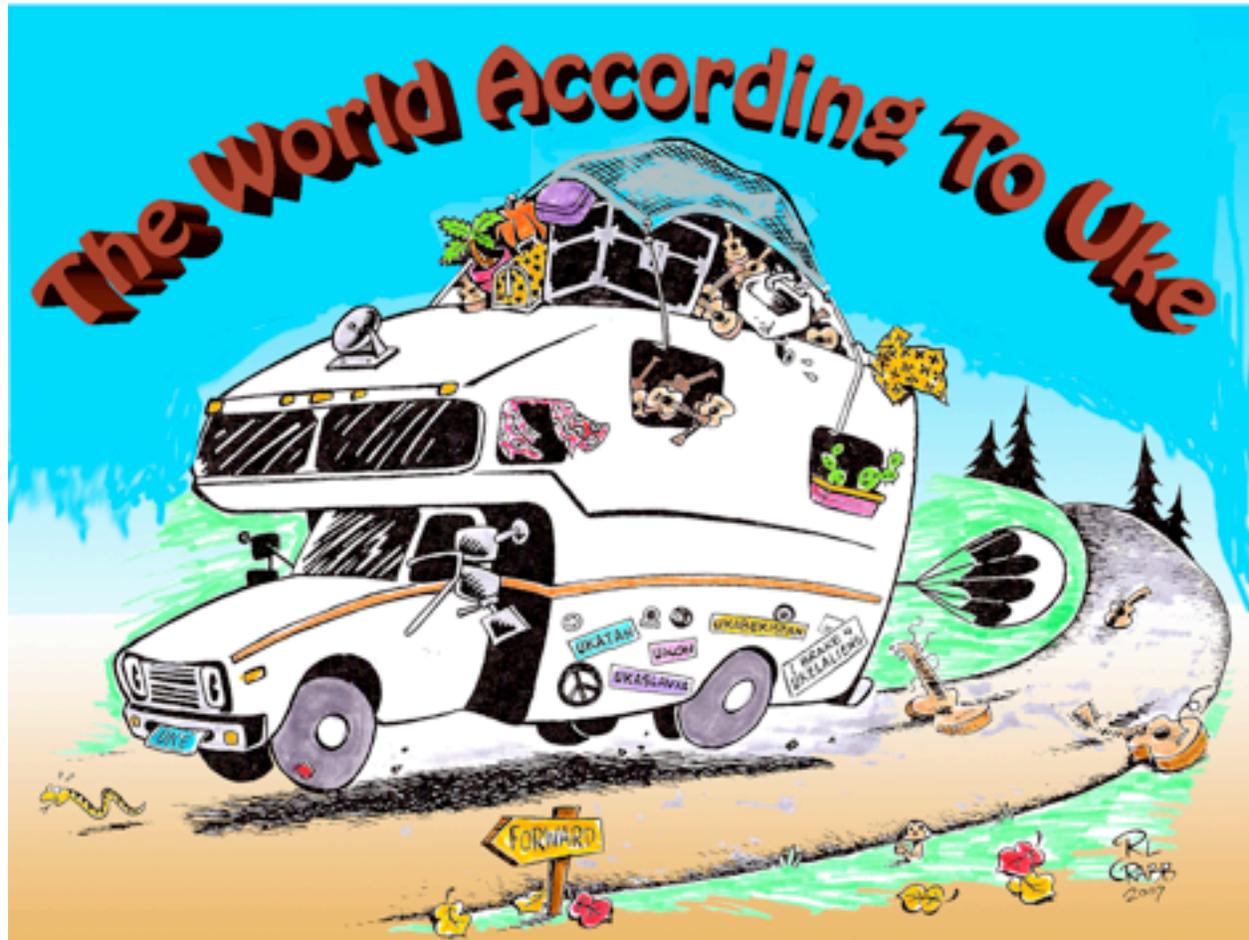


Ukulele History



As Told To Dan Scanlan

The World According To Uke

Ukulele History As Told To

Dan Scanlan

Dan “Cool Hand Uke” Scanlan

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Forward

This history is a love affair. The ukulele has been my close friend, talking stick, umbrella, refuge, passport and rosary for half a century. I love it and it follows me wherever I go. As my first “digital” device, it was an appropriate topic for a digital book, *Cool Hand Uke’s Way to Love Uke*, from which this history is excerpted.

Friends and I began making music in 1961 as our last year of high school drew to a close. I bought a cheap guitar and I think I had a tenor banjo for a while. My friend’s father loaned me a banjo-ukulele he had taken to the trenches of World War II. He showed me a bit of *Please Don’t Talk About Me When I’m Gone*, the only song he remembered. I learned to play the uke and studied guitar. I loved the sound of the glissando, the sliding of a chord up the neck while strumming. I heard it often in the Pizza Parlors of my youth, and that’s what I wanted to play. Fun to do on a ukulele.

In front of me in line for classes on my first college day was a fellow named Pat Sauer. We started a conversation that we have yet to finish. He is a natural born musician, someone who can hear a song on the radio and play it before it’s over. I do not have that kind of skill. Learning a new song is a struggle for me, although a bit easier after 50 years of trying. When the Paul Newman movie came out, Pat gave me the moniker, *Cool Hand Uke*.

Pat played an unusual sport. He liked to guess where I would make my (incorrect) chord change and be there when I did. It didn’t bother him that I was playing out of rhythm. He was more intrigued at guessing how long I would hang onto a chord before releasing it for the next one. As a result, I spent at least a decade trying to fix my meter so I could jam with musicians other than Pat.

Because of that experience I make sure my students count beats correctly, right from the beginning. Turns out to be very important.

I’d like to leave the planet in a slightly better condition than it was in when I arrived, so it’s important that I pass along what I have learned about music and the ukulele.

I have been teaching ukulele and its history for most of two decades and my love of it includes its lore. A college friend taught me the two songs he knew on the ukulele, *Five Foot Two*, and *Ain't She Sweet?* Then I bought a tiny book on how to play ukulele for 25 cents. It numbered the chords, but didn't name them, and used Stephen Foster tunes as examples. It was simple and I learned to play. Until the Internet came along 30 years later I did not know other uke players. Today numerous players flavor my days with skill and enthusiasm.

Early on, I learned the relationship between guitar and ukulele. I could play tunes on either instrument (with sloppy timing, of course) but there were low notes I couldn't reach on the uke. I learned to dampen the uke to compensate and eventually to play other notes in their stead. Then, at a ukulele festival in Hayward CA, one player after another played miniature guitars with six strings but called them ukuleles. I was taken aback. I felt betrayed — part of the ukulele's charm is its reentrant tuning, and part of its challenge is the absence of bass. I felt folks playing instruments with six non-reentrant strings at a ukulele festival was like showing up at a knife fight with a gun.

I'm over it now. Anyone can play whatever they choose to express their music. Still, the soprano ukulele with a reentrant string is the original ukulele and has a distinctive voice. When I hear fabulous musicians playing an instrument with a bass string, I do not hear ukulele. I hear great music, but not ukulele. One simply can't get that charming sound without a reentrant string.

Low-G ukulele players may find this book useful, but it is focused on ukuleles tuned GCEA with the G an octave higher than one would expect; i.e., a reentrant string. Baritone ukuleles aren't addressed in this book, either. They could just as aptly be called soprano or alto guitars, since they share the non-reentrant tuning of a guitar, but with a slightly smaller body.

In college, Pat, two friends and I formed the What the Hell Four and performed on KXLU college radio. We played *Sinner Man*, *St. James Infirmary Blues* and a few other tunes. I wrote college songs for the ukulele, including *Plastic Will Eat You Alive*. I'm embarrassed I still remember some of it. In the late 1960s I wrote anti-war songs, love and unrequited love songs and humorous ditties. Pat and I wrote and performed as

Flathead in the 1970s. I continue writing and performing today, and have penned perhaps 300 tunes in the past 40 years.

