

# The Brass Herald

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## Vincent Bach Artisan



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# Vincent Bach Artisan Collection

**Philip Biggs**

Last year Vincent Bach launched a ground-breaking range of trumpets which have been given the umbrella title of the Artisan Collection. The collection consists of five different horns and consists of Bb Trumpet, C Trumpet, Eb Trumpet, Combination D/Eb Trumpet and Piccolo Trumpet.

Vincent Bach publicly state that no other brand evokes more passion, loyalty and respect than Bach Stradivarius. Exceptional tonal colour, balanced response and superb projection are the hallmarks of designs by Vincent Bach. Carrying on the legacy and true to the vision of the master craftsman, the makers of today's Bach Stradivarius proudly introduce the Artisan Collection. Skillfully handcrafted, Artisan culminates in a unique blend of classic design, elegant styling and the signature Bach sound.

This is a big launch by one of the major players on the world's brass instrument manufacturing stage, so I was eager to talk to two of Vincent Bach's best about the Artisan Collection - Tedd Waggoner and Jeff Christiana. Here is how our conversation went.

**PB** *Tedd, welcome back to The Brass Herald. It's always a great pleasure to feature you and the Vincent Bach company.*

**TW** Thanks Philip and especially for the opportunity to talk about and discuss our newest trumpet project, the Artisan Collection by Bach

**PB** *Please tell Brass Herald readers the inside story of the new Artisan trumpet range.*

**TW** Sure Philip, but first I feel it's important to understand a bit about where we (Bach) were in the years leading up to the development of the Artisan Collection. When I was offered the position as Director of Bach Operations in the fall of 2006, I truly believed this was a perfect fit. With 36 years of experience with the company, I was able to draw from my own personal experiences in marketing, customer service, manufacturing, artist relations and performance as an active trumpet player. I have spent my entire career dedicated to the understanding and promotion of Vincent Bach and the product of his design.

Significant changes had to be made within the factory, but it was important to do so with a clear understanding of Mr. Bach's vision. I'm happy to report that we truly are hitting on all cylinders

in manufacturing with overwhelming reports coming back from players and the market place that our products have never been better in terms of overall quality and consistency. Had this not been the case, we would never have been able to even consider a project with the scope of the Artisan line. With quality and production now in sync, it was at this point Jeff Christiana, Conn-Selmer's Director of Marketing - Trumpets and Trombones, and I put our heads together and started brainstorming new product ideas which ultimately lead to the Artisan project.



Jeff and Tedd with the Vincent Bach Artisan trumpets.

**PB** *What was the motivation for bringing about this particular range?*

**TW** I've been with Conn-Selmer, Inc (Bach) since late 1972 and have seen my share of ups and downs within the company. That being said, I can never remember going through a more difficult time as we did while in the midst of a labour strike at the Bach plant. Not only was production at a stand-still, but we had to re-assess many of our production methods and re-evaluate the plant lay-out. New product development was the last thing we wanted to talk about. As one can imagine, new products are essential to the success of any company. What was even more critical at the time, we were dealing with the harmful effects of many false rumours in the market, being negatively impacted by aggressive competitors and generally working hard to regain our position in the professional trumpet

market. Never have we tried such an aggressive strategy. Our motivation was to do something that has never before been accomplished to this degree within our company. In addition, we really needed to make a point or statement to the trumpet world that Bach really is the leader in professional trumpets and, in my opinion, the most prestigious name in brass.

**PB** *What does the range comprise of?*

**TW** Rather than introduce a single or succession of limited edition models over a long period of time, we wanted to put together a plan to develop a collection of five new models consisting of a Bb, C, Eb, D/Eb tunable bell and long-bell four-valve piccolo trumpet. To compound the challenge, Vincent Bach had never produced three of these models (Eb, D/Eb, and picc) in these specific configurations, so this would mean development starting from scratch. It was absolutely imperative that all five models be launched at the same time for maximum impact on the market. Believe me, this was no small undertaking and not without much well-deserved scepticism within the company. Any single new product development requires commitment by every facet of a company. It takes substantial time, personnel and financial resources to take a project from conception to launch. Now, take these considerations and multiply them by five! Fortunately, we have a very forward-thinking and committed administration who gave us their full support.

