

Serpent Newsletter

P.O. Box 954 Mundelein, Illinois 60060 USA

Newsletter for Serpent Enthusiasts

April 1, 1995

A Note from the Editor

Since the publication of the September 1994 issue, with it's plea for more money and editorial contributions, very little has happened in the area of money. Thankfully, a very few individuals have made larger than expected donations, so this newsletter was possible. The next issue in September 1995 remains in doubt! The reduced available funds have resulted in the last minute deletion of several larger articles, since I could not afford to print the extra pages or mail the extra weight.

In the arena of editorial submittals, things have been better; most if what was sent in appears here, with the exception of the above mentioned articles (my apologies to those who worked to produce them, we will try again next time we have enough money to produce a newsletter).

The phone number here at Serpent Headquarters (I jest!) is about to change, but the phone company has not yet told me exactly what the change will be. Apparently the area code (the first three digits, for you who aren't familiar with the phone number system in the States) must change due to all the available numbers being used up by people with pagers and cellular phones. Naturally, the phone company decided to inconvenience those of us in the rural northern regions rather than fool with the numbers of the people who are the source of the dilemma! When the number changes, those calling my old number will hear a message announcing the revised number, and I will publish the change in the next newsletter.

Speaking of phones, a number of you have had difficulty in sending FAXes to my number, which is shared by the phone, FAX, and answering machine. These unlucky people have found themselves listening to my answering machine message instead of the FAX tones. I now have a new digital system which alleviates the problem somewhat. Most calls from FAX machines will go to my FAX machine, and

those that don't will hear a message instructing the caller to press "pound-pound-pound", or ###, followed by immediately pressing the START/SEND button to begin the FAX transmission. I have tested this from several machines and it seems to work reliably. I presume that calls originating from overseas will work just as well...Good Luck!

Paul Schmidt

Serpent Workshops

The Serpent Weekend is imminent, and will occur from the evening of Friday May 19 through afternoon Sunday, May 21. The event will be hosted by Andrew van der Beek at his house in rural southwestern England, and will be led by the London Serpent Trio, including Alan Lumsden, Cliff Bevan, Phil Humphries and Andrew. At least two Americans are planning to attend, and other interested parties should contact:

Andrew van der Beek, Cantax House, Lacock, Chippenham, Wiltshire SN15 2JZ, England
phone/FAX 01-249-73-0468.

Keith Rogers and Jeremy West of Christopher Monk Instruments will attend the Serpent Weekend at Lacock on Sunday, May 21st, when they will give a short informal seminar in the morning and be available during the afternoon for a chat. Serpentists attending the meeting will be welcome to visit the London workshop if they are interested and have the time.

The International Historic Brass Symposium will be held July 26-30 at Amherst College, Amherst, MA. Note that this year the event lasts a week instead of the usual weekend festival. A great number of early brass luminaries have been invited, and even though it has not been established just who will actually be able to come, it promises to be a landmark event and well worth attending. There will be participation opportunities for all players of historic brasses including Serpent and ophicleide, and the lineup of performing artists is exciting to contemplate. For more information contact:

The Historic Brass Society
148 West 23rd Street #2A
New York, NY 10011 USA
phone/FAX: 212-627-3820
e-mail: jjn@research.att.com

Getting Serpents

Once again, with the exception of the Christopher Monk Instruments, there is no news in the field of Serpent makers. Those known to spend time in this pursuit are listed below.

David Harding	Christopher Monk Instruments
56 Netherton Road	47 Chalsey Road
Appleton	Brockley
ABINGDON	London SE4 1YN
Oxon. OX13 5JZ	England
England	Phone: (44) 081 692 8321
	FAX: (44) 081 694 8784
	Jeremy West & Keith Rogers

Robb Stewart Brass Instruments	Dominique Bouge'
140 E. Santa Clara St. #18	B.P. 29
Arcadia, CA 91006	22330 Collinee
USA	France
Phone: 818-447-1904	Phone: 96-31-43-66

Purchasing Serpents in the United States

I am uncertain who among the readership is seeking to purchase their first (or another) Serpent. If all readers own an instrument, then my comments are moot. However, if this issue is read by any Americans who are in search of a new instrument, please take heed. I have been informed of two recent purchases in the New England area of the United States where the well-meaning neophyte has paid an instrument dealer approximately 100% over the "normal" retail price of a Serpent. [I consider the normal price to be all costs involved in purchasing and shipping an instrument directly from the maker--plus duty charges of course]. I assume that

the impulsive buyer does not mind paying an additional \$1000-1800 for a Serpent. For those Americans who are not impulsive, I suggest you contact the makers directly.

