

Serpent Newsletter

P.O. Box 954 Mundelein, Illinois 60060 USA

Newsletter for Serpent Enthusiasts

September 27, 2024

A Note From the Editor

In these pages you will find a lot of new serpent information of the usual kinds, plus a special article on a unique instrument (and a mention of a surprising home-built creation of considerable ingenuity). Two great serpent gatherings are covered, and we say goodbye to an old serpent friend.

There is also some very exciting news regarding a long-awaited recording, and a nostalgic return to some serpent cartoons that were featured in the early days of this newsletter.

And I am happy to report an index of the *Newsletter for United Serpents* and the *Serpent Newsletter* is being generated, and is already available and downloadable as PDF documents from the Serpent Website via a link on the *Newsletter Backissues* page. Two spreadsheets, one for text and the other for illustrations & photos:

www.serpentwebsite.com/backissues.htm

Once either PDF is viewed, or downloaded, it may be searched using any Adobe PDF document reader application by pressing Ctrl-F on your computer keyboard and entering the search word or words, then noting where the search function has highlighted all occurrences that match the search criteria.

At the time of this writing, the index includes all editions/issues from the beginning, through September 2008, and work to bring it up to date is progressing as fast as arthritic hands trying to type accurately will allow.

Note that these indexes/indices are built primarily as a collection of keywords and names, NOT as a substitute for the actual newsletters. Case in point, it is not practical to have each index contain every proper noun from the various newsletters, so for example there will be a mention of a CD recording by the album name, and the names of principal performers and composer(s), but the index will not usually

contain the names of every performer, or the name of every musical selection. In other words, searches for main points may be made, but not for lower levels of detail.

Please consider sending in YOUR serpent news, and consider if you have contributed financially in the form of a donation to cover newsletter expenses (see the *About the Organization* section of this edition).

Paul Schmidt

Workshops

- 2024 Serpentarium

The Serpentarium took place once again in Dorchester, Dorset, England, from Friday May 24 through Monday May 27. The primary location was the *Shire Hall*, an 18th-century courthouse that was used as the county hall until 1955, and since then as a museum. The last time a Serpentarium was held in Dorchester, it was in 2019 and the event was based in the *Durnovaria Band Hall* (*Durnovaria* is the Latin form of the name of the Roman town that became Dorchester), but since that facility was already booked, the Shire Hall was a suitable alternative. Practically right across the street is a large pub named the Royal Oak, and this is where participants got dinner and quenched their thirst each evening.

Friday was a non-participation day, with attendees who had arrived a bit early having the chance to visit the several museums located within easy walking distance. At 7:30 PM things got started with a fine public concert given by the London Serpent Trio (Phil Humphries, Andy Kershaw and Nick Perry, who is the current maker of the Christopher Monk serpents) in the historic courtroom; the LST sat where the judge used to preside over cases, and the audience sat in



2024 Dorchester Serpentarium participants, outside of St. Michael's church, Stinsford (aka Mellstock Church)
Back (L-R) Phil Humphries, Andy Kershaw, Arnold Myers, Christian Körner, Paul Schmidt
Front (L-R) Ross Nuccio, John Weber [participant Nick Perry was not present this day]

the several galleries on three sides. They began with *The Liberty Bell March* by Sousa, then two cancioneros, *Esos tus claros ojos* by Ginés de Morata and the anonymously composed *La tricotea*. Then a nod to repertoire of past incarnations of the LST, *Huntsmans' Chorus from Der Freischutz* by Carl Maria von Weber, and *March from Scipio* by Handel, followed by Albert Ketèlbey's *In a Persian Market*. Then came two arrangements by Cliff Bevan, Arthur Sullivan's *The Lost Chord* and the traditional sea chanty *What Shall We Do With A Drunken Serpent?*

The concert continued with compositions written especially for the LST, the world premiere of Stephan Binnington's *Miniature Suite* (the composer was in attendance), Judith Weir's *Fall of the Cherry*, and PDQ Bach's *O, Serpent* (both sung and played in round form as intended). After an intermission came Charles Gounod's *Funeral March of a Marionette* and three movements from *Divertimento No. 1 for Three Bassett Horns, K439b* by Mozart. For the local Dorchester connection, they played *March in D/Dorchester March* and *Haste to the Wedding*, both from Hardy manuscripts. Next was music from *West Side Story* by Leonard Bernstein, including *I Feel Pretty*, *Maria*, *Officer Krupke* and *America*. The concert concluded with Phil Humphries' arrangement *James Bond Suite* by John Barry and Monty Norman, including the *007 Theme* and the theme from *On her Majesty's Secret Service*, as well as *Baron*

Samedi's Dance of Death from *Live and Let Die* and finally *The James Bond Theme*. The courtroom's enthusiastic audience was sizeable, occupying the majority of the available seating. After the concert, some beer was consumed across the street at the Convivial Rabbit microbrewery, after which dinner was had at the Royal Oak pub.

Saturday morning, the playing sessions began in the Jury Room of Shire Hall, a suitable space for a gathering of this size. Phil Humphries had arranged with the museum's café to provide catering for our group, providing tea mid-mornings and mid-afternoons as well as light lunch of sandwiches, chips, etc; right in the room. Playing participants were Phil Humphries (who usually directs the larger previous events) from England, Christian Körner from Germany, Arnold Myers from Scotland, and the usual trio of Chicago-area players Paul Schmidt, John Weber and Ross Nuccio. The third LST member, Nick Perry, was on hand to do most of the directing of the sessions (he would not be present at the concluding concert), and still manage to squeeze in a little playing as a substitute until Andy Kershaw would be available. Music was being prepared for the concluding concert, and the group began with Beethoven's *Equale No.1* (originally for four trombones), then a tea-time break, afterwards resuming with Johann Heinrich Schmelzer's *Sonata à 7 flauti in G major*. After a lunch

break, the ensemble rehearsed two dances from the Hardy manuscripts, *Dashing White Sergeant* and *Devil Among the Tailors*, followed by the Ralph Vaughan Williams arrangement of *Old Hundredth* (written for the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II), and after another afternoon break for tea, more work on the Schmelzer *Sonata* as it was by far the most challenging piece. Everyone then went across the street to the Royal Oak for beer, dinner and more beer.

