

# LUTHIERS SANS FRONTIÈRES UK

## HAITI 2019 - MISSION REPORT

**SPONSOR : AUBERT LUTHERIE  
DICTUM  
POLLINATION PROJECT**

Registered UK charity no: 1168809

### Introduction :

Summer 2019 has been the eighth LSF-UK mission to Haiti since 2008 and this project keeps growing and meet the same success year after year. For eleven years now, LSF-UK has been training several luthiers from different music schools in the country, and until now, going back every year to the different local music camps for the past five years. We can evaluate part of the project's progress by seeing the students coming back to the course : this year we had six luthiers coming back every year since 2015, one since 2016, four since 2017, two since 2018 and one new luthier representing a new school. Obviously their working skills is improving a lot for most of them and this is why we tried to push a bit more on more advanced and precise repair and set up this year.

Thanks to a successful fund-raising campaign this year and a 1000 USD grant from the Polli-nation Project, we could buy more specific and quality tools for the Haitian luthiers.

Just as a reminder and to put things into context, the situation of the country this year has been quite challenging and disrupted our teaching plans as I will explain further down. It has been in the continuation of the protests starting at the beginning of last summer, related to fuel prices and the government's corruption. Things have only gotten worse since.

Julie Folio and Svavar Garri Kristjánsson planned on teaching at the Ste Trinité music camp this year again, but this time, only for the last two weeks as we were not available before and in order to spend one more week together at the Jacmel's music camp before Garri's depar-ture. But that was the first impact of the political situation on our summer and all the camp's dates have been moved one week forward, and as we already booked our tickets, Garri's three weeks stay were now matching the Sainte Trinité three weeks music camp. So, now again, exactly as last year, we spent the three first weeks together at this first camp, then Julie went to Jacmel for a month, then to Marmelade, Cap Haitien and Petionville. It's been hard to organise things differently than last year to see other areas/schools as accommodation is not always possible to get. Now, sit back and enjoy the reading.



## Personnel :

Svavar Garri Kristjánsson, luthier employed at Tim Toft Violins, Stone, UK. (15.07.2019 - 04.08.2019)

Julie Folio, luthier in France (15.07.2019 - 25.09.2019)



## Cost :

Air fares and train : £1600  
Equipment purchased : £1530

Living expenses : £192  
Marmelade camp : £500

## Ste Trinité music camp (15.07.19 - 4.08.19) :

We landed in Port au Prince on the 15th of July, early afternoon and went straight away to the camp, less than an hour drive. This year, the camp was actually in the capital. It was supposed to be at the same location than last year but the school organising that camp decided to change area a few days before because of block road risks on the way to Mirebalais. We stayed in an important facility, I think it was a school so there was a lot of classroom that were used for teaching and also used as bedrooms for all the students. Our accommodation was in the priest's house where we were sharing three rooms for about 20 volunteers.

On the first day, we unpacked all the tools and equipment we had in our new workshop (one of the classroom) with the students' help, we organised the working space and started working straight away. We started with assessing every instruments that our students brought, restoring some



of their tools and making some double bass and cello closing clamps. The start of this camp was a bit slow : again, because of the many protests early 2019, the school year has been rescheduled and, mid-July, some of the students still had classes and exam to pass. We only had six students during the first days.

Although it went really well as we really had time to spend with them and we could check their level and how much they've been working this past year.

This year again, we asked Blume Haiti not to bring any new luthier students : this decision is the result of what happened in 2017. As we had 18 students, we couldn't teach everybody at the same time so we were in the obligation to make groups. Also, it is really difficult to equip that many workshops for now. And the last reason is that we want the Haitian luthiers to train the new generation or school that needs it.



We agreed to have one new student (from Hinche) that a Canadian organisation was giving tools to and he also had a quick lutherie experience with Tchoupy before. Little by little, we had more students coming back to our class as they finished school, at the end there were eleven of them. This year again, we were really amazed by the students motivation ! They came to work and they were really hungry for it ! In about two days there were so many things done : a fingerboard wedge, some crack repair, peg bushing and set ups. We even started the bow work later as we were overwhelmed by all the restoration work to teach.



