

HISTORICAL INSTRUMENT SECTION

Craig Kridel and Clifford Bevan, Editors

Serpent

It's certainly been an astonishing summer for historical brass enthusiasts from throughout Europe and the United States. While the season began with a smashingly successful serpent gathering in England [organized by Andrew van der Beek and attended by serpent virtuosi and cognoscenti Alan Lumsden, Cliff Bevan, Phil Humphries, Murray Campbell, Americans John Weber and Paul Schmidt, and others], the summer concluded with an unbelievable array of performances, paper presentations, and discussions at the Historic Brass Society's week-long *International Historic Brass Symposium* at Amherst College in the United States. Allan Dean, Bruce Dickey, Lowell Greer, Edward Tarr, Don Smithers, Sue Addison, and Benjamin Peck were just a few of the over 250 participants. And I am pleased to report that serpent performances by Frenchmen Bernard Fourtet and Michel Godard were the talk of the week. While the next *HISS* column will describe certain events from this gathering, I will mention that discussions from the symposium have had a dramatic impact upon this column.

John Taylor and I had begun to discuss last spring the possibility of increasing the frequency and broadening the scope of the *Historical Instrument Section (HISS)* for upcoming issues of the *TUBA Journal*. I viewed the Symposium as the perfect occasion to discuss HISS columns with the leading members of the historical brass community. What has resulted is a new configuration of the Historical Instrument Section with four distinct topics each year. These include a winter column on the serpent, which I will continue to edit; a spring column on

instrument collections and museums edited by Arnold Myers; a summer column on ophicleide & 19th century brass edited by Anthony George; and a fall column on tuba and assorted items from the TUBA Archives edited by archivist, Ronald Davis. Cliff Bevan, perhaps the sole low-brass humorist in print, will continue to submit two essays each year that accompany the serpent and ophicleide columns.

Anthony George is one of the leading ophicleide players of today's early brass scene. Tony serves as professor of ophicleide at the Royal College of Music in London, and is currently involved in a recording project with the Wallace Collection where he plays the ophicleide for music originally written for the Cyfarthfa Brass Band in Wales. Arnold Myers holds the position of Curator of the Edinburgh University Musical Instrument Collection. In addition to his leadership and substantial scholarship within the musical instrument field, Arnold has recently initiated an Internet Listserv, the *Musical Instrument Discussion List*. Lastly, our TUBA archivist, Dr. Ronald Davis, serves as professor of tuba at University of South Carolina. Each columnist will prepare his own "formal" introduction as we proceed through the upcoming *TUBA Journal* issues.

I cannot be more thrilled with these developments and see the expansion of the Historical Instrument Section as a testimony to the foresight of the former *TUBA Journal* editor Karen Cotton and the thoughtfulness and insight of the current editor, John Taylor. As we extend the section to four columns each year, we will continue to maintain what I hope has become a "hallmark" of the section,

namely, a sense of adventure and exploration. We have sought not to permit the column to become merely academic and pedantic (if not self-righteous). The editors pledge to keep the Historical Instrument Section informative, interesting, and, with Cliff Bevan's help, entertaining. I wish to express my thanks to John and Karen, and we all look forward to a new era for the Historical Instrument Section.

While the purpose of this issue's column is primarily to announce plans for the section, what would be a *HISS* column without a contribution by Cliff! I have so enjoyed reading one of his past essays, written in 1989, upon his first encounter with American football. I have received permission to reprint the essay, originally published in 1990 in the British music journal, *Winds*, under the column title "Out of the Mouths of . . . cometh forth wisdom heard by Clifford Bevan." For our purposes it is reprinted in a slightly abridged version entitled ". . . a long silver row." As Americans are in the midst of their football season, the following is a wonderful reminder of the grace and beauty of this grand collegiate festivity.

. . . a long silver row. by Cliff Bevan

What did you do on the American tour, Daddy?

All sorts of wonderful things, son.

Did you go to Disneyland?

No, But I met a man who plays piano on a bicycle there.

Is that all?

I played the Charleston in Charleston, drove an Oldsmobile the length of Manhattan, shared a bath with six others in Pennsylvania, joined in a band of keyed bugles and ophicleides in Pottstown, played the serpent in Columbia...

