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Classical ukulele: Redefining the ukulele

Abstract

Developed in Hawaii after 1879, the ukulele was first used as a strummed instrument to accompany the human voice and traditional hula dances of Hawaii. During the 20th century, as the ukulele's popularity spread, it achieved notoriety amongst comedians and entertainers. Since the millennium a new generation of players have sought to define the ukulele as a serious instrument. The classical ukulele approach emerged in 2004 and until recently focused on creating arrangements. As the first person to do a PhD on classical ukulele, my research is forward looking in its aim of creating new contemporary classical works, and backward looking in my desire to better understand the ukulele's European roots. The first part of this paper is, therefore, dedicated to providing a history of the instrument in the context of classical ukulele. The second part discusses the techniques used in the new works. As a teacher, performer, composer/arranger and researcher I have embraced a holistic approach to the ukulele. This is reflected in my portfolio of new works for classical ukulele and the overview of my research which is presented here.

Keywords

ukulele; classical ukulele; fingerstyle ukulele; machete de braga; contemporary

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Lecture-recital given at The 21st Century Guitar Conference 2021 under the title: New Works for Classical Ukulele.

Classical ukulele: Redefining the ukulele¹

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Developed in Hawaii after 1879, the ukulele was first used as a strummed instrument to accompany the human voice and traditional hula dances of Hawaii. During the 20th century, as the ukulele's popularity spread, it achieved notoriety amongst comedians and entertainers. Since the millennium a new generation of players have sought to define the ukulele as a serious instrument. The classical ukulele approach emerged in 2004 and until recently focused on creating arrangements. As the first person to do a PhD on classical ukulele, my research is forward looking in its aim of creating new contemporary classical works, and backward looking in my desire to better understand the ukulele's European roots. The first part of this paper is, therefore, dedicated to providing a history of the instrument in the context of classical ukulele. The second part discusses the techniques used in the new works. As a teacher, performer, composer/arranger and researcher I have embraced a holistic approach to the ukulele. This is reflected in my portfolio of new works for classical ukulele and the overview of my research which is presented here.

With just four strings, the lowest of which is C4 in the scientific pitch notation system, and a range of barely two octaves, the ukulele is indeed small. In fact, the scale length of a standard soprano ukulele is approximately 35cm, about half the size of a standard classical guitar. In physical terms the ukulele is to the guitar what the violin is to the cello. But while the violin is celebrated as a solo, orchestral and ensemble instrument, the ukulele is often denigrated as being a toy, a novelty or a comedy prop. The reasons for this are both simple and complex. On the one hand ukuleles are small and relatively inexpensive. A decent beginner ukulele can be bought for as little as £30. The violin is also small but even a cheap violin is expensive compared to a ukulele. Furthermore, the fashion for making plastic ukuleles, which started in the 1940s with toy manufacturer Mattel and has continued to this day, has added to the stigma of the ukulele being poor quality, toy-like, disposable and gimmicky. Unfortunately, the ukulele does not have the right image for the elitist world of classical music.²

A more fundamental but interlinked problem is the lack of sophisticated repertoire for the ukulele. How then can the ukulele overcome stereotypical images and its lack of cultivated repertoire – both historic and modern – in order to achieve a robust pedagogy and rigorous curriculum? One reason why this is important is the growing popularity of the ukulele amongst schoolchildren. While it is widely accepted that it takes many years of study to become a concert violinist, the ukulele is frequently portrayed as being simple and unrefined. This idea, proliferated by mainstream media and often abetted by self-glorifying ukulele players, claims that just three chords will lead to ukulele stardom (Raucous, 2015). When a 2018 YouGov report commissioned by the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra found more children across the UK wanted to learn the ukulele than the violin, the flute, or the cello (Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, 2018), the ukulele's popularity was seen as an affront to classical music rather than an opportunity to foster a new approach and attitude. The Times was particularly scathing: "It is news that might have pleased George Formby if not musical traditionalists: the popularity of the ukulele is on the rise while schoolchildren's

¹ Lecture-recital given at The 21st Century Guitar Conference 2021 under the title: New Works for Classical Ukulele.

² Elitist attitudes in classical music are being challenged by artists such as Margaret Leng Tan who, since graduating with a doctorate from Julliard, has dedicated her life to performing on toy pianos in order to demonstrate their validity as classical instruments. Elitist attitudes in classical music are being challenged by artists such as Margaret Leng Tan who, since graduating with a doctorate from Julliard, has dedicated her life to performing on toy pianos in order to demonstrate their validity as classical instruments.

interest in more sophisticated instruments is waning” (Sanderson, 2018). The rebuke was damning. It exposed deeply entrenched stereotypical views that the ukulele is neither sophisticated nor traditional. In the hands of well-known entertainers such as George Formby and Tiny Tim these accusations carry some weight. Both men based their careers on being non-conformist and developed their own unique, sometimes controversial, styles. Tiny Tim’s playing was basic, but Formby’s elaborate strumming patterns have endured, creating a tradition in their own right. Formby’s lyrics might be dated but his triple stroke is very much in vogue. It is also worth remembering that battute and rasgueado are historical strumming techniques that have been integrated into modern guitar repertoire and performance. Furthermore, the ukulele is not limited to strumming patterns but, like the guitar, can facilitate a wide range of techniques and musical styles. One advantage of adopting a broader and more skill-based approach through classical ukulele is that children can be taught how to read and appreciate music from a young age. As the popularity of the ukulele continues to flourish in schools it is surely time for classical music institutions such as the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, and newspapers such as *The Times*, to move away from deeply entrenched, conventional notions about the ukulele and adopt a more open and forward-looking perspective.