The rest of the camp went really well, in the same atmosphere, much work surrounded by music ! Some of our big projects this year were making fingerboard wedges and a new cello button and button patch but also, as we were short on bridges (small violin sizes) we actually had to make them from a piece of maple we brought. Plus the rest as usual : bow repair/rehair, crack repair, new bridge and soundpost, broken necks and scrolls, peg bushing, retouch (finally !!), new peg holes to drill, etc...

And again, during this camp, students were helping each other out, teaching the less experienced ones.

Therefore, they really do respect each other work and share everything they know with the others. They really do not understand the «keeping trade secret» thing and that's one of the things we are really proud of.

A warm (really warm) and happy three weeks with good results, a last day at the swimming pool, Garri flying away, and a final concert concluding the camp.





## Jacmel music camp (5.08.19 - 25.08.19)

On the Monday, we drove to Jacmel with a few other volunteers. Janet Anthony (President of Blume Haiti) joined us there as she couldn't get to Haiti before that. I stayed in the same house that the previous year, an old wooden Haitian house, 3 minutes walk to the music school. We had really nice meals, the kitchen ladies were taking good care of us, and we didn't have as much trouble with the water quantity (for showering) than the previous year. The atmosphere in the city was a bit different than the last time I came, I felt. The places I used to go to/visit last year were now closed or always empty..

We started the music camp, happening in the school, the next morning. I worked with Gina the whole day and she told me that there will be some more students (one or two) from the school joining us in the workshop. By the end of the first week, there were four more students which is a total of six people in the tiny workshop. This situation was really complicated, I couldn't check on Gina's progress because I had to focus on four beginner that didn't know anything about violin (even as an instrument), there were not enough tools for everybody (as I gave most of the tools away at the previous camp), and there was not enough space for me to be in the workshop, I actually had to stand outside and wait for someone to call me for advice/help and couldn't really check how people were working.

I really couldn't teach, and we couldn't use more space as the roof was used for rehearsal most of the day. But my main question



was : «why does the school needs five luthiers ?». So just before the weekend, I got to talk with Stefani (director of the school), she explained to me that they want to have as many luthiers trained as possible because Gina needs help and they never know who they can trust enough to stay at the school and actually do the job. I explained that Gina could teach people during the whole year and that I prefered teaching two more luthiers properly so they could learn more instead of four in those conditions.



I've been teaching Gina and two other students the next two weeks. It was a really good group, and again, really helping each other with the little they knew which was really encouraging. It's mainly been some set up (bridge, soundpost, pegs) and bow work as it was the more urgent, but having them doing the same work over and over has been really good practice. On the last day, one of the new student did a PERFECT violin soundpost in 10 minutes ! Happy him and happy me !

I realised that teaching during this camp is challenging sometimes because all the students are coming to the workshop all the time for anything : changing a string, instruments and bow cleaning, bow rehair, get some rosin on their bow, it never stops so it feels like working in a hurry, which is what happens, mostly, when you work during a music camp. It's just not ideal when you want to teach and especially teaching more

advanced things. Although, it might be difficult to have instrument's maintenance during the rest of the year as the students might not be in school at the same time than Gina.

