

Ukulele 101



Presented by

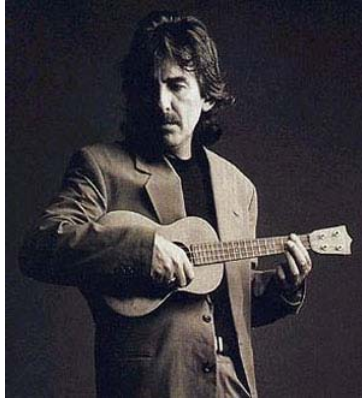
Jim Webster

Nashua River Instruments

Clinton, Massachusetts

<http://www.nashuariverinstruments.com>

Not just for Arthur Godfrey anymore
Likely and Unlikely Suspects



George Harrison
Eric Clapton said, after dinner at
George's the ukes would come out



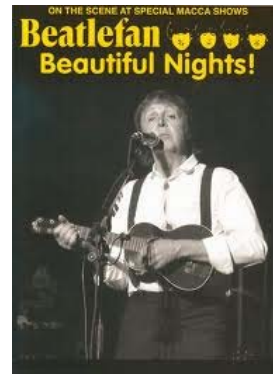
Warren Buffet --not to be confused with Jimmy



Doris Day



The King



Paul McCartney



The Ukulele Orchestra of Great Britain



Amanda ** Palmer of the Dresden Dolls



Jake Shimabukuro
The Jimi Hendrix of Ukulele – Really!

Introduction

These few songs are arranged from dead easy (Skip to my Lou, which has only two chords) to others that will take a bit more work.

Key of C – Two and Three-Chord Songs

The first few songs are in the key of C. This is the easiest key to learn on a ukulele in standard C tuning. This is because you can play the easiest version of a C chord with just one finger on one string. Then you can play an F with only two fingers. Then there's the G, which takes 3 fingers (which is like a D chord to any guitar player, by the way).

Think of the familiar "diatonic" scale. It has 7 notes (plus an 8th note that is also the beginning of the same scale one octave higher):

Do Re Mi Fa Sol La Ti Do

You can also think of each of these notes as having a number, like this:

| | | | | | | | | |
|---------------|----|----|----|----|-----|----|----|----|
| | Do | Re | Mi | Fa | Sol | La | Ti | Do |
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
| C Major Scale | C | D | E | F | G | A | B | C |

Because we are playing in the key of C, "Do" in the C major scale will start on C and "Fa" and "Sol" are an F and a G respectively, as shown in red above.

Once you know three chords (the first, fourth, and fifth of the key you are playing in) you can play thousands – tens of thousands of three chord songs – Rock, Folk, Blues, etc. This is because so many songs are built on a backbone of three chords based on the 1 (Do), 4 (Fa) and 5 (Sol) notes of this familiar scale.

Learning variations of these three chords can make these songs more interesting. This is why I introduce some variants of these chords in the second version of "Red River Valley." That way you will see that you really can play songs with only three chords. And yes, you can play a bit fancier by adding few other chord forms.

More chords, more keys

Don't worry – this is to take home and work on later – or maybe for a Uke 102 class. But to show you where to go next, I've included a few songs with more than three chords and in keys other than C. With the chord chart in the back of this booklet and with the list of resources and Web sites I've included, you can hunt down a gazillion tunes with lyrics and chords.

There are other things to work on down the road – strumming styles, fancier fingering, movable chords, etc. But the important thing for today is that by the time you've got through "Red River Valley" you will be playing real music. In the months and years ahead you will quickly progress to more tunes, more chords, discovering melody notes, etc.

Time and Rhythm

In addition to learning a few chords, you also need to learn a bit about strumming in time. The first few songs in this book are in 4/4 time. This is probably the most familiar and widely used time signature – a straightforward 4 beats to every measure. I've laid out the first few songs to also show where each measure ends. This way you can more easily count and strum four beats for each measure and also see how the words and chord changes fall within this simple rhythmic pattern.

