

LUTHIERS SANS FRONTIÈRES UK HAITI 2018 - MISSION REPORT

OFFICIAL SPONSOR : AUBERT LUTHERIE
DICTUM

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Introduction :



The first time luthiers have been travelling to teach in Haiti is when local music schools asked for their students to be trained to take care of the donated instruments. There were very few instrument repairers in Haiti and musicians couldn't afford to stop using some instruments because it broke or needed new set up. Instruments in Haiti are rare and still valuable, therefore they need to be taken care of. Ten years after the first LSF's mission to Haiti, things have changed considerably. To this day we can actually count about ten Haitian Luthiers spread throughout the country that we've trained and who have the skills to work independently on instruments. Most

of them have participated to the LSF-UK training for the past four years, regarding the newest students they've partly been trained by LSF's volunteers but also by the Haitian luthiers. This summer 2018 is the fourth one in a row that LSF-UK has been sending volunteers : Julie Folio and Svavar Garri Kristjánsson went back in July to teach at the Ste Trinité music camp for three weeks and as Garri flew back to the UK at the beginning of August, Julie stayed until the end of September teaching in more schools and visiting the different workshops of the country. This report will be organised regarding the different areas visited during our stay.



Personnel :

Svavar Garri Kristjánsson, luthier employed at Tim Toft Violins, Stone, UK. (09.07.18 - 31.07.18)
Julie Folio, luthier. (9.07.18 - 25.09.18)

Cost : (approximate)

Air fares : £1600

Equipment purchased : £790

Living expenses : £335

Equipment :

About 70kg of tools and supply, we had donation collected by LSF-UK from Dictum, the Soundpost UK, Aubert Lutherie and from different violin makers and repairers. But as the students start to have all the basic tools usually donated (like chisels, files etc...) we had to buy more of the specific tools for repair which are more expensive and rarely donated.

Sainte Trinité music camp 10.07.2018 to 30.07.2018



As the camp was suppose to start on the 9th of July 2018, we planned on arriving on the Tuesday 10th in Port au Prince and starting working the next day but things didn't go as expected. The weekend before our departure from London, lot of protests and demonstrations started to take place all over Haiti because of a price hike on fuels. Several flights cancelled from different airlines, different embassies asking their citizen to not go to Haiti or to stay inside for safety etc... Therefore we were not sure about travelling to Haiti for our safety. But after much talking and news checking (and a excellent knowledge of strike and protest thanks to French experience) we then assumed that there should be no danger travelling there, staying in contact with our local friends and already-on-site volunteers, following their instructions and travelling places and times that were safe.

When we finally arrived, things were pretty quiet in the capital, on our way to Petionville from the airport, not many people in the street, or only the

ones focusing on the French-Belgium football game.

We stayed a night in Petionville with few volunteers from Blume Haiti (some of them had to cancel their trip due to the protests situation) waiting for someone to inform us if the road to the camp was clear and safe and we drove there the next day. From there, we actually couldn't work until the next Monday as students and teachers were still stuck in the Cemuchca music camp as their were road blocks.

So everything really started on the Monday 16th. Thirteen students intended the course at the Ste Trinité camp (including three new ones). The camp took place near Mirebalais, about 37 miles from Port-au-Prince. The camp was divided in three areas : a camp were volunteers would eat and sleep, an other one (15min drive away) were all the work was taking place (music and lutherie) and a last one (5min walk away) were the students were sleeping.



There was no real space to set up a workshop as we couldn't have a room where we could store tools safely so some cabinet makers (there was a workshop in the building) built us a wooden room in a day, with a lock and everything so we could store things inside and work outside.

We started our teaching by checking our student's tools, their condition, sharpening, marking them, assessing the instruments and bows they brought for repairs, reviewing our students knowledge by putting them in little groups and let them take measurements, and write lists of what to fix and change on those instruments.



Then we could start the repair work. Like the previous year, Garri mainly taught bow rehair and repair, amazingly as most of the students can now rehair a bow without damaging them, properly and really quickly (one hour or so), really professional. When he had some time and at the point we had to stop the bow work as the instrument work was getting really important and the end of the camp coming, he helped Julie teaching instruments repairs and set up.



