

Luthiers sans Frontieres UK

Mission Report



3rd mission to Haiti

28th July- 12th August 2012

Introduction

Since its first mission to Haiti in 2008, the craft of Lutherie in Haiti has been transformed. In 2008 the Music Schools in Haiti had very little expertise in the maintenance of the violin family of instruments. The first mission was based at a summer music camp of Ecole St Trinite, (The Main Music School in Port au Prince) which was held in Leogane, west of Port au Prince. For three weeks, basic principles of repair and set-up were taught and a large number of instruments and bows repaired. The second mission took place in Petionville, Port au Prince in July 2010, just six months after the devastating earthquake. In spite of the difficult conditions, a lot of useful work was done and the students, from four different music schools, received on-going training. In 2011, two American Luthiers again visited Petionville to continue the work. Given that LSF could see the very real benefit of our involvement, a further mission was planned for 2012. All of our involvement in Haiti is coordinated by Professor Janet Anthony of Lawrence University, Appleton, Wisconsin. Janet has many years of experience with the music schools in Haiti. This allows us to time our missions and target our resources very efficiently.



The mission was in two parts. A week-long 'pop-up' workshop/training session at Cange north east of Port au Prince. This was again at the summer camp of Ecole St Trinite and was held at a church/School complex. This was attended by Luthiers from PaP, Cap Haitian, Le Pleine, and Jacmel.

The second week was spent at the Dessaix-Baptiste Music School in Jacmel on the south coast. This was LSF's third visit to the school which now has a substantial workshop and resident Luthier. This was attended by Luthiers from Cap Haitian, and Jacmel.

Personnel

Robert Cain , Luthier and Lecturer at Newark School of Violinmaking travelled from his home in Newark, UK.

Catherine Robertson, Luthier and recent graduate from the Newark School, travelled from her home in Edmonton, Canada.

Equipment

Approximately 40Kg of supplies were taken including:-

A donation of fittings and bow hair from LSF Belgium.

Used strings from J & A Beare and others.

Various donations of tools from Luthiers in Canada and the UK.

Tools and fittings purchased with LSF funds.

Other music teaching volunteers also brought supplies for the workshops.

Cost

(approximate figures)

Air fares £2000

Other travel £300

Equipment purchased £300

All internal transport, food and lodging were provided by our hosts i.e the Music Schools.

LSF volunteers contribute £250 per person towards their mission, so the approximate cost to LSF funds was close to £2100.

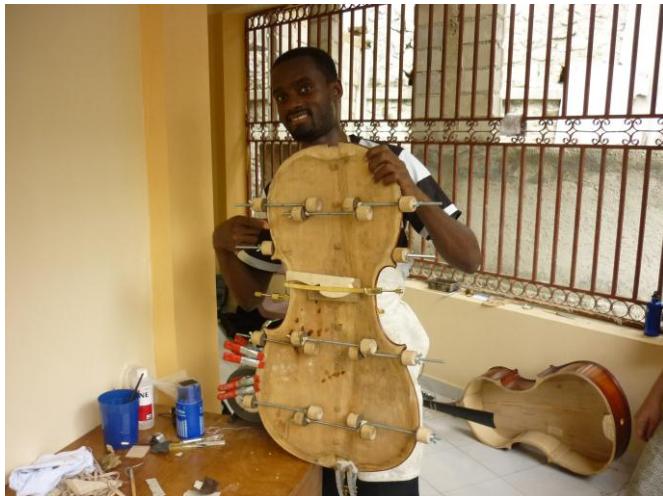
Work

Week 1

During the first week, a 'pop up' workshop was established in the staff accommodation at a school and hospital complex in Cange.



Tools were brought from the LSF sponsored workshop in Petionville (Port au Prince) by one of the Student Luthiers and, together with the tools that we brought, we had an almost complete workshop.



Things that were lacking, e.g. cello stretcher clamps were improvised by the students who amazed us with their ingenuity (see photo).

Various repair projects were undertaken to give the students a chance to show how they had progressed since our last visit. We worked alongside them and carried out some more complex repairs. In such a humid climate, traditional hide

glue takes much longer to dry. Given the time constraints, painful decisions had to be made about the use of epoxy resin!

Week 2

The second week was spent at the Dessaix-Baptiste Music School in Jacmel. It was very gratifying to see the functioning workshop which was built in 2009 after our first visit. The tools and other equipment were still in use and being stored carefully although we were very surprised to see how badly the tools had corroded due to the high humidity. The Jacmel workshop has secured an EU grant to allow Cannes (its resident Luthier) to visit a workshop in Strasbourg (the twin town of Jacmel) for 3 months. This also includes funding for some tools and LSF will give advice on the appropriate purchases.



Conclusions

After four years and three visits to Haiti we can see that real progress has been made. The workshops in Cap Haitian and Jacmel are functioning well and providing a useful service to the music schools although still in need of training and resources. It is not clear whether things are going as well in Petionville and we will do our best to monitor the situation.

A large donation of old cello bridges was received from Willam Harris Lee of Chicago. This proved to be surprisingly useful. With a large number of bridges available, there is a good possibility that a suitable old one can be recycled, thus saving a lot of skilled work and resources. Unusable bridges can also be recycled as bow wedges, repair studs/cleats etc given that the wood is stable and of high quality.



Recycled strings are also very useful. Second-hand, good quality strings are a much better prospect than new, cheap ones. We arrived with a bundle of maybe 2000 which were donated by various workshops. We soon learned, however, that taking a bundle of mixed-up strings on a mission requires a lot of valuable time and energy in sorting them out on-site and storing them efficiently. Happily there were lots of volunteers on hand to help with sorting. In other circumstances, local Luthiers may not have the expertise to do this themselves once the mission is over.

Recommendations

1. Establish a String Recycling Scheme where musicians and workshops can donate their part-worn strings to LSF UK. The strings can then be sorted and re-packaged in the UK ready for dispatch to LSF projects. It is a simple idea and the potential benefits are enormous.
2. Collect old, good quality cello bridges.
3. Liase with the Workshop in Strasbourg which will host Cannes (the Jacmel Luthier). If possible, arrange a visit to Cannes when he is there.
4. Liase with Music Fund regarding the proposed project in Cap Haitian.
5. Liase with Ecole St Trinite to establish whether the workshop in Petionville could be used more effectively.

6. Maintain contact with all three workshops so that we can best know what we can do to support them in the future.
7. Information should be collected from Luthiers who work in tropical climates regarding glues, tool care etc. There must be a lot of useful information available which could be applied to Haiti and other similar locations.
8. Set up a Youtube channel with videos of this mission.

The input from Strasbourg and the potential Music Fund project in Cap Haitian will develop things further in Haiti. It remains to be seen how and when LSF would be needed for a further mission. We will keep in touch and respond as required. Meanwhile, LSF UK can take the credit for nurturing Lutherie in Haiti and raising awareness around the world to a point where many more people know about and respond to the need. The future is very positive.

Thanks to the LSF UK committee, fundraisers and supporters at Newark School of Violinmaking, LSF Belgium and throughout the Violin Trade, without whom none of this would be possible.

Robert Cain
Catherine Robertson
August 2012



Further information, including previous mission reports, can be seen at :-

<http://www.luthierssansfrontieres-lsf.org>

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Send us your e-mail if you'd like to be updated on LSF's work