In 2006 Hawaiian ukulele virtuoso Jake Shimabukuro rose to stardom when his ukulele cover of George Harrison’s *While My Guitar Gently Weeps* went viral on YouTube. Shimabukuro’s instrumental arrangements of songs such as Queen’s *Bohemian Rhapsody* and Leonard Cohen’s *Hallelujah* have helped the ukulele become more accepted in the realms of pop culture. Less well known, however, is a style of playing promoted by classical guitarist turned ukulele player John King (1953–2009). Known as classical ukulele, this style of playing has continued to develop since the publication of King’s (2004) groundbreaking book/CD *The Classical Ukulele*. Employing a classical guitar approach to the ukulele King created a diverse collection of arrangements including works by Bach, Mozart and Beethoven, traditional Hawaiian and Irish tunes and Scott Joplin’s jazz standard *The Entertainer*. By applying an unconventional approach to an unconventional instrument, King’s arrangements, supported by his performances, challenged stereotypical views that the ukulele is merely a toy, a novelty or a comedy prop. In recent years a growing number of classical ukulele exponents, including the author of this paper, are exploring how new techniques can be used to create solo and ensemble works that are original, idiomatic, cultivated and innovative.

The primary goal of my research is to compose, arrange, commission, perform, present and record new, contemporary works for the ukulele. A secondary goal is to create pedagogical and didactic material to further the development of a robust curriculum for classical ukulele. To this end my research approach is both forward looking and backward looking. It is forward-looking in its aim to create new repertoire and approaches, and backward looking in its commitment to be informed by the repertoire and techniques of other historically related instruments. The three main questions driving my research are:

1. How did classical ukulele evolve? What are the historical and cultural contexts behind the development of John King’s (2004) book CD?
2. How might existing models of instrumental style and musical culture inform and expand the identification, history, cultural context, contemporary practice and repertoire of classical ukulele?
3. How can classical ukulele be developed as a concert instrument with a contemporary and growing repertoire?

Historical background

Ukulele is a made-up Hawaiian word, commonly thought to mean bouncing flea. The earliest printed mention of a ukulele, as a musical instrument, of which I am aware was in a 1888 concert report: during an interlude a rendition of “Yankee Doodle” was given on the violin, banjo, guitar and ukulele. Later in the evening a quartette of singers was accompanied by guitar, banjo and ukulele (K.K., 1888).³ To this end the ukulele may appear to be a new creation but, as ukulele historians Jim Tranquada and John King have established, the history of the ukulele is far more complex. Despite its Hawaiian name and cultural associations, the ukulele’s roots are European (King & Tranquada, 2012). The ukulele is in fact an adaptation and merging of two traditional instruments from the Portuguese island of Madeira⁴ called the Machete (or Machete de Braga) and the Rajão. These instruments were taken to Hawaii in 1879 by Portuguese immigrants from Madeira. Three of these immigrants – Manuel Nunes (1843–1922), Augusto Dias (1842–1915), and José do Espírito Santo (1850–1905) – were the first men to make ukuleles in Hawaii. It is widely accepted that the ukulele adopted features from both the machete and the rajão. The small body and four strings of the ukulele come from the machete⁵ while the G4-C4-E4-A4 tuning comes from the top four strings of the rajão.⁶

In 19th century Madeira the machete was played by all classes of society. On the one hand it was used as a simple folk instrument to accompany the songs and dances of the peasantry and on the other it featured in the concert halls and ballrooms of the upper classes. Furthermore, as found by Portuguese academics Manuel Morais and Paulo Esteireiro the machete was also played by prominent ladies of Funchal society and was included as an “essential discipline” at a school for young girls along with singing and playing the piano and the guitar (Morais & Esteireiro, 2012, p. 5). Given the machete is one of the forerunners of the ukulele, it makes an interesting case study as it begs the question: how did the machete overcome its toy-like appearance and folk roots to succeed as a sophisticated, society instrument? Furthermore, the machete’s success was not just a local phenomenon. The British based guitarist and composer Catharina Pratten was inspired to compose for the machete while string manufacturer G. P. Guivier & Co. (1903) of 4 Great Marlborough St, London, advertised and stocked “machette”⁷ strings. Machetes are not known to have been made in the UK, but many Victorians did visit Madeira and machetes could easily be bought as souvenirs from shops such as the “Fancy Bazaar” in Funchal (Taylor, 1882, p. 26). As will be shown, however, the machete was much more than a tourist trinket.⁸ It featured in a number of musical entertainments and concerts in the UK in the second half of the 19th century.

³ A publication of the report on the following day on the Hawaiian Gazette may be read online: <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83025121/1888-12-11/ed-1/seq-1> (p. 1).

⁴ The Madeira Islands are an autonomous region of Portugal. They are situated in the North Atlantic Ocean, 400km north of the Canary Islands and 520km west of Morocco.

⁵ The machete was traditionally tuned DGBD

⁶ The rajão was tuned DGCEA - the D & G were both re-entrant

⁷ This spelling was often used perhaps to indicate the Portuguese pronunciation being closer to *brunette* or *laundrette* rather than the Spanish machete or broad bladed knife.

⁸ The earliest known photographs of a machete were taken in Oxford (1857/58) by the Reverend Charles Dodgson, who is better known as the author Lewis Carroll (King & Tranquada, 2012, p. 15). His subjects were three sisters: Edith, Lorina and Alice Liddell. Dodgson’s photographs show them dressed in Madeira lace and holding the machetes which they probably bought as souvenirs when they visited Madeira in 1856–7 with their parents. Alice was the inspiration for Carroll’s popular novel *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865).

