THE LONDON SERPENT TRIO

Christopher Monk, serpent and spokesman
Alan Lumsden, serpent
Andrew van der Beek, serpent

Carl Maria von Weber
(1786-1826)

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
(1756-1791)

Various

The Huntsmen's Chorus

Divertimento (c. 1783)
Allegro
Minuet
Adagio
Rondo

"Moments with the Masters"

I N T E R V A L

Gino de Morata
Francisco Millan
Anonymous

Simon Proctor

Three 16th-century Spanish Cancioneros
Essos tus claros ojos, Jeromica
O dulce y triste memoria
La Tricotea

Three Songs for Three Serpents (1981)
Chanson des Tortues
Hermannslied
Turf Tavern

Judith Weir

Franz Anton Hoffmeister
(1754-1812)

The Fall of the Cherry (1979)

The Hen, the Cuckoo, & the Donkey
(1783)
WHAT IS A SERPENT?

THE SERPENT is a musical instrument made of wood, which measures about two metres. The inside bore is carved in two opposing halves from solid blocks of wood – two thick ones as a rule for the French serpents, eight, or sometimes ten smaller ones for English serpents. The blocks were glued together, old glues often deteriorating, causing leaks. As a result, serpents were covered with an impervious material to give an airtight seal. The best makers used leather or vellum, but cheaper serpents were covered with a cloth bandage and painted black.

Serpents have a cup mouthpiece, usually of bone, wood, horn or ivory, as well as a brass crook, roughly 500cm long, which connects the mouthpiece to the instrument.

There are two main types of serpent. The French serpents are known as "serpent d'eglise" and were lightly built with sweeping curves. English, or military, serpents were often twice the weight, more compact, with metal reinforcements and struts to help it survive a less sheltered life.

From its first appearance in France around 1590, the serpent had a place supporting voices in plainsong till the late years of the 19th century. It insinuated itself also into court orchestras, theatres and wind bands all over Europe. In the reorganisation of military music in the second half of the 18th century it was widely adopted as a spectacular and rewarding bass. Since bandsmen came to provide the wind sections of symphony orchestras, opera houses and festivals, from this time well into the 19th century, the serpent enjoyed a period of very widespread use, both in Europe and the New World. Its 'soft richness of tone', so valued by musicians, lost ground as the century progressed to instruments like the tuba, which could offer the far greater volume and heavier sonority increasingly required. Mechanical and acoustical improvements made them easier to play as well, and infinitely less demanding on the skill of the player. So, the serpent drifted into the obscurity of village church music and, for most of this century, has been more often seen in museums than heard on concert platforms.

Since 1976, THE LONDON SERPENT TRIO has played very widely at concerts, business functions and festivals in the U.K. They have also performed in the Bahamas, Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Holland, Spain, Switzerland and U.S.A. thus restoring a great deal of interest in this delightful instrument.
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The 399th anniversary of the venerable, yet exotic European musical instrument called the "serpent" is being marked this season in a gala international tour by the London Serpent Trio. The group will return to Yale's Collection of Musical Instruments to perform the second concert on this season's series on Sunday, October 29, at 3:00 P.M. This ensemble in recent years has been at the forefront of the revival of this intriguing ancestor of the tuba that takes its name from the S-shaped curves of its form. The bass member of the cornetto family, the serpent is made of wood; its bore is carved from opposing blocks that are glued together and covered with leather, vellum, or cloth painted black to prevent leaks. The instrument is played with a lip-vibrated cup mouthpiece of bone, wood, or ivory.

Although it is rather unwieldly and difficult to play, the serpent has a surprisingly light and expressive tone. From its first appearance in France around 1590, the serpent had an ecclesiastical use in supporting voices in plainchant. It later insinuated itself into court orchestras, theaters, and wind bands all over Europe. Supplanted in the 19th century by a succession of developments culminating in the modern tuba, the serpent lived on in the obscurity of village churches and town bands until its recent revival by its dauntless champions in the "early music" movement.

Comprised of three professional British brass players, Christopher Monk, Alan Lumsden, and Andrew van der Beck, the London Serpent Trio has toured Europe and the U.S. several times. Noted for the dry wit of their presentation as well as the virtuosity of their handling of the instruments, the ensemble has been a favorite with the Yale Collection audience on previous visits to New Haven. In the words of a Boston Globe critic, "...they offered an afternoon of sanctified English dottiness, somewhere on the spectrum between Gerard Hoffnung and the King's Singers."

The concert will take place in the second floor gallery in the Collection at 15 Hillhouse Avenue, New Haven. Tickets are $10 each ($5 students and senior citizens). For ticket information and reservations, please telephone 432-0825.