

Hand or Valve (or both): Horn Teaching, Technique, and Technology at the Paris Conservatoire, ca 1840-1903

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This presentation examines the progression of horn teachers, technique, and technology at the Paris Conservatoire between 1840 and 1903. These two dates are significant: 1840 marks the first appearance of a valved horn method by the valved horn teacher at the Conservatoire at the time (Joseph Émile Meifred); 1903 marks the date that François Brémond, horn teacher at that time, convinced the Conservatoire administration to allow him teach valved horn exclusively. This timeframe embraces two worlds of horn playing in Paris, handhorn and valved horn, which were embraced or ignored (and in one case combined) by the progression of teachers. It begins with the imposing figure of Louis François Dauprat, with his monumental Méthode, large following of successful students, and influence as a performer in the Opéra orchestra, extending to the addition of Meifred who developed an affinity for the early valved horn and, through his early performances at the Société des Concerts and Opéra, and his collaborations with horn makers, became the Conservatoire's first professor of valved horn. Dauprat's successors on natural horn, Jacques François Gallay, Jean Baptiste Mohr, and finally Brémond, each composed their own methods and teaching materials, which show approaches at odds with prevailing styles and uses of the horn outside the Conservatoire. As a result, the natural horn maintained a prominent place in the horn teaching at the Conservatoire until the turn of the 20th century. This presentation will elaborate of the individuals and their circumstances, and show musical examples and other evidence of their progress toward acceptance of the valved horn.

Naturel ou piston (ou les deux) : l'enseignement, la technique et la technologie du cor au Conservatoire de Paris, ca 1840-1903

Cette présentation retrace l'histoire de la classe de cor du Conservatoire de Paris entre 1840 et 1930 en s'intéressant au corps enseignant qui l'a dirigée et à son influence sur l'évolution des techniques de jeu et sur les mutations de l'instrument. Les limites chronologiques de cette étude sont importantes : 1840 marque la publication de la première méthode pour cor à pistons, écrite par Joseph-Émile Meifred, alors professeur de la classe ; 1903 est la date à laquelle François Brémond, professeur en titre de la classe, obtient de l'administration du Conservatoire l'autorisation de ne plus enseigner que le cor à pistons. Ce cadre temporel voit se côtoyer à Paris deux familles distinctes, le cor naturel et le cor à pistons, deux univers dont les caractères propres seront plus au moins pris en compte par les enseignants successifs. Cette lignée de professeurs commence avec la figure imposante de Louis-François Dauprat qui, par sa Méthode monumentale, formera une lignée de brillants disciples, et qui marquera durablement de son influence en tant que soliste de l'orchestre de l'Opéra. L'un de ses élèves, Meifred, s'intéressera particulièrement aux premiers cors à pistons. Par son utilisation au sein de la Société des Concerts comme à l'Opéra et par ses collaborations avec des facteurs de cor, il saura promouvoir cet instrument et deviendra le premier professeur de cor à pistons du Conservatoire. D'autres disciples de Dauprat, comme Jacques-François Gallay, Jean-Baptiste Mohr et Brémond, continueront quant à eux à promouvoir, en dehors du Conservatoire, l'usage du cor naturel et de ses techniques de jeu dans leurs différentes méthodes. Cette situation contribuera à maintenir l'usage du cor naturel de façon privilégiée jusqu'à l'orée du XX^e siècle.

My talk today is about the progression of horn teaching, technique, and technology at the Paris Conservatoire from 1840 to 1903. This progression shows a remarkable range of invention and depth of tradition, with horn teachers who were able to exert considerable influence, even when, at times, they seemed out-of-touch with the reality of horn-playing going on around them. But, as Trevor Herbert mentioned yesterday in his opening address, it really represents an interesting progression of value systems at the Conservatoire.

In 1840, the horn situation at the Conservatoire was, arguably, one of the most potent in the musical history of the instrument. Louis François Dauprat was the professor of natural horn and, though only two years away from retirement, still in possession of his full teaching powers. His colleague, former student Joseph Meifred, had joined the Conservatoire faculty in 1833 as its first teacher of valved horn, but horn teaching at the Conservatoire was guided first and foremost by Dauprat's monumental *Méthode de cor alto et cor basse*, first published in 1824, which cast a huge shadow over all pedagogy for the horn¹.