Sunday morning, Andy Kershaw returned and this allowed Nick to spend more time directing the ensemble. After warming up with *Equale*, a new selection was reviewed, *Floral Dance* by Katie Moss; this is a favorite of British Brass Bands. More work was done on the Schmelzer before tea break, after which *March in D/Dorchester March* was added to the repertoire. Two selections from what past Serpentariums have dubbed *The Plasticine Suite*, so-named because it includes tunes associated with various Aardman Animation Studios productions, were introduced; *Wallace* (the theme from the *Wallace and Gromit* shorts and movies) by Julian Nott as arranged by past Serpentarium regular Lizzie Gutteridge, and *The Great Escape March* by Elmer Bernstein, as parodied in the movie *Chicken Run*. After lunch, more time was spent polishing most of the pieces previously rehearsed. The ensemble then moved to the courtroom in the same building for the first in a series of group photos. Beer, and dinner as sometimes accompanies beer, followed at the Royal Oak.

Monday morning was spent giving a final spit-shine to all of the concert selections, in concert order. A three-vehicle car-pool then transported everyone to nearby Stinsford, where a number of group photos were taken in various locations and poses. It should be noted that Dorchester is indeed Thomas

Hardy country, and Stinsford was where he was born and often wrote about fictionally, giving it the alternate name Mellstock. At 2PM, St. Michael's church (aka Mellstock Church) was filled to near capacity by the paying audience (which in that small space is about 70 persons), with proceeds being donated for upkeep of the church building. Nick Perry did not participate in the concert due to a conflict with another gig, but Andy Kershaw was present, for a total of seven performers including Phil (there was no director for the performance). The concert order was *March in D/Dorchester March*, *Equale No.1*, *Sonata à 7 flauti in G major*, *Dashing White Sergeant*, *Devil Among the Tailors*, *Old Hundredth*, *Wallace*, *The Great Escape March*, and *Floral Dance*. After a sustained standing ovation and repeated cries for "encore", a reprise of *Dashing White Sergeant* was ordered. After the car-pool returned everyone to Dorchester, some attendees departed on their journeys home, while others remained and enjoyed a final beer-infused repast at the Royal Oak, and this chapter of the Serpentarium saga came to a successful close.

● Serpent Journey

The Serpent Journey took place from April 10 ~ 14, 2024 in Saignelégier, Switzerland. Michel Godard wrote "25 serpent players came from all over Europe and from Canada. We started with a jazz concert at the *Café du soleil* (myself, Alexandre Zanetta on serpentino, Matthieu Michel on trumpet, Bruno Helstroffer on theorbo and a rhythm section of students from the Basel conservatory), then we had three days of workshop and ensemble playing, a night of open stage with Stephan Berger giving a premiere of his *mémoires d'un serpent* and the students. The final concert



The 2024 Serpent Journey group photo, Saignelégier, Switzerland

was full of music from renaissance to jazz , with Francesco D'Auria (drums) and contemporary music with the premiere of a new piece that included the teachers as soloists with the entire ensemble.

ROBERTO OTTAVIANO
Astrolabio



New Materials

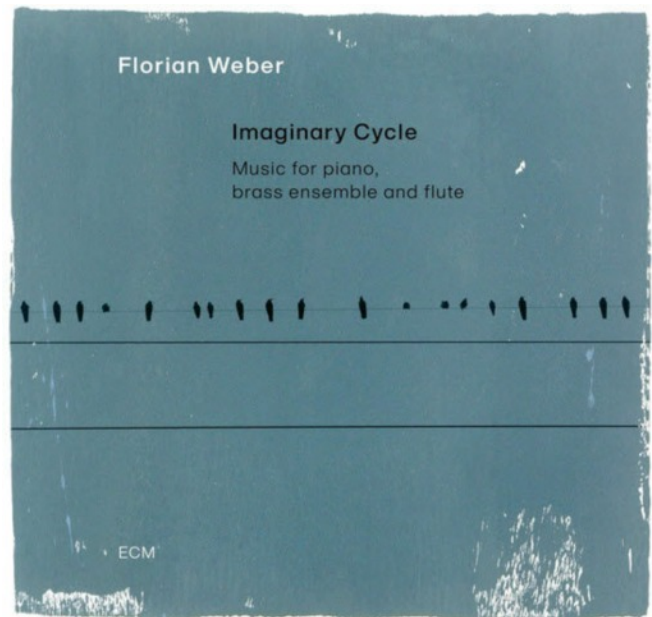
● *Astrolabio*; CD recording of a collaboration between Michel Godard (serpent, serpent and electric bass) and soprano saxophonist Roberto Ottaviano, also including Gianluigi Trovesi on alto clarinet and Glenn Ferris on trombone. Dodicilune Dischi # ED346, www.dodicilune.it. Obtained from Amazon.

First, a clarification to avoid confusion; in spite of the similar album name, participation of Michel Godard and Roberto Ottaviano, and the common record label, this is an entirely different album from *Astrolabio Mistico*, Dodicilune Dischi # ED556, reviewed in the April 2024 edition of this newsletter. The CD reviewed below is the older of the two albums.

All selections were composed by Roberto Ottaviano unless noted. The first track *Astrolabio* is an “ambient” kind of composition, which has three musicians sustaining dissonant chords while, taking turns, the remaining musician plays a jazz solo. *Hiçaz Mandira*, by composer Abd Al-Aziz [presumably this is the same 19th-century Ottoman composer known elsewhere as Sultan Abdulaziz], follows with a middle-eastern underlay by Godard’s driving tuba line. Next is an extract from Kerry Minnear’s *Schooldays*, originally written for the progressive rock band *Gentle Giant* in the 1970s, quite *avant-garde* and often atonal. *A Natural Hero* follows with its bouncy ground bass line on tuba, and duetting reeds that sometimes engages the trombone as a trio. The sole track with serpent is next, the anonymously composed *Meu Sidi Ibrahim* that begins with a languid and soulful line by Godard, later joined by the other players.

Antonious Block is next, a playful take on the wanderings of the eponymous knight from Ingmar Bergman’s *The Seventh Seal*. There follows another extract from a selection originally written by and for the *Gentle Giant* band, *Aspirations*, which is a more straight-forward jazz-rock piece that gives Godard a nice free-form tuba solo. Up next is *Temptations*, quite abstract in its rhythm and tonality, and then the album returns to a more conventional jazz-fantasy with *Antidotum*. The album closes with *Ghost Church*, which sounds like, well, a soundtrack for a movie about a haunted church, what with spooky dissonances and all. This is a difficult album to describe, nevertheless it is clear that the players had fun recording it!