submitted by Craig Kridel

News from the Christopher Monk workshop

If it is possible ever to describe the Serpent business as "ticking over" then that more or less is what is happening at the Christopher Monk Workshops. Benefits are being reaped from a move of premises within south London a year ago: more space to move in, more light, more storage space, less rent and other fixed charges (due mainly to a large and shared building) and a reflected increase in productivity. We have now caught up entirely with the backlog of customers waiting for a Serpent, and waiting times are now shorter (we think!) than ever before. The list of Serpents in production remains unchanged - soprano, tenor and bass all in C (the bass having an option for three keys), bass in D and a three key military instrument. We have yet to pick up an order for an anaconda but continue to wait in hope and excited anticipation!

The list of two tenor cornetts (large bore with key and small bore) also remains unaltered, however both instruments have been completely revamped in the last nine months and are now unrecognisable from their forebears both inside and out. The new models blow with much more focus and responsiveness as well as being very much lighter in the hands. We are excited about this development and harbor hopes that the new instruments will help to foster general interest in the tenor cornett. The newest cornetts (of course my own special passion!) continue to improve as we gradually tweak various parameters on the model. The latest examples are almost unrecognisable from those which we made two to three years ago. We have also been developing a straight 16th Century-style cornett, based on drawings, as well as a new model curved cornett with a larger bore than our current instrument.

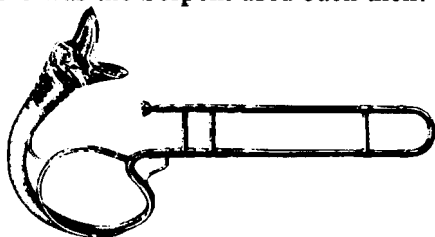
The Stanesby oboe and the Eichentopf oboe da caccia are going to some happy customers and the latest plans are to develop an oboe d'amore later this year. Readers might question the relevance of even cornetto news let alone oboe news to a Serpentist. Please be sure that these (even more!) popular instruments do provide the funding which our workshop needs to survive, assuring the future of Serpent production: this is of course the true mission inherited from our founding father, Christopher Monk. If the very thought of the digression offends, then regard it as a sort of bursary!

Jeremy West, March 1995

New Materials

Serpentist Helmut Schmitt in Germany reports that he has participated in a new double CD recording on the French SCAM/BNL label. It includes the "Missa for Organ" by Louis Marchand (1669) with Bernard Coudurier on organ, and plainsong of Francois de la Feillee. Helmut performed with Ensemble Alter-nation, directed by Jean-Yves Haymoz and Jean- Paul Fouchecourt, using a Monk designed C Serpent built by Jeremy West. The catalog number is SCAM/BNL #112851 A/B.

Stephen Saunders plays Serpent on the new recording of the Berlioz Missa Solennelle, Philips #442 137-2. The performance by John Eliot Gardiner's Orchestre Revolutionnaire et Romantique also includes Stephen Wick on buccin (a trombone with a bell shaped like a dragon head, popular during the French Revolution), and Marc Giradot on ophicleide. Although less flashy than the Berlioz "Symphonie Fantastique" performance by the same group and specialty players, this is a fine example of period music to play for those who ask "where was the Serpent used back then?"



Where Serpents Gather

Recent Serpent Activities in the United States - excerpts from the "Historical Instrument Section; Serpent," Craig Kridel and Clifford Bevan co-editors, TUBA Journal, Vol. 21, No. 3, Spring 1995

Members of the English ensemble, the Mellstock Band, toured New York, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Vermont, and Maine during the month of December 1994 and performed their unique repertoire of West Gallery music. The Mellstock Band's most widely distributed recording, "Under the Greenwood Tree" (Saydisc CD-SDL 360), is the perfect introduction to this literature and displays the fundamental role of the Serpent. The ensemble's American tour could not have been better timed in that the day before they arrived, CBS/Hallmark Hall of Fame aired a production of Thomas Hardy's "Return of the Native" with the ensemble portrayed,

including Mellstock Serpentist Phil Humphries. For those who happened to miss this airing, I have been told that Hallmark's productions have been released for video rental. The Mellstock Band reported that one of the highlights of the tour was a performance at the Hanover (NH) Revels of a choral work with 45+ voices, 10 woodwinds and strings, and a bass line, well-supported, by just two instruments-- the Serpent and an ophicleide played by guest artist Robert Eliason.

