

Luthiers sans Frontiers

Report on the Mission to North India, Kalimpong – Gandhi-Ashram-School August 2008-10-12

5th August 2008 – 28th August 2008

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Effective work:

1. 5 Cellos: new sound-posts, new bridges, cleaning, changing tailpieces, strings, gluing open parts
2. 4 ¼-violins: new bridges, tailpieces, cleaning, strings
3. 5 4/4-violins: diverse small things
4. 2 violas:
 - 1st :cleaning, new bridges, strings
 - 2nd :Correcting the angle of the neck, new bridge, new sound-post, strings, tailpiece
5. 3/4 -violin: diverse small things
6. 6 cellobows rehairing
7. 6 small violinbows rehairing
8. 2 violinbows rehairing

At the workshop:

The workshop I was working in the school was the room I set up as a workshop one year ago. I was working from Monday to Friday from 8.30 am to 6.00 pm, usually. It was a big difference coming the second time to Gandhi Ashram School and knowing what situation to expect referring to the situation of the workshop as well as the situation of the instruments. Even if I had to recognize that around fifteen violins I repaired the year before were broken again and at maybe six of them the neck was broken out. The new bridges I made one year

before were bended extremely and I even more got to know the difficult influence of the hot and humid summer combined with the dry and cold winter. But for all that I have been better prepared. After arranging everything, I worked in the first days by myself and tried to get an overview of the situation. I was talking to the headmaster of the school about the idea teaching people in Gandhi Ashram School in violinmaking and how it would be a worth way to realize that. Out of these conversations came my initiative to talk to the teachers and the older students to include them into the idea of giving a violinmaking-training. The staff reacted enthusiastic and luckily got active and talked to two ex-students of the Gandhi Ashram School and found in them 2 interested persons for learning violinmaking. To give to everybody who was interested in the work of violinmaking the chance to get an idea about it I decided to start an “open workshop”. I engaged the older students to come to the workshop, to ask questions and to even try some easy work. In the following weeks everybody who was interested, came to the workshop and I tried to find some easy work, to give them already an idea what violinmaking is about. So within the following weeks I continued repairing, but spent also a lot of time by explaining work-steps of violinmaking. Surprisingly interested were also the young students of class 6 and 7, they would not be able to start a violinmaking-training in the next years – of course they should first finish school at least until class 10. So the idea came up to start with the training also a “violinmaking-club” for students from class 6 onwards. It could be hold once a week, the students would check all the instruments, order them and learn how to put a new string, how to put a bridge straight and how to paste pegs. Just small things, but they could help to hold the instruments in a better condition for a longer time. One morning I went to the classes 1-4 to explain them the violin, why it is so breakable and how to take care for it – like I did it already one year ago.

In my left free time in the evenings and on the weekends I went to visit some of the childrens families and spent time with them in their houses and villages.

The 5 interested persons:

William:

He is working as a carpenter for the school and because of his profession and is manual skilled and used to work with wood. He is in the mid-forties and has a family. That means he is already settled down and is not very keen in leaving Kalimpong. The only problem is, he cannot speak in English – but he understands it!

Reishma:

Reishma is around 18 years old and she had to leave the Gandhi Ashram School in class 5, because she had to help in her family at home. She is very interested in learning violinmaking and it would give her the opportunity to learn a profession and to find work. My impression was that she needs time to learn manual skills, but I really would like to give her this opportunity and see how it develops. One thing to be aware, will be that if you teach girls or young women, you never can be sure, how long they will be able to come. Because of several reasons, one is of course because of children, but the other one is that you never know if they will be allowed to continue working when they marry or if they have to stop working and be at home. And also you never know if they move away with their husband.

Lila:

She is also around 18 years and left school after class 6 – out of reasons I don't really know. She, too, has no school degree and spent the last years at home helping her parents. Unfortunately she only came at the end of my stay so I never had the chance to show her some work. As she is also a young woman, like Reishma, the same problems could come up. But anyway I would really advocate to give both of them a chance.

Marcel:

He is in the same age like Reishma and Lila. Like both of them he also had to leave the school after class 5 or 6. It seems that he had problems with the

earlier headmaster and also his family needed help on the fields. The teachers were talking about him as a hard-working, intelligent and responsible boy and were regretting that he left school so early. Because he was needed on the fields and at the work of the farm, he only was able to come one morning. If he could find a way to come regularly to the training it would be great to give him, too, this opportunity.

Vivien:

He is a teacher of the school and in charge of the administration work in school. He showed a big interest in violinmaking and came regularly after school to the “open workshop”. He won’t be able to participate in a training regularly because of his others responsibilities in school. But I would really like to include him especially as a person who organizes in the background and who could be the contact person for us from Europe. He is responsible, trustworthy and hard-working and could support the others by organizing themselves.

All the 3 teenagers and the of course Vivien the teacher are able to speak English and to communicate with them is no problem at all. Not to underestimate is, that the Indians are not used to organize themselves and to be responsible for their working day, especially not the young ones. The Indian school system is very strict and gives a lot of rules – it is not yet established to work on your own and to get information by yourself. They are used to be told what to do and what to learn. So they will need control and some guidance to get independent and responsible in what they are doing. That’s also one part where Vivien could be included and important.

This is also why it would be so important that violinmakers would come regularly, to give the necessary corrections, explanations, ...

Location:

I was living, as I did in the year I spent there, in a room of the school. It’s an easy location, but it has a bathroom with a cold shower and a western toilet.

Like in a lot developing countries the tap water is of course not drinkable, but recently they got a filter in school-so there is filtered drinkable water down in the kitchen available – that’s really a big improvement! I enjoyed a lot to be included in the society of the school – in the school lives the headmaster (Fr. Paul, Indian Jesuit priest), a novice of the Jesuits and at the moment 8 boys of the school are staying in the boarding.

Conclusion:

It was wonderful to come back and to meet all the people again, people who have a place in my heart. To again experience what difference it is to work for a purpose – the poor children of the villages and the music they play. The gratefulness of the people and their hospitality was again overwhelming. And my work was more successful than I expected. I am optimistic that in a few years there could be some Indian violinmakers of Ghandi Ashram School working in their workshop of the school. And even start to do repairing work for the surrounded musicians and other private schools. There will be difficulties by realizing this idea and only if we from Europe and the people of Ghandi Ashram School work together it can be a successful work.

To realize this idea it would be necessary to send in the next years regularly 3-4 times a year, violinmakers for 4-8 weeks to Ghandi Ashram School and to teach the violinmaking students there. After the first 3 years it could be sufficient to do once a year a visit for further instructions and necessary help.