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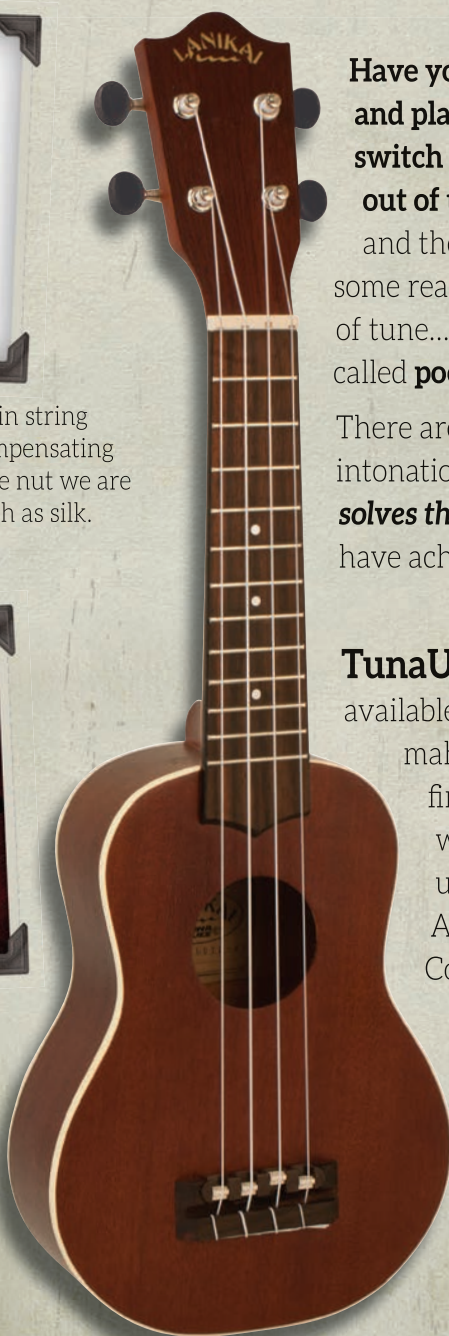


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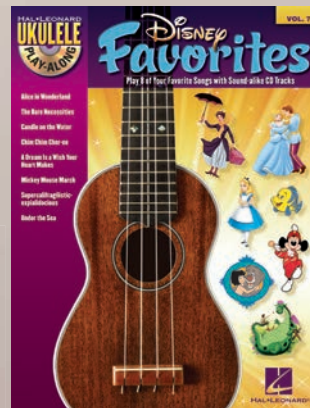
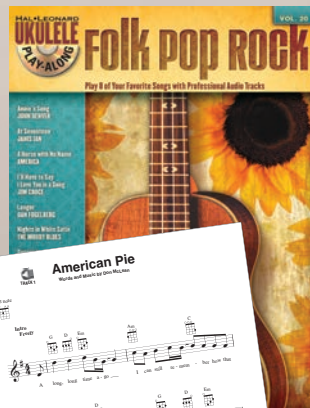
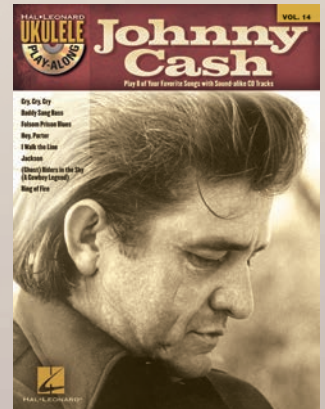
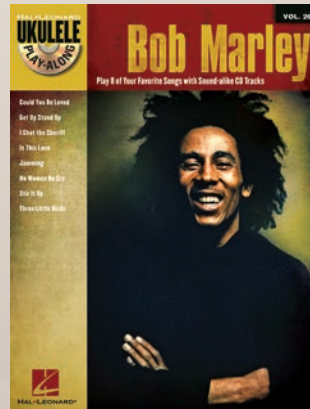
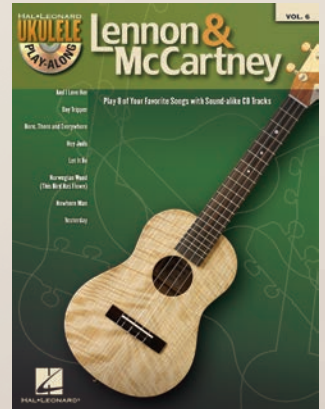


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Ukulele

Spring 2014 • VOLUME 1, ISSUE No. 4

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PHOTOGRAPHER: Emily Fisher

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“Here’s the thing, this is what I really believe in,” says Heidi Swedberg, the former “Seinfeld” actress-turned-ukulele-educator profiled in this issue. “I think it’s far more important to make music than to be good at making music.”

Words to live by.

The fact is, you can be as good as you want to be at playing the ukulele, depending on how much time and effort you want to put into it. Or you can just pick it up and strum a few chords, or pick a sweet melody line, and just have fun with it.

The ukulele, and the big-hearted community that has sprung up around this tiny instrument, can be very forgiving that way.

When it comes to playing the ukulele, making music is a pleasure unlike any other and requires little more than the desire to join in and connect with friends, family, or colleagues. Being good at making music requires a commitment that may or may not fit your schedule or meet your needs.

It’s up to you, and no one is going to judge you.

One thing that is certain: ukuleles are an accessible pathway to making music. When ukulele music is fueled by passion, there are no limits to what you can do.

Of course, being good at making music has its rewards.

Case in point: Edward Hernandez and

Luck Uke. Edward is the winner of the solo category of Ukulele magazine’s 1st annual Holly Jolly Ukulele Song Contest, having submitted a video performance of John Lennon’s “Happy Christmas (War Is Over)”; Lucky Uke won the ensemble category for their spirited rendition of “Feliz Navidad.”

Both take home a Golden Tiki Award.

And thanks to the many other thoroughly entertaining, creative, fun-loving folks who submitted videos—your reward is the sheer joy of making music.

It really doesn’t get any better than that.

—GREG CAHILL
Editorial Director,
Ukulele magazine



‘When ukulele music is fueled by passion, there are no limits to what you can do.’

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UkuleleMag.com

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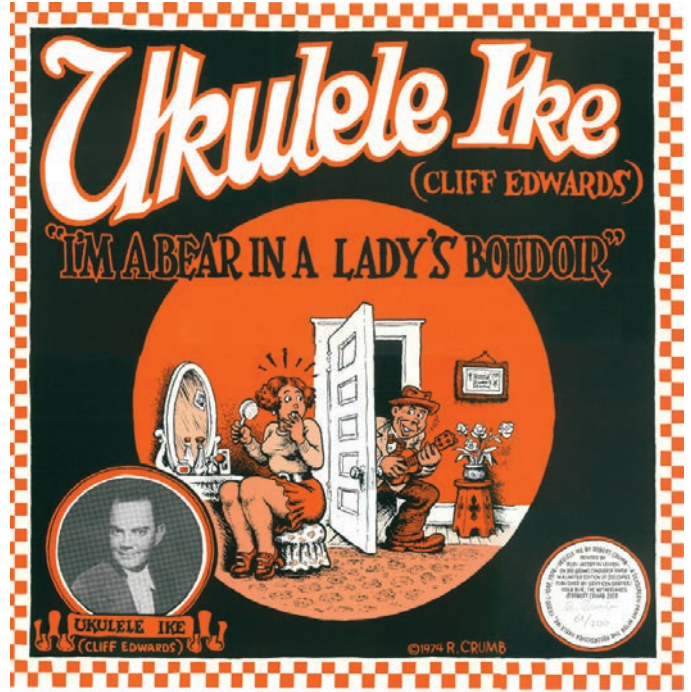
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jakeshimabukuro.com

Manitoba Hal

An advertisement for Gruhn Guitars. The background is a dense collection of various ukuleles and one guitar, arranged in rows. In the center, there is a large orange guitar pick shape containing the text "Gruhn Guitars" in a cursive font and a line drawing of a rabbit-like creature playing a guitar. At the bottom, a black banner with white text provides contact information.

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February 7-9

Katoomba, New South Wales, Australia

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bluemugs.com.au

Waikoloa Ukulele Festival

March 1

Waikoloa Village, Hawaii (Big Island)

Performances, lessons, giveaways, and more.

Master of ceremonies is Danny Kaleikini, the "Ambassador of Aloha."

ukulelefestivalhawaii.org



Danny Kaleikini



Ukulele Carnival

March 1–8

Oaxaca, Mexico

Carnival in Oaxaca is a pageant of sound and color. The Zócalo is filled with people in costume and the sounds of Southern Mexico mingle with the scent of eucalyptus trees and incense. Workshop with uke clinician **James Hill** and cellist Anne Janelle. Class size is limited to 24 students. Plus visits to Mayan ruins, carnivals, and local markets.

destination-arts.com

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March 24–28

Corbett, Oregon

Four nights, three days of instruction and performance. Band Camp is appropriate for advanced beginner, intermediate, and advanced players. Instructors include **Paul Hemmings**, **Gerald Ross**, **Aaron Keim**, and the **Canote Brothers**. Plus performances, workshops, jams, and more.

menucha.org/programs/uke-band-camp



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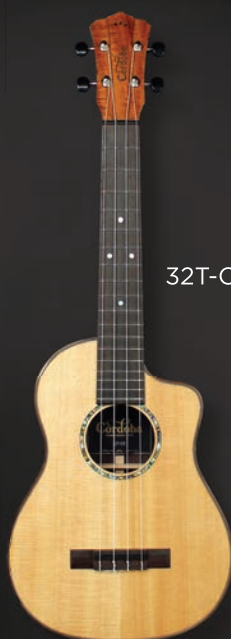


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Lights, Camera . . . Uke!

Clem Snide's Eef Barzelay has used the ukulele on everything from film soundtracks to Journey covers



I really have to give credit to my wife for bringing the uke into my life. She bought me a sweet little concert-sized Martin for my birthday way back in 2003. I plinked and plucked at it for a little bit and then promptly stuck it in the closet where it stayed. Then, in 2007, I was offered the job of scoring a movie called *Rocket Science*, written and directed by Jeff Blitz.

The movie's about a stuttering teenage boy coming of age and finding his voice. Jeff wanted the music to follow suit with accordions and trombones and other sad/silly sounding things. "I want the music to make me laugh and cry at the same time," he would say.

Naturally, the uke made for a good addition to that ensemble. Not only that, but once I stumbled upon an open-fifths tuning, I discovered a very simple, yet effective, way to built a harmonic and sonic foundation upon which the score could stand.

Since then, I've gotten to work on a few more films, and I've anchored most of the music with a uke. I now mostly use a baritone uke that plays more like a little guitar and has a greater range than the smaller ones.

I've been preaching the gospel of uke for some time now. A perfectly good-sounding uke can be yours for less than \$200 and is much easier to play than a guitar. And now they're all the rage with hipster and anti-

I've gotten to work on a few more films and I've anchored most of the music with a uke.

hipster alike, because it just makes sense. They're fun to use in reconfiguring unlikely cover songs as well. I made an EP of Journey classics, just me singing with a uke, and a little piano, and it came out super sweet.

—Eef Barzelay



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Meet the Melbourne Ukulele Kollektive

How Johnny Cash helped to spark an Australian uke revival

By Amber von Nagel

People start ukulele clubs for many reasons. Maybe there are no other uke clubs in their area, or they want to connect with others, or because maybe they just want to have fun. Dean “Dino Divo” Denham of Melbourne, Australia, did it for all of these reasons, but also because he wanted to fill the world with joy.

He felt the ukulele could do that.

Denham began the Melbourne Ukulele Kollektive (muk.com.au) in 2004, when there were no other uke clubs to be found in Melbourne. Since then, his club has become a performing force to be reckoned with, playing everything from Leonard Cohen to the Clash, and performing actively throughout the year. He and his club also organize the annual Melbourne Ukulele Festival (muf.org.au), which continues to grow every year.

I asked Denham about his role as the club leader and festival organizer, and about the inspiration behind his uke endeavors.

What led you to start the Melbourne Ukulele Kollektive?

Well, strange as it may sound, Johnny Cash died [in 2003] and I felt like I just had to do something. I'd been thinking about starting a uke group for a long time and simultaneously closely following the final recordings of Johnny Cash, who had always been a big influence on me. I, like many, was avidly following these releases, knowing them to be soon his last. My first daughter, Elvira, had just been born when the news of Johnny's passing came. It felt like a light had gone from the world that would never shine again and that absence needed to be filled. It would take many more than just myself to fill it, but it called. So I decided it was time to do something—something good.

How do you organize and promote your club?

We're very unorganized! It's been an organic process and it just sorts itself out. Having said that, I generally act as musical director, book all the gigs, organize set lists and rehearsals, do all the admin. You get the picture. But it's not a



Giving his club the spotlight in this Australia Day People's March photo, Dean Denham (clad in a green Hawaiian shirt and straw hat) stands to the far left.

one-man show, because we have lots of people who do things like graphics, web design and admin, costuming, et cetera. Anyone can bring a song to the group and, as I like to say, run it up the flag pole and see if anyone salutes. About the only time there was any sort of tension in the way it was working was in the early days when the good players, most of them professionals, were feeling held back by the beginners that were rapidly joining the group. By “held back,” I mean they wanted to play more complex arrangements than the beginners were capable of. We still have very good, technically advanced players, but they are very conscious of how the material they bring to group has to have an element to the arrangement that makes it something the beginners can do.

As for promotion, we mostly do that by playing at as many shows as we can and letting the audience know that we are an open group, with no joining procedure other than showing up for

rehearsals. We run a weekly, free beginners session, and many of the people who start there go on to play in the band. Word of mouth plays a big role, and of course there's all the Internet stuff—Facebook, Twitter, blah blah.

You also organize the Melbourne Ukulele Festival, which just celebrated its fourth year. What are some of the challenges of organizing a festival, and how do you overcome or manage these challenges?

