



Serpent Newsletter

P.O. Box 954 Mundelein, Illinois 60060 USA

Newsletter for Serpent Enthusiasts

September 27, 1995

A Note from the Editor

This edition of the newsletter will be dedicated largely to the material I had for last issue but could not afford to print. We have received just enough money, since the last issue, to print and mail this one. Please don't forget to send in your donation if you have not already done so.

The interview with Michel Godard is reprinted (with some editing) from its original form in the T.U.B.A. Journal. Thanks to publisher Karen Cotton for painless permission to reuse the material here.

Paul Schmidt

Where Serpents Gather

Thanks to Cliff Bevan for responding to last issue's request for more information on the group Travelling by Tuba:

I'm writing in response to a paragraph in the recent Serpent Newsletter asking for information on the participants in Travelling by Tuba. The players are Gavin Woods (tuba, etc.) and Stewart Death (accompanist). I first met Gavin in 1990 when I was one of the board of examiners for his diploma recital at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester, where they both are based. Since then he has worked as a freelance with a large number of orchestras, is a regular member of the Phoenix Brass Quintet (not Arizona, but -presumably- risen from the ashes!), and tours around with Travelling by Tuba.

During this presentation, Gavin plays on various members of the bugle horn family, and also didjeridu, conch shell and Viking horn. I am fairly certain that the Serpent he uses is by Harding. The ophicleide is one of only two (so far) made by Manchester Brassmakers. It stemmed from a commission offered by Gregg Butler, an enthusiast who lives in the north of England, and was keen to own a new ophicleide. Since they had to tool up for the job, Manchester Brassmakers decided to make more than one.

The prototype was completed about two weeks before my ophicleide recital at the Horniman Museum, London, also in 1990, and I was privileged to give it its first public airing.

Interestingly, one of the three craftsmen comprising the company is Derek Farnell, an enthusiastic Serpentist who participated in the performance of Tchaikovsky's 1812 Overture in the St. John's Smith Square Serpent Celebration [in 1990].

In July, Paul Schmidt played Serpent in a hastily assembled group which performed for a composers-for-charity function hosted by a local church. This annual festival has local writers and arrangers present brief programs of their work, with the proceeds going to a religious charity. A local arranger assembled the group, which was comprised of recorders plus the Serpent. The 20 minute program included a Handel overture and some Franck dances. Afterwards, the Serpent was the center of attention. However, so far no new works for Serpent have come from it....

About the Organization

The Serpent Newsletter is a not-for-profit publication dedicated to the support of, and communication between the Serpent enthusiasts of the world. Since the newsletter provides a forum for all pertinent information of interest to Serpentists, 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.

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Note that we no longer have a separate representative for the European continent. Ernst Wilzek has apparently moved, and in spite of receiving a more recent address from Christopher Baines, no reply has been received from two letters. Nigel Nathan is now handling all of Europe.

An Interview with Michel Godard

The interview is a compilation of several phone and FAX sessions which took place during September and October 1994 between Michel and Paul Schmidt. The original, and longer, version appeared in the Winter 1995 T.U.B.A. Journal. It is with the kind permission of publisher Karen Cotton that this re-edited version appears here.

Michel, let's start with introductions. Can you give me a bit of personal information, such as name, rank, serial number, etc.?

Of course. My full name is Michel Ernest Ren Godard. I am 34 years old, and am married with two children. I live in Monthyon, which is in France.

Are any of your immediate family also involved in music? Guessing from your age, I suppose that your children are not.

That's correct. My children are very young. Lise is 3 years old and Raphaël is only 1 year old. But my wife Linda is a professional singer.

Is this the same Linda who sings on some of your albums?

Yes, she is Linda Bsiri, and she is on three of my albums.

Your town is Monthyon. I don't know France very well; where is that located?

It is located about 50km from Paris, in the countryside. It is a small town.

Obviously you don't stay at home all the time. What type of musical activities give you reason to leave the peaceful countryside?

Well, I play in several groups, and between them they keep me busy. They encompass many musical styles. For example, I play occasionally with symphonies, but in the classical style I spend most of my time with the Arban Chamber Brass. I also play tuba with pianist Magali Goimard, primarily doing classical duets. I spend a lot of time in early music as well, and of course I play lots of jazz.

Tell me more about the jazz. I have just about all of your recordings, and they are mostly all jazz. But for the benefit of the reader, please name the groups.

