

Serpent Newsletter

P.O. Box 954 Mundelein, Illinois 60060 USA

Newsletter for Serpent Enthusiasts

September 27, 1998

A Note from the Editor

This newsletter has always been dated April 1 (the anniversary of the debut of the London Serpent Trio) and September 27 (the date of Christopher Monk's Celebration). I always try to get things done so that the issues are at least in the mail by those dates. This time around, I found myself sitting down to start work on it on the 27th, with no excuse like sudden trips to China. Chalk it up to a warm early fall with great weather, where the roads beckon to my bicycle and I have to follow its lead.

This is the 14th edition since the newsletter started its current schedule of regular publication, and I'm gratified that all recent issues have been comprised solely of items submitted by others. Gone are the days, it seems, when I had to write everything myself.

Unfortunately, the days when I had to plead for funds are not gone. A quick check with our treasurer confirms that after this issue is mailed there will be just enough money in the bank to send a family of four to the movies (matinee, no popcorn.) Never before have the funds been so low. There are six months before the next issue is due to be published, and it will not happen without money. Please send some to the appropriate address (see About the Organization).

Paul Schmidt

New Materials

- Randy Cabell has completed a sample offering of a larger book of 19th century American brass music called *The Martial Music of Camp Dupont*. He has "chosen from the original arrangements for trio and tastefully recreated for a military band ca. 1835, more specifically A Harmonie Music Group" comprised of primo & secondo parts (B flat clarinets or flutes or oboes or fifes), two natural horns crooked in low B flat, a bass line (serpent or bassoon), snare drum and bass drum, and "An Early Brass Group" comprised of E flat and B flat cornets, E flat alto, tenor horn, ophicleide and E flat bass. Twenty one selections are listed on the cover, but the current sample includes *Dinner Call - Roast Beef, The Presidents March and March of the Riflemen*. If you are interested in learning more about this volume, contact Randolph W. Cabell, Route 1 Box 448 A, Boyce, Virginia 22620, email <rcabell@visuallink.com>

- There have been some adventuresome players out there wanting to build their own serpents. One or two articles have been printed in these pages on just that subject, but perhaps we can use some more. So, consider this a plea for Do-It-Yourself serpent articles. Submit them to the editorial address in the About the Organization section.

- BEULAH publishes a series of historic classical music recordings on CD. Prepared from the original EMI and Decca master acetates and tapes, these reissues have all been carefully restored to the best possible sound quality and some reportedly contain serpent stuff (for instance the *Tattoo, Aldershot 1930's* and *S.S. Wesley (Church Music)* recordings). BEULAH, 66 Rochester Way, Crowborough, East Sussex, TN6 2DU, England, or webpage <http://homepages.enterprise.net/beulah/>

About the Organization

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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Where Serpents Gather

• First Serpent Orchestral Experience by John Weber

On Sunday, February 22, I received a call from James Winfield, the conductor of the Tower Chorale, to play serpent in the orchestra for a performance of Mendelssohn's oratorio *Saint Paul*, Op. 36, at St. Louise de Marillac Church in LaGrange, Illinois. Mr. Winfield explained that after studying the score, he realized that it would be much better to perform the part on serpent rather than tuba. The concert was on Sunday, March 1. That meant I had only one week to prepare for my serpent orchestral debut! This would be quite a challenge along with my full time teaching job as band director in School District 152, Harvey, Illinois. Fortunately I had some tools to help me: my Walter Sear tuba excerpt book and my computer. After accepting the job I sat down at the computer and entered the music in Coda's Finale music software and proceeded to play along with the computer. This really helped me with my intonation. On Monday I bought a recording of *Paulus* performed by Chorus Musicus Koln and Das Neue Orchester, a two CD set from Opus 111, #OPS 30-136/136. It's an original instrument recording with Anton van der Beeck playing serpent (could this be Andrew van der Beek?) The recording is quite good and the tracks for the most part were numbered the same as the sections in the score. That was a great help when furiously



flipping pages and remote to try and pack in as much practice in the little time I had available.

The booklet inside the CD had a picture of the first page of the score. This helped me realize my position in the orchestra. The serpent part is printed between the bassoons and the horns. That's quite a change from being at the bottom of the brass where I normally play tuba. The part was interesting in that it sometimes doubled the bass, played among the trombones and also played with the woodwinds in a different manner than a tuba part would.

We had a rehearsal the Saturday before the concert. It was neat to sit between the bassoons and trombones. I really enjoyed my "new" role in the orchestra. Mr. Winfield had me play a short demonstration of the serpent sound for the orchestra and we proceeded with the rehearsal. It was great fun. I gave an apologetic look to a startled oboe player and fortunately my sound started to blend better as the rehearsal progressed.