I've chosen the first couple of songs because their chord changes fall pretty predictably at the beginning of a measure. They also have chord changes spaced far enough apart so you won't have to struggle too hard to move your fingers from one chord to the next (at least if you play slowly). This is a good way to learn new chords and train your fingers (or is it your brain?) to develop muscle memory.

After a while your fingers will know where to go. But until that happens it's a good exercise to practice playing while counting (and tapping your foot) to a steady 4/4 beat. If you fumble a chord change don't worry about it, but stay with the beat and make the next chord change when it is supposed to come, even if you've missed a strum or two as you fumbled with the fingering.

This is also good practice for playing with other people. You (or one of the others) can fumble a chord change from time to time. But everyone else is going on with the tune on time. So don't worry about playing the beats you missed. Just know when the next chord change is coming and climb back into the song.

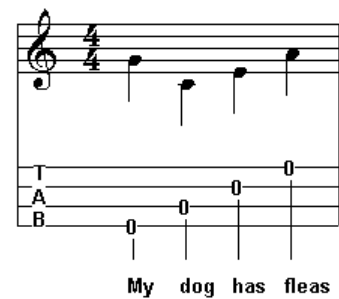
I've also included one song in 3/4 time - "Home on the Range" This is familiar waltz time - one, two, three; one, two, three, etc. with the emphasis on the "one." A good way to play waltz time is to strum down on the 1 beat and then to brush up across the strings with your fingers for the 2 and 3 beats: down, up, up; down, up, up, etc.

Tuning the Uke

Songs in this book are arranged for standard ukulele C tuning. There is also a D Tuning, which is just like this one, but starts a full note higher.

C tuning is commonly used these days, though a lot of older and traditional Hawaiian songbooks use the D tuning. Stick with C tuning for starters.

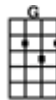
I've listed several web sites that give you visual and audible assistance for tuning. You can get a good clip-on digital tuner for about \$15 - \$20, which makes tuning really easy.



Skip to my Lou



Lost my partner, what'll I do |



Lost my partner, what'll I do |



Lost my partner, what'll I do |



Skip to my Lou my darling |



Gone again skip to my Lou |



Gone again skip to my Lou |



Gone again skip to my Lou |



Skip to my Lou my darling |



I'll get another one pretty as you |



I'll get another one pretty as you |

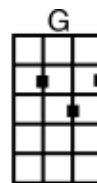
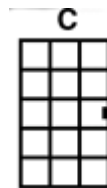


I'll get another one pretty as you |



Skip to my Lou my darling |

Chords used:



Time:

4/4

This is a good song to start with because you can play it using only two chords.

There are actually quite a few songs that can be played with just two chords. A few examples are:

Jambalaya
Clementine
(Hang Down your Head) Tom Dooley
My Home's Across the Blue Ridge Mountains
Take Me Back to Tulsa

See the "Resources and Web Links" section at the back of this book for links to lists of more 2-chord songs.

Red River Valley (version 1)



From this | valley they say you are | going. We will |



miss your bright eyes and sweet | smile. For they |



say you are taking the | sunshine that has |



brightened our pathways | a while..

Chorus



Come and | sit by my side if you | love me. Do not. |



hasten to bid me | adieu. Just re- |



member the Red River | Valley and the |



cowboy who loved you so | true.



I've been | thinking a long time, my | darling of the |



sweet words you never would | say. Now, |

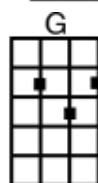
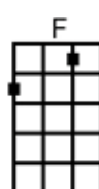
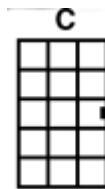


alas must my fond hopes all | vanish For they |



say you are going | away

Chords used:



Time:

4/4

By adding a third chord, you can play thousands upon thousands of folk, rock, and blues songs.

This old cowboy song has been recorded by everyone from Jimmie Rodgers, to Roy Rodgers, to the Andrews Sisters.