So, roughly two years ago, we put together a very talented team of people and started the development of the Artisan Collection culminating in the launch of the entire line in February 2010 at the Texas Music Educators Association (TMEA) convention in San Antonio, Texas. Since that time, there has been an incredible amount of excitement and interest in the entire line. This truly has been a great project and has resulted in new products that perfectly complement the great line of Bach Stradivarius trumpets.

**PB** *How did the name Artisan come about?*

**TW** At the very inception of this project, our team felt that it was important to highlight the fact that these five models were new and different within the Bach Stradivarius family. There was much discussion within our company and with close "friends" outside of the company



as to possible names for this collection. It should come as no surprise that we really could not reach consensus (seems that there are a lot of folks with strong opinions when it comes to Bach). During this process, we happened to be staring at a sample of the "old-style" Bach case badge (you know the one....the rectangle casting that depicts an "old-world" craftsman at his bench working with a trumpet bell) that was intended to be used on the new case and as part of the new engraving. Then it dawned on us....the craftsman sitting at the bench really is an Artisan! The definition of the word Artisan is "a person skilled at an applied art". Collectively, this made perfect sense as the definition can ideally be applied to both the skilled craftsman on the shop floor making the Artisan trumpets and to the performing artist expressing themselves through the making of music. There you have it.....the birth of the name "The Artisan Collection".

**PB** Do you have a specific group of players in mind for the Artisan?

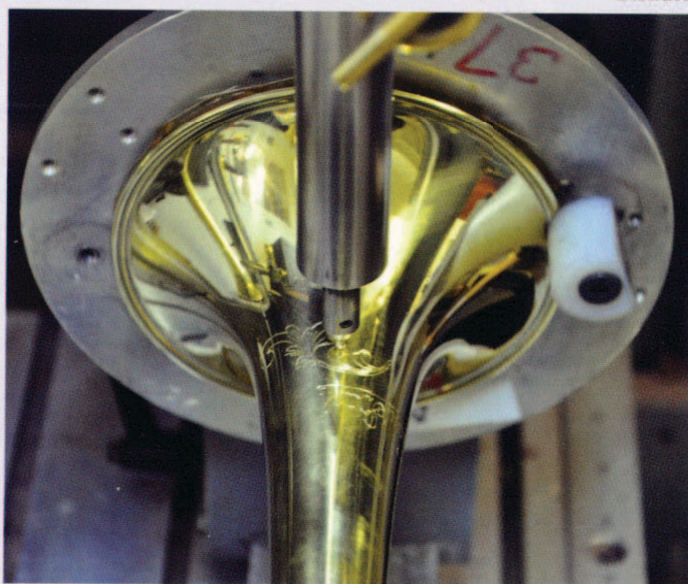
**TW** By their nature, the C, D/Eb, Eb and Piccolo are primarily geared towards classical players. The Bb, on the other hand, is a great all-around horn. Everyone from great orchestral players to screaming high lead players have picked up the horn and love the response, the feel and the colour in the sound. Most recently, we were fortunate to have one of L.A.'s fantastic trumpet players playing the Artisan Bb live on the 2011 GRAMMY Awards. So, my best advice is for a player to get a hold of an AB190 Bb trumpet and give it a test run to see if it's right for them.

**PB** Are there any characteristics which differ from the Stradivarius with the Artisan?

**TW** Basically, the difference is in the construction. We looked at all of the design features used throughout Vincent Bach's career. Trumpets made in New York City, the Bronx, Mt. Vernon and Elkhart, Indiana all had their own unique design elements that contributed to the overall sound and response of those instruments. (Players still scour the Earth in search of Bach trumpets from their favourite era with just the right playing characteristics.) We know that even the smallest changes in component parts, material, construction and design significantly impact how a horn plays. After experimenting with numerous Vincent Bach design elements, we found that the combination found on the Artisan trumpets coupled with a special acoustic treatment of the bells results in a look and feel similar to that of vintage Bach designs, but with great new response characteristics.