In 1991 I placed an article in the local paper to promote a performance in Nevada City CA at Cowboy Pizza. I received a call from A. C. Fox, who told me the article had been about his family. He was a great grandson of Manuel Nunes and his mother, Flora Fox, taught ukulele at the 1915 San Francisco Pan Pacific Exposition. He asked me to visit him at his Lake of the Pines home and I did. He had a Nunes ukulele, a beautiful but fragile instrument with gut strings and wooden tuning pegs. I had a Leonardo Nunes ukulele and brought it to show him. (Years later I gifted that ukulele to a Madeira Island folk music society.)

Fox said his mother was still alive and would be celebrating her 104th birthday that month. I asked when and he said “October 29th.” “That’s my birthday,” I answered. “Do you think she would talk to me on her birthday?” He gave me her number and I called.

“You’re a ukulele player?” she asked on the phone.

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Well, come on over. We’ll tear up the town.”

So, on October 29, 1991, I drove to a retirement home in Santa Rosa CA and had a chat with Flora Fox on her 104th birthday, my 48th. She had an elegant Leonardo Nunes ukulele. She described sitting on her grandfather’s lap while he played ukulele “beautifully”. She also told me her grandfather took four strings from a five-string instrument and put them on the body of the “little one” and made the first ukulele. I didn’t understand what she was saying, since accepted history at the time didn’t have it that way; the ukulele was reported to be a simple modification of the *machete da Braga* or *braguinha*.

Six years later Mauricio Marques of Madeira Island, Portugal, emailed me for Roy Sakuma’s address. I had performed at Sakuma’s Honolulu festival and had a early ukulele site on the Internet, Cool Hand Uke’s Lava Tube (www.coolhanduke.com). Marques was producing *A Father and Son Reunion: The Braguinha Meets the Ukulele*,

and wanted to talk to Sakuma about the project in which American players return the ukulele to Madeira and teach Madeiran folk musicians to play it. The Americans would study the *braguinha*. The project culminated in a performance of the Madeiran and American players on Madeira Island Day at Expo 98 in Lisbon, Portugal, the last World's Fair of the 20th century. Marques had the support of the Madeiran government and others for the project.

I became the American coordinator. I was to find players and support. I queried airlines, the Polynesian Cultural Center on Oahu, the University of Hawaii Ethnomusicology Department, and various ukulele groups in Hawaii. I wasn't good at generating financial support. I was dismayed.

I had met Fred Fallin in Providence RI at the 1997 Ukulele Hall of Fame Museum Exposition. We became fast friends. Fallin is a tremendous ukulele performer and a walking, talking museum of ukulele and Tin Pan Alley history and lore. (Much of this history was gleaned from him.) He has been collecting and playing ukuleles for 60 years. He is a friend to hundreds of ukulele players, collectors and manufacturers. I told him about the Reunion project.

That did it. Fred contacted Leslie Nunes in Honolulu, another great grandson of Manuel Nunes, who in turn enlisted Alfredo Canopin, an exciting ukulele performer and teacher. As the event approached — September 1998 — I still did not have a commitment from any player. I raised a few dollars locally for the project.

As soon as I bought a plane ticket, Fallin, Nunes and Canopin committed to attend at their own expense. Nunes went even further — he obtained declarations from the mayor of Honolulu to present to the mayor of Funchal, Madeira, and gift ukuleles from Sonny Dee and Kamaka. Alfredo, a retired Navy officer, was able to “hitchhike” on military transports to make his way from Honolulu to Madeira, the exact reverse of the Portuguese immigrant itinerary in 1878. President Clinton had just bombed Sudan and Afghanistan. The American military was on alert and Canopin had to take an extended, round-about route to the island. But he made it.

When Madeiran musicians heard the ukulele for the first time they gasped in unison “*Rajão!*”. They showed me an instrument, one Flora Fox alluded to — a *rajão*, a five stringed instrument tuned DGCEA. The D and G strings are reentrant. Nunes and his pals had taken the “my dog has fleas” sound of the G, C, E and A strings of the *rajão*, and put them on the body of the smaller *braguinha*. The *braguinha* is the father of the ukulele and gave it its size, but the *rajão* is the mother that gave it its heart and voice.

I love that the ukulele is a marriage not only of two instruments but two cultures — Madeiran and Hawaiian. I love that those two cultures are themselves melting pots. Hawaii is populated by Polynesians, Japanese, Chinese, English, Portuguese, Filipinos, Mexicans and Americans. Madeira is a mix of Portuguese Celts, Moors, Africans and English. Both islands are fruits of the so-called Age of Discovery and are ports of respite for sea travelers, and offer water, fuel and food. And music.

The ukulele, a blend itself of cultures, is a tool that empowers people to express the music that dwells within them. There’s a planetary awakening I am lucky to join.

My interest in all aspects of the ukulele sprouted long before I met Flora Fox, but intensified after our visit. Meeting Fred Fallin in 1997 widened the horizons of my interest and led me down intriguing pathways. Returning the ukulele to its ancestral home and sharing my love of the ukulele with Madeiran folk musicians and traditional luthier Carlos Jorge Rodrigues exploded my understanding of the ukulele and what it means to the world. Years of email correspondence with German ethnomusicologist and educator Gisa Jaehnichen brought me deeper understanding of culture and music. What I’ve gleaned is in this book. Peqce,

Dan Scanlan, Nevada City, California, March 2013

Chapter 1

The Early Times

Two Hot Spots

Twenty million years or so ago the Americas drifted west. The Atlantic Ocean spread apart and the Pacific narrowed. South of the Rock of Gibraltar, off the coast of Morocco, a hot spot grew where Earth's hot liquid center oozed through a thinness of the ocean's floor. The ooze coagulated ever larger until some seven million years ago a series of islands bubbled to the surface and hardened in the air above the sea.

On the opposite side of the planet other hot spots emerged on the Pacific floor as it was compressed by the moving continents. Seven million years ago islands bubbled to the surface of the sea. That process creates land even today on the Big Island of Hawaii.

Millions of years later humans found these island groups — Madeira in the Atlantic and Hawaii in the Pacific. Centuries after that their finding of one another would spawn the ukulele. **Embracing that history is the first step to Love Uke.**

Two Peoples, Two Melting Pots

In the 8th century, Moors invaded Spain and Portugal, and brought *ouds* (lutes). They ruled for 600 years. Portugal defeated the Moors by 1249, but the *ouds* remained.

Spain immediately attempted to seize Portugal but was turned back for good in 1385. Peace allowed Portugal to explore the oceans and discover Madeira Island.

João Gonçalves Zarco, an explorer working for Portuguese Prince Henry the Navigator, found refuge from a storm in 1418. He named the island he found, *Porto Santo*, "Holy Port". He did not see the larger island next to it, thru the fog. Two years later he

returned and claimed the larger island for Portugal. He named it *Madeira* — wood — for its forests.

Phoenicians, Romans and North Africans may have stumbled onto Madeira Island 600 years before, Scandinavians even earlier. Maps from the 1300s show the islands. And a legend tells of two lovers who were stranded and perished there. But no unman lived there when Zarco arrived.

The first to settle Madeira were Celts from Braga, a village in northern Portugal. The new arrivals set fire to clear the heavy woods for agriculture. The fire raged for seven years, at times driving settlers into the sea. When it subsided, the fire left the soil rich in phosphate, good for vines.

