



LSF-UK Ecuador 2010 mission report



Background:

In December 2009 the LSF-UK received an invitation to do a mission in Ecuador. The invitation came from Patricio Aizaga, the conductor of the Ecuadorian National Youth Orchestra. This orchestra is the pinnacle of the Ecuadorian music education programme. It is maintained by the ministry of education, and functions on the same principles as El Sistema in Venezuela.

The LSF was invited to run a course for the members of the orchestra, young people from 16 to 35 years of age. The course was open to all members of the orchestra.

The Mission:

The mission took place over 3 weeks in September 2010 in Quito, Ecuador. Two volunteers participated, Njål Bendixen, violin restorer and Anna Huthmaker, archetier. Njål Bendixen taught violin set up and tool making, and Anna Huthmaker taught bow rehairing.

The orchestra resides in a building with a rehearsal space for the orchestra, offices, etc. Adjacent to this is a smaller building with rehearsal spaces for each instrument group: a viola room, a bassoon room, a trumpet room etc. A temporary workshop was set up in this building with impromptu workbenches. The space proved to be adequate.



The course ran over three weeks. The first week was dedicated to violin setup and tool making. The second week to bow rehairing, and the third week to violin set up and tool making again. During the second week maybe half the time was spent on violin work though. Some 15 people attended the course. Most of these had little dedication and several of them only came along for the fun of it. At the end of the course only 5 people proved to be genuinely interested. Of these 5 persons one of them was particularly interested in bow work.

The bow part of the course was a great success. All participant managed to rehair at least one bow satisfactorily, and several students were able to learn how to change broken faceplates as well.

The violin part of the course was a bit compromised, due to lack of time. The decision to include tool making was a very ambitious one for what was essentially only a two and a half week course (considering that the bow part of the course took up a half a week of time). In the tool making part the students learned to harden and temper metal and to make their own knives and blades for peg shapers. Many students made knives, and four of the five dedicated students were able to begin making a peg shaper. Only one of the students had a working peg shaper by the end of the course, but the tree others was in a position to be able to complete the making of the peg shapers by themselves, after the course. The fifth dedicated student only did the bow part of the course.



The tasks normally associated with violin set up are: Fitting pegs, truing or replacing the fingerboard, reshaping or replacing the topnut, cutting a bridge and fitting a sound post. As well as these tasks one repair task was included in the course: adjusting the neck angle by removing the font and either inserting a shim under the fingerboard or deepening the neck slot in the front. With this repair technique the students were able to ensure that the instrument had the correct elevation.

All of the students were able to shape a fingerboard and topnut, and all students were able to cut a bridge. Only some students managed to fit a sound post and only one student was able to fit a set of pegs. However the students would be able to help each other to learn the tasks that they did not manage to do during the course. Some tools and materials were given to the students, and some to the organization managing the orchestra, to be kept safe and made available for future missions.

Financial overview:

Njål made a contribution of £250. £100 from a talk to a Rotary club. £110 was raised through raffling of tango lessons. A donation of £40 was given by Jeremy Bennett, an evening class violin making student, who got the money from charity donations from his place of work.

Anna did not make a direct contribution financially, since she did not ask the LSF to cover all of her airfare. She did in fact make an indirect contribution of far more than £250 by asking for a contribution of only \$400 and then covering the rest of her airfare herself.



Total cost of the Ecuador mission:

Njål's flight:	£1158
Anna's flight:	£275
Tools:	£507
Njål's contribution:	-£250
Total:	£1690



Anna Huthmaker, of Huthmaker Violins donated a large amount of bow rehairing and repairing materials and bow related tools.

David Dyke of Luthiers Supplies donated 120 violin pegs, and in return Njål will set up an 1/8 size violin for him.

Frank Pedus of Pro Arte allowed us to purchase tools at greatly reduced prices.

Peter Smith of Newark School of violin making kindly donated 10 ingots of peg paste.

Thoughts for the future:

The course was a great success. All of the aspects of simple violin setup and bow rehairing have been taught. A few dedicated students are now able to continue the work. A permanent workshop has been set up in the rehearsal building. This workshop is under the overview of FOSJE, the organization responsible for the youth orchestras.



We have been invited to return to Ecuador in the future. I believe that it is worthwhile to continue our efforts there. Future courses should include advanced set up of violins, violas, cellos and double basses, and also advanced bow rehairing (weight and balance points etc) and simple bow repair.

Njål Bendixen