

Serpent Newsletter

P.O. Box 954 Mundelein, Illinois 60060 USA

Newsletter for Serpent Enthusiasts

April 1, 1998

A Note from the Editor

I have to apologize for the tardy newsletter this issue. I was hastily dispatched to solve some computer problems in China, and did not think to take my serpent folder along. Indeed, after getting back, I forgot all about the newsletter until Nigel Nathan emailed to ask when he would be seeing the European copies.

I don't have much to offer in this issue, other than letting the content speak for itself. I do want to point out a small correction in Nigel's phone and fax numbers (About the Organization section), and the new address & phone numbers for Christopher Monk Instruments (Getting Serpents).

Paul Schmidt

Where Serpents Gather

- In February, Paul Schmidt got a call from a Chicago area director who was looking for a serpentist to play in Mendelssohn's *St. Paul*. Paul was not available, and luckily John Weber was. According to John, the performance with the Tower Chorale in Western Springs, Illinois, went very well, and we strike another blow for contemporary involvement of the serpent in historic works.

- On December 5th, and again on the 7th, Doug Yeo played serpent with the Boston Classical Orchestra. The concerts, advertised under the

banner of 'The Mysterious Serpent', were held in Faneuil Hall and directed by Harry Ellis Dickson. The program included Rossini's *Barber of Seville* overture, Mendelssohn's *Sinfonia No. 5*, William Grant Still's *Romance for Bass Trombone and Orchestra*, Schubert's *Symphony No. 1 in D* and Proctor's *Concerto for Serpent and Orchestra*. The program was a smashing success, with both concerts sold out. Doug also did a preview of the program a few days earlier at the local Border's bookstore. With exception of composer biographies (provided by Doug), the author of the orchestra's program notes lifted most of the text from the Serpent Website.

- In November, Sue Bradley performed Proctor's *Tuba Concerto* with piano accompaniment, for an audience of one. Before you think that this must be one for Guinness, be advised that this was done to satisfy the requirements of an examination. On the same 'program', Sue also performed Cliff Bevan's *Variations on The Pesky Serpent*, an adagio by Bach, and the Vaughan Williams *Tuba Concerto*. Sue's letter did not specify, but presumably the serpent was used only for the Bevan selection.

- The London Serpent Trio performed in March (1997) for a party aboard a barge on the Thames, from Charing Cross pier, to Greenwich, and back. Their program included two arrangements by Cliff Bevan, *Old Father Thames* and *Steersmen's Chorus* from *The Flying Dutchman*. In May, the LST played for a reception at the Guildhall, London. In September, they played for a wedding reception in the garden of a delightful house in Twickenham, London. The hosts asked for Mozart, and once again Cliff provided timely arrangements on two selections from *The Marriage of Figaro*. All programs were well received.



• Phil Humphries wrote about his engagements over the last year. Besides his work with the London Serpent Trio, The Mellstock Band and The Seven Dials Band, he was able to use the serpent for some other gigs as well. The Royal Scottish National Orchestra was continuing their project of recording film scores by Jerry Goldsmith, having previously used serpent in soundtracks for the *Alien* films.

In early 1997 they continued with the music to *Tora Tora Tora*, where the composer used the serpent to give the impression of an ancient Japanese instrument, backed by koto and other strings. On this occasion, Goldsmith was conducting, and Phil has a chance to talk with him. The composer was pleased with the serpent, and revealed that he had never before heard the piece as it was supposed to sound. When the film's original soundtrack was recorded, the dearth of serpentists in Los Angeles necessitated the use of a bassoon instead. He confirmed that the only scores of his that called for serpent were *Alien* and *Tora Tora Tora*.

