself, with tenor Brian Dougherty and soprano Michèle Eaton.

- On February 26, 2013, the Arizona State University Bands gave a concert in Gammage Auditorium on the University's campus, featuring "classic" music for wind band. Among the pieces played was Felix Mendelssohn's *Nocturno*, Op. 24 in its original instrumentation for eleven winds. Composed for pairs of oboes, clarinets, horns and bassoons with flute, trumpet and English bass horn, the *Nocturno* was later arranged by the composer for a larger wind band and it is in that version the piece is most widely known. Today, Christopher Hogwood's critical edition of the piece (published by Bärenreiter) is usually performed with a euphonium in place of the bass horn, but since Mendelssohn sanctioned ophicleide in performances of his works that called for bass horn, the ASU performance included Douglas Yeo on ophicleide. ASU has proven to be a lively crucible for exploration and evangelization of historic bass brasses. Earlier in February, Doug gave a presentation about serpent and ophicleide as they intersected with Hector Berlioz's musical world in France as part of an ASU School of Music graduate course *Topics in 19th Century Music*, and on January 30, the ASU brass faculty (David Hickman, trumpet;

John Ericson, horn; Douglas Yeo, trombone; Deanna Swoboda, tuba) gave a concert at Phoenix's Musical Instrument Museum where Doug played Arthur Sullivan's *The Lost Chord* on his c1855 ophicleide in C by Roehn (Paris).

- In the last days of November and on the first of December, 2012, a national convention of 'steam punk' enthusiasts, titled *TeslaCon*, took place in Madison, Wisconsin. The theme of this convention was a fictional trip to the moon taking place in the Victorian period, and the convention center was full of attendees wearing the great costumes that go with the steam punk hobby. Since the 1st Brigade Band, which is headquartered in nearby Watertown, was hired to provide live music for the grand ball on December 1, the curators of the Heritage Military Music Foundation, which owns the instrument collection used by the band, resolved to have an exhibit of horns to show at the convention. Serpent Newsletter editor Paul Schmidt, also a member of HMMF and of the band, spent the day manning the three instrument display tables and demonstrating several horns including a Bb bass over-the-shoulder Saxhorn and two ophicleides in C and Bb. The passing attendees had a good time studying the period instruments, especially the keyed brasses, which go well with their assumed clothing styles, and many posed with the horns for photos. One 'vintage style' photographer captured Paul serenading on his own Bb ophicleide to the tune of *I'll Take You Home Again Kathleen*.



- The Chicago chapter of the American Recorder Society, in collaboration with the West Suburban Early Music Society, presented an all-day early music workshop titled *Puzzles, Canons & Renaissance Unica* on April 6 at Concordia University in River Forest, a Chicago suburb. Bob Wiemken of the Renaissance band *Piffaro* suggested the theme of the workshop, provided the sheet music, and conduct the band of 30 players from the Chicago and

northern Indiana area. The group spent the day studying and playing a dozen works by celebrated composers of the 15th and 16th centuries, each a musical puzzle of some sort.

The medieval mind delighted in puzzles, mathematical wizardry, and musical games, and these compositions each played its own little game with musicians of the day and their audience. The workshop commenced with 14th C composer Guillaume de Machaut's *Ma fin est ma commencement* - "My beginning is also my end" - a retrograde canon for which the original musical score featured the lyrics for vocalists printed upside down and backwards relative to the notes for recorder or shawm. Singers would start at the end of the piece and work their way back to the beginning, accompanied by instrumentalists moving in the other direction. Exercises like these delighted the medieval mind and showed off the mastery of both composer and musician to audiences who knew how to read music and who could also appreciate this sort of technical virtuosity.

Each of the selections was provided with a facsimile of the original manuscript, study sheets for those in the group who could not manage the tablatures, and a full score in modern notation with the puzzles worked out by Wiemken. Whenever possible, the band tried to play off the original notation during the study and examination, always using recorders for this purpose, and then switched to the modern score for a full reading with diverse period instruments including recorders, shawms, dulcians, and serpent.

