

VICTOR-CHARLES MAHILLON AND HIS ANTI-CORNET STRATEGY

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ABSTRACT

The irruption of the valve cornet in the music world of the first half of the nineteenth century has been a milestone in the brass instruments history and is considered by modern scholars to have influenced the technical evolution of the trumpet. But its etymology, its social connotations, and its tone were hardly compatible with the noble character of the trumpet. While finding a place in many orchestras thanks to its playing capabilities, the cornet became the target of some authors who complained about its use as a substitute to the trumpet. In the third quarter of the 19th century, the Belgian maker, acoustician, organologist and museum curator, Victor-Charles Mahillon also feared the imminent extinction of the trumpet in symphony orchestras. That's why he took "strong measures" – as he said in his famous *Éléments d'acoustique musicale & instrumentale* (1874) – to depart from the cornet timbre and to reinstate the trumpet as an important brass orchestral and solo instrument. This paper will detail the strategies used by Mahillon to reach his goal, and the process that led him to develop – like other brass makers of his time – new forms of trumpets, from hybrids between cornet and trumpet to still higher-pitched instruments.