Figure 1 - Louis François Dauprat

Comprehensive in all aspects of technical and musical performance, as well as providing practical advice for composers, performers, and teachers, Dauprat's *Méthode* provided exercises and descriptions that produced intelligent players capable of high levels of artistic performance. The natural horn, divided into *alto* and *basse* designations that identified specialized ranges and technical demands, was seen as having a kaleidoscope of timbral colors, whether in its handstopping or in its crook changes, and composers and performers were encouraged to develop technique that acknowledged and even celebrated this color palette, while achieving even higher sophistication in musical expression.

¹ Louis François Dauprat, *Méthode de cor alto et cor basse* (Paris: Schonenberger, 1824). There are two English translations of Dauprat's *Méthode*: Jeffrey Snedeker, « Dauprat's *Méthode de cor alto et cor basse*, » *Historic Brass Society Journal* 4-9 (1993-1997), and Viola Roth, *Méthode de cor alto et cor basse en trois parties*, facs. ed./English translation (Bloomington, IN/San Diego, CA: Birdalone Books, 1994). See also Gary Greene, « Louis François Dauprat: His Life and Works » (Ed. D. dissertation, University of Northern Colorado, 1970).



Figure 2 – Méthode de Louis François Dauprat

Meifred, a winner of the *premier prix* as a *cor-basse* at the Conservatoire in 1818, was drawn to the valved horn shortly after its arrival in France in the mid-1820s². Meifred's early work with this instrument included several firsts, including:

- His work with instrument maker Jacques Charles Labbayé which resulted in various improvements that won a silver medal at the Industrial Product Exposition in 1827 in Paris. This instrument received a long, thorough, and favorable review by Fétis in *Revue Musicale* in 1828³. Improvements included tuning slides for valves, and re-design of body to allow for a stable valve section and internal crooks.
- The first recorded solo performance of a valved horn in France on March 9, 1828, on the inaugural concert of the Société des Concerts du Conservatoire. (with great reviews from François Fétis in *Revue Musicale*). The piece he performed was his *Premier Solo* for horn and piano, a piece you will hear shortly.

² For a comprehensive look at Meifred's life and work, see my dissertation: Jeffrey Leighton Snedeker, « Joseph Meifred's *Méthode pour le Cor Chromatique ou à Pistons* and Early Valved Horn Performance and Pedagogy in Nineteenth-Century France » (DMA dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1991).

³ Fétis, « Exposition des Produits de L'Industrie, Instruments de Cuivre: Cors à Pistons » *Revue Musicale* 2 (1828), 153-162. See also Snedeker, « Fétis and the 'Meifred' Horn » *Journal of the American Musical Instrument Society* (Fall 1997).



Figure 3 - Joseph Émile Meifred

With Dauprat's guidance and encouragement, Meifred built a strong reputation for himself as a performer, teacher, and innovator, creating a hybrid approach to the valved instrument that both conservatives and progressives could tolerate. His *Méthode pour le cor chromatique ou à pistons* (Paris: Richault, 1840) was a comprehensive description of his hybrid approach, and was key to Meifred's acceptance and eventual success as a player and teacher of the valved horn⁴.



Figure 3 – Méthode de Joseph Émile Meifred

⁴ A thorough examination and English translation of this *Méthode* are provided in my dissertation, *op. cit.*

To summarize the important points of the *Méthode* itself:

- The preference for a two-valved instrument instead of three-identified as the minimum amount of new technology needed.
- Valves can be used as crooking devices, or as a means to provide open and stopped notes for effect on any pitch throughout the range of the instrument.
- Valves also can serve to fill in gaps in the harmonic series to improve intonation and avoid the timbral and technical difficulties of fully stopped notes.
- Leading tones should always be « lightly-stopped », preserving a desirable natural horn characteristic related to color and intonation.
- Melodic direction, chromatic and enharmonic relationships, and dynamic considerations may also influence choices of stopped or open tones.
- Changes in hand and valve can be simultaneous.
- A preference for Horn pitched in F (vs. E-flat preferred by Dauprat).

Meifred also composed most of the *concours* pieces for his students, who included J. L. Antoine Halary, Hubert Massart, Villimain Juvin, C. L. S. Lefebvre, A. C. Cugnot, and Jean Dancla⁵.

When Dauprat retired from the Conservatoire in 1842, his successor, Jacques-François Gallay⁶, another former student and an outstanding *cor alto*, built on Dauprat's work through his own *Méthode pour le cor* (Paris: Schoenenberger, 1845). This method took the natural horn perhaps to its zenith, with demanding exercises and a full range of musical challenges in solos and horn ensemble music that asks the horn and its player to cover three full octaves.