This recording is certainly not classical, or conventional jazz or even rock, and with only one serpent track it is not really a ‘serpent’ album, yet many readers of this newsletter will find much about the album to commend it.



● *Florian Weber: Imaginary Cycle*; CD recording of music by composer-pianist Florian Weber, accompanied by Anna-Lena Schnabel (flute), Michel Godard (serpent, tuba), the euphonium quartet *Quatuor Opus 333*, and a quartet of trombones. ECM Records # ECM 2782, www.ecmrecords.com. Obtained from Amazon.

The composer Weber originally intended to write a cycle of connected solo piano compositions, but on advice of his collaborator Manfred Eicher, decided to introduce a large brass element, settling on four euphoniums in the form of the ensemble *Quatuor Opus 333* and four trombones plus tuba, serpent and flute. Even with all this brass accompaniment, Weber’s idea was to mostly score and record them as if they were at a distance, perhaps on a balcony. The ‘imaginary’ cycle is in four parts, each with three or four movements (*Opening, Word, Sacrifice, Blessing*) plus a *Prelude* and an *Epilogue*.

The *Prelude* begins as a piano alone, with simple lines that gradually add counterpoint and some elements of *canon*. The brass gradually fades in from what appears to be a considerable distance. The careful listener will detect a certain amount of Glenn Gould-like vocalizing on the part of the pianist. Moving along to the cycle itself, the music becomes more lyrical. At times, the music takes on the qualities of a Renaissance mass, with call-and-response between piano and brass. Weber tried to duplicate some of the musical effects used by composers such as Gesualdo and Orlando di Lasso, and to a degree the brass assumes a choral quality one minute, then that of a more traditional brassy accompaniment.

The euphonium quartet is mostly written to support what the ebb-and-flow if piano is doing, but the trombones come across as more individualistic and improvisational, taking off on little excursions before returning to the fold. Godard's tuba usually carries the bass part, although there are times when he becomes the solo, for instance flutter-tonguing and singing through the horn in track 7's *Word:III*. The tuba often provides deep "surges" during phrases that are heavier on brass. He gets a chance to use the serpent in places such as the free-form improvisation that is track 11's *Sacrifice: III*. The flute part assumes two personas; sometimes as a fluttery character, but when joining the brass it becomes more like a piccolo trumpet on top of the ensemble. Track 13, *Blessing:I*, gives them a chance to form a duet that becomes faster and more aggressive, reminding this reviewer of the exchange of tones between a human operated music synthesizer and massive alien sounds emanating from a space ship in the movie "Close Encounters of the Third Kind".

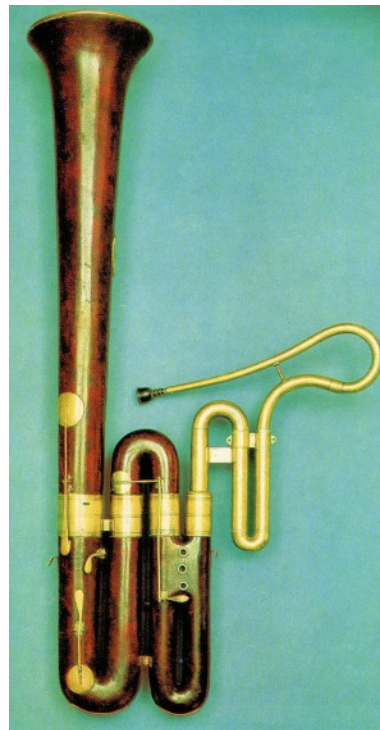


Civil War serpent-originally from April 1995

While some of the music in this cycle is of a rapid and/or flighty style, most ranges from quietly moody to majestic and quite stunning, a collaboration of piano and wind instruments that is rarely heard and less often committed to recordings. It is a "hybrid of multiple musical languages that seamlessly blends the harmonious with the oblique". Weber

is a skilled pianist, and all the 'guest' wind players are obviously proficient. When the composition encourages improvisation, the results are satisfying rather than merely random sounding.

As a 'serpent recording', this reviewer only detected it on that one track 11. But there is an unexpected twist to this. Michel Godard advised that Patrick Wibart joined him on serpent during that track, although Patrick is not mentioned in the CD booklet's listing of performers. [But this is not the first time that two serpents have appeared together on a commercial recording; it has happened at least twice before with two serpents, and with more than two on recordings by the London Serpent Trio, *Sweet and Low* and *Fill Your Glasses*.]



Contraserpent in F or Eb, half an octave lower than a serpent in C, by Jean Baptiste Coeffet, Gisors or Chaumont-en-Vexin, ca. 1830/35 from Herbert Heyde's book, Hörner und Zinken, published in 1982

- Nick Byrne wrote about his big news; his new CD ophicleide album *Réverie & Caprice* has finally been collated, edited, printed & released on his own label 'Rusty Trombone Recordings' label. It includes works by Schumann, Mozart, Percy Code, Braun, etc. He started work on this project in 2015 and finished it this year. It's a collection of pieces that don't necessarily exhibit any technical or 'virtuosic' abilities (that was for his first CD *Back from Oblivion*) but are works that he loves and believes work well on the instrument; an eclectic collection. He wrote, "It will be available on all the usual downloadable platforms or direct from me in CD form at nickophi@me.com or online at www.ophicleide.com by the time of this issue arrival in readers letterboxes. As a promotion I am also happy to send this new recording anywhere in the world for Au\$20 flat rate." At the time of writing this article in the last week of September, Nick's new website is not yet active, but hopefully a copy can be obtained soon for review in these pages next April.