For me, seeing as I book the artists and organize the program, it's finding a good balance of performers to make up a broad and entertaining show. I think I've made a few mistakes in this regard, mostly by having too much of the same style or genre in the one show. I'm getting better at mixing it up, but still with some sense of consistency. Overall, our biggest challenge is just dealing with the huge amount of tasks involved with putting on an event of this size



Melbourne, Australia

(around 50 acts over three nights and two days); volunteer coordination is a classic example, as is sponsorships, design, website updating, newsletters, publicity and promotions, artist billing, and so on. We overcome all these by having a great team of people who devote huge amounts of time and energy into making it happen. I would also like to point out that in addition to this huge amount of effort that they put in, they have done so with no expectation of receiving payment for their efforts, which is pretty amazing. Of course, one day we hope to have such a successful fest that we all get paid, but in the meantime our priority is to pay all the artists and cover our other costs. Our 2013 fest was the first to turn a small profit, so we were very pleased with that!

MUK is a major financial supporter and the members make up the bulk of the volunteers. We couldn't have done MUF without the MUK!

Any word yet on what we can expect for MUF's fifth year?

We got a great response from audiences and artists about holding the festival in Northcote at the Town Hall and nearby venues, so we will back there again next year. We'll be running an extra workshop space to accommodate the big demand for that. [Our] uke art exhibition will be

back and is always a big favorite; there's always great stuff there. As for our international guests, Jim D'Ville from the USA will be returning with his cello-playing friend, Gideon Freudmann. Manitoba Hall is making his MUF debut, as will Ukulele Russ from Alaska. We have a bunch of great ukers from Europe, including Shelley and Marco of Uke Box fame and Ukulollo from Italy. Still working on a few other special international guests, but there's a big number of new local and interstate groups coming as well. So, it'll be like the previous [years] only bigger and better!

You also have put on two "Anarchy in the MUK" shows, where your club plays British punk songs. What inspired you to start doing this event?

I guess due to the general demographic of the group, these songs had a big effect on us in our salad days and hold a special place in our hearts. Plus, it's good to get away from the standard sunshine-and-palm tree approach to uke repertoire.

Can we expect to see more Anarchy in the MUK shows popping up in the future?

Perhaps. It is a lot of fun! However, our last concept show was Legends of Oz, which had classic Australian songs from the '70s to the modern

day: Nick Cave, Kylie Minogue, Daddy Cool, Yothu Yindi, Russel Morris, and so on. It was a big success and the group had a good time, so we may look at doing that again. In the meantime, I'd like to work up a set of somewhat "scary" songs to go with the visual theme for the next MUF, which has a kind of scary fairytale angle.

Do you have any advice for people who want to start their own uke clubs?

Try not to be too uptight with your structure. Be supportive and guiding to the members, but not limiting their opportunity for self-expression. If someone wants to have a go, let them! I've often been surprised at the great response from an audience to a lead vocalist I thought would totally bomb. People love realism! I also think a good group leader can help keep things moving along and not let the momentum slow down too much during the rehearsal and arrangement process. Sometimes you need someone who can say, We're doing it this way, to avoid getting bogged down in the details and multitude of opinions. This is tricky! Egos can be delicate things. Above all, do it 'cause you love it! And besides, Johnny Cash is dead! Somebody's got to do it!



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A Planet-Friendly Uke

It's the sweet sound of sustainability. **Blackbird Guitars** has launched a new eco-friendly uke model. In November, the San Francisco-based instrument manufacturer introduced the **Clara**, a concert-sized ukulele made from Ekoa, a plant-fiber composite that looks like real wood. According to the company, Ekoa is "a proprietary, first-of-its-kind, renewable, plant-based material that provides the warm sound and feel of vintage old-growth wood with the toughness of carbon fiber."

"Blackbird has spent the better part of a decade developing small, travel-friendly, carbon-fiber instruments with world-class tone," Blackbird Guitars' co-founder Joe Luttwak noted in a press statement. "With the Clara, musicians get what was previously unobtainable—the experience of a vintage old-growth wood instrument in a lightweight, durable, and sustainable package." vThe Clara is \$1,150 (direct); an optional Mi-Si preamp is an additional \$200. blackbirdguitar.com



Win a Bushman 'Jenny' Ukulele

The Indiana-based company Bushman Music Works is gathering submissions for its fifth ukulele video contest. Applicants have until January 31 to submit up to three clips of themselves playing the uke. The judging will wrap up on February 7, and though Bushman owner John Hall says that it is not unusual for the company to receive more than 200 applicants, the top five finishers will each receive one of the company's Jenny models. The first-place winner will also receive tickets and accommodations for two to the Ukulele Luau in Indianapolis, October 17–18. "We've had several bands and stars who got their big break with our contest," Hall said. "**Julia Nunes** won it on her 18th birthday. Since then she's played the **Bonaroo** festival."

If you're interested entering the contest, visit bushmanmusic.com and click on "Ukulele Video Contest."

Jake Shimabukuro Releases Live Concert DVD!



Hawaiian uke superstar **Jake Shimabukuro**, who spent the bulk of 2013 touring in support of his acclaimed CD, *Grand Ukulele*, has released a live DVD of his October concert in Boulder.

"It really captures the energy and essence of the tour," Shimabukuro said as he prepared to take the stage in Wilmington, North Carolina, one of the final stops in a busy year that saw him playing in 2,000-seat venues.

"The Grand Ukulele tour was a first for me," Shimabukuro said. "Taking a six-man crew with me, touring on a bus, having a trailer, bringing our own lights, our own sound. Prior to this tour it was just me and a road manager and we were renting a minivan, so this was really a luxury tour for me."

Jake's Tips for Ukulele Beginners

When beginning players ask him for playing advice, Jake Shimabukuro doesn't hesitate to respond. "The thing I tell people is just have fun, play songs that you like, and play things that interest you," Shimabukuro said.

Ever since his mother gave him his first ukulele as present when he was just four years old, Shimabukuro has had no shortage of fun with the instrument.

"When I was a kid I never thought of it as practice, I just wanted to play all of the time. I never thought, 'Oh I need to practice a song,' or 'I need to practice technique.' I just picked it up and strummed it and had fun with it. In fact, my parents would have to take it away from me so I would do normal, everyday things like eat dinner, go to bed, or do homework."



Peace, Love & Ukulele!

Kala Brand Music has resurrected its popular Ukadelic series for its Makala line. The San Francisco Bay Area-based company is spreading good vibes with such Pop art models as Tie dye, USA Flag, Peacelove, Black Paisley, Skulls, Tropical Day, and Tropical Night as well as new Steampunk and Camouflage ukes. Design features include agathis top, durable injection molded back and sides, rosewood fingerboard, mahogany neck, and geared tuners. Ukadelics are available in soprano size and have a list price of \$84.99.

Victoria Vox Debuts Ukulele Undies and 'Voxer-briefs'

With nine solo albums under her belt and a steady touring schedule since 2004, **Victoria Vox** has lived and breathed the ukulele for the past decade.

Now, she's wearing them, too.

Vox recently unveiled a new line of ukulele-themed panties and "Voxer-briefs" on her website and at shows.

"Ultimately, I'm a songwriter, performer, and entertainer, but I've learned a thing or two about marketing from all my time on the road," Vox says.

So far, Vox's fans have been snapping up the priced-to-move under-things at a decent clip.

"The underwear has been a huge hit, though I don't make a lot of money from them," Vox says.

Vox's mother was instrumental in the underwear's creation.

"My mother teaches screen printing at the University of Wisconsin in Green Bay. She taught me how to do it." If the idea of getting even closer to the ukulele appeals, check out Vox's panties and briefs at victoriavox.com, or catch her in early 2014 when she hits the road for a Seattle to-San Diego tour.

—David Knowles

 A promotional poster for Menucha's 4th Annual Ukulele Band Camp. The background is a scenic view of the Columbia River Gorge. In the foreground, there is a large graphic of a clipboard with a badge that reads:

MENUCHA'S 4TH ANNUAL UKULELE BAND CAMP
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 The main text on the poster reads:

MENUCHA'S 4TH ANNUAL UKULELE BAND CAMP
 JOIN THE BAND
 MARCH 24-28 | 2014

 Below the main text, there are two sections:

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 At the bottom, it says:

CALL US AT 503-695-2243 OR GO TO OUR WEBSITE FOR MORE INFORMATION
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The Saga of Cliff 'Ukulele Ike' Edwards

The rags-to-riches-to-rags story of a 1920s uke giant

By Amber von Nagel

Cliff Edwards, one of the most influential figures in the ukulele world, led a tumultuous life. Born in 1895 in Hannibal, Missouri, he dropped out of school at the age of 14 and got his start in show business shortly thereafter playing drums in St. Louis bars. In the years before his rise to fame, he struggled to make ends meet, taking on any job he could find, from working in carnivals to driving milk trucks, with dreams of becoming a full-time musician and entertainer.

Edwards made the ukulele his instrument of choice because he needed something to accompany his vocals, but couldn't always count on there being a piano at every bar he'd play in. He couldn't read a note of music, but that didn't stop him from becoming a highly proficient player. He acquired the nickname "Ukulele Ike" in 1917 when he was working at a café in Chicago. As the story goes, a waiter who couldn't remember Edwards' name began referring to him as "Ukulele Ike."

The name stuck.

Through the late 1910s and early 1920s, Edwards appeared with his ukulele in numerous vaudeville acts, including the Ziegfeld Follies. He began his career as a recording artist in 1923, but it wasn't until 1924 when he starred with Adele and Fred Astaire in George Gershwin's Broadway musical *Lady Be Good* that he made his big break. Over the course of the decade he recorded over 150 sides, including "California Here I Come" (1924), "Paddlin' Madelin' Home" (1925), and "Singin' in the Rain" (1929). His incredible ukulele playing, triple-octave-range vocals, and charming showmanship (including deft sleight-of-hand tricks) made him an enormously popular artist during the 1920s, and that popularity played a significant role in bringing about the ukulele's first wave of popularity.

As time went on and the public's musical preferences began to shift away from vaudeville-influenced jazz and novelty tunes, Edwards' pop-

ularity waned. He continued to record great music, but he was unable to manage the wealth he accrued at the peak of his fame, and wasted it on alcohol and drugs. He ran into legal problems with his ex-wives and accrued massive debt. However, in the middle of his downfall, Edwards saw his greatest success: In 1940, Walt Disney hired him to voice Jiminy Cricket in the film *Pinocchio*. His connection to Disney was one of his few lifelines, and Disney would continue to support Edwards financially for the rest of his life.

After decades of addiction and financial struggle, Edwards died of cardiac arrest in 1971 at the Virgil Convalescent Hospital in Hollywood. Nobody knew who he was, and his body was left unclaimed for days. When Disney Films caught wind of his passing, the company offered to purchase his remains and pay for his burial. The Actors' Fund of America and the Motion Picture and Television Relief Fund ended up covering his burial and Disney paid for his grave marker.

Despite Edwards' tragic life story, he was a monumental influence, not just to ukulele players, but to legions of Disney fans, ever since Jiminy Cricket's "When You Wish Upon a Star" became the company's signature tune. Many people may never know who was behind what Walt Disney called "the voice with the smile,"



but his musical legacy has given him life long after his death.

Essential Ukulele Ike

In contrast to his stature as the voice of Disney through its theme, "When You Wish Upon a Star," Edwards also recorded several racy titles, like "I'm a Bear in a Lady's Boudoir," in addition to his sweet standards:

"That's My Weakness Now"
"It's Only a Paper Moon"
"Fascinating Rhythm"
"I'll See You in My Dreams"
"Love is Just Around the Corner"
"My Dog Loves Your Dog"

—Greg Olwell



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













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GIVEAWAY RULES: No purchase necessary. Void where prohibited. Entrants must be 18 years or older. Each entry must be individually submitted using the Official Entry Form at UkuleleMag.com/Win/Kala-Giveaway and received by March 14, 2014; facsimiles may not be substituted. Prize drawing will be made on or around March 24, 2014. The prize will be fulfilled by Kala within 60 days of receipt of winner's written acceptance. Employees of *Ukulele* magazine and Kala are not eligible to win. Odds of winning depend on the number of entries received. Limit one entry per person. *Ukulele* magazine reserves the right to notify the winner by mail or by e-mail and to identify the winner in the magazine as well as the *Ukulele* website and Facebook page. International entrants, please note: If the winner is resident outside the United States and Canada, he or she is responsible for all shipping, customs, and tax costs. In the event that an international winner is unwilling or unable to cover these costs, he or she will forfeit the prize and a new winner will be selected at random. Giveaway entrants may receive information from *Ukulele* and Kala. For the name of the prize winner, send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to Kala Giveaway, c/o *Ukulele* Magazine, 510 Canal Blvd, Suite J, Richmond, CA 94804. This offer ends on March 14, 2014. Taxes are the responsibility of the winner. No prize substitutions are permitted.











Basic Ukulele Chords

Just need some chords to start playing your favorite songs?
 These major, minor, seventh, and minor seventh chords should get you started.








