

Serpent Newsletter

P.O. Box 954 Mundelein, Illinois 60060 USA

Newsletter for Serpent Enthusiasts

September 27, 2023

A Note from the Editor

While preparing this edition of the Serpent Newsletter, I did some quick math and concluded that there have already been 62 editions in its current format over 31 years, this edition being the 63rd. I started editing and publishing this periodical in April of 1992, following the six year period when Craig Kridel published the seven editions of his *Newsletter for United Serpents*, beginning in 1986.

Nigel Nathan in England has also helped for a long time with collecting subscriptions and mailing hard-copies of the newsletter (of course, now Europe is 'emailed PDF' copies only) while elsewhere distribution remains mostly via mailed hard-copies. And of course, Nigel for many years hosted the Serpentariums at his large home. Before Nigel, a couple in Bonn, Germany, the Wilzek's, handled UK/Euro newsletter distribution.

For such a small 'community' of serpentists, ophicleidists and enthusiasts, this kind of uninterrupted longevity for an associated supporting publication is certainly a pretty good track record.

Having a newsletter like this only works because of an enthusiastic readership that gives back by submitting information, photos, and references for the editor to follow up on. Things remain a bit slow in the 'serpent world', and we don't currently enjoy as many new performances, new sheet music and new music recordings coming out at the rate they used to in the past. Hopefully we will see a rebound, but even without all of that there are still newsworthy things to share.

As usual, please continue sending in any information on past or future performances, sightings, related videos and audio recordings, music and book publications, etc.

Paul Schmidt

Workshops

- Phil Humphries wrote about the biennial Serpentarium, the next iteration of which should take place in May of 2024, and probably in southern England. Phil would like to take a poll of serpentists who are interested in attending, since in order to make the planning worthwhile, there needs to be at least a quorum. With some regular attendees having to bow out due to age-related travel issues, we cannot assume the usual kinds of participation as we once could.

If you are interested in attending a May 2024 Serpentarium, please email Phil directly at serpent.phil@btinternet.com as soon as possible, so he knows the approximate number of participants. Because the next edition of this newsletter will come out less than two months before the presumed date of the event, the decision will be initially announced via email to those who replied to this survey. If you definitely expect to attend, say so in your email. If you would like to attend but are not yet sure of your availability, say so in your email. Even though the initial decision on whether to have a 2024 event will be communicated from Phil by email, the details will also appear in the April 2024 edition of this newsletter so that late-comers may still participate.

- In June 2-4, 2023, the annual Whitewater Early Music Festival took place at the University of Wisconsin's Whitewater campus. This long-running event has been sponsored by Chicago's well-known Oak Park Recorder School for decades, and indeed attending it once long ago (probably in 1990?) was probably the first time I had ever tried playing serpent with other people, at least without being hidden by other serpentists around me, which would have been the case with my first public 'outing' on serpent at 1989's *First International Serpent Festival*. That I was somewhat able to do so back then, not at all long after I had first started on the instrument, encouraged me to keep playing it in spite of the inherent hardships, AND attend the *400th Anniversary of the Serpent Workshop* in England in 1990. Because this event was not just for recorder players, beginner or experienced, but also for any early music instrumentalists, it was so encouraging to me, not to mention

being good experience. So, this year I decided to participate again. The organization of all the concurrent 'sessions' seemed to be a bit different from what I recalled, with players pretty much being corralled into structured groups of sessions according to experience level and difficulty of music to be played. I chose the 'advanced' curriculum, and within that I selected both the exploration of Thomas Weelkes madrigals and also the more challenging study-through-playing of Bach's complete *The Art of Fugue* as arranged by Eric Haas. I had the most fun with the Bach, and mostly read from the bass recorder book. The diverse ensemble did not have a lot of other players on the bottom part, or at least not on instruments which could be heard enough by everyone else, and they needed to hear it in order to stay together through the contrapuntal syncopations. I got a lot of positive feedback; a good example was a player from the other side of the approximately 30 person group, who came up and told me, "You're doing a great job; even when you screw up, you remain on time on the beat, and we all are following you!" In my own experience, the only other times in my serpent playing 'career' when I have stressed my embouchure as much as this would be at the Serpentariums, and usually those parts are not as difficult as this music was. It was fun and rewarding, and I recommend this kind of thing to other players, if they have the opportunity.

submitted by Paul Schmidt



*Serpent sculpture in the Brussels Musical Instrument Museum
photo by Chris Culp*

New Materials

● Dr. Beth Chouinard-Mitchell, who plays tubas and serpent, has been working for years on her *The Serpent Source Book*, and based on information on her website (www.bethmitchelltubastudio.com) just before the April 2023 edition of this newsletter, it was supposed to have become available shortly after that edition was published. When this was questioned recently, Beth replied, "YIKES!