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 cimbasso, 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)

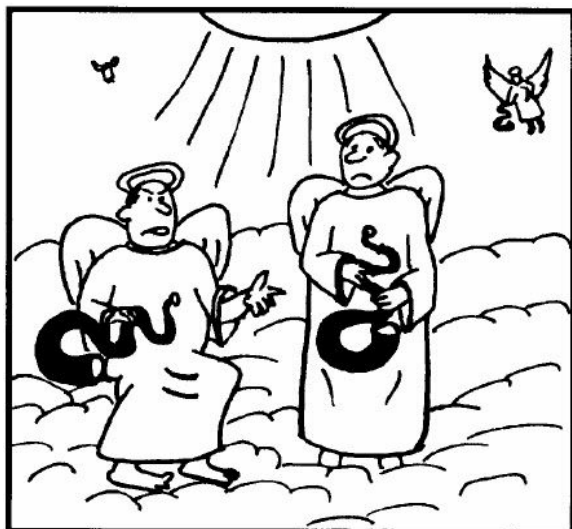
S Berger Serpents
Stephan Berger & Erna Suter
Atelier de Cuir
Les Prailats 18
CH-2336 Les Bois
Switzerland
Phone: 0041 (0) 32 961 1188
<www.serpents.ch>
<sberger@serpents.ch>

(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>



"I guess I shouldn't complain, but I did kind of expect to get a harp!" - originally from Sept. 1994

Where Serpents Gather

● Bernard Fourtet wrote, "The end of Spring and beginning of Summer (2024) have been quite busy with the serpent....I played on a tour with the ensemble *les Passions*, directed by Jean-Marc Andrieu, playing *Les Lamentations* and the *Requiem* by Jean Gilles. Also, some concerts with *Méandre* (ensemble de serpents de Toulouse, with Anne-Lise Panisset (mezzo soprano), Philippe Matharel (tenor cornet), Harumi Baba, Lilian Poueydebat and myself (3x serpents), Emmanuel Schublin (organ), where we played some pieces by Lassus, Gabrieli, Byrd, Monteverdi, Schütz, and Rore. These programs will be performed again during the end of August and in September.



Postage stamps from the DDR
(German Democratic Republic, aka East Germany),
Musikinstrumenten Museum Leipzig

Serpent, französisch, 17.18. Jh. (Serpent, French, 17th-18th Century)

Tenor Flügelhorn, Deutsch, vor 1850 (Tenor flugelhorn, German, before 1850)

● Doug Yeo wrote that he is traveling to the San Francisco Bay Area in October to play the following concerts with Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra, directed by Grete Pedersen. The program is called "Dreams and Passions", and Doug will be using his ophicleide on Mendelssohn's *Midsummer Night's Dream Overture*. The program details can be found online at philharmonia.org/2024-25-season/dreams-passions/ and consists in part of *O Frondens Virga* by Hildegard von Bingen, *Symphony No. 49 in F minor* "La Passione" by Haydn, Mozart's *Clarinet Concerto in A Major*, and the aforementioned *Midsummer Night's Dream*. Concert venues and dates are Herbst Theatre, San Francisco (October 17), First United Methodist Church, Palo Alto (October 18), and First Congregational Church, Berkeley (October 19).

● In mid-September, Doug decided that his sturdy yet unwieldy ophicleide case, made by the Boston Symphony Orchestra's logistics people for use when he traveled with his ophicleide on orchestra tours, was just too heavy and too much for him to deal with on the trips mentioned above. He contacted Paul Schmidt to inquire about the ophicleide road case he had made back in the year 2000, as described on the Serpent Website's www.serpentwebsite.com/case.htm webpage. How well had that case worked out, how often had it been used and under what kinds of travel situations, and had the instrument suffered any damage while being transported in it? After a flurry of detailed emails, Doug decided that he wanted a similar case and if possible would like to try it out on the rapidly approaching trips. He purchased a nearly identical case shell on Amazon (made by SKB and intended to make golf bags suitable for handling by airline baggage gorillas). Paul emailed the original templates for cutting foam blocking to fit the case's interior contours (the templates are available on request to anyone following the webpage's construction article). Doug printed those, stuck them to cardboard, cut them out, and tested them in his new case shell, and they fit. Armed with this confirmation, and using the templates, Paul rough-cut some blocks from his stock of 2" and 3" thick closed-cell chemically-cross-linked polyethylene foam, and loaded his van with a small bandsaw, the pre-cut foam plus ample spare foam, and as many other tools as might come in handy.

The next morning, Paul drove to Doug's house; although they are both part of the 'greater-Chicagoland' group of serpent and ophicleide players, neither had actually been to each other's homes. The bandsaw was set up on a pair of sawhorses on the driveway, and Doug's case shell was rested across another pair inside the garage. It took about six hours of careful measuring and cutting to fine-tune the fit of the foam blocks to the case, and more significantly, to determine the contact points between the blocks and Doug's



Paul Schmidt applies adhesive to foam blocking in Doug Yeo's new ophicleide road case

ophicleide, and make the necessary cuts to "trim away everything in those places that was not ophicleide shaped". Somewhere in the middle of this, they broke for lunch and story telling at a local eatery. While Paul continued to work, Doug made a couple quick trips to the local big-box hardware store to buy suitable foam adhesives, etc. Late in the afternoon, they glued all the foam pieces into the case shell, and Paul affixed a pre-made luggage identification plate to the outside of the case. Paul had to leave for an evening rehearsal, and the next morning Doug confirmed by email that all the foam blocking was still in its proper position and now firmly attached to the case. He had one final thought for a modification, and this was discussed with a few more emails. The bell end of the ophicleide was lightly touching a block of foam, but Doug wanted to try it with one of those molded foam bell inserts, and had purchased a suitable one for his instrument. He planned to trim its thickness so it could replace that one block of foam. It was a day well spent, and allowed Doug and Paul hours of catching-up conversation.



Doug Yeo's new ophicleide road case, ready to travel

● Nick Byrne wrote, "In other news we have a very interesting concert coming up with my Sydney Symphony colleague Scott Kinmont on Serpent. As part of the SSO & Opera House chamber music series we are presenting *Obscurata* - a collection of transcriptions for the most obscure instruments used by the orchestra in ensemble including Bass oboe, Serpent, Ophicleide, Bass Horn, Bass & alto flute amongst others, all accompanied by a batterie of percussion & a Contrabass Quartet. Works by Ravel, Berlioz, Schubert, Vevjanovsky amongst others all cunningly arranged by Scott Kinmont. Surely a delight for the senses is in order for the listeners.



Orig. From Sept. 1995



In Memoriam: Leonard Byrne

Leonard Ian Byrne passed away at the age of 70, in January 22, 2024, in Spokane Valley, Washington state, USA. He is survived by his wife of 36 years, Helen Eggleston Byrne; both have attended many Serpentariums, and Leonard was also part of the “Roving Ophicleides” busking act that appeared at the Vintage Band Festivals in Northfield, Minnesota, variously joined by Paul Schmidt, John Weber, Clark Wolf, and Erhard Schwartz in different years.