In jazz, I play both Serpent and tuba with my band "Le Chant du Serpent", which has a CD named after it. I play jazz duets with guitarist Marc Ducret, and in mixed ensembles with various European musicians. I won't name them all, but your readers may recognize Wolfgang Puschnig, Christof Lauer, Rabi Abou Khalil, etc. There are also the ensembles which I have joined for making recordings.

I am an Early Music enthusiast, so I'm interested in your involvement in that arena.

In early music, I play with a group called "La Fenice". This is lead by cornetto player Jean Tubery, and I play primarily Serpent with this band. We do a program "Anima e Corpo" of 17th century music featuring Cornetto, Serpent and continuo. I also play duets with harpsichordist Virginie Vuong; we do a program of early music where I use Serpent, and another of contemporary music where tuba is used.

Do you participate in any clinics or other similar musical outlets?

I do quite a lot of composition. I participate in some master classes as a tuba clinician for Yamaha, and I have done some work for theater and ballet.

Can you name a work or two which you have composed?

Of course, I compose whenever I play jazz, but I have done some work on commission for symphonic wind ensemble and tuba, including a concerto called "l'historic d'une belle".

Besides tuba and Serpent, do you play any other instruments?

Sometimes I play bass sackbutt with "La Fenice". In January we will be participating in a recording of Monteverdi's "Orfeo".

Michel, I presume that you started on some other instrument and then changed to tuba. I'm curious if you had a similar start.

My parents are both musicians. My mother plays the accordion and my father is a trumpet player. They are not professionals, but they were with the same band. At the age of 9 years I wished to play an instrument like them, so I began playing the trumpet, eventually participating in the same band as my parents. My teacher was associated with the band, which was sponsored by the automobile company Peugeot and consisted of employees of the company. As a teenager, I went to the conservatoire of Besançon, which is a city in France near the Swiss border, and I continued to study the trumpet there. When I was 17 years old, the teacher of trombone and tuba, Jean Pierre Berque, came to me and said "come with me and take the tuba." I agreed, and I quickly learned the instrument. I should point out that this first tuba was the very small French type of tuba.

After the conservatoire, where did you continue your study of the tuba?

I did not attend a university for the purpose of studying the tuba. Instead, I studied privately with tuba teachers, and took master classes with several professionals. After the conservatoire, I went to Paris, and this is where the study occurred. However, many of the master classes took place in Switzerland.

Who did you play with in Paris?

While in Paris, I played with a professional military style symphonic wind ensemble called "La Musique de l'air". The tuba soloist there was Jean Appelgehn, and I studied with him. This orchestra was my first professional gig.

When did you first become interested in the Serpent?

I heard a famous recording by the London Serpent Trio called "Sweet and Low". At that time I was heavily into Baroque music, and the sound of the Serpent and its possibilities intrigued me. I was very curious to explore this "new" sound, and it seemed that I should try to learn the instrument. Of course, I was also thinking about somehow using this to the advantage of my tuba playing. Much music for Serpent is now played on the tuba and knowing the original would help me interpret the music as it should really sound.

You knew Christopher Monk, who of course was the man most responsible for the fact that there are Serpentists playing today. How did Christopher figure into your discovery of the instrument?

After I became first interested in the Serpent, I arranged to meet Christopher. I went to London in 1986 with the idea of buying an instrument, and I really fell in love with it. I have an instrument in C by Monk, and I also have an original instrument in C by Baudoin, made around 1810.

How long did you study the Serpent before you could play it in public, and what did you use it for initially?

I worked on this problem for about five years. You know, this instrument is really difficult to play! In 1991 I started to play it in concerts, first in improvised and jazz music. After a lot more practising I began to use it in early music. I studied alone, listening a lot to cornetto players, trying to find a good mouthpiece.

You divide your time between classical, jazz, and early music. If I understand correctly, you probably started with classical.

Yes, my original studies were all classical. When I started the tuba, this was what I played. I was looking for

recordings of the tuba when I first came to it, and I heard a record called "Busch Babies". It featured Arthur Blythe on saxophone and Bob Stewart on tuba. I was very impressed and started to be interested in this kind of music.

Who are your major jazz influences?

Of course Bob Stewart, and Howard Johnson, Dave Bergeron and Joe Daley.

Please elaborate on your work as a composer.

When you play jazz music or improvised music you compose at the same time. So, as I've done all the classical studies, I began to put more things on paper. First, I wrote just for students and for myself. Later I started to do some commissioned pieces. I never really studied composition as such, in fact I prefer to compose as a sort of "autodidact", using my own ideas instead of the traditional formulas, at least at some points.