A long history of military and commercial treaties between Portugal and Britain, from as early as the Treaty of Windsor of 1386, meant that by the 18th century British merchants were firmly established in Madeira (Hancock, 2005). United within an organisation known as The British Factory they controlled the island's economy, particularly the lucrative wine trade. The demise of the wine industry in the 19th century led to economic and social uncertainty but the invention of faster steam ships made the islands an increasingly popular tourist destination and health spa for the Victorians. This burgeoning tourist trade resulted in the publication of numerous guidebooks and travel journals by English speaking residents and visitors. Unlikely titles such as *Madeira: Its Scenery, and How to See It* (Taylor, 1882) and *Madeira, Its Climate and Scenery* (White, 1851) included sections on the machete. While many of these accounts are anecdotal, they do, nevertheless, form an important part of the social history of the machete and are an indication of the impression it had on British visitors and residents.

Writer and lithographer Andrew Picken, who visited Madeira in the 1830s for reasons of poor health, observed, "It [the machete] has not much power, but great sweetness and liveliness of note" (Picken, 1840, p. 4). Picken's enthusiasm was not shared by John Dix, an American visitor, who considered the sound "thin and meagre" (Dix, 1850, p. 72). Dix did concede that "There are one or two players in Funchal who have attained wonderful proficiency in playing on it. Their execution is astonishing" (Dix, 1850, p. 73). Dix witnessed these players at the monthly concerts put on by the Philharmonic Society of Funchal. These concerts included performances by music teachers and amateurs and were "attended by the Portuguese, the British residents, and many of the visitors to the island." (Dix, 1850, p. 72) One of the most prominent instruments was the machete. Despite his appreciation of the standard of playing Dix considered the guitar "a finer instrument" (Dix, 1850, p. 73) and incorrectly declared: "It is not probable that the machete will ever emigrate from Madeira." (Dix, 1850, p. 72)

One of the most comprehensive accounts of the machete was given by Robert White in his guidebook *Madeira, Its Climate and Scenery* of 1851:

The machete is peculiar to the islands; it is a small guitar, with four strings of catgut, which are tuned in thirds, with the exception of the lower two, which have an interval of a fourth. This instrument is used by the peasantry to accompany the voice and the dance. The music consists of a succession of simple chords, but, in the hands of an accomplished player, the machete is capable of much more pleasing harmony and the stranger is sometimes agreeably surprised to hear the fashionable music of our ball-rooms given with considerable effect on what appears a very insignificant instrument. (White, 1851, p. 38)

White did not provide specific details about the music, or the musicians, but the "fashionable music of our ball-rooms" almost certainly refers to the music of Cândido Drummond de Vasconcelos. In the late 1990s a handwritten manuscript by Cândido Drummond for machete and guitar, dated 1846, was discovered in a music shop in Funchal, Madeira. The collection contains forty-six pieces composed for the machete with guitar accompaniments by Manuel Joaquim Monteiro Cabral; it was subsequently published with an introductory essay by Portuguese academic Manuel Morais (Vasconcelos, 1846/2003). Most of the Drummond pieces are in the form of European ballroom dances including waltzes, polkas, marches and quadrilles – the fashionable music referred to by White. Until the discovery of the Drummond manuscript the machete was regarded as a simple folk instrument. But the discovery of this historic repertoire immediately changed perceptions. The machete is now considered a sophisticated instrument with a historic repertoire and thus worthy of academic study.

The research of Manuel Morais has focused on the machete within its homeland of Madeira. My own research, however, has explored the British connection in order to determine whether the popularity of the machete was parochial or whether it can be viewed in a broader context. The results were surprising.

British Newspaper Archives revealed that the machete featured in numerous amateur concerts throughout England during the second half of the 19th century. The principal exponent was Mrs. Oakley and she participated in numerous amateur concerts between 1869 and 1884. A review of a concert in aid of the new organ fund at St Saviour's, Hoxton, London, recounts that a large audience was in attendance and, "the programme judiciously selected"; several of the performers received a "special word of commendation" including Mrs. Oakley whose "artistic playing of the machete in two duets with Mrs. Phelps, Portuguese Airs and Carnival de Venice and Madeira Country Airs, was well appreciated and received rapturous applause" (St.Saviour's Hoxton, 1869). The connection with Madeira was established by the titles of the pieces, although they are not in the Drummond collection. A more significant connection with Madeira, however, was established through the name Phelps. Joseph Phelps⁹ was a wine merchant whose family had established themselves in Madeira at the end of the 18th century. His eldest daughter Bella Phelps (1820–1893) is credited with starting the embroidery trade in Madeira (Forrest et al, 2016) during the 1850s. Further research revealed that Mrs. Oakley's maiden name was in fact Clara Phelps (1831–1897), the sixth daughter of Joseph and Elizabeth Phelps. Letters of the Phelps family, published by their descendants in 2016, led to the revelation that Clara's machete teacher was none other than the celebrated composer and performer Cândido Drummond.

Clara's mother, Elizabeth, who played the harp and the piano, placed great importance on her children studying music and encouraged them to study a variety of instruments including piano, guitar, Portuguese guitar voice and machete. As her husband Joseph was often away in England trying to sell wine, Elizabeth frequently wrote to him about their children's musical activities. In 1847 she wrote, "Clara and H[arriet] continue to practise their stringed instruments much to the satisfaction of Cândido and Cabral [sic Cabral]. We really owe those two gents a large debt of gratitude for their instruction" (Forrest et al, 2016, p. 43). Clara was 16 at the time and was learning the machete from Cândido Drummond while her elder sister Harriet was learning the guitar from Manuel Cabral. Cabral is known to have arranged the guitar accompaniments for the Drummond pieces but a letter by Clara's brother Charlie, dated 13th January 1852, is the first confirmation that Cabral and Drummond also performed together. "There have been some very nice parties this year ... Mr. Lowe played a great deal of music last night to a highly delighted audience, as also Cândido and Cabral on machete and guitar" (Forrest et al, 2016, p. 123).