The Malmsey grape thrived and Madeira was a wine of choice for hundreds of years around the world, including America. The United States' founding fathers celebrated with Madeira wine when they issued the Declaration of Independence in 1776.¹ The people of Braga brought their musical instruments with them — including the *braguinha*, sometimes called the *machete de Braga*. It was a primary instrument in Madeiran folk music. Later, Madeirans invented the *rajão* and it joined the *braguinha* in folk ensembles.

The world's first sugar cane plantation was established in Madeira by 1425. Sugar's role in the economy of Madeira would later be mirrored in Hawaii and the need for sugar workers would set the stage for the creation of the ukulele.

In 1478 Christopher Columbus visited Madeira to buy sugar and married the daughter of the first governor of Santo Porto. Finding flotsam of foreign plants on the beach, he surmised other lands or islands were even further west than Madeira. This led him to seek a western route to Hindustan until he stumbled onto the Americas, lost and hungry.

In the Pacific Ocean, Polynesians, probably from the Society Islands near New Zealand, migrated by boat to Hawaii between 1 and 600 AD. They were undisturbed by Europeans for more than 1,100 years. Madeira would have a minor role in ending that era.

Captain James Cook visited Madeira in the mid 1770s and fought with a local resident. He returned to plant a tulip tree near the beach to make amends. (The tree lived until 1963.) On his third voyage, he came upon the Hawaiian Islands and named them after a friend, the Earl of Sandwich. It was January 1778. He returned the next year after not finding a “Northwest Passage” across the American continent. He was slain by natives on Valentine’s Day 1779 at Kealahou Bay on the Big Island of Hawaii when he tried to retrieve a boat that had been taken from his ship.

Eleven years later, 1790, the first Portuguese arrived in Hawaii, sailors on the ship *Eleanora*.

King Kamehameha unified the Hawaiian Islands and established a sandalwood trade in 1805 — Hawaii’s first foray into international commerce. In 30 years the sandalwood was gone. In 1819 Kamehameha’s successor Liholiho ended the *kapu* system of religion and temples. Protestant missionaries from New England quickly filled the void with churches and hymns. They built publishing houses primarily for religious texts. On Kauai, Ladd and Co. planted the first Hawaiian sugar cane field in 1835. The Hawaiian government instituted The Great Mahele in 1844, a 12-year program that redistributed Hawaiian land. At first foreigners were not allowed land, but the law changed in 1850. By the end of the century most of non-government land was in the hands of foreigners.

Hawaii’s sugar industry expanded during the American Civil War when Dixie sugar production faltered. Island sugar exports declined at war’s end, but in 1876, King David Kalakaua, who had been elected with the support of the Hawaii sugar barons, negotiated a trade agreement with the U.S. that ended the tariff against Hawaiian sugar. The industry sweetened and the need for workers intensified.

Chapter 2

The Marriages

A Marriage of Peoples

In 1849 thousands travelled by land and sea to join the California Gold Rush. But Dr. Wilhelm Hillebrand of Paderhorn, Germany didn't seek gold. Infected with tuberculosis and financially secure, he set out to find his breath. He tried the climates of Australia and the Philippines, but his medical practice failed and his health continued to decline.

In December 1850, he arrived in Honolulu. Apparently the climate was good to him and he stayed in Hawaii for 21 years. In that time he was befriended by Queen Emma, the wife of King Kamehameha IV. The Queen and Hillebrand were avid amateur botanists and they brought to Hawaii a wide variety of plants from the Asian mainland, including the plumeria used in weaving leis, the traditional floral wreaths Hawaiians wear and present to visitors.

By 1848 thousands of Hawaiians had died of influenza. Two years later the island of Oahu lost half its population to smallpox. Faster ships made it possible for the smallpox virus to survive the trip from San Francisco to Honolulu. Kamehameha and Emma raised funds for a hospital and Hillebrand became its first director and presiding doctor. Queens Hospital is still one of the largest in the South Seas.

Hillebrand returned home in 1871 but, dissatisfied with the new German Reich, he returned to Madeira Island where he published *Flora of the Hawaiian Islands*. Hildebrand saw Madeira's dismal agricultural condition brought on by drought. He knew the need for sugar workers in Hawaii. He wrote friends there and agreed to hire the bark *Priscilla*, which carried 120 Madeiran workers to Hawaii in September 1878. Although there were traditional Madeiran musical instruments on board, apparently none of the passengers could play them. (Ethnomusicologist Gisa Jaehnichen believes there were Madeiran instruments in Hawaii before the *Priscilla*, brought there previously by sailors.)

The next year Hillebrand hired the *Ravenscrag*, and that bark brought woodworkers Manuel Nunes, Augusto Dias and Jose Espirito Santo and 350 other Madeirans to Hawaii. Musicians were on board— Joao Luiz Correa and Joao Fernandes. João Gomes da Silva was a passenger with a *braguinha*, but he couldn't play it. He loaned it to Fernandes who played as he disembarked the *Ravenscrag* — venting after four months at sea. Nunes and his cohorts noticed the glee of the Hawaiians at Fernandes' energetic performance. Fernandes later played *braguinha* for Hawaiian royalty and at a three-day luau in Waimanalo.

A Marriage of Instruments

Nunes, Dias and Santo thought they would be serving the needs of their fellow countrymen. Although the *rajão* was played in the taro fields and had earned the nickname “taropatch fiddle”, there was not much call for repair work.

Manuel Nunes' older brother Octaviano João Nunes was a *viola* and *rabeca* maker who specialized in *rajões*. Manuel knew how to make instruments, but he hadn't come to Hawaii to make them or to teach Hawaiians how to play Madeiran music. Nor was he a musician, *per se*. (Although, according to his granddaughter Flora Fox, he “played the ukulele beautifully”.)

Ethnomusicologist Jaehnichen says Nunes realized Hawaiians needed an easy-to-play instrument to accompany their short, structured songs. The complicated sound of a typical Madeiran ensemble that included *rajão* and *braguinha* didn't fit the musical styles of Hawaiian players. Nunes worked with Dias and Santos to develop a mini-*rajão*, something appropriate to Hawaiian music. They took the GCEA strings from the *rajão* and put them on the body of a *braguinha*. The tuning was reentrant: the G string was an octave higher than one would normally expect it to be. The tuning gave the sound of the mnemonic “My Dog Has Fleas”.

The new instrument could be played using the same fingering geometry for making chords on the guitar, but with no bass. Like the *rajão*, it could be used for melody and rhythm, ensemble or solo. (The *rajão* was tuned DGCEA, with the D and G strings reentrant. On the new four-string instrument, tuned GCEA, only the G was reentrant.)

To market their new instrument, they took it directly to King Kalakaua, an accomplished musician. *Paniolos*, Mexican cowboys, brought the guitar to Hawaii earlier. Kalakaua could play the mini-*rajão* immediately, loved it and it quickly became the favorite musical instrument of the islands — as well as the first conscious souvenir of any place. (Almost concurrent with the development of the ukulele was the emergence of the slide guitar. One of the earliest tunings for slide guitar, DGBGDB, echoes the tuning of the *braguinha*, DGBD.)

Dias opened a music repair shop in 1884 on King Street in Honolulu and manufactured ukuleles, primarily of native koa wood. Nunes and Santo soon followed suit. By 1900 only Nunes still made ukuleles, but orders came so fast, others set up shop., By 1911 Jonah Kumalae was turning out 300 ukuleles a month. They sold for \$3 to \$5. Hawaiians who couldn't afford it, made their own from cigar boxes or coconut halves. Samuel K. Kamaka opened in 1916. Ernest Kaii, and the Aloha Ukulele Company set up shops. Soon mainland guitar companies made ukuleles: Martin, Gibson, Gretsch, Regal, Washburn, et al.