Major Chords

C 0003 	C 3211 	D 1230 	D 1114 	E♭ 0341 	E 2341 	F 2010 
G 0132 	G 3121 	A♭ 3121 	A 2100 	A 3121 4 fr. 	B♭ 3211 	B 3211 








Minor Chords

Cm 3111 	Cm 0111 	Dm 2310 	Em 0321 	Em 3421 
Fm 1024 	Gm 0231 	Gm 3241 	Am 2000 	Bm 3111 

Seventh Chords

C7 0001 	D7 1112 	E7 1203 	F7 2310 	G7 0213 	A7 0100 	B7 1211 
--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Minor Seventh Chords

Cm7 1111 	Dm7 2314 	Em7 0102 	Fm7 1324 	Gm7 0211 	Am7 0000 	Bm7 1111 
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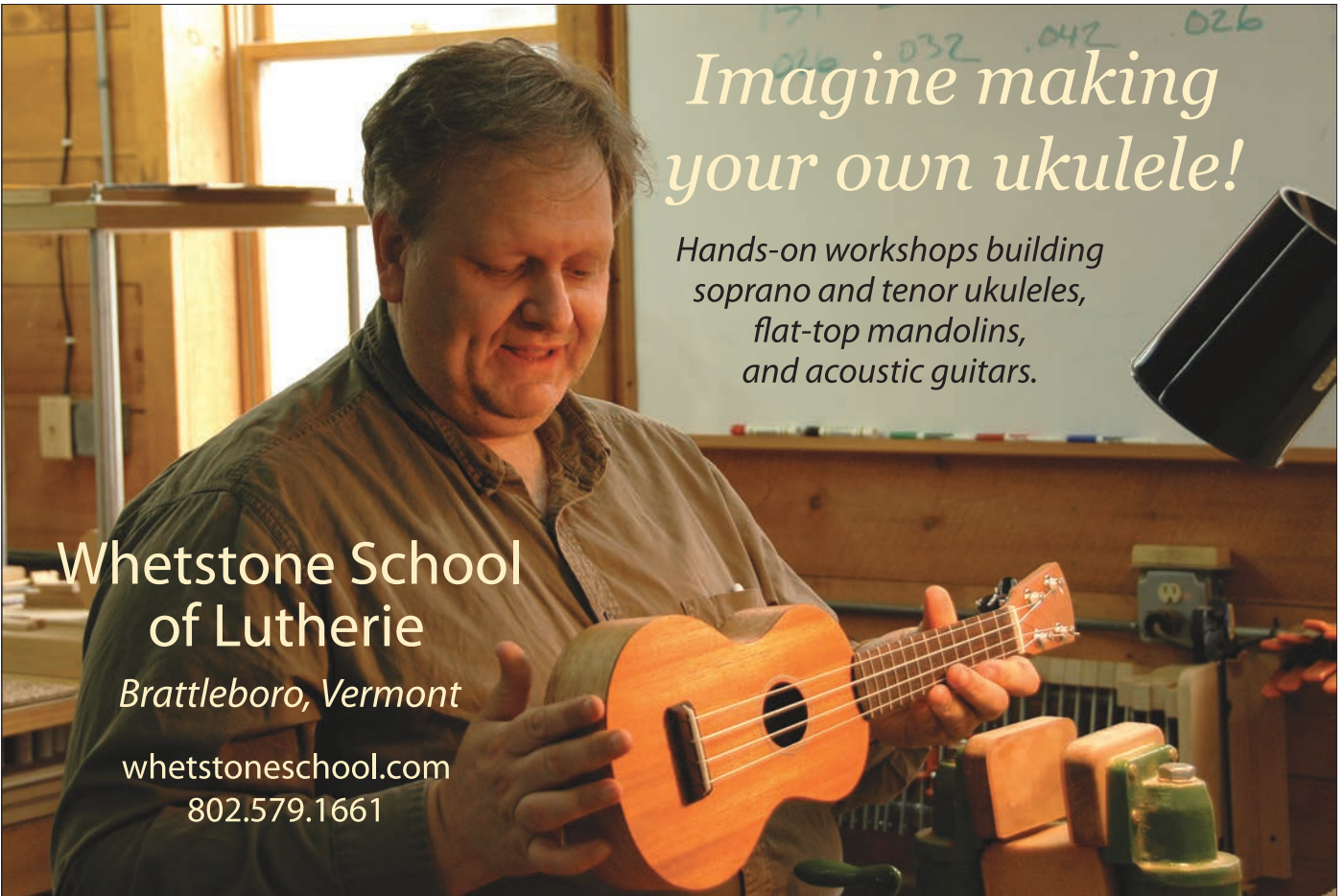


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ORIGINAL CHORD	SUBSTITUTION
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Fig. 1

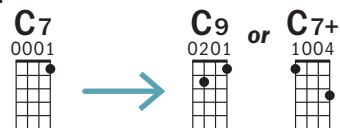


Fig. 2

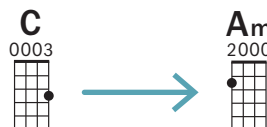
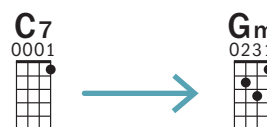


Fig. 3



How to Jazz Up the Uke

Learn to use swing-style substitutions to make songs more interesting

By Fred Sokolow

You may have noticed that jazz players seldom play the chords exactly as they're written in songbooks or fake books. Employing the mystic art of jazz alchemy, they enhance simple chord progressions and make them more interesting, subtler, and prettier. Well, uke maven Jim Beloff noticed this, and asked me, "How do you come up with those jazzy chord changes?" My resulting book and CD is called *Jazzing Up the Uke*, and it's about chord *substitution*. It may not be out on the market yet when you read this, but here's a sneak peek at a few jazzy ideas to start you on the road to thinking like a jazz player.

Getting Started

While there are no substitution *rules*, there are some common *ideas* that allow you to vary a given chord progression, so you never have to play a song exactly the same way twice. You can make it fancier or simpler, busier or less cluttered, and change the tone and feel, depending on your mood. Sometimes it's a matter of substituting one chord for another, like playing a C9 instead of a C7 (more on that later). At other times, you can play a whole series of chords where only one chord was written. There are

21 substitution ideas in my book—here are four of them, as well as tips on playing my arrangement of "Red River Valley."

Direct Substitution

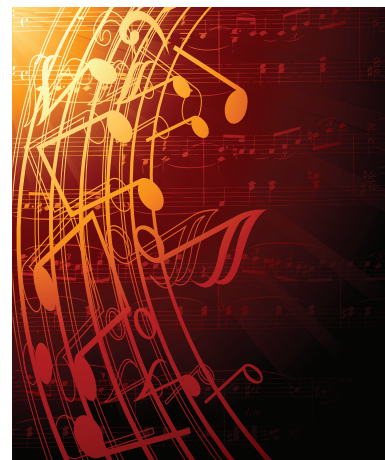
You can substitute any chord from the same chord type as the given chord. For example, instead of C7, you could play C9, C7 augmented (C7+), or C13, just to name a few, because all these chords are C7 with an extra note added (a ninth, a sharp fifth, and so on). They're all variants of a C7 chord. [Fig. 1]

Relative Minor Substitution

For a major chord, you can often substitute or add the relative minor. That's the minor chord that's a sixth above the major chord. For example, A is the sixth note in the C major scale, so Am is the relative minor of C. Instead of just playing a C chord, you can play Am or a C followed by an Am. [Fig. 2]

Dominant Minor Substitution

Given a seventh chord, you can add or substitute the minor chord that is a fifth above it. For example, for a C7 you can substitute Gm (a fifth above C7), or play Gm followed by C7. [Fig. 3]



Ascending or Descending Melodic Lines

You can also substitute a series of chords that contains an ascending or descending melodic line that harmonizes the song's melody. The effect is like ear candy—two melodies happening simultaneously that harmonize with each other.

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Jazzing Up 'Red River Valley'

Traditional; arranged by Fred Sokolow

These four principles are illustrated in my arrangement of the old cowboy song "Red River Valley" (see music on page 26). First, check out the basic tune, using simple, first-position chords. You can play along with the recording at UkuleleMag.com. Then check out the jazzed-up version. Listen to the recording and play along with it, too.

The first measure is a "pickup measure." The first full measure matches the words "sit by my." If we compare the basic progression to the one with fancier chords, most of the differences between the two can be explained in terms of the four substitution concepts discussed earlier:

Measure 1: Am is a relative minor sub for C.

Measure 2: Dm is a dominant minor sub for G7, because Dm is a fifth above G.

Measures 3–4: Am is a relative minor sub for C, and Cmaj7 is a direct sub for C. The series of chords (C, Cmaj7, Am, C) contains a descending melodic line on the top string: C, B, A, G.

Measure 5: Am is a relative minor sub for C.

Measure 7: Dm is a dominant minor sub for G7.

Measure 8: G7+ (G augmented, or a G chord with a sharp fifth) is a direct sub for G.

Measures 9–10: Cmaj7 is a direct sub for C, and C9 is a direct sub for C7. The series of chords (C, Cmaj7, C7) contain a descending melodic line: C, B, Bb, similar to the melodic line in bars 3–4.

Measures 11–12: F+ (F augmented) is a direct sub for F, and Dm is a relative minor sub for F.

Measure 14: Dm is a dominant minor sub for G7, and G7b9 is a direct sub for G.

Measure 16: C6 is a direct sub for C.

I know, some things are unexplained!

What about the G-diminished (Gdim) chord in measure 6, or the Fm6 chords (there are three of them)? Well, remember there are 17 more substitution principles that I haven't described in this brief article. If you're interested, you'll find them in my book. (Remember, you don't need to use all of these substitutions every time you want to play a jazzy version.)

I hope that this fancy arrangement and the explanations of substitutions will give you an idea of some of the possibilities in this realm. When you start applying substitution concepts to swing tunes, instead of folk tunes, it gets even more interesting. Have fun!

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'Red River Valley' with basic chords

(Come and sit _____ by my side _____ if you love me _____ Do not has - ten _____ to

6 bid _____ me a - dieu _____ But re - mem - ber the Red _____ Riv - er Val - ley _____

12 and the cow - boy who loved _____ you so true _____)

'Red River Valley' with jazzy substitutions

(Come and sit _____ by my side _____ if you love me _____ Do not

5 has - ten _____ to bid _____ me a - dieu _____ But re

9 mem - ber the Red _____ Riv - er Val - ley _____ and the

13 cow - boy who loved _____ you so true _____)

Who's Afraid of the Pentatonic Scale?

The well-traveled pentatonic scale unlocks the door to a world of song

By James Hill

Whether you're a strummer, a hummer, a picker, or a singer, you need to know the pentatonic scale. The good news is it's easy to play and it's found in most genres of music from nearly every corner of the world. What's not to love? In this lesson, you'll explore this often-overlooked musical wonder.

As you can see in the diagram below, the pentatonic scale is simply the open strings *plus* one new note on each string (for this lesson I've chosen C-major pentatonic).

It's that easy!

Start by playing eight times on each note, then try four on each. Then two, then one. Keep the rhythm steady! [Fig. 1]

A Truly International Scale

If I were stranded on a desert island, the pentatonic scale is the one scale I'd take with me. It's lightweight (just five notes) and it's international. By that I mean it's a scale found in music from all over the world. Want proof? Compare the following melodies. The first is a Chinese folk song from the Ming Dynasty—era (circa 14th century) called "The Flower Drum." [Fig. 2]

The second is a well-known ditty by Stephen Foster, the father of American popular music that uses the same notes as "The Flower Drum." Can you name the tune? [Fig. 3]

My point is this: the pentatonic scale is well-travelled. It's a cornerstone of musical traditions from all over the world (European, Asian, and African traditions in particular). It's a sound that unites humanity across borders and generations.

It's the little scale that could!

If I were stranded on a desert island, the pentatonic scale is the one scale I'd take with me. It's lightweight (just five notes) and it's international.

Fig. 1

Beginner

"The Flower Drum"

Fig. 2

C-Major Pentatonic Scale

Fig. 3

Name This Tune! (See next page for answer.)

Fig. 4

'The Bonus Blues'

Am

Dm Am

There's a bluesy bonus to learning the C-major pentatonic scale: it doubles as the A-minor pentatonic.

The Bonus Blues

But wait, there's more! There's a bluesy bonus to learning the C-major pentatonic scale: it doubles as the A-minor pentatonic (think blues and old-time music). Why? Because every major scale has a relative minor scale—A minor is the relative minor of C major. That's right, it's a two-for-one!

Don't believe me?

Try these blues licks and see for yourself: they only use notes from the pentatonic scale you learned in this lesson. [Fig. 4]

Now it's your turn: take the notes of the C major pentatonic scale (aka A-minor pentatonic scale) and create your own melodies. In doing so you'll join a musical conversation that began centuries ago and continues to echo in the pop, rock, jazz, and blues music of today.

Enjoy!

(The mystery tune in Fig. 3 is Stephen Foster's "Oh, Susanna!")



JAMES HILL is one of the leading ukulele players and teachers of his generation. His newest learning resource is *The Ukulele Way*, a series of books, CDs, and online videos on solo ukulele (playing melody, chords, and rhythm simultaneously). This lesson is adapted from *Ukulele in the Classroom, Book 1* by James Hill and J. Chalmers Doane. Learn more at theukuleleway.com.



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Happy Viewing!



Jambalaya (on the Bayou)

Words and music by Hank Williams

Hank Williams released “Jambalaya” in 1952, and the single promptly went to No. 1 on the country charts.

Williams used the melody from the Cajun tune “Grand Texas” as a foundation, and wrote his lyrics to the tune, based on his own impressions of Louisiana (country-and-western singer and songwriter Moon Mullican is said to have co-written it, and his estate receives royalties). Having spent years performing on the Shreveport-based radio show, *Louisiana Hayride*, Williams had plenty of Cajun-inspired food and partying experiences to draw from as he penned the song. Its title, drawn from the spicy Creole and Cajun dish, evokes the joyous spirit of Louisiana culture. The song’s lyrics espouse a devil-may-care attitude (“Good-bye, Joe, me gotta go, me oh my oh”), so let that inform your interpretation.

The tune has been covered by a host of others, producing a bevy of hit records, which include versions by Jo Stafford (also in 1952), the Carpenters, Fats Domino, and John Fogerty.

It’s a fun song to play on the ukulele and it’s easy to pick the melody line from the chords (listen to Williams’ recording and whistle along to get the tune ingrained in your mind).

This version follows Williams’ original cut of the song. Later versions added a third verse (“Settle down far from town, get me a pirogue/ And I’ll catch all the fish in the bayou/Swap my mon to buy Yvonne what she need-o/Son of a gun we’ll have big fun on the bayou”). The tune is great for beginners, since it switches between just two chords (C and G7) throughout the whole song, and the verses and choruses use exactly the same chord progression and are the same length.