While the Serpent in the West Galley was being seen throughout New England, the Serpent in the church was being heard in Chicago. Craig Kridel took part this past February in a lovely concert of neo-Gallican chant with the professional early music choir, In Terra Vox. Neo- Gallican chant represents a movement of the late 17th-early 19th century that re-asserted the chant repertoire of the Church of France in place of the Roman rites and Gregorian monophony. Neo-Gallican chant is characterized by part-singing, 3-4 part polyphony, and improvised ornamentation. The Serpent would not only double the cantus and/or bass line but could also play a composed, continuo-like instrumental part. Our performance included sacred works written for choir and Serpent by Abbe Nicolas Roze (1745-1819), Serpentist, composer, and the first librarian of the Paris Conservatoire.

My comments thus far are merely leading up to describing most important American Serpent event of 1990s-- the appearance of the Serpent in the Boston Symphony Orchestra. This occurred in the winter 1994 performances of Hector Berlioz's "Messe Solennelle", a work discovered in 1991 and receiving its first American performance. The original instrumentation includes voices, strings, woodwinds, and Serpent, ophicleide, and buccin. B.S.O. bass trombonist Douglas Yeo saw the Berlioz performance as the perfect opportunity to make his Serpent debut and, thus, auditioned for Maestro Seiji Ozawa. The alternating ophicleide and buccin parts were performed on baritone horn by the B.S.O.'s tuba player, Chester Schmitz. While the Boston Symphony Orchestra has yet to record this work, a lovely 1993 world-premiere performance/recording is available on original instruments by the Orchestre Revolutionnaire et Romantique (John Eliot Gardiner, conductor; Philips 442 137-2). Historical brass performers on this recording include Stephen Saunders on Serpent, Stephen Wick on buccin and Marc Giradot on ophicleide.

Carl Willetts sent a program for a March 30 performance at London's Barbican Centre by the ensemble "Travelling by Tuba". It was billed as a virtuosic and humorous insight into the tuba and its relatives, plus a mysterious "exploding tuba!" The promotional photo of the two players shows euphonium, tuba, bass trumpet, bugle, ophicleide, Serpent, and didjeridu. Who are these players? Please send any information on this ensemble or its players to our editorial address.

Helmut Schmitt wrote that he hosted a Serpent gathering in southern Germany which attracted five players. The event lasted one weekend, and fun was had by all. Helmut also mentioned that he has been having good success over the last year with his Monk Serpent in D, built by Keith Rogers of Christopher Monk Instruments.

Nigel Nathan says that he has been playing Serpent with the Chiltern West Gallery Quire, where he performed at the annual "Carols and Customs" as produced by the English Folk Dance and Song Society at the Cecil Sharp House in London. Quite a bit of interest in his Serpent (and Serpents in general) was generated at this event.

Recent addition to the Serpent brotherhood, Carle Kopecky, reports:

I play a keyless Harding Serpent in C, purchased from Antique Sound Workshop in Brookline, Mass, last Spring. As a tubist who also struggles with a bassoon, I felt that the Serpent was the ideal instrument for me. Several people tried to discourage me, one of which was trying to sell me an ophicleide, but I am pleased that I persisted.

Trying to find a place to play has proved more challenging. As an amateur musician and newcomer to the early music scene, I made several false starts. My town band laughed me back to the tuba and the local baroque/classical choir ignored my letter. I did go to the Early Brass Festival at Amherst. Finally, by "horning in" on a local folksinging group I made contact with some English country dancers.

The English Country Dance tunes are usually synco-pated, or they deedle- deedle-deedle incessantly, so the dancers really appreciate a strong bass to keep

them on the beat. Most of the music is written with only a melody line, in treble clef, so I play from the chord notations. Sometimes I write my own bass line. On those with a written bass part I alternate between Serpent and bassoon (for the fast ones with lots of sharps). Other musicians playing for these dances are now linking me with more players of early music.