Thanks for bringing this up. I thought I got all references as to WHEN deleted! (I just took that sentence down). My publisher friends advised me to erase all predictions, and that 'books always take longer than you think', and to say nothing other than, "we are getting VERY close, and are closer than ever before!" I have run into a few snafu's as I have since heard is typical with publishing. I hope by late fall? Because this would be a killer Christmas gift !"



*Domange, Laureate of the Military Musical Gymnasium, Student of Mr. Caussin, Professor at the Conservatory
illustration by A. Collette
thanks to Mark Jones*

"Where am I? The copy is done, needs to be set into the correct program now, several of the methods have been entered into Finale (computer music engraving software), with several more to go... but it is happening!"

"For the curious... because there seem to be many who are wondering: Why is this taking so long? My biggest delay has been my work schedule which pays my bills, unlike writing which doesn't (yet). I have recently returned from working abroad for two months (as a tuba player and teacher) which brought the publishing adventure to a screeching halt. I do have to work full-time (musician, teacher, lecturer) which is eating into the finalizing of the project."

"CONTEST POSSIBILITIES: ALSO THE TITLE IS CHANGING upon the recommendation of some serious famous serpenters. Perhaps you can put out a contest to your newsletter readers to rename the book... AND they can vote on the top 3 ideas. The title needs to be short, snappy, and containing the idea that this book contains "FRENCH HISTORICAL SOURCES FOR SERPENT, TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH, WRITTEN USING

PRIMARY SOURCES, INCLUDING MUSIC FROM THE METHODS TO PLAY AND LEARN FROM" (Which is way too long for a good title!)"

"It will probably be something along the lines of: *French Historical Sources for Learning Serpent* or *French Historical Sources and Music for Learning Serpent* or *French Serpent Sources* or *French Sources & Music for Serpent* or *The French Serpent: Historical Sources and Music* or *Learning the French Serpent: Historical Sources and Music* or something like that. The prize for the best title is that the winner will get a free copy of the book once it finally comes out." Clarification; even if Beth can't use the winning title for some reason, she still plans to honor the winner with the prize. And since the actual timeline is uncertain at this time, it is unknown what the deadline for contest entries is; submit yours as soon as possible! Beth's email address can be found on the PressKit webpage of her website as mentioned on page 2 of this newsletter.



1994 White House Christmas Ornament...U.S. Marine Band with an ophicleide! It honors James K. Polk, the 11th President of the United States from 1845 to 1849. The cameo at the center features an illustration of the President and Mrs. Polk on the South Lawn of the White House while they are serenaded by the United States Marine Band. The scene is fictional, but based on a daguerreotype by John Plumbe taken in 1846. The band's leader is Francis Scala, and the instruments that can be seen include a trombone, clarinet, and an ophicleide (see detail at right). thanks to Mark Jones

- A scientific article on the antimicrobial effect of fungal melanin in combination with plant oils for the treatment of wood has come to light. It may be accessed by going to this website,

www.frontiersin.org and then using the search tool at the upper right to search for "Antimicrobial effect of fungal melanin"; the pertinent article should be one of the few that

appear in the search results. Or, simply use this URL to directly access the article:

<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fmats.2022.915607/full> where you may download a PDF of the article at no cost. The article is a collaboration of four scientists, Anh N. Tran-Ly, Markus Heeb, Tine Kalac, Francis W.M.R. Schwarz, and is specific to fungus in serpents made from walnut. A serpent-savvy reader will quickly note that the authors are not music historians, and get some serpent details wrong, e.g. the serpent was the "godfather of the Saxophone". The article is also very technical and might be difficult for laymen to follow. Some assumptions made seem rather odd, and the conclusions not entirely reliable, so take them with a grain of salt. Regardless, this may still be of interest to some newsletter readers.