⁵ Throughout this article, references to *concours* pieces and winners are taken from lists provided in Constant Pierre, *Le Conservatoire national de Musique et de Déclamation* (Paris, 1900), and Birchard Coar, *A Critical Study of the Nineteenth Century Horn Virtuosi in France* (Dekalb, IL: self-published, 1952).

⁶ The primary scholarly source for Gallay's life and work is Lisa Emrich, « Jacques François Gallay: Performer, Teacher, Composer; His Approach to Performance as Revealed through Exam Pieces for Natural Horn and Piano » (DM dissertation, Indiana University)



Figure 4 - Jacques François Gallyay



Figure 5 – Méthode de Gallyay

What is most telling in his *Méthode*, however, is that Gallyay would not go so far as even to acknowledge the existence of a valved horn. In fact, he shows a clear bias for the natural horn:

The use of stopped sounds is one of the greatest means of expression that one can utilize on the horn. In the course of this method, I have taken it upon myself to indicate the manner of producing [these sounds] with as much accuracy as possible, and have reserved a special section to speak about their effects. This nuance, this contrast, this opposition in any instance gives music an immense variety and adds inexplicably to its beauty and charm. One must accept here that it is not in the horn's nature to be perfect, although it does have over other instruments a superiority of language belonging only to the horn which no one will contest... Experiments with stopped tones, of which I have not found any examples written for the same purpose, either in former compositions or those of today, have been submitted several times for the appreciation of the public, (fn.: The Fantaisies on les Martyrs, on Straniera, the 9th and 11th solos contain entire phrases where I have intentionally combined the effect of stopped tones.) and I must say that the appreciation with which this musical novelty has been received and the sanction which has been willingly given to it have proved to me beyond question that this innovation has seemed fortunate and in good taste⁷.

In this passage, not only does Gallyay reinforce a bias for the natural instrument, but it is also possible that his reference to a horn not being perfect in nature is a veiled criticism directed at the valved instrument, which was often called « cor perfectionné » by several writers, including his colleague Meifred. Gallyay's strong bias for the natural horn is reinforced in the choices of *concours* pieces during his tenure, all of which he composed himself. His students represent an interesting

⁷ Gallyay, *Méthode*, 90; translation assistance from Coar, *op. cit.*, 94, and Joseph Neisler (unpublished translation of Gallyay *Méthode*, n.d.).

collection of the next generation of players, including Jean Baptiste Victor Mohr, Jean Garigue, and three members of the Bonnefoy family, among many others, for whom the natural horn remained important.

Through the 1840s, Gallay and Meifred performed quite frequently as soloists and in various ensembles, and generally to good reviews. Gallay performed pieces that required extensive hand technique, particularly in the middle and upper ranges of the instrument. Meifred tended to focus on the middle and lower ranges, and received considerable acknowledgement for performances of solos and chamber music on the valved horn.

By the 1850s, interest in military music and its instruments grew, and the Conservatoire eventually, perhaps grudgingly, responded by absorbing the Gymnase musical militaire, and replacing it with a new class for students of military music in 1856. Between 1856 and 1870, classes in saxhorn, cornet à pistons, and trombone à pistons added to the presence of valved instruments there, but there was still evidence that training on these instruments was not perceived the same way as the traditional ones. In 1861, the celebrated cornet soloist Jean Baptiste Arban petitioned to Daniel Auber, the Director of the Conservatoire at that time, to begin a valved cornet class to replace the trumpet class, which had been taught by François Georges Auguste Dauverné since 1833⁸. Dauverné apparently taught natural, slide, and valved trumpet, but was not progressive minded enough to include the cornet, at least in Arban's opinion. The response from Auber was:

*It is true that the valved cornet has become a very useful instrument in the orchestra nowadays and that many composers dedicate an important part to it. However so far, there seems to have been no need to create a special class for the valved cornet at the Conservatoire, since most pupils that follow and graduate from the horn, trombone and trumpet classes, are able to play the cornet in our theatre orchestras and public concerts. Some of them have even become quite famous. Therefore I do not believe that the creation of a class for valve cornets is justified at the moment...*⁹

