



A TRIO OF REASONS TO PLAY THE UKULELE

MUSICAL – SOCIAL – HEALTH
(Updated June, 2019)



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Musical – Social – Health

Musical

Is the ukulele an easy instrument to learn? Is a question I am often asked, and there are normally two parts to my answer.

On the one hand, the ukulele offers a relatively easy early learning curve. Only four strings means that some of the difficult stretches needed to play the guitar, for example, are non-existent and with the 'uke' being so much smaller, chords are easier to move between each other. Many of the chords use only one, two or three fingers, so it is quite common to be able to play a handful of chords and songs even after just one lesson.

On the 'flip-side' of the argument, the ukulele is a serious instrument and if you want to progress beyond this level, you will need a little perseverance and a light sprinkling of practise. Learning any instrument requires you to be in it for the 'long-haul' (it is a skill you will have for the rest of your life) and if you have a positive mind-set, you can take it to whatever level your ability allows.

Enjoyment and encouragement are so important, and because you can achieve so much in the early stages this can 'egg-you-on' to learn more chords, songs and strumming patterns and pretty soon playing a musical instrument is within your grasp – something you previously thought impossible.

Ukuleles are fantastic weapons of 'mass-instruction' and learning in a group is, by far, the best way to start. The weaker strummers and singers support the stronger members of a group and together you can produce a half-decent sound quite quickly. In a larger group you can get 'lost in the crowd'. Who cares if you miss the odd chord here and there or cannot sing and strum at the same time? Let the others take the strain whilst you gradually increase in confidence.

There will always be those who wish to perform in front of others. Building up to a performance of any size will improve your singing and playing and give you and others something to aim for – you might even get brave enough to perform alone – perhaps at an open-mic! There will be those who want to be a virtuoso and others who just want to play the music they like for their own pleasure. Some will want to perform at The Royal Albert Hall, and others at their local care home. Performing is, however, not the be-all-and-end-all and many will delight in the process and the fact that they are enjoying making music in the company of others.



Social

When you start learning ukulele in a group, look around you, and you will soon notice that there isn't a ukulele 'type'. Strummers and singers come from all 'walks of life':

NHS managers mingle with gamekeepers, teachers, civil servants, business owners, therapists, unemployed, stay-at-home parents, accountants, dentists, architects, students, retired, nurses – the list goes on. No matter what your background, the ukulele could be the thing that brings you closer together to folks with whom you would not normally mix.

As the ukulele attracts people of all ages, there can be intergenerational benefits. There was a time when extended families lived within close proximity and different generations worked and played as one. Families used to make music together in the parlour, in church, or in the pub. This is something we have lost as a society and a mixed-age ukulele group, at least for an hour a week, can recreate that which used to happen frequently and naturally. You may be young, old or in-between but you all have one thing in common, you are on an amazing journey together – learning to play an instrument.

This may be the first time you have attempted to play anything, or the next one in a long list of attempts. You may have a musical background or none at all, but none of this matters because learning to play an instrument together is a great leveller, and as I said earlier – a great encouragement to each other.

People come to the ukulele for a variety of reasons: There are those who want to learn an instrument – plain and simple; others, who are using this as a way of finding a new focus after retirement or because they are isolated following bereavement. There might be carers who see their weekly hour of 'uke' as respite and others who need some 'me-time'

for different reasons. On a very basic level, it can be a pleasant reason just to get out of the house for an hour or two!

Sometimes though, it is just about togetherness and belonging. If you watch a choir, orchestra or any musical ensemble you will notice that people are singing or playing their own parts and yet they are often moving and breathing together. A ukulele group is no different. Strumming and singing together towards the same goal breeds a real sense of 'esprit de corps' – the same feeling as playing in a team or being part of a unit or company. It engenders pride in and responsibility for the whole group. Even the most selfish of people can become team players. It is a wonderful thing to belong, to a cause, a goal, a shared experience and corporate music making is no different.

Volunteering can be personally rewarding and a great contribution to the local community and society as a whole. Every year we have fifty or sixty members of D.UKE.S. (our local ukulele clan) who give up their time to become 'The Purple Army' to assist artists and customers from all over the world as part of our own 'Ukulele Festival of Scotland'. They make a great team and find that working together in this way helps them to bond even more. Everyone pulls together to make what has been described as: *The World's Best Ukulele Festival* and *The Rolls Royce of Ukulele Festivals*.

www.ukulelefestivalofscotland.co.uk

Health

Listening to a ukulele can make you smile and playing one can make that smile even broader. Just think about the George Formby, toothy grin! If you add the singing to the strumming, you are looking at a list of health benefits 'as long as your arm'.

When you play an instrument and sing, endorphins are released which create a warm, fuzzy feeling of happiness. One study suggests that the amount of 'jolly chemicals' created when involved in activities like these are greater than those produced by eating chocolate! It is commonplace to see a ukulele player enter a session frazzled with stress, only to see them leave with a smile on their face and a spring in their step. Some GP's even adopt 'social-prescribing' where a pastime such as ukulele or choir can be 'prescribed' for its benefits on a person's physical and mental health.

