

## Serpent Newsletter

P.O. Box 954 Mundelein, Illinois 60060 USA

Newsletter for Serpent Enthusiasts

April 1, 1996

### A Note from the Editor

There are only three things I need to say before the "news" part of the newsletter. First, as predicted in the last newsletter, my phone's area code has changed from 708 to 847. This change affects both phone calls and FAX calls. Second, much of the material in this newsletter is related to the Historic Brass Society's symposium last July. It has taken a while for this more detailed material to arrive, but I think that it's of sufficient worth to merit publication many months after the fact. Third, please send money if you have not done so in the last couple of years. I suggest between \$10 and \$20 per subscriber. European readers can take the suggestions made by Nigel Nathan on this matter. Now, on to better things.....

Paul Schmidt

### New Materials

● Cliff Bevan is making his arrangement of the Tchaikovsky *1812 Overture* available to the Serpent music buying world. This is the same arrangement which was used as the finale to the 1990 Serpent Celebration in London, with the exception that the original melody is restored in place of the "Happy Birthday" theme (used in the concert version) near the end. The arrangement is for eight Serpents plus tutti Serpents "with optional bells and cannon". As Cliff points out, if you are experiencing a local shortage of Serpents the arrangement will work with euponium/tuba band, trombone choir, bassoons, etc. Piccolo Press, 10 Clifton Terrace, Winchester, SO22 5BJ, England. £11.95/US\$20.00

● Simon Proctor's abbreviated version of Mousorgsky's "Pictures at Exhibition", in quartet form with a playing time of approximately 10 minutes, is available through this newsletter. The piece is titled "Miniatures at an Exhibition" and is available in versions for euphonium/tuba ensemble and saxophone quartet. \$20.00 for score and set of parts.

● Jeremy West has authored a book, in collaboration with Susan Smith, titled "How to Play the Cornett". It is a comprehensive guide featuring over fifty pages of text and more than 100 pages of exercises. It is intended as a tutor for players of all levels and offers advice on technique, repertoire and performance. £20 plus postage; write to Jeremy West at the address shown below.

### Getting Serpents

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

Christopher Monk  
Instruments (Jeremy West)  
47 Chalsey Road  
Brockley  
London SE4 1YN  
England  
Phone: (44) 0181 692 8321  
FAX: (44) 1081 694 8784

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

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

## Workshops

### ● National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Symposium: Serpents (regarding the 1995 Amherst Symposium)

Participants at the NEH Symposium discussion on Serpent included Bernard Fourtet, Michel Godard, and Craig Kridel. The symposium began by Craig Kridel acknowledging two significant events, both occurring approximately 20-25 years ago, and both serving to punctuate the emergence of interest in the Serpent in the 20th century. These moments included the construction of Serpents by Christopher Monk and the publication of history of the tuba, *The Tuba Family*, by Clifford Bevan. Kridel stated that the renewed interest in the Serpent is a testimony to the career of Christopher Monk who, through his workshop, provided reproductions of authentic instruments for a generation of serpentists and who served to focus interest on the Serpent through the formation of the London Serpent Trio (the sole performing ensemble of Serpents). [It was also noted that Christopher conducted the first Serpent class of the 20th century here at Amherst College in 1986.]. Christopher's efforts established and defined interest in the Serpent among early music and historical brass enthusiasts as well as among the general public. Similarly, Clifford Bevan's *The Tuba Family* situated the Serpent within a brass tradition and established and widely popularized the lineage between the Serpent and the tuba. This permitted the Serpent community to establish ties with a constituency of modern musicians and to keep the memory of the Serpent active among present day musicians.