Descendants of the three woodworkers today have animated discussions about the “true” inventor of the ukulele. It's likely the three friends collaborated. The effect of their friendship was apparent later when others opened shop. The Honolulu ukulele makers hung out together and shared reputations as craftsmen and ardent partiers.

What's In a Name?

There are several versions of when and how the mini-*rajão* got the name “ukulele”. Some say the sight of Fernandes playing the *braguinha* as he came down the gangplank reminded the Hawaiians of scratching at fleas. One literal translation of ukulele is “jumping flea”. Others say British soldier Edward Purveys, Chamberlain to King Kalakaua, played it so energetically that he inspired the name, and that he, rather than the instrument, was its first reference. (The King fired Purveys, who was caught spying on the royal household for American businessmen.) Others surmise the name is a pun based on the union of *ukeke* and *mele* (song) or *lele* (dance). The *ukeke* is a traditional Hawaiian one string instrument made of bamboo and plucked like a Jew's

harp. (The *alii*, Hawaiian royalty, were known to be practitioners of double and triple meanings in their everyday speech.)

Queen Lili'uokalani said the union of *uku* and *lele* means “the gift that came here”. Leslie Nunes, a great-grandson of Manuel, acknowledged this when he titled his book *Ukulele, the Gift of the Portuguese to Hawaii*. Queen Lil did not like the “jumping flea” interpretation, and thought it demeaned the instrument.

May Singhi Breen wrote that “...It was so small, in comparison to the guitars the natives were used to playing that, when they first played it, their fingers and hands sort of ‘skipped off’ the small keyboard. That’s why it is call *ukulele*, meaning ‘jumping flea’”. In 1915 the *New York Times* reported it meant “dancing flea”.

Another version attributes the origin to a remark made at a house party at Judge W. L. Wilcox’s home in Kahili, where Gabriel Davian was playing a self-made ukulele. He joked that “judging by the way you scratch at it, it must be called ‘*ukulele*’ (jumping flea).” The name may have come from any or all of these. Pick your favorite. And play on it.

In Hawaii *ukulele* is pronounced “oo-koo-lay-lay”, but on the mainland it is usually pronounced “you-koo-ley-lee”. In England it is spelled “ukelele”. Often the instrument is simply called “uke”, but some Hawaiians declare it a derogatory term and don’t use it. Others, however, use “uke” as a term of fondness.

Although the inventors called it a mini-*rajão*, in some European histories of the ukulele, the instrument was described as a *cavaquinho*, which is a similar instrument from Portugal’s mainland, but is tuned differently, similar to a *braguinha*.

As the ukulele grew in popularity, the *rajão* faded away. Some players later wanted more volume, so Nunes doubled each string and appropriated the *rajão*’s pre-ukulele nickname for the new instrument, “taropatch”. Later, Martin Guitar also would make a taropatch. The ukulele expanded even more in the 1920s with the creation of the tiple, a 10-string ukulele, on which the two outer strings are doubled and two inner strings tripled. Martin made those, too.

Chapter 3

Early Ukulele

Aloha ‘Oe

Perhaps the most important early song associated with the ukulele was *Aloha ‘Oe*. Queen Lili‘uokalani wrote the first version at Maunawili Ranch in Oahu in 1878, one year before the arrival of the *Ravenscrag*. It was based on a lover’s fond farewell. After U. S. Marines and businessmen usurped Hawaiiin government by dethroning and jailing Queen Lil, *Aloha Oe* became the *de facto* anthem of indigenous Hawaiians. (Hawaii’s official state song, *Hawai‘i Pono‘i*, was written by Queen Lil’s brother, King David Kalakaua.

Aloha Oe’s similarity to hymns of the time are legion, and include Charles C. Converse’s *The Rock Beside the Sea* and George Root’s *There’s Music in the Air*. The published 1884 version of the chorus deviated from Lili‘uokalani’s 1893 songbook *He Buke Mele Hawaii*, presumably to avoid a direct paraphrase of Root’s tune. The Bishop Museum has the original manuscript in the Queen’s handwriting, visible here. The late John Young’s transcription of the original is here. A live version was recorded in Madeira as part of the *Father and Son Reunion* project and is available of CD. Today *Aloha Oe* is not just a beautiful love song and haunting lament, but a sophisticated political statement

The Infant

King David Kalakaua played several instruments, but the ukulele was his favorite. He played it at his numerous parties and designed and made his own ukuleles. He learned from Augusto Dias, to whom he gave permission to use the royal crown as a trademark on the ukuleles he made. At Kalakaua’s Jubilee celebration in 1886, the ukulele and hula appeared together for the first time. Queen Emma, Queen Lil, Prince Leleiohoku and Princess Likelike all played it. There is no doubt that royal fondness for it advanced its popularity among Hawaiians.

By the end of the 19th century the ukulele travelled abroad. It attended the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago and San Francisco's 1894 Mid-Winter Festival. It appeared in fairs in Buffalo, Atlanta, New York and Los Angeles. A photograph of the Kanaka Band that toured the mainland in 1895 showed a ukulele player. In 1899 in San Francisco, Edison made the first recording of a Hawaiian band with a ukulele, a six piece orchestra that included ukulele player July Paka. These appearances helped associate the ukulele with Hawaii, but they did not popularize it.

Bird of Paradise opened on Broadway in 1912. When playwright Richard Walton Tully, a resident of the California Gold Rush town of Nevada City, visited Hawaii to conduct research for his play, he also learned to sing Hawaiian songs and play the ukulele.

His play caused a great stir in New York. A lawsuit over the play's authorship lasted for years and ended in clarification of U.S. copyright law. The Kamaka family of ukulele makers taught hula to the cast. The mother of Laurette Taylor, who starred in the daring production, was incensed at Taylor's bare ankle. A newspaper reported her saying, "I didn't raise my daughter to be a harlot!" New York would never be the same. The play helped dissipate the uptight, strait-laced Victorian Era and usher in the Roaring Twenties. When movies learned to talk, *Bird of Paradise* became a film hit. Among the 30 or so Hawaiian songs in the play was, of course, *Aloha Oe*.

The Blossoming

The next popularity push for the ukulele came from the same city where Kalakaua drew his last breath. The 1915 Pan Pacific Exposition had the dual purpose of celebrating San Francisco's rebirth from the devastating 1906 earthquake and fire, and the opening of the Panama Canal. The Territory of Hawaii pavilion was one of the most popular exhibits at the fair. Beautiful scantily-clad brown-toned people danced the hula and bands performed energetically with ukuleles.

Two of Manuel Nunes' granddaughters were among the Hawaiian residents who taught ukulele at the Exposition. One, Flora Fox, sat on her grandfather's lap as a child when he played the ukulele. She said "My grandfather took four strings from a five-string

instrument and put them on the body of the little one”, a reference to the union of the *braguinha* and *rajão*.

The San Francisco event was timed perfectly for the ukulele. The Hawaiian ragtime tune *On the Beach at Waikiki* became a huge hit. The song writers of Tin Pan Alley took note. Almost immediately “Hawaiian” music — *hapa haole* music, really — sold sheet music in the millions. The phrase means “half non-Hawaiian,” although to make a living, Hawaiians, too, wrote songs in the genre, in addition to traditional music in the Hawaiian language.

The Pan Pacific Exposition set off a craze that lasted 20 years. From 1915 to 1935 the ukulele was the most popular instrument in the American home — until big bands subdued it. Still, Tin Pan Alley songs written on pianos by Berlin, Porter, Gershwin, *et al*, were played on ukuleles by commoners in parlors, dorms, rowboats, under the moon, parties, weddings and even in foxholes in wartime.