And what was your favourite thing?

Oh, no doubt at all: the Saturday afternoon ball game.

But I thought you weren't interested in sports?

You're right, but this was different.

How was it different?

In every way. It summed up all the reasons for the New World's not being the Old World. And that's interesting, when you think about it, because most of the population of the USA is descended from European immigrants, but something affects them all—some sort of national virus—and causes them to become very different. You know: the thing about two nations divided by a common language.

Tell me about the game.

It's difficult to find the words.

Just try, Daddy.

Imagine a Saturday in October with the sky a clear, deep blue. The huge stadium had been burning in the sun for hours. Remember that South Carolina is the same latitude as Algeria.

The spectators began arriving before midday. The state fair was on right next to the ground, so with that, and it's being Saturday and the game, all the roads were jammed solid. As soon as a car would arrive and park the whole family would tailgate: lower the tailgate of the car and picnic off it, passing the time of day with their neighbors also tailgating. The most social car parks I've ever seen.

The stadium itself, owned by the university, seated 75,000, and was breathtaking. You could see the towering wings of its superstructure reaching into the sky from miles away. An hour before the game it was already filling up. The spectators were family groups out for an afternoon of really good entertainment.

And they certainly got it, even before the game itself began. It was like a Roman festival, or a medieval fair. Everywhere you looked on the field there were groups of players warming up—but not in isolation: there would be three doing an identical routine in one spot and perhaps four more doing a different identical routine a few yards away. As though it had all been choreographed.

And then there were the cheerleaders, doing cartwheels and backward flips, leaping backward off each other's shoulders and somersaulting before being caught by two others from their team.

But what really caught the eye, the moment you walked into the place, was high up beneath one of the corner towers. It was like a flower bed in the sky, and the most prominent flowers formed a long silver row.

Silver?

Yes; the 17 silver sousaphones in the band, playing away like things possessed. The voice came over the loudspeaker keeping everyone informed of the next stage in the proceedings and the band made its way down to the field. When they had assembled, smooth as oiled clockwork, they stretched from end to end and side to side.

"How many are there?" I asked.

"Over 300," came the reply. A band of over 300 with 17 silver sousaphones gleaming in the sun and every instrument forward-facing!

The conductor standing on a raised platform raised her arm; her sub-conductors, ranged along the touchlines, raised their arms in turn. Players raised mouthpieces to lips. Came the down-beat ...and a solid wall of sound from 283 forward-facing bells and 17 silver sousaphones...

But that, of course, was only the beginning. Flags twirling, tassels shaking, cheers led by bronzed girls with infinitely long legs and knickers printed with the home team supporter's motto*, marching, counter-marching, running, jumping, standing-still, and all the time the zest and vigour and sunshine and cheers and applause and excitement... until the solemn moment when the audience stood and three flags were held vertical. A total hush for the national anthem.

And then the field cleared in a magic second and the audience was on its feet again with a forward-facing cheer that shook the sun in the deep blue sky as the teams ran on...

Well, tell me about the game, Dad.

Couldn't understand a thing, son. It was all stopping and starting. Worse than cricket.

Then why have you bothered with all the preamble?

Because to me, and to my fellow European musicians, the preamble was what it was all about. Listen to this, from a book I bought about the history of school music in the USA. (Do you realize they introduced music into school in 1838? The tuba had only been invented three years at that time!) Here's an extract from the report on an experiment during World War I when groups of service men had been asked to sing *The Star Spangled Banner* so that a consensus could be arrived at and an official version published:

... there were a few striking facts that emerged. One is that the American people emphasize their rhythm by using freely the unequally divided beat. Whether or not this is connected with their liking for ragtime may be debatable question, but it seems, as one observer put it, that our people in the singing of *The Star Spangled Banner* at least, dot a note almost every time they have a chance.

That's not very European, Daddy,

Absolutely right, son.

But you seem to spend a lot of your time trying to get your band to play like the American band you heard at the football game...

Time for you to go to bed, now, I think, son...

* The words printed on the knickers were "GO COCKS," referring to the name of the home team, The Fighting Gamecocks. Fender (car bumper) stickers were also obtainable, but I doubt the Editors would reprint their message...