

Craig Kridel and Clifford Bevan, Editors

*Streams of Recent Serpent Occurrences*

By Craig Kridel

The serpent world continues to flourish with new recordings, performances, instruments, and many opportunities for those individuals interested in exploring a "pre-tuba" world. Perhaps the most intriguing development recently has been the completion this spring of two replica (circa 1830s) cimbassos. English instrument designer and maker Nicholas Perry completed the first cimbasso for London Serpent Trio member Andrew van der Beek. As noted previously in these pages and elsewhere (e.g., Bevan's second edition of *The Tuba Family*), this Italian upright serpent has been documented in use at La Scala in 1816 and 1825 and scored in Rossini's *Armida* (1817), Bellini's *Il Pirata* (1827), Verdi's *Nabucondosor* (1842), and Verdi's *La Traviata*

(1853). Perry's "early cimbasso" (not to be confused with the "cimbasso," the all-metal, valved contra-trombone) made its debut at the Lacock Serpentarium, a biennial event held in May at the beautiful historic village of Lacock in the

English countryside of Wiltshire. This year's event attracted 17 serpent and ophicleide players. Group playing sessions were conducted by van der Beek and Clifford Bevan, culminating with an informal performance by Serpentarium participants and the London Serpent Trio. The cimbasso received favorable reviews from the Lacock players, and Perry, quite enthused with the response, plans to make additional instruments as well as to consider the possibility of constructing a serpent Piffault (a French military serpent) and serpent Forveille

(an upright, metal-wood serpent).

The 2001 Dartington Summer Music Festival in Devon, England scheduled Bevan as serpent/ ophicleide instructor

and staged a performance of the relatively unknown Hector Berlioz mass, *Messe Solennelle*, with a complete array of historical brass, Bevan on



**Above: Douglas Yeo, serpentist, Boston Symphony Orchestra.**

**Clifford Bevan (left) and Phil Humphries, members of the London Serpent Trio, inspecting Perry's cimbasso.**

*Tora!*, conducted by the composer.

Perhaps Humphries most unique serpent role, however, occurred this past spring when he was invited to perform with the

New London Consort in Henry Purcell's opera, *Dido and Aeneas* (allegedly composed in 1689; however, recent evidence suggests an earlier debut), at the Royal Festival Hall's 50th Anniversary celebration. Philip Pickett, director of the New London Consort, decided to recreate an early 18th century performance

from Lincoln's Inn Fields which lists a serpent as one of the orchestral instruments. Pickett scored the serpent for the beginning of Act two with the appearance of the chorus of witches in the cave.

While Humphries was playing Purcell and Berlioz, Douglas Yeo was preparing to perform Wagner and Haydn. At the Tanglewood Music Festival in July the Boston Symphony Orchestra performed Wagner's *Overture to Rienzi*, James Conlon conducting. Yeo used both a Christopher Monk Workshop C serpent and a Monk

ophicleide, Humphries on buccin (the dragon-headed trombone), and Craig Kridel on serpent, performing alongside modern symphonic instruments. Humphries, known primarily for his work with the London Serpent Trio and the Mellstock Band, has participated in many symphonic serpent performances and can be heard on two Royal Scottish National Orchestra's recordings, a re-recording of the *Alien* film soundtrack, music composed by Jerry Goldsmith and conducted by Cliff Eidelman, and a recording of Goldsmith's *Tora! Tora!*



D serpent for the performance. Later that month Yeo participated in a harmoniemusik performance at Tanglewood's Seiji Ozawa Hall (this being his second concert; his Tanglewood serpent debut occurred in 1998). On this occasion Yeo played the 9th part of Josef Triebensee's arrangement of Haydn's

Symphony 92, the *Oxford Symphony*, scored for standard harmonie instrumentation of two oboes, two clarinets, two horns, two bassoons, with contrabassoon/serpent and trumpet.