The concert was very exciting. The Tower Chorale and soloists were great. After the concert many people talked to me about the serpent and I played for those who were curious to hear the sound. I am very thankful to James Winfield for seeking a serpentist to perform and to Paul Schmidt for recommending me. It was a unique and wonderful experience. Thank you X24.

- Drake Mabry writes that his *Four Tanka* for soprano and serpent were premiered April 9th by husband & wife team Linda Bsiri and Michel Godard, in Poitiers, France. As an encore for the concert he joined them in an improvisation for two serpents and voice. Currently he is working on a solo work for serpent. He is planning on playing a trio with pianist Catherine Schneider and celtic percussionist Olaf as part of the *Fete de la Musique* in France, a national celebration. They will play some improvisations, a few standards, and of course some blues. By the way, 'tanka' is an unrhymed verse of Japanese origin.

- On April 29, Doug Yeo participated in a lecture demonstration on the serpent at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. The event was hosted by curator Darcy Kuronen and also featured instrument conservator Gary Stewart. The program was attended by a capacity crowd of 45 (the MFA's music gallery is a small place!). Fellow serpentists Tra Wagenknecht

and Paul Schmidt showed up, both to lend their support and to finally meet Doug. He mentioned that in a wonderful coincidence, Simon Proctor had called earlier while Doug was busy with his pre-lecture practice of the Proctor *Serpent Concerto*.

After Darcy's introduction, Gary spoke for about 30 minutes on serpent history and the museum's collection of serpent related instruments. Then Doug played and talked for another 45 minutes. There was nice interaction with the crowd, who were obviously enjoying themselves. Doug performed on both of his bass serpents, the Baudouin and the Monk, as well as the soprano "worm" serpent, borrowed from Craig Kridel and contrabass "anaconda" serpent, George, borrowed from Connie Palmer.

The event only broke up when Darcy kicked everyone out so that the museum could close for the evening. Several photos were taken and Doug wrote an article *Serpent Night at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts*; all of these are available on the web at <http://www.yeodoug.com/serpentnight.html>

- About a year ago, Doug made some chamber music with the Whispering Hill Wind Ensemble, a group of eight Boston area college professors who enjoy getting together regularly to play Harmonie Musik (see their webpage at <http://www.cba.neu.edu/~vgodin/whwe.htm>). It was the first time they had played with a serpent, and Doug's first time for playing chamber music on serpent. This event proved to be so enjoyable that it helped to inspire the following event:

- On July 31, Doug joined members of the Boston Symphony Orchestra in a Prelude concert preceding the evening BSO concert at Tanglewood. This chamber program was held in the Seiji Ozawa Hall, and was nearly filled to its capacity of 1000. They began with the *Three English Military Marches* by Haydn, where Doug used his Monk serpent. He then had the opportunity to speak for a while about the serpent. Following was the *Partita in E flat* by Hummel, with the Baudouin serpent coming into play. Next, "George" the contrabass serpent was brought out to an audible gasp and much craning of necks in the audience. Doug spoke about George, then joined in playing this monster in a performance of the allegretto movement from Beethoven's *Symphony No. 7*, but not before contrasting George with the soprano "worm" serpent. The concert closed with *Harmonie*

Partita Op. 79 by Krommer, Doug once again using the Baudouin serpent, and the work's Bohemian flair had the audience to roaring its approval. Fellow serpentists Craig Kridel and the Wagenknechts, Tra and Robert, were able to attend. Members of the BSO management commented that they had never before seen an audience more engaged and obviously enjoying themselves at a chamber concert.

- On August 25, Doug took the serpent to North Central College in Naperville, Illinois as part of a three day low brass workshop. He gave a lecture and recital of music for bass trombone and serpent, including Cliff Bevan's *Variations on the Pesky Serpent*.

- Doug is looking forward to a November 15 serpent performance in Hartford, Connecticut, with the Connecticut Valley Chamber Orchestra. He will be the featured soloist, and will include the Proctor *Serpent Concerto*, Mendelssohn *Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage*, as well as other orchestral and harmonie music featuring the serpent. The concert is scheduled for 3 PM at Trinity Episcopal Church in Hartford. For further information, contact Robert Howe at email <arehow@vgernet.net>