In 1860 Clara moved to England when she married John Oakley, a young vicar who went on to become Dean of Carlisle and then Dean of Manchester. Clara met John while he was working as a private tutor in Madeira. Writing to her brother Joseph about her engagement Clara observed how music had brought the two together. "It was singing duets together as did it I believe" (Forrest et al, 2016, p. 300). Despite marriage and her move to the UK, music and the machete would remain an important part of Clara's life. Shortly after her wedding, her father noted: "We have got a piano, and last Tuesday we had some friends to dine with us, among others Clarinha and her husband. She played the machettinho de braga exquisitely; I never heard her play better" (Forrest et al, 2016, p. 86) The use of the diminutives "Clarinha" and "machettinho" seem to be used as terms of endearment. Joseph was undoubtedly writing as a proud parent, but Clara had had an excellent teacher in Cândido Drummond and was clearly a dedicated student. As early as 1847, aged just 16, her mother had noted her daughter's ability: "Clara's machete has obtained unbounded applause from the Corral up to the top of Pico Ruivo" (Forrest et al, 2016, p. 56). Over twenty years later Clara, now known as Mrs. Oakley, continued to perform on the machete in England. Between 1869 to 1884 Mrs. Oakley's performances on the machete continued to delight and surprise audiences: "Mrs. Oakley sang with sweetness several popular ballads, and fairly brought the

⁹ Joseph Phelps, Esq. is included in the List of Subscribers for Andrew Picken's (1840) *Madeira: Illustrated by Andrew Picken, with a description of the island*. Two illustrations included machetes.

house down by her clever performances on the machete, an instrument which the bulk of the audience seemed to have seen for the first time” (The Dean, 1882). John Oakley’s obituary acknowledged that “he devoted much time to the popularisation of music, and with the members of his family often gave concerts for the people, which were widely appreciated” (Death of Dean Oakley, 1890). The family’s performances were held in a variety of venues, including churches, barns, schoolrooms, halls and workhouses.

The machete, thanks to an idiomatic and cultivated repertoire and the proficiency of its exponents, was accepted as a concert instrument both in Madeira and in England. Despite the machete’s toy-like appearance, its repertoire and the people who played it proved that a small, four string guitar is deserving of a sophisticated repertoire and capable of virtuosic concert performances. Although Drummond’s music might be classed as light, it reflects a deep understanding of the machete and his capacity to nurture an audience. By using the fashionable European dance forms of the time Drummond appealed to a wealthy, elegant and largely foreign audience. Given the extreme economic hardship and deteriorating social conditions in Madeira during the 19th century, which would eventually lead to the machete being taken to Hawaii in 1879, Drummond’s achievements were extraordinary. His formula for success was simple but effective. The machete was given the melody while the guitar provided simple, largely chordal accompaniments. The higher notes of the machete coupled with the lower register of the guitar provide a pleasing balance and would have been particularly effective in small concert rooms and parlours. The pieces are rhythmical and lively in character taking the form of polkas, waltzes, marches and quadrilles. In the machete parts running scale passages and ornamentations are frequent. Chords are often used at cadence points and thirds and sixths are used to fill out the melody. Several other pieces in the form of Theme and Variations are long and virtuosic. Unfortunately, very little is known about Drummond’s life and while it would seem he had formal musical training it is not known if he was part of a school of machete players.¹⁰ While other machete manuscripts from the mid to late 19th century have come to light, the Drummond manuscript remains unique for its technical and musical sophistication.

Part of my research has involved learning and performing the Drummond repertoire. Not only has this enabled me to gain a practical insight into this unique repertoire, but it has also given me the opportunity to visit Madeira on several occasions. In 2017 I commissioned a machete, built to traditional standards, from master luthier Carlos Jorge Pereira Rodrigues. His workshop is situated in the Rua da Carreira, Funchal, the very same road mentioned in Ellen M. Taylor’s guidebook of 1882 where, “Machetes both large and small are well made by Rufino Telles, 56 Rua da Carreira, and vary from 3,000rs. to 5,000rs” (Taylor, 1882, p. 28). Meeting prominent local luthiers and musicians who are continuing the traditions of Telles and Drummond has provided greater insight into the musical and cultural importance of the machete in Madeira. On one occasion I was invited to view the private collection of historical machetes owned by Norberto Gomez including an instrument from 1817. As one of the few people outside Madeira to play the machete it was a great honour to be invited by the *Associação Regional de Educação Artística* of Madeira in 2018 to record a CD of pieces from the Drummond manuscript. The following year I was invited back to the island to perform arrangements of the Drummond pieces for machete and string orchestra. The concert with the Madeira Camerata was part of the 600-year anniversary celebrations of the islands. Performing and giving presentations on the music of Cândido Drummond at music festivals and ukulele events throughout the UK and Australia is not only helping to preserve and disseminate this unique repertoire, but also enabling audiences to experience the historical repertoire of one of the

¹⁰ Morais was unable to locate either a birth certificate or a death certificate for Drummond, but mentions accounts that indicate that Drummond was active from at least 1841 and, that, according to the German writer Mendel, he had died by 1883 (Vasconcelos, 1846/2003).

forerunners of the ukulele while encouraging them to re-evaluate the potential of the ukulele. A potential which has often been overshadowed by stereotypes.