To emulate the boom-chuck sound of Williams’ original, try strum pattern 1 (p 32). If you’re playing with a pick, use downstrokes for each beat, striking just the C string on beats 1 and 3, and strumming through the whole chord on beats 2 and 4. If you’re using your fingers for strumming, try plucking the bass notes on beats 1 and 3 with your thumb, following up with an index-finger strum on beats 2 and 4. For a more laid-back feel (and a little more momentum), try the eighth-note figure shown in strum pattern 2 (p 32). And if you’d prefer to fingerpick the song, try the alternate-bass pattern shown on p 32.

—Andrew DuBrock



Intro

G7 C

1. **C G7**
 Goodbye Joe, me gotta go, me oh, my oh
C
 Me gotta go pole the pirogue down the bayou
G7
 My Yvonne, the sweetest one, me oh my oh
C
 Son of a gun, we'll have big fun on the bayou

Chorus

C G7
 Jambalaya, crawfish pie, filé gumbo
C
 Cause tonight I'm gonna see my ma cher amio

G7

Pick guitar, fill fruit jar, and be gay-o

C

Son of a gun, we'll have big fun on the bayou

Fiddle Solo (over Verse progression)

2. **C G7**
 Thibodaux, Fontaineaux, the place is a-buzzin'
C
 Kinfolk come to see Yvonne by the dozen
G7
 Dress in style and go hog wild, me oh my oh
C
 Son of a gun, we'll have big fun on the bayou

Repeat Chorus

Fiddle Solo (over Verse progression)

Repeat Chorus

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Beginner

Strum Pattern 1



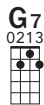
Strum Pattern 2



Fingerpicking Pattern



Chords



*Strum: \square \square \square \square \square \square ∇ \square ∇ \square ∇ p i p m p i p m

* \square = down; ∇ = up

Melody (Verse/Chorus)



1. Good-bye Joe me got - ta go me oh my oh Me got - ta go pole the



6 pi - rogue down the ba - you My Y - vonne the sweet-est one me oh my oh



12 Son of a gun we'll have good fun on the ba - you Jam - ba

Note

The melody line of the verse repeats in the chorus. Additional verses and chorus are on p 31.

—Greg Cahill

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How Long, How Long Blues

Words and Music by Leroy Carr

Leroy Carr and Scrapper Blackwell first recorded “How Long, How Long Blues” in 1928, and it went on to be such a big hit for the duo that they kept recording and re-releasing different versions of the song—even versions with other names. Many others have recorded the tune over the years, including Count Basie, Ramblin’ Jack Elliot, Eric Clapton, Pinetop Perkins, and countless blues artists.

This eight-bar blues is based on “How Long Daddy,” recorded in 1925 by singer Ida Cox and banjo/guitar/ukulele player Papa Charlie Jackson. “How Long, How Long Blues,” with its doomy bass line, was a best-seller for Carr and Blackwell.

In his book *Nothin’ But the Blues*, writer Lawrence Cohn noted, “The sound and the attitude evoked such a responsive chord in black listeners that the record reportedly sold a million copies and had to be rerecorded when Vocalion wore out the master.”

The song, adopted in 1988 into the Blues Hall of Fame, inspired the Mississippi Sheiks’ “Sitting on Top of the World” and Robert Johnson’s “Come On in My Kitchen.”

Blues great Muddy Waters wrote that it was the first song he ever learned.

Over the years, “How Long, How Long Blues” has been recorded in quite a few different keys. For instance, Carr and Blackwell’s original cut was in the key of E^b, but Clapton and Ramblin’ Jack both recorded versions in E, while blues pianist Pinetop Perkins played it in the key of C. The following arrangement shows the tune in the key of C, since it falls easily under the fingers on the ukulele, but we’ll follow the lyrics that Clapton used on his 1994 acoustic release, *From the Cradle*.

This arrangement essentially uses just three chords—C, F, and G—with the added C7 and F7 voicings to create nice chord transitions that also highlight melody notes. However, if you’re new to the ukulele and this is too many chords, you can simply leave out the C7 and F7, and continue playing C and F, respectively, for these chords.

Most blues songs follow the common 12-bar format, but “How Long, How Long Blues” uses the less-common eight-bar format. Try the steady eighth-note strum pattern and play the song at a



relaxed tempo. To achieve the laid-back bluesy feel of the song, strum it using a triplet feel (also called a “swing” or “shuffle” feel). This feel subdivides each beat into a triplet, with the first eighth note getting the value of two triplet notes while the second eighth note gets the value of only one triplet note. This may sound confusing, but listen to recordings of the song and you’ll see how this rhythm should sound. Then, just think about making every downstroke a little longer than every upstroke, and you

should be fine.

Fingerpickers may want to try the pattern shown **on page 35**, which uses a monotonic bass pattern with the thumb under a riff-like groove above with the fingers. As long as you have the thumb plucking on each beat, you can play virtually any pattern with the fingers (or rest the fingers completely!). So if you’re not keen on this pattern (or it’s too complicated), find something that works better for your fingers.

—Andrew DuBrock

Chords

C
0003

C7
0001

F
2010

F7
2310

G7
0213

Strum Pattern

C
0003

Swing (♩ = ♩♩)

Fingerpicking Pattern

C
0003

* Strum: ◻ V ◻ V ◻ V ◻ V p i m i m i p i

* ◻ = down; V = up

C **C7**

1. How long, baby, how long

F **F7**

Has that evening train been gone?

C **G7** **C**

How long, how, how long, baby, how long

C **C7**

2. Went to the station, didn't see no train

F **F7**

Down in my heart I have an aching pain

C **G7** **C**

How long, how, how long, baby, how long

C **C7**

3. I feel disgusted, I feel so bad

F **F7**

Thinking 'bout the good times that I once have had

C **G7** **C**

How long, how, how long, baby, how long

C **C7**

4. I could see the green grass growing on the hill

F **F7**

I ain't seen no greenback on a dollar bill

C **G7** **C**

How long, how, how long, baby, how long

C **C7**

5. You're gonna feel sorry you feel so blue

F **F7**

When you want me, baby I declare I want, want you

C **G7** **C**

How long, how, how long, baby, how long?

C **C7**

6. Don't have no money for to ride the train

F **F7**

I would ride the rugs, baby, to be with you again

C **G7** **C**

How long, how, how long, baby, how long?

C **C7**

7. How long, baby, how long

F **F7**

Must I keep my, my watching point?

C **G7** **C**

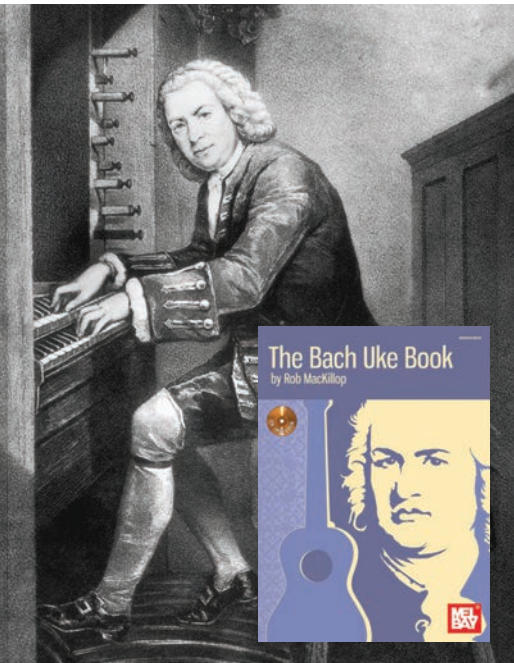
How long, how, how long, baby, how long?

Player Tip

You can easily pull the melody line out of the chord notes. Give it a try.

—Greg Cahill

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Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring

A familiar J.S. Bach melody for duet between two ukes

Many Bach arrangements, in *The Bach Uke Book* published by Mel Bay Publications, bring together two ukuleles. The upper part is tuned GCEA for soprano, concert, or tenor ukulele, and the lower part is tuned DGBE for a baritone ukulele or the first four strings of a standard-tuned guitar. Although in 3/4 time, most of the top part is in triplets, that is, three notes per beat. Notice that in m. 1 the upper part begins with a rest. Try counting in triplets: One-and-a, two-and-a, three-and-a, one—then start playing.

Also for the upper part, m. 1, play the last note (eighth fret, second string) with your ring finger. Keep your pinky in reserve for the eighth

fret on the first string in m. 2. You may be tempted to play these with a barre, but I think it sounds better if you use two fingers.

Mm. 9, 10, and 11, for the upper part, look comparatively easy, but most students play them too fast; they can seem slow after those triplets. The lower part has an easier job, but remember that your role is to support the upper part. The timing in m. 8 is debated by Bach interpreters. The short note at the end of the second beat could be played as written, but some argue that it was the convention of the day to coincide it with the third note of the triplet in the upper part. Your choice!

—Rob MacKillop

Advanced

Melody (soprano, concert or tenor)

Accompaniment (baritone)

13

1 3-0 0-3 1-0 3 0 5-8 6-6 8 8 8-7-8 0 0 3-1 0 0 3-1 0-1 0 5-8-6-6 8 8 8-7-8 0 0 1-3

0 5-7 2 0 7 0

1 1-1 1 1 1 1 3 2 3 0 2 2 2 0 3 2-3-2 0 1 3 2 3 0

19

1-3 5-3 1-0 0 0 1-0 0 0 5-8 6-6 8 8 8-7-8 0 0 3-1 0 0 3-1 0-1 1

3 1 0 1-3 0-3 3 5-7 2 0 3-1 0-1 1

0 2 3 1 0 1 1 3 3 2 3 1 3 0 1 3

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EXPERTLY UKE-ING SUSAN

Heidi Swedberg has gone from fabled 'Seinfeld' cast member to one of the country's top ukulele clinicians

Story by David Templeton

Photographs by Emily Fisher



“**T**here goes Ken Middleton,” says musician Heidi Swedberg—of Heidi Swedberg and the Sukie Jump Band—pointing through the window into a bustling downtown bakery in St. Helena, in rural Northern California. Out at a sidewalk table, where Swedberg is having breakfast this already-hot summer morning, the rumbling of the occasional cattle truck rattling down Main Street causes Swedberg—in town for the annual Wine Country Ukulele Festival—to shout to be heard.

Which makes her cough—because she’s getting over a terrible cold—which does nothing to dampen Swedberg’s enthusiasm at being here, amid some of the best ukulele players and teachers in the world, including the aforementioned Ken Middleton.

“He’s a fabulous Englishman, who’s just flown over,” says Swedberg. “He’s one of the teachers at the festival. He’s standing in line with Daniel Serna from Yokohama Ukuleles. And right in there is Dave Eagen. He’s a soundman par excellence, but also an amazing musician, and he’s also teaching ukulele.”



Swedberg leads a clinic at the 2013 Wine Country Ukulele Festival

Swedberg is perhaps better known as an actress (*Hot Shots*; *Galaxy Quest*) than a musician. Of all her roles, her most recognizable is the character of Susan Ross, on the television show *Seinfeld*. Yes, she played George Costanza's doomed fiancé, who, in one of the series' most outrageous and notorious episodes, died of toxic poisoning after licking hundreds of wedding invitation envelopes. Nowadays, Swedberg plays the ukulele more often than she plays characters on screen. Her family-friendly, uke-driven party band with the patently upbeat name released its first album, *Play!*, in 2009 and has just produced an effervescent follow-up, *My Cup of Tea*. As a teacher (sukiejumpmusic.com), she focuses on beginning and intermediate ukulele students, mainly children.

"I'm fairly new to the whole ukulele world myself," Swedberg says, explaining that she's played since her childhood in Hawaii, but left music behind not long after high school to focus on acting.

"I received my first ukulele from the Easter Bunny, in Kailua, Hawaii, when I was about five," she says. "I have three older sisters, and we came out one Easter morning, and there was a

little line of ukuleles waiting for us. Actually, it was a line of those little triangular ukulele boxes. The shape of those cardboard boxes has always been really magical to me. It was Easter, but those boxes didn't have to be Easter egg colors or anything, just the color of cardboard happiness, man. I still love those boxes.

"A lot of times, my students use them as cases, with a little tape seam on them so they open and close," she continues. "Sometimes, we'll even build a handle into them, because

when you're working with kids, and they are dealing with \$30 instruments, sometimes the case costs more than the instruments themselves, so to keep it affordable for the families, we'll turn their cardboard boxes into cases. Kids love 'em. They decorate them all kinds of ways, draw and paint designs on them, line them with fake fur.

"It makes the kids way happy."

Swedberg learned the basics from her mother, who was left-handed.

'I received my first ukulele from the Easter Bunny, in Kailua, Hawaii, when I was about five.'

—Heidi Swedberg

“My mom plays a right-handed ukulele, strung as a lefty, upside down and backward,” Swedberg laughs. “I find it impossible to play like that, but that’s how she plays. She taught us our first three chords, which I think every kid in Hawaii is required to learn before the fourth grade—C, F, and G7.”

Swedberg kept that first ukulele all the way through high school, and played it often, if not particularly well.

“It was always one of those adolescent, teenage angst things,” she recalls, smiling with mock embarrassment at the memory, “noodling around in my room, writing songs about some boy at school who hadn’t noticed me. That sort of thing. But I never had a professional teacher. I never studied. I figured out chords just by listening to them.

“I pretty much thought I was making them up, discovering brand new chords previously unknown to civilized people.

“I invented the E minor, did you know that?” she jokes.

Asked why she stopped playing, Swedberg says, “Oh, yeah, well. I loaned that first ukulele to a boyfriend—and never got it back. So for my college years, I didn’t play, because I didn’t have anything to play on—all because of that rat fink, Jeff Page.”