The size of sheet music shrank, the sale of records swelled, radio and talking movies captivated audiences in and out of the home. And in the thick of it all was the ukulele. Accessible and cheap, many were well constructed. A good player could play just about anything on it — rhythm, harmony, melody — and percussion.

Players, songs, styles, manufacturers, method books, and types of ukuleles proliferated. Guitar companies made them. In 1907 the revered Martin Guitar Company made ukuleles that sounded dull. Manuel Nunes told Martin the thickness of the wood and bracing were wrong². Martin started making them again, first of mahogany in 1915. In 1920 Martin wood ukuleles took off. Today Martin ukuleles from that era can be as expensive as a restored Bentley. Gibson, Gretsch, Harmony, Regal, Dobro, National, Washburn and many other guitar builders went into the ukulele business. Some makers made only ukuleles or spin-offs of the ukulele.

When mainland manufacturers falsely put “Made in Hawaii” decals on their instruments, a state law made it *kapu*, forbidden. Tiki King in Felton, California maintains a database of more than 600 brands of ukuleles. Visit it [here](#). The ukulele history of the Martin Guitar Company is [here](#). Here’s a list of famous ukulele players.

Two years after the Pan Pacific Exposition, the U. S. Congress passed legislation to prohibit alcohol by 1920, ushering in the “speakeasy” ukulele era. Virtuoso and historian Fred Fallin of Chicago describes the era as one of gangsters, flappers, raccoon coats, rising hemlines and rolled down socks, washboard hairstyles, jazz, talking movies, the Edison phonograph and live radio. Ukuleles had been to war in doughboys’ knapsacks, and even though Prohibition took effect as World War I ended, folks in the Roaring Twenties would party anyway, with ukuleles and illegal libations, until the economic collapse of 1929. Prohibition ended in 1933. The ukulele’s popularity waned as Big Bands filled the legal drinking clubs with big sounds — brass, reed, piano and drum.

Chapter 4

Players and the Songs

Strummers and Pickers

Here are a few of the notable early ukulele players. This is by no means comprehensive. Forgotten players come to light almost daily in recent times.

Ernest K. Kaai was called “Hawaii’s greatest ukulele player” by bandleader-composer Johnny Noble. At the age of 19 in 1900 he was organizing and playing in ensembles. He travelled the world with his ukulele. He played the Yukon Exposition in Alaska in 1906, toured the U.S. Mainland in 1911 and performed at the Pan Pacific Exposition in 1915. Kaai became Hawaii’s first music publisher in 1916 with the first instructional book on the ukulele. He advocated using the thumb on the first strum in waltz time. Along with July Paka, Johnny Almeida, Bill Paaluhi and Alpaca Smith, he was among the first to play solo melodies on the ukulele. Not only did he take Hawaiian music to the mainland, he brought Tin Pan Alley to Hawaii and played its tunes in his numerous bands. If there’s one link twixt King Kalakaua’s initial ukulele playing and the mainland players, Kaai is it. More **here**.

Wendell Hall, “the pineapple picador” or “red-haired music maker”, was popular in the 1920s and ‘30s. The Ludwig Company produced a Wendall Hall Professional banjo-uke in 1932-3. Six years before Ukelele Ike’s 1929 *Singing in the Rain* was a hit, Hall sold over two million copies of his song ‘It Ain’t Gonna’ Rain No Mo. He hosted several national music radio programs, including the *Gillette Community Sing*. He wrote ukulele instruction books and performed on taropatch, banjo-uke and tiple variants of the ukulele. He helped design his own uke, the Red Head. More on Wendall Hall here.

May Singhi Breen received a ukulele one Christmas and formed The Syncopators with several other women. She met songwriter Peter DeRose in 1923 and left the group for him. They married in 1929. She convinced music publishers to add ukulele arrangements to sheet music. To brighten the sound of the ukulele she popularized the stiffer and louder D6 tuning (ADF#B).

The P’Mico company was so taken with her they created a May Singhi Breen autographed banjo-uke. She sued the American Federation of Musicians to force it to accept the ukulele as a true musical instrument. She recorded the first audio ukulele lesson, produced method books, and edited one by Wendall Hall. She and DeRose hosted a radio show *Sweethearts of the Air* from 1923 to 1939. Breen was the original *Ukulele Lady*. Her books emphasized solo arrangements for the ukulele and carried the slogan “Uke can play the melody”. Her Ukulele Hall of Fame Museum page is here. A YouTube version of a 1920s recording of a ukulele lesson she created with female singer Vaughn DeLeath is here.

Bobby “Uke” Henshaw performed WWI patriotic songs. When war ended he introduced the ukulele to England and toured Europe. He may have introduced the ukulele to George Formby. The press called him *The Human Ukulele*. He circled the globe three times and spread the ukulele’s favor worldwide. Henshaw licensed a line of namesake ukuleles, baritones and guitars. More here.

Bill Tapia played ukulele at age twelve for soldiers in Honolulu during WWI. He taught several celebrities, including Betty Grable, Jimmy Durante and Buster Crabbe. Later he moved to the U.S. mainland and played guitar in big bands. In the early 21st century

his ukulele career flourished anew and he became an icon of the “third” ukulele wave of popularity. He died in 2011, just shy of his 104th birthday.

Jesse Kalima is credited with accelerating the ukulele as a solo instrument. In 1920 at age 15 he performed a stunning version of *Stars and Stripes Forever* in a Territorial Amateur Hour contest. It not only became an instant hit but a nearly mandatory show-off tune for ukulele performers. He was one of the first to abandon the uke’s reentrant tuning and lower the G string. He was the first to amplify his ukulele. His was the biggest name in ukuleles during World War II.

Roy Smeck shares a history congruent with Henshaw’s. The Harmony Company produced the Vita-Uke, with Smeck’s signature. This “Wizard of the Strings”, was a virtuoso on guitar, mandolin, Hawaiian steel guitar, banjo and ukulele. He endorsed a brand of ukulele strings and was one of the first musicians to perform in a sound movie. More on Smeck here. In New England there remain players who studied with Smeck. Luthier/performer Joel Eckhaus of Maine is one notable student.

As the nation prepared for Prohibition, **Cliff Edwards** performed *Ja-Da* on the ukulele in a Chicago vaudeville nightclub. It was a hit. A nightclub owner who could’t remember Edwards’ name called him *Ukelele Ike* (he used the British spelling). Edwards, perhaps the most influential performer of the 1920s to popularize the ukulele, insisted on playing Martins. Fred Fallin has one of his Martins, a burn mark on the peg head where Edwards kept his cigarette. Edward’s 1928 hit *I Can’t Give You Anything But Love* became an anthem during the Great Depression. He hit again in 1929 with *Singing in the Rain*. He recorded jazzy versions of popular tunes of the 1920s. His friend Walt Disney gave him the voice part of Jimminy Cricket in the 1940 movie *Pinocchio*. Bing Crosby once said he learned to croon from Edwards. He may have been the first “scat” singer. More on Ukulele Ike here.

While the Pan Pacific Exposition was underway in San Francisco, an 11-year-old lad from Lancashire was playing the part of a stable boy in an English movie. His father, a successful actor, had just died, and George Booth, being the oldest of seven children, had to work. By 1920 he was working in British minstrel shows. He met a woman in 1923 who became his wife and directed his career; by then he took his father’s stage

name — **George Formby** — and played the ukulele he bought from a fellow showman for thirty shillings. He became wildly popular, made hundreds of recordings and dozens of movies. He heard recordings of Cliff Edwards and other American players, but he developed his own style, one he called the “split stroke”. His style was exactly that: *his* style, immediately recognizable upon hearing it. Beatles George Harrison, John Lennon and Paul McCartney each cited Formby as a major influence in their music. Harrison, especially, was fond of the ukulele and in the 1980s joined the George Formby Society of enthusiasts. In the 1960s Herman’s Hermits recorded *Leaning on a Lamp*, one of Formby’s hits some 40 years earlier. More on George Formby here.