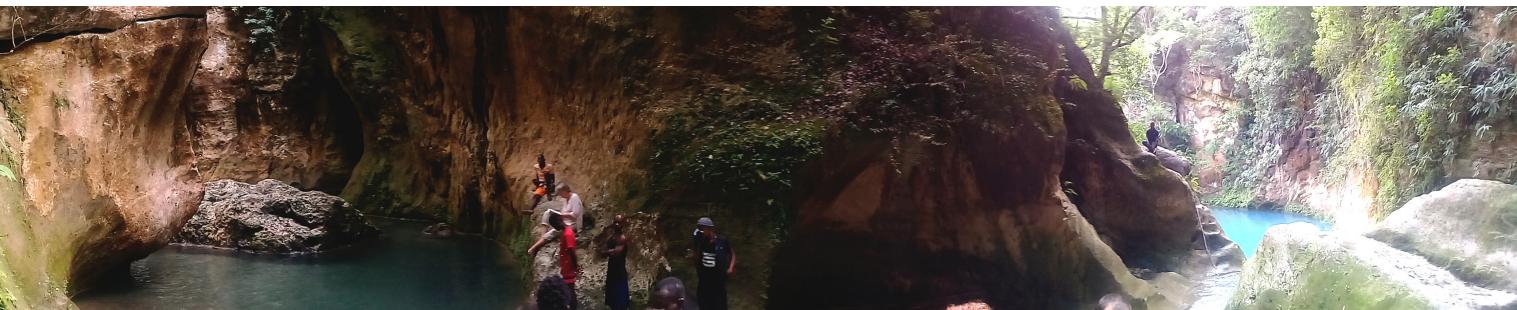
During those few weeks, Wilbens (director of the Marmelade music school) was around and we talked about the camp he was organising for his school very soon. He really needed the luthiers to come to his camp as many of his school's instruments needed repair. It was too much work for him and Ronaldo (the other luthier in Marmelade) because they are also music teacher during the year. His main issue about organising the camp was money. He managed to get some help from Blume Haiti but it would not cover for the luthier's accommodation, food and transport. This is why I requested to use part of LSF-UK Haiti's budget for this purpose.

Another thing, during one day, with Janet,



we travelled to the Port au Prince to «collect» a shipment that was sent by Blume Haiti to Haiti several months ago (a year or two). The container, full of music sheets, instruments and instrument accessories, was held by US customs all this time, so I came along to assess the condition of the string instruments. For the worst ones, they got friendly with a rat family or two, some others had the

neck unglued as the instruments were still about full tension when they were sent, a few of them had broken scroll or cracks (from before mostly) and some others just needed adjustments. The ones I picked for repair were also gonna be work projects for my last week in Jacmel and the next in Marmelade. The camp ended with a concert, a buffet and



a dance and it was time for me to say a last goodbye to all the volunteer staff from Blume Haiti and other foreign teachers who were going back to their home the next day. It was still another week for me to spend in Jacmel.

*École de Musique Dessaix-Baptiste*  
*Certificat*  
*Honneur et Mérite*

Décerné à: FOLIO JULIE

*En signe de remerciement et de reconnaissance pour le travail exceptionnel réalisé en tant que professeur de LUTHÉRIE pendant le grand camp d'été de musique 2019.*

*Fait à Jacmel, le 21 Aout 2019*



*Janet Anthony*  
Janet Anthony  
coordonatrice du grand camp d'été de musique

## Jacmel after camp - one more week (26.08.19 - 1.09.19)

This is when the «fun» part starts.

Just after the camp, the school was empty. No more students around, empty rooms, and silence. The house I was staying at was also going to be empty. As there were no more volunteers, I had to go to the «Cuban house» to eat : this is the place where the south americans music teachers stay.

So to make things more interesting, we invited two luthiers, Kervins (from les Cayes) and Remy (from the Ste Trinité school), thanks to Blume Haiti who paid for their stay. They were staying at the same house that I was in.



So as the school was empty, we could avoid working in the oven-workshop and use the roof space. Gina was mainly working on set ups for practice and to make sure she could really teach the basics to others of her school. Meanwhile, Kervins and Remy started doing all the big work on the container's instruments and some of the school's ones that we didn't have time to work on yet. The two other students from Jacmel were assisting them and watched carefully how things had to be done and had their own repair project on the side. When everybody was focused on their own work, I challenged myself with making a new C-rib on a violin.

The last two days of the camp or so, there was no electricity in the city. It might have been even longer but I didn't realise it as the school has its own system (solar panels I think). But this system stopped working a bit before the weekend and starting working again about a week later. So no electricity in the school, or in any houses, hottest summer ever in Haiti (or wherever), no fan, difficult. I was going to a hotel early mornings to charge my phone for 30 minutes every day, paid some guy in the street so he could charge my phone with his generator, that was something else.