For years, as she graduated and began land-

‘Here’s the thing, this is what I really believe in. I think it’s far more important to make music than to be good at making music.’

ing roles in movies and television shows, the ukulele was a distant memory. Coincidentally, it was a television show that reignited Swedberg’s childhood connection to the instrument.

“After I moved to Los Angeles, I was auditioning for a TV pilot, and the character was a singer-songwriter,” she says. “And things were going along pretty good, and they had me come in to test for the network, which is where the final audition happened.” In television, she explains, you have to sign contracts before you do the final audition on a TV show. “Just before that last audition, they said, ‘Do you play the guitar?’ and being an actor, I said, ‘Sure. Of course I do!’

“That’s one of the rules they teach you in Hollywood. You never say no. ‘Can you ride a horse?’ Sure! ‘Can you shoot a gun?’ Absolutely! Of course? I live to shoot guns. So I told them I could play the guitar, even though I couldn’t, and then before the audition I went down to McCabe’s Guitar Shop in Santa Monica and I got myself . . . a baritone ukulele! I figured, they’re TV people. They don’t know the difference between a baritone ukulele and a guitar!

“And as it turns out . . . they didn’t.”

Tired of raising her voice to be heard above the passing trucks, Swedberg pauses as a large vehicle carrying bags of manure roars past.



"Anyway, I got the part," she shrugs, then adds, "and after they shot the pilot, they rewrote the episode, and decided they didn't need that character in it. It was fine, because that contract I signed said that I had to be paid for the entire season whether I appeared in the show or not, so . . ."

By that point, of course, she'd become fully reunited with playing the ukulele, and this time, she stuck with it. She found her first real teacher, McCabe's late luthier John Zender, who passed away a few years ago, and whom Swedberg recalls fondly.

"He was a beautiful man with a long white beard," she says. "He taught me to fall in love with the ukulele again."

She stops to wave at a pair of gentlemen stopping in at the bakery, which appears to be the place to get breakfast in tiny St. Helena. Asked if she now considers herself a musician, and actor, or both, Swedberg ponders the question as she takes a bit of her breakfast.

"In my case," she finally says, "I don't think there's much of a difference. I'm still acting. I'm just acting like a musician. I think that's kind of just how I roll. 'Musician' is the part I'm playing right now, because I honestly don't think I'm that great of a musician.

"I'm that good of an actor, either," she laughs. "But what do we care?"



Swedberg does not appear to be feigning humility. She's clearly just offering a brutally honest assessment of her own gifts.

"Here's the thing, this is what I really believe in," she continues. "I think it's far more important to make music than to be good at making music."

Does she feel the same way about acting?

"I don't think acting is all that important," she says. "Not compared to music. For the most part, acting is just entertainment. I think there is some importance to the theater, but TV and all that? Come on! It doesn't matter what monkey you hire for the job, it's all going to work out.

"But music," she goes on, "music is a basic form of human communication. Music is essential in keeping us human, in keeping us connected—connected within our own culture, and connected to other cultures.

"It's a communication tool. We do tend to think of music as entertainment, which is fine. Entertainment is fine. But communication is better. Communication is vital to making our lives worthwhile."

And what is it, exactly, that Swedberg believes she is communicating with her own music? This one takes no time to ponder. She's clearly thought about this question.

"What I want more than anything," she says, "is to encourage other people to play, to sing, to make music, to have music in their own lives, as a vital part of their lives. And you don't have to be good for it to be vital. I stand for making music no matter how bad you suck."

She laughs again, then bangs on the table, emphasizing every other word with its own bang.

"I think!" Bang! "You totally!" Bang! "Have to!" Bang! "Get over!" Bang! "Your fear!" Bang! "Of!" Bang! "Sucking!"

Bang!

"Just get over it, man! And make music! And sing, and play. That's why I love the ukulele so much. We're a lot less judgmental about how people play the ukulele than we are about how they play the guitar, have you noticed that? The ukulele is a little bit silly. It's funny. People aren't intimidated by it.

"If you come to a party and you have a guitar, people are gonna look at you like, 'Ooh, beautiful guitar! Can you play it?' But if you go to a party with a ukulele, people will say, 'Ooh, that's cool! Can I try it?'"

Clearly, Swedberg is someone who wants to spread ukulele happiness wherever she goes, to make people laugh, to make people smile. And the ukulele, she has proven over and over, is the perfect instrument to make that happen.

"It's awesome!" she says. "When you see a ukulele, you know it's time for a holiday. It's a good time, wrapped up in one little instrument. Ukulele! It means 'Party,' you know what I mean?"

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SOUTHERN GOTHIC

Singer-songwriter Amanda Shires
deconstructs the happy-go-lucky ukulele

BY JEFFREY PEPPER RODGERS



Amanda Shires is one emerging songwriter who's taking the ukulele down some less-traveled roads. Spin her latest album, *Down Fell the Doves* (Lightning Rod), and you'll encounter dark-edged, emotionally intense lyrics that are nothing like the stereotypical happy-go-lucky uke song—just a sampling of titles, such as “Devastate,” “Box Cutters,” and “Deep Dark Below,” makes that very clear. In fact, you may not even recognize the ukulele on most of the tracks—especially because she usually fingerpicks the uke, and sometimes treats it like a mini-electric guitar, with tremolo and Tube Screamer overdrive effects and all.

Shires first made her mark on the music scene as a fiddler. As a teenager, she even played with the Texas Playboys, the backing band of Western swing legend Bob Wills. But in her early 20s, Shires shifted her focus from fiddling to songwriting, in a country/roots/Americana vein, and eventually relocated from her native Texas to Nashville.

Recently she married fellow songwriter and former Drive-By Truckers Jason Isbell, whose guitar rings through *Down Fell the Doves*.

Shires is clearly serious about the writing craft—she's got a quote from Leonard Cohen's “Hallelujah” tattooed on her arm (“Love is not a victory march / It's a cold and it's a broken hallelujah”), and in between tours she's completing an MFA in poetry at Tennessee's Sewanee School of Letters. Yet, in conversation, her playful spirit shines through, as does her love of the uke. “I could sit around and play ukulele all day,” she says in her Texas drawl. “It's so light. You can carry it around with you to the mailbox and serenade your mail man.”

How did you find your way from fiddle to ukulele?

Since I left Texas to pursue songwriting and quit being a side person as my full-on job, I had to learn how to communicate with other musicians. When I would write songs on fiddle, I couldn't translate to other people sometimes what I wanted to hear for rhythm and chords or chord inversions—things that you can't do on violin, which is mostly just a lead instrument.

So where did you first get your hands on a uke?

At Steve's Guitars in Colorado. I was playing a show there, and he had a whole bunch of things hanging on the wall. I was like, "What is that?" He said, "That's a ukulele—I'll trade you that for a CD," and I said, "Done."

That's a pretty good trade.

Well, it wasn't like the best ukulele in the world, but I didn't need the best ukulele in the world. I was interested in it, and he supports musicians.

Did it make sense to go from four strings on violin to four strings on the ukulele?

No, actually, because I play a five-string fiddle. I honestly just liked the sound of the ukulele, and I liked the size of it. I am not a lazy person, but we kind of have a rule in bands that you can't pack more than you can carry. The ukulele was easy to carry around with the fiddle. I think if

you can make up a song on the ukulele, if it can stand up with the smallness of ukulele, it'll stand up anywhere.

Did picking up the uke help you write more songs?

It's probably 50/50 now. Sometimes I'll write some kind of melody on the fiddle and take it to the ukulele to figure out what I want the rest of it to sound like, and sometimes I'll write on ukulele. Sometimes I'll pick up whatever Jason's got lying around. I don't think I write a lot more—the ukulele just makes it a little easier.

Since you're classically trained on the violin, have you developed that kind of formal knowledge on the ukulele?

I'm starting to. I've been teaching myself. When I got it, I had a few guitar players show me some things. Now, since my finger has healed up [from a broken bone], I'm able to play for longer amounts of time and practice more, so I've been trying to get better. I've always liked learning, and the ukulele is so forgiving when you're learning. It's not like when you screw up on violin, where it's like piercing your ears out. When you mess up on ukulele, I don't know, you just keep going. It's more encouraging, I think.

The learning stages of violin can be pretty rough.

My mom would make me practice outside, and

then she would throw the dog out there with me because the dog would howl [laughs].

On the album, there are not a lot of obvious ukulele sounds aside from 'If I.'

That's because I ran it through a whole bunch of pedals. My producer, Andy LeMaster, and I were going for some sounds, so we did a lot of putting ukulele through an amp and through different effects, just to have different kinds of tones. I recommend it. I have this electric ukulele that me and a guitar luthier made [see sidebar, "Have Ukes, Will Travel"]—it looks like a baby death-metal guitar. It's so cute. I used that on the record, and I was playing baritone ukulele but now switched over to tenor.

You use a low tuning rather than re-entrant tuning, right?

Right. I changed one of my strings and tuned my baritone like a guitar for that record. But I've got four ukuleles sitting out right now and they're all in different tunings.

You tend not to strum your uke, as so many players do.

Yeah—that's kind of happy.

And not what you're going for?

No. I mean, I appreciate happy songs. You know, Townes Van Zandt said you could either write

'The ukulele is so forgiving when you're learning. It's not like when you screw up on violin, where it's like piercing your ears out.'



"Zip-a-Dee-Doo-Dah" or the blues, and I prefer it's not "Zip-a-Dee-Doo-Dah" when I write. I like to listen to other people's happy songs.

'A Song for Leonard Cohen' is a highlight of your album. Is his music a model for what you aspire to in your songwriting?

If I could accomplish or even get close to the clarity and precision that he has, that would be ultimate success to me. I just think he's the best. I don't know if I aspire to be like him, but I relate to a lot of the things I've read in his biographies. Mostly, you know, I aspire to be like myself, but everybody has influences.

The fact that you're studying poetry seems like a connection to Cohen, since that was his background.

But I did it backward. He did the poetry first and the music second. I love language and I love knowing what words mean, gaining insight somehow.

Graduate school is an unlikely path for a touring musician. What was the impetus for going for your MFA?

I just want to be better at writing. I feel like with

ukulele or violin or writing or being good at anything, it takes practice.

I'm the kind of person that has a lot of questions. I appreciate being able to go to a school and be comfortable in a room with other people who are on the same level as me and not be

afraid to ask questions or figure things out. Education never hurts. Being able to operate in writing on more than instinct would hopefully be something that happens from school. At least I'll have more tools in the toolbox to be able to make it happen.

HAVE UKES, WILL TRAVEL

Among the instruments heard on Amanda Shires' *Down Fell the Doves* is a baritone ukulele made by Chris Jenkins in Mansfield, Texas (cjenkinsluthier.com). Since making the album, Shires has switched to a Martin tenor ukulele—she's now a Martin Ambassador, which gives her the opportunity to borrow a variety of ukes and tinker with tunings and sounds. As a musician on the road for some 200 days a year, Shires appreciates that the tenor is even lighter than the baritone, plus she finds it more comfortable—and playable without a strap.

Nashville luthier Joe Glaser worked with Shires to create the electric ukulele heard on "Bulletproof" and other songs. "We chopped apart an electric guitar and put it back together into a ukulele, like Frankenstein," she says.

Shires uses Martin strings on her ukuleles. Onstage, her acoustic uke is amplified with a Fishman pickup and L.R. Baggs direct box, and she sometimes runs the signal through a pedal board (with reverb, delay, tremolo, and tube screamer) and an amp for not-exactly-traditional uke tones.

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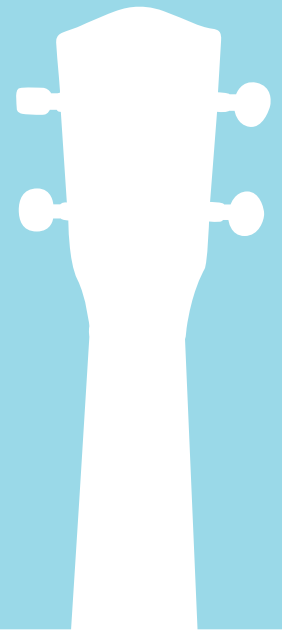


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The Uke Steps to the Head of the Class

The small, but mighty, ukulele makes its case for a place in music education, sweetly

.....
By Emily Wright



Even the word sounds like a smile. For the past four decades, the ukulele has been a staple of Canadian music education. First pioneered in the 1960s by Canadian educator J. Chalmers Doane, the use of the ukulele as an introduction to music making has recently been refreshed by many teachers, including artist and educator James Hill. Together with a thriving and interconnected community of teachers and performers that includes Melanie Doane (J. Chalmers' daughter) and Victoria Vox, the small, but mighty, ukulele makes its case for a place in music education, sweetly.

A Multi faceted Approach

"[The ukulele] is a vehicle for music literacy, for a complete musical education," says ukulele performer, writer, and clinician James Hill. He admits that this is a bold statement, but it's one that Canadian music educators have been immersed in the living proof of for the past several decades.

From the start, nothing is off-limits, even for the earliest beginners.

Ear training, note reading, improvisation, arranging, composition are all addressed from the first lesson, which in the Doane-Hill curriculum avoids the "C-chord trap," in which the students learn a few chords and subsequently see the instrument only in a chordal capacity.

Since it's not chained to one particular style of music, the ukulele also keeps most doors open in terms of what direction lessons can take. Classical arrangements make sense. Jazz melodies or harmonies sound right. Novelty songs are the norm. And, of course, Hill says it helps that with the ukulele "it's always a little bit funny. You can maintain a kind of lightness in the teaching and learning."

Still, many beginners quit because they get bogged down in the seriousness of learning an instrument, succumbing to the weighty expectations associated with the recorder or violin.

Using the ukulele allows the teacher to introduce and explore all aspects of playing and to think about music in a way that gets students to stay upbeat and motivated about music making throughout the learning process.

Singing Is Part of the Experience

One of the biggest differences between ukulele as an introductory instrument and other methods, like the recorder or violin, is the implicit expectation that the children will sing. While uke is perfectly capable of being a melodic or harmonic voice unto itself, it has a rich (and humorous) history as accompaniment instrument to voice that is attractive to young learners.