The Songs

Vaudeville was born in New York City concurrent with the birth of the ukulele in Hawaii. By the end of the 19th century the ukulele took New York by storm and vaudeville morphed into Tin Pan Alley. Songs joined *Aloha Oe* as ukulele “gotta haves”: *Ain’t She Sweet*, *Five-Foot-Two*, *Ja-Da*, *That Certain Party*, *Moonlight Bay*. The instrument lured novelty tunes: *O’Brien Is Tryin’ To Learn To Talk Hawaiian to His Honolulu Lu*, *What Did Robinson Caruso Do With Friday on Saturday Night?*, *They’re Wearing ‘Em Higher in Hawaii*, and many, many more. In England, George Formby sang novelties written by associates; his wife insisted Formby’s name be added as an author. In the U.S., Tin Pan Alley and Chicago churned out hit after hit.

Players “covered” the Tin Pan Alley tunes, and Hawaiian song makers emulated the success of the New Yorkers. Tin Pan Ally composers wrote their songs on piano but the nation played them on affordable ukuleles.

Drum makers Ludwig and Slingerland added necks, tuners and strings to drum heads and made banjo-ukes. The uke easily made the leap from vaudeville to movies. Radio and records brought music into homes. Movies, records and radio defined the music people would learn and play in the moonlight. It was party time, despite the Prohibition, and soon, despite the Depression.

Just before and after October 29, 1929, (the Depression hit working people before it hit Wall Street) the ukulele and song makers went into action: *Brother, Can You Spare a*

Dime?, *Pocketful of Dreams*, *I Can't Give You Anything But Love*, *Wrap Your Troubles in Dreams*, *Over the Rainbow*, *On the Sunny Side of the Street*, *Pennies From Heaven*, *Stormy Weather*, *Side by Side*, et al. The Industrial Workers of the World published a book of labor songs with ukulele chords.

The ukulele helped doughboys get through WWI and Americans to plow through the Great Depression. The reentrant voice of the ukulele gave folks power to say what's on their minds and still foster a happy feeling. Prohibition ended in 1933 and the nation's love affair with the ukulele began to fade — but not necessarily in the movies. In 1933 Oliver Hardy played *Honolulu Baby* and broke a ukulele in *Sons of the Desert*. Due in part to records and radio bringing produced music into the home and the big bands that filling night clubs, the ukulele was on the wane by 1935.

In the Appalachian countryside, the ukulele took another hit. Photos taken in Virginia and North Carolina in the mid-1930s show ukuleles and banjo-ukes in nearly every down home country band. Bill Monroe's fiery mandolin and Lester Flatt's hot banjo fired up the countryside in 1938. In rural bands, ukuleles faded like kindling to ash as bluegrass grew.

During World War II, GIs took ukuleles to battle fields. (This author's first ukulele was a banjo-uke from 1934 that had been to WWII and sported a drawing of a smiling airplane). Soldiers brought home ukuleles from Hawaii. But, in general, ukulele popularity weakened. It didn't stand a chance when rock and roll soared.

Chapter 5

Ukulele Cycles

The Ukulele's First Re-Entrance

The ukulele didn't go completely away, but took a back seat until a newer media came along: Television.

Arthur Godfrey made his mark as a radio personality in part by talking to a single individual when “on mic”. This intimacy was infectious and made him a star.

Sometime in the late 1940s Godfrey approached an instrument manufacturer — accounts vary, Martin, Vega or Favilla, take your pick — to make a baritone ukulele. Rarely tuned with a reentrant string, it uses the four high strings of the guitar, DGBE. Godfrey became associated with the ukulele through the baritone and lent his name to a series of plastic ukuleles manufactured in the 1950s.

The Italian luthier Mario Maccaferri, inventor and classical guitarist (at least until an accident damaged his hand), made plastic ukuleles and banjo-ukes. Two of the most popular were the Arthur Godfrey TV Pal and the Islander Uke. Maccaferri also made the Mastro plastic banjo-uke. Millions were sold in the 1950s. More on this phenomenon here. (Maccaferri previously made his mark by inventing the plastic clarinet reed, bathroom tiles and clothespins. He was the luthier who built Django Reinhardt’s guitar with the oval sound hole.) The Maccaferri ukes played well, sold well and sounded great, but, unfortunately, they were treated as children’s toys by most musicians at the time.

Meanwhile, a former tuba player was working in a music store in Los Angeles. He learned bass during the Korean War, but ukuleles in the store intrigued him. A record producer heard him play and by the end of the ‘50s **Lyle Ritz** had recorded two jazz ukulele albums. He played bass in the Wrecking Crew, the rhythm section for Capitol Records. When Roy Sakuma of Honolulu began to produce the International Ukulele Festival in 1971, he searched for Ritz, whose playing influenced many Hawaiian musicians. Sakuma says Ritz had no idea he had a Hawaiian fan base. Today his fame is worldwide,

In the early 1950s **Herbert Khaury** used the name Larry Love to play ukulele and sing unusual renditions of old songs in Page 3, a lesbian bar in New York’s Greenwich Village. By the early ‘60s he had a cult following in the Village and changed his name to Tiny Tim. In 1968 Rowan and Martin featured him on their popular television comedy *Laugh In*, and later he brought his warbled version of *Tip Toe Through the Tulips* to the Johnny Carson, Ed Sullivan and Jackie Gleason programs. (The *Laugh In* name was a

spin-off of the be-ins and love-ins of the era, which were themselves spin-offs of the sit-ins of the civil rights movement of the previous decade. *Laugh In* rehabilitated Richard Nixon who had given his “swan song” earlier. The “sock it to me” abuse he took on the program apparently made him palatable to the American voter.)

The year after Tiny Tim’s big hit, a Honolulu banker by day and ukulele performer by night, **Eddie Bush**, recorded *A Man and His Ukulele*. He, too, appeared on programs hosted by Johnny Carson, Mike Douglas, Merv Griffin, Ed Sullivan, Lawrence Welk and Johnny Cash. His goal differed from Khaury’s. “I want to show that (the ukulele) can be used as a featured instrument, not only as background or as a novelty,” he said. Bush stretched the limits of the instrument. Especially notable is his version of *Holiday for Strings*, a tune selected for the 1998 compilation *Legends of the Ukulele*, assembled by Jim Beloff. Bush passed in 2002 of a heart attack at age 67.

Tiny Tim presented the ukulele as a novelty along the lines of Jack Benny’s violin or Bob Hope’s golf club. He suffered a heart attack on stage at the Ukulele Hall of Fame Museum’s First Expo in Montague MA, Sept. 28, 1996. (Fred Fallin was the last person to talk him as he walked on stage and his only hospital visitor.) Khaury suffered a fatal attack in Minneapolis performing *Tip Toe Through the Tulips* three months later at a women’s social club. His use of the ukulele in the 1960s was unique to the era, and his death marks, roughly, the beginning of the second “re-entrance” of the ukulele’s popularity, the third wave, or current one.

The children’s program, *Sesame Street*, used the ukulele as an object of derision. In 1970 Ernie consoled the Cookie Monster whose ukulele broke, but who then ate it when repaired.

Events outside the purview of mainstream media during the late 60s and early 70s secured the ukulele for future generations.