With Phil playing serpent, his group 'The Mellstock Band' provided some music for the film *Kull the Conqueror*. The film was scored by Jerry Goldsmith's son Joel. The music was of a medieval flavor, and Phil also participated on slide trumpet. In October, The Mellstock Band recorded the soundtrack, and appeared in, the new film of Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (see photo above). Phil says that the film's director also worked on the James Bond film *Goldeneye*, and is also an avid musician and was very interested in the band. In November and December, the band toured England with their Christmas show *Rejoice All Men*, and also repeated their *Human Shows* and *Love and Liquor, Death and Dancing*.

With 'The Seven Dials Band', Phil played serpent and trombone in *Dickens & His Music* at The Oxford Playhouse. The show featured actor Freddie Jones (*Dune*, *The Elephant Man*, *Firefox*, and many other films). Much of the music performed can be heard on the previously reviewed CD *The Music of Dickens and His Time*.

● Virginia area serpentists continue to get together at least once a year. Connie Palmer again opened her home with Robert and Tra Wagenknecht as co-hosts. Nine serpentists and friends attended the most recent gathering. Instruments included tenor and bass serpents and George, the contrabass, as well as recorder, shawm, lysarden and sackbut. Attending were Bruce and Charlene King, Bob and Merrilllee Pallansch, Connie Palmer, Rick and Iris Schwartz, and Robert and Tra Wagenknecht. The several hours of music making included a couple of short works played by 'A Company of Waites', the renaissance group consisting of the Schwartzes and the Wagenknechts, which sometimes included the serpent. The 'Waites' recently presented their "lecture/recital" in the Gellman Room concert series at the Richmond Public Library. Some of the locals play together in a serpent and drum group as time allows.
Submitted by Therese Wagenknecht.

● In August, Craig Kridel went to England to collaborate with David Townsend in a week of workshops at the Sidmouth International Folk Festival. Members of The Mellstock Band, including Phil Humphries, threw a party at the village hall in Dewlish. Phil, Cliff Bevan, and Craig primed themselves with a goodly bit of beer, then gave an impromptu concert, in the style of The London Serpent Trio, Craig using his English bass horn.

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 players of related instruments, 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.

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New Materials

Ensemble De Organographia has recorded an unusual album, called *The One Horse Open Sleigh*, that presents unusual arrangements of familiar Christmas tunes, supposedly in the original versions. The focus is on carols written in the 19th century, but also includes vintage arrangements of older tunes, as published in the 19th century. Perhaps half of the selections are in a form that closely resembles what the modern listener will be accustomed to. The remaining pieces vary between virtually unknown to barely recognizable, being substantially different from what we are familiar with.

The performances are realized by a trio of multi-instrumentalists; Philip Neuman, Gayle Stuwe Neuman, and Laura Zaerr. Some selections also feature Allan Martin on piano and Donald Singer on miscellaneous percussion. All instruments are either authentic antiques or replicas. Brass instruments include ophicleide, ballad horn, and various early valved instruments from cornet to tuba. Woodwinds include flageolet, recorders, and versions of bassoon, clarinet, and flute that are less developed than

modern versions. The piano is an 1850 square model and there are numerous vocals performed by Ms. Neuman.

The liner notes are descriptive and include brief histories of the pieces, as well as source information on the arrangements. While the original versions credit the composers, the specialized 19th century arrangements list sources such as *The Union Tune Book (1842)*. Indeed, the latter are unmistakably examples of the period, as evidenced by the peculiar color lent by the harmony lines. One minor revelation; James Pierpont, the author of Jingle Bells, was the uncle of U.S. financier John Pierpont (J.P.) Morgan.

Better known carols include *Jingle Bells*, *O Come Emmanuel*, *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing*, *Adeste Fideles*, *God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen*, etc. Especially interesting are the less common selections such as *When Jesus Christ was Twelve*, *The Lord at First Adam Made*, *When Righteous Joseph*, *Let All That Are to Mirth Inclined*, etc.