The epigram, "If you can sing it, you can play it," has truth to it: students have a much easier time recognizing and quantifying things like intervals and rhythms when they are the ones generating them.

Singing also breeds confidence and an earthy approach to music making, where the desire to do well is balanced by the simple pleasure of being able to sit down and play a song.

Corollary to String Playing

Both Hill and Melanie Doane are trained violinists, as well as products of the ukulele-based system for which they now advocate. Doane, who describes herself as "in the trenches" of music education, says, "One thing my dad figured out is that it's such a great instrument in tandem with another instrument, because you have your ear training, your chords, and singing—things you don't normally address playing single notes until much later on.

"It's this great rounder-outer of musicianship."

Ukulele education isn't sold as a means to churn out generation after generation of virtuosic uke players: Hill emphasizes the idea that the purpose of the curriculum is to develop a love of making music, and that the choice of ukulele as a means of introduction to larger musical concepts lends itself to any instrument the student may go on to study.

The Benefits of the Group Setting

While ensemble playing is the bread and butter of nearly every student's introduction to music, there is always a disparity in comprehension that can make playing in a group a daunting prospect for students who fall behind and terribly boring for students who are ahead. While Hill has taught plenty of private lessons, he finds that small groups of 10 to 20 are actually the most effective way to address the different needs in the ensemble.

The arrangements are three or four parts, and you can accommodate multiple levels of skill simultaneously, so everyone is being challenged at the right level. The students who need more time have the time, and the students who are more advanced can become mentors, and then they learn still more through teaching. Hill refers to this as a "convection current" in the classroom.

Building Your Own Program

Hill and Doane are tremendous ukulele

players, but you don't have to be a pro to lead your own program. There is significant overlap in left-hand technique for violinists and cellists, as well as the obvious analog to guitar.

With a little practice and application of the ideas and techniques already ingrained in every music educator, you can be up and rolling in no time.

There is a wealth of support infrastructure available online, from lesson templates and flash cards to book samples and arrangements, including those from Hill and Chalmers Doane's well-established curriculum.

In terms of budget, implementing a ukulele program is vastly less expensive than nearly any other string-education system. For under \$50, you can get an absolutely serviceable ukulele that will be good for years to come. String teachers know what kind of guitar or violin \$50 buys. No guitar or violin.

Other advantages: uke strings are inexpensive and easy to change. The uke is sublimely portable and easy to store. Its sound is pleasant—even when the notes aren't right!

And Doane and Hill stress that there is a general sense of fun during classes that are ukulele-based that is sometimes harder to create with other instruments.

Although the benefits of music education are extensive and well documented, it can be a challenge to start and maintain programs in schools: students' enthusiasm can fizzle out when the road gets bumpy, and not all youngsters want to play an instrument largely associated with classical music.

Budgetary concerns are always at the forefront of discussion—cash-strapped schools and parents hesitate to sink huge sums into courses that don't have broad appeal. Establishing a ukulele program can serve as a gateway to a more robust music curriculum, just as playing ukulele paves the way for students to progress to any other instrument with a strong foundation in musicianship.

There is a general sense of fun during classes that are ukulele-based that is sometimes harder to create with other instruments.



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Motown's House Music

Luthier Gary Zimnicki makes beautiful music out of the ruins of Detroit's houses

By Patrick Sullivan

It stood for a century in the heart of Motor City. Built in 1910, the snug two-story home on Detroit's Trumbull Street was a six-minute walk from Motown's legendary Hitsville U.S.A. recording studio and less than a mile from General Motors' longtime world headquarters.

Today, the house is gone, replaced by an empty lot on a block full of boarded-up buildings in a fiscally bankrupt city. But the structure's venerable bones aren't buried in a landfill, rather they are singing out as a unique musical instrument.

And the home itself can be seen in a most unexpected place: a pearl inlay on the headstock of a blonde soprano ukulele built by Michigan luthier Gary Zimnicki.

Crafted from reclaimed wood harvested from the Trumbull Street house, this

unique uke, with strips of birdseye maple down the back, recently attracted major buzz at the 2013 Healdsburg Guitar Festival, held in the San Francisco Bay Area. Zimnicki, a well-known guitar maker who recently began crafting ukuleles and mandolins, used maple floor boards from the deconstructed dwelling to fashion the back, sides, and neck of the instrument. The top is made of Douglas fir that once helped support the house's ceilings.

The 56-year-old Zimnicki, who lives in the Detroit suburb of Allen Park, got the idea from a friend. "He said to me, 'Wouldn't it be a cool thing to make a uke out of an abandoned house?'" Zimnicki recalls. "But I had no idea how to go about it. I wasn't about to grab a flashlight and a crowbar and just start taking a house apart."



Then the luthier stumbled upon Reclaim Detroit, a nonprofit organization that dismantles vacant structures to recover materials for re-use. In the Great Recession's wake, Detroit has struggled to cope with thousands of abandoned buildings, and Reclaim Detroit offers an eco-friendly, job-providing alternative to the wrecking ball.

The project required Zimnicki to sort carefully through piles of maple floorboards, looking for sound pieces. And he had to clean the wood he found, which required gloves and a mask. "There was a hundred years of filth on this wood," he says with a laugh. "I couldn't really tell the quality until I got it back to the shop and sanded it down and got past the surface disgustingness."

Zimnicki was careful to avoid cracks, which were common. "I don't mind nail holes though, because they can be filled and they serve as a

reminder of where the wood originated," he explains. And diligent cleaning revealed pieces with an interesting birdseye figure he used for the instrument's back.

For a soprano uke, Zimnicki typically uses a big piece of koa to make a one-piece top and a one-piece back. But the floor boards from Trumbull Street were only about two inches wide, requiring a multi-piece approach. The dark strips between the maple on the back and sides are from a locally harvested black walnut tree.

"I don't typically put a seven-piece back on a uke," Zimnicki says with a chuckle. "But there

was no getting around the seams, so I decided to make them as visible as possible."

The soundboard and braces, meanwhile, are made from Douglas fir taken from the home's ceiling joists. "I had to dig through quite a few planks, since the grain orientation was often 90 degrees away from what I wanted," he explains.

Given the challenges, Zimnicki didn't have high hopes for the sound.

"I was really excited when I finally strung it up because it sounded way, way better than I expected," he says. "That was something I kept hearing from people at the Healdsburg show—

Why would Gary Zimnicki, a well-respected luthier with a 30-year career under his belt, take a chance on a pile of dirty wood from a torn-down house?

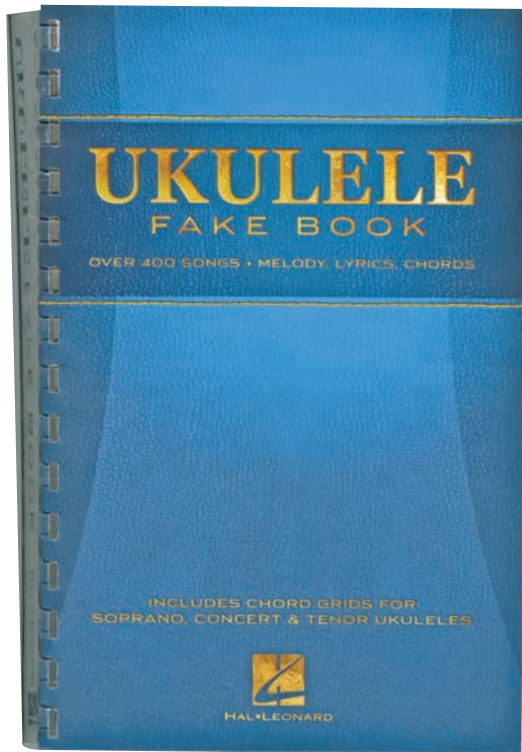
that it was one of the better ukes they'd played." The wood deserves substantial credit, Zimnicki adds. "The house was built in 1910, so the wood was likely cut even before that," he says. "And there's no substitute for age when it comes to high-quality wood."

Reclaim Detroit has also furnished the luthier with material for two other ukes and a mandolin, and he plans to make others.

Why would Zimnicki, a well-respected luthier with a 30-year career under his belt, take a chance on a pile of dirty wood from a torn-down house? He cites the desire for a unique instrument and the good feeling that comes from keeping material out of landfills.

But there's more at work. Zimnicki has lived in the Detroit area his entire life, and his wife teaches at Wayne State University, blocks from Trumbull Street. "Detroit really takes a beating in the press lately," he says. "Like a lot of people around here, I kind of resent the exposure we get in the national media. Of course, there are some bad things going on. But this is my way of letting people know there are some really great things happening here also."





Ukulele Fake Book

Any comprehensive ukulele song book that doesn't start with "Afternoon Delight" and end with "Zip-A-Dee-Doo-Dah" is second best to Hal Leonard's new **Ukulele Fake Book**.

From Hank Williams to Michael Jackson songs that everybody knows, and mid-century schmaltz to hippie anthems, over 400 songs are crammed into 686 pages in this small (but thick!) songbook, making it a great companion for trips to the uke club. Comb binding helps it lie flat on a music stand.

\$39 (MSRP). halleonard.com

First Worldwide Virtual Ukulele Festival

The festival may be virtual, but the ukuleles are definitely real. Daniel Ho is teaming up with playuke.net's Douglas Reynolds to organize what could eventually turn out to be the biggest ukulele jam in history.

Ho and Reynolds have begun taking submissions for what they've dubbed The First Worldwide Virtual Ukulele Ensemble. Based on Eric Whitacre's a virtual choir project, which features 2,052 pre-recorded singers meshed seamlessly together, which has been viewed more than four million times on YouTube, the ukulele version asks entrants to submit clips of themselves playing the tune "Pineapple Mango."

"We're not expecting millions of views but we do think it will gather a large, worldwide

ukulele audience and participation," Reynolds said. Beginners and more advanced players are all encouraged to submit videos of themselves playing along to the song. The organizers are working hard to get the word out, and hope to have upward of 1,000 strumming participants.

"Daniel is currently on an Asian tour promoting participation there and will be hitting the British audience soon. I plan to premier it at our 6th Annual Reno Uke Fest in April and then post it online for the world."

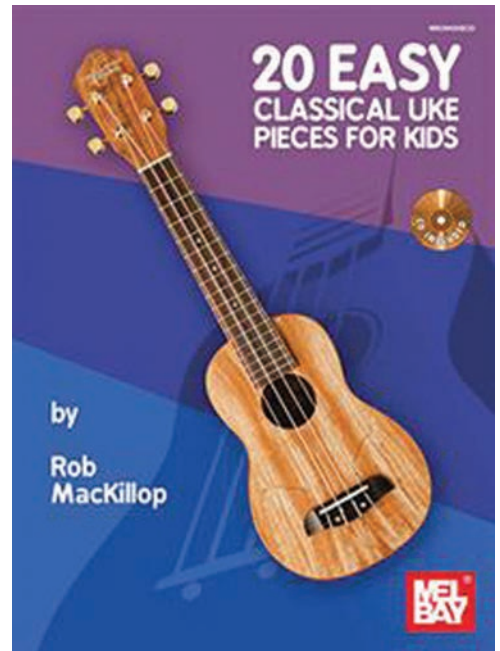
Those interested in joining the virtual fun, should check out the application guidelines at ukulele.net and have your version completed by March 15.

—David Knowles



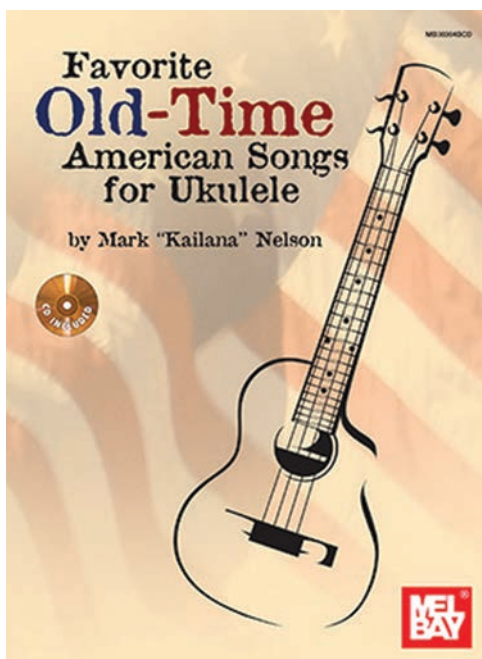
20 Easy Classical Uke Pieces for Kids

Learning classical music can be a daunting proposition, for adults and kids, so this book and CD combo could be a welcome addition to parents and teachers. The arranger, Rob MacKillop, has 25 years experience in the classroom and he has a keen sense of how kids learn, noting that most children have trouble forming chords. These simple, melodic tunes, presented in easy-to-read ukulele tablature for beginning/intermediate players, range from a Mozart Aria to Beethoven's "Für Elise" to the Scott Joplin rag "The Entertainer." Available in print or as an e-Book.



20 Easy Classical Uke Pieces for Kids
by Rob MacKillop (Mel Bay, \$14.99)

Favorite Old-Time American Songs for Ukulele



This book and CD set offers more than 100 traditional tunes arranged for ukulele. The material ranges from sentimental hearth songs to laments and lullabies to ballads and play-parties, to the sacred and profane. There are mountain songs ("Old Joe Clark") and frontier tunes ("Red River Valley") and sea chanteys ("The Drunken Sailor"), but also chapters on how to transpose a ukulele tune, understanding uke notation, and the benefits of playing a baritone uke. Available in print or as an e-Book.

Favorite Old-Time American Songs for Ukulele by Mark "Kailana" Nelson (Mel Bay, \$39.99)

For Adventurous Ukers on the Go

Tiny, innovative soprano uke offers big sound and go-anywhere vibe

Ukuleles made from man-made materials have been around since the genius luthier Mario Maccaferri turned his considerable talents and inventiveness away from inventing the plastic clothespin to develop the wonderful Islander line of plastic ukuleles. Though many of these pieces of mid-century kitsch Americana are now collectible, these plastic ukes made in the '50s were real instruments and sound good.