Born in Renton, WA, on April 24, 1953, Leonard spent his grade school years in Burien, WA and attended Junior High (Middle School) and High School in Huntsville, Alabama, where his father was an engineer for Boeing working on the Saturn V and Apollo projects. Leonard earned a B.S. and M.S. in Electrical Engineering from the University of Idaho, and began his engineering career in Spokane, WA at Keytronic. He then spent many years at ISC, a company known for its bewildering array of names over its life, including ISC-Bunker Ramo and Olivetti. He concluded his engineering career after several years at Packet Engines once Alcatel acquired it and decided to close its Spokane office. At that time Leonard chose to focus on music.

Leonard was the tuba player in the Huntsville Civic Symphony his senior year in high school. At the University of Idaho he took private lessons from Robert Spevacek, the only music lessons he ever had. He had no formal music education other than those lessons and his public school music education. When he unexpectedly landed an engineering job in Spokane, he then successfully auditioned for Principal Tuba with the Spokane Symphony. Leonard literally excused himself from the middle of his final interview with Keytronic CEO Lew Zirkle in order to rush down to the symphony office to sign up for the tuba audition. Keytronic hired him anyway. Leonard was

principal Tuba with the Spokane Symphony for 48 years, from 1975 until October 2023, when it became apparent he would never again be able to perform at a professional level.

Leonard's dedication to his craft became most apparent in his final years as his health began to fail. He loved playing with the symphony so much that he devised ways to manage his limited energy in order to still be able to get on stage and play. He suspected that the life-saving experimental bone marrow transplant he endured in 1988 aged him 10 years beyond his chronological age, and contributed to his more recent heart and cancer problems.

He also performed with Clarion Brass, the Royal Band of the Royal Fireworks, and the low-brass groups Octuba and SPARC (Spokane Piston And Rotary Club). Leonard was the founder of the Spokane chapter of TubaChristmas, and helped start the symphony's *Soiree* series. In addition to the tuba, Leonard collected and enjoyed playing other low brass instruments including euphonium, helicon, cimbasso, ophicleide, serpent, and alphorn.

Paraphrased and edited from an obituary published by Spokesman-Review on Feb. 4, 2024, notes from Helen Byrne, and from personal knowledge of this newsletter editor.

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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Suggested minimum contribution for non-European subscribers is \$20 US for 4 issues (2 years); these subscriptions are required for individuals, and institutions that manage to receive the newsletter without contributions are doing so entirely at the discretion of the regional representative. As of April 2012, all newsletters distributed in the European region are electronic, not printed, and there is no subscription charge. European region readers may choose a printed hardcopy option, in which case rates for UK subscribers are ‘price on application’. For the time being, newsletters distributed elsewhere remain in printed form. Non-UK/EU contributions may be made using PayPal, sent to the email address ocleide@earthlink.net

The Migration of the Anaconda

by Arnold Myers

I was asked to write for the Serpent Newsletter on how the unique historic contra-serpent in 16-ft C made its way from the Tolson Memorial Museum in Huddersfield (where it was apparently a permanent exhibit) to St Cecilia's Hall Concert Room and Music Museum in Edinburgh (where visitors assume it is equally permanent). My first engagement with it was in the late 1960s when, as a student, I made the pilgrimage to Huddersfield (in the north of England) to view the rare instrument, having read about it in Reginald Morley-Pegge's eponymous article [Reginald Morley-Pegge, "The 'Anaconda'". Galpin Society Journal XII (1959) pp.53-56]. Little has been added to RMP's account of its making by the brothers Joseph and Richard Wood around 1840 and its early regular use in the parish church of Almondbury (near Huddersfield) and occasional use in York Minster.

The instrument itself is a curious cross between serpent and ophicleide. It has the convoluted shape of a serpent and the compass to low C, but the eleven large key-covered toneholes properly spaced over its length of the ophicleide, dictated by its proportions – holes the size of a finger-tip

clearly would not work on such wide tubing. The associated mouthpiece, probably original, has a cup volume of 20 millilitres, the biggest of the many brasswind mouthpieces that I have measured.

In the Huddersfield museum, from at the latest 1939, the Anaconda was on loan from the successive members of the Wood family, descendants of one of its makers. In 1956 permission was given for its use in the Hoffnung Music Festival concert on the 13th November (see image at right). Then it was played by Nigel Amherst (using a tuba mouthpiece). Gordon Jacob's composition for the occasion, *Variations on 'Annie Laurie'*, was probably the first original music to be scored for the instrument.

Following the return of the Anaconda to Huddersfield it was taken back by the Wood family.

Between 1972 and 1977 (probably for longer) it was kept in the home of its owner at that time, Miss Ada Wood of Almondbury. Paul Gretton, editor of the short-lived journal Cornett and Sackbut,

attempted to study and have it X-rayed in 1978 but was advised by the Tolson Museum curator, E.W. Aubrook that the owner would not allow it to leave her flat.

Its next public appearances were when Christopher Monk arranged for it to be played in performances by the London Serpent Trio. In 1984 the then owner, Milton Wood, asked Christopher Monk to restore the instrument to playing condition. Milton Wood was hoping to sell it, but he was looking for £20,000 [The price at the time of a fairly good car, which Milton Wood saw as being of comparable value.] which the Serpent Trio members thought excessive. Christopher wrote to me in December 1984 suggesting that I might buy it, but it was beyond my means. Christopher wrote to me again on 23 February 1985 reporting that the Anaconda had been in full playing condition for a few days and was better than he could have hoped. It had been fitted with a new crook made by Ted Kirby [In Edinburgh it is displayed with the original crook, the new crook is kept in the museum store.] which made 'all the difference' and that 'four octaves is quite possible'. Its debut with the Serpent Trio was an ITV [Independent Television, the British commercial television broadcaster.] children's programme in March 1985, later it was featured in the Serpent Extravaganza at St John's, Smith Square on 25 July 1987.



COMMITTEE

John Amis
Dennis Dolson
Gerard Hoffnung
Ian Hunter
Lawrence Leonard
Roger Lubbock
Fritz Spiegel

THE Hoffnung MUSIC FESTIVAL CONCERT

at the
ROYAL FESTIVAL HALL
TUESDAY NOVEMBER 13TH, 1956
AT 8 P.M.