This Land is Your Land

Chorus



(This land is) | your land, this land is | my land, from Cali-



fornia to the New York | island, from the redwood |



forests to the Gulf stream | waters, |



This land is made for you and | me

Verse



(As I was) | walking, that ribbon of | highway, I saw a-



bove me that endless | skyway. I saw be-



low me a golden | valley |



This land is made for you and | me |

Verse



(As I was) | walking, I saw a | sign there, and on one |



side it said it said "No Tres -| passing". On the -|

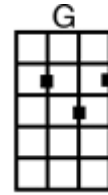
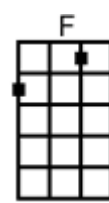
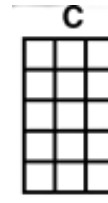


Other side it didn't say | nothing. |



That side was made for you and | me. |

Chords used:



Time:

4/4

Red River Valley (version 2)

From this | valley they say you are | going. We will |

miss your bright eyes and sweet | smile. For they |

say you are taking the | sunshine that has |

brightened our pathways | a while

Chorus

Come and | sit by my side if you | love me. Do not |

hasten to bid me | adieu. Just re-|

member the Red River | Valley and the |

cowboy who loved you so | true.

I've been | thinking a long time, my | darling of the |

sweet words you never would | say. Now, |

alas must my fond hopes all | vanish for they |

say you are going | away

Chords used:

C F

G

Optional Chords

C7 F7

G7

Time:
4/4

This version introduces seventh chords. These can often be used to make transitions between the major chord changes, especially in many folk and blues songs.

Try also inserting seventh chords between the major chord changes in "This Land is Your Land."

You Are My Sunshine

(You are my)



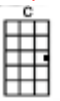
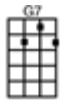
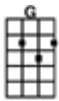
| sunshine my only | sunshine. You make me |



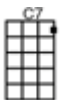
happy when skies are | gray. You'll never |



Know dear how much I | love you. Please don't |



Take my sunshine | away. (The other)



| night dear as I lay | sleeping, I dreamed I |



held you in my | arms. When I a- |



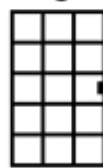
woke dear I was mis-| taken, and I |



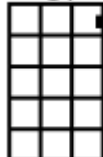
hung my head and I | Cried. (You are my)

Chords used:

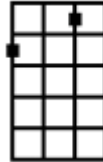
C



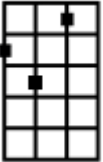
C7



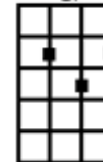
F



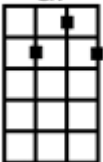
F



G



G7



Time:

4/4

Here is another traditional song using seventh chords as transitions. Try using the seventh chords on some chord changes but not on others to create some variety and suspense in your playing.

Home on the Range



Oh, give me a | home, where the |



buffalo | roam, where the |



deer and the | antelope |



play | where |



seldom is | heard a dis-



couraging | word and the



Skies are not | cloudy all | day

(chorus:)



Home, | home on the |



Range, | where the |



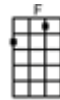
deer and the | antelope |



play | where |



seldom is | heard a dis-

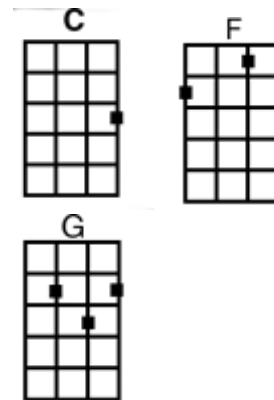


couraging | word and the



Skies are not | cloudy all | day

Chords used:



Time:

3/4

This song introduces 3/4 time. The beat for each measure goes **One**-two-three, **One**-two-three, with the emphasis on the One beat. One way to play a simple 3/4 rhythm is to brush down with your thumb and then up and up again with your forefinger with the emphasis on the down stroke - **Down**-up-up, **Down**-up-up.

3/4 is often called "Waltz time." Once you get into playing 3/4 you will recognize the familiar waltz rhythm that works with, for example "Tennessee Waltz," "Kentucky Waltz" and a thousand others, though many of these will require your learning some additional chords.