Though not a direct descendant, Outdoor Ukuleles is a small company based in Bend, Oregon, that recently began producing ukes from synthetic materials. As a longtime fan of not just ukes but those lovely plastic ukes of yesteryear, I was eager to take one for a test strum. What I found was a little uke with much more going on than just a modern twist on the past.

The Outdoor uke's design and construction takes a unique approach by using just five pieces molded from polycarbonate to give a larger sound to this small instrument. The company does it by making the body and neck a one-piece unit, so that when the whole thing is put together, the neck is hollow, giving the small soprano a larger interior air volume, which Outdoor notes gives the volume of a concert or tenor in a soprano-sized package. Rounding out the package is a clever one-piece fingerboard with frets and a nut, a headstock face, a bridge, and a one-piece top with fan bracing. The Outdoor's squared-off neck is another unique design element, which looks strange and maybe a little like a lap-steel guitar, but proved surprisingly comfy for my left hand even during long sessions of strumming.

The result is a unique ukulele. I wouldn't say that the Outdoor is louder than other sopranos I've played, because many of them can be tiny Howitzers, but its sound has something special, and it'd be hard not to credit the hollow neck for it. When strumming, you can feel the neck vibrating, and it seems to add a touch of reverb to the typical staccato chop of a soprano. It's a unique sound, to be sure, and a fun one, too. Like other sopranos, the Outdoor has a bright sound and, perhaps thanks to the polycarbonate body and D'Addario Titanium strings, it sounds slightly brighter than the typical solid wood soprano.

If there's one complaint I have with the Outdoor it's that the frets may be too high. I find it really easy to press just a little too hard on the strings when fretting, which makes the notes go out of tune. Tune up and play gently and it's easygoing.

The Outdoor Ukulele

Soprano ukulele made from polycarbonate

Grover tuners

D'Addario Titanium strings

\$100

outdoorukulele.com





Outdoor debuted with the black model sent in for testing. Since then, the company has added two new colors: camouflage and transparent.

Sure, there are many other good-sounding soprano ukuleles available for the same price, but how many of them have the ready-for-anything vibe of the Outdoor? Just imagine taking it canoeing with your sweetheart, letting your toddler niece play it without fear, or bungee-jumping off of the Kawarau Bridge.

—Greg Olwell



A little uke with much more going on than just a modern twist on the past.

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An Instrument Engineered for Playability with a Sharp Eye for Detail

The Godin MultiUke is a high-strung tenor with sleek style and ergonomic touches

Early riffing on the style of the Canadian company's popular Multiac nylon-string guitar series, in many ways this little electro-acoustic wonder from Godin looks like a guitar's kid brother. And, like Godin's electrified acoustic-guitar designs, the Godin MultiUke high-G strung tenor ukulele turns something old and familiar into something sleek, sophisticated, and modern for players who want to plug in.

The soundhole-less top and chambered solid-mahogany body sets the focus on problem-free plugged-in performance. The mahogany body is routed to give some acoustic characteristics to the electric sound, while also reducing the weight of this relatively hefty ukulele. It also helps to give the uke a usable, but not loud, sound when played acoustically.

Though most ukuleles can be said to be easy to play, the Godin really excels. From the belly cut on the body to the chamfered (or beveled) bout on the cutaway, and finger-friendly Ergocut inward bevel on the edge of the frets, the MultiUke is an instrument engineered for playability with a sharp eye for detail. Though I never considered fret shape a limitation on my playing, the care put into every element of the design comes through in the playing experience. The uke I tested sported a comfortable C-shaped mahogany neck with rosewood fingerboard bolted to the body, which has a natural-finished solid cedar top. (The MultiUke is also available in solid koa with a sunburst spruce top.)

The action on this high-G-tuned tenor was low and the intonation was outstanding, making the MultiUke a refreshing exception to ukes that go out of tune as you go up the neck. The use of individual saddles for each string not only enhances the intonation, it allows the individual undersaddle pickups to provide consistent volume from string to string.

The instrument also features the signature Godin design for the preamp adjustment sliders, which look a little like a crop circle, and a cutaway body to provide easy access to all 19 frets. This is a boon, especially for players migrating from guitar. That 15th fret really comes in handy when your solo races up the neck and you're looking for that high G, although note-clarity drops off beyond there.

I played the MultiUke through three different amps, and it performed like a rockstar with all of them. Playing through two acoustic-centric amps—a Fishman Loudbox 100 and a Roland

Godin MultiUke

Electric-acoustic tenor ukulele with a chambered mahogany body and solid cedar top

Mahogany neck with rosewood fingerboard & bridge

RMC pickups and preamp with three-band EQ and volume controls

\$757 (MSRP); \$599 (street)
godinguitars.com





AC-40—produced a great clean sound, with the Roland’s excellent built-in chorus and reverb effects making me feel like a rockstar. It was even fun to play it through an old Fender amp with the gain cranked. Each setup lent a distinctively different character to the sound, but the jubilant soul of a ukulele couldn’t help but shine through.

The onboard three-band EQ is designed to work within the tonal range of a ukulele and allowed some room to finesse the tone, but I found it necessary to turn the bass down on the amp when fingerpicking to reduce the sound of the plucked string. Though I am a fingerpicker at heart, I found that playing with a felt ukulele pick sounded best, emphasizing the crisp, bright qualities of the tone while maintaining clarity.

The Godin MultiUke is an excellent instrument for performers and enthusiasts, whether you are stepping up in the ukiverse, moving over from guitar, or need a feedback-resistant live instrument. Though it’s not the least expensive acoustic-electric option, aesthetically and acoustically the value of the versatility and fun factor of the Godin MultiUke are immeasurable.

—Breeze Kinsey

I played the MultiUke through three different amps, and it performed like a rockstar with all of them.



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An Acoustic-Electric Concert Uke with Style and Great Sound

Luna Mo'o Cedar Concert sports distinctive looks & a responsive sound

Luna Mo'o Cedar

Concert uke with solid cedar top, laminated mahogany back and sides, mahogany neck, and rosewood fingerboard and bridge

Thin matte finish

Onboard pickup and preamp with controls for volume, treble, and bass

Aquila Nylgut strings and gig bag, included

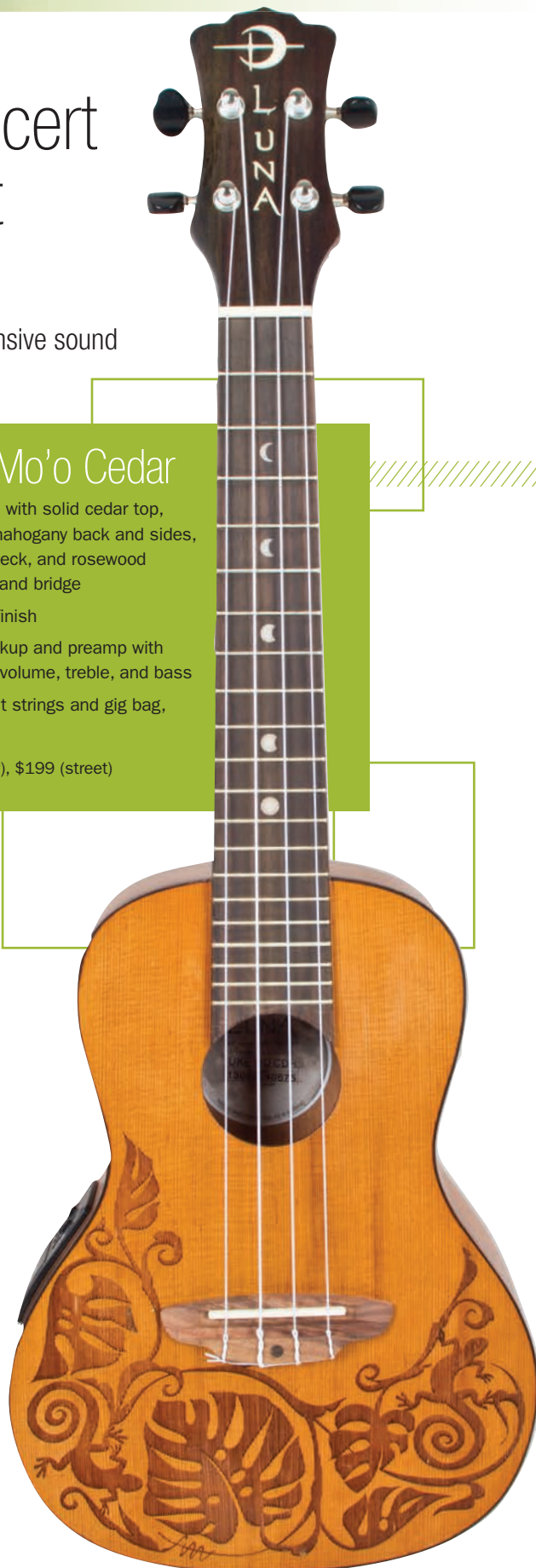
\$299 (MSRP), \$199 (street)

Having entered the world of stringed instruments about a decade ago with a line of guitars designed specifically with female players in mind, Luna Guitars is the brainchild of musician and stained-glass artist Yvonne de Villiers. Luna has grown and now makes a full line of instruments, including a large array of ukuleles joining the company's acoustic and electric guitars and basses. Having been impressed by the sound, feel, and value of Luna's acoustic guitars in the past, I was happy to check out the Mo'o Cedar ukulele—a concert-size instrument with a solid cedar top and a built-in pickup.

No question about it, the intricate design carved into the cedar top is the first thing you notice when pulling the Mo'o from the included gig bag. Created by Luna's artist-in-residence Alex Morgan, the design depicts Polynesian guardian spirits, manifested in a pair of lizards—called Mo'o in Hawaiian—intertwined with tropical leaves. Besides being a cool, tattoo-like design, the laser etched carving removes a thin portion of the top surface, revealing a little of the wood's structure. I like the design and it's easy to imagine that removing even a small amount of wood from the top's lower bout would change its flexibility and tone. Also contributing to the instrument's looks are Luna's distinctive "moon phase" inlays on the rosewood fingerboard.

Luna chose laminated mahogany for the uke's back and sides, and the neck is also made from mahogany. On our review instrument, these woods seemed to be of decent quality and had a fairly plain appearance. The Mo'o uses a set of genuine Grover tuners with an open-gear design and black tuner buttons, and it came strung with Aquila's popular Nylgut strings. Players who may want to perform with their uke will appreciate that Luna outfitted the instrument with a pickup and onboard preamp that includes controls for volume, bass, and treble.

I had never played a ukulele with a cedar top before, and was curious about how the Mo'o would sound. Cedar is the wood of choice for many high-end classical guitars, where it's prized for its quick tonal response and ability to develop great volume. Much to my delight, I discovered these qualities in the Mo'o ukulele! Indeed, the instrument was able to develop a full voice with the lightest touch from my picking hand, leading to respectable volume with little effort. But volume is one characteristic and it's not a good one if the instrument





doesn't also have a pleasing sound. However, this also isn't a concern with the Luna, since its sound offers a lovely combination of rich balance and crispness.

My positive impression of the Luna continued when I checked out its electronics through an AER Compact 60 amp, a small, high-end amp designed for acoustic instruments. The Luna sounded good with its two EQ sliders centered, but I was also able to shape the sound toward more bass or treble, which is useful not only to accommodate personal taste, but also to compensate for different amps or PAs, the sound of a particular room, or the needs of a band.

Overall, the Luna Mo'o is a great concert uke. Between its looks, responsive acoustic tone, and great plugged-in performance, the company has created a real winner, and at a reasonable price!

—Teja Gerken

The instrument was able to develop a full voice with the lightest touch from my picking hand.



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An Acoustic-Electric Tenor Uke Fit for a Rock Star

Hey, soul sister, is that the Fender Jimmy Stafford Nohea tenor uke?

Even with the ukulele revival of the last several years in full-swing, radio listeners took note when the sweet sound of a uke turned out to be the foundation for Train's 2009 mega-hit "Hey, Soul Sister." Not only does the use of a uke in this pop context speak for itself, it's also a great example of reaching for a ukulele to unlock a song's potential.

"When we wrote 'Hey, Soul Sister,' it was written on guitar," says Train's lead guitarist Jimmy Stafford in a video on Fender's YouTube channel. "It sounded good, but it didn't really sound special until somebody suggested, 'Try a ukulele on that.'"

Stafford used a uke that happened to be at the studio to record the song, but he soon began working with Fender (whose guitars he was already endorsing) to supply some ukes with built-in pickups to take on tour. One thing led to another, and now Fender has released a similar tenor uke as a signature model.

The Jimmy Stafford Nohea (the Hawaiian word for "hand-some") starts out with an appearance that's fit for, well, a rock star. Without a doubt, the first thing to grab the eye is the instrument's Telecaster-style headstock, which has all four tuning machines on one side. Besides just being cool and undeniably rock 'n' roll, this design puts all the pegs within easy reach and gives the strings a straight path from the nut to the tuners, which may lead to better tuning stability. The vintage Kluson-style tuners further enhance the vintage Tele-vibe.

The Jimmy Stafford ukulele is built with laminated koa for its body (top, back, and sides), a mahogany neck, and rosewood for its fingerboard and bridge. While the koa used isn't of the most outrageously figured variety, Fender gave it a unique look by applying a "transparent black" gloss finish, which gives the instrument an attractive brown/grey color that looks a lot flashier in person than in photos. An abalone rosette, top purfling, and position dots on the fingerboard further establish that nohea—I mean, good looks—were important when Stafford and the designers at Fender discussed the specs for the signature model.