Determination and Germination

Roy Sakuma of Honolulu studied ukulele with jazz virtuoso Herb Ohta, who encouraged him to become a performer. (Ohta San had recorded dozens of ukulele

albums. His son, Herb Ohta, Jr., is a professional ukulele performer and teacher carrying on the family tradition.) Sakuma chose to teach and by 1971 had created the International Ukulele Festival in Kapiolani Park, Honolulu, the world's premier ukulele festival. As many as 800 students perform each year. Sakuma and his wife, Kathy, pepper the bill with performers from around the world.

By teaching children, developing music programs and publishing a definitive ukulele chord reference in two languages, Sakuma has kept ukulele vibrant in Hawaiian culture. Long before the present ukulele craze, Sakuma was quietly but ardently connecting students, luthiers, schools, clubs and performers. The impact of Sakuma's 40 years of teaching youngsters to play ukulele is huge.

Sakuma produced numerous CDs of culturally significant and musically stunning ukulele performances. Each year he guides groups of "Super *Keikis*", talented students, to perform publicly. They enthrall Honolulu audiences and many become the phenomenal Hawaiian ukulele players who perform today.

Chalmers Doane was hired in 1966 by the Halifax, Nova Scotia school district when a small but vocal group of citizens demanded better music instruction. Doane favored the ukulele as a primary teaching tool. "[If] the strings are developed successfully," he argued, "the others fall into place."

An accomplished trombonist, violinist, bassist, pianist, clarinetist and ukulele player, he quickly built award-winning orchestras and musical groups. He commissioned an inexpensive ukulele, a distinctive obtuse triangle with three small sound holes. It still is a favorite of Canadian groups. Success in Halifax, fueled by Doane's own passion for teaching, spread across Canada. The goal — to give every child a quality music education by sixth grade.

The Langley Ukulele Ensemble in British Columbia is a testament to Doane's successful vision. Canadian ukulele wizard **James Hill**, a close friend, student, and musical partner of Doane's, owes no small part of his success to the programs built by Doane. Hill today carries on the work, performs world wide, and develops ukulele

workshops in schools across Canada. He edits Ukulele, Yes!, an on-line resource for ukulele teachers, continuing a project initiated years ago by Doane.

One reason ukulele was chosen as a primary instrument for education rather than, say, the recorder or penny-whistle, is that it readily lends itself to the study of harmony. One exercise prevalent in the Canadian system is “singing the strings”. Students select one string and sing whatever note is being played on that string when a chord is made. The diminutive ukulele provides an easy way to study harmony.

Three other notable aspects of Doane’s program are: changing from hiring instructors who play to hiring performers who teach; redirecting the music budget from high school to earlier grades; and emphasizing performance. (Performing music, Doane says, fosters literacy in music, akin to speaking, reading and writing in the study of language.)

There is a 21st Century ukulele craze worldwide, but Canada has been hip to the ukulele for half a century. The Langley ensemble performs in Hawaii yearly and is highly regarded worldwide, as is its famous alumnus, James Hill. Liverpool, Nova Scotia, hosts an International Ukulele Ceilidh every two years, an event that features groups and players from Canada, the U.S., England and Japan.

The present ukulele wave of popularity is the rest of the world catching up to Hawaii and Canada.

The Ukulele’s Second Re-Entrance

It started in the late 1970s on telnet and bulletin boards, then newsgroups and email, then email forums. The Internet allowed people all over the world to communicate in new ways. By the mid-1990s, the World Wide Web emerged for non-commercial uses. Like other enthusiasts, ukulele players discovered one another. Although I had been playing ukulele for more than 30 years, I knew few players until the mid-1990s, when we found one another on the Internet.

A discussion group created in the mid '90s by a New England college student may have been the first visit of the ukulele to cyber space. The Ukulele Freedom Front, the Ukulele Hall of Fame Museum, Riot Ukes and Cool Hand Uke's Lava Tube were early ukulele websites. In email forums and on a growing number of websites, players traded stories, songs, playing tips, instrument reviews, repair tips, histories and recordings. Ukulele players learned they weren't alone. Collectors met players. Luthiers found players. Most forum members were established players and, at first, newcomers to the ukulele were few.

But their numbers grew. And grew.

Although uke groups met here and there — Roy Cone's group in Salisbury TX and the Vokuleles in Chico CA had been around for 30 years — there was little communication among groups, with the possible exception of participants in Sakuma's festivals. In 1993 the First Annual Northern California Ukulele Festival was produced in Hayward, near San Francisco. In 1999 Andy Andrews and Peter Thomas held a ukulele gathering in Thomas' Santa Cruz home preceding that year's Hayward event. That was the genesis of the 200-member Santa Cruz Ukulele Club that now meets monthly and produces numerous ukulele events, workshops and songbooks. The club also provides ukuleles to children.

The Ukulele Hall of Fame Museum was founded in Providence RI in 1996 by Paul Syphers, Sue Abbotson, David Wasser, Nuni Lyn-Walsh and Tom Walsh. It has a large ukulele collection, produced several festivals, maintains a hall of fame, and publishes a periodical on ukulele lore. Still existing as a not-for-profit organization, it no longer produces festivals, but oversees a program that provides ukes to children.

In 1997 Jim and Liz Beloff published *The Ukulele: A Visual History*. The colorful and informative book increased awareness of the ukulele. Most music stores sold it. The book captured the history and the feeling that surrounds ukulele. Jim's sister and brother-in-law produce the Fluke, an unusual-shaped plastic body ukulele popular with new players. They have since issued a smaller version, the Flea, and a banjo-ukulele. The Beloffs maintain popular ukulele community bulletin boards, and have published more than a dozen song books, available through Flea Market Music.

In 1998, ukulele teachers Alfredo Canopin, Fred Fallin and this author joined historian Leslie Nunes, a great grandson of Manuel Nunes, to return the ukulele to Madeira Island and introduce it to folk musicians. Most Madeirans did not know they were the source of the ukulele. *A Father and Son Reunion: The Braguinha Meets the Ukulele* was partly sponsored by the Madeira government and produced by this author and João Mauricio Marques of Madeira. The Xarabanda Cultural Center of Funchal, Madeira, and traditional luthier Carlos Jorge Rodrigues contributed facilities and instruments to the project.

Madeira musicians brought to the project songs that were common in 1879 when the *Ravenscrag* sailed for Hawaii. Americans brought songs significant to the history of ukulele — *Aloha Oe*, *Ain't She Sweet*, *On the Beach at Waikiki* and others. To acknowledge that African slave ships passed through Madeira heading for the Americas, the Americans included a blues tune, *Everybody's Fishing*. When it was performed in Madeira, the audience went wild, echoing "Everybody's Fishing" loudly as a call-and-response. The Americans asked what the attraction was, a Madeiran musician explained that "everybody's fishing" is a slang phrase in Madeira, much akin to "far out and solid. It's a great time — everybody's fishing."

As American musicians travelled to Madeira, U. S. President William Clinton fired missiles into Sudan and Afghanistan. Alfredo Canopin, U.S. Navy Retired, circumnavigated the globe by military transport and took a circuitous route dictated by the U.S.'s war needs. In the Reunion show, John Phillip Sousa's *Stars and Stripes Forever* was set to be the resounding final number. The band discussed whether to include the song in the Lisbon set list or not. No one wanted to bring a war song to the World's Fair. Sousa is a Portuguese national hero, so the band decided to present the song as a Portuguese folk tune rather than an American military march.

After ten days of rehearsal, the Father and Son Reunion Band — three Americans and four Madeirans on ukuleles, rajão and braguinhas — performed two shows in Madeira and a third on Madeira Island Day at the World Expo in Lisbon. The Expo concert was telecast live throughout Europe and served to further the ukulele's prominence in that part of the world. Rain began to fall during the concert, set on an outdoor stage on

piers in the bay, cutting short the show. *Stars and Stripes Forever* was the only tune not performed.

