

Craig Kridel and Clifford Bevan, Editors
By Craig Kridel

The Biennial Dispatches: Serpent Events and Occurrences

This is an even year, therefore it must be time for the odd array of serpent and ophicleide news. Such dispatches have been a biennial occurrence since the Historical Instrument Section's conception in 1992. In years past, I found myself traveling the world (well, actually, to France) in search of appropriate news for this column. Gathering material is no longer an issue. News abounds not merely from the vast assortment of serpent activities—an increased number of performances, events, and recordings—but also due to easy access now provided by the many websites devoted to historical brass. This year's dispatches, certainly not comprehensive in scope, are more focused as they describe those news items that invite readers to explore further this wonderfully uncharted territory of the pre-tuba world.

Since my last report in the Winter 2002 issue, many new serpent and ophicleide websites have been launched. We are quite excited with the debut of the Joe R. and Joella F. Utley Collection of Brass Instruments webpage (a component of the National Music Museum's website). Perhaps as homage to the serpent world or just recognition of the delightfully artistic shapes of the serpent, Dr. Sabine Klaus, curator of the Utley Collection, offers web visitors the opportunity to see and read about the only known metal serpent d'eglise at the Serpents in the Utley Collection website. While serpentists and ophicleidists have enjoyed for years the web-efforts of Paul Schmidt's Serpent Website, two new webpages devoted exclusively to the ophicleide have recently appeared. The Ophicleide Directory, maintained by John Davies, presents a photo gallery, discography, listing of music and reference books, and an ophicleide wanted & for sale section. Also, Erhard Schwartz maintains an Ophicleide webpage with an extensive

listing of first performances of works scoring ophicleide, contemporary research articles, and links to affiliated period composers, modern ensembles, and organizations. For those readers who wish to hear the actual sounds of the ophicleide, accessible over the web, please visit Middle Tennessee State University Professor David Loucky's webpage where visitors can listen to works by Carl Maria von Weber and Maurice Ravel in RealAudio. ITEA members may recall Dr. Loucky's ophicleide presentation at the 2002 ITEC. Since that session, Dave appears even more involved with various ophicleide projects and performances. When asked recently about the ophicleide, he responded, "I mainly enjoy the instrument for its timbre. It is a challenge to play, requiring great embouchure strength to play in tune. But the unique sound that one can achieve in its various registers is truly appealing. I find the ophicleide to have amazing possibilities for expressiveness, in part because of its diverse tone colors in various tessituras. While we strive on modern brasses to match timbre from range to range and pride ourselves on achieving clear, centered tone at all times, the tone variation on the ophicleide can be more interesting for the listener. It is especially able to describe dark and murky moods!" Dave concluded his comments with an open call: "I would welcome the opportunity to work with any composer who is serious about writing for the ophicleide." Since the serpent has its modern concerto, composed by Simon Proctor and premiered in 1989 at the International Serpent Festival, perhaps it's time for the ophicleide to receive a concerto, too! Are there any composers out there willing to take the challenge?

And speaking of concertos . . . Douglas Yeo of the Boston Symphony Orchestra recently performed the Procter *Serpent*

Concerto with the South Dakota Symphony Orchestra (at the Washington Pavilion of Arts and Science in Sioux Falls, S.D.) in conjunction with the National Music Museum's Beethoven and Berlioz Festival, held in Vermillion, S.D. For those unable to attend this event, readers may still hear the Procter *Concerto* since it has been recorded by Doug, with piano reduction, as part of his recently released CD, *Le Monde du Serpent* [see CD reviews, New Materials column]. As Dave Loucky mentions the diverse tone colors of the ophicleide, I continue to be astounded by the different textures of the serpent as Yeo blends his many sounds with voice, brass, woodwinds, and piano. Readers are encouraged to visit the rather extensive "Complete Program Notes for *Le Monde du Serpent*" website and enjoy Doug's reflections, documents, and photographs. In many respects, Doug has written a serpent memoir that offers one of the nicer introductions and overviews to serpent playing of the past 30 years. I am also pleased to report that Procter's *Serpent Concerto* is scheduled for publication in 2004, with piano reduction, by Southern Music Company.

Turning to other recent recordings, the famed French serpentist, Michel Godard, continues to expand our conception of what serpents and serpentists do. Michel, unquestionably the most widely recorded serpentist in the world, has just released *Castel del Monte II, Le Regard d'un Ange*, and, most recently, *Tuba Tuba Two* with Dave Barger, where both players set aside their tubas to perform two selections on serpent and sackbut. Michel's first composition for solo serpent (or other low instrument), *Serpens Secundo*, commissioned by Radio France, has been published by Drake Mabry Publishing and one may see an excerpt of the piece on that website. Also, please visit the Fanspace and Label Hopi webpages to learn more of Michel's



Michel
Godard



many CD recording activities and touring schedule. In addition, Michel has been teaching serpent at the Paris

Conservatory, continuing a tradition from the late 18th century when six serpent teachers were employed at the conservatory (with four adjunct serpent teachers and 8 performing serpentists to round out the staff). For now, Michel is the sole instructor and reports that his serpent course is open to tuba and euphonium students. During the past years four students, two French and two Japanese players have specialized on the serpent and are now playing with orchestras and in recital performances.



