

Dan “Cool Hand Uke” Scanlan Biography, the Short Version



In 1961 Dan Scanlan and several of his friends learned to play guitar. Scanlan was fond of the glissandolations perpetrated by banjo players at the local pizza joint, so he also learned the ukulele, an instrument he toyed with as a child. A few years later he began writing songs for both instruments — several hundred to date. Today he is a seasoned performer who is known to give good workshop.

In the past 50 years he has been the ukulele lead in several bands — Flathead, the Self Righteous Brothers, Endangered Species and Juke, all duos; and in combos of various sizes: The What-the Hell Four, Top Quark, Jukolin, Cool Hand Uke and the Enablers. He performed solo as “Rodd Gnawkin the Singing Mechanic” in the ‘70s and early ‘80s, but then adopted “Cool Hand Uke”, a nickname that had been given to him by a friend when the movie *Cool Hand Luke* appeared in the mid 1960s.

Today he travels the country giving ukulele workshops and leads the 40+ member group Cool Hand Uke and the Strum Bums Ukulele Extravaganza Rescue and Relief Band. (Strum Bums, for short.) They perform at least once a week locally and in their 16-year history under Scanlan’s leadership performed at festivals in New York City (where they got a standing ovation), twice at the Honolulu International Ukulele Festival and headlined the Gold Pan Ukulele Festival in Auburn CA. The group meets weekly in downtown Grass Valley, although it was born at the Senior Center at the Nevada County Fairgrounds in 2000.

Before starting the Strum Bums, Scanlan led the Vokuleles ukulele group in Chico CA for the last seven years of their 37 years as a ukulele performance club.

Scanlan was the American coordinator the 1988 international project “Father and Son Reunion: The Braguinha Meets the Ukulele”, in which the ukulele was returned to its ancestral homeland, Madeira Island, Portugal. He and two other players taught Madeiran folk musicians to play the ukulele and he learned to play the braguinha and rajão, the forerunners of the ukulele. The Father and Son Reunion Band performed two shows in Madeira and a third at the Lisbon, Portugal, World’s Fair. One of the songs performed by the group was Scanlan’s own energetic instrumental, *Raga Rag*.

An important participant in each of the five International Ukulele Ceilidhs in Liverpool NS over the past ten years, Scanlan is the festival emcee. Four times, he has toured by Toyota camper from California to Liverpool and back, averaging 11,000 miles each trip and giving performances and workshops. His stops have included Salt lake City, Milwaukee, Chicago, Cincinnati, Pittsburgh, Reston VA, Catonsville MD, Norwalk and New Haven CT, Cape Cod, Boston, North Carolina, Alabama, Kansas City, St. Louis, Albuquerque NM, Austin TX, Providence RI, New York City, Annapolis MD as well as his own state. His fifth Uke in the Fall tour begins September 2015.

Currently more than 750 students are enrolled in Scanlan’s 72-lecture on-line ukulele course at [udemy.com](https://www.udemy.com). He has self published a method book for playing the rajão and has published iBooks on the ukulele and its history, including interactive ukulele playing and chord books for the iPad. He has self produced half a dozen CDs of original tunes and an instrumental CD of Tin Pan Alley standards.

He lives with his wife Joan on a farm in Nevada City CA where they eat colorful organic eggs from their own chickens for breakfast every day.