The first ukulele craze on mainland America was sparked by the Panama-Pacific International Exposition of 1915 which featured a lavish Hawaiian Pavillon (Tranquada, 2014/2015). The two main attractions of the Pavillon were its exotic decorations and a bandstand of Hawaiian musicians who sang and accompanied themselves on guitars and ukuleles. Visitors were serenaded with songs such as *Aloha Oe* by the deposed Queen Liliuokalani and *On the Beach at Waikiki* by Henry Kailimai. As well as experiencing the music visitors were able to buy their own ukuleles from a stall. Over several months an estimated 18.8 million people visited the Hawaiian Pavilion leading to a surge of interest in the ukulele and Hawaiian music on mainland America.

Tin Pan Alley songwriters were quick to seize on the rising popularity of the ukulele and the public's fascination with Hawaiiana. But while the Hawaiian musicians had wooed with their melodic voices and tinkling ukuleles, Tin Pan Alley responded with humour, parody and racial denigration. Hits such as *Oh, How She Could Yacki Hacki Wicki Wacki Woo* (1916) parodied the Hawaiian language while other songs, such as *They're Wearing 'em Higher in Hawaii* (1916) offered a humorous, non-sensical approach. Although the ukulele was also associated with moonlit beaches, palm trees, floral leis and romance the penchant for humour grew with the ukulele's popularity.

In Britain, the most influential ukulele artist of the 20th century was comedian, entertainer, actor, songwriter and self-taught ukulele player George Formby (1904–1961). Songs such as *With My Little Stick of Blackpool Rock* (1937) and *When I'm Cleaning Windows* shocked the establishment. Some of the lyrics were considered too risqué and subsequently banned from BBC radio. Nevertheless, Formby's controversial lyrics combined with his cheeky grin, working class persona and virtuosic strumming made him hugely popular with the public. In the 1940s Formby rose to become the highest paid entertainer in the British Isles. In 1946 he was awarded an OBE. Formby made an indelible mark on the ukulele. Ironically it was the BBC documentary *Frank Skinner on George Formby* which premiered in 2011 which sparked a revival of interest in Formby. Today Formby's memory is proliferated by the George Formby Society whose annual convention attracts tribute acts of all ages.

A further degrading of the ukulele occurred in the 1940s when toy company Mattel, most well known for their Barbie dolls, brought out a plastic ukulele and named it *Uke-A-Doodle*. The name doodle (OED) implied it was an instrument for simpletons while being made of plastic made it cheap and toy-like. Mattel invented the plastic ukulele, but it was classical guitarist turned luthier Mario Maccaferri (1900–1993) who made plastic ukuleles a multi-million-dollar business. In the early 1940s Maccaferri began making plastic clarinet and saxophone reeds; then, a chance meeting with TV personality and ukulele player Arthur Godfrey (1903–1983) inspired Maccaferri to create an affordable ukulele from plastic. Godfrey promoted the instruments and between 1949 and 1969 Maccaferri sold an estimated nine million plastic ukuleles (Nagyszalanczy, 2015). Although Maccaferri aimed to create good quality instruments, including the *Islander* and the *Islander Deluxe* models, the stigma of being plastic and cheap, compounded by the rising popularity of the guitar, eventually led to a demise in the popularity of the ukulele. The stigma of being a child's toy remained.

Unfortunately, the ukulele's already dubious reputation was not helped by the quavery falsetto voice and outlandish appearance of American singer, songwriter and ukulele player Tiny Tim. Over six feet tall his

stage name Tiny Tim¹¹ was as ironic as his appearance and song lyrics. His first album *God Bless Tiny Tim* (1968) featured his best-known hit *Tiptoe Through the Tulips*. Despite being something of an oddity Tiny Tim enjoyed a brief period of popularity. In 1969 over 40 million viewers tuned into *The Tonight Show* Starring Johnny Carson to watch Tiny Tim marry 17-year-old Miss Vicki. Today Tiny Tim is remembered more for his strangeness than his music. He played the ukulele left-handed but with the ukulele strung for a right-handed player. His playing amounted to little more than basic strummed chords. The image of a tall, long haired, outlandishly dressed man playing a ridiculously small instrument while singing in a high falsetto voice made the ukulele even more of a musical outlier. Despite the efforts of less well-known ukulele artists such as Herb Ohta (b. 1934), Lyle Ritz (1930–2017) and Bill Tapia (1908–2011), whose careers brought the ukulele a degree of musical validity in the genres of jazz, pop and swing, the ukulele has struggled to shake off its reputation for being a toy, a comedy prop and novelty. It is against this wave of preconceived images that a new vanguard of ukulele players has sort to bring credibility and dignity to the ukulele.

Classical ukulele

Attitudes towards the ukulele began to change in the 1990s when Hawaiian singer songwriter, sovereignty activist and ukulele player, Israel Kamakawiwo'ole (1959–1997), had a worldwide hit with his reggae version of *Somewhere Over the Rainbow* (by Harold Arlen and Yip Harburg, 1939). Since the millennium a growing number of ukulele artists, including Canadian James Hill¹² and multi-Grammy Award winning Daniel Ho¹³ have fostered a new, serious approach to playing and teaching the ukulele. The most innovative and challenging approach, however, is the so-called classical ukulele style advanced by classical guitarist turned ukulele player John King. His book/CD *The Classical Ukulele* (King, 2004) included arrangements by composers such as Bach, Beethoven and Mozart and is regarded by many as the cornerstone of classical ukulele repertoire. King drew on his classical guitar background by applying guitar techniques to the ukulele. His arrangements, particularly of Bach, set a precedent for redefining the ukulele.

