



# Luthiers sans Frontiers UK-Belgium Joint Mission to Haiti Summer 2010

## Mission Report



## Introduction

In July 2008, three members of LSF UK spent three weeks in Leogane, Haiti as resident Luthiers of the Summer Camp of St Trinite Music School, Port au Prince. During the camp, six musicians from sites across Haiti were given instruction on basic repair and maintenance of the violin family of instruments. In addition, a large number of instruments were repaired by the Luthiers. The aim of LSF was to return in 2010 to develop this training and to carry out some more complex repairs.

St Trinite, founded 40 years ago, was the main music school of Haiti and was based at a complex of buildings in downtown Port au Prince that included a music school, concert hall, day school, trade school and the Episcopalian Cathedral (one of Haiti's famous buildings). Over 1000 young people received music tuition and participated in numerous orchestras, choirs and music projects. As well as having a highly trained local staff, the School received regular input from many professional musicians with a special interest in Haiti who have, for many years, travelled from the USA to teach at St Trinite and other centres.



Downtown Port au Prince

On January 12<sup>th</sup> 2010, the whole St Trinite complex was destroyed in the earthquake. The casualties were few at the music school but over 200 people died elsewhere in the complex. Apart from the terrible loss of life, the loss to the Haitian



Interior of Cathedrale St Trinite

community of this cultural treasure is immense. The St Trinite Music School continues to function in improvised buildings at its original site and at its annexe in Petionville, a suburb of Port au Prince which was also affected by the earthquake.

It may be difficult to appreciate the relevance of music and Lutherie to a community that has suffered massive trauma only six months ago. The reality, as we observed, is that life continues to go on in as 'normal' a way as possible in these extraordinary circumstances. Schools, hospitals and businesses continue to function in improvised buildings with typical Haitian

resourcefulness and help from NGOs. After careful discussion with our Haitian and American partners, it was decided that an LSF mission would still be able to provide useful input into the music school as well as provide continuity and much needed encouragement if we still came, knowing things would be more difficult than usual.

### The Mission

The participants were Robert Cain, Luthier and Lecturer at the School of Violinmaking, Newark College, UK and Anna Huthmaker, Archetier of Huthmaker Violins, Atlanta, USA. Belgian LSF provided 1000 euros of tools for the mission. Seven students aged 18-30, came from four centres across Haiti i.e. Port au Prince, Cap Haitian, Jacmel and Les Cayes where there are music projects of different sizes.

The mission was based at Eglise St Jaques, Petionville, where a room has been set aside for a permanent Atelier. Robert taught half the students set up and basic repair techniques whilst Anna, in another room, taught bow rehairing and repair. We swapped at the half-way point. Three of the students had taken part in the 2008 workshop in Leogane and have been doing useful work since. The heat and humidity made for difficult working



Anna's bow workshop

conditions. Accommodation was partan i.e. sleeping on the floor with a mosquito net and a fan. Haitian plumbing is not for the fainthearted! Any discomfort was more than compensated for by the generous, welcoming and appreciative people we lived and worked with.



Candle powered glue pot in use

Part of the challenge of any LSF mission is in improvising techniques to suit the local conditions e.g. to cope with the erratic electricity supply, Rob had invented a candle powered glue pot made of two tin cans and a jam jar. This was highly successful and could be easily copied by the local Luthiers. It also doubled as a tea pot!



Atelier Petionville

### **What did the Mission cost?**

Approximate costs were as follows:-

Flights, USA-Haiti and UK-Haiti	2000e
Tools donated by LSF Belgium	1000e
Equipment donated by LSF UK and supporters	1500e
Equipment donated by USA supporters	<u>1500e</u>
	<b>6000e</b>

The participants raised all of the funds for their own travel and so the net cost to LSF was minimal.

### **What did we achieve?**

#### **Teaching skills**

By the end of the project, all the students were able to re-hair bows to an acceptable standard. All students had also learned basic bow repairs e.g. faces, lappings etc.

All students started to set up a violin i.e. top nut, fingerboard shoot, soundpost, bridge, pegs. Some students went on to tackle more advanced repairs on instruments damaged in the earthquake. All the students can now play a useful role in maintaining instruments and bows in their respective centres.