- Gabe Stone wrote about some Harmonie music that he has only recently 'discovered' on the IMSLP online public domain music library; these all include parts for serpent. *Grande Harmonie* by C. Münchs may be accessed via [https://imslp.org/wiki/Grande_harmonie_\(M%C3%BCnchs_%2C_C.\)](https://imslp.org/wiki/Grande_harmonie_(M%C3%BCnchs_%2C_C.)), *La bataille de Marengo* by Georg Friedrich Fuchs is via [https://imslp.org/wiki/La_bataille_de_Marengo_\(Fuchs%2C_Georg_Friedrich\)](https://imslp.org/wiki/La_bataille_de_Marengo_(Fuchs%2C_Georg_Friedrich)), and *Die Schlacht bey Leipzig* by Pavel Lambert Mašek is via [https://imslp.org/wiki/Die_Schlacht_bey_Leipzig_\(Ma%C5%A1ek%2C_Pavel_Lambert\)](https://imslp.org/wiki/Die_Schlacht_bey_Leipzig_(Ma%C5%A1ek%2C_Pavel_Lambert)). Gabe also draws attention to a catalog of music, perhaps less well-known, in PDF form downloadable via <https://www.concertbandmusicstore.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Maximes-Music-catalog-July-2022.pdf> where the Harmoniemusik selections are listed beginning on page 50. Just a few of the titles: *Mor di Nelson* by Joseph Drechsler, *Coronation March for the Emperor Napoleon* by Georg Druschetzky, *Ouverture du Chapitre Second* by Jean-Pierre Solie.



Detail from White House Christmas Ornament cameo
(continued from left)

Getting Serpents

Here is the list of Serpent makers who have made themselves known to us. Many instruments are available through dealers, and all makers will deal directly with individual customers.

Christopher Monk Instruments
(c/o Nicholas Perry)
224 North Street
Luton
LU2 7QN
England

Phone: +44 (0)1582 457 992
<nicholasperry_instruments@gmail.com>
(see Christopher Monk Instruments website URL at lower right)
(*serpents, early cimballo, bass horns*)

David Harding
The Early Music Shop
Salts Mill, Victoria Road
Saltaire
West Yorkshire BD18 3LA
England
Phone: +44 (0) 1274 288 100
<www.earlymusicshop.com>
(*resin serpents*)

Serpents Ribo
(c/o Pierre Ribo)
Rue Van Oost, 40
1030 Bruxelles
Belgium
Phone: 0032 497 574 496
<pierre.ribo@souslesplatanes.be>
(*Serpents*)

3D printable serpent designs by Mark Witkowski after examples at the Bate Collection, Oxford; downloads now hosted on the Serpent Website; see lower right for address

Serpentones Lopez
Juan Lopez Romera, maker
<http://serpention.com/>
(*wooden serpents & cornetti*)

Wessex Tubas
Jonathan Hodgetts (UK)
Andy Loree (USA)
www.wessex-tubas.co.uk
www.wessex-tubas.com
(*ophicleides, quinticlavens*)

S Berger Serpents
Stephan Berger & Erna Suter
Atelier de Cuir
Les Prailats 18
CH-2336 Les Bois
Switzerland
Phone: 0041 (0) 32 961 1188
<www.serpents.ch>
<sberger@serpents.ch>

(*serpents, both wood and carbon fiber, serpent cases, accessories*)
(*formerly Wetterberger serpents*)

Christopher Monk Instruments
(c/o Jeremy West)
+44 (0)1388 526999
<www.jeremywest.co.uk/christopher-monk-instruments.html>
<hmcornett@gmail.com>
(*Cornetti*)

Sam Goble Historical Mouthpieces
phone: +44 (0) 77 8056 4370
<www.samgoble.com>
<info@samgoble.com>
(*cornett and serpent mouthpieces*)