This year, the work (the teaching part) felt really easy as the students are now more experienced. We would explain a job to one student and regarding their understanding and the result of their work we would then use this student to explain this job to another when needed so there was no more risk of misunderstanding due to the language as well. It gave us some extra time to focus on more complex work and to be more organised. In the end, most of the students got to be a teacher for someone at some point and same as the previous year, they all got to do a lecture to the group about something they improved or learned and done this year. We had lectures about bow rehair, opening and closing instruments, gluing cracks, studs, sharpening, button patch, raising elevation, fix a broken neck by using screws, fitting pegs, re fitting neck, bridge and soundpost, peg bushing, making saddle and top nut, etc...



This summer camp felt a bit like being back in the Newark school again in a way, you have this group of student always hanging out together even after class, really getting along, having fun together and when it comes to work, they focus, show others what they've done, ask question, and when someone get stuck and the teacher is busy, they ask another student for help. They also respect each other's work. Only difference, no competition !





After Julie took a bow rehair class with Garri to use for the rest of her stay we ended the camp with a song at the camp concert, then had a luthier's party where the students used that opportunity to thank us and LSF-UK, explaining how this training was important to them and their feeling of always learning something and having more to learn. We distributed most of the tools and supplies to the different schools regarding what they were missing the most (some tools were kept to make sure Julie had the minimum to work for the next two months), took a few pictures and made our goodbye.

Next stop : Jacmel.



Dessaix-Baptiste music camp 01.08.2018 to 19.08.2018



The journey to Jacmel was slightly delayed because of another call to demonstrate on the day of our departure but in the end everything went fine. I traveled there with Janet and three other Americans musicians volunteering for the Jacmel music camp, once there three Canadians came and stayed with us. It was actually the first time in four years that I really felt like being in Haiti as we could walk free in the city every day or go out at night, compare to the usual July music camp where everything happen on site. Jacmel is a beautiful city by the sea, full of arts (painting, mosaics, papier maché sculpture...), living city at night and seems to be a great touristic spot for Haitians.

We went to the Dessaix-Baptiste music school the first morning and I went on the roof working with Gina in her little workshop with vue on the mountains. As far as I understood, before Gina, Kanes (I hope this is the right spelling) used to take care of the instruments at the workshop. He previously trained with LSF and went to work with a luthier in Strasbourg (France) for about three months. Sadly, he cannot keep working at the school or not as much as he needs other jobs to provide for his family, so Gina was the only person I was teaching at first.



I've been comparing the organisation/set up of the workshop since the last visit from Robert Cain from a video I found where he presents the school and it is impressive to see how much tools added to the first donations. There is obviously now a lot more storage for tools, wood, fittings... so a bit less working space, which is enough for Gina but can start getting a bit tight if you work on different instruments at the same time. Regarding supplies, I found a few unusual things (that I didn't expect to see there) like retouch varnish, wood filler etc... which have been left there but Gina wasn't sure how to use it so we tried to work on that. Otherwise this workshop has pretty much everything tool-wise, we made space for more instrument storage by re organizing shelves and set up some hanging system.

We reviewed a few basic things together like set ups as she hadn't come to the Ste Trinité camp for the past two summers. There was a few jobs that she would do automatically as she's been shown but without understanding the why and of course sometimes it wouldn't solve the problem or wouldn't be accurate to the work she had to do so we worked a lot on that too. We also worked on things she's never done and the button patch was the biggest challenge but it worked out fine !

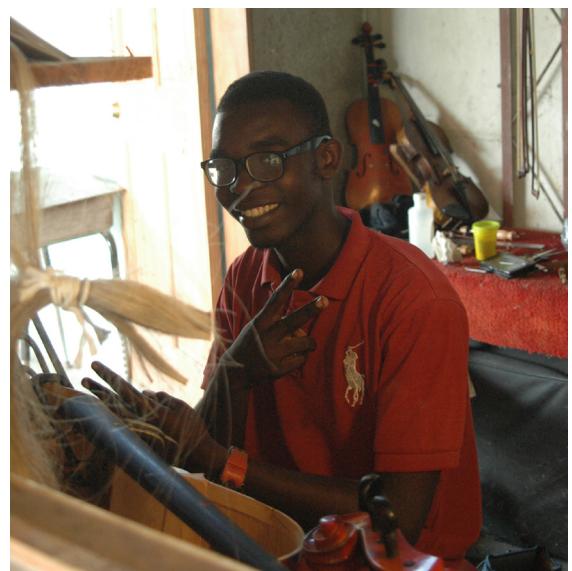


During the first week in the workshop, it has been really nice to have only one student to really take time explaining things, it was also good to have time for me to help Gina by working on some other instruments as they were coming in everyday, I would show her what I was doing, how and why as she would keep working on her own projects.