5, Thornton Way,
LONDON, N. W. 11.
25th August 1956

Dear Mr. Aubrook,

I am enclosing a leaflet with some information about a very curious concert which is to take place at the Royal Festival Hall on the 13th November.

One of the items on our programme is a piece for a collection of the oddest possible instrument written specially for us by Dr. Gordon Jacob and we are wondering whether it would be at all possible to borrow the contra-bass serpent which I believe you have. I would like to say at this point that the concert is by no means a frivolous affair, but a serious attempt at musical caricature and that some of our most distinguished musicians and composers are taking part. We are particularly intrigued by the contra-bass serpent and the possibilities of having a special item composed for it and we beg you to seriously consider our strange request. Perhaps I might help you to make a favourable decision by saying that the Victoria and Albert Museum are also collaborating with us and are lending us their famous giant double-bass for the occasion.

Mr. Eric Halfpenny of the Galpin Society tells me that I should write to you personally and I am waiting very eagerly for your reply.

Should you decide to lend us the instrument, we would of course arrange all transport, insurance etc. It may also be possible of course, that the instrument is not in working order, but I am given great assistance here by members of the Galpin Society who have offered to try and restore the instrument into playing order.

Yours sincerely,

E. W. Aubrook, Esq., A.M.A., F. R. E. S.,
The Tolson Memorial Museum,
Ravensknowle Park,
HUDDERSFIELD

Gerard Hoffnung

Other excursions with the Serpent Trio took in New York, Boston, and other U.S. venues. In the Trio, the Anaconda was played by Andrew van der Beek.

In the course of the Serpent Trio's custodianship the Anaconda was given pride of place in the Galpin Society 40th anniversary exhibition in London. [The Galpin Society, Made for Music. Exhibition; London, August 1986, catalogue, item 125.] In 1988 it was the subject of acoustical investigation at the University of Surrey. [Drinker, Philip A., and John M. Bowsher. "The Application of Noninvasive Acoustic Measurements to the Design, Manufacture, and Reproduction of Brass Wind Instruments." *Historic Brass Society Journal* 5 (1993), pp.107-31.] The bore profile was plotted using the technique of acoustic pulse reflectometry, (see photo below). The common serpent has a bore profile that is close to conical throughout, but the Anaconda has a length of nearly 1 meter of cylindrical tubing following the first bow. This can be seen by eye, but the bore reconstruction confirms that the interior profile follows the exterior.

Milton Wood, having turned down an offer of £10,000, consigned the Anaconda to Phillips, the London auctioneers who at that time held regular musical instrument sales. It



The Anaconda in the laboratories of the University of Surrey in 1988. The technique of acoustic pulse reflectometry requires the attachment of an initial cylindrical tube that is at least as long as the object to be measured. The experimenter in the control room is Philip Drinker; the original crook is lying on the floor.

came under the hammer 16 March 1989 with an estimate of £10,000-20,000. [Phillips, Son & Neale, Sale No. 27,601, lot 48.] I was out of the country (at a Galpin Society meeting in Paris) so I asked the instrument dealer Tony Bingham to bid on my behalf. Inexplicably it was sold without reserve and Tony was able to buy it for me at a hammer price of £5000. The 10% commission I paid him was very worthwhile!

The Anaconda was brought to Edinburgh and put on display in the Reid Concert Hall Museum of Instruments (at the time I was Director of the Edinburgh University Collection of Historic Musical Instruments). It made a return visit to St John's, Smith Square for the great serpent celebration in 1990. [Murray Campbell and I took it from Edinburgh to London by train using the case that Christopher had had made for it. The train guard, noting the size of our luggage and the space it was taking up, asked what we were transporting. On being told, he responded 'what would happen if everyone had one of those?'] Van der Beek borrowed it in 1995 so he could sit for a portrait painted by June Mendoza – it is as much a portrait of the Anaconda as of Andrew. When I organised a series of video and audio recordings of historic instruments in the Edinburgh University Collection, I invited Andrew to record several serpents, which he did on 30 September 1998 (see photo below). For the Anaconda he chose to play the traditional British tune *Hearts of Oak* (William Boyce, 1759) which, unusually, reaches its climax on its lowest note and thus shows off the instrument splendidly.



Andrew van der Beek with the Anaconda at the recording session in the Reid Concert Hall, Edinburgh, 30 September 1998.

The University closed the Reid Concert Hall Museum in May 2015. The new display of the Collection of Historic Musical Instruments opened at St Cecilia's Hall in May 2017. The Anaconda was given its own dedicated showcase, where it resides today. Occasionally demonstrations are given by the versatile ophicleidist, Tony George. The instrument remains on loan to the University from the present writer: the museum label is silent on this detail.

AM / bpo2024 / 21.9.24



1876—Paris, France: *Université illustrée* publishes *Chantres au lutrin* (Singers at the Lectern), a print by Henri Brispot depicting a serpent with voices (October 1876; source: *Museum of Musical Instruments*). thanks to Will Kimball

More Exciting News

● Michel Godard wrote regarding an illustration printed in the April 2024 edition of the newsletter, “Years ago, when I first saw the postcard *A Concert of Angels*, I did some research in Spain; it turns out that the painting is a fake, still anonymous but from 20th century. [But it] would have been nice to have evidence of serpent playing in Spain by then :-)

*Serpent detail from
A Concert of Angels*



● Andy Kershaw has made a couple of videos as part of a series by The Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment. *Introducing the Serpent* can be viewed on YouTube at this URL youtu.be/mnhy31PNUvU?si=kJIQgFC6x3LxyPMk and *Introducing the Ophicleide* is at

youtu.be/yoL43PiifpE?si=XZkwUyrUeAKFqnIM and of course you can find these videos simply by doing a search within YouTube for the video titles (in *italics* herein).

● The famous musical instrument museum *Bate Collection of Musical Instruments* is in the process of moving to a new home. Quoting from an Oxford University publicity webpage, “The Schwarzman Centre will co-locate the humanities faculties and libraries in a newly constructed building at the heart of the historic Radcliffe Observatory Quarter. The state-of-the-art facility will make the Schwarzman Centre a powerful locus for deep, interdisciplinary research and significantly improve the quality and types of space used for day-to-day teaching, enhancing the experience of students and the academics who teach them. Faculties and institutes included in the move are English, History, Linguistics, Philology & Phonetics, Medieval and Modern Languages, Music, Philosophy, Theology & Religion, Institute for Ethics in AI, Oxford Internet Institute. In addition, seven libraries and collections will be part of the new Centre: English, Film, History of Medicine, Music, Philosophy, Theology & Religion, Bate Collection of Musical Instruments. New facilities will include a 500-seat concert hall and a 250-seat auditorium, as well as flexible performance and exhibition spaces for music, dance, and art. Various museum closures are programmed for this month (September) and October, 2024, in preparation for the move. Visit the Bate website www.bate.ox.ac.uk for more information.