But waltz time isn't just for traditional waltzes. For example, Bob Dylan's "The Times They are a Changing" is in 3/4. Though to play it in the key of C, you will also need to learn an A-minor and a D-minor chord to use in addition to the C, F, and G chords you now know.

Stand by Me



When the night has | come and the |



land is | dark and the |



moon is the | only light we'll | see | No, I |



won't be | afraid. No I |



won't be | afraid just as |



long as you | stand, stand by | me | |

Chorus:



So, darling, darling | Stand by | me .. Oh, |



Stand by | me .. Oh, |



Stand, | stand, stand by | me. | |

C

If the sky that we | look upon should

Am

tumble and | fall, or the

F

G

C

mountain should | crumble in the | sea | I won't |

C

cry. | No I |

Am

won't shed a | tear just as

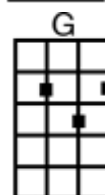
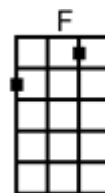
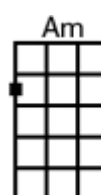
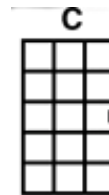
F

G

C

long as you | stand, stand by | me.

Chords used:



Time:

4/4

By adding an Am chord you can now play classic Doo Wop era songs of the 50s and 60s. For example you can also use this chord progression for:

"You Cheated You Lied"

"In the Still of the Night"

"A Thousand Stars in the Sky"

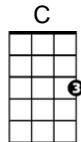
"Devil or Angel"

"Bristol Stomp"

"Has Anybody Seen My Gal" by Sam Lewis, Young, and Henderson

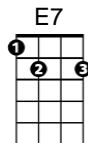
CHORDS USED IN THIS SONG

Verse 1:

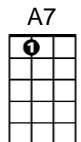


[C]Five foot two, [E7]eyes of blue
But [A7]oh! what those five foot could do,
Has [D7]anybody [G7]seen my [C]gal?

Verse 2:

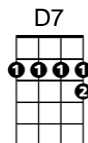


[C]Turned up nose, [E7]turned down nose
[A7]Never had no other beaus.
Has [D7]anybody [G7]seen my [C]gall?

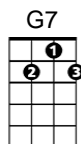


Bridge:

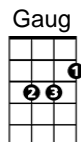
Now if you [E7]run into a five foot two, [A7]covered in fur,
[D7]Diamond rings and all those things,
[G7]Betcha' life it [D7]isn't [G7]her,
[Gaug]But...



Verse 3:



[C]Could she love, [E7]could she woo?
[A7]Could she, could she, could she coo?
Has [D7]anybody [G7]seen my [C]gal?