Thus, one can see that Auber and presumably the Conservatoire administration felt the training received according to existing traditions gave students the foundations needed to pick up other instruments later if they chose. With that in mind, it is confusing that a decision was made to discontinue the valved horn class three years later in 1864, at least in hindsight. Until 1864, both natural and valved horn-playing continued to be well-represented by Gallay and Meifred. In 1864, however, first Meifred retired (October 1) and then Gallay died (October 18), and for some unknown reason on November 1 the Conservatoire administration discontinued the valved horn class¹⁰. The cause in favor of valves was not helped by Gallay's successor. Jean Baptiste Victor Mohr, one of Gallay's former students, was hired as the sole horn teacher a few weeks after Gallay's death. Mohr was an outstanding horn student at the Conservatoire, winning the *premier prix* in natural horn in 1847. In 1853, he joined the Opéra orchestra and served there until 1883. He also took part in the Concerts Padeloup and the Société des Concerts. After becoming professor at

⁸ For some background on Dauverné's teaching and an English translation of his *Méthode*, see Snedeker et al, « Dauverné's *Méthode pour la Trompette* », *Historic Brass Society Journal* 3 (1991): 179-261.

⁹ From a series of articles in *Brass Bulletin* (vols 9-14) by Jean Pierre Mathez, « Jean Baptiste Arban (1825-1889) », *Brass Bulletin* 10 (1975), 14.

¹⁰ ARRÊTÉ d'administration, November 1, 1864. I thank Cyrille Grenot and Claude Maury for providing me with a copy of this *arrêté*.

the Conservatoire, Mohr also created his own method, *Méthode de premier et de second cor* (Paris: Escudier, 1869), devoted exclusively to natural horn.



Figure 6 - Jean Baptiste Victor Mohr



Figure 7 – Méthode de J. Mohr

During this time, Fétis and others continued to try to rally support for what they saw as progress, asserting that valves were among the most important discoveries ever offered to composers, and that France was « toujours en retard » to other countries which had moved forward by adopting valved horns, trumpets, trombones, and substituting bass and contrabass saxhorns for ophicleides. In one article, Fétis suggested this « prejudice » had also affected composers—they either sympathized with the musicians or catered to their egos so their works would be performed properly, if at all, naming Mohr as one of the influential players affecting composer's choices. An example Fétis presented was Meyerbeer's *L'Africaine* which includes two valved and two natural horn parts « so as to not hurt their feelings ». For horns, he further noted that the argument of desirable timbre of the natural horn was no longer defensible, since one could get the same effects with valves over a wider range, recalling Meifred's technique. In the end, Fétis was convinced that makers such as Adolphe Sax had raised the level of valved instruments to a point where they should no longer be excluded¹¹.

This controversy continued for more than twenty years, and included arguments from composers (e.g., Camille Saint-Saëns), critics (e.g., Fétis), players (e.g., Arban), and « modern » instrument advocates (e.g., Henri Chaussier), with subjects ranging from desirable tone to the « proper » use of new technology. Through it all, as a result of Mohr's teaching and apparent influence, it appears that not much changed for horns at the Conservatoire. Mohr, like his predecessors, composed all *concours* pieces up to 1885, then chose pieces by Gallay, Weber, Mengal, and Dauprat, demonstrating a

¹¹ Fétis (père), « De la nécessité de substituer les nouveaux instruments d'Adolphe Sax aux anciens dans les orchestres », *Revue et Gazette Musicale* 32/27 (2 July 1865), 215-216.

clear bias for natural horn. Interestingly, Mohr's students included the next generation of players and teachers of valved horn, including François Brémond, Henri Chaussier, J. L. Penable, Emile Lambert, Louis Vuillermoz, and Fernand Reine.

Mohr's *Méthode* offers clear insight into his bias. It consists primarily of exercises for First and Second horns, with some written descriptions clearly derived from his teacher, Gallay, and even Dauprat¹².

Reading this method, it is as if the valved horn does not exist. Ironically, it was Arban in 1886 who, in response to Saint-Saëns' article in *Le Ménestrel* that mentioned Chaussier which Claude Maury showed us in his lecture earlier today, while trying to convince new Conservatoire Director Ambroise Thomas to endorse a new, improved cornet, made a curious connection between his request and the horn class at the school.

The commission [proposed to consider this new cornet] could at the same time discuss with you the reintegration of the valve horn into the Conservatoire. The class has been discontinued since the death of Meifred, leaving a vacancy that is to be regretted... Nothing would be simpler than to create a mixed class for natural horn and valve horn, led by the same teacher. It is up to you, dear Master, to give the signal of Progress by introducing into the Conservatoire the changes called for by the Modern School¹³.