Okay, so the Jimmy Stafford Nohea looks great, but how does it sound and play? As you'd expect from an instrument

Fender Jimmy Stafford Nohea Tenor

Tenor uke with a laminated koa body, mahogany neck, and rosewood fingerboard and bridge

Transparent black gloss finish

Abalone rosette, purfling, and position markers.

Fishman Sonitone electronics

\$499.99 (MSRP), \$350 (street)





built for a guy accustomed to slinky strings on an electric guitar, this uke plays like butter, thanks to its thin neck and low action. Played acoustically, the Jimmy Stafford Nohea sounds bright and balanced—and loud. I was impressed with the uke's tone, which had enough character and complexity to be in line with its selling price. That's especially noteworthy considering it's made from laminated woods, which tend to be stiffer and less complex than solid ones.

But not this uke.

Since Stafford needs his uke to keep up with the volume of a full band playing the band's signature hit, his signature model is equipped with a Fishman Sonitone pickup system. Powered by a nine-volt battery (accessible through a compartment next to the output jack in the lower bout), the electronics' controls includes volume and tone controls that are almost invisibly mounted inside the soundhole. Plugged into a high-end acoustic-friendly AER Compact 60 amp, this setup sounded great, and also validated Fender's choice of the somewhat more rigid laminate-wood construction, as it was virtually impervious to unwanted feedback at high volumes.

Whether or not you're a fan of his band, the Fender Jimmy Stafford Nohea tenor uke is a hip

instrument for anyone in the market for a tenor uke with a pickup.

—Teja Gerken



As you'd expect from an instrument built for a guy accustomed to slinky strings on an electric guitar, this uke plays like butter.

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A Tenor for Our Times

A solid-wood electric tenor with high-end touches

While I met Moku Ukulele's big Kahuna Mike Mulqueen at a recent Wine Country Ukulele Festival in Napa, California, somehow we didn't get around to splitting a bottle of cabernet. We did, however, talk a lot about ukes. He loves them, and with Moku, he wanted to take his ideas and know-how from his shop in San Francisco to overseas manufacturers so he could offer a bounty of soprano, concert, and tenor ukuleles spec'd out with attractive features at reasonable prices.

He ended up created two lines, the affordable Choice and higher-end Select lines. The Select line is handmade and features choice all-solid woods and gloss finishes. Mulqueen recently redesigned the MS-90TC to be a little deeper, from $2\frac{3}{8}$ " deep to a back that tapers from $2\frac{6}{8}$ " near the cutaway to $3\frac{1}{8}$ " near the endpin. Excited about his new top of the line MS-90TC tenor cutaway outfitted with a pickup, Mulqueen asked if he could send one in. Maybe I'm a ukulele glutton, but who am I to resist?

Deep, Rich Sound

It seems like as the level of ukulele virtuosity rises and more guitarists discover that the ukulele is (obviously) superior, some of the things that guitarists like are being more regularly seen on ukuleles. Take the nice book-matched Sitka spruce top on our test Moku. Guitarists love Sitka spruce for reliably delivering responsiveness and bright, balanced sound. It's a reliable and handsome wood that generally offers more zing and booty than the same instrument made with a top from more traditional woods like mahogany and koa, which tend to have a strong midrange. And, true to that old saw, the Moku has a lively sound with a snappy response and bright top-end. The MS-90TC pairs this with African mahogany back and sides, which, while not a true mahogany in a botanical sense, is viewed as a perfectly reasonable substitute. Having had a little experience with the thinner-bodied version, this deeper update version has created a uke with a deeper, richer sound with a little more gravity.

The body is bound with tortoiseshell celluloid around the top, back, and cutaway. Another nice high-end touch is the bone bridge saddle and nut. The nut was nicely finished with no sharp edges, but the bridge saddle was a little tall, making

Moku MS-90TC Tenor

Sitka spruce top, African mahogany back and sides

African mahogany neck, rosewood bridge and fingerboard

Abalone inlays on fingerboard and rosette

Mi-Si (test) or Fishman pickups available

\$609.99 (MSRP);

\$520 (street)

mokuukes.com





the action higher than I prefer. That's an easy enough detail for a guitar repairer to adjust, though. It was also set up with Aquila's popular Nylgut strings.

Plug 'n Play

Like the other cutaways ukes in the company's lineup, the MS-90TC features a pickup, presumably since people who want to plug in overlap with people who need clear access to 20 frets. In our tester unit's case, it was a Mi-Si Acoustic Trio Uke system, which marries the trusted L.R. Baggs undersaddle pickup with Mi-Si's rechargeable onboard preamp. The preamp is unique in that it features a small rechargeable battery on the circuit, which can reportedly last for 16 hours on a 60-second recharge. Unlike other onboard electronics, the Mi-Si doesn't have any controls, so you can't fuss with volume or tone controls. Besides, your fingers are the only tone controls you need, so think of the lack of controls as one less thing to distract your playing, rather than a missing feature.

In addition to regular old acoustic strumming and picking, I plugged the Moku into a Fishman Loudbox 100. The result was a lively uke, indeed. The sound had some of the lacy brightness you often get with an undersaddle pickup,

but it also had a full bottom-end that had a rich, microphone-like response. Trimming just a hair from the amp's treble control smoothed away the high-end and gave me one of my all-time favorite plugged-in uke sounds. If there's one downside to the glossy finish, it's that it can be slippery and if you're plugged in, expect the sound of the uke sliding around on your sweater to come through the amp.

With all of the competition on the market, the Moku MS-90TC does a great job of delivering a lot of high-end ukulele features, like good electronics, attentive setup, and nice woods at a reasonable price.

—Greg Olwell



Some of the things that guitarists like are being more regularly seen on ukuleles.



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Charting a Course with the Compass Rose Style-C Tenor

Looking to the past, innovative maker Rick Turner creates something new

When it comes to making instruments, Rick Turner is a man of unbridled enthusiasm. He simply loves searching through the dustbins of history for the best ideas and synthesizing those with his own concepts to make singular guitars, basses, and ukuleles. With his groundbreaking work in 1969 with Alembic guitars and basses kick-starting independent, custom guitar building, and his own Renaissance instruments heavily imitated, the results of his looking backward to jump forward have always been unique and left a wake of inspired luthiers following his lead.

Some people are serial killers; Rick Turner is a serial innovator.

With his high-end Compass Rose line, Turner approached ukuleles with this same gusto in a sincere effort to convert guitarists into ukulele players. Though the Compass name celebrates the great navigators who fanned the Polynesian people across the vast Pacific, this uke breaks from Hawaiian tradition to appeal to guitar players fanning out to ukulele. Having had a bunch of experience with a variety of his other instruments, I was eager to get ahold of one of his tenor ukuleles for review.

He obliged by sending one of his high-end, Style C HO-bodied 12-fret tenors.

Hi-Def Ecosystem

Let's pause for a moment and pull that name apart and look at some of the features of this arrow-headed ukulele. The "HO" is short for Howe-Orme, an innovative guitar and mandolin maker from a hundred years ago whose mandola shape inspired the Compass Rose's outline. Just as traditional wood for making ukuleles was taken from local trees (when you're in Hawaii, that's koa), Turner wanted to make ukes using woods harvested near his shop in Santa Cruz, California—a town that is one of the epicenters of ukulele madness. In this case, the Compass uses solid Claro walnut for the headstock face and the body's back, sides, and top. It's a beautiful, heavily-figured dark brown wood with a glossy modern polyester finish and the body and headstock is bound with an elegant rope binding. Turner gave himself a little leeway by using Adirondack spruce for the interior bracing, mahogany

Rick Turner Compass Rose Style-C Tenor

Low-G tenor ukulele with a Claro walnut body, mahogany neck, and floating ebony fingerboard

Side-mounted soundhole

Gotoh vintage-style tuners

\$1,600 (MSRP)

rickturnerguitars.com





for the neck, and ebony for the fingerboard that floats above the body after meeting it at the 12th fret. The idea is that lifting the fingerboard off the instrument's top, as is done with the violin family and archtop guitars, helps the sound by freeing the top to vibrate more.

It'd be hard to say whether or not Turner's cantilevered fingerboard gets all the credit, but this tenor uke is special. It feels alive when you play it.

No doubt, part of the full experience of this uke's sound comes from the extra soundhole on the Compass's side. But it's more than that: there's a spark of life in this uke that inspires you to play chord melodies, single note lines, and more basic strumming. All of which is made easy by the obvious attention spent on the marvelous fretwork and the full feeling C-shaped neck, but it's the sound that I can't stop feeling happy about.

It's balanced in a way that doesn't seem to emphasize one range over the others. It's got high-end sparkle when you need it, just pull back toward the bridge. The low-end is surprising from an instrument so small, but it's the midrange that gives the whole package warmth, presence, and punch. They all come together to make a hi-def ecosystem of sound. Can you tell that I love it?

Of course, you can find great instruments in all price ranges, and \$1,600 is a handsome price for a ukulele, but few other instruments can give you a sense of being a part of history. With his record of craftsmanship and innovation, future generations are going to celebrate the work of Rick Turner. But, even more than that, it's just a ukulele that's fun to play again and again and for the serious uker, that's a bargain.

—Greg Olwell

There's a spark of life in this uke that inspires you to play chord melodies, single note lines, and more basic strumming.



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A Rare Flower: c.1930 Gibson Poinsettia

One of the most valuable ukuleles is also one of the most mysterious

Why Gibson chose to festoon a ukulele with poinsettias is anyone's guess, but it's hard to argue with the striking results of this rare Poinsettia ukulele.

Though Gibson showed up relatively late to the First Wave ukulele party and never dipped as deeply into the ukulele pool as its rival Martin, the noted guitar maker also produced wonderful ukuleles. While most were relatively plain or simply ornamented, Gibson also offered a few outlandish designs that are among the most collectible "Holy Grail" ukuleles of all. Like this rare Poinsettia uke from around 1930. Only four or five Poinsettias are known today and as you might expect from a custom-ordered item, each seems to have unique features.

Based on the company's top-of-the-line Uke-3 production model, the mahogany body is painted with poinsettias on the top, back, sides, and back of the headstock, with a 17-fret ivoryoid fingerboard decorated with poinsettia inlays and pearl-inlaid peghead veneers and body binding completing the striking look.

First cataloged by Gibson in 1927–28 and available through the early '30s, the Poinsettia is exceedingly rare and highly collectible these days as both Gibson collectors and ukulele collectors vie for the few surviving examples. One of those was recently auctioned online through a Goodwill in central Wisconsin. Even in rough and unplayable condition, the price soared to \$5,027—asking prices for a decent example like this one are generally for a few thousand more.

Because these were available as custom or-

ders and Gibson's records are not known for being overly thorough, some details about what changes happened and when are lost to history, but some details help the guess. According to dealer Vic DeRobertis, this is one of two known Poinsettia ukuleles that have the later "Gibson" inlay on the headstock, which was introduced around 1930, while the earlier models had the company's earlier "The Gibson" logo.

Around the same time, Gibson also produced the even-more-elusive and over-the-top Florentine uke, which featured the uke's entire body and back of the neck painted with scenes of Venetian canals and gondolas, despite the inconvenient truth that Florence is on the other side of the Italian peninsula. Gibson made just enough of those that it is certain they exist, but may be even rarer than this Poinsettia.

Uke collectors may never know how the Florentine and Poinsettia ukes came to be, but the results are wonderful little pieces of art.

—Greg Olwell

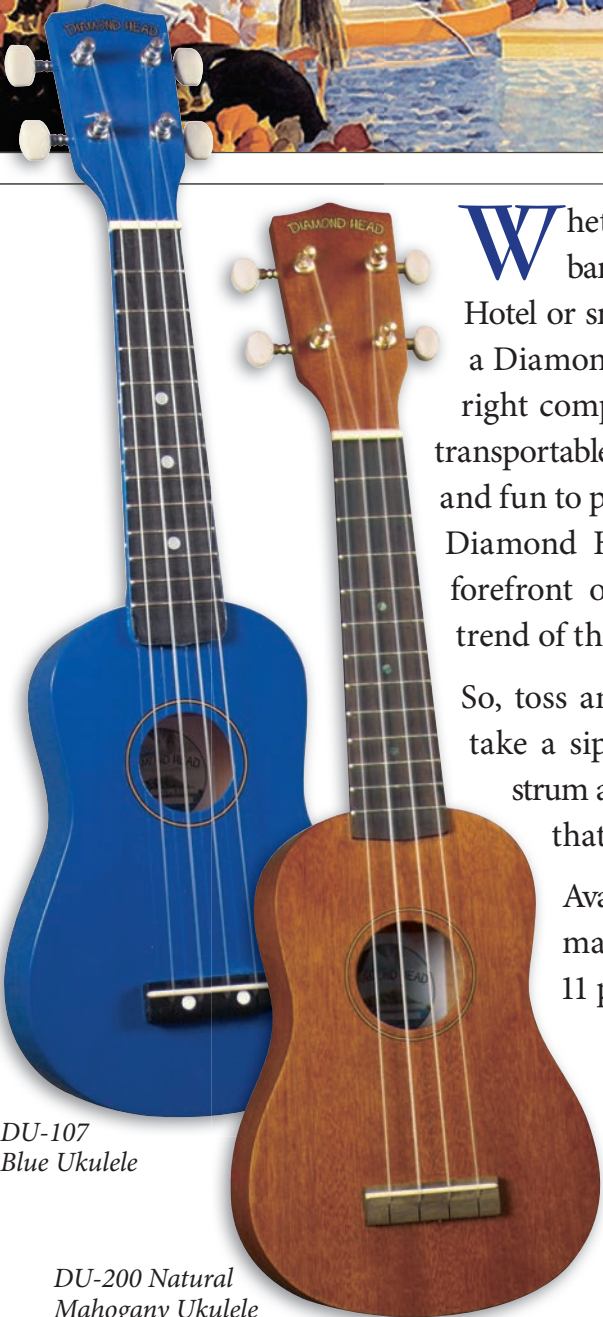


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