

Gustav Besson

Paris, France

- 1837 Gustav Besson (1820-1874) designs a new cornet with better acoustical properties than any others.
- 1838 Besson opens shop in Paris, rue Tiquetonne 14 (photo 1).
- 1845 Besson moves to rue des Trois Couronnes 7 (photos 2&3).
- 1854 Besson invents a straight through bore design.
- 1855 Besson invents a full-bore design, improving response.
- 1856 Besson invents the prototype system of tools to enable production of consistent copies.
- 1857 A dispute with Sax over his patent forces Besson to move to London and open a factory there while his wife takes over the Paris factory. The "Brevete" mark changes to "Brevetee" to indicate feminine ownership.
- 1869 Separate serial numbers for Paris and London start with Paris starting at zero in their new location at rue d'Angouleme 92.
- 1874 Gustav dies, leaving the business to his widow and two daughters. Daughter Marthe takes over running it.
- 1880 Marthe (photo 4) marries Adolphe Fontaine and the company changes to Fontaine-Besson.
- 1881 The Paris factory has 62 workers.
- 1882 Besson develops a new cornet with compensating design.
- 1884 The Paris factory is at serial #30000.
- 1889 The Paris factory moves to rue d'Angouleme 96-98.

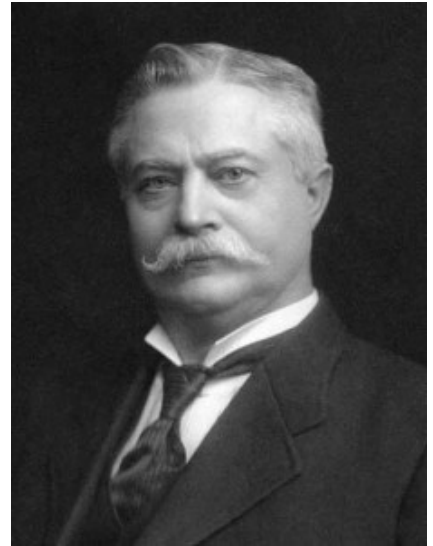


	<p>MANUFACTURE D'INSTRUMENTS DE MUSIQUE, BOIS & CUIVRE Système Prototype F. BESSON 96, 98, rue d'Angoulême, Paris (Adresse télégraphique : Fontaine-Besson, Paris) Fournisseur des Armées, Marins et Conservatoires de toutes les nations, des Concerts du Conservatoire, Lemoine et Colonne, de la Garde de Paris et de toutes les Musiques civiles et militaires en réputation. 49 MÉDAILLES et DIPLOMES D'HONNEUR, la seule MÉDAILLE D'OR décernée par le Ministère de la Guerre en 1889 Le "Système Prototype" est le seul assurant la parfaite justesse dans tous les Instruments</p> <p>DERNIÈRES CREATIONS Saxophones, nouvelle percus et clés additionnelles. — Les "Cornophones". — La Clarinette "Pédale". — Basses et Contrebasses, nouvelles proportions. — Les Cornets "Le Soliste", le desideratum. — Le Concertiste. — Tambours. — Clairons et Trompettes.</p>	
LE SOLISTE		CORNOPHONE

- 1894 The Paris factory is at serial #50000 and a work force of 145. Marthe moves to London to avoid Fontaine's violent behavior. 90 workers in Paris strike for six weeks in protest of him.
- 1895 Marthe sells the London business on April 15th and Adolphe sues to try and block the sale. The quarrel is finally resolved the following year.



- 1895 The English Besson company retains export rights for the Besson name after the sale, and doesn't allow the F. Besson company to sell in the US.
- 1897 Carl Fischer (photo 2), the importer for Besson & Co, acquires some instruments from Adolph Fontaine in Paris. Besson & Co obtains an injunction against this practice (Music Trade Review, 12-25).
- 1906 The Paris factory is at serial #70000.
- 1908 Both Marthe and Adolphe die this year, and their daughter, Mathilde Sabatier, takes ownership.
- 1920 The Paris factory is at serial #82000.
- 1920 There are a number of trumpets marked "Fabrication Francaise Perfectionee" that are said to have been the work of Joseph Rapuano. The lowest serial number is around 79000 and should date to just after WWI. These usually have a slide ring on the first slide for tuning (photos 1&4). To avoid the import ban, it's said that these were made from imported parts, which were legal, assembled in New York. This would have helped satisfy a large demand for professional-level trumpets in the 1920s and 1930s.