General discussion then turned to the present state-of-the-field. It was acknowledged that Serpent enthusiasts have constructed a fine network among themselves. United Serpents sought to provide a venue for those enthusiasts inspired by the work of Christopher. United Serpents' recognition in over 10 music journals, the *London Times* and *USA Today* and on the BBC radio and NPR proved to focus and attract general interest in the instrument. The efforts of Paul Schmidt, editor of *The Serpent Newsletter*, and the periodic gathering of serpentists in 1986, 1987, 1989, 1990, 1995 in England and the United States all provided opportunities for enthusiasts to meet and perform together and for one another. In addition, information is presently disseminated to modern day tubists through the biannual column "Historical Instrument Section: Serpent" in the international *TUBA Journal*, and Serpent activities are always represented in Historic Brass Society publications. Moreover, the availability of instruments is well-established even after the death of Christopher Monk, with aspiring makers emerging each year and with the transfer of the Monk Workshop to Jeremy West.

In terms of proposed activities for the next 20-25 years, general discussion led to the identification of five research areas as topics that have received some attention while deserving much more exploration.

#### Serpent in its sacred context:

While Serpent creator Canon Guillaume's intent for the instrument (to bring a vitality and zest to plainsong) is often mentioned in introductory Serpent discussions, further studies need to examine the careers and performance practices of those serpentists who, for example, were employed by the Parisian churches in the early 18th century or those three serpentists who in 1692 were employed in the Chapelle du Roi. The presence of the Serpent in 17th and 18th choral music desperately needs to be documented.

#### Serpent in its military tradition:

The Serpent served as a mainstay in the 18th & early 19th century Prussian, French, and English military bands. The Conservatoire de Musique in Paris, founded in 1796, employed four professors of Serpent out of a total 21 brass instructors. Eight additional serpentists served on staff, and at any time 40 Serpent students would have been in attendance. Their repertoire, musical exploits, and the many Serpent treatises call for further examination.

#### West Gallery music and the Serpent:

Serpentists Dave Townsend and Phil Humphries are involved in very important work as they research and reconstruct the Serpent's role in the sacred and secular music of 18th and 19th century rural England. This era is best portrayed in Thomas Hardy's *Under the Greenwood Tree* (subtitled *The Mellstock Quire*) and is receiving the attention it so deserves.

#### Serpent as solo instrument:

This topic has been so well depicted during this symposium by Bernard's and Michel's fine performances. These stand alongside Alan Lumsden's legendary 1989 performance of Simon Proctor's *Serpent Concerto* and display the instrument's role in early music as well as modern music.

#### Serpent in an orchestral tradition-- symphonic and harmoniemusik:

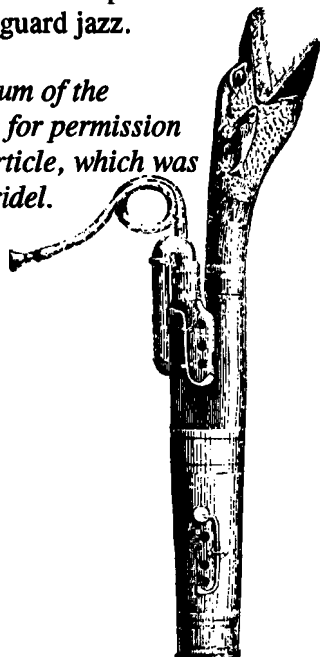
The Serpent, basshorn, Serpent Forveille, and Russian bassoon were all employed to play the symphonic and harmonie (9 part wind arrangements) literature of the 18th and 19th century-- works composed by Haydn, Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Verdi, Wagner and bass lines specifically composed for the instrument. Examinations of specific performances and performers is greatly needed.

Craig Kridel suggested that such research was possibly being completed in "concomitant" form, i.e., Serpent-related material emerging as asides and endnotes in other musicological (non-brass-related)

research. Kridel commented that we should not bemoan the fact that so much needs to be done; instead, one must be somewhat astonished by what has been accomplished in the past 20 years.