Then, after a few discussions with Gina and Janet, we decided that it would be nice to welcome an other student in the workshop, also to reconnect Gina with the luthier's group. So we



invited Cesar Edmond, a young man from Croix-des-Bouquets (13km for Port-au-Prince) who took part in the LSF workshops at the Ste Trinité music camp since July 2017 and who earned the «Best Spirit» price at the end of the 2018 camp in the luthier's group. He has been really easy going, helpful and great to assist Garri and I teaching things to others, motivated, nice and skilled during the whole time we've been teaching him, trying doing things as good as he could, starting over a few times if needed and always with a smile.





So the three of us spent the two following weeks working together and it sometimes felt like a professional workshop where everybody was doing its job. It was good to not feel too needed and watch them working by themselves time to time. After three great weeks of work, sickness one

or two days (who doesn't?), visits on weekends, it was time to go again, say goodbye to Gina and reach our next destination with few Haitians musicians Janet, Heidi (American violinist), and Cesar : Marmelade.

EMM music camp
20.08.2018 to 26.08.2018



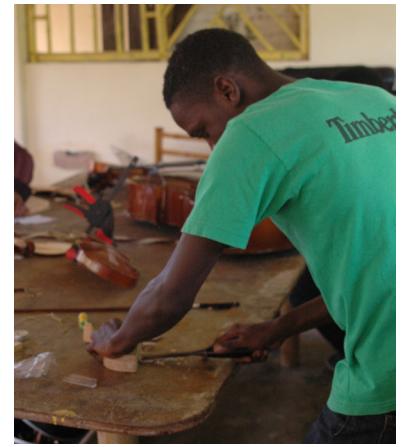
Marmelade

I'll try to spend as little time as possible explaining that Marmelade is some kind of Haitian paradise, or just paradise, perfectly beautiful, cold (when I say cold, it means no sweating which is amazing enough), with the best housing for volunteers and students etc... It is a little town in the North of the country in the middle of the mountains where the previous Haitian President René Preval grew up and actually came back to retire from political work. He then helped a lot the local activities in many domain : agriculture, edu-

cation, juice factory... and helped a lot the local music school. He is now buried in the site where our music camp was taking place.

As the Ste Trinité music school gave scholarship to all the luthiers during their camp, Blume Haiti, who usually take care of that, still had the money reserved for the luthier. This money has then been used to cover the expenses of housing and feeding luthier students in Marmelade and Cap-Haitian.





It was only one week to spend in this perfect location with six luthiers (including one new student from Marmelade) in a open workshop made out of bamboo. This temporary workshop has been set up on the occasion of this music camp as the Marmelade music school doesn't have any despite the fact that several local luthiers have been following the training from LSF UK and LSF Belgium. This music school as a particular set up : all the music classes (theory and practice) take place in a classic school after the classes are done (sometimes after 2pm/3pm), therefore they don't have their own building and it seems that they can't be given a permanent space in this building for a workshop. After talking with Wilbens who used to be a luthier student and now in charge of the string program in Marmelade, he said he will be trying to negotiate a room dedicated to the violin repair and set up at the place we actually had the music camp so their would be a permanent workshop. The lack of workshop is a real problem as the tools we donated to that school are spread into the different homes of the luthiers we've been training. I'm staying in touch with Wilbens to monitor progress on this matter.



