



Luthiers sans Frontieres-UK

Mission to Haiti July 2015
Funded by the Fresh Leaf Charitable Foundation

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Mission Report

Introduction

In 2008, 2010, and 2012 LSF-UK has run training missions in Haiti. These missions have played an important part in supporting orchestral music in Haiti and as a consequence, workshops now exist in many music schools and the resident luthiers continue to build their skills.

The LSF-UK 2015 Haiti mission was based at two centres. We arrived in Cap Haitien and set up an improvised workshop at the Cemuchca Music School summer camp in Vaudreuil for eight days. Trainee luthiers joined us for an intensive training programme in the repair and maintenance of stringed instruments.



We then decamped and travelled overland to Cange, central Haiti and became part of the summer camp of St Trinite Music School, Port au Prince, remaining there for the next ten days. Many of the trainees from Cap Haitien came with us to Cange and we were joined by new, local trainees. In total, 12 trainee luthiers from 8 music programmes in 5 geographical areas were taught.

Personnel

Robert Cain: Luthier and Teacher at The Newark School of violinmaking.

Monika Gapinska: Luthier, working in Berlin.

Julie Folio: Student Luthier at the Newark School of Violinmaking.



The work

Approximately 100 Kg of tools and equipment was brought from the UK. Training started with the basics of instrument assessment and adjustment and progressed through maintenance to more complex repairs. It was a very steep learning curve as many had no previous experience with instruments or fine woodworking. Having three teachers meant that the students could be given a lot of individual attention when needed.





Teaching was carried out on instruments brought along by the students and host Schools. Many instruments and bows were put back into playing order during the programme.

There was a strong emphasis on getting the more experienced students to support the beginners, thus setting the pattern for the future.

At the end of the mission, all the tools and supplies which we brought, with an approximate value of £3000 were donated to the five, small provincial music schools which hitherto had had no training or equipment and can now begin to establish their own workshops.

Unfortunately, we all became sick at various times but, due to good teamwork, we managed to keep the teaching going without disruption. We all left Haiti a good few Kg lighter!



Visit to Ecole St Vincent

In cooperation with the London-based charity 'Music for Haiti', our mission plan also included a scoping visit to Ecole St Vincent, Port au Prince. St Vincent is supported by 'Music for Haiti'. Below is Monika's report:-

With over 450 students, including 170 boarders, attending classes, St. Vincent's Center for Handicapped Children teaches reading, writing, history, geography, mathematics, English, art and music. In addition to the school, St. Vincent's treats about 500 patients a month in its medical clinic, physical therapy department, eye clinic and the only clinic in all of Haiti to provide orthodontic treatment.



Monika with a Student at St Vincent

The Music Program at St. Vincent's has consisted up until now of lessons for drums, guitar, woodwind and brass instruments. Musical training has been highly successful, resulting in ongoing education at American universities for those that are extraordinarily talented, such as former student Carlot Dorve (Michigan State University) who plays the trumpet and is currently studying for a Performance Degree.

To support the thriving musical program, we believe that the students of St. Vincent's need training in instrument maintenance and repair. With new facilities becoming available, the school intends to launch a teaching program in January 2016 in order to teach these essential skills.

The school director is very enthusiastic about a possibility of having luthier training at school and is sure to find capable and interested students.



Carlot Dorvet with instruments at St Vincent

Visit to the Petionville Workshop

This workshop was established with the help of LSF UK in 2010 at the Eglise St Jacques centre, Petionville (a suburb of Port au Prince). This followed the destruction of the Ecole St Trinite facilities in downtown Port au Prince during the earthquake.



A lot of resources have been put into this workshop by LSF and by other visiting Luthiers. Sadly, Monika found the workshop in a much neglected state with little sign of useful work being done. A meeting was held with St Trinite staff to encourage them to make better use of this valuable asset.

Summary and recommendations.

- The arrangements worked well. We were able to supply a large amount of equipment purchased from the 'Fresh Leaf' grant. In addition, we took a large amount of donated equipment from the LSF-UK stock.
- The students applied themselves well and learned a lot in a short time. They should now be able to perform a valuable service to their home schools.
- Taking a student as part of the LSF team was very successful. Julie gained valuable experience and made a very positive contribution to the mission.
- The scoping visit to Ecole St Vincent was very useful in assessing the need for a future training mission and for providing 'Music for Haiti' with valuable first-hand information. This is the first time that LSF has cooperated with another organisation in this way. There is great potential here for increasing efficiency by getting like-minded organisations to work together like this.
- The Visit to Petionville confirms our view that no further investment of time or materials should be made until the St Trinite School has a plan to develop the Lutherie workshop at Eglise St Jacques (see below).
- A further mission to Haiti could be planned for 2016, possibly with a Luthier on a career-break spending more time working with the students from the 2015 mission. This could take place at Petionville and make use of the workshop facilities and accommodation. St Trinite staff have agreed in principle.

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Robert Cain
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