King's most significant contribution to ukulele technique was to apply the Baroque guitar technique of campanella – most notably used by Gaspar Sanz (1640–1710) – to the ukulele. In campanella (Italian for small bell) the notes are placed on alternate strings to create over-ringing effects reminiscent of little bells. This technique is particularly effective on instruments, like the ukulele and the Baroque guitar, that utilise re-entrant tuning.¹⁴ King demonstrated the potential of campanella on the ukulele by recording an entire CD of pieces by Bach arranged in campanella style. One arrangement would certainly have seemed like a novelty, but an entire suite (BWV 1006) proved that the ukulele, in the right hands, was a musical tour de force. The virtuoso technique and polished sound exhibited in King's playing has become a defining feature of classical ukulele.

Campanella style is a challenging and beautiful technique and has been applied to a variety of arrangements from Bach to traditional folk and fiddle tunes.¹⁵ In 2020 I acted as a consultant on the new

¹¹ The name Tiny Tim was taken from the character of that name in *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens.

¹² Hill's Uketropolis website offers courses for teachers and players of all levels (<https://www.uketropolis.com>).

¹³ In 2016 Daniel Ho and guitar legend Pepe Romero released a CD of duets for ukulele and guitar called *Aloha España*.

¹⁴ Re-entrant tuning is when the strings are not tuned in an ascending, or descending order. On the ukulele, for example, the 4th string is the second highest string.

¹⁵ See for example Muir, S. (2015). *35 Scottish Folk Tunes arranged for Ukulele* [Musical score]. Schott

Rock School Ukulele Syllabus¹⁶ and recommended the incorporation of campanella scales as something highly idiomatic to the re-entrant tuning of the ukulele. Rock School subsequently included campanella scales across a broad range of levels. Incorporating a technique associated with the Baroque guitar into a rock syllabus is a bold and innovative move but one which demonstrates the stylistic fluidity of the ukulele and its capacity to give old techniques a new application. It also demonstrates the progress that is being made in promoting, and accepting, a new approach to the ukulele. Campanella style is, however, both counter-intuitive to play and technically demanding in that it requires an intimate knowledge of both left-hand and right-hand fingering. With the notes constantly moving across the strings and along the fingerboard there are few, if any, repeating patterns. For any ukulele player accustomed to strumming chords or playing simple arpeggio patterns, campanella can be confusing and illogical. But with the introduction of more learning pathways, such as the Rock School Ukulele Syllabus and my *The Classical Ukulele Method* these techniques are becoming integrated into ukulele repertoire. Table 1 presents the pedagogical material I composed in the context of my research.

Table 1 Pedagogical material composed in the context of this research

Title	Publisher, Year
The Classical Ukulele Method	Les Productions d'Oz , 2019
100 Arpeggio Exercises for Ukulele	Les Productions d'Oz, 2019
12 Progressive Studies for Ukulele	Les Productions d'Oz, 2018
21 Studies for Ukulele	Les Productions d'Oz, 2018
12 Progressive Lessons by Sor arranged for ukulele	Les Productions d'Oz, 2018

Recently composers have begun to explore how campanella can be applied in original compositions. During Lockdown 2020 I composed *A Conspiracy of Ravens*¹⁷ – a set of three pairs of pieces based on the old English ballad *The Three Ravens* by Thomas Ravenscroft.¹⁸ The first piece in each pair was an arrangement of the melody in campanella style and the second piece was an original variation of the melody. Each set explored a different key, and the final set used an alternate tuning with the E string tuned down to Eb to sound an open C minor triad across strings 4, 3 and 2. The pieces can either be played on a re-entrant tuned ukulele or on a 5-string ukulele with double 4th strings that sound octave Gs. The inclusion of tablature enables greater flexibility in choice of instruments. On a 5-string ukulele the double 4th course evokes the Renaissance guitar adding to the ancient qualities of the original tune. This work is a prime example of my research approach to create new repertoire that is informed by the past. Table 2 presents the pieces I composed in the context of my research.

¹⁶ <https://www.rslawards.com/rockschool/graded-exams/ukulele>

¹⁷ *Conspiracy* is the collective term for ravens

¹⁸ Included in his volume *Melismata* (from 1611), of which a facsimile is retrievable from <http://www.pbm.com/~lindahl/ravenscroft/melismata/all.pdf>

Table 2 Repertoire composed in the context of this research¹⁹

Title	Publisher, Year
Theme & Variation on the Dowie Dens of Yarrow	Les Productions d'Oz, 2018
The Falling Rain	Les Productions d'Oz , 2019
12 Traditional Tunes arr. for ukulele	Les Productions d'Oz, 2019
A Conspiracy of Ravens	Les Productions d'Oz, 2020
Mercurius Suite	Les Productions d'Oz, 2021
Blinter	Commissioned by Giovanni Albini for the HighScore Festival 2021 (unpublished)
Flower Sleeps at 4	Joint runner-up: Joyce Dixey Composition Competition, the University of Surrey, 2021 (unpublished)
Lines of Flight	Unpublished, 2021
The Book of Dreams	Unpublished, 2021–2022

Another technique based on the idea of bells is the tintinnabuli approach of Estonian composer Arvo Pärt (b. 1935). From the 1970s Pärt moved away from neo-classical and twelve-tone techniques to create a new style, called tintinnabuli, based on early Western music including plainsong and Gregorian chant. The purpose of tintinnabuli (from Latin tintinnabulum: a small tinkling bell), like campanella, is to create effects like the ringing of bells but achieves this in a different way to campanella. As explained by Paul Hillier (1996) tintinnabuli technique is based on a fixed diatonic scale and characterised by two voices. The first voice moves diatonically, usually in stepwise motion, and is called the M-voice. The second voice arpeggiates a major or minor triad and is called the T-voice. The T-voice is generated automatically from the M-voice at a given range and intervallic distance from it. In both campanella and tintinnabuli the over-ringing notes move from consonance to dissonance but while campanella achieves this through a single melodic line, tintinnabuli employs two voices – one melodic (M-voice) and one triadic (T-voice) (Muir & Albini, in press)