As said previously, during that week, only one new student from Marmelade participated in the training, the five others had two to four years long of experience with LSF UK. We mainly worked on the Marmelade's instruments which were in really good condition, no big damage that could have happened by careless accident like broken scroll or bridge, just mainly damages like wear and tear due to time or lots of playing. After some observation I actually noticed that the musicians there were cleaning their instrument after every use, carried their instrument the right way and with much care, made sure they never touch the bow hair with their hand (good to see so much white hair on bows) etc... So the luthiers we've been training managed to show and teach the local musicians the best way to prevent damage and this is so far the only school I've visited with this characteristic.

As I said, paradise.

Janet finally left to go back to the US and we spent the last day visiting Marmelade, its Fort and caves during a difficult mountain hike and left for Cap Haitien with Heidi and three luthiers.



Cemuchca music school 26.08.2018 to 09.09.2018

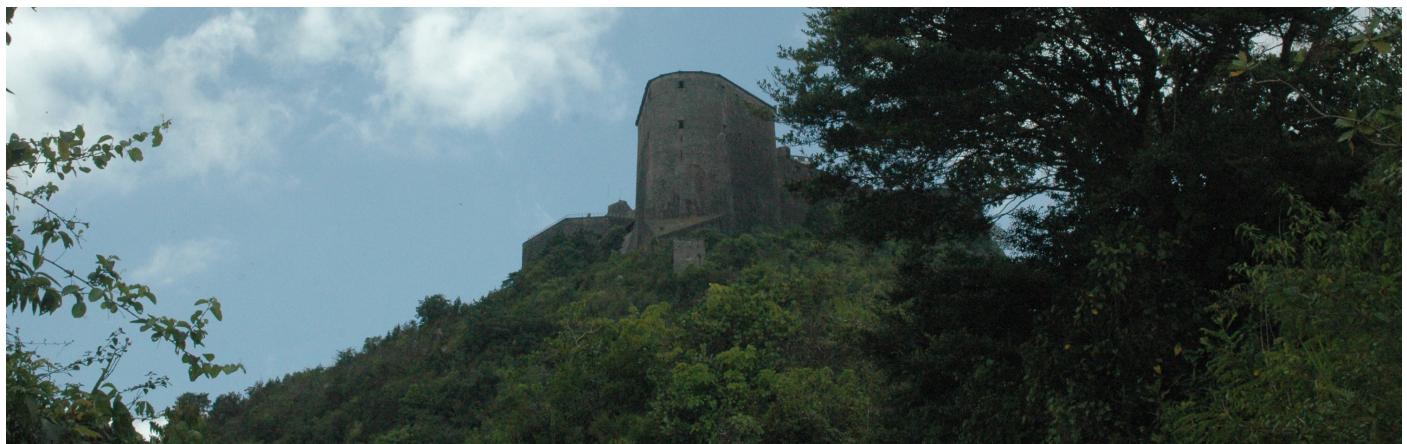


Cap Haitien

We arrived at the Cemuchca music school in about 3-4 hours driving time from Marmelade, and had a bit of time left to visit the school, the permanent workshop where Tchoupy works, his recording studio, meet part of the school staff, and walk a bit outside until someone pick Heidi and myself up to the house we would be staying at (20min walk from the school).

The next morning, back to the school where a few more luthiers joined the class. The luthiers were sleeping at the school, sadly on some blankets covering the floor, there was a shower and toilets in the small backyard. We were eating every meal together into some tiny restaurant. There were in total 10 students following this course, but as school was starting again (classic school) three of them had to leave after the first week and two of them in the middle of the second one.

Many of the students really wanted to come to Cap Haitien as Tchoupy talked to them about his project of an official association of Haitian luthiers. This idea would help them being recognized, known across the country and maybe to collect more tools, instruments, supplies, donation and training. They've been talking a lot about the main qualities of this «alliance» : keep sharing knowledge, tools, travel to another luthier if he needs help with an instrument... We'll try to work on a website presenting them and their different workshop etc... An Haitian BVMA ? The other big step on things happening is the creation of a VIOLIN REPAIR SCHOOL. So this is all really early to announce, it might take quite a bit of time but Tchoupy and Spence (director of the Cemuchca school) are working on it. The structure has been bought in not so good condition so work has started to renovate the place.