The London Serpent Trio: Phil Humphries, Stephen Wick, Clifford Bevan

And speaking of performances . . . many landmark events have taken place this past year. Certainly the most noteworthy was the May 2003 performance by the London Serpent Trio at London's Horniman Museum with its newest member, tubist Stephen Wick. The London Serpent Trio, founded in 1976, is now composed of Clifford Bevan, Phil Humphries, and Wick, who, as many readers are aware, may be considered England's leading serpent/ophicleide orchestral player having participated in numerous recordings with Wallace

Collection, Orchestre Revolutionnaire Et Romantique, London Classical Players, London Gabrieli Brass Ensemble, Orchestra of The Eighteenth Century, and the New London Consort. Any ensemble that programs a Mozart *Divertimento*, Offenbach's *Pepito Suite*, *Quando m'en vo* from *La Boheme*, and Noel Coward's *A Room with a View* (while concluding with a foxtrot encore) certainly receives kudos from this columnist. The London Serpent Trio toured the United States in the 1980s and, with Steve joining the forces, the Trio may well be coming back to America. We can only hope!

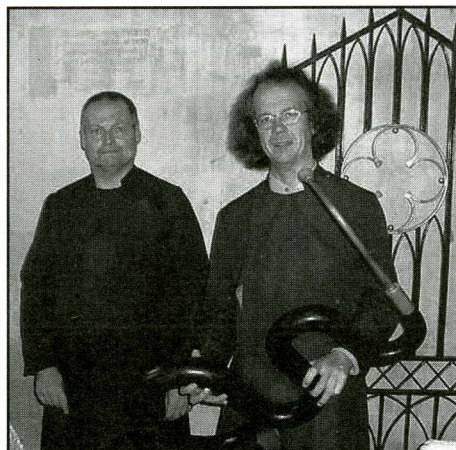
As we conclude the bicentennial of Berlioz's birth, I am pleased to report that another historical brass group has come onto the scene (one for which I am directly involved). Berlioz Historical Brass, an ensemble exploring the role of early 19th century brass instruments, staged its debut concert this past fall at King's Chapel, Boston and performed the world premiere of Clifford Bevan's *Les mots de Berlioz*. This work, commissioned as a companion piece to the recently discovered Berlioz mass, *Messe solennelle* (1824), takes as text a letter Berlioz wrote to a friend on the day after the mass's first performance. Bevan scored the piece for choir, buccin, serpent, and ophicleide, all instruments appearing in *Messe solennelle*. To these, Bevan rounded out the quartet with bassoon, an instrument often used to double the serpent. Berlioz Historical Brass players included Ben Peck on buccin (the dragon-headed trombone), Douglas Yeo on serpent, Jay Krush on ophicleide, and Suzanne Nelsen (of the Boston Symphony Orchestra) on bassoon. The concert, *Berlioz, Then & Beyond*, also



Berlioz Historical Brass: Ben Peck, Suzanne Nelsen, Douglas Yeo, Jay Krush

included excerpts from Berlioz's *Messe solennelle* and works by Handel, Roze, and Du Mont. I am pleased to report that *Les mots de Berlioz* will soon be published by Piccolo Press and will be available for those trombonists and tubists who have yet to obtain historical instruments. For details of the concert, ensemble, and Bevan's composition, visit the Berlioz Historical Brass website.

Finally, we must not leave the sacred music world unmentioned. This past summer a rather significant "first" (in modern times) occurred in London when Phil Humphries and yours truly played serpent with the St. Etheldreda's Church Choir in a performance of the first *Messe Royals* by Henri Du Mont (1610-1684). While all 18th century French cathedral choirs included two serpentists, no modern sacred music performance with two players had been staged. Dr. Peter Wilton, British chant scholar and Director of Music of the Gregorian Association, was commissioned to realize a performance edition of the first *Messe Royal* in the late 18th-early 19th century *chant sur le livre* (chant by the book) style. Peter adapted portions of the mass from serpentist Jean-Baptiste Métoyen's early 19th century treatise, *Recueil de chants d'église* (1810). The premiere was con-



Peter Wilton and Phil Humphries

ducted by Dr. Wilton who is currently preparing to publish the realization (for two serpents and/or bass instruments) of the Du Mont mass as an offering of the Gregorian Association.