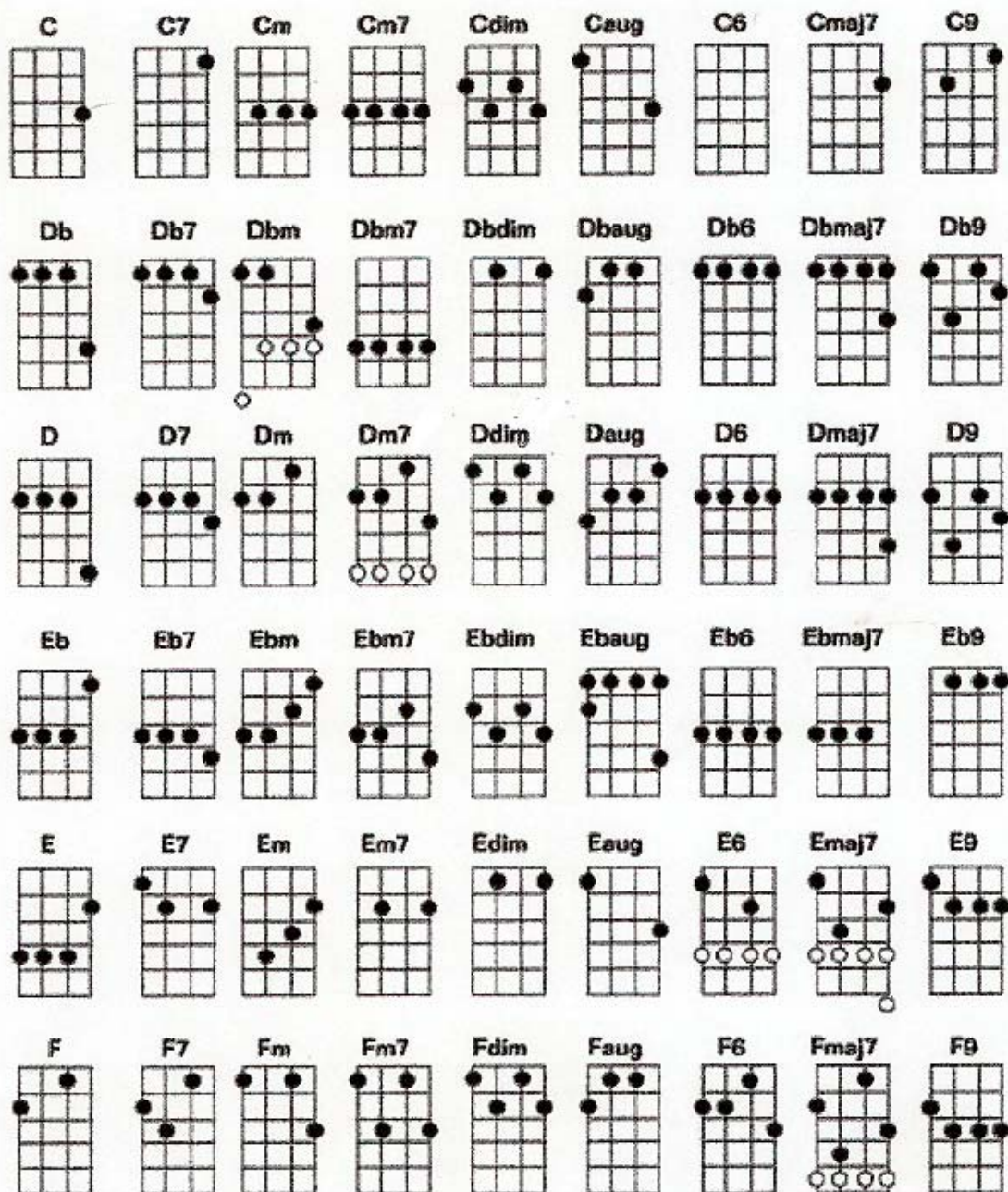


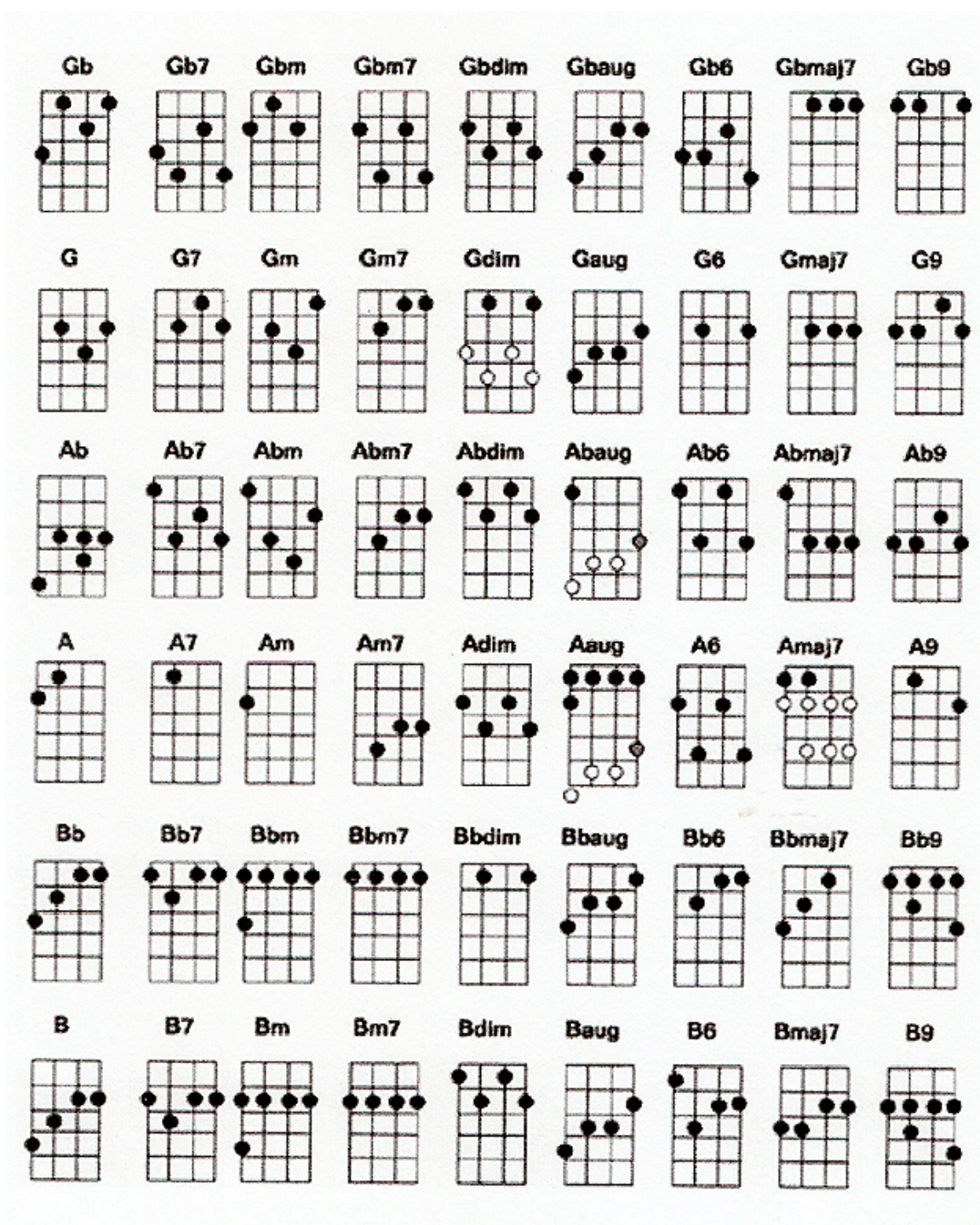
Note: You can ignore the Gaug and just stay on the G7

<http://www.alligatorboogaloo.com/uke/tabs/030104.html>

Ukulele Chords...

Ukulele Chord Chart - Standard G C E A Tuning:





Resources and Web Links

Note: Go to my web site for clickable links to these web sites:

<http://www.nashuariverinstruments.com>

Buying a Good Quality Inexpensive Ukulele

When buying a ukulele, you need to be aware that some have traditional style tuning pegs; others have guitar-style geared tuning machines. Unless you are a purist or are looking at old collectible ukes, you want the guitar-style tuners with gears. These make tuning and staying in tune a whole lot easier than the straight through the neck pegs.

Finding a good ukulele for much less than \$150 and up can be a challenge. There are a lot of cheap but junky ukes. Most of these are plagued by high string action, string slots that are too high at the nut, cheap tuning machines, poorly positioned bridges, etc. You will find good playable, inexpensive ukuleles at local music stores. But when shopping, look for geared tuning machines that turn easily and strings that lie low enough to the fret board (this is called low "action") so that you can play easily but without "buzzing" sounds that can be caused by frets that aren't level or strings that are *too* low.