It is not known to me at this time if the commission was ever formed or acted. What did happen, however, took a few more years to manifest. When Mohr passed away in 1891, his former student François Brémond, was hired as his successor. Brémond (1844-1925) had entered the Conservatoire in 1868 and won the *premier prix* a year later. While at the Conservatoire, he joined the *Théâtre des Bouffes-Parisiens*, and in 1872 joined the faculty of the *École de Musique* at Lyon. In 1875, he returned to Paris to play first horn at the *Opéra Populaire*, the *Concerts du Châtelet*, and later, the *Théâtre de la Gaité lyrique* (1877). In 1878 he became principal horn at both the *Société des Concerts* and the *Opéra-Comique*, remaining with both until 1898 and continuing with the latter a few years longer as second horn. He taught horn at the Conservatoire until 1922. At heart, Brémond was a natural horn player, which was the focus of his training, but like Fétis and Arban saw that the valve horn had supplanted the natural horn everywhere else; as a result, he became the motivating force for the adoption of the modern instrument in France. For the first time since Meifred's retirement, the valved horn reappeared at the Conservatoire in 1897. Brémond phased its adoption over five years, such that it became the official instrument in 1903. In a letter to his friend and former student Reginald Morley-Pegge, Brémond shared how he accomplished this:

My dear Pegge,

The valve-horn class had not been held since 1863, and it was I who asked M. Ambroise Thomas to allow me to hold one valve-horn class every week.

I then got permission for the sight-reading test at the annual public examination to be played on the valve horn (for this the student fitted a detachable set of valves to his instrument in public), and finally both the set piece and the sight-reading test to be played on the valve horn, hand technique being retained for specifically hand-horn phrases.

¹² I thank my friend Michel Garcin-Marrou for providing me with a copy of Mohr's *Méthode*.

¹³ Mathez, « Jean Baptiste Arban (1825-1889) », *Brass Bulletin* 10, 4-5.

*From then on (1897) the valve-horn class was virtually, if not officially, reinstated by me. Hand horn until 1896- hand and valve horn from 1897 to 1902- valve horn since 1903...*¹⁴

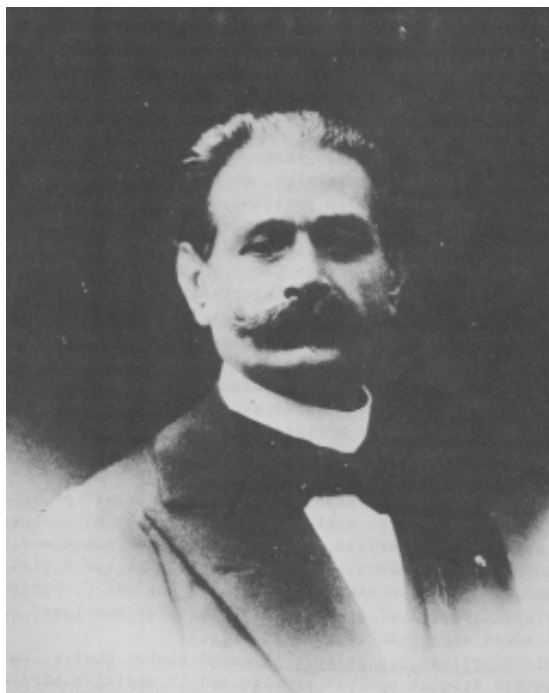


Figure 8 - François Brémont

Brémont remained prejudiced to the natural instrument, however, and, according to Morley-Pegge, used an 1823 Raoux *cor solo* with a detachable set of valves, and extra valve tubes for lower crooks. He also preferred an ascending third valve and his initial influence in using this type of instrument caused it to remain popular in France well into the 20th Century. Morley-Pegge reported that he was left-handed and used that hand in the bell, reasoning (and teaching) that players should finger the valves with the right hand like all other valved brass instruments. Instrument makers, however, remained unmoved by this. Brémont was noted for his magnificent tone, beautiful phrasing, and trills. He warned his students against doing things that were bad for the lip, including smoking, shaving the upper lip (and accompanying « imperial »), and eating fried foods. These very precautions, however, did not prolong his own career; he stopped playing altogether shortly after 1900.

One can see this change in teaching reflected in the progression of *concours* solos during Brémont's tenure, which begin with pieces by Gallay and Dauprat, and, by 1900, include solos by Leroux, Joncieres, Maréchal and Pugno. Later repertoire included Dukas' *Villanelle*, Saint-Saens' *Morceau de Concert*, and works by Henri Busser and Florent Schmitt, all clearly intended for the valved horn. In addition to a few contest solos he composed, Brémont also compiled several books of exercises for study, borrowing from Dauprat, Mohr, and Gallay, and adapting their etudes for the valved instrument.