The serpent and ophicleide worlds are quite active and even more accessible now. I encourage readers to visit The Serpent Website and/or subscribe to *The Serpent Newsletter*, edited by Paul Schmidt, for additional information pertaining to news, new recordings, available instruments, and upcoming serpent gatherings. For those interested in obtaining a serpent, please visit the website of the Christopher Monk Workshop, directed by Keith Rogers. The serpent world continues to grow as more players are exploring original repertoire and realizing that old and new instruments can be played together. We encourage you to join us and enjoy your own adventures in this unexplored realm of "pre-tuba existence."

Notes (in narrative order):

Serpents of the Utley Collection Website:
www.usd.edu/smm/UtleyPages/Serpents/serpents.html

The Serpent Website:
www.serpentwebsite.com

The Ophicleide Directory:
www.wcwband.co.uk/ophicleide.htm

The Ophicleide Website:
www.ophicleide.de

David Loucky's Website:
www.mtsu.edu/~music/loucky.html

Le Monde du Serpent Website:
www.yeodoug.com/publications/le_monde_du_serpent/le_monde_du_serpent.html

Complete Program Notes for *Le Monde du Serpent*:
www.yeodoug.com/publications/le_monde_du_serpent/le_monde_du_serpent_notes.html

Southern Music Company Website:
www.southernmusic.com

Michel Godard: Castel del Monte II (ENJ-9431 2); Le Regard d'un Ange (Symphonia Odyssey SYO 01710); Tuba Tuba Two (Enja 9448-2)

Michel Godard-related websites:
www.michelgodard.fanspace.com/about.html; www.labelhopi.com/english/html/artistes/godard/godbiogb.htm

Drake Mabry Publishing Website:
www.drakemabrypublishing.com

London Serpent Trio Website:
www.preludeentertainment.co.uk/pages/entertainmentideas/backgroundmusic/classicallight/serpenttrio.html

Berlioz Historical Brass Website:
www.berliozhistoricalbrass.org

Piccolo Press Website:
www.berliozhistoricalbrass.org/piccolo.htm

Gregorian Association Website:
www.beaufort.demon.co.uk/chant.htm

The Serpent Newsletter; P. O. Box 954; Mundelein, IL 60060 USA

Christopher Monk Instruments Website:
www.jeremywest.co.uk/cmi/index.html

4x24 



CALARTS

CalArts School of Music New Millennium Brass Performance

- An innovative, advanced program for all brass instruments.
- Emphasis on intensive study, new composition, world music, technology and interdisciplinary collaboration.

- New Millennium Brass Faculty

Edward Carroll (Trumpet, Brass Studies Coordinator)

Daniel Katzen (Horn, Boston Symphony Orchestra)

James Miller (Trombone, LA Philharmonic)

Norman Pearson (Tuba, LA Philharmonic)

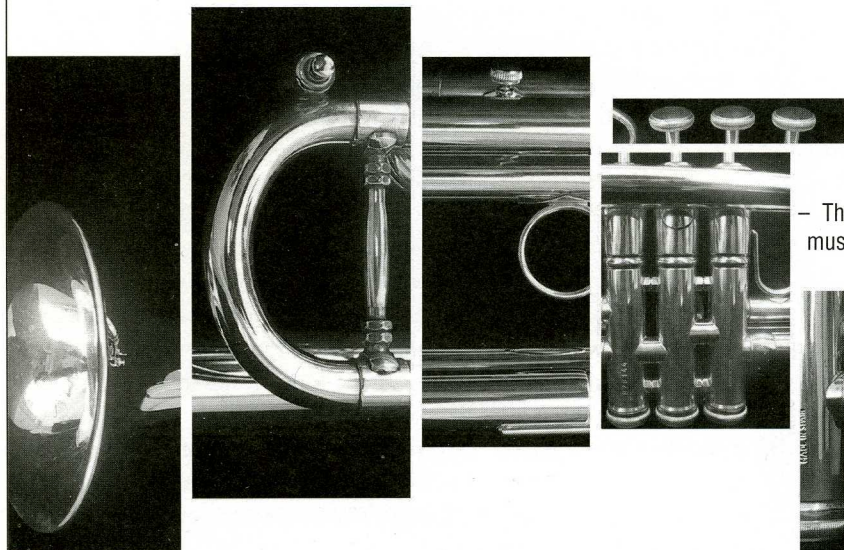
- Elective Studies with

Wadada Leo Smith (Trumpet, Improvisation, Composition)

John Fumo (Jazz Trumpet)

Alex Iles (Jazz Trombone)

- The CalArts School of Music is widely recognized as a trendsetter in music education. We offer rigorous training in a broad range of forms and traditions. At CalArts, all forms of music have equal value.



CalArts School of Music
24700 McBean Parkway
Valencia Ca 91355-2397
661-255-1050
admiss@calarts.edu

www.calarts.edu