

by Craig Kridel and
Clifford Bevan, Editors

SERPENT

Explorations proceed in the serpent world, and one of our leading adventurers continues to be Doug Yeo, serpentist and bass trombonist with the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Doug's serpent pursuits have shown what one person can accomplish with a little enthusiasm and a lot of technique. Past columns tell tales of his serpent concerto performances (with the Boston Pops and the Boston Classical Orchestra). Such accomplishments were followed this past spring with a lecture-demonstration at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts (fully described as "Serpent Night at the Boston Museum" with accompanying photographs at www.yeodoug.com/yeoarticles.html). More concerto performances are scheduled for this autumn as well as the expected arrival of commissioned works for serpent and strings. New territories are indeed being discovered!

Yeo the Explorer, however, led the way this past summer at Tanglewood. There he organized a Prelude Concert, an early evening performance in Ozawa Hall before the evening's concert with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, where he performed on serpent with a wind ensemble. The

repertoire consisted of that fertile and greatly unexplored terrain – harmoniemusik. Wind ensembles of the late 18th and early 19th century were typically called "Harmonie" bands since they often constituted the wind section of a symphony orchestra and, generally, provided the harmony for a work in contrast to the melodic material of the strings. The wind band typically included pairs of wind instruments – generally an octet of oboes, clarinets, horns, and bassoons; the serpent or bass horn was at times used as a 9th instrument, in contrast to a contrabassoon, to support the second bassoon's 8th line. [We also know that Harmonie bands used whatever instruments were at hand—often a serpent instead of a contrabassoon.] Harmoniemusik is quite different from works for large wind band or for the wind quintet. The aristocracy of this time often employed their own Harmonie ensembles to provide entertainment; yet, churches, municipalities, and military regiments often supported such ensembles. Around 1800, it is suggested that there were several thousand wind harmony bands in Europe. And, of course, composers and arrangers provided these ensembles with repertoire of serenade music, operatic arrangements, marches, religious music, and

various dance music.

With the standard Harmonie ensemble of two oboes, two clarinets, two horns, and two bassoons, Yeo selected three compositions that specified the serpent. These included *Three Military Marches* by Franz Joseph Haydn (1732-1809), *Partita in E-flat (Octet Partita)* by Johann Hummel (1778-1837), and *Harmonie in E-flat, Opus 79* by Franz Krommer (1759-1831). The denouement of the evening was the performance of a Harmonie arrangement of the second movement of Beethoven's 7th Symphony (an anonymous period version, yet one approved by Beethoven). These works, all in modern editions, proved stunning, and the Beethoven, a brilliant programming concept since the work was being performed later that evening with the B.S.O., brought the 800 person audience to a hush, not the least caused by the contrabassoon line being performed by Yeo on "George," the 1990 contrabass "anaconda" serpent, made by Christopher Monk and loaned to Doug for the performance by Connie Palmer.

In past (hiss) columns I've described musical adventures for the interested low brass player, experiences typically of a listening nature. I recognize that a very convincing rationale must be made for tubists to consider investing time and money in a serpent and, for this reason, I have not sought to proselytize. Yet, Doug Yeo's adventures demonstrate that one person can build a community around his passion for the serpent, and Stephen Wick's involvement with serpent and ophicleide depict how these instruments nurture an informed approach for music making (as described in this section in the summer issue). Now, we discover the wind literature of Harmonie—a repertoire that, while inaccessible to the tuba, offers a rich musical tradition for the serpent and bass horn, instruments that seem to appear with some regularity. A rationale for taking up the serpent is beginning to emerge as these new opportunities for performance become more available. And, I am most pleased to report, ground-breaking musicological work has been completed that offers a simple way for the enthusiast and adventurer to explore this Harmonie repertoire.



Doug Yeo, serpent, with Robert Sheena and Chikao Inomata, oboes; Richard Svoboda and Roland Small, bassoons; Richard Sebring and Daniel Katzen, horns; Thomas Martin and Craig Nordstrom, clarinets; Seiji Ozawa Hall, Tanglewood, July 31, 1998.