Build an experimental serpent from plans via
<www.serpentwebsite.com>



Pianist Susan Wass accompanies Doug Yeo on serpent
photo by Tom Hentschel

- Doug Yeo gave a recital of music featuring serpent at the 50th anniversary International Tuba Euphonium Conference, held at Arizona State University in May/June 2023. Doug's program was titled *The Serpent: Yesterday and Today*, and it included four works, one each from the eighteenth, nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries. Two pieces for serpent and piano were included: Cliff Bevan's *Variations on "The Pesky Sarpent"* (1996), and Thérèse Brenet's *De bronze et de lumière* (2008), in which Doug was accompanied by pianist Susan Wass. Two pieces for chamber winds were also on the program: Johann Nepomuk Hummel's *Partita in E-flat* (1803), and the *Divertimento in B-flat (Chorale St. Antoni)* attributed to Joseph Haydn (1782/84). The wind group was conducted by ASU faculty conductors Jason Caslor and Jamal Duncan, and the personnel included ASU faculty and graduate students Martin Schuring and Curtis Sellers (oboe), Joshua and Stefanie Gardner (clarinet), Albie Micklich, Michelle Fletcher, and Harrison Cody (bassoon), and Isabella Kolasinski and Bailey Hendley (horn). Doug played his 1996 Christopher Monk Workshop church serpent in C (one key) made by Keith Rogers and Nicholas Perry. The program was recorded by Central Sound at Arizona PBS for future national broadcast.

While at ITEC, Doug also gave a presentation about the celebrated Sousaphone player, John M. "Chief Red Cloud" Kuhn (1882–1962), who played Sousaphone with John Philip Sousa's band and many other groups including the Isham Jones Orchestra and the NBC Radio Orchestra in Chicago. An article by Doug about John Kuhn will appear in the International Tuba Euphonium Journal in 2024.



London Serpent Trio -1989

Where Serpents Gather

- Bernard Fourtet wrote, "The choir *Capella Auscitensis* from Auch had planned two concerts of the four voice *Requiem* by Thomas Luis de Victoria. The first of them was performed in Cintegabelle in the south of France; it was played in *alternatim* with the historic organ played by Emmanuel Schublin. I played serpent *colla parte* with the bass choir parts. The second one was performed in St. Orens church in Auch. But instead of the organ, Méandre (the serpent quartet from Toulouse, i.e. Philippe Matharel on tenor cornet, with Michel Nègre, Lilian Poueydebat and myself on serpents) played some Roland de Lassus *motets* in *alternatim* with the choir. As for the *colla parte* bass parts, the three serpents shared the different versets. Méandre goes on working regularly; we are now preparing the whole *Prophetiae Sibyllarum* by Roland de Lassus once again...."



*TOP: Rehearsal with ASU students, faculty and Doug Yeo (unknown photographer)
BELOW: Performance of the Hummel Partita in E-flat, Doug Yeo on serpent (photo by Tom Hentschel)*



*Hanover History and Hops Festival, Hanover County, Virginia, June 2, 2023
Doug Austin, mandolin / Sue Tarr, fiddle / Gabe Stone, serpent*



About the Organization

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

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The Gemini Twin Serpents *playable sculpture*

More Exciting News

● Scott Hall wrote, “Here in this photo (below left), I present *The Gemini Twin Serpents*, a sonic sculpture created by MONAD Studio | Eric Goldemberg + Veronica Zalberg with musician-luthier Scott F. Hall. This horn duo was played in Miami Symphony's *Seven Decades and Beyond* event. Following that, it was displayed along with many other instruments we've made at The Ritz-Carlton South Beach, official hotel partner of Art | Basel 2022. We three have been creating unusual 3-D printed instruments together since 2014. *The Gemini Twin Serpents* were 3-D modeled in MONAD Studio's signature style and were 3-D printed in many pieces which were assembled, filled, painted, and clear-coated inside and out to glossy perfection. It has two distinctly separate bores, each of which incorporates a consistent horn flare from end to end with no cylindrical sections. Although the exterior curves are very elaborate, the bore profiles inside develop as the curvaceous cornucopia



Choro band Orquesta de Enrique Peña, Félix González on ophicleide; thanks to Mark Jones

one expects to find within traditional serpents (although these do terminate in very wide bell flares). Each horn includes six fingerholes (hard to see in the photos as they face towards the center of the writhing mass)...all twelve holes incorporate a copper ferrule which tapers subtly down to the body via carefully sculpted epoxy putty. One performer stands fully upright while the other plays seated. Though not visible in my photo, two Kelly small shank 6-1/2 AL mouthpieces are associated with this horn now. To hear me playing the taller horn, proceed to this YouTube video <https://youtu.be/My4fULG8eSo> or simply look within the many videos uploaded at the Scott F. Hall YouTube channel.”