#### **Supply of Equipment**

Tools and fittings were distributed between three centres, Port au Prince, Jacmel and Cap Haitian. These will be kept safe and made available to any subsequent LSF mission. The value of these items was approximately 4000 Euros of which, 1000 Euros worth of tools were donated by LSF Belgium.

#### **Information gathering/Continuity/Support**

There was great value in LSF repeating this scaled-down version of the 2008 mission. LSF was able to maintain and develop contacts with the local musician-Luthiers and the organisers of the Music School, Per David Cesar and the Directors of the Summer Camp, John Jost and Janet Anthony.



Tools etc donated to the Jacmel workshop

Discussions were held regarding the rebuilding of St Trinite Music School on Port au Prince and the inclusion of an atelier in the plans.

A short visit was also made to the Dessaix-Baptiste Music School in Jacmel where an atelier has been built since the 2008 mission although it suffered

damage in the earthquake. Rob carried out some teaching and repairing here as well.

Discussions were held regarding the future direction of LSF in Haiti

### **Reflection**

The aim of LSF is to enable communities to become self-sufficient whilst providing expert input where necessary. These recommendations are made in the light of the 2008 and 2010 missions.

### **Timescale**

The timescale of the project was adequate for teaching bows but very limited for teaching the various fitting-up tasks. Each student had only one chance to complete each task. Both LSF members were sick during the Mission. This was not only unpleasant but took valuable time from the schedule and needs to be taken into account in planning missions.

### **Choice of students**

Too many students were allocated to the project. A better idea would be to have one student from each centre who could then pass on the skills to others. LSF members must have more control over this issue to maximise the benefit of the mission.

### **On-going supply of equipment**

Many of the tools supplied in 2008 were lost in the earthquake. Other tools had deteriorated significantly due to the climate. We need to take advice from projects as to the best way to store and preserve tools. Sourcing of consumables such as fittings, glue, bowhair etc is an ongoing problem.

### **Communication**

Rob learned a small amount of Kreyol prior to this trip. This was extremely useful in the both in teaching and building relationships with the students and other Haitians. This should be a requirement for any mission member.

The experience gained in the 2008 mission was extremely valuable and enabled the 2010 mission to be planned and executed much more efficiently.

## **Recommendations**

The aim of LSF is to enable communities to become self-sufficient whilst providing expert input where necessary. These recommendations are made in the light of the 2008 and 2010 missions.

### **i. Supply of instruments.**

If the pool of instruments in Haiti could be increased substantially, stocks could be held in the main centres. Instruments in need of repair could then be replaced from stock and the repairs carried out with less urgency, either at a central workshop or locally. Visiting luthiers could then have advance notice of the repairs needed at each centre and come prepared to work, teach or do both.

Sourcing the instruments free or charge is not a problem. Many workshops/institutions around the world would donate unused, student-grade instruments e.g. LSF Belgium already has a large collection. The issue of safe and appropriate storage in Haiti would need to be addressed prior to shipment. There are tentative plans for temporary buildings at the Port au Prince site in 2011. Facilities are available in Jacmel. An accurate assessment of the required instruments would be needed.

### **ii. Training a luthier outside Haiti**

There are possibilities of a short-term training placements in workshops in Montreal, Cuba and possibly other centres. This would enable a Haitian to be trained to a much higher level, in a professional environment. The trainee could then return to Haiti to pass on their skills, or, other Haitians could repeat the exercise. This would require money for airfares, accommodation and living expenses in the host country although the ideal model would be for accommodation and hospitality to be provided locally, free of charge.

### **iii. Future LSF Mission to Haiti**

Given the disruption to everyday life due the earthquake, progress with i. and ii. may be more difficult. It may be appropriate for a further mission to Haiti in 2011/12. Further discussion is needed with our local partners.

The next Mission could be repeated and be based at Jacmel where a rudimentary workshop already exists. Teaching could be carried out in the nearby Teacher's residence. Tools could be collected from Port au Prince en route. Jacmel is an easier environment for volunteers stay in. Instruments could be transported to Jacmel from other centres. Further discussion is needed with our local partners.

Thanks to:-

- The many Luthiers and Trade suppliers who contributed equipment for this mission.
- The numerous supporters who contributed financially.
- The music school staff, students and volunteers for their hospitality.