The 1997 publication of the *Wind Ensemble Sourcebook and Biographical Guide* [ISBN 0313298580] twenty year's worth of research by Marshall Stoneham, Jon A. Gillaspie, and David Lindsey Clark. Their scholarship resulted in a compiled list of 12,000 surviving Harmonie works by over 2400 composers and arrangers. The 456 page *Wind Ensemble Sourcebook and Biographical Guide* is divided into three parts with the first 100 pages consisting of one of the more comprehensive presentations of this wind repertoire. The next 220 pages present a detailed listing of the various composers, and the final section discusses instruments and performance practice. Serpent parts pepper these portrayals and discussions; the serpent does indeed offer an entry into this important late 18th and early 19th century wind music.

Now, the companion to the *Sourcebook* has just been released as the *Wind Ensemble Catalog* by Gillaspie, Lindsey Clark, and Stoneham [ISBN 0313253943]. This 459 page catalog, continuing their years of scholarship through various libraries, monasteries, and castles, provides ways to access compositions by citing modern editions and the location of library copies. The *Catalog* is quite spectacular and serves as the complement not only to the *Sourcebook* but, also, to the yet-to-be-released third and final volume, *The Wind Ensemble Thematic Catalog 1700- 1900*. Quite regularly, we have maintained that the serpent holds possibilities and opportunities for the low brass player. Well, an examination of the "Wind Ensemble Catalog's" two page listing of (period) harmoniemusik arrangements of works by F. J. Haydn displays 11 different symphonies with specified serpent parts! Yes, I believe the serpent literature of the late 18th and early 19th century has just greatly expanded thanks to Gillaspie, Lindsey Clark, and Stoneham. Doug Yeo proved that wind players will gather to perform Harmonie and, in so doing, will "permit" a serpent to join in on the fun. Researchers Gillaspie, Lindsey Clark, and Stoneham now provide access to this glorious repertoire. The "opportunities for the adventuresome serpentist" category (as mentioned in last year's column) continues to expand in glorious ways!!

Updates and oddities: Since last year's dispatches, I received numerous e-mail posts from readers inquiring about West Gallery Music and the West Gallery Music Association. The leading proponents of this material, The Mellstock Band, appeared



*The Yeo and Serpent families
Serpents come in different sizes; Yeos come in different ages; l-r: anaconda (George), serpent, serpette, worm; l-r: Doug, Linda, Pat, and Robin Yeo.*

once again in a recent film. The BBC's 1998 production of Thomas Hardy's *Tess* offers a wonderful "West Gallery music video" of the ensemble and provides a fine complement to their earlier appearances in Jane Austin's *Pride and Prejudice* and Hardy's *Return of the Native*. I encourage readers to visit the Gallery Music website at www.publishing.co.uk/gm/gm.html as well as to visit the wonderful website of the *Serpent Newsletter*, edited by Paul Schmidt, at <http://shoga.wwa.com/~ocleide/>. Paul provides the most up-to-date listing of serpent news and events.

And now, we turn to Clifford Bevan who continues to answer those unanswerable questions.

LOST AND FOUND

by Cliff Bevan

When John Milton's *Paradise Lost* appeared in 1667 many people found it difficult to understand. Groups of intellectuals argued about its meaning on late-night television, in front of an audience of unseeing debauchees and insomniacs. Newspapers asked why airport bookstalls were confusing travellers by offering this nonsense alongside gripping thrillers and bulky works of romantic fiction. Consequently, in the second edition Milton added an explanatory Argument, which began like this:

This first Book proposes, first in brief, the whole subject: Man's disobedience, and the loss thereupon of Paradise wherein he was placed: then touches the prime cause of his Fall, the Serpent, or rather Satan in the serpent...

Down below, in his warm and comfortable corporate HQ, Old Nick lounged, tail thrown carelessly over the side of his revolving executive chair as he gazed at the flickering monitors that lined the wall before him. He picked up his mobile phone and pulled out the forked aerial. "Board-meeting in ten minutes' time," he announced, and drained the contents of the cup on his executive desk. For a moment his horns drooped. "How I hate cold hemlock," he said bitterly.

Shortly afterwards the members of the Board began filing in. There were a couple of real estate agents, an inspector from the Inland Revenue, a railroad ticket clerk, an orchestral conductor, that woman from the Post Office, a second-hand car salesman . . . all the usual horrible faces.

Old Nick called them to order. "The purpose of this meeting is to devise a method of reestablishing a strong presence in our competitor's market-place," he explained. "And I expect you to come up with some good suggestions- otherwise, there's always room for another stoker..."