¹⁴ Reginald Morley-Pegge, *The French Horn* (London, 1973), 5-6.

His most important publication is *Exercices journaliers* for the valved horn (125 pages, Paris: Leduc, 1900) - there is still evidence of natural horn consciousness, but it really is designed for the valved instrument:

- Fingering charts are for three-valved instrument, but includes one for instruments with an ascending third valve and one for those with a descending third valve.
- Fingering charts still make reference to how the valves «crook» the horn into different keys.
- He encourages composers to write for the horn as if they were writing for cello or bassoon - the horn is completely chromatic through full range. Exercises covering three chromatic octaves support this.
- He advocated using E or E-flat crook for younger players (as did Dauprat and Gallay).
- Despite reports of supporting Meifred's use of hand and valves, the only mention of handstopping with valves is to identify a few notes that must be stopped when using ascending 3rd valve instrument, in the lowest part of the range, just like Meifred did with a two-valve instrument.
- He advocated using the right hand on valves - as mentioned before, Morley-Pegge said it was because he was left-handed and wanted that hand in the bell (defending himself with a quote from Dauprat), but there is no mention of that reason here, only that one should use the right hand on the valves.

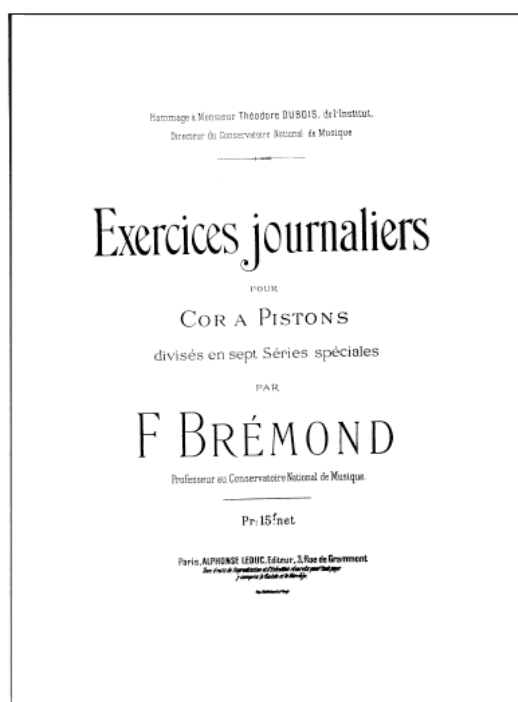


Figure 9 – Exercices journaliers de François Brémont

So, in conclusion, the factors that influenced this progression of horn teaching, technique, and technology from 1840 to 1903 at the Conservatoire ring familiar.

It is clear that the primary forces in maintaining the natural horn as the primary instrument were individuals in positions of influence, namely Dauprat, Gallay, and Mohr. Their biases are evidenced in teaching methods/materials and in *concours* solos chosen. Compromises, for example in the work of Meifred, were allowed if they were clearly connected to natural horn traditions (e.g., using hand « appropriately » or using crooks). Despite the various « real-life » forces at work (e.g., most hornists outside the Conservatoire playing valved instruments due to their practicality or technological advantage, relating to size of orchestration or venue, or popularity) and strong encouragements from the outside to update teaching methods, some would hold to the past, perhaps honorably, in wanting to make sure old repertoire is respected, or simply out of prejudice.

It is clear, however, that these attitudes had a corresponding influence on composers and concert repertoire - some composers were hesitant to write « important » works, like operas and symphonies, that went against these conventions, others were frustrated by inspiring practices heard elsewhere that were not supported in Paris. Likewise, conductors would spare themselves the wrath of the musicians by choosing repertoire carefully and conservatively - this is borne out in the repertoire of concerts at the Société des Concerts and other venues. This fed and perpetuated the apparent « need » of natural instruments, or not needing valved instruments.

In the end, just as Meifred made compromises in joining the old technique and the new technology, the adoption of the valved horn was completed by Brémond's similar compromise almost 70 years after the first valved instruments (and their teachers) were invited into the Conservatoire. While Brémond's accomplishment was a simple act of helping the Conservatoire catch up to the present, however, Meifred's initiative was a look forward to the future. While much indeed was lost as the subtle nuances of handstopping technique fell out of fashion, the contemplation of the mix of open and stopped notes was on the mind of both natural and valved horn players throughout this period.