If you sing when you strum then you will automatically be oxygenating your blood more than normal. This is one of the many reasons why singing for dementia patients particularly those suffering from vascular dementia can be recommended. When you breathe to sing you use your full lung capacity, in fact, singing is great for the respiratory system in general. It opens up those 'pipes' and has been found to be beneficial in some cases with asthma sufferers.

Tests have shown that playing an instrument and/or singing, creates thousands of tiny electrical 'impulses' all over the brain which demonstrates that musical activity uses just about every single area of our grey-matter. This means that engagement in musical endeavours is a one-stop-shop for exercising our brains. There have been some amazing tests conducted where Alzheimer patients who have lost the power of speech, seem miraculously to be able to sing all the words of a favourite song.

Strumming and singing songs can also have a beneficial reminiscent and educational effect. There is nothing quite like music to take you back to a time or place and songs are also great deliverers of all kinds of bits and pieces of information and trivia: History, Geography, Mathematics, Languages, Religious Studies and more are all covered in your average ukulele group songbook.

As a musical, social or health 'tool' the ukulele is very accessible. There are ukulele groups and lessons all across the country. If you can't get out of the house there are loads of online opportunities for learning. Some teachers even offer Skype or Facetime lessons and there are dozens of books available on Amazon. Group tuition tends to be around £5 per hour and you can buy your first, budget ukulele for around £25!

So, what are you waiting for? Come and join us on a Monday evening (see the yellow advert on the back page of this booklet for details) or contact Stuart for a 'Fast Track' option. – You won't regret it!

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STUART BUTTERWORTH, D.U.K.E.S.

AND 'A TOUCH OF PURPLE'

Stuart takes a 'Music for All' approach in everything he does and loves teaching the ukulele to around 100 students each week. Collectively, Stuart's students form Dumfries and Galloway Ukulele Strummers and Singers (D.U.K.E.S.)



D.U.K.E.S. meet on Monday evenings (term-time only) at Dumfries Baptist Church Centre. For more information about D.U.K.E.S. and 'Ukulele Mondays' please see the full-page, yellow advert on the back cover of this booklet. D.U.K.E.S. members who wish to perform can form their own group(s) and/or join 'A Touch of Purple' (A.T.O.P.)



‘A.T.O.P.’ performs arrangements of pop and rock songs with various ukulele parts and vocal harmonies. The band meets on Thursdays at Colvend Public Hall. Appearances include The Ukulele Festival of Scotland 2018 and 2019 and The Theatre Royal, Dumfries. All but three of the current members joined D.U.K.E.S. as absolute beginners.



Formerly a Director of Music and Head of Expressive Arts in Secondary schools and a guest lecturer on teacher-training courses, Stuart currently lives on the beautiful Solway coast in south-west Scotland with his wife, children and grandchildren. In addition to his ukulele work, he conducts The People’s Choir, Castle Douglas.



TESTIMONIALS

"Great workshop! These are great tools. It's not just what you did, but how you did it. Beautiful for different levels of players."

"Thank you! - I Learned much."

"Best workshop so far this festival."

"Thank you. Fab pace, I learned loads. Loved the fact that you don't let people ping and pluck (when you are talking/demonstrating). Most enjoyable workshop."

"Fantastic workshop at a fantastic festival. Thank you so much!"

"Thank you! Great materials, very clear tuition and a whole lot of fun - I felt like I achieved a lot in a short time. Brilliant. More! More!"

"Well planned, well delivered, fun and informative."

"Great fun and learnt all the five techniques. Enjoyed the singing with the riffs etc. added in. Very good handout too made it easy to follow." Jane Nash - Australia

"Excellent workshop - fun and informative - Thank you!"

"The absolute best workshop ever. Great explanations. Great fun. Learnt loads. Can't wait until next year!"

"Stuart - you are an excellent teacher!" Larry - USA



UKULELE MONDAYS

WITH

D.U.K.E.S.

DUMFRIES AND GALLOWAY UKULELE STRUMMERS & SINGERS

BEGINNERS AND NEW MEMBERS ALWAYS WELCOME

NO UKE? NO PROBLEM! SPARES ALWAYS AVAILABLE

5.15 PM—6.15 PM

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WANT AN EASY SING AND STRUM?
THIS IS FOR YOU!

'AMBASSADORS' ON HAND TO WELCOME
AND ASSIST NEW BEGINNERS

6.30 PM—7.30 PM

DUKES JAM

1ST MONDAY: OWN CHOICE
2ND MONDAY: FOCUS ON CHORDS
3RD MONDAY: FOCUS ON STRUMS
5TH MONDAY: OWN CHOICE

7.40 PM—8.40 PM

DUKESTRA

1ST, 2ND, 3RD & 5TH MONDAYS
FOCUS ON ARRANGEMENTS
AND PLAYING AS A BAND

EVERY 4TH MONDAY

6.30 PM—7.30 PM

IMPROVER/INTERMEDIATE WORKSHOP

7.40 PM—8.40 PM

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COME AND JOIN IN THE FUN!