The octagonal ophicleide

● A fellow serpent enthusiast from North Carolina has recently subscribed to this newsletter, and wrote about an ophicleide made by his teenage son Henry. The instrument was based on the Serpent Website’s article for building an ophicleide, specifically Paul Schmidt’s design for the Box-O-Cleide, www.serpentwebsite.com/SOPT_concept.htm except that Henry went the extra mile and made the wooden bore tubing with an octagonal cross-section, to be closer to a round profile. The instrument’s body is made from 1/4-inch plywood, it stands about 43-1/2 inches tall, and the outer sides of the ‘bell’ end are about 4-3/8 inches apart. It has nine holes with key coverings.

The key mechanisms are made from bronze welding rods brazed onto copper tone hole covers. Those covers were made by splitting and flattening salvaged copper plumbing pipe, shaping them around the instrument body with a slight gap, then gluing leather on to act as pads and fill the gaps. Dimes (American coins worth 1/10th of a dollar) are soft-soldered onto the mechanisms to serve as finger keys.



Tapered copper bocal on octagonal ophicleide

The bocal is made from copper plumbing pipe that Henry annealed and tapered by pulling (many times!) through holes bored through wooden boards. Even with multiple stages of annealing and filling with pitch, the pipe did kink and even crack when bending into shape; those have been repaired and patched. A thumbscrew on a collar allows for tuning adjustments of the bocal position. He turned the mouthpiece from a scrap of hardwood using a friend's ophicleide mouthpiece as a template. He made reamers for the cup and backbore from salvaged reciprocating saw blades. It plays reasonably well, though it requires a lot of steering from the player. He worked on it one or two afternoons per week at his grandfather's woodshop and finished in about a month.

Henry plays his home-made octagonal ophicleide, complete with a hardwood mouthpiece that is a copy of a friend's ophicleide mouthpiece.

The instruments' dimensions are based on Paul Schmidt's Box-O-Cleide plans



- Nick Byrne's The Ophicleide.com website, originally scheduled to be relaunched on 16th September, has been delayed slightly. It will be in a basic form so if readers also have a Ophicleide-related commercially available release they would like listed on the site they can send the details to my email & I will happily list it on ophicleide.com.

- There are several YouTube videos that include ophicleide which have not been previously mentioned in these pages. Igor Martinez performs on the video titled *Gabriel Fauré - Après un rêve - Ophicleide*, found by searching YouTube for that title, or directly from this URL youtu.be/SJvDYMSSmRg?si=hqbbqG1xkwGC7F2qR. Everson Moraes plays ophicleide with his Brazilian Choro band on "*Ai Morcego*" *POR EVERSON MORAES E GRUPO BY RENATA GREEN*, URL youtu.be/ECJJavX3FnI?si=Dq0TLxMRjFc_jfzi. Corentin Morvan on ophicleide joins with Fabien Verwaerde on cornet and Lucie Sansen on piano to present *Corentin Morvan // An history of French Tuba - The Ophicléide (Corbin - Teutatès)*, youtu.be/GBNH-RLrC94?si=agWtMyLYDcr9JSrn. Sam Gossner, historical brass specialist, demonstrates an original 1830's C ophicleide by Charles Sax (father of the more famous Adolphe Sax) in the video *1830's Charles Sax Ophicleide in C Showcase*, youtu.be/YgsQFxFA8zw?si=2MXT_WqkNLUzTqJa. Jack Adler-McKean plays a number of excerpts from the ophicleide parts of orchestral music, using a Wessex Bb ophicleide on the video *Orchestral excerpts for keyed ophicleide*, youtu.be/lGiqo5EtqMI?si=FePG9SbJtt3tZsEY. Martin Monné from the website www.retiredbrass.com performs *Vaclav Smita: Romance for trombone...on Ophicleide*, youtu.be/7aV5Ynb0t-s?si=2TpuYa1Trl-3N0OX.

- Patrick Wibart wrote, "I have the immense honor of succeeding my teacher Michel Godard at the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique de Musique et de Danse de Paris (CNSMDP) from the start of the school year in September (2024). I will be continuing the teaching of the Serpent in this place, primarily for Saxhorn (or euphonium) and tuba players but the class is also open to all instrumentalists from the conservatory for a cycle of 1 or 2 years. I am really very honored to continue the tradition of the Paris Conservatory, of which it is interesting to recall that at its creation in 1793 (year II of the revolutionary calendar) there were two entire classes of Serpent and that finally after almost two centuries of absence, Michel Godard brought back the Serpent to this prestigious place. In the same time I continue my teaching of the Serpent at the Versailles Conservatory, but there only for tubists in Master and bachelor programs."

"Additionally, four albums featuring diverse ensembles and music, where I play the serpent or ophicleide, will be released in the coming months (Ensemble Correspondances,

Les Lunaisiens, Les Arts Florissants and a chamber music album with a Trio with Arpeggione and Harp) I will keep you informed of their release dates.”



Patrick Wibart with serpent

- Patrick also recently produced a YouTube video of some of Jacob Van Eyck's famous diminutions for recorder of the 17th-century song *Doen Daphne d'over schoone Maeght* (*When Daphne, that most beautiful maiden*), arranged for serpent & continuo. Patrick plays serpent with accompaniment on virginal by Ayumi Nakagawa. The video title is *Serpent - Doen Daphne D'over Schoone Maeght : Jacob Van Eyck (1590-1657)*, youtu.be/nkR36zSecjs?si=AvMfDPXNrHZBUXgl.