Joseph Rapuano (b. 1882 in Italy) (photo 3) came to the US in 1902 and worked as a trumpet player in New York. In 1918, he was playing at the New Amsterdam Theater and living at 222 E. 105th St in NYC (draft record). At the same time, he was trying to patent his "New Wonder Mute," a straight mute for trumpet (advertising).



1922 Early Rapuano ad below.

**Musical Instruments, Supplies
and Novelties**

FROM THE
MOST RENOWNED FACTORIES OF PARIS

A. ROBERT

BUFFET F. BESSON LOREE

Sold by

Joseph Rapuano

222 East 105th St. New York City





1927 Last ad found for Corrado selling Besson trumpets.

1930s William Costello (b.1886 in Italy) was a Besson dealer in NYC in the 1930s and possibly until c.1950, when he retired. Trumpet #93468 has a "Costello – Sole US Agent" case banner (below).



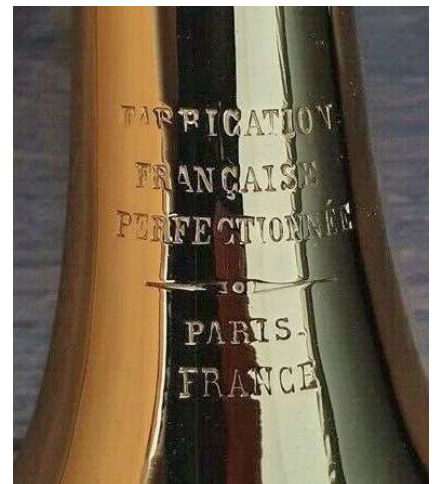
1932 Strasser Margaux & Lemaire acquires F. Besson with Aubertin making valves, bells & final assembly.

1934 The Paris instruments are at serial #87000.

1935 Joseph Rapuano dies on February 28, likely ending his imports (NYC records). An ad appears in September announcing a new partnership between Liese-Meha Inc and Mme Besson for importing instruments from Paris (bottom right).

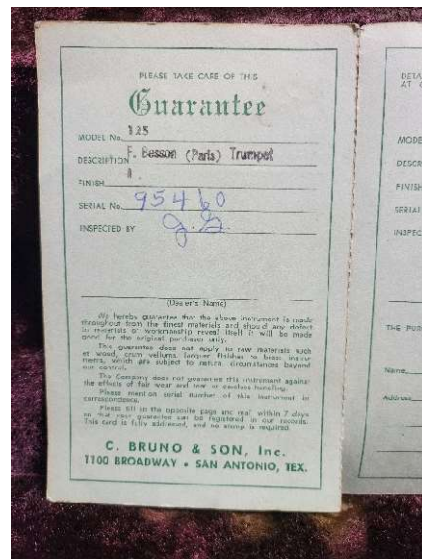
1937 Liese-Meha Inc, 1595 Broadway, New York, representatives of Besson, Paris, owned by Mme. F. Besson (Presto, June). [This was another operation set up to import F. Besson trumpets. Owned by Oscar J. Liese (1906-1983), who lived in Brooklyn.]

Oscar Liese, 145 Lincoln Rd, Brooklyn, returns from La Havre, France to NYC on October 20 (immigration



record). [Since this was the main port for Paris, he was likely working on his import business with Besson.]

September 1937 Downbeat ad



1940 A c.1940 Liese-Meha catalog shows players using the Besson Meha trumpets. These were imported to New York and prepared for sale by brass technician Perry Pirone.

Exports likely end with the German occupation.

1946 Selmer has a new contract with Besson of Paris & London for exclusive distributorship in the West for their brass musical instruments (*International Musician*, March).

1950 Besson Inc. is formed in San Antonio, Texas on October 10 to sell brass in the US. This is started by Geoffrey Hawkes of B&H and set up by Milton Fink, the owner of Southern Music and the C. Bruno & Son dealership there (The History of B&H, Howell).

