

• Doug Yeo is putting the finishing touches on his new DVD, titled *Approaching the Serpent: An Historical and Pedagogical Overview*. Filmed at the Joe R. and Joella F. Utley Collection of the National Music Museum in the USA, it is the first video of its kind, giving viewers a comprehensive look at the serpent. Doug demonstrates a variety of types, shapes and sizes of serpent, gives a serpent lesson, invites viewers to play duets with him and answers questions about the serpent. The DVD also includes PDF files of all musical examples, exercises and duets. The running time is just under two hours, and the DVD will be available in PAL and NTSC format versions. Doug writes that the planned release date is May 15. In the meantime, you can take a look at his website page devoted to the DVD, www.yeodoug.com/publications/approaching_the_serpent/approaching_the_serpent.html.

Doug writes, "The important thing for people to know is that it will be available in both NTSC (Region 1 - USA) and PAL (Region 2 - UK, EU, Japan) versions. People will have to specify which format they want. I'll obviously have an idea from their address, but if someone wants to send a gift to someone, it will need to be in the right format."

I will have a new order form on my website once I have discs in hand. I'll have Warwick Music in England who will sell the PAL version, and Hickeys Music in the USA who will sell the NTSC version - both of those places take credit cards (I don't). So there will be flexibility for people who want it."



• *Charles Levens: Te Deum*; Hortus Editions # Hortus 060, CD recording, with vocal soloists of Ensemble Sagittarius, the combined choirs Ensemble Baroque Orfeo and Groupe Vocal Arpège, Orchestre Baroque Les Passions, and featuring Volny Hostiou on serpent, Michel Laplénie directing. Obtained from Amazon France.

Recorded in November of 2007 at the Chapelle de la Miséricorde, Regional Directorate of Cultural Affairs of Aquitaine in Bordeaux, this CD presents two grand motets by French composer Charles Levens, a contemporary of J.S. Bach. Born in 1689, Levens initially worked in various musical and leadership capacities in rural churches before being appointed head of the Saint André Cathedral choir school in Bordeaux, where he remained for the rest of his career. Besides running the music school and supervising the students, he was responsible for composing liturgical music for special occasions, and renewing the mass and motet repertoire in particular.

Levens' sacred compositions were well regarded during his life and could be heard at the Chapelle Royal a generation after Pierre Robert served there. The two motets selected for this recording are *Te Deum* and *Deus Noster Refugium*. The former was composed around 1722 while Levens was still at one of his previous postings, and was notably performed in 1758 to honor the governor in Bordeaux and again in 1789 to celebrate the change in the political tide at the start of the French Revolution. Its twelve sequences are in a prayerful, hopeful vein, full of exaltation and adoration, and are delivered as a series of vocal solos, duets, trios and five voice settings. The *Deus* piece was one of the composer's most famous works during his lifetime, with the mood of the music closely following the text's statements of trust in God for protection from all trials.

The forces delivering this performance are seven vocal soloists from Sagittarius, including two female sopranos, counter-tenor, tenor, and three baritones, plus the 28 singers of the combined choirs Orfeo and Arpège, accompanied by the 18 instrumentalists of Les Passions. The orchestration consists of violins, violas, cellos, one bass, two oboes, a bassoon, a theorbo, organ and Volny Hostiou's serpent. Like the Robert recording reviewed above, the vocals and instrumentals are well balanced and very clear in presentation. Unlike the Robert, the music is generally more powerful throughout, with more choral as opposed to solo, and more of the band playing more often. The serpent is much more prominent in the mix than in the Robert, and this CD serves as a good example of serpent as used in Baroque orchestra. The serpent playing is accurate and musical, handling the fairly fluid lines with aplomb. The CD booklet notes, which are in French and English, take care to quote a document listing the musicians who were hired for a performance of this work, with the serpent being duly noted.

• *Requiem pour Claude de Lorraine*; Entheos # CD005, CD recording, with Ensemble Entheos, featuring Volny Hostiou on bass cornett, Benoît Damant directing. Obtained by email request made to Entheos, myspace.com/ensembleentheos, contact@ensembleentheos.com.

Claude de Lorraine was the first duke of Guise and prince of Lorraine, living from 1496 to 1550. Claude and his brother Anthony were raised during the reign of Louis XII. Upon his death, a grand funeral was produced and the music written for it is the subject of this CD.

It may be worth taking note of the funeral itself, since its organizer Edmond Boullay wrote such a specific diary of the plans and proceedings. While Claude died in April, the funeral could not take place until his sons arrived and this did not happen until the end of June. In the interim, Claude was given a funeral commensurate with his status as a foreign prince, which indeed he was given the politics at that time. For eight days his body was laid in state for public viewing, after which his body was embalmed, laid in a lead coffin, and carried to a chapel of the Church of Saint Lawrence. At about that time his brother John also died and the two bodies were laid together in a larger room. His body was then taken to the local nunnery where an effigy has prepared with a wax head copied from his face, and this was available for more viewing for another eight days. Finally the body was moved in a large procession to the church for the funeral. On July 1, three masses were given in his honor, lasting seven hours. Due to this length, most of the nobility only attended the last one, the funeral mass itself.