- As with the 'new' ophicleide videos mentioned above, there are several YouTube videos that include serpent which have thus far been unrevealed in these pages. Oscar Abella gives a thrilling serpent play-along with the Euskadiko Orkestra - Basque National Orchestra, conducted by Maite Aurrekoetxea, on part of the *Overture from Handel's Music for the Royal Fireworks*, using a period Military serpent, on the video titled *Händel's original Serpent part in "Music for the Royal Fireworks" (1749)*, youtu.be/GHVPA9GHZhc?si=ZrcF5hdWHe-3f-4. Oscar also plays serpent on his own composition *Ballad for Nattoo for Serpent and Piano*, with David Jiménez on piano, on the video titled *Oscar Abella: Ballad for Nattoo" for Serpent and Piano [Live]*, youtu.be/P2lsO4GuJkc?si=D9ReDT9czhM4gaN6. Daniel Gregor Schmidt of Germany plays his unusually tan-finished church serpent in *Gregorian chant with serpent - Alleluia: Emitte Spiritum tuum*, youtu.be/wkrC4k2oGiA?si=FYfnS2IJdPWWZi-p. Scott Hall, who has made many serpent-inspired musical sculptures over the years, has produced a small, flat profile "pocket serpent", demonstrated in the video *A 15-inch flat-form pocket serpent by Scott F. Hall*, youtube.com/shorts/aqLWfXf0dIg?si=YO1pZNSKCK2XAhFn.

- Jonathan Harker of New Zealand is a musician & teacher, and active amateur editor of Wikipedia pages/articles. He has been working to make the "Serpent (instrument)" article more professional in its language, also including more references, citations and sources, double-checking stated facts, etc. He has been in consultation with the editor of this newsletter and with a few prominent serpentists to verify facts and gather more information, as well as to get corroborative sources when only the memory and personal knowledge of individuals can be found to support aspects of the article.

So far, most of the changes have been beneficial, however some aspects of the older article (e.g. details of playing technique) have vanished, and according to Harker this was because Wikipedia is an encyclopedia, not a "how to" guide. At the time of this writing, some of this is to be reconsidered, and hopefully at least some of the redacted information will be reinstated.

Harker has also decided to create a new Wikipedia article on Christopher Monk. At the time of this writing, information is minimal but with hopes that much more will be added. Your editor has submitted some photos of Christopher in hopes that they might be added to the webpage.

- The Edinburgh Renaissance Band printed the following about accomplished long-time serpentist, and Serpentarium host), Murray Campbell: “Congratulations to Murray who has been presented with a lifetime achievement award from the European Acoustics Association. Professor Murray Campbell is a Senior Professorial Fellow and Professor Emeritus at the School of Physics and Astronomy. He is also a founding member of the University’s Acoustics and Audio Group. The European Acoustics Association (EAA) works to promote the development and progress of acoustics in its different aspects, its technologies and applications. The EAA award for lifetime achievements in acoustics is issued every 3 years to someone who has demonstrated outstanding scientific and/or industrial achievements in the field of



Murray Campbell with his EAA award

acoustics. The medal was due to be presented at the opening ceremony of the triennial EAA Forum Acusticum congress in France in April 2020, but this was postponed to a virtual event in early December. Professor Campbell works on the physics and acoustics of musical instruments. As well as all that, he is a founding member of the ERB!”

Murray has also been awarded The British Empire Medal (BEM; formerly British Empire Medal for Meritorious Service), a British and Commonwealth award for meritorious civil or military service worthy of recognition by the Crown. HM The King's Birthday Honours List 2024 recognizes selfless and innovative service to others from people across the UK. Over 1,000 people from across the UK have received honours in HM The King's Birthday Honours List 2024. The focus of this List is individuals who have had an immeasurable impact on the lives of people across the country - such as by creating innovative solutions or driving real change in public life. Many are active community champions, innovative social entrepreneurs, pioneering scientists, passionate health workers and dedicated volunteers. Murray's award reads “Professor Donald Murray Campbell. Professor, Musical Acoustics, Edinburgh University. For services to the Carlops Church and to the community in Tweeddale and Edinburgh. (Penicuik, Midlothian)”.

● Here is another ophicleide video, but listed separately from the previous ones because it barely includes the instrument. It is titled *Les Visites Musicales de Nulla Dies Sine Musica carnyx, keyed trumpet and bugle, ophicleide, piano*, youtu.be/wKtgs0u9Bs4?si=vA0vo6mDm0wpqK7p. However, the ophicleide that gets briefly played near the end, possibly by multi-instrumentalist Guy Estimbre, is one with a zoomorphic bell like a Russian Bassoon. The event was a temporary exhibition called *An Exhibition In the Wind? A Journey Through Time*, and there was a webpage about it, but at the time of this writing that seems to have disappeared.



Scott Kinmont (serpent) with colleagues Matthew Ockenden, Fiona MacNamara and Noriko Shimada after playing Mendelssohn's *Symphony No. 5* in Sydney Opera House

● [This arrived at the last second, and thus is located here instead of in the *Where Serpents Gather* section]. Scott Kinmont wrote, “2024 has seen an unusually busy year for the serpent in the Sydney Symphony Orchestra. In March, a performance of Mendelssohn's *Symphony No. 5 in D major/D minor, Op. 107 "Reformation"* conducted by Sir Donald Runnicles took place at the Sydney Opera House. In June, performances of Handel's *Water Music* took place in more 'serpent friendly' halls - the 1,000 seat Sydney Recital Hall and a regional venue just out of Sydney. Using modern instruments but with the addition of serpent, harpsichord and recorder, the director Erin Helyard came up with creative ways to feature us, sometimes setting a verse of, say, a hornpipe for the ancient instruments and then contrasting them against the modern ones in the next. It was a really effective use of colors and met with wild enthusiasm from the audiences. In October I am curating an unusual concert entitled *Obscurata*, where I have arranged music for some of the 'less loved' instruments of the orchestra - alto flute, bass oboe, basset horn, double bass quartet, vibraphone, alto trombone, serpent of course, and featuring the remarkable talents of Nick Byrne on Ophicleide [Nick wrote separately about this; see *Where Serpents Gather*]. Music by Ravel, Caccini, Schubert, Vejvanovsky and Berlioz's *Fisherman* from Lelio as recently recorded by Nick on his latest release CD, an absolute must have for your Christmas shopping list! Photos and concert report to follow for next year's edition. Best wishes from the Antipodes!”



Two serpents by Ludwig Embach, Amsterdam, who was in business between 1820-1844 made serpents, etc.

Upper serpent is held by the Rijksmuseum In Amsterdam, NL 1825 - c. 1835 BK-NM-11430-42



Lower serpent is held by the Musée des Instruments de Musique (MIM) Brussels, Belgium Inventory # 1227