



## Background

In 2008 a request was received from the Kampala Music School in Uganda for violin repair services and training for local repairers. In response John Milnes went as an LSF volunteer for two weeks, taking with him specialist tools and materials. He worked with two trainees, Charles and Joshua, who quickly picked up the essentials of set up. They made a good start in difficult conditions: there was no permanent workspace, benches or secure storage for tools and instruments undergoing repair. LSF planned to return once a more permanent workshop space was found.

In the meantime, the School raised the funds to purchase a more suitable building for its activities. It moved from its original home in a YMCA building to a larger premises which also had workshop space so this was an excellent time for us return to continue the training of local repairers. This second LSF trip was undertaken by Keith Graves and James Hawkins in April 2014.

**First days:** We arrived in Kampala late on Sunday 5th April - just in time to miss the Schools



Kampala Music School

Easter Choral concert! In the morning we were met by Director Kiggundu (Fred) Musoke and shown around the new school building. The new school has around 15 teaching and practice rooms including two large rooms used for small concerts and band rehearsals, a huge improvement on the previous cramped YMCA building. A small building behind the school (the original staff quarters) now provides a home for Jimmy the live in caretaker, as well as the workshop space and some

storage. We met Charles who showed us the workshop and existing tooling.

The workshop is around 3.5m x 2.5m and contained a desk and some shelving. We spent a couple of days finding scrap timber and putting up tool boards, more shelving and rebuilding an old kitchen unit we found to create more bench space. Charles took us on a shopping trip into Kampala (on the infamous bodaboda moped taxis) to buy some of the heavier tools. Despite having brought a large suitcase full of small tools and equipment, we still lacked many tools that repairers would consider essential and initially we were stuck without an electric drill to help put up shelves etc until we managed to hire one!

**Day 3:** It was agreed with Fred that our priority should be for Charles to learn a wide range of repair work rather than simply go through the backlog. In the event we were able to do both. Joshua (from the previous mission) was not free, which meant that one of us was always free to carry out more repairs. Charles started his first crack



James and Charles



repair with Jims guidance: a nice French violin with the back centre joint open, owned by Nicholas, one of the teachers. A large paraffin stove served to heat the glue, which worked well if the windows were open to vent the fumes!



Keith, Charles and James

The School had several cellos in various states of repair: some just needing basic maintenance (especially endpins) and others with holes, cracks and broken necks. Charles moved on to fitting violin pegs, which entailed learning how to set up and sharpen the various shapers that had been donated. This meant learning how to operate our hand cranked grinder with reasonable success on shaver blades and chisels!

The rest of the week was spent on repair work: more cellos, more pegs, fingerboard shooting, bridges and soundposts on a range of instruments. Due to a lack of time or tools, unusual methods were used in several cases: a cello with a hole in the side was repaired without front removal, using 'pull through' studs on wire to provide support, while some closing clamps did dual service as neck clamps.



**Week two** started with a look at retouching: we had brought a (very) limited supply of primary colours plus black, white and burnt sienna. As we could not bring flammable liquids on the plane, meths and a Shellac mixture were bought in the first week. The shellac proved a challenge, as did the meths which contained so much water that it would not clean the brushes, however we were able to achieve some colour matching.

We started on bow rehairing by the Wednesday, a task that most students find complicated and difficult to learn, but as Charles had previously done some rehairing with John he picked it up fast and was able to rehair his first bow by the end of the morning. Here we discovered that the local meths does not burn in a spirit lamp, so the paraffin stove was used until we found that surgical spirit would burn better!

As we were due to leave late on Good Friday, we spent Thursday and Friday morning both showing Charles some more interesting techniques and continuing to work through the stock repairs. Amongst other things, Charles learned how to adjust an instruments' neck angle, take off a front and repair a crack, reglue a cello neck and fit high quality bridges.

### **Generating income**

We had brief discussions with Harriet Fowler (a member of the school board) and Fred regarding the financial status of the workshop: whether KMS should employ Charles or if he should be allowed to rent the space on a self employed basis and charge for his work. There seems to be no consensus yet, but we left a price list (based on hours per job) as a guide. A basic system for booking in instruments and recording work done was created, but this



needs refining. It seems that there may only be enough work for one repair person on the schools existing stock, and perhaps not full time. However, as there is only one music shop in Kampala (and therefore possibly in all Uganda!), which sells instruments of a generally poor standard, it would seem the school is ideally placed to put the workshop on a more self sufficient footing if a way can be found to import and retail instruments. Charles has had some contact with musicians from Kenya looking for instruments and repairs and there are other music schools and Projects that might become involved.



Staff and volunteers including Director Fred Musoke (front left)

### **Conclusions**

Although it was disappointing to have only one trainee, Charles turned out to be a phenomenally quick learner with excellent skills and will be able to pass on this knowledge. The previous mission identified some goals, which in the main have been achieved:

- A reliable, secure workshop space created, with storage for ongoing work, tools and materials.
- A workshop price list started and discussions underway regarding financial future
- Additional training for Charles achieved

In addition, the school has a large stock of Woodwind instruments (and some brass) which need maintenance. There is scope for further training of Charles or another volunteer in woodwind and/or brass repair work.

Future aims therefore would seem to be:

- Acquire some better quality tools (list below)
- Create a simple and reliable procedure for tracking repairs and invoicing
- Decide upon a financial model for the workshop to be self sustaining
- Further training for Charles: either a follow up mission to reinforce the training carried out or a visit to Europe for work experience.
- A Woodwind/Brass repair visit



- Identify further potential repairers for all instruments
- Violin lessons for Charles: this should be straightforward given that there are teachers on site

### **Volunteers**

Keith Graves: violin repairer and teacher of making and repair at South Thames College.

James Hawkins: self employed violin restorer based in South London.

### **Equipment**

Around 40 kilos of tools and materials were taken. For this we would like to thank:

- Luthiers Sans Frontieres Belgium and Despiau Bridges for a huge stock of bridges and accessories
- Antonis Andreou and other LSF members for tools and materials
- Christin Wils for collecting and sorting strings from various London shops
- John Carpenter and other NAMIR members for donations of strings and fittings
- Students from South Thames College for donations of tools, bowhair and jigs

### **Costs**

Travel and associated costs            £2100

Tools and materials purchased        £172

LSF volunteers contributed a minimum of £250 each leaving the approximate cost to LSF of around £1800.

Tools needed\*:

- Cello endpin reamer.
- A functioning block plane
- Varnish - dry materials such as shellac and resins and a few decent brushes
- More clamps: G clamps or similar for cello/bass neck gluing, some 1" - 3" for general repair work, arc clamps for bass
- Better files/rasps: needle files for bridges and nuts, small hand files flat and crossing, plus a good small half round rasp
- Repair wood: no pine or maple available locally

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\*NB Charles may be coming to the UK with his four piece vocal group for a charity concert, courtesy of another organisation, in which case we will attempt to supply him with some extra tools and materials.

*Keith Graves, James Hawkins on behalf of LSF UK April 2014*