From Scott's channel, here are some specific videos that show some of his other serpent-related musical sculptures. Search for “A flat-form pocket serpent horn by Scott F. Hall (series production model, spring 2023)” or use this URL <https://youtu.be/YUMBIr7mqmg?si=A7kTclQBjAOegJKy>,

“A flat-form pocket serpent horn (number one of four by Scott F. Hall, 17 February 2023)”, the URL is <https://youtu.be/NFPihH3WiMo?si=wDAZh0x0kSkSs0yg>, “Hornucopia 8 (Live)”, URL is <https://youtu.be/35K-XAYnbMI?si=x3woMVvzhH0fhACI>.

● As noted in previous editions of this newsletter, one of the more delightful historical applications of the ophicleide is in the Brazilian *choro* (pronounced show-row) band setting, especially in the music of composer Irineu de Almeida, who was also a noted player of trombone, euphonium and ophicleide. A recent addition to YouTube’s collection of ophicleide *choro* playing can be found by searching for “Qualquer "Cousa" de Irineu de Almeida - Ophicleide”, or by using this URL <https://youtube.com/shorts/HwGM83gSkik?feature=share>, where ophicleidist Wesley Procopio really gets around on the instrument.

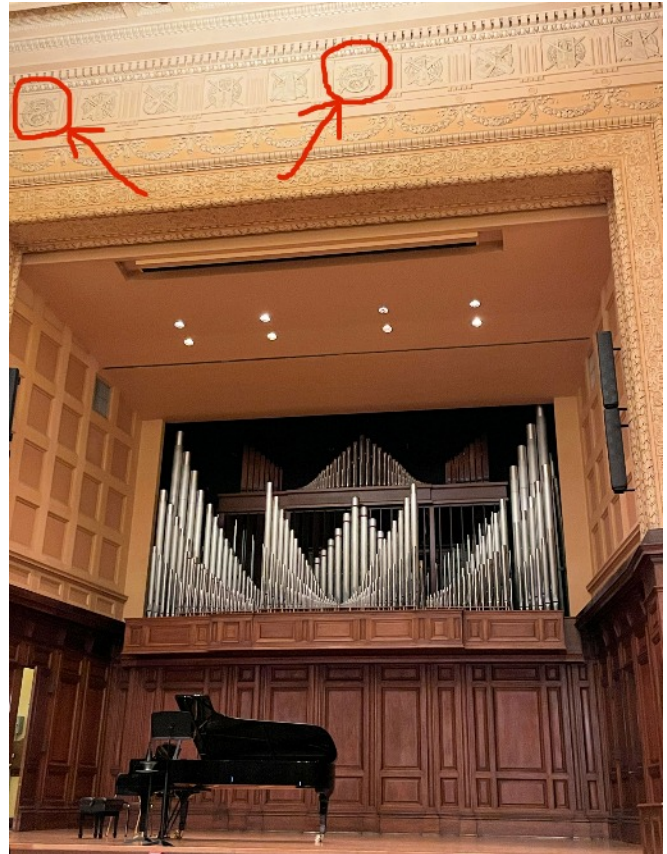


Brazilian choro band, this and below thanks to Mark Jones

Daguerreotype of an anonymous ophicleide player



● Doug Yeo wrote of a sighting, “I’m in Urbana at the University of Illinois, waiting for one of my students to give his senior recital. It’s being held in Smith Memorial Hall. This is the first time I’ve been in the hall and I looked up and what did I see? Look at all of the serpents, repeating every five panels all around the hall”. See the photos below.



Smith Memorial Hall, showing two of the serpent panels



Smith Memorial Hall, showing detail of a serpent panel

**From the Archives:
10, 15, 20 & 37 Years Ago**



Clockwise from upper left: The Roving Ophicleides (L-R) Erhard Schwartz, John Weber, Paul Schmidt, at the 2013 Vintage Band Festival in Northfield, Minnesota; Cliff Bevan & Doug Yeo at Keith Rogers' Celebration 2008; 2003 Serpentarium session at Boswedden House, Cornwall, England (L-R) Paul Schmidt, John Weber, Murray Campbell, Christian Körner; Serpent Workshop at Amherst College, Massachusetts, 1986, participants (L-R) Robert & Tra Wagenknecht, Christopher Monk, Connie & Phil Palmer