By the end of the week, we had a day of electricity in the school, and all the instruments were ready for the Marmelade week. But fun isn't over yet. During a few days, we organised our journey to Marmelade with Wilbens (back to Marmelade by the end of the Jacmel camp) and Stefani. Things were not so easy but in the end, we got our driver from Jacmel to Port au Prince and an other one from there to Marmelade. On the Sunday, the day we were leaving, everything packed, a last coffee at the hotel for their electricity and a phone call from Stefani. «The driver couldn't find any gas yesterday night, and now he is not answering».



That's about when I realised that the situation of the country was getting really bad and that was only gonna get worse for the rest of my stay. Anyway, we panicked a bit as this all journey organisation had been really complicated and we couldn't miss our driver in Port au Prince, but in less than 30 minutes, Stefani got us some random driver from public transport and we could leave almost on time.

On the long way to Marmelade.



## Marmelade music camp (01.09.19 - 8.09.19)

After about seven hours drive across the country, we finally arrived in Marmelade, little «cold» paradise in the northern mountains. The camp took place in the same facilities than the summer 2018, I was staying in the «bamboo house» with the Haitian staff and the luthiers.

The organisation of the camp was a little different than the previous year, as there has been less funding, the students (musicians) had to get food back in town or home but because all the luthiers and myself were staying on site, it didn't affect us.

Five luthiers joined the course that week, one of them couldn't make it at the Ste Trinité camp and an other one, only for a week, this is also why I wanted to give them more training.

The week went really well, quite far from the city, any city, so really calm, but strong protests started in Port au Prince at the beginning of the week. One of the two phone company of the country was down for 24 hours but this is about the only way that the country's situation affected us.



We managed to finish all the instruments from Blume Haiti, the ones we've been given by the Marmelade school and students and most of the ones that the luthiers brought with them.

There is still no actual workshop for the school (refer to the 2018 report) but the new plan is having the workshop at Wilbens' house which is under construction. He's extending his living area and a room will be the new lutherie working space. Living about 5 minutes walk from the music school, it seems like a good compromise.



It's been really hard and quite sad to leave this place once again, and actually say goodbye to most of the people that I will not see again that summer. We had a last day visiting the town and its market, the workshop to be, and went back to the camp for the final concert. The Marmelade orchestra is really amazing ! The musicians, no matter how young they are, are so passionate and motivated, therefore, their progress is visible. Also, I'm used to see people listening to loud music on massive speaker during parties, every kind of modern music on which you can dance or move your head, a lot. In Marmelade, they had the big and loud speaker on the last night when most of the students had left, but they played some Tchaikovsky, dancing like pretending they were the actual musicians or conductor. Great.

Monday is departure day, back to the city and hot weather. Goodbye Marmelade. Hello Cap Haitien.





## Cap Haitien (9.09.19 - 15.09.19)

It's been a long bumpy dusty road in a tap tap but eventually I arrived at the music school early afternoon, welcomed by Tchoupy and some of his luthiers students. We talked about what was to do and where his apprentices were at, work-wise, what they needed to learn from me the most. After a little time, Spence (director of the Cemuchca music school) brought me to the place I would be staying at. It was in a little building, 5 minutes walk from school, where many families were living. On the first floor, a really nice family had a room for me. It was nice to actually live with Haitian people, in an Haitian family, being part of their everyday life. Even as a guest, it felt like truly living the Haitian life.

On the first evening, it rained. People were so excited, they all came out in the street with hundreds of buckets to collect as much water as they could. It hadn't been raining for 4 months. I had my everyday bucket shower thanks to that big rain I guess.

I started the class the next day. We glued many open seam, started a big crack repair job on a cello and a new bridge with four students. I think it was on the second day, I went home for lunch and Tchoupy called me not long after I was gone to tell me not to come back because protests started in the city and all the students had to go home as early as possible. On the third day, I've been waiting about one hour for some of the student to show up, some came later.



Back to context : for the past few weeks, it was getting harder and harder to find gasoline in the country, at some point, during that week, you could only find it at the black market for a crazy amount of money. With every kind of consequence we can imagine, the price of public transport (the ones who could still find gas) increased a lot.

So some of Tchoupy's students, that morning, couldn't find or pay any motorcycle or tap tap to come to the school and had to walk for two hours. And they were going back the same way in the evening.