If you have a digital tuner, bring it with you. If you don't have one ask the store clerk to let you borrow one. Tune the ukulele to standard pitch GCEA. Then play the A string "open" (this means, without pressing or touching the string with your left hand). Confirm that the plucked string shows a perfect A on your digital tuner. Then press the same string down at the 12th fret. It should sound one octave higher and the digital tuner should also show you that the string's pitch is A. Then try the same procedure on the G string. Don't be concerned if the pitch is off a *tiny* bit at the 12th fret (either sharp or flat) but if it's off by more than a few "cents" (hundredths of a semi-tone) as indicated by the dots on your tuner's display, it means either the string action is too high or the bridge is poorly positioned. If so, put the ukulele back on the wall and try another one.

But there are a few really good ukuleles available for surprisingly little money. I recommend these in particular, though there are many others also:

"The Classic" Uke

This is my first choice for a low-cost, well-made ukulele. Empire music in Canada sells these. They ship to the U.S. with no problems. These guys specialize in instruments for schools and teachers and therefore have made it their business to find good, playable ukes at low cost.

I especially recommend "The Classic" uke, which they sell for about \$55. Be sure to specify that you want the model with guitar-style tuning machines and tell them you want it set up for C tuning. This is a really playable and good sounding instrument – much better than many I've seen for twice the price.

<http://www.empire-music.com/Catalogue.php?ProductID=CL500M>

The Kala "Makala" Uke

These are pretty widely available and are made in soprano, concert, and tenor sizes. A concert size should sell for about \$55. The link below is for Bounty Music in Hawaii. It's worth a look at Bounty's web site just to see the large variety of ukes available from various manufacturers in

prices ranging from \$50 into the thousands. Although I've listed Bounty's site, you can find Makala ukes from many dealers on-line, and probably also in some local music stores.

Compared to the "Classic" uke (above), the concert model has a longer neck (it joins the body at the 14th fret instead of the 12th). This doesn't make much practical difference unless you're planning to shread lead guitar licks.

<http://www.ukes.com/kala-ukuleles.html>

Fluke Ukes

These plastic-bodied ukuleles are really very playable and actually sound pretty good. They are made in two basic models: the soprano size "Flea" and the concert size "Fluke." For either model these are going to be \$200 or more. In that price range there are many other good ukes also. But I mention these Fluke Ukes because they are made in many colors, many with colorful images of Hawaiian-style gods etc. – so they look good – at least if you're into over-the-top gaudy good. Also they are designed with flat bottoms, giving them a built-in stand. You can buy directly from the manufacturer's site I've listed below, but you will also find them stocked by many music stores. I know that The Music Emporium in Lexington, Mass. carries them and there may be other local dealers also.

<http://www.fleamarketmusic.com/>

Tuning a Ukulele

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fk_Ot02AUbc&feature=related

http://www.get-tuned.com/ukulele_tuner.php

Ukulele Chords

<http://www.alligatorboogaloo.com/uke/chords/index.html>

Song Collections with Chords and Lyrics

<http://www.alligatorboogaloo.com/uke/tabs.html>

<http://www.chordie.com/>

<http://www.ukulelesongs.com/>

<http://www.doctoruke.com/songs.html>

Two-Chord Songs

http://guitarforanyone.com/more_2_chord_songs.html

<http://www.notplayingguitar.com/2008/06/85-two-chord-guitar-songs.html>

On-Line Must-See Ukulele Performances

George Harrison – The Devil and The Deep Blue Sea

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G5CkIniOcqS>

George, Paul, Ringo

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v5k-OE0-fWs>

My Little Grass Shack

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3HNpVs_QZkQ

My Little Grass Shack (Andrews Sisters)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dUD7jD2wbEc&feature=related>

My Little Grass Shack (Arthur Godfrey)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g8TlgSIhm90&NR=1>

Ukulele Orchestra of Great Britain

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2q-gk3iklS8&feature=related>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u1TByDV8Pf4&feature=related>

Israel "IZ" Kamakawiwo' ole

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V1bFr2SWP1I&feature=fvw>

Jake Shimabukuro

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=puSkP3uym5k>

Warren Buffet

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xRDbpOgfonU>