Bernard Fourtet stated that he was not as optimistic as Kridel. He saw a paradox that the Serpent has found its home with early brass players. While being one of the most commonly heard instruments in Europe for three centuries, the Serpent has not yet joined fully the early music revival. Others in the audience alluded to the fact that the Serpent is just now being accepted in the early brass community. Bernard underscored that there are many stigmas to remove and that the Serpent must be viewed not as a torture instrument but as a musical instrument. Bernard acknowledged the importance of the Serpent in sacred and contemporary music and closed by stating that he sees the Serpent as a tool for making music; what is most important is not the instrument but, instead, is the music. Michel Godard continued with this theme and discussed the closeness of sound between the Serpent and the human voice. This is one aspect that makes the instrument so wonderful for him. Michel did note that he came to the Serpent from jazz. He mentioned that this symposium is the first time he has ever been asked to perform because of an instrument. On all other occasions he is asked to perform because of his music. The general discussion noted that at times we are so focused on the instrument that we forget that the Serpent is merely a way to play music. Michel concluded the session by demonstrating the many unique aspects of the Serpent as a instrument for avante-guard jazz.

*Thanks to Jeff Nussbaum of the Historic Brass Society for permission to reprint the above article, which was submitted by Craig Kridel.*



- The Robert Barclay baroque trumpet making workshop, mentioned in the September 1995 Serpent Newsletter, is being held again this year. The dates are July 1-6, and the fee is \$400. There are places for 10 persons to attend; contact Richard Seraphinoff, 9245 East Woodview Drive, Bloomington IN 47401, phone: 812-333-0167, FAX: 812-337-0118.

## Where Serpents Gather

*excerpted from a report by Laura Conrad on the Internet, regarding the 1995 Amherst Symposium:*

- This year the early brass weekend which usually precedes the Amherst Early Music workshop was expanded into a five day symposium. The Serpent playing was the biggest surprise to most of the audience. There are two French players who have become authentic virtuosos on this very difficult instrument. Bernard Fourtet played Bassano divisions on Serpent better than most professional recorder players can play them on recorder. Michel Godard played with Ensemble La Fenice, which also featured some of the best cornetto playing of the week, in the tightest and most exciting renaissance improvisation I have ever heard. He also demonstrated the use of the Serpent in contemporary music. He was a jazz player before he took up baroque and renaissance music, and it shows in his ability to listen to his colleagues instead of merely playing.

One of the most exciting sets of the week was thanks to a medical emergency. *The Zephyr's Choice Baroque Wind Band*, which normally plays with two oboes, two natural horns, and a baroque bassoon, was missing the bassoon player. So they asked both Marilyn Boenau (on baroque bassoon) and Bernard Fourtet (on Serpent) to play the bass line. They blended beautifully, and it was almost the first time all week when there was ENOUGH bass in a baroque piece.

In addition to going to two concerts a day, and several lectures, and practicing and doing some informal playing, I also found time to take a Serpent lesson from Bernard Fourtet. I decided that when I heard a Serpent player who made me say "I wish I could do

that", I would see if I could get a lesson from that person. Bernard's performances certainly made me say that, so I talked to him and told him I was a beginner. He seemed interested [in my progress], so I asked him to give me a lesson.

He started by correcting the way I held the instrument and making me sit in a more relaxed position. Then we spent a while making sure I was covering the holes with my fingers (I have small hands, and the fourth hole on my instrument is at the edge of what I can handle.) He stressed that I should try to relax my hand and drop my fingers onto the holes. [Finally, after about 20 minutes] we had changed enough things about the way I had been doing things that playing one note was surprisingly difficult.

When I was finally making A, G and D [on my D Serpent] come out pretty regularly, we [decided on] practising only those three notes for a while. Then we played a *Stabat Mater* from "Methode de Serpent" in the book he had with him. [The] chant-like top line [was] to be played by the student [while the] more decorated second line [was for] the instructor.