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Auxerre is a cathedral city 170 kilometres south-east of Paris. Founded by the Romans, it already had a long and distinguished history by the time Canon Edme' Guillaume was given charge of the cathedral choir towards the end of the sixteenth century. Life was good for Guillaume, with a daily walk under the trees that lined the wide main street, a morning coffee as he read the *Church Gazette*, and a shop that let his cook have truffles at a discount when they were in season. The choir? Well, it was a job that had to be done, and he took it seriously enough to have a weekly rehearsal.

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Not all the choristers were quite so serious, however, and it only needed the Tour de France or some other national sporting event to ensure that Edme' would find himself the only one at choir practice.

He first became aware of a certain amount of discontent in the town on one of his regular visits to Madam Tellier's establishment. It was a tiny episode, but it turned out to be significant. One of the girls made a remark about Edme's lack of expertise in a particular activity and was told to "Shut-up" by a fellow worker. When a third commented, "Don't worry, he probably can't hear you anyway," all three dissolved into giggles. A few weeks later there was a headline in the *Auxerre Oracle*: "Choir's Performance Falls Flat." The town's radio station ran a phone-in programme during which the local population expressed its dissatisfaction with the singing at the cathedral. The final blow came when Edme' arrived home one evening and switched on his answerphone. He heard the testy tones of the Dean summoning him to this office in the cloisters the following day.

Never a man to use one word where two or more would do, the next morning the Dean droned on interminably, leaving Edme' wondering if he was already in Purgatory. But he came up to earth with a jolt when he heard; "I should be very unhappy if you were the first Canon to be fired," spoken in a way that left him in no doubt that such an event would actually make the Dean the happiest man in Auxerre.

It was as he despondently strolled back to his lodgings that he had an idea. There on the opposite side of the street was Madame Tellier, puffing along in the summer heat in a thin floral dress, bits of her ample body shaking

with every step she took.

"That's what the choir needs," thought Edme'. "Lots of support. Firm support, but flexible support. Support that will give where necessary, yet keep everything within certain bounds. Now, where shall I find that?" he asked himself, looking wistfully at Madame Tellier's retreating form as it bounced its way across the cathedral square.

Like any true musician, he ruled out electronics. "Those keyboards never sound like the real thing. Synthesiser, SINthesiser," he muttered, as he carried down to his basement workshop enough candles to allow him to work uninterrupted through the night. By daybreak he had found the solution. He had no notion where such a revolutionary idea had come from, but he was too tired to think about it and too excited by the prospect of trying out his new instrument with the choir.

The choristers were not too complimentary about the appearance of the serpent, but as soon as they heard its gentle, vocal tone, there were in no doubt that this was the answer to all their problems. They used it at Mass next Sunday, and afterwards the congregation talked about nothing else. Madame Tellier even asked Edme' if he would make one to order for her establishment and he readily agreed, although he could not understand why she should need one, not having a choir. And it was not long before the phone was ringing non-stop with orders from nearby towns and villages . . .

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Old Nick tore open the latest parcel of books from the mail-order house. Reading, he had found, was the best way to relax after a long day tormenting people. With no bookstores in H**I itself, he was forced to

rely on the postal service, but he subscribed to a large number of booksellers, many of whom had noted his particular interests on their databases.

"A good selection," he said, looking pleased as he picked up each individual volume. "The Devil to Pay, Satanic Verses - who is this Rushdie, haven't heard of him - oh, and a video, Hellzapoppin. But what's this? Burney, *The Present State of Music in France and Italy*. Looks pretty boring to me. He flicked carelessly through the pages, stopping abruptly to put out a call to all Board members to attend an urgent meeting in five

minutes' time . . .

"And so, my friends, I bring you to the point of this meeting. Let me read from this excellent work by Mr. Burney:

In the French churches there is an instrument on each side of the choir, called the *serpent*, from its shape, I suppose, for it undulates like one. This gives the *tone* in chanting, and plays the base when they sing in parts . . . it mixes with them better than the organ . . . is less likely to overpower or destroy by a bad temperament, that perfect one, of which the voice only is capable . . . The *serpent* keeps the voice up to their pitch, and so is a kind of crutch for them to lean on . . .


Old Nick put down the book and smiled at the Board.

"Ladies and gentlemen, allow me to congratulate you all on having achieved our aim with such speed, and in such an underhand, deceitful and generally nasty way. I think a bonus all round is richly deserved." And he brought out his largest box of matches . . .

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