**PB** How long have you been in full production with Artisan?

**TW** The five Artisan Collection models were introduced to the market in 2010. While they were introduced as a group, the Bb and C started shipping in May, the Eb trumpet deliveries starting in July and the piccolo in September. The D/Eb was also scheduled to be built in September but as we were getting ready to release the model for production, Jeff and I decided to hold off and rethink the overall construction of this model. Don't get me wrong, it was a good playing instrument as first designed, but we decided to make some significant changes which required us to completely redesign the bell and leadpipe configurations and make new mandrels. The changes we made to this model put it over the top! Because of these redesigns, the D/Eb trumpets just started shipping in January 2011.



Artisan trumpet engraving.

**PB** Is the Artisan range a limited edition or will it be a long term production runner?

**TW** One of the really neat things about the development of the Artisan Collection is that it gives us a great new platform for future development. Without committing to anything specific, we can envision a number of new and exciting products in the world of Bach trumpets, cornets and flugelhorns. And just for the record, we have not forgotten about our trombone playing brethren. You will just have to keep your eye on Bach to see what's next.

**PB** Hi Jeff, it's great to feature you in *The Brass Herald*.

**JC** Hello Philip. As always, it's great talking with you. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to share the Artisan story with the loyal readers of *The Brass Herald*.

**PB** The Vincent Bach Artisan trumpet range has certainly got everyone talking. As usual with Vincent Bach products it sounds a resounding success.

**JC** Thank you very much and yes, these horns have created quite a "buzz" in the trumpet world. It's interesting that you use the phrase "as usual" in your statement when referring to the level of success we are experiencing in the market. Product development at Bach is never taken lightly and we are keenly aware that introducing anything new or different under the Bach brand name requires the utmost care and responsibility. The reason these new models have been successful is that we have painstakingly developed products that remain true to the legacy of Vincent Bach. Basic design elements, dimensions, materials and processes used to make the new Artisan collection are all consistent with those used when handcrafting the entire line of today's Bach Stradivarius instruments. It's interesting that I often get the question 'How is the Bach Artisan trumpet better than other Bach Stradivarius models?' First and foremost,

you have to keep in mind that the Artisan is a Stradivarius trumpet. Our goal was not to build a better Stradivarius, just a different one. By design, all five models complement one another and are characterised by a quick response, a warmth and presence all around the horn, a broader spectrum of tonal colour and great projection. All of this is experienced within the signature core Bach sound.

**PB** Who was involved with the development of the trumpets?

**JC** It was truly a team effort. Experienced craftsmen, design and process engineers, tool makers, testers, operations management, graphic designers,

marketing specialists and prominent teachers and players brought years of experience and expertise to the project. We were also very fortunate to have the support and guidance of long-time Bach artist Michael Sachs, principal trumpet with The Cleveland Orchestra. When we put the initial plan together for the development of the Artisan Collection, we felt that it would be critical to have the involvement of an extremely talented artist to assist in the acoustical design of these instruments. Michael has been a Bach endorsing artist his entire career and is truly among the top in the world of classical trumpet. This was extremely important, as four out of the five new models are specifically geared towards classical players. During the development process, it was clear that Michael would prove to be invaluable asset in the acoustic development of these instruments. His professionalism, his approach to playing, his concept of sound, his ability to discern subtle differences when experimenting with changes, his critical eye and his



ability to express himself in both meaningful and (most importantly) helpful ways, were perfect for guiding us to the end result. It is also no small side-note to tell you that Michael is one of the most knowledgeable and passionate Bach enthusiasts that I have ever met. His broad understanding and appreciation of the history and development of Vincent Bach, both the man and the designs, played a key role in this development. Michael's extensive experience playing more "vintage" Bach trumpets allowed us to establish a "stake in ground" or basis for comparison when testing prototypes in terms of overall response, colour, breadth and projection. All of these attributes combined were really perfect for the scope of this project and we are very proud that he was part of the Artisan "team".