Getting Serpents

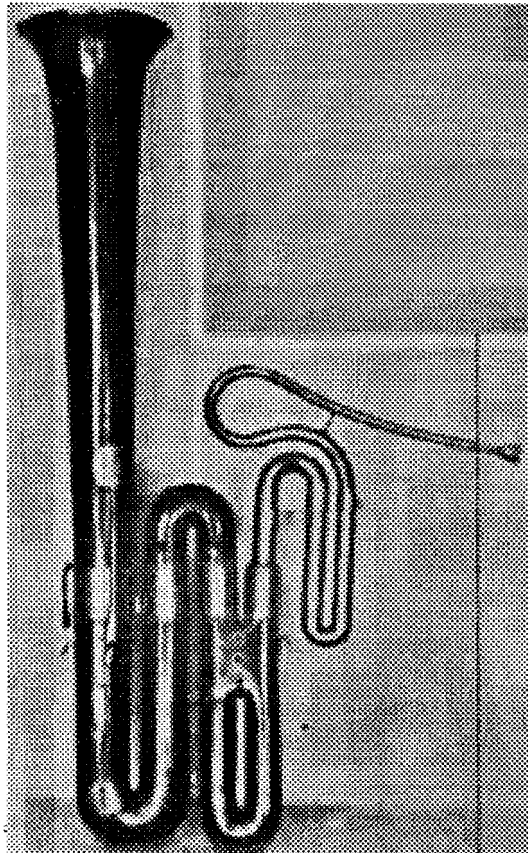
Here is the list of Serpent makers who have made themselves known to us. In the case of Monk and Harding instruments, there are numerous dealers who are able to order from the makers, and might even have some in stock. All four makers will also deal directly with individual customers.

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
(0)161-740-7778
(*ophicleides, etc.*)

Derek Farnell
82 Crumpsall Lane
Manchester M8 5SG
England
Phone:
Phone: 818-447-1904
(*ophicleide, serpents*)



Workshops

- *Ophiophiles at Oxford* took place on July 10-12 in Oxford, England. We were truly an international gathering, if a relatively small one, with John Weber from the USA and Stephen Willis from Cyprus making up our octet. Andrew van der Beek came and helped us out on Saturday, joining in to enable us to give a spirited rendering of the 1812 Overture.

Our numbers varied a bit from Friday evening through Sunday afternoon, so we had the opportunity to play groupings from trios to the aforementioned Tchaikovsky nonet with no one being left out. With eight of us on Saturday and plenty of space available in the Bate, we played mostly in two quartets.

Sunday afternoon we got to handle and blow some of the Bate Collection's (leaky!) serpents, a bass horn, ophicleide and sundry others.

Our heartfelt appreciation to Drs. H. LaRue, curator, and Joanna Archibald, museum assistant, for extending their hospitality, providing the administration, giving up their weekend with great risk to their personal musical sensibilities, plying us with refreshments and letting their serpents out to play.

submitted by Nigel Nathan

● The 14th Annual Early Brass Festival, sponsored by the Historic Brass Society, was held on Friday July 31 through Sunday August 2, in Amherst. About 75 musicians participated in the weekend's lectures, informal early brass playing sessions, workshops and concerts. Many of the leading early brass performers in the field were in attendance. The bass sackbut virtuoso Wim Becu led cornetto and sackbut players in a workshop on Renaissance and early Baroque wind band repertoire and Niklas Eklund gave a class in natural trumpet pedagogy. Papers on horns were given by Thomas Hiebert, who discussed 18th century *cor mixte* styles, and William Rogan presented a talk on Schumann's horn terminology. Three trombone related talks were given by Charlotte Leonard (The Role of the Trombone and its Affekt in 17th c. Lutheran Church Music), Richard Raum (Schubertian Trombones), and Benny Sluchin (The Trombone a Piston in France). Andre Smith gave a spirited talk on the life of Victor Ewald and the history of the tuba in Russia.

A special session, with more than a touch of hilarity, was the first known public performance on the "cornahawk." This instrument, by cornetto maker John McCann, is a combination cornetto and tomahawk, and was given its debut performance by Allan Dean and Bob Stibler who played several Renaissance duets. McCann explained that it not only joined his interests in cornetto making and American Revolutionary War history, but also was a continuation of a long tradition of making instruments in wild and flamboyant styles, often with animal heads or instruments of warfare. Additional suspense to the performance was added as the blade part of the instrument was pointing in toward the player but all went well and the audience enthusiastically responded in the spirit in which the session was presented.

The Gala Festival Concert included a wide range of early brass repertoire. Cornettist and conductor Michael Collver performed Medieval music by

Ciconia and Grenon, joined by slide trumpeter Steve Lunhahl and Wim Becu, the Frescobaldi canzona for cornetto and sackbut, *La Liparella* with Becu, and closed the concert in a dazzling rendition of Handel's *Eternal Source of Divine Light* with trumpeter Niklas Eklund. Eklund also gave a stunning reading of Leopold Mozart's *Concerto for Trumpet* and was later joined by trumpeter Robin Pyle in a performance of an anonymous 17th century *Sinfonia*. Horn performances included two Cherubini sonatas performed by Jeff Snedeker accompanied by keyboardist Kathryn Cook and two trio sonatas by Pezold and Graun performed by Claude Maury who was joined by strings and continuo. Of the more unusual performances were Fred Holmgren's reading of the Haydn *Trumpet Concerto* played on keyed trumpet. This performance on keyed trumpet was a first for the Early Brass Festival. Benny Slucin gave a beautiful performance of a work by Demersseman on the valve trombone.