*Illustration for the article
"Matrimony at Reduced Prices"
from page 79 of the 1849 issue
of 'Punch.' Magazine
-thanks to Doug Yeo*



In the *Circular Canon* by Bartolomeo Ramos de Pareja (1482), musicians played in a circle, thus the music had no beginning or end. *Prenez sur moi* by Johannes Ockeghem was a canon for three parts, each entering three beats behind and a fourth above the previous line. Josquin's *Adieu mes amours* was a canon for tenor and bass with embellishments in the upper voices. Part of the fun with this were the

variable cadences which needed to be adjusted on-the-fly according to what earlier voices decided to do...sort of like jazz! Another selection by Josquin was his *De tous biens playne*, in which half of the band played the very syncopated two part canon *Fuga ad minimum* in which the second part is only the minimum subdivision's delay behind the first, overlaid by the subject's chanson. John Lloyd's *Puzzle Canon* required the musicians to solve a musical riddle embedded in the music in order to figure out how to play the canon. The group enjoyed a lot of lively conversation about music in the Renaissance, early forms of musical notation, and enjoyed playing some fascinating works. Bob frequently complimented the group's sight-reading skills and he also had several favorable things to say about Paul Schmidt's serpent playing.



Weather vane, made in 1992 by Ray Smith, on the roof of the Museums Resource Centre, Standlake, Oxfordshire. Thanks to Andy Lamb, curator of the Bate Collection at Oxford, for finding this in the Oxfordshire Museum Guide

- On November 11, 2012, Doug Yeo gave a recital with organist Kimberly Marshall titled *Sonic Awakening* at the Arizona State University Organ Hall. He has posted four videos of the recital on YouTube.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=tZoF4TINOTY shows Doug playing bass trombone on *Hosanna* by Franz Liszt and the chorale *Heilig ist Gott der Vater*.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=AKfK5gWYzm4 features Doug on ophicleide playing Sir Arthur Sullivan's *The Lost Chord*.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=zbxrUcArauc is *Canzona I* by Girolamo Frescobaldi, performed on bass sackbut.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=6y8Ae0es4Bs is *Recercada Primera* by Diego Ortiz, played on serpent.

More videos can be seen at www.youtube.com/ASUTromboneStudio.

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
<nicholas@perry2185.freemove.co.uk>
(see Christopher Monk Instruments
website URL at lower right)
(serpents, early cimballo, bass horns)

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

(resin serpents)

Serpents Ribo
(c/o Pierre Ribo)
Rue Van Oost, 40
1030 Bruxelles
Belgium
Phone: 0032 497 574 496
England

<pierre.ribo@>souslesplatanes.be>

(serpents)

Kaiser Serpents
<http://www.kaiserserpents.com>

(fiberglass serpents after Baudouin)

Serpentes Lopez
Juan Lopez Romera, maker
<http://serponton.com/>

(wooden serpents & cornetti)
Derek Farnell
82 Crumpsall Lane
Manchester M8 5SG
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(ophicleides)

Wetter/Berger Serpents
Stephen Berger
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Phone: 0041 (0) 3296 11188
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Switzerland

<info@serpentmakers.ch>
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<www.serpentmakers.ch>

(alphorns and serpents, both wood
and carbon fiber)

Christopher Monk Instruments
(c/o Jeremy West)
+44 (0)1388 526999
<www.jeremywest.co.uk/
christopher-monk-
instruments.html>
<hmcornett@gmail.com>

(cornetti)



Sam Goble Historical Mouthpieces
phone: +44 (0) 77 8056 4370
<www.samgoble.com>
<info@samgoble.com>
(cornett and serpent mouthpieces)

Build an experimental serpent
from plans via
<www.serpentwebsite.com>

● Gabe Stone wrote, "There is an iPhone/iPod app by Ambroise Charron Music for serpent and ophicleide fingerings. Type in "old brass" in your app search. There are lots of other early instrument tablatures that one can download.

● Gabe also wrote that his friend and fellow Colonial Williamsburg musician David Gardner (see their concerts in the *Where Serpents Gather* section of this newsletter) visited Disney World in Florida and took a photo of a bit of serpent-shaped sculpture at the Haunted Mansion.



Disney World
Haunted Mansion
serpent

photo by
David Gardner

● Patrick Wibart has some new ophicleide videos on YouTube, showing his virtuosic playing.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=9pvTCLX-REQ shows three ophicleide players performing the *Scherzo* from the *Ophicleide Trio* by Ludwig Milde (1849 – 1913).

www.youtube.com/watch?v=ztZQET08E-4 has Patrick playing an 11 key ophicleide in Bb with piano accompaniment on the *allegro ma no troppo* first movement of Gustav Schreck's *Sonate, Op. 9* and www.youtube.com/watch?v=M_b6TF4xIPg has the *allegro* third movement.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=gn430KKgGnc has Patrick playing a 9 key Bb instrument, with piano accompaniment, on Carl Maria von Weber's *Andante et Rondo Hongrois* (Andante e Rondo Ungarese).