I also went to a Revolutionary War re-enactment (I used to do these a few years ago) and brought out the Serpent in the evening when the fifes and drums were "jamming". They went bananas! Said I could play with them any time. The fife is pitched in B-flat and the tunes, mostly marches, are easy to follow by ear, playing B-flats, Ds, Fs, etc; down low. Like playing tuba, very easy and fun, and you can play as loud as you want! It was also the first place I went (other than Amherst) where many people knew what a Serpent was but were delighted to actually see and hear one. "Is that what I think it is?" was the most common question, for a change. You have to dress in period clothing at these events, however.

Next is my local TUBACHRISTMAS, if I can figure out how to hold the music - perhaps with a flute lyre(?).

Donald Beyer played Serpent in a performance of the Mendelssohn Reformation Symphony with the Massapeque Orchestra. He also participated in the 1994 Harvey Phillips Oktubafest and TubaChristmas. His participation has extended to a series of demonstration/lectures featuring about 40-50 historic wind instruments. Also, he continues to play Serpent for Masonic Funerals in the 9th Manhattan District.

More perspective on the In Terra Vox concert with Craig Kridel. Chicago area Serpentists attending included Paul Schmidt, Daniel Heiman, Dick George, and John Weber. Directors of several prominent Chicago area early music ensembles were also present. Craig was able to get a large section of the program notes dedicated to the Serpent and its history. Bravo to In Terra Vox director Anna-Lise Pasch for the brave programming move.

Doug Yeo also submitted his angle on his Serpent work with the Boston Symphony Orchestra (B.S.O.). After a performance by the B.S.O. with violinist Itzhak Perlman, conductor Seiji Ozawa unwound by meeting with staff and listening to a short tryout by

Doug on the Serpent. Berlioz is one of Ozawa's specialties, and his interest in the recently rediscovered "Messe Solennelle" paved the way for admitting the Serpent into a performance by otherwise modern instruments. Since the mass has a part for Serpent, it was a chance that needed to be taken, and Doug was successful. Ozawa gave the go ahead for Serpent participation in performances of the mass in Fall 1994 concerts in Boston, New York, and Tokyo. Immediately, the B.S.O. office asked Doug to write an article on, you guessed it... the Serpent, for the BSO Program of that week. Phone calls to Jeff Nussbaum of the Historic Brass Society, Craig Kridel, and Dr. Phil Palmer provided information and applicable photos, and the three page item "Tempted by a Serpent" appeared in all its glory. The photos included the now famous picture of Serpentists at the First International Serpent Festival 1989 (standing in serpentine formation in the courthouse steps in Columbia, South Carolina) and Phil Palmer in his Serpent infested studio (holding "George" the world's largest Serpent/anaconda). The Boston Globe wrote a nice article on the event, and a subsequent review of the Boston concert mentioned "Douglas Yeo contributed an amusing note to the program book on that strange instrument, the Serpent, and played it with unobtrusive skill." Doug suddenly finds himself riding a high profile he could not have imagined - and all in the name of Serpents!

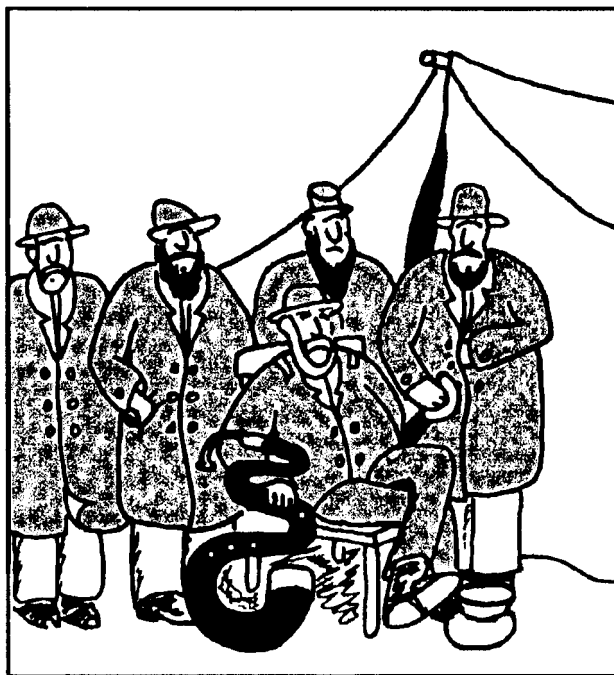
More Exciting News

Developments with the Serpent Forveille and the Frichot Basshorn

I wish to thank Stephen Wick for helping me obtain a Serpent Forveille. This instrument, invented in 1823, had always been a curiosity to the late Christopher Monk and, in Christopher's view, may have advanced the fingering pattern of the Serpent. I was able to locate such an instrument at a major London instrument dealer's shop, and Stephen gave the instrument a good going over before I made the decision to purchase the horn, an 1835 instrument made by Darche of Paris. One runs risks when purchasing any antique instrument and, indeed, I am finding new fingering options and new cracks with each passing week. However, the possibilities and the sense of "advancement" of the Serpent Forveille do