In the end, for some of them, working days were getting quite short which was a shame. We didn't manage to finish the big repair project but I wrote for them everything they had to do. They managed to do some soundpost, bridge work and some other quicker repair.



Regarding the music school and the violin repair school, the building work is still in progress, so nothing new for now. From what I understand, Music Fund is planning another trip to Cremona for Tchoupy really soon (2020?)

The week went really quickly and I left Cap Haitian by bus to go to my final destination : Petionville.

## Pétionville (15.09.19 - 25.09.19)

In the afternoon, I arrived at the bus station in Port au Prince where Remy was picking me up to go to Petionville with a driver. There were road blocks on fire on the road, we managed to go around but the driver was scared that he would no have enough gas to go back home. We arrived well in the school where Remy left me with the school's custodian living here with his family.

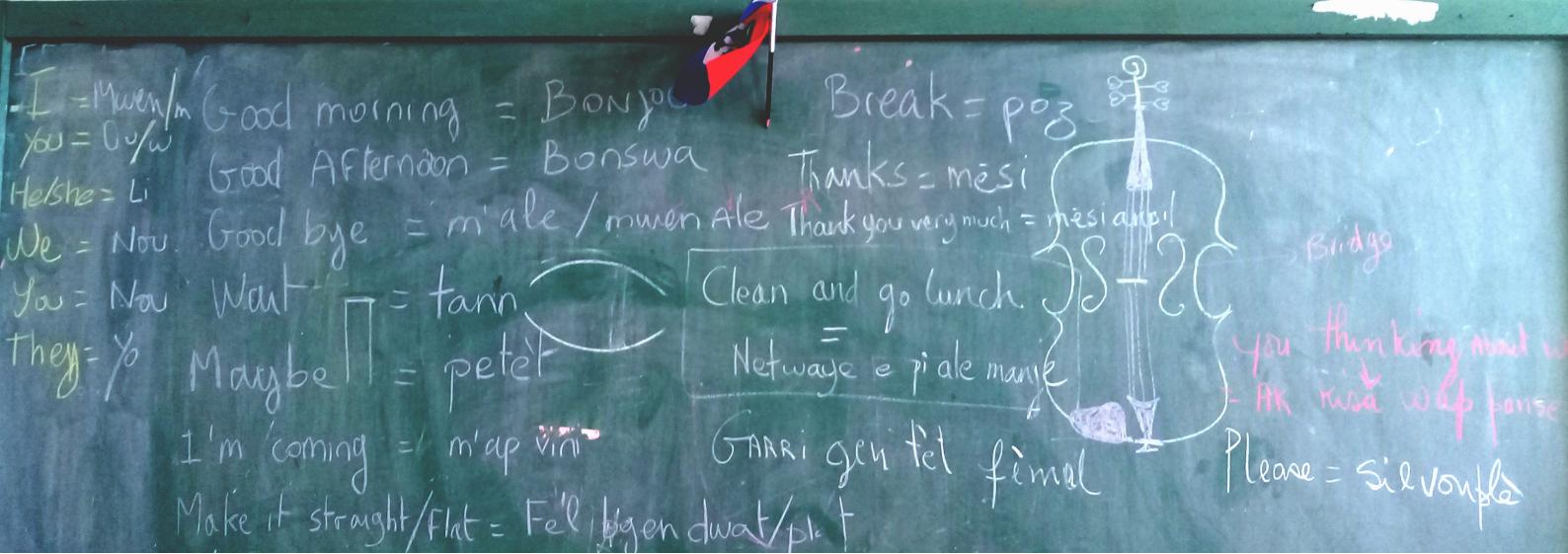
On the next day, Monday, nobody showed up at the school, no teacher, no administration staff and no students. On that day, after weeks of tension, protests and a general strike started and still didn't end to this day. People were confined in their home, either scared to go out because of the violence, or because there was actually no way to get any kind of transport (or for a lot of money). The school's guardian was making food for me or was going out sometimes to get me some street food and water. So until Thursday, I couldn't do any work, or anything else outside the facility, the place was covered in soot because of the fires nearby, I could hear gun shots time to time and people panicking in the streets when they were not empty. Not an easy situation.