Re-Entrance Reconsidered

The second “re-entrance” or third wave of ukulele popularity is here because of...

- Educators using the ukulele extensively in Canada and Hawaii.
- The rise of the Internet, enabling ukulele enthusiasts to connect and share what they know and love through email forums, bulletin boards and the World Wide Web.
- Jim Beloff’s book on the ukulele and the popularity of Flea Market Music and its forums.
- The proliferation of ukulele festivals in the US, England, Ireland, Canada, Australia, Japan, Thailand and elsewhere.
- *The Father and Son Reunion: The Braguinha Meets the Ukulele*, presenting the ukulele to its ancestral home, the World’s Fair and European television audiences.
- Israel Kamakawiwo’ole’s version of *Somewhere Over the Rainbow/What a Wonderful World* warming people’s hearts worldwide, and flavoring ads, movies and radio, and, in Hawaii, politics.
- The emergence of YouTube and its frequent use by ukulele enthusiasts.
- The wide and quick dissemination of Jake Shimabukuro’s presentation of *While My Guitar Gently Weeps*.
- The Mighty Uke movie by Tony and Margie Coleman. The process of videoing players and groups around the world invigorated the ukulele world and expanded its fan base.
- Attention paid to ukulele performers by National Public Radio and later by mainstream media.
- The proliferation of ukulele manufacturers. The Magic Fluke Co., alone, has sold more than 50,000 ukuleles since 1999 and it is but one of the new manufacturers.
- The support of players and festivals by many ukulele manufacturers and music publishers.
- The popular and stunning ability of the Ukulele Orchestra of Great Britain, setting a standard toward which many other groups now strive.
- Projects like The Beatles Complete on Ukulele in which players collaborate to explore entire categories of music.

- The growing inclusion of ukulele in music festivals, fairs, ensembles and recordings of all genres and interests.

The recent popularity of the ukulele piqued the interest of professional guitarists. Beatle George Harrison long favored the ukulele and never shied away from saying so. Some guitar players now admit to playing the ukulele and others apply their skills to it for the first time. Rockers Eddie Vedder of Pearl Jam and Greg Hawkes of The Cars enter stages, ukulele in hand.

Younger people take up ukulele in droves. The fad feeds on itself. It is no longer unusual to hear ukulele in movies, radio, television ads, open mics, on stage or street corners. Billionaire Warren Buffet often opens meetings by playing ukulele. New and established players share gigs, insights and stories on Facebook and other social forums. Hundreds of ukulele manufacturers, large, small and custom, sell quality instruments. In 2012 more than 12,000 ukuleles and related items are up for auction on eBay every day.

On October 6, 2011, activists at Freedom Plaza in Washington DC, protested the U.S. invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan. When the stage was quiet an impromptu jam fired up the crowd — two banjos, a fiddler, a harmonica player and three ukuleles (one old ukester and two young players). No guitar in sight. The friendly ukulele is reemerging as an instrument of choice for peace and social justice activists.

Community ukulele groups perform everywhere — retirement and convalescent homes, schools, fairs, festivals, weddings and funerals — wherever music is needed. Groups meet, drink and have fun. Retired WWII baby boomers, former protestors of the Viet Nam War, today get their jollies in ukulele groups. Senior groups are peppered with youngsters keen on bringing a different, more strident energy to ukulele. The newly retired pay big bucks to attend high-end ukulele campouts. Community recreation districts offer low cost classes and ukulele-centric events. Luxury ships offer ukulele cruises.

The uke is in the front lines in the fight against joblessness — workshop presenters are increasing, and the uke paraphernalia business thrives. Uke on, Godfrey!

Is there a downside to the present ukulele popularity?

I have used ukulele to express politics, loves, a broken heart, humor, sadness, family fondness, philosophical and historical insights. I hope love of uke by the masses leads to universal health, a clean and live-able planet, honest and accurate elections and peace, and is not a diversion from civil endeavor. The Third Great Ukulele Craze, the one in which we find ourselves, outshines the first two, is worldwide, inclusive and will, I believe, jauntily help to bring peace, harmony and justice to this otherwise beleaguered planet. The ukulele helped people weather Prohibition, the Great Depression and two world wars. Today, let it flourish and continue to bring health and harmony to all of us.

Chapter 6

Overtones

Ukulele accompanied the major advances in communication in the 20th Century. Its first craze coincided with the advent of radio, records and movies. Its second craze ushered in television. In the 21st Century, people are fascinated by the tiny ukulele and even smaller tools that allow people to see and talk to one another anywhere in the world.

Many turn to the ukulele to play music for the first time, and tune up with an app on their phone. Teachers use ukuleles to illustrate harmony, rhythm and melody, and call up their lessons on iPads.

The ukulele was born of different instruments and cultures. Today it brings together cultures, classes, locations and stations in life, as do iPads, iPhones and the Internet .

For decades, news outlets spit out disinformation with ineffective public scrutiny. Today, using social media like FaceBook, people share critical assessments of news reports across great distance without corporate filters. Bystanders with camera phones post live coverage of events they witness. Bloggers worldwide comment and report.

Even though social networks are rife with frivolous noise, they still provide a framework for instant civic communication.

Parallel to this surge of news analysis is the increasing number of common folk who make music and share it freely on the Internet. The ukulele is frequently the chosen instrument for homegrown music on FaceBook and YouTube. Some of that music is played on the ukulele and and reinterprets the news.

It's difficult to push canned music at people who make their own music.

The combination of homemade music and socially gathered news can dampen TV's control of public conversation and consequent spoilage of the common good.

The charming and disarming reentrant voice of the ukulele can speak urgency without rancor, insight without insistence, truth without harrumphs, beauty without pomp, justice without blood. An inscription on Woody Guthrie's guitar read "This machine kills fascists". The ukulele is friendlier: "This tool tickles away meanness."

The ukulele world is rich with peace and justice and care for the Earth. The sentiments show up often in *The Mighty Uke* movie and in group names such as Ukes for Sanity, Peace Ukes, Ukulele Underground, and the slogans "Uke can change the world", "Play ukes, not war games", *et al.* Ukulele clubs give ukuleles to children. In the mid-East, Paul Moore of Ukes for Peace teaches both Israeli and Palestinian children to play ukuleles happily with one another.

The ukulele is an extension of the original *Aloha* Spirit. To the Kanaka Maoli, *Aloha* was two way, generous giving and gracious receiving., and related to *ohana*, family. European and American missionaries and businessmen usurped *aloha*, made it one way and commercialized it. Today *aloha* is sold by hotels, shirt manufacturers, trinket makers, cruise planners and bosses.

Still, native Hawaiians, the Kanaka Maoli, adhere to true reciprocal *aloha* as the source of wellness and spirit, and express *aloha* through song, ukulele and *hula*. Israel Kamakawiwo'ole gave the world a sterling example of politically ardent *aloha* and beautiful music.

The ukulele can be a powerful instrument of peace and wellness, justice, harmony and progress. Or it can be a frivolous fad that provides a second adolescence to aging war babies and diverts them from confronting corporate war and plunder.

There is a choice.

Love of ukulele includes celebrating a union of two folk instruments that wedded cultures across opposing oceans, and raised high and wide families of healthy harmony.

May we keep true to the ukulele's lesson.

Bruce "Utah" Phillips said, "The most radical thought in America today is the long memory." We have the chance to seize the good that came before us and strum ourselves to harmony.

And fun.

Dan Scanlan

1 Portugal abolished slavery without a war when it declared independence 10 years earlier in 1766.

2 From a conversation with the late Mike Longworth, Martin Guitar's long time historian.