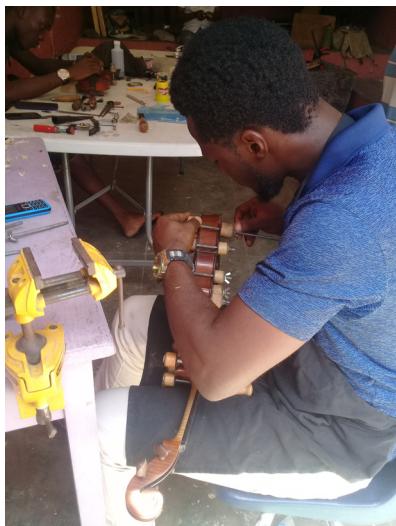




This is a building located at 5min walk from the music school, the main entrance would be a customer entrance and a little workshop part (as it would also be a professional workshop), at the back you would find a woodwind/brass and violin workshop with enough space for students. On the same floor, you would have a bedroom and bathroom for teachers from LSF for example, and more bedrooms on the first floor for luthiers coming from other part of the country temporarily. Visiting the place was really exiting, unfortunately, it was too dark to take pictures.

The other project of the Cemuchca school is a music school, but not like an outside-classic-school-activities school, an actual music school from which you can graduate (maybe a University level) which doesn't exist yet in Haiti. I also visited the building site, huge, where constructions have started, including another workshop. Constructions are paused at the moment as more funding is needed.

In conclusion, Cap Haitien is a great place to live in and might become the new music capital ! Here comes the last day of travel, lets go to Pétionville !