seem somewhat encouraging. Also, I have commissioned American historical brass instrument maker, Robb Stewart, to copy a metal bass horn as invented by French ex-patriot Louis Alexandre Frichot in the 1790's. I am embarking on studies of these two bass instruments of the early 19th century and, as I continue to practice my 1827 Serpent Forveille treatise by Hermenge, I will keep the membership informed of any oddities and/or insights that emerge from my research. Of course, I would also be interested in talking to others who are actively involved with the Forveille and bass horn.

Craig Kridel



Serpent newcomer Daryl Hickman, attending the University of Missouri at Columbia, was snooping around in a storeroom and came across a dusty Serpent. His professor, eager to dispose of the thing, told him he could have it indefinitely, and Daryl has launched himself on a mission to become an active Serpentist. Daryl is looking for music, advice, sources for mouthpieces, etc. Write him at 1508 E. Walnut Street, Columbia, MO 65201, USA. If you happen to know the maker of this particular Serpent, or have any information about its history, please write to both Daryl and the Serpent Newsletter.

Busy French Serpentist Michel Godard was interviewed in the latest T.U.B.A. Journal. You should be able to locate this article via your local university music school's library. It may be reprinted in this newsletter at a future time.

Jeremy Montagu writes:

Evidence of the suppressed love for the Serpent in England can be gauged from the sale of our postcards in the Bate Collection (University of Oxford). The first we could afford were black-and-white, and they were printed in sheets of eight in batches of 500. I had to choose what I thought would be the most interesting and the most attractive of our instruments. Over the years we have sold only 95 of the Caspar Tauber contrabassoon, a Viennese instrument of the Beethoven period, 99 of a valve trombone by Besson, 258 of our famous Bressan recorders, 181 of the pair of horns in the well-known Zoffany portrait of the Sharp Family making music on their barge (the Boston Early Music Festival used the painting as their poster a few years ago), and 188 of the two clarinets from the same painting. But in that time we have sold 448 postcards of a Serpent! Admittedly it's quite an interesting Serpent; it was played at the battle of Waterloo in 1815 by Richard Bentinck, a drummer (perhaps that was a basic rank or term for a bandsman?) in the 23rd Regiment of Foot, which later became the Royal Welch Fusiliers. All the same, it was quite a surprise to find that the Serpent is twice as interesting as the Bressan recorder, the finest of all his instruments to survive, and five times as interesting as a Beethoven period contra! Still, all's well that ends well - a special donation to celebrate the 85th birthday of our prime donor, Philip Bate, from William Morley-Pegge (who gave us the instrument along with many others in the memory of his father Reginald) has enabled us to reprint it, and to do so now in full colour.

Jeremy Montagu, curator

The Bate Collection of Musical Instruments
phone 01865-276139
e-mail: bate.collection@music.oxford.ac.uk



Donald Beyer submitted an excerpt from the novel "A Dangerous Dandy" by Pat Cody. His aunt was reading it and noticed a passage where a character is listening to the music in a West Gallery performance in an southern English church. The character inquires about a strangely winding horn which is later identified as a Serpent.

About the Organization

The Serpent Newsletter is a not-for-profit publication dedicated to the promotion of the Serpent and communication between its proponents around the world. The newsletter is distributed according to three regions, each with its own representative. All financial contributions should be sent to the proper regional representative. Announcements, editorial items, comments, recordings for review, new subscriptions and photographs should be sent to the editorial address.

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NOTE: Nigel's address has changed since the last newsletter. His phone/FAX number is (01734) 668092 within the U.K., or 011-44-173-466-8092 from the States. Also, Nigel notes that due to lack of activity and an incommensurate amount of paperwork, he is closing the official United Serpents bank account there, and will be handling the flow of Serpent funds as petty cash. To this end, please discontinue writing checks to United Serpents/Serpent Newsletter, and make payments directly to Nigel Nathan at the above address.

(USA, Canada, other countries, Editor & Treasurer)

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