Always a main part of the HBS Early Brass Festival are the informal playing sessions. This year Richard Seraphinoff led about a dozen natural horn players in reading sessions throughout the weekend. They were joined in the fun by cornett and sackbut sessions led by Orum Stringer and natural trumpet sessions led by Fred Holmgren. A small group of keyed brass also joined the festivities.

The HBS is planning activities as part of a large symposium to be held in Paris on March 10-13, 1999. For more information, contact the HBS at 148 West 23rd Street #2A, New York, NY 10011, phone 212-627-3820, email <jjn@reserach.att.com>, or refer to the webpage <http://www.lundahlcorp.com/hbs/>

submitted by Jeff Nussbaum

More Exciting News

Doug Yeo sent word that he now has two bass serpents. Besides the custom made presentation model made at the Christopher Monk Workshop, he has acquired an antique Baudouin church serpent from the Bissonnet shop in Paris. Both instruments have been seeing lots of use lately (see articles in Where Serpents Gather).

- Some unusual instruments photos can be viewed on the web at <http://www.contrabass.com/contrarchive/frenchmart.html> (check out the [serpdroit.jpg](#) *oddly shaped serpent link*).
- Mark Jones reports that he has found an original English military serpent for his collection. This one has six holes, three keys, and a canvas type covering. It is currently undergoing restoration. Mark has also found a beautifully hand colored European print, 19 X 14 inches, of the inside of a cathedral, with a mass going on, with choirs on each side, with a musician holding a serpent on each side in front of the choir. It is estimated to date from about 1830.
- Early Music America wants you to know about their webpage domain change. It is now <http://www.earlymusic.org>
- (Still) Desperately Seeking Serpent - I am seeking a fiberglass/resin serpent (by Harding or other) for extensive (often outdoor) use. If you have an instrument with which you are desirous of parting, please call or email Brian Cardell at 410-566-4324, <cardell@cua.edu> or <caliensis@juno.com>
- Michel Smiga, an instrument repairman in France, has informed us that he has a list of about 70 serpent makers available, with dates and locations. These are historic makers, with Dupre and Monk being the latest. If interested, email <cjsax@club-internet.fr>
- A couple more webpages dealing with the serpent have turned up. Brief mention is made at <http://www.contrabass.com/pages/dis-spt.html> including a discography. A short article resides at <http://www.s-hamilton.k12.ia.us/antiqua/serpent.htm> which is a part of a *Guide to Medieval and Renaissance Instruments*.
- While we are on the subject of webpages, here are a couple pertinent ones from the Bate Collection. <http://www.ashmol.ox.ac.uk/bat/ophios.html>
<http://www.ashmol.ox.ac.uk/bat/serpents.html>
- Martin Douglas has recently been appointed Music Development Officer for the Skye and Lochalsh Young Music Makers and as such would appreciate hearing from any serpent ensembles, or similar, who would be willing to offer performance/demonstrations for young people in Skye (perhaps as part of a Scottish tour?) The available budget is modest, but the locale offers many compensations. He is also on the hunt for a cheap but playable serpent, wood or plastic. If you can you help, contact martin Douglas, 31 Mains Bernisdale, Skeabost Bridge, Portree, Isle of Skye, Scotland IV51 9NS, or phone +44 (0) 1470-532728 or email <martindouglas@compuserve.com>
- On Friday, August 14, The Berkshire Eagle published a story by Andrew Pincus titled *A Musical Serpent Joins BSO*. It relates the whole story of Doug Yeo and his recent infatuation for the serpent. If interested, you can probably obtain a copy through your library or directly from the paper.
- The pioneering scholar and publisher Mary Rasmussen was the recipient of the 1998 Christopher Monk Award which was presented by Historic Brass Society president Jeff Nussbaum at the HBS 14th Annual Early Brass Festival in Amherst, MA. She was recognized for her numerous contributions to brass music, and she gave a spirited talk relating activities of her early career.
- A report from a bandmember, recently returned from a trip in Germany, mentions a rustic 'theme' restaurant on a side street in Rothenburg. This is the kind of place that has waiters dressed in period costume, the customers drink from tankards, etc. Apparently, they use a resin serpent, filled to the bottom bowl with wine, to pour from the bell into said tankards.

