



LUTHIERS SANS FRONTIERES UK

REPORT ON LSF MISSION TO KAMPALA February 2009



Background

The Kampala Music School (KMS), operating in the basement of the YMCA building in Wandegeya, central Kampala, opened in 2001 and provides a wide range of teaching in classical music. A growing string section now needs workshop services to maintain instruments in good condition and to repair bows.

Charles Dickens Awany, who had studied music at the school and is a carpenter/ joiner was identified as a potential trainee to learn instrument repair. Charles recommended a colleague, Joshua Kagenda as a second trainee.

LSF UK was contacted in 2008 and agreed to send John Milnes on an initial exploratory visit in February 2009. John already knew Martin & Harriet Fowler who live in Kampala and offered him accommodation during his stay.

Planning

Advance planning was done with Fiona Carr and Virginia Renshaw on behalf of KMS in the UK, and with the Director of the School, Simon Yiga. Fiona provided £600 to buy tools and materials (including bow hair and a bench vice).

LSF volunteers at the Newark School of Violin Making assembled a set of hand tools (violin knives, bridge holders etc.).

Philip Ilhe provided a range of bridge blanks. A substantial donation of new strings was made by the Sound Post Ltd. (UK) and workshop tools were donated by J. & A. Beare Ltd., London.



Workshop space

Simon Yiga arranged for workshop space in the Nasso Guitar workshop (above) about 10k outside the centre of Kampala. The guitar makers were very welcoming and made space for us to work on the veranda. However, after two days it was clear that sun and wind made this a difficult place to do violin work and we relocated temporarily to Harriet Fowler's garage in Mbuya (below).



Trainees

Charles Dickens Awany (b. 14.03.76) (right) did a two year training in carpentry and joinery at the Don Bosco Vocational Training School. Between 2003 and 2006 he studied at the Kampala Music School and completed an ABRSM diploma in performance (voice). He is a self-employed carpenter joiner.



Joshua Elvin Kagenda (b. 18.03.77) (left) worked as a carpenter/joiner for the Roko construction company between 2001 and 2005. He is now a self-employed carpenter/joiner.

Schedule of work

The school had a dozen violins, eight cellos and two violas that needed attention. Training was based on working to repair these, following the detailed steps in Violin Repair Essentials. (A copy was left with each trainee.)

The work focussed on: instrument assessment, fitting a new bridge, adjusting the string settings and nut, setting up for playing, and bow repair.

During the ten days each trainee cut and fitted several bridges, completed a number of rehairs and set up several instruments for playing condition.

Assessment of progress

Charles is a careful craftsman who responded thoughtfully to the requirements of violin work. His musical ability will be valuable for learning the details of making instruments play to their best potential.

Joshua is a very astute craftsman who learned quickly and remembered details accurately. He will need the help of a musician when setting up instruments.

In summary both trainees made a good start in violin and bow work.

Recommendations

A RELIABLE WORKSHOP SPACE

The school now has a basic set of tools which will be stored in a tin trunk. To do repair work the trainees will need a secure workshop space, ideally near the school, with a sturdy table or workbench, good light and some storage space where instruments under repair can be kept. A workshop space has not yet been found.

VIOLIN/CELLO LESSONS

Charles in particular, but probably both trainees, would benefit from a few music lessons so that they can tune the instruments, learn how to manage pegs and micro adjusters, and be able to bow a few notes in order to assess playing characteristics.

A WORKSHOP BUSINESS PLAN & PRICE LIST

Raw materials (bridge blanks, bow hair etc.) will need to be bought for the workshop. A price list of services would generate income for the workshop to pay professional fees to Charles and Joshua and meet other expenses. This price structure could perhaps distinguish work done for the Kampala Music School from work for outsiders at a higher scale to generate income for the workshop.

ADDITIONAL TRAINING

Charles and Joshua would benefit from several weeks more training so that they can safely maintain all aspects of stringed instruments. In principle this could be provided by further visits from LSF volunteers, provided a workshop space is found and sufficient funds raised to send volunteers from the UK.

John Milnes
(on behalf of LSF UK)
March 2009