Most of your recordings have been reviewed in the Serpent Newsletter. The first one I know about is "Le Chant du Serpent", where you play both tuba and Serpent, and your wife Linda does scat vocals. Are there any recordings before "Le Chant?"

Before that recording I made just one other. It is still available, but only as an LP. It's called "Comedy" and features Bob Stewart on some tunes. It is on the label "Label Hopi", the same as some of my other CD recordings.

What countries have you played in lately, and have you been able to perform with any of your influential players?

I have played a lot in Europe, and have performed with both Mel Culberson and Roger Bobo, as well as with Bob Stewart. I also have performed in Japan, China, Africa, USA, and Korea during the Olympic games. I have not appeared directly on TV or radio, but music from my recordings has been used for background in both types of media. Also, concerts have been broadcast on the radio.

Are there any new projects in the works?

This year we will be recording the early music project "Anima e Corpo" with Jean Tubery. I'm doing a record for children called "Bobo", which will be out on the Anvidis label. I should say that this has nothing to do with Roger Bobo, but instead refers to the children's cry. A recording with Rabi Abou Khalil has just come out on the Enja label, called "The Sultan's Picnic". A duo of myself and Marc Ducret (guitar) is also to be recorded this year.

Every player has humorous stories of gigs which went haywire. Do you have a couple you can share with us?

One funny story is about a TV show I worked on in France. I was playing the Serpent for a very famous music producer. After the session, she came to me and said "I'm impressed! I never heard a bassoon played like this!". The worst thing that ever happened was during the first concert of a tour with my band "Le Chant du Serpent". This happened last year, and we were in Germany, and the show was to be recorded by the radio station. The first tune was a trio with harpsichord, cornetto, and myself using the old Baudoin Serpent. You know how these instruments can absorb moisture in the upper curves of the horn and the wood can dry or rot out. Well, on the first tune the Serpent broke in two pieces at this weak point. I can tell you that this is a strange feeling, to say the least!

Ouch! my own Serpents are reasonably recent ones by Monk, but I live in fear of breaking them like you described. What did you do?

Luckily, Yamaha was involved in the concert, and they had repair people there for both brass instruments and woodwinds. We had a reprieve till the next day, and those two guys labored overnight. Between the two of them they stripped back the leather around the broken spot, and were able to glue the wood back together. The next day, I found the instrument ready to play again, with only the patched leatherwork showing what had happened.

Michel, thank you for taking the time to struggle with bad FAX connections and correcting the inevitable fine points lost in translation. Do you have any closing comment for the readers?

Thank you for asking me for the interview! In closing, I think that it's very important for a tuba player today to be in contact with the music of our time. I don't think a player should focus only on "contemporary music", but work with jazz, rock, folk, funk, etc. Music has to be created by the instrumentalists, not just played by them.

Workshops

This year was the big event at Amherst, with the usual weekend early brass festival becoming a weeklong symposium. It was held from July 26 through 30. The program (thanks to Robert Wagenknecht and John Weber for sending copies) listed Bernard Fourtet, Michel Godard and Craig Kridel as the Serpent experts; others listed under the 19th Century Brass heading, such as Cliff Bevan and Jay Crush, are also active Serpentists. Unfortunately, since

there have been no articles submitted on the proceedings, very little can be said here about what went on, other than the following program details.

Serpent related events.....Wednesday evening saw a concert featuring the Chestnut Brass Company, including Serpentist Jay Krush on ophicleide; Tony George joined in on ophicleide. Bernard Fourtet was also listed on this concert, playing Serpent and sackbut. On Friday afternoon there was a keyed brass program featuring Ralph Dudgeon (keyed bugle) and Tony George (ophicleide), among others. Saturday morning included a discussion session including Craig Kridel, Michel Godard, Ralph Dudgeon and Cliff Bevan. That evening, Michel Godard participated in a concert which also included horn player Lowell Greer. Michel's ensemble also included cornetto, harpsichord and violin.

All indications are that both Bernard Fourtet and Michel Godard produced remarkable performances. The few notes received claim that they raised the level of Serpent playing to new heights. Great things were also reported about ophicleide player Tony George.