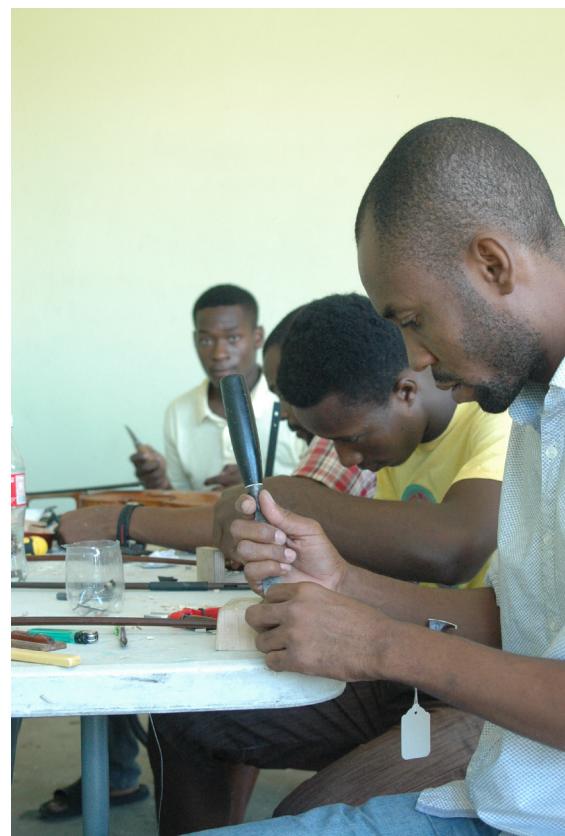
Ste Trinité music school - Pétion-ville

10.09.2018 to 25.09.2018

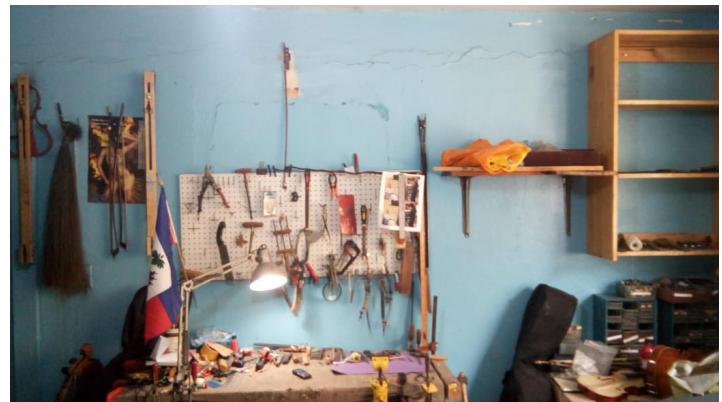


Petionville

This time we traveled by bus to the capital with Remy (luthier from the Ste Trinity School) and a few others who were finally going home. I'll just use this part of the report to talk a bit more about Remy. He's been coming to the LSF UK training since our mission in 2015 with Monika Nomada and Robert Cain, and especially on that year we had a bit of trouble with him as he wouldn't pay much attention to what he was shown (work-wise) and was kind of agitated in class. The two next years were kind of similar, he also would be too confident and work too fast without asking for help or having his work checked step by step by one of the teacher which obviously ended up in starting the job all over again. And this year, a miracle. Definitely the most amazing progress (he actually got the «Best improvement» price at the Ste Trinité camp) and Garri and I were delighted with his work and behavior at 100%. During this summer 2018, he was present during the Ste Trinité camp, Marmelade, Cap Haitien and Pétionville, he made a lot of progress and also helped much with the teaching.



Regarding the Pétionville workshop, the last time we heard about it was when Monika went to visit in July 2015. She reported the place as «in a much neglected state with little sign of useful work being done» (ref. Report Haiti 2015) again this year, miracle. The workshop was super clean (as clean as a workshop can get), with different work spaces such as machinery (band saw and electric plate for glue), sharpening, workbenches, storage and also a space dedicated to woodwind and brass instrument repair. I've been told that since Remy has started the lutherie training and uses the workshop, things have changed a lot regarding the state and organisation of the work-space. This was good news.



I spent my last two weeks in Haiti working with him and Kesly (the new student from Marmelade). Two others came when they could, out of their school or working time.

One of my disappointment was that I actually decided to spend two full weeks in Pétionville as the Ste Trinité music school is the biggest music program in Haiti and has been hosting all those music camps through the years and sent us four different students in total, so I wanted to spend

time there to help improve those students skills, and only one (Remy) showed up everyday. One came for one day, one had another job on the side so wasn't so available (which is understandable) and the last one, who was the new student that we've taught at the first camp didn't come at all. I thought that I could have used this time to maybe teach in an other school that needed it with Remy but it was also good to finally see and work in the Pétionville workshop !



Summary and recommendations :

- Some of the Haitian students have ambitions to open their own violin repair workshop, as not part of their music school but more willing to open a business. They would also keep working for their school on the sides. Therefore they will need their own tools and they've already asked me if they could send me money to buy those as they assumed that it was not LSF to pay. It would be good to have a talk to know if LSF could help a «professional» business/workshop or if the work and donation should only go to the music schools.

- Tchoupy has already three apprentices working with him in the Cemuchca school (two of them are incredibly promising) and as this violin repair school project is on its way, maybe it could be nice to start talking again about Tchoupy going to Newark ? He would gain considerable experience that could be used for him to teach

new things and of course improve his skills and knowledge.

- Delegating teaching is now a complete part of our course. Some luthiers are obviously better in pedagogy than others but it is all working incredibly well, students feel less ashamed to ask any kind of help or question and if one seems to do something wrong the other runs to help.

- Again, Garri and Julie are willing to go back for the next Ste Trinity music camp in July (Julie maybe longer again regarding her professional situation) as the luthiers asked for it. They always feel like learning more, one said «I feel like if I miss one year (of the training at the camp), I will be lacking so much knowledge and be so late compare to the others». So we actually think that we could teach more advanced technique now and focus in buying/collecting more precise and specific tools.



Conclusion :

Writing this report has been harder because it was sometimes difficult to write the term «students» as they're becoming more serious, skilled and professional, enough to be considered as «luthiers» really. This group is trying so hard to get better at their workbench, for some of them it is not just an occupation or an help to their school when they work on instruments ; they realized it is a full time job and they want it to be their full time job. For some others, they are just simply in love with music and will do everything they can to make it live in their country, and they consider that fixing instruments is an important part of this.

This summer has been particularly overwhelming as we noticed that even after the two weeks camp in July, Haitian luthiers kept showing up during the rest of Julie's stay, travelling through the country (about 450 miles !) to learn more. Seeing more of the country and more music schools has also been a truly positive experience and helped knowing what was needed (tools, support and materials), understanding the way things work in Haiti and the organisation of the different schools and workshops.

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, Cemuchca, and Ste Trinité again. 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 Luthierie, Tim Toft Violins.

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