What chiefly surprised me about this experience was how exactly like my first recorder lesson the Serpent lesson was. Common to both: relax your neck, relax your shoulders, relax your fingers, drop the fingers onto the holes, support the breath. [The Serpent lesson also made the points that] the instrument isn't making the note--you are making the note, [and] you aren't playing the instrument; you're playing the acoustics of the room.

The moral of the story is that you don't take a music lesson because you are going to be told surprising things about how to play an instrument. You take it because there are things you know intellectually but don't believe quite enough to be acting on them as well as you should. Having someone whose playing you respect tell them to you while watching you play does make it easier to act on them in subsequent practise. Before my lesson I had been playing for 5 months with no previous brass experience. Recorder players who like me very much put up with me playing one brief piece with them. Now after a year of playing every day, I play a suitable piece that I have practiced at least as well as an intermediate recorder player, and I have performed with two recorder groups and a Balkan Brass Band.

● Wik Bohdanowicz reports that after attending the May 1995 Serpent gathering at Lacock, England, he was able to notice that locale used for the BBC production of *Pride and Prejudice* on TV. Even better than recognizing the location was the appearance of the Serpent in the dance band (it was Phil Humphries, more on this later).

● Speaking of the Lacock gathering, you might recall that the Serpent band was asked at the last moment to substitute for a band that could not play for the town festival. The magazine *British Bandsman*, in the June issue, published a brief article titled "Rescued by Serpents", where the story was recounted. In a subsequent issue in July, a member of one of the local bands wrote to the editor, protesting that there are legitimate reasons for bands missing engagements, that those are still unfortunate occasions, and that his band was not the guilty one! (the original article did not name names). Regardless, it was still Serpents who came to the rescue!



● An advertisement for Rosehill Instruments, from an unnamed publication in England, features a Serpentist standing next to one of the traditional British style postal boxes on a city street (the identity of the player was not apparent from the picture received by this newsletter). The advertisement copy states that the establishment has some interesting instruments, such as the pictured "curved post horn, or [is it] a mail Serpent?"

- Simon Proctor's *Concerto for Serpent and Orchestra* will be performed by Douglas Yeo, Serpentist (and bass trombonist) of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, accompanied by the Boston Pops Orchestra with conductor Keith Lockhart in May 1997. Details of exact dates of the performances (there will be at least two; one will occur on a Saturday evening and will be broadcast on radio) will follow as the 1997 Pops schedule becomes finalized. Doug will also perform the *Concerto* with piano on a recital in Boston's Jordan Hall during the 1996-97 season; that date will also be announced when it is firm.

- Doug has also developed a "loaded" home page on the Internet's World Wide Web which contains articles, teaching resources, photos, etc. Look for the addition soon of his article *Tempted By A Serpent* which he wrote for the BSO program book during performances of Berlioz' *Messe Solennelle*. The Douglas Yeo home page can be found at the Internet address shown on page 6 (in the *for sale* section).

- Craig Kridel and Cliff Bevan stopped by to visit Doug Yeo at the Boston Symphony summer home, Tanglewood last summer where a lively discussion of Serpent and G bass trombones took place. A happy coincidence was the fact that a friend of Doug's, Roger Green, from Trowbridge, England, happened to be visiting the Yeo family which made for wonderful conversation and interaction between Cliff and Roger. Look for an account of the visit as well as photos to appear in a book Roger is writing about his producing a solo CD featuring Doug and Britain's Black Dyke Mills Band. Both the album *Proclamation* and the book *In Pursuit of a Dream* are scheduled for a Christmas 1996 release.

- Paul Schmidt has been continuing to play Serpent with small groups for the series of "Composers-for-Charity" functions mentioned in the September 1995 newsletter. The formerly annual events now occur every other month and have become something of a cult hit in the local musical scene. But the best part is the free pizza afterwards. Paul also continues to play Serpent with a weekly band consisting primarily of recorders, lutes and viols.