Triebensee (1772-1846), an oboist who studied composition with Johann Albrechtsberger, was part of a renowned group of Czech harmoniemusik arrangers and composers. Today, alas, he is only known for his wind instrument arrangements of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* and *Le Clemenza di Tito*. Fortunately, research is now being published that may well bring more recognition to Triebensee and, most certainly, generate many opportunities for low brass players who wish to explore early 19th century wind repertoire. Musicologists Marshall Stoneham, Jon Gillaspie, and David L. Clark are publishing a year's worth of their carefully-conducted research from this relatively unexplored world of 8-10 part classical wind music. Furthering the bibliographic studies of David Whitwell, Stoneham, Gillaspie, and Clark have published three reference works, *Wind Ensemble Sourcebook and Biographical Guide*, *The Wind Ensemble Catalog*, and *Appraisals of Original Wind Music*. Perhaps equally important, Gillaspie is now preparing performance editions from this research for Sarastro Music of London. Two recently produced Sarastro editions of special interest to low brass players include a set of trios, published in 1829, for 2 horns and bass horn/trombone (serpent) by Friedrich A. Belcke (1795-1874; a member of the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra and later of the

Berlin court orchestra), and a most interesting concertante for two clarinets, bassoon, two horns, and bass horn/trombone/serpent by Friedrich Witt (1770-1836; Kapellmeister at Wurzburg) where the low brass part shifts between accompanying the clarinets and bassoon



**Doug Yeo performing in a harmoniemusik arrangement of the Oxford Symphony.**  
Photo by Walter Scott

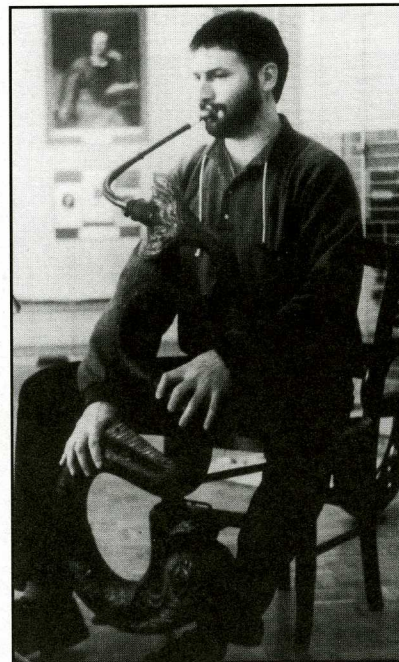
while also acting as a bass for the horns. With Gillaspie selecting harmonie arrangements for Sarastro's publication, much low brass repertoire will emerge in forthcoming years.

To conclude this biennial potpourri of serpent activities, we welcome "the emergence" of another professional serpentist, Jeremie Papasergio, who performed at the spring Boston Early Music Festival with the French early music ensemble, *Dolce Memoire*. While I have yet to determine which Ensemble Douce Memoire recordings include Papasergio on serpent, many recordings are available from our other two well-known French serpentists, Michel Godard and Bernard Fourtet. Godard continues to astonish us with his avant-garde playing, notably, *Repons* (chant with serpent improvisation) and *Castel Del Monte* (serpent, brass, woodwinds, percussion,

vocals). Fourtet has produced one of the finest recordings of the serpent in its traditional sacred context, *Le Livre d'Orgue de Montreal* (organ and chant from the Montreal Organ Book). Although, this is in striking contrast to his recent recording

as serpentist in Sergei Prokofiev's *Pierre et le Loup*, what he describes as wonderfully comical - "a mad adventure with a French rock-star." Fourtet has generated an impressive serpent discography through the

past years (including many 17-18th century works as well as a performance of Mendelssohn's *Paulus*); yet, an unknown



**Bernard Fourtet with an 1830 "zoomorphic" serpent.**

aspect of his career includes producing a new generation of players as the serpent instructor at the Conservatoire de Toulouse. For the past seven years Bernard has conducted Conservatoire serpent classes in 16th-17th century repertoire and 18th century bassoon literature (acknowledging that many of the late 18th century Paris Conservatoire serpent professors also served as bassoon professors).