By way of making a recommendation, it must be noted that the Rick Seraphinoff / Robert Barclay natural-trumpet-making summer workshop is a hoot! Serpentists Terry Pierce, Robert Wagenknecht, and Paul Schmidt participated this year, along with other Serpent friends such as Jack Werner, Fred Holmgren, Franz Streitwieser and Lowell Greer. Four other players-turned-instrument makers also participated. The workshop was held at the metal-arts shop at Indiana University from June 19 - 24. With natural horn maker Seraphinoff and natural trumpet maker Barclay leading the way, all eleven participants were able to turn a few flat sheets of brass into fine-playing and historically credible examples of natural trumpets. Fred gave the horns a toot to prove that they worked, and everyone left with their instruments, silly smiles, swelled egos, and lots of burns, bruises and cuts. It remains to be seen if this workshop will be offered in the future, but it comes highly recommended!

Report of Serpent Weekend, Lacock, May 19-21 1995

On Friday, the 19th of May 1995, about 14 Serpentists converged on the quiet Saxon village of Lacock in Wiltshire, England. Andrew van der Beek, a founding member of The London Serpent Trio, hosted the gathering at his early 18th century home, located on the banks of Bide Brook, from whence the village derives its Saxon name 'lacuc', or 'little stream'. Andrew's home is an ideal setting for a Serpent gathering, having large rooms, a large garden, the isolation from neighbors afforded by distance, and an otherwise quiet and beautiful rural setting. Situated between Chippenham on the M4 motorway and the city of Bath, Lacock is held by the National Trust, preserving it relatively unchanged. The village was founded around the abbey, which is the location of the first photograph taken by pioneer William Henry Fox Talbot in 1835.

Friday noon saw the first arrivals, Paul Schmidt and John Weber, in a state of jet-lagged stupor after the flight from Chicago. Closer to the appointed starting time of 6:00 PM, most of other players and enthusiasts arrived. Present were Alan Lumsden, Cliff Bevan, Phil Humphries (all of the London Serpent Trio), Bob Boorman, Christopher Baines, Colin Dipper, John Schofield, Murray Campbell, Nigel Nathan, Peter Davies, Robert Dulake, Stephen Andre, Sydney Hemsley, Tom Dibley and Wiktor Bohdanowicz. Playing en masse commenced under the direction of Phil Humphries. This warm-up party finished the evening by crossing the footbridge to The George pub, which holds the longest continuous license in England, for a pint or two.

Saturday, the group reunited for another mass playing session, this time with a couple more latecomers. Shortly into this session, Andrew arrived with the news that the group scheduled to play in the village festival later in the morning had cancelled. The question was, could we whip some music into shape for playing in an hour's time? Of course! The odd polkas, jazz tunes, renaissance and baroque selections were pressed into service, and just before noon the motley ensemble assembled in the center in the village. It soon became a battle for the milling audience's attention, since a fellow on unicycle juggling flaming batons soon appeared. Having played their hearts and lips out, the players slithered back to home base for some tea. Afterwards, several trios formed for afternoon sessions, followed by a photo session in the garden. Andrew's father-in-law, a freelance author of magazine articles was preparing a feature on the Serpent Weekend, and many colorful poses followed.

In the afternoon, Alan Lumsden, Cliff Bevan and late arrival Tom Winthorpe joined in the garden of The George and presented an hour's worth of memorable selections through the delightful medium of ophicleide trio, and the

ale flowed. The highlight of the program as the LST version of Ketelbey's "In a Persian Market". After dinner, another massed playing session, this time directed by Alan Lumsden, beginning to develop and refine the ensemble's sound. The music changed to works by Gabrieli and others, often in the form of works for two antiphonal quartets, allowing most players to have their own parts. When this got to be too much fun for one day, the company adjourned to The George.

On Sunday, Alan and Cliff Bevan took turns conducting the group, until late morning when Keith Rogers, of Christopher Monk Workshops, arrived. Keith started with a slide presentation showing the new workshop and some of the varied instrument types being made there. Soon the slides began to show the work in progress on the second church-style anaconda, being built for Matthew Bettenson (?). This is a duplicate of the instrument built by Christopher Monk for Phil Palmer and introduced to the world as "George" at the Serpent Celebration of 1990. In closing, Keith produced the currently completed sections totaling almost half of the instrument, and laid them out on a large table for review. The presentation ended with players trying the latest Monk style church Serpent built by Keith. It should be noted that two other recent Serpents were also present during the weekend. Sydney Hemsley's home built instrument was available for inspection and was being played by its maker in all sessions. Stephen Andre also brought his partially completed fiberglass creation, and all interested parties had ample time to trade notes and techniques on Serpent making and repair.