- Robert Wagenknecht reports that he recently played Serpent for a performance of an ensemble called *The Company of Waits*. The group consists of a soprano recorder, soprano and alto shawms, tenor zink/lysarden (played by Robert's wife, Therese), and tenor sackbut and Serpent (played by Robert). The occasion was a children's music workshop, and both Robert and Therese also gave presentations on harp (Therese) and euphonium (Robert).

- Phil Humphries sent a letter which details his recent Serpent related activities. Phil appeared with the Mellstock Band for about five minutes in the second episode of the BBC's *Pride & Prejudice*, appearing on BBC TV last fall. The sound was recorded on June 9th of 1994 and the two dances used were Shrewsbury Lasses and Mr. Beveridges Maggot. Filming of the scene took place at Brocket Hall, Welwyn, Herts on August 23-25 of 1994. The Mellstock Band's lineup included four members; Dave Townsend (forte piano), Tim Hill (clarinet), Charles Spicer (Vox humana), and Phil Humphries (Serpent). There were also four extra musicians, consisting of violins, cello and flute. *Pride & Prejudice* was very well received by British audiences, and the show has been sold for international distribution, both on TV and on video tape. There is also a book called *The Making of Pride and Prejudice*, published by Penguin books, which features a photo of the band.

The London Serpent Trio played for a gathering at the British Museum on November of 1995, and the three players on this occasion were Cliff Bevan, Andrew van der Beek and Phil Humphries.

Phil's other engagements with The Mellstock Band included the new Christmas show *Rejoice all Men*, which travelled from Oxfordshire to Kent, then to Wiltshire, to Sussex and ended on December 15th at the Lord Leycester Hospital Warwick. To end 1995, the band appeared on BBC television on New Year's Eve in the film *The Return of the Native*, which was shown in the USA on December 1994.

Phil also played sackbut with his group *Courtlye Musick* for two broadcasts on Christmas Day. The first was live on BBC Radio 2 and the second was prerecorded for BBC television.

## More Exciting News

- The Historic Brass Society has established the Christopher Monk Award which will periodically be presented to a distinguished member of the early brass community for outstanding contribution to the field. The Award has been established to recognize the activities of major scholars, performers, teachers or instrument makers in the historic brass field. Nominations are accepted from HBS members and the recipient will be selected by a committee of the HBS Board of Directors.

The late Christopher Monk, who died in 1991, was perhaps early brass music's greatest advocate. He single-handedly revitalized the use of the cornetto and Serpent through the activities of the Christopher Monk Workshops and was a tireless supporter of numerous musicians including many of the major early brass scholars and performers active today.

The first recipient of the 1995 Christopher Monk Award was Edward Tarr, the distinguished trumpeter, cornetto player, teacher and early brass scholar. The Award was presented at the International Historic Brass Symposium held in Amherst in 1995.

- The Historic Brass Society and Pendragon Press have launched a new book series called "Buccina". Up to four titles on the history of brass instruments, their music and social function, from antiquity through the 19th century are planned for publication annually. Stewart Carter, the general editor of the series, has indicated that this series will allow studies of greater depth and breadth to be published than has been possible in the Historic Brass Society Journal. Contact Jeff Nussbaum of the HBS at 212-627-3820 or Pendragon Press 518-828-3008 for more information.

- For Sale: Harding Serpent in C, perfect condition, 1.5 years old (selling to finance another instrument) with case, \$900. Contact Douglas Yeo, phone: 617-861-1472, FAX: 617-674-2140, email: [yeo@bu.edu](mailto:yeo@bu.edu), internet: <http://www.iclnet.org/yeodoug/>

## About the Organization

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

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

(United Kingdom &  
European continent)

Nigel Nathan  
40, The Crescent  
Earley  
READING, Berks  
RG6 7NN  
England

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

Paul Schmidt, editor  
Dick George, treasurer  
Serpent Newsletter  
P.O. Box 954  
Mundelein, IL 60060  
USA  
editorial FAX: 847-356-7865