The players are obviously skilled performers, the ensemble is almost always good and the performances are lively and well phrased. Some quibbles; the ophicleide playing exhibits a fault in quality that might be due to a lack of proper embouchure, inappropriate mouthpiece, leaky pads, or perhaps just a poor example of the instrument, and the recording features an apparently artificial reverb on all tracks that sometimes works to round out otherwise thin arrangements but at other times is merely distracting and unnatural. The use of the ophicleide as solo instrument on *The First Noel* seems to be appropriate, given this reviewer's traditional use of that tune to demonstrate the instrument.

Since only a few record stores carry this, your best bet is to buy directly from Pandourian Records, 709 5th Place, Oregon City, Oregon 97045, phone 503-657-5930, email <neuman@uofport.edu>.

The catalog number is Pandourian # PRCD1004.

● *The Cambridge Companion to Brass Instruments* is a new book that should be of interest to anyone involved with early brass instruments. Edited by Trevor Herbert and John Wallace, it consists of 18 articles, each on a different aspect of the subject. For example, the articles focus on ancient non-western lip-vibrated instruments, how brass instruments work, design and manufacture prior to 1800, design and manufacture since 1800, the cornett, the sackbut, the pre 1800 trumpet, the baroque and classical horn, keyed brass, low brass, brass in the modern orchestra, brass bands, playing & learning & teaching brass, post-classical horn, jazz improvisation on brass, brass solo music since 1800, brass in avant-garde music, and others. The authors are Arnold Myers, Robert Barclay, Keith Polk, Bruce Dickey, Trevor Herbert, Edward Tarr, Ralph Dudgeon, Cliff Bevan, John Wallace, and several others.

Obviously, each article has been written by an acknowledged expert, and the fact that all articles are easy to read and accessible to the layman is an unexpected delight. Indeed, a few days spend with this volume will bring any brass enthusiast up to speed with a major portion of the basics relating to historic and modern brass instruments, music, and players. While not a picture book, adequate graphics are provided where needed to make or clarify the authors' points, and all of them are clearly illustrated.

Cambridge University Press, ISBN #
0-521-56343-7 hardcover, 0-521-56522-7
paperback.

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 four makers will also deal directly with individual customers.

Christopher Monk
Instruments (*Jeremy West*)
Workshop 4
30 - 32 Devonshire Road
Forest Hill
London SE23 3SR
England



Phone & fax:
+44 (0) 181 291 6900

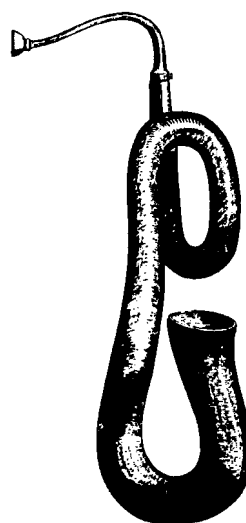
Web: www.pavilion.co.uk/paulnieman/CMI.html

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
(ophicleide, serpents)

Derek Farnell
82 Crumpsall Lane
Manchester M8 5SG
England
Phone: (0)161-740-7778
(ophicleides, etc.)

related to serpentists, and therefore present against their will (call Sheila Girling-Smith at (01865) 865214 for more information on this). Those who register early will be sent a list of local bed-and-breakfasts. To register, or for organizational questions, contact Dr. Joanna Archibald, Bate Collection of Musical Instruments, Faculty of Music, St. Aldate's, Oxford, OX1 1DB, England. Or, you may phone (01865) 286261, or fax (01865) 276128, or email <batecoll@ermine.ox.ac.uk>. Serpent or music related questions may be addressed to Nigel Nathan (see address, phone, email in this newsletter, About the Organization). The fee for registration is £20, payable to The Bate Collection.