After lunch, the entire gathering assembled in the from lawn between the house and a mammoth beach hedge. Cliff Bevan directed the ensemble through successful performances of the large works rehearsed previously. As evening drew near, players began filtering away, some went for another pint, and a great weekend came to a close. A good time was had by all!

New Materials

Following are synopsis of four pieces published by Cliff Bevan, all of which may be used for Serpent ensemble. Ranges also allow performance by consorts of euphonium/tuba or bassoons or trombones. Order from Piccolo Press, 10 Clifton Terrace, Winchester, SO22 5BJ, England. All pieces come with score and parts, are nicely computer typeset and professionally printed and bound.

"What Shall We Do With a Drunken Serpent?", arranged by Cliff Bevan for trio. £5.95 / \$10.00. This challenging arrangement starts with a six bar descending modulation which uses the well known sailor's hornpipe as a theme.

Then first the middle, followed by the bottom part precede to recite the main theme in 5/8 time, with the other two parts playing syncopated accompaniment. The next section restates the theme in a series of variations, changing metre every bar for good measure. The theme is stated once more through an increasingly inebriated section which ends up in a descending pattern based on the melody associated with the words "early in the morning" in the song. This is fun to play, once the players have the syncopation down steady, and is sure to please any audience.

"Toccata and Fugue in D minor (BWV 565)" by Bach, arranged by Cliff Bevan for trio, £5.95 / \$10.00. This arrangement, unlike most others which claim the entire piece but deliver only the famous toccata, does in fact manage to quote all themes and basic developments, albeit in the span of 80 measures. This is possibly the last piece an audience would expect to hear from a Serpent trio, and other than from the London Serpent Trio, it would **amaze** this reviewer if they ever will. This is a very challenging arrangement, requiring great technical skill and dexterity. It is most likely to find real application with bassoon trios or with tuba trio, for which the technical demands are within grasp of most players. The arranger notes on the cover that the piece was premiered by the LST at St. Albans International Organ Festival, where the "spectacularly difficult" first part was realized on ophicleide. After the audience recovered from initial shock, they rocked the venerable building with disbelieving laughter, then tumultuous applause. If you program this work with your group, you should expect a similar reaction.



"The Lost Chord", by Arthur Sullivan, arranged by Cliff Bevan for trio, £4.95 / \$7.00. This setting of Adelaide Proctor's poem by the composer of the famous Gilbert & Sullivan operettas is more in the vein of his equally well known hymn "Onward Christian Soldiers". The work has been critiqued both as "the grandeur of Beethoven" and "the epitome of all that is worst in the Victorian ballad". According to contemporary perspective, it is a well worn war-horse of a tune with pleasant harmonies and a short performance time. This is essentially a straight forward arrangement. As the arranger notes, "in the event of a local shortage of Serpentists" this piece can be realized by any trio of instruments with similar range, and should find a niche in any group's repertoire.

"Birthday Fugue (Fuga Quattrocento a 5)", by "Frescobeardy", for quintet, £4.95 / \$7.00. In the manner of another resourceful (and perhaps more infamous)

musicologist, Cliff Bevan discovered this work just in the nick of time for the 400th birthday party of the Serpent, and with the sort of serendipity only this type of research produces, the work just happened to be for the correct type and quantity of instruments warranted by the situation. Composed in the style of the clean-shaven Frescobaldi, this double fugue slowly unfolds possibly the most famous tune known on this planet. Technically accessible, this composition can be pressed into service by a great variety of instrumental quintets, whenever there is the need to paraphrase the title's melody without exactly quoting it.

On the horizon....Simon Proctor has been commissioned to compose (arrange is not a strong enough word for what needs to be done here!) an abbreviated version of Moussorgsky's Pictures at Exhibition, in quartet form with a playing time of approximately 10 minutes. It is anticipated that this will be a piece which will prove

playable on many different instrumentations, although it's intended disposition will be euphonium / tuba quartet. Interested persons may write to this newsletter for more information on pricing and availability.

Getting Serpents

Since the last issue, it was reported that Dominique Bouge is no longer making Serpents. Otherwise, there have been no new developments reported in this area. The editor paid a visit to the Christopher Monk workshops in May, and can attest that the new location seems to be a great improvement technically and logistically, not to mention being quite close to a great sandwich shop. Here is the list of known Serpent makers.

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