

'Ukulele Basics

History

The 'ukulele originated in the 19th century as a Hawaiian adaptation of the small guitar-like instruments brought to Hawai'i by Portuguese immigrants. The word "ukulele" means "jumping flea," which is what the Hawai'ians thought the musicians' fingers looked like when they were playing.

Care of the 'ukulele

"Treat it like a small child."

Keep it in a comfortable temperature range.

Keep it protected from impact, crushing, and surface damage.

Increase humidity – we live in a desert here in Boise!

A damp sponge in ventilated container inside the case works fine.

Sizes of 'ukulele

Four basic sizes of 'ukulele:

soprano (standard), concert, and tenor, all of which tune to G C E A, and baritone, which tunes a fourth lower, to D G B E

Terminology

Head (with tuning pegs), neck, body (with shoulder, waist, and soundhole)

Strings vibrate between the "nut" (peg end) and the "saddle" (on the "bridge").

Frets: spaces between the fret wires

Up the fretboard: toward the body, making higher tones

Down the fretboard: toward the pegs, making lower tones

Fingers:

#1 – index

#2 – long, or middle

#3 – ring

#4 – little, or "pinky"

Note: string players number the fingers this way, which is confusing for piano players, who call the thumb #1 and the fingers #2 through #5.

Pitch: the "highness" or "lowness" of a tone, determined by string vibration rate

Faster vibration produces a higher pitched tone.

Vibration twice as fast produces tone one "octave" higher.

Interval: the musical distance between two pitches

In our Western (hemisphere) system of music the octave is divided into twelve even intervals, which correspond to the fret locations.

Chord: tones of three or more different pitches played or sung at the same time