Workshops

For those lamenting that this is the year *between* the biennial Serpentariums at Lacock, you will be cheered by this news of 'Ophiophiles at Oxford'. Join us for a weekend of serpent playing, tutored by members of the London Serpent Trio, courtesy of the Bate Collection museum in Oxford. Although the official program starts on Saturday, July 11, we will be getting together starting Friday evening from 6:00 until 9:00 for informal playing, followed by thirst-quenching at a local hostelry. Since this weekend's events will be determined somewhat by the participants, the organizers are open to suggestions. Registration will start on Saturday at 9:30 AM, and the morning hours will be used for playing sessions. In the afternoon, the Galpin Society will be having a meeting, or players can meet for more sessions. A possible mini-concert is possible for those Galpins who don't run for cover quickly enough. After dinner, there will be more playing. On Sunday, there will be more playing sessions, followed by an opportunity to handle those serpents in the Bate Collection that are reasonably healthy and are allowed out of their 'cages'. There will also be small events available to those noncombatants who might be

Quotes & Anecdotes

Not exactly serpent related, but Nigel Nathan's contribution came just in time to fill this otherwise empty column.

A Gender for Today

As you are aware, ships have long been characterized as being female (e.g., "Steady as she goes" or "She's listing to starboard, Captain!"). Recently, a group of computer scientists (all male) announced that computers should also be referred to as being female. Their reasons for drawing this conclusion follow:

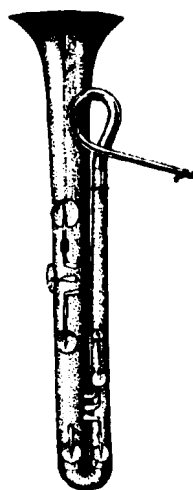
Five reasons to believe computers are female:

- 1) No one but the Creator understands their internal logic.
- 2) The native language they use to communicate with other computers is incomprehensible to everyone else.
- 3) The message "Bad command or file name" is about as informative as, "If you don't know why I'm mad at you, then I'm certainly not going to tell you."
- 4) Even your smallest mistakes are stored in long-term memory for later retrieval.
- 5) As soon as you make a commitment to one, you find yourself spending half your paycheck on accessories for it.

However, another group of computer scientists (all female) think that computers should be referred to as if they were male. Their reasons follow:

Five reasons to believe computers are male:

- 1) They have a lot of data, but are still clueless.
- 2) They are supposed to help you solve problems, but half the time they are the problem.
- 3) As soon as you commit to one you realize that, if you had waited a little longer, you could have obtained a better model.
- 4) In order to get their attention, you have to turn them on.
- 5) Big power surges knock them out for the rest of the night.



More Exciting News

- The excellent recording by The Chestnut Brass Company, *Tippiecanoe and Tyler Too* has been re-released by Sony Classical. It has been retitled *Hail to the Chief*.
- Early Music America has changed their webserver, hence their website's URL has changed. The new URL is <http://www.cwru.edu/affil/ema/>, and their email is <EMAoffice@aol.com>. They also have a new toll-free phone number 1-888-SACKBUT. Calls on Fridays are especially welcome.
- Nigel Nathan has received his new Monk D serpent, with three keys. He reports that the relative intonation is superior to his older Monk C serpent, and he is quite pleased.
- Paul Fursdon is reportedly taking advantage of his retirement to realize a long time ambition and make himself a serpent. He has been doing lots of research into what animates the beast, but would welcome more theoretical considerations and, especially, input from anyone who has constructed their own. If you wish to contribute to his adventure, contact him through Nigel Nathan (address in 'About The Organization').
- The British magazine *Choice* recently featured an article on portrait painting. June Mendoza's oil painting of Andrew van der Beek, holding the Anaconda, was a highlighted selection. The observant reader might recall that a rendering of that portrait appeared in this newsletter a few years ago.
- Stewart Bunyan recently bought a Monk military serpent, as part of his research towards the serpent and its use within the military band for his PhD. He is a tuba player in the Grenadier Guards Band, and is hoping to be able to play serpent in their 18th century programs once he has mastered it. He has consulted with Cliff Bevan, and will be taking lessons from Steven Wick. He asks that anyone who is knowledgeable about the serpent in military bands please contact him. His email is <Bunyan@btinternet.com>.