

Craig Kridel and Clifford Bevan, Editors

## Helicon^Word with...er...one meaning only.

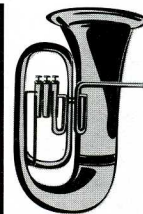
By Anthony George

In the U.K. at the moment, the biggest box-office success is a film called "Lock-stock and two smoking barrels" which has, as its central plot line, the theft and search for two ancient shotguns. (At this point the reader may be excused for thinking the *TUBA Journal* has briefly turned into a film society. But stick with me. I will at some point soon show you the reason for the reference). For many years, the-sawn-off shotgun, by which I mean a shotgun with the barrel sawn-off, has been the preferred weapon of nasty criminals on film and TV. This brings me to the definition of a helicon. Yes, you've guessed it. A helicon is a sawn-off sousaphone!! But why, I hear you cry, would anyone want to saw-off the glorious bell of our proud marching bass. I mean— it makes such a joyous sound. Well, the helicon was around first, of course. The idea of taking a helicon - essentially a circular wrap-around tuba - and rotating the bell forward to face in the same direction as the rest of his wind band appealed to Sousa. But what of the instrument that was its forerunner; what are they like to play? What do they sound like? And why is this column talking about helicons when we should be receiving some informative discussions on

ophicleide mouthpiece dimensions of the mid-Victorian period. Well, I have to confess that I'm having an affair with a helicon. Please forgive me, O beloved ophicleide. Whilst practising ophicleide I often sneak away for a quick go on the helicon just because it's such fun. Playing pedal tones is amazing! The whole instrument vibrates, which means that you do as well, because it's wrapped around your body - a lovely feeling, indeed. It is also a huge exercise in self control as it's very difficult not to play pedal tones all day long!

The helicon in question is a Bohemian instrument with three rotary valves made around 1875ish (many thanks to John Webb of Swindon for lending the instrument from his collection). The pitch, however, is a bit of a problem. This beloved helicon only works in E which suggests that it was built in a very high pitch E-flat. This gives an E-flat scale of:

E-flat	F	G	A-flat	B-flat	C	D	E-flat
1	2	1	2	3	1	2	1
3		2	3		3	3	2
		3					3



As you may have guessed, many notes are out of tune. So the 1st and 3rd valve slides have been greased with super-slick slide cream and are proving useful! The reason I am using this instrument is that the Wallace Collection is doing some 19th century quintet concerts. We decided to use the helicon in some of our transcriptions of popular brass band pieces (although in the *William Tell*, the solo 'cello opening has been transcribed onto ophicleide). I have to admit that once the noise has been sorted out with regards to intonation, the helicon makes a very compact sound (with only a 9 inch bell!), which suits the group since they are playing small bore instruments. Moreover, the helicon curiously has a good weight of sound - maybe because my body is inside! Helicons are still being made to this day in the former Eastern block countries. Perhaps it's time to book holiday to Poland . . .

## Welcome to the Millennieide!

By Cliff Bevan

As many of you will know, shortly we shall be entering a new millennium.

Deciding how to celebrate this event has given the powers-that-be many sleepless nights. We are all aware of the problems entailed in setting-up celebrations commemorating someone's birthday, golden wedding, or eighty years' member-

ship of the athletic club, but there we are talking about a period of 2,000 years. What would be an appropriate symbol of the progress achieved during that time? What artifact has conferred continuity on the progress of civilisation so unmistakably that people of all ages, in all places, will recognise it as a symbol of civilisation

itself?

I hear you murmuring the answer even before I confirm that you are right. It is, of course, the ophicleide. Just in case there are any waverers, any doubters, any who chose to spend the history period surreptitiously smoking behind the bike sheds, the Historical Instrument Column