While working on an arrangement of Arvo Pärt's *Für Alina* (1976) I began a series of original sketches in order to more fully understand how tintinnabuli might be applied to the ukulele.²⁰ I was also curious to see how this tintinnabuli could be used as a compositional approach on the ukulele. The sketches gave me the freedom to experiment with alternate tunings and different tonalities while coming to grips with Pärt's system of assigning the T-voice to different positions based on the note's relationship to the scale. To find first position superior, for example, the T-voice is identified by finding the first triad note above the scale note. In C major the first triad note above C is E (3rd), the first triad note above D is E (3rd), the first triad note above E is G (5th) and so on. By tuning the 4th, 3rd and 2nd strings of the ukulele to sound as the open T-voice meant the sketches focused on inferior positions as the M-voice remained on the top string and T-voice on the lower three strings.

Over time the sketches developed into a collection of four short pieces called *Lines of Flight*. Each piece uses a different tuning. The first piece, *Holloway*, simply required the 2nd, or E string, to be tuned down a semitone to Eb to create a C minor T-voice (GCEbA). The second piece, *Patientia*, used an open F#minor

¹⁹ Table A1 of the Appendix contains links to recordings of the pieces.

²⁰ Coincidentally, Italian ukulelist Giovanni Albini was also experimenting with tintinnabuli at the same time. We would later collaborate on a presentation and paper discussing our findings.

tuning (F#AC#F#). The third piece, *The Red Angel*, used an open A minor tuning (ACEC) and the final piece, *LockDown*, used an open D minor (ADFC) T-voice. While not hugely practical in a performance setting the pieces represent a reimagining of the way the ukulele might be used to explore different tonalities. The inclusion of a tablature line facilitates an easy reading of the alternate tunings. Reading from the notation, however, is particularly challenging as the known landscape of the fingerboard is constantly and dramatically being altered. Jonathan de Souza describes retuning guitar strings as an act of “voluntary self-sabotage” as “retuned instruments change pitch-to-place mapping, while preserving the instrumental interface” (De Souza, 2017, p. 89). Despite the disorientation of learned auditory responses (De Souza, 2017, p. 84) the alternate landscapes offer new sonic possibilities as well as new technical challenges.

The new works discussed here are but a small sample of a field that is rapidly growing and advancing. Like any developing field classical ukulele faces a number of challenges ranging from how to convince classical music promoters and institutions to acknowledge and embrace classical ukulele to more fundamental issues such as score presentation. An important feature of Flea Market Music’s classical ukulele publications by John King and Tony Mizen was the inclusion of both staff notation and tablature. The books are beautifully presented and include an audio CD of all the pieces as a further guide for players. The inclusion of tablature makes this often-challenging music accessible to many players but is not without controversy. Within classical music circles tablature is often regarded as trivialising or oversimplifying the music. While there is no denying the importance of musical literacy for teachers and professionals, the ability to read musical notation should not be a mark of classical exclusivity. To do so would exclude the many millions of amateur ukulele players who enjoy playing all styles of music. The modern prejudice towards tablature is also odd given its historical use by Renaissance and Baroque guitar and lute composers and players. It is, for example, possible to play on the ukulele four-course Renaissance guitar music by composers such as Adrian Le Roy by reading from facsimiles of the original manuscripts. Given the similarities between the Renaissance guitar and the ukulele,²¹ it is arguably a more authentic and erudite approach to this music than arranging it for, and playing it on, a modern six string guitar.

An alternative approach to notating for the ukulele was offered by Dutch guitarist and composer Dimitri van Halderen in his *Meditations on a Small Scale* (2018), one of the pieces composed for me in the context of my research – see Table 3 for a complete list of these pieces. Ukulele staff notation is usually written on one staff, but van Halderen (2021) decided to use two staves in order to clarify the role of the high G (4th) string. This made the score easier to read and reduced the amount of fingering. Ultimately, however, the decision was made not to publish the work in this format as the score would have required two lines of staff notation plus one line of tablature, thus taking up a considerable amount of page space.

²¹ See Page, C. (2016). *The Guitar in Tudor England*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316257975>

Table 3 Commissions and collaborations in the context of this research²²

Composer	Title, Year	Publisher, Year
Tolgahan Çoğulu	I am on a Long & Narrow Road (for microtonal ukulele), 2018	Unpublished
Dmitri van Halderen	Meditations on a Small Scale (i & ii), 2018	Les Productions d'Oz, 2021
Loretta Notareschi	Evocations, 2019	Disegni Music 2019
Milton Mermikides	Insighted for ukulele & electronics, 2019	Viribus Music, 2020
Tom Armstrong	Shadow Variations for ukulele ensemble, 2019	-
David John Roche	In Every Heart, 2020 Ukulele Concerto, 2022	Ukulele Modern, 2021 Unpublished
Choan Gálvez	In Despair, 2021 Common Blue, 2021 Twenty Six Days, 2022	The Ukulele Bookshop, 2021 The Ukulele Bookshop, 2021 The Ukulele Bookshop, 2022
Marius Fleck	Fragile, 2022	Unpublished
Edward Cowie	In progress	-
Stephen Goss	In progress	-