● Scott Hall of Florida, who has made a number of serpent inspired instruments, wrote about his newly acquired ophicleide, "I've got a Guichard ophicleide I figure is circa 1837 now; number 103 by him. Quite similar to the Guichard at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. It was formerly owned by the sound designer Ben Burrt (Darth Vader's breathing, the Pixar film *Wall-E* and many other sounds). I acquired it in rather rough shape as you can see in

More Exciting News

● Jeremy West and Nick Perry have written to advise that, after years of waiting and much encouragement from friends, Jeremy has launched the new Christopher Monk Instruments / Jeremy West website in December of 2012. The new look is cleaner and much easier to navigate than its predecessor site and they hope that you can find a few minutes to visit. Two new items that you will find are CD's for sale (all in stock) and online cornett lessons for players who live far away and where help is not easily available. If you have any thoughts, ideas, wishes, criticisms, if you spot errors... please do provide feedback through the website www.jeremywest.co.uk/christopher-monk-instruments.

the picture and refurbished it subtly to make it playable. All the springs were gone; my quick and nondestructive solution was to insert square-cut chunks of soft, red pencil eraser. For pads, I'm using cut pieces of sticky foam rubber. These are obviously inappropriate solutions in terms of historical accuracy, but hey!... it plays beautifully now. I'm sure someday, it'll move on to someone who'll do a proper 100% restoration on it."



*Scott Hall's
ex-Ben Burrt
ophicleide*

● Scott also sent information on an historical square serpent, similar to the modern Squarpent, located in Musée de la Musique in Paris, France, whose website is an excellent example of what happens when a museum tries to get cute with their web design and forgets in the process to make it functional. An infuriating website! Anyway, the instrument in question has an unusual cut and is rotated in a different way than usual, and is terminated in a square bell; see photo.

Scott wrote, "It seems in taking a look that this perhaps started out as a long, square-section-sawed piece of rosewood. It's clearly been halved like an alpenhorn to carve out the bore - the bell has split at the glue joint now. The bell actually looks like it was worked separately at some point, then reattached (a joint is visible - looks like it's missing a covering ring). Apparently, the outsides were rounded - but not all of them - note up near the bocal how they left it quite square."

"It seems that they cut 45 degree angles into this long piece of wood later to create these bends by rotating and gluing. It's noteworthy, though, that those bend sections are quite a bit thicker - I'm conjecturing that maybe pieces made quite separately from the long piece of wood."

"In all, I think looking at this historical precedent could lead to some rather interesting reproductions including 45 degree angle cut and rotated bends. Imagine how easy it would be, for example, to make an 8 foot long paper conical bore model - or Styrofoam or urethane foam bore model -

*Serpent, anonymous, France,
early 19th Century, from the
collection of the Musée de
la musique, Paris
catalog E.1629
photograph by Claude Germain
reproduced large here to show
details*



fiberglass over it while long and straight, extract the core, and then do the necessary cuts and attachments to configure this final folded shape. Like the *squarpents* [see the construction articles on the Serpent Website], the bocal would be included automatically in a project made this way. If not fiberglass to be final surfaced with a nice Bondo skin and paint, even non-toxic paper maché could work.



*The 'Fribourg Serpent' at the
Musée d'art et d'histoire Fribourg
Switzerland*

*Photo used by permission of
Dr. Verena Villiger Steinauer,
director of the museum, copyright
Musée d'art et d'histoire Fribourg*

● The Musée d'art et d'histoire Fribourg (Museum of Art and History Fribourg, or MAHF), is located in the town of that name in Switzerland, between Lausanne and Berne, www.mahf.ch. Although not a musical instrument museum, it is still in possession of an unusual serpent. Volny Hostiou visited to study this example, and included mention of it in a paper he wrote on serpents. Volny asks the obvious questions that any serpentist might when confronted with this object. Is this 'Fribourg Serpent' actually a musical wind instrument? Its inventory sheet, which is very terse, says nothing of its manufacturer, or its origin. A serpent specialist would naturally remain skeptical in the face of this and ask many questions, such as has it been manufactured for us to play or is it simply an object of decoration? If this is truly a musical instrument, the position in which it has been exposed until today at the museum precludes trying to play it. What are its materials of construction and if playable, what does it sound like? Hopefully, Volny will be able to answer these questions soon.

*David Partouche, serpent
Musique de la Garde Impériale*