Besson trumpet #92226 is sold through Besson Inc and has a guarantee card with their 1100 Broadway address, which they moved to in 1950. [likely pre-war NOS]

1951 Besson/B&H purchase the almost bankrupt F. Besson. A new company is formed by Geoffrey Hawkes, using his Paris publishing company Editions Hawkes, and Couesnon SA, as a subsidiary of Editions Hawkes. They allocate shares at 60% EH and 40% Couesnon, with Emil Stoecklin of Couesnon the director (Besson shareholder minutes).



- 1953 Besson Inc of Texas is dissolved on 12-28 (opencorporates.com). At this time, the musical instrument business was sold to C. Bruno & Son (Jonathan Gurwitz). After this, the guarantee cards switch names but have the same address (author's photos 1-3 last page, #95460).
- 1963 The English Besson catalog, published by Bruno, includes the F. Besson trumpet. Mario Marcone, who works for Bruno in NY, visits the Paris factory, which is located at 16 rue du Faubourg, Saint Denis, the same location as Editions Hawkes. The trumpets were being assembled there from parts made by Couesnon. At this time, they decide to switch to valves made by B&H (Marcone). [These valves show up on trumpets with serial numbers in the 100k range (photo 4 last page).]
- 1968 The English Besson catalog from Bruno has the model 125 trumpet by F. Besson as their top model made in Paris.
- 1968 B&H now has full ownership of Besson & Co.
- 1974 Meha #102147 is said by the original owner to have been purchased new in 1974 in New York City. He bought it from his teacher, Roy Stevens, who also used one. Stevens claimed that the company had been sold to a larger manufacturer and that these were the last hand-made ones. [Not sure if he had his facts mixed up on these but Stevens was a student of William Costello, the Besson importer before WWII.]
- 1979 Any remaining Besson production would have ended with the factory fire at Couesnon (Cousenon SA, photo 1). The highest serial numbers found are in the 103k range (photos 2 & 3).
- 1982 The long-dormant F. Besson name is alive again when B&H hires Zig Kanstul to make modern copies. He measures about fifty trumpets and begins production based on these and tools reproduced from the originals saved from Paris. They are introduced for sale in 1983 (*Music Trades*, 1983). [A Kanstul Besson Meha is shown in photo 4.]
- 1992 Kanstul starts production of the International models (Howell). (photos 5 & 6)
- 1998 Kanstul ends production of most Besson models, but new ones were still available later from old stock. He continues to make the Classic and Stamm models (Besson website).
- 2003 The Music Group buys the manufacturing business of B&H (Howell). The Besson designs & tooling are destroyed, and the name is used in a new line of instruments built in India and other locations (Ron Berndt).



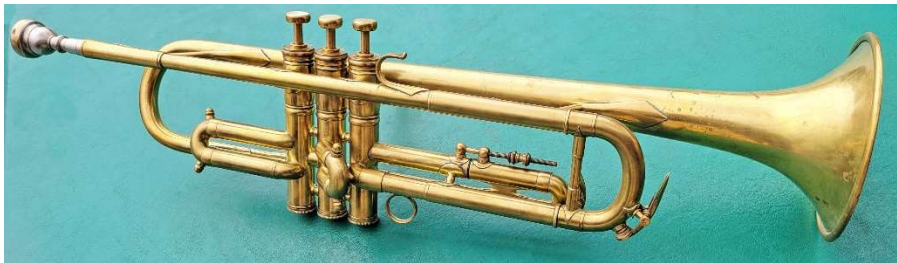
2006 Buffet Crampon buys the Besson name and production is moved to Markneukirchen, Germany (Berndt).

2019 BAC Musical Instruments acquires the records and tooling from Kanstul (Berndt). [There is no mention of the Besson name on the BAC website in 2023.]

Early history is from the *New Langwill Index* unless noted.

Photos are from Horn-u-copia or online auctions unless noted.

#95450 (author's photos below & 2nd on right)



Besson Trumpets in the 1973 Couesnon Catalog.



**F. Besson
Trumpets**

Meha Trumpet
The large bore trumpet that led the trend of modern trumpets—it has been often imitated but never equalled. Available in clear brass lacquer (Model 7900) or silverplate (Model 7901).



Brevete Trumpet
The medium large bore horn which set the standard to which modern trumpets are designed. Available in clear brass lacquer (Model 7904) or silverplate (Model 7905).



#101841 c.1970