It has become standard practice to publish classical ukulele repertoire in both staff notation and tablature thus making this new, often complicated repertoire more approachable. It also means music of this repertoire can be played on ukuleles with different tunings such as ADF#B or a baritone ukulele tuned DGBE. Nevertheless, the technical requirements of much of this repertoire remains beyond the skill level of many ukulele players as illustrated by the fact that currently the majority of classical ukulele players come from a guitar background. Some of the most influential classical ukulele players include John King (USA), Rob MacKillop (Scotland), Tony Mizen (UK), myself (UK), David John Roche (UK), Paul Mansell (UK), Donald Bousted (UK), Mustafa Kamaliddin (Canada), Thijs Kevenaar (Netherlands), Choan Gálvez (Spain), Wilfried Welti (Germany), Elisabeth Pfeiffer (Germany) and Giovanni Albin (Italy) – all of whom have a guitar background. The lack of a robust curriculum for fingerstyle and classical ukulele is an area which requires further development but changing attitudes and a more formalised approach are reflected in the growing number of ukulele syllabuses being offered by music examination boards across the UK. These include Rock School, RGT@LCM, University of West London, Nationwide Music Exams and Victoria College Exams. Currently, the two main music examination boards in the UK, the ABRSM and Trinity College London, do not include a ukulele syllabus.

Conclusions

The term classical ukulele may appear contradictory, perhaps even a little dated, given the current impetus to create original repertoire but the term is widely used within the ukulele scene and has come to represent a new and forward-looking approach to the ukulele. The term also acknowledges the innovative work of John King's (2004) *The Classical Ukulele*, a book which is considered a milestone in ukulele repertoire. In time, however, a more accurate and inclusive term such as contemporary ukulele may be adopted. It is certainly the hope of the author of this paper that a new generation of ukulele players will

²² Table A2 of the Appendix contains links to recordings of the pieces.

incorporate ‘classical’ techniques and typical strumming patterns to further the evolution of the ukulele. The creation of robust learning platforms for the ukulele are gradually being developed, particularly in the form of online courses and workshops, but it is still an area that requires further expansion. Nevertheless, small changes in attitudes suggest the ukulele has a bright future. At the tertiary level the Conservatorio Antonio Vivaldi (Alessandria, Italy) recently commenced a ukulele module (November 2021). This course is the brainchild of composer, ukulelist and academic Giovanni Albini.²³ Albini was also co-director of the First Ukulele International Conference (UIC, 2021).²⁴ Perhaps one of the most positive indications of how academic attitudes towards the ukulele are changing is my own acceptance into the Post-graduate Research Programme at the University of Surrey (Guildford, UK) to carry out PhD research on the ukulele. My PhD portfolio *New Works for Classical Ukulele* offers a new, holistic vision for the ukulele, acknowledging both its Hawaiian origins and Portuguese roots while exploring its affiliations with the four course Renaissance guitar and the five course Baroque guitar. To this end the ukulele is best described as the embodiment of many rich and diverse traditions. As pointed out by King and Tranquada (2012) “the adoption of the ‘ukulele by Hawaiians is an example of what the Cuban historian Fernando Ortiz called transculturation—the complex interaction between cultures that produce unique offspring, both like and unlike its parents” (p. 198).

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Samantha Muir studied guitar at the Royal College of Music, London. She is currently doing a PhD on the ukulele at the University of Surrey with Steve Goss and Milton Mermikides as her supervisors. By commissioning and composing new works for the ukulele she aims to demonstrate how the ukulele can be used as a solo concert instrument. Her work was featured in the Spring edition of Ukulele Magazine which declared 'Muir spearheads a growing movement to expand the uke's repertoire and range'. Samantha also plays the machete de braga and the rajão – the forerunners of the ukulele. She is a member of the Consortium for Guitar Research at Sidney Sussex College, University of Cambridge.

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Appendix

Links to recordings of compositions related to this research

Table A1 Links to recordings of Samantha Muir's compositions

Title	Link(s)
Theme & Variation on the Dowie Dens of Yarrow	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lom3zWLKMew
The Falling Rain	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qTDe_WJPUMk
A Conspiracy of Ravens	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q_AsMUmwoHk
Mercurius Suite (in 3 movements)	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=itqmL9g4Ap4 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a1MsPRkpDK4 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J2UiXxy8008
Blinter	https://open.spotify.com/track/0pV0glbsOWqgnUnbmFtQWV
Flower Sleeps at 4	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L5sdhPCj4NI&t=2s
The Book of Dreams	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6EQozntVmfY&list=PLOXFNoTensEmV9s9pxNM-oqxi9Lxl_XUc&index=1
Lines of Flight (tintinnabuli)	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BWhnkyglEU8&list=PLOXFNoTensEmy8kqQTLnRFDv9i4F7gGXG

Table A2 Links to recordings of compositions by other composers

Composer	Title, Year	Link(s)
Tolgahan Çoğulu	I am on a Long & Narrow Road (for microtonal ukulele), 2018	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wSH7NLfosjc
Dmitri van Halderen	Meditations on a Small Scale (i & ii), 2018	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P4ay7gPRbkc&t=24s https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XoBI23e_y08
Loretta Notareschi	Evocations, 2019	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=74nL-l1Cgfl
Milton Mermikides	Insighted for ukulele & electronics, 2019	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UH00UpZnfNc
Tom Armstrong	Shadow Variations for ukulele ensemble, 2019	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LzXddWDzaSE https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gTZ9CmbVAqo
David John Roche	In Every Heart, 2020 Ukulele Concerto, 2022	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=01fYBSuCFVw&t=18s
Choan Gálvez	In Despair, 2021 Common Blue, 2021 Twenty Six Days, 2022	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pBgVhCuS-2k https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qs6Ba-EVlc8 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ljoDd0GzIVo&t=24s
Marius Fleck	Fragile	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n2v3G4UM4ZI