

Kaiser Serpent Owners Manual

First of all, let me say thanks for purchasing your serpent. I sincerely hope there will be many more serpents to follow the production of your instrument, but by purchasing one of the first serpents you are helping me realize a dream of starting a small business based on something that I enjoy: music.

- **Keeping in touch** -- I don't plan on making millions of serpents. You may notice the serial number on your serpent has three digits. If I ever need to use that third digit I will be impressed and surprised. In that vein, I hope that the people who buy my serpents will keep me posted. If something fails, I need to know, not only so that I can fix yours, but also so I can make improvements on the serpents that follow. If you get disgusted trying to learn serpent and decide to sell, let me know. I may be able to find you a buyer or I may decide to buy it back from you. Keep a look out on my website. I hope to place serpent etudes with recorded accompaniment and other items on that space that will help people learn to play.
- **Don't get discouraged!** – You have chosen to learn and play an extremely tough instrument. It will take a while to learn to play even a simple piece. People significant to you will laugh at your folly. Stick with it. When you get discouraged, listen to someone who can truly play like Douglas Yeo. If you are not a good sight singer now, you will be developing that skill at the same time you learn to play serpent. In general, good brass players are good sight singers. After all, a brass instrument uses just a few valve or slide combinations to play all the pitches. On serpent, it is essential to hear the pitch in your head before you play the note. If you are a low brass player, your serpent playing will help your main instrument. The serpent is the ultimate buzz amplifier. Practice regularly!
- **Mouthpieces** – The receiver of your serpent is the same size as a tenor shank trombone receiver. If you don't like the wooden mouthpiece that came with your serpent you can use any tenor trombone mouthpiece you choose. The only sizes that will allow you to play that low Bb or C however will be something as wide or wider than a Bach 5 or a Schilke 48. Generally speaking, the serpent mouthpiece has a small bore; a slight backbore flair; and a relative shallow but wide cup.
- **Wooden Mouthpiece Care** -- DON'T LEAVE THE MOUTHPIECE IN THE BOCAL ... it stands a much better chance of getting broken; it could get stuck; and the grain on the shank will become permanently compressed. After 3 or 4 playing sessions you should oil the bore of your mouthpiece with woodwind bore oil. You can use a pipe cleaner or straw to push a small piece of rag soaked in oil through the mouthpiece. You can also oil the cup and the outside of the shank as needed. Initially, the entire mouthpiece is coated in turners wax so the outside shouldn't need any attention for a while.

- **Bocal Care** – The wrapping of thread on the bocal that forms the seal is fairly delicate, but it will last a long time if the bocal is not removed too often. You should adjust the bocal in and out while turning it clockwise as you look at the receiver. I say this because the thread is wrapped in the opposite direction so a clockwise motion helps keep the thread in place. Whenever you remove the bocal apply some woodwind cork grease to the thread to act as a lubricant and remember the screwing motion when you re-insert it.

- **Bocal Thread** -- In the event that the bocal thread needs replaced, you can do this yourself. Get some Coates brand all purpose thread in a color you like. There is a tiny (1/32) starter hole about 3/8 of an inch from end of the bocal. Insert the thread through this hole and pull the end out through the bocal bore. You can knot it or secure it with tape to assist yourself in holding the thread as you begin wrapping. Wrap a SINGLE continuous layer of thread along the bocal moving toward the small end. Stop wrapping when you have about 3 inches of the bocal wrapped. While holding your wraps in place, have an assistant put a small amount of super glue along the brass to thread transition at both the beginning and ending of the wrapped section. Both the brass and the thread need to be wetted by the glue to keep it from unraveling, but you don't want to build any noticeable thickness with the glue. After the glue dries, trim the thread dangling through the hole.

- **Bathing Your Serpent** – If for some reason you get the serpent dirty, don't be afraid to wash it with some mild soap and water. The only painted area is in the bell so be careful there not to scratch the paint but the rest of the color is molded in. If you want to soak your serpent in the tub, remove the bocal first. You can carefully wash the mouthpiece with a mild soap and a mouthpiece brush, just remember to oil it after it is dry.

- **Tuning Your Serpent** – Believe it or not, your serpent can and should be tuned. By tuning, I mean adjusting the bocal in and out to make playing the serpent as easy as possible. I tune using the notes low F or middle C and an electronic tuner. These are very good notes on the serpent. Here is the method. Finger the tuning note and play. Vary your buzz frequency until you feel the serpent is “helping” your note resonate best. Hold that pitch and then look at the tuner. If you are flat, screw the bocal in, sharp screw the bocal out. Repeat the process until you get close. Don't look at the tuner while you're manipulating the frequency, you will only get false results as you subconsciously force the serpent into tune.

- **Fingering** – I am including a fingering chart. Remember, a serpent fingering chart is only a starting point for your own fingering chart. Keep notes on what works best for you.

- **Playing Tips** – If you venture out into an ensemble setting, like for instance a Tuba Christmas, wear a foam ear plug in one ear. This will allow you to hear your pitch in a noisy background. Make a habit that when you begin your

practice sessions that you always play the same starting pitch, be that a low F, or middle C or some note that you find relatively easy. Play your pitch in a long sustained tone. Before you play your starting pitch, sing it or imagine it in your head. Play your pitch then check yourself with a tuner. Pause and attempt to hit your pitch again. After you have warmed up practice this technique on other pitches. This exercise strengthens your ability to get your pitch centered immediately. If you have access to a piano, find a book of simple melodies written in base clef. A beginning Trombone book will do nicely. Play your first note on the piano. Play the etude. Check your ending pitch against the piano. Play duets. If you can, practice the serpent a little each day.

Kaiser Serpent Fingering Chart

The chart displays three rows of notes on a bass clef staff. Above each note is a fingering diagram consisting of five circles representing fingers. Black circles indicate which fingers are used for that note, while white circles indicate which fingers are not used. The notes and their corresponding fingerings are as follows:

- Row 1:** Bb (1, 2, 3, 4), B (1, 2, 3, 4), C (1, 2, 3, 4), Db (1, 2, 3, 4, 5), D (1, 2, 3, 4, 5), Eb (1, 2, 3, 4, 5), E (1, 2, 3, 4, 5), F (1, 2, 3, 4, 5), Gb (1, 2, 3, 4, 5), G (1, 2, 3, 4, 5), Ab (1, 2, 3, 4, 5), A (1, 2, 3, 4, 5).
- Row 2:** Bb (1, 2, 3, 4), B (1, 2, 3, 4), C (1, 2, 3, 4), Db (1, 2, 3, 4, 5), D (1, 2, 3, 4, 5), Eb (1, 2, 3, 4, 5), E (1, 2, 3, 4, 5), F (1, 2, 3, 4, 5), Gb (1, 2, 3, 4, 5), G (1, 2, 3, 4, 5), Ab (1, 2, 3, 4, 5), A (1, 2, 3, 4, 5).
- Row 3:** Bb (1, 2, 3, 4), B (1, 2, 3, 4), C (1, 2, 3, 4), Db (1, 2, 3, 4, 5), D (1, 2, 3, 4, 5), Eb (1, 2, 3, 4, 5), E (1, 2, 3, 4, 5), F (1, 2, 3, 4, 5).

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Again, thank you for purchasing a Kaiser Serpent. I hope it brings you many years of enjoyment.