On the Thursday, the lady who had the workshop keys came in as she needed to come to the city to try to find water to drink for her family. Remy managed to come to work for a bit but he had to go home early as he had to walk back and wanted to avoid protests as much as possible. So we did work on the Thursday, Friday, Monday and Tuesday. We mostly did work on all the rental instruments from the school to get them ready for the start of the school year so we only did some set ups, little crack repairs and raised elevation on a few instruments. We did try to go out on a calm morning to go buy some turpentine at the art shop just a few minutes away from the school but obviously it stopped being calm when we arrived there and we had to run back as the

police was firing tear gas (hopeful guess) in the next street.

It's been a really short and hard time to do any other work, some other students were supposed to come to the workshop classes during this time but it was difficult or impossible for them to come to the school. On the Wednesday, I left the school really early morning to make sure I would avoid any road block or protest and any kind of danger. I arrived well, the airport was full : people trying to leave to country, people who couldn't travel the previous day as the airport was closed because of a fire (I really didn't think I was going to make it home at this point), a lot of stressed and irritated people. Leaving Haiti in those condition was very strange, a mixture of fear, sadness, guilt and relief.





## Summary and recommendations :

- This year, some of the students talked to us about the fact that they are a bit worried about their working conditions : some of them do not get paid and do a lot of work for their school and they just don't know how long they will be able to do this. They all need money to live and they really love repairing instruments, this is why they don't leave but they feel like their work is not really appreciated to its true value. I am not sure what we can do about that, how to encourage the schools to compensate the luthiers' work as they don't all have money to do so (especially for the free schools).
- We really want to start working on a «pairing workshop» project in Haiti where European/US/or other workshops will sponsor/adopt an Haitian workshop. That would result in tool/equipment donation, help and advice with projects on video calls and hopefully, maybe some work experience. This way, the lutherie project in Haiti would last and allow every students and workshops to learn from different people and to have their own supplier. I am preparing an online survey for workshop's holder to make sure of what we can expect from this project.
- Returning to Haiti is something that we both (Garri and Julie) wish will happen but I would not suggest any trip back there as long as things don't get better politically and get stable again, as sad as it is to say so.
- A question about «using» the Haitian luthiers to do LSF's mission in their area. A few students really stood out this summer and we realised that, except for some things they've never done, they are completely independent work-wise. So I was just wondering if they could teach during one of the LSF's mission (in but also out of Haiti) with one of the regular volunteer if there's a need somewhere close enough. A smaller cost for air fares, a chance for them to improve as they will teach, but they would also give more appropriate advice and have a closer way of thinking or doing things in that region. Let's say if they go teach anywhere else in the Caribbean, Central America, environment and climate is pretty much the same, the fact that you cannot find all the things you need to do the work or don't always have the appropriate tools. We know how our students always manage to make things work using their creativity in the workshop and this resourcefulness is needed and contagious. Just a thought.

## Conclusion :

We pretty much said those things before but this project is a success, really. All those students who came, year after year, getting better, more interested, with more question and more interesting personal project every year as they get more confident, all of this is the result of years of work from LSF UK in Haiti.

Sadly, the situation of the country is not allowing us to think about what's coming next, if we can plan another mission and when. But we, today, see an end coming to this project as a regular, yearly trip and the pairing project might be the way to close it and make sure that there will still be teaching and donation going there.

Thanks to the Ste Trinité Music School for the organisation of the July music camp and all the schools for welcoming Julie and the luthiers after that : Ecole Dessaix-Baptiste, Ecole de Musique de Marmelade and Cemuchca. Thanks to LSF-UK and of course Blume Haiti for organizing and supporting our luthiers and project in Haiti.

Thanks to all donors, supporters and sponsors including : Dictum, Aubert Lutherie, Tim Toft Violins, Newark students, our friends and family and a special thanks to the Pollination Project for their grant.



Further information and previous mission's report can be seen at :

<http://lsf-uk.org> // <http://lutheriehaitihsf.wordpress.com>

Further inquiries to [info@lsf-uk.org](mailto:info@lsf-uk.org)