Requiem pour Claude de Lorraine



Collection
Le Parnasse Français

Entheos
Direction artistique : Benoît Damant

During his life, Claude loved music and always provided for high quality musicians during his reign. Indeed, in 1525, he ceded some of his musicians to Pope Clement VIII, which could only have happened if his artists were of the highest quality. Because of his large and qualified staff of musicians, and because of the support he had given musicians during his life, the funeral mass was given a large and well prepared performance. The mass used was the *Missa pro Mortuis* of Pierre Cléreau (aka Clereaux),



*Ensemble Entheos
with Volny Hostiou
playing serpent*

one of six masses the composer wrote. Although there is some reason to suspect that the composer might have been on hand to direct the performance, there is no specific record of him doing so. This mass is arguably his best composition, and is written as a paraphrase of Gregorian melodies, coupled with Italian influences due to the many years he lived in that country previously.

Multiple versions of this mass exist, and for the performance on this CD, a book residing in a collection in Munich was used. This version calls for 'all the stops' to be pulled, so the instrumentation calls for extra instruments such as cornetts (including the rarely heard tenor and bass), in addition to the more typical viol, bassoon and organ. For this recording, the cornetts include both regular and mute soprano cornetts, a tenor cornett, and a bass cornett as played by Volny Hostiou. While the bass cornett is organologically considered to be in a parallel line of the brass family to that of the serpent, one so rarely hears a well played example that this newsletter can bend a bit and pretend that it belongs here! The bass cornett used in this case is made by Serge Delmas after an instrument in the Musical Instrument Museum (M.I.M.) in Brussels. The singers include a male soprano, counter-tenor, tenor and bass. On the *Libera me* track, a guest singer is added, a young girl soprano.

Even given the smaller forces used for this recording, the sound is surprisingly large. Benoît Damant has assembled a fine group and the performance is very accomplished. The quality of the work itself is also considerable, and this is an important recording, even beyond its significance to the early brass world due to the presence of the rare cornetts.

In addition to the Cléreau mass, the CD also features three organ selections of the type that might have been used in the funeral service, especially given Cléreau's Italian influences. These are *Canzon Francese deata Frais et Gaillard*, *Canzon Francese deata Martin Menoit*, and *Ricercar sopra Martin Menoit*, all by Andrea Gabrieli and performed here by Michaël Parisot on an historical instrument.

This recording is not well distributed, and readers are unlikely to find it in stores or online. After reading about it on Volny Hostiou's website serpent.instrument.free.fr, this

reviewer contacted Benoît Damant who furnished a copy via the Entheos website; he has indicated that readers may contact him through the group website as listed above to investigate obtaining additional copies. The CD booklet is in French only, so as a service to English speaking readers, Paul Schmidt with help from Daniel Heiman has prepared an English translation. As a result, the PDF file of a separate booklet in English has been placed on the Serpent Website discography page, which may be downloaded and printed. See www.serpentwebsite.com



Illustration from a May 30, 1906 issue of the weekly illustrated British humour magazine "Punch."

- *En ces jours-là, je répandrai mon Esprit*; Gimini Music # GM 1016, CD recording, featuring Mario Hacquard, baritone vocalist and Volny Hostiou on serpent. Obtained from the publisher at www.gimini-music.com/cdsearch/mario2, or email cd@gimini-music.com.

This recording is exclusively of Gregorian chant, as realized by a single baritone vocalist with serpent accompaniment as well as a few select instances of a clapper, a drum and tambourine played by two percussionists. The title of the CD is taken from the Old Testament book of Joel, chapter 2 verse 28, "And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out my spirit...." The text of the 22 tracks is meant to represent several days of services during Pentecost, and they are divided by the days and types of service, Vespers, Matins, Laudes, etc. Many of the chant melodies are familiar due to their use in modern Catholic and Protestant liturgical settings; all text is in Latin.

It is hard to say too much about such an open faced production as this. Mario Hacquard has a fine baritone voice and a delivery that seems totally in place given the material. The brief CD booklet notes say that he was a pupil of Pierre de Saint-Jorre in the study of plainsong at the École César-Franck (César-Frank School) in Paris, which was active from 1935 through 1985. The vocal lines are often fairly complex, and he manages them with a clean sense of line and excellent agility.

Volny Hostiou's serpent shines throughout, as he often introduces the melody, accompanies the singer, or adds little flourishes at the ends. He is not playing on every selection, but there is still plenty serpent sound in evidence. In some instances his playing is punctuated with the dull thump of a loosely roped drum or the jingle of a tambourine, and on two selections a clapper resounds to invite the faithful to kneel and then stand up again.

Overall the music is soulful, peaceful, resonant and so generally agreeable without being intrusive that this reviewer has taken to playing it while working. It is a good example of chant and of the serpent in this venue.

Although there is little in the brief CD booklet of interest, the most interesting parts have been translated from French to English, and a PDF of the booklet insert is available on the Serpent Website discography page for download.

- *The Music of Christopher Eley*; Bandleader Recordings/Modern Publicity - Royal Heritage Collection # BNA 5196, CD recording, with The Duke of York's Band of the Coldstream Guard, Major Graham O. Jones directing, and featuring Stephen Wick on serpent. Obtained from CD-Zone UK from an order placed via Amazon.

Remembered today largely on account of his popular and oft-performed *The Duke of York's March*, Christopher Eley was a German-born contemporary of Franz Joseph Haydn. At the age of about 29 he emigrated to England to assume the position of director of the Coldstream Guards Regimental Band, a post he held for eight years. During this time and that concurrent with his subsequent post as leader of the Royal East India Volunteers Band, he was arguably one of the most influential people in the elevation

ROYAL HERITAGE COLLECTION

The Music of Christopher Eley

1785 - 1794



as played by

The Duke of York's Band of the Coldstream Guards

Director of Music: Major Graham O Jones MBE