For those who wish to explore further these and other recordings, please visit The Serpent Website, overseen and

conscientiously updated by Paul Schmidt, and/or subscribe to *The Serpent Newsletter*, edited by Schmidt. For those interested in obtaining a serpent, visit the website of the Christopher Monk Workshop, directed by Keith Rogers. The serpent world continues to grow as more players explore new

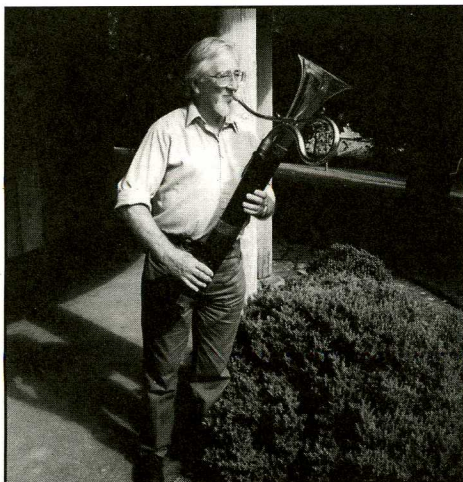


areas of repertoire and realize that old and new instruments can be played together in early music, chamber music, orchestral, and choral settings. We encourage you to join us and enjoy your own adventures in this unexplored "pre-tuba" realm.

**Notes** (in narrative order):

Nicholas Perry; 20 Queen Street; St. Albans, Herts AL3 4PJ; England.

"Extracts from the trombone and cimbasso parts of three early nineteenth-century Italian works," Piccolo Press; 10 Clifton



Clifford Bevan playing a cimbasso.

Terrace; Winchester, Hampshire, SO22 5BJ; England; P. O. Box 50613; Columbia, SC 29250; USA.

Lacock Serpentarium; Cantax House, Lacock Chippenham SN15 2JZ England; <http://www.lacock.org/> The Alien Trilogy; Varese Sarabande VSD-5753.

Tora! Tora! Tora!; Varese Sarabande VSD 5796.

Doug Yeo

Stoneham, M., Gillaspie, J. A., and D. L. Clark. (1997). *Wind Ensemble Sourcebook and Biographical Guide*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press. (Music Reference Collection, Number 55).

Gillaspie, J. A., Stoneham, M., and D. L. Clark. (1998). *The Wind Ensemble Catalog*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press. (Music Reference Collection, Number 63).

Clark, D. L. (1999). *Appraisals of Original Wind Music: A Survey and Guide*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press. (Music Reference Collection, Number 77).

Sarastro Music; P. O. Box 17096; London, SW15 1ZT; England; [info@sarastro.com](mailto:info@sarastro.com)

Repons (chant with serpent improvisation); Studio SM #D2490; The Choir of the

Ligugé Abbey and Michel Godard, serpent.

Castel Del Monte (serpent, brass, woodwinds, percussion, vocals); Enja #ENJ-9362-2; Michel Godard, serpent.

Le Livre d'Orgue de Montreal; Ateliers du Fresne #300 002.2; D. Herisset, organist, La Maitrise de la Cathedrale d'Angers choir, and Bernard Fourtet, serpent.

Pierre et le Loup, Prokofiev; EMI/Virgin Classics 72435 4536922, Bernard Fourtet, serpent.

Paulus, Mendelssohn; Harmonia Mundi HMC 901584.85, Bernard Fourtet, serpent.

The Serpent Website

The Serpent Newsletter; Paul Schmidt, editor; P. O. Box 954; Mundelein, IL 60060 USA [ocleide@wwa.com](mailto:ocleide@wwa.com); European representative: Nigel Nathan; Boswedden House, Cape Cornwall; St. Just-in-Penwith; Penzance; Cornwall TR19 7NJ; England [serpents@boswedden.org.uk](mailto:serpents@boswedden.org.uk) Christopher Monk Instruments; Workshop 4, 30-32 Devonshire Road; London SE23 3SR England; [www.jeremywest.co.uk](http://www.jeremywest.co.uk)

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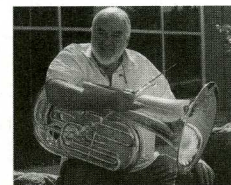
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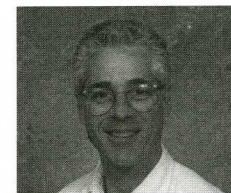
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