**PB** *What are the major characteristics that are unique to the Artisan horns?*

**JC** We experimented with various construction techniques and component parts from various eras in Vincent Bach's development before finalizing the design of the Artisan trumpets. Although some think that the component parts used on the Artisans were for cosmetic reasons, this could not be farther from the truth. If these component parts did not give us the desired results in playing characteristics, trust me, we would not have used them. As you know, when playing trumpet, it is "alive" and vibrating in your hands. It is responding to the players input by providing feedback, resistance, response, tone colour and projection resulting from the sum total of the materials, tapers, dimensions, finishes, construction, component parts and overall design. In short, any variation in materials, manufacturing processes, or design can have a significant impact on the playing characteristics of any horn. So, looking at the Artisan trumpets from a vintage perspective, you have two-piece valve casing with nickel silver and brass casings, wider sculpted "S" braces, hex-shaped pull knobs and bracing, convex radius or rounded connecting ferrules, a 1st slide spit thumb ring, brass valve guides along with an extra set of plastic, brass inner/nickel-silver outer slide tubes and a flat bell bead. We experimented with many different components before deciding on these. What you see on the Artisan horns are those components specifically picked for their contribution to the overall response and playing characteristics based on their specific size, shape, weight, mass and placement. Change any one of these and you change the way the horn plays.



Jeff and Tedd refer to Mr Vincent Bach's original drawings.

**PB** *Are the production processes different regarding the production of the Artisan?*

**JC** You would be amazed by the number of players who come to the Elkhart to pick out a horn and tour the plant who are surprised to see just how much hand work goes into building a Bach Stradivarius trumpet. Throughout the factory, you find many experienced craftsmen (both men and women) performing very detailed and labour intensive work in critical areas such as bell fabrication, bell spinning, mounting, buffing, lacquering, final assembly and testing. Most of these processes are virtually the same for all Stradivarius trumpets. That being said, there are a few key differences in the production of the Artisan models. We have established a separate production line in the mounting cell area (where we solder together all of the basic component parts) due to the unique construction of the Artisan Models. There is more time and hand work required in the mounting process. Also, there are differences in both process and materials in bell fabrication that ultimately contribute to the unique response and tonal characteristics of the Artisan horns.

**PB** *I believe there is a new case for the Artisan with some exciting new features.*

**JC** This was a very important part of the project development process. From the start, it was our intention to offer both the Bb and C trumpets as standard outfits in double cases. That being said, having played trumpet for the better part of 40 years now, I have had the opportunity to try most double cases on the market and felt that there were key improvements that could be made. We started working with a very talented group of engineers from a well respected case manufacturer on the interior layout and design. Our goal was to have a great new line of cases that have the classic Mt. Vernon Stradivarius look on the outside, but have incredible new and functional internal designs.

All of the case nests use modern materials such as soft micro-fibre fabric and high-density foam. They are extremely functional and provide maximum protection. In the double case, the trumpet sits absolutely level in the case and is suspended by the bell flare and bell tail. The bottom of the valve casing doesn't touch the bottom of the case. The valve casing fits between a padded "slot" that prevents the horn from "rocking" side-to-side. Any size trumpet, including short and long bell piccolos

will fit securely in this system. Storage for mouthpieces and accessories is found in a closed compartment in the divider with a lid and snap. Special mouthpiece rings allow for any size trumpet mouthpiece including those that have extra mass below the rim such as Bach Megatone and other popular mouthpieces. Special closed compartments with zippered pouches hold all of the extra slides and tuning crooks on the Eb and D/Eb models, while the piccolo case has individual slots for mouthpieces and the set of four mouthpipes. Sorry for the long explanation, but I really do feel the Artisan cases truly offer the best in form and function. There is as much interest and enthusiasm about the cases as the horns!

**PB** *I'm sure there will be great interest and excitement about the Artisan at the upcoming ITG Conference.*

**JC** I couldn't agree more. We will certainly be there with a entire range of Artisan trumpets along with a full complement of Bach Stradivarius trumpet, cornet and flugelhorn models. Shows such as the ITG conference provide trumpet players of all ages a really wonderful and unique opportunity. In addition to experiencing all of the incredible recitals, concerts, clinics and master classes given by world-class professionals, players get a chance to test and compare any numbers of horns during their time in the exhibit halls. I would invite any and all players attending the 2011 ITG conference in Minneapolis to come by the booth, say hello, and see for themselves why we feel that Bach Stradivarius trumpets are truly remarkable instruments.

**PB** *I very much look forward to being with you in Minneapolis at the ITG, Jeff.*

**JC** Thank you Philip. Be sure to come by the display so that you too can get an up-close and personal look at the new Bach Stradivarius Artisan Collection.

**PB** *Thanks so much Tedd and Jeff for such an enlightening interview on this exciting new range of trumpets from Vincent Bach.*