

GRACIE TERZIAN'S
HARP UKULELE

UKULELE GUILD
OF HAWAII

VINTAGE UKE
DESIGN DETAILS

DIMINISHED
SEVENTHS LESSON

Ukulele

FALL 2022

KANEKOA HAWAIIAN TRAILBLAZERS

NEW UKES

OHANA
CK-570G
CONCERT

IBANEZ
UKS100
SOPRANO
& UKC100
CONCERT

SONGS

GRATEFUL
DEAD
FRIEND
OF THE
DEVIL

JIM BELOFF
CAN'T HELP
BUT SMILE



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A Spirit of Sharing and Giving

Ukulele Guild of Hawaii founder Mike Chock talks about the vital group's more than two-decade history

BY HOLLY RUDIN BRASCHI

"Come join us for *kanikapila!*" invited a group of enthusiastic ukulele musicians sheltering under an open canopy from the sweltering July sun in Honolulu's Kapiolani Park. It was 2016. I was strolling among the vendor tents during intermission at Oahu's annual Ukulele Festival before returning to my seat to hear Jake Shimabukuro's performance. Their playing had stopped me in my tracks. As I listened, I noticed an "Ukulele Guild of Hawaii" sign on the front of the canopy. "What is the UGH?" I asked. That question opened a door to some of the most generous and talented ukulele builders, players, and instructors I have met during my career. I joined the UGH that day and have been grateful for the friendships I have maintained ever since.

Among the outstanding members inviting me into the tent that day were Kimo Hussey, player/instructor extraordinaire, then UGH President; Manny Halican, one of the most innovative ukulele luthiers in the world, then UGH VP; and Mike Chock, the luthier, instructor, and mastermind who launched UGH in 2000.

Celebrating their 22nd anniversary this year, the Guild is the most far-reaching organization in the ukulele world. "The UGH is an inclusive mix of professional and amateur builders, players, supporters, collectors, historians, and aficionados of ukulele," Chock explains. "Currently, our members hail from Japan, Australia, New Zealand, Korea, Germany, Switzerland, Finland, Czechoslovakia, throughout the U.S., and Canada." The UGH has enjoyed a remarkable evolution that has even kept it going through the Covid shutdown. Looking back, Chock, shares his story to inspire ukulele enthusiasts worldwide to join the UGH ohana (family).

The spark that inspired Chock to create the UGH was ignited when he attended the Guild of American Luthiers (GAL) convention in 1992 in Tacoma, Washington. At the time, he was an amateur builder looking for guidance. GAL, founded in 1972, is the foremost source of information for makers, repairers, and restorers of all kinds of stringed instruments.

Kimo Hussey (left) and Mike Chock at the UGH's 2016 Hawaii Ukulele Festival



“Back then, there was no manual or instruction book on ukulele building. Hawaiian ukulele builders were very protective of their designs. Everyone was constructing secretly in their garages hoping for a great result,” Chock says. A contractor by profession who built homes from scratch, Chock was trained to follow blueprints to the letter. But in the ukulele world at that time, there were no ukulele-building blueprints. “If I found an ukulele with a beautiful sound, I examined the inside bracing, took measurements, and made a pattern by putting the instrument down on butcher paper to trace the outlines. But the outlines always came out too big because of the differential between the edge of the uke and where the outlining pen hit the paper.

“The GAL convention was a revelation,” he continues. “The sharing of information in seminars and workshops was unbelievable! I wanted to create the same and more for ukulele enthusiasts worldwide.”

The idea percolated, and as fate had it,

two events in the 1990s helped bring his Ukulele Guild of Hawaii dream to life. The first occurred when Chock was teaching his friend Leland Onekea, an architect, to build ukuleles: “We were getting frustrated, looked at each other and simultaneously said, ‘We need accurate plans!’” Their original plans were drawn on vellum. Then, using his architectural background, Onekea transferred them to AutoCAD for accuracy, making it easy for anyone to successfully replicate an instrument that was not only playable, but produced a good sound. To make the plans accessible to builders, Chock enlisted his son Asa to help him write a book. A graduate of the Rhode Island School of Design, Asa merged the original plans with step-by-step building instructions into the *Hana Lima 'Ia* [handmade by] *Ukulele Construction Handbook*. The book's detailed plans are so accurate that students and builders continue to use it worldwide. (It can be purchased on Chock's website: hanalimastore.com)

The second event launched Chock's 30-year teaching career. “I was asked to teach an ukulele building class for the Honolulu adult vocational education program,” he says. Of the hundreds of students Chock taught over the years, many became professional luthiers. Chock became known for encouraging students to innovate and experiment, and a few interesting building innovations purportedly came out of his classes, including side ports of all shapes designed to enhance sound. He is also regarded as the inventor of the universal ukulele bridge, where the saddle is split and can be moved under the fourth string to accommodate either a high or low G string.

Now Chock had the key elements for starting the UGH—viable ukulele blueprints and a pool of possible members. “When I officially started UGH in 2000, I had 18 interested luthiers plus students from my vocational classes,” he says. “Unlike the GAL, which focuses on the building of fine instruments, we wanted the UGH to focus on all things ukulele in three ways: presentation, preservation, and participation.”

The UGH accomplishes the first of those through annual exhibitions, the first held in the fall of 2000. The 2019 exhibition was at Honolulu's Bishop Museum just before the Covid shutdown in Hawaii. The goal of UGH exhibitions is to encourage the sharing and exchange of ukulele ideas, building techniques, and music among fellow makers, hobbyists, players, and enthusiasts.

“For our first Ukulele Exhibition, a three-day event held at the Waikiki Marriott, we exchanged exhibition and workshop space with the hotel for free Hawaiian music and dance entertainment,” Chock says. “We drew hundreds of locals and tourists. Amazingly, we became an international organization overnight just by word of mouth.

Both national and international players and luthiers wanted to participate in the event! Several local hula *halau*s [schools] also performed. Our entertainers included ukulele stars Lyle Ritz, Bill Tapia, Benny Chong, Byron Yasui, Kimo Hussey, and Bryan Tolentino. An international and local

From left: Two ukuleles made by Manny Halican, two by John Covey, and one by Mike Chock (all of whom serve on the UGH Board of Directors).



cast of professional builders exhibited their custom ukuleles and taught workshops, including Eric DeVine of DeVine Guitars and Ukuleles on Maui; Shinji Takahashi of Seilen Ukulele from Japan; Bob Gleason of Pegasus Guitar and Ukulele on the Big Island; and Nathan Ching of Guitar-smith, on Oahu.”

For the preservation part of their mission, the UGH is dedicated to making sure that the history of the official state instrument of Hawaii is accurate. Several UGH members are ukulele historians, including Jim Tranquada, Tom and Nuni Walsh, and Shawn Yacavone. The late John King, who wrote *The ‘Ukulele: A History* with Tranquada, was also a member.

To bolster participation and inspire new players, the UGH’s last president, Kimo Hussey (who was on the cover of the Spring 2021 *Ukulele*), introduced music instruction through a Ukes for Keiki (kids) program that features the ukulele as a starter instrument. “We also offer music therapy instruction through the Wounded Warrior program at the VA and at Shriners Hospital,” Chock says. “Our eventual goal is to create an ukulele teaching methodology and a standardized group-lesson curriculum.” Prior to the Covid shutdown, a number of

professional performers/instructors taught the group classes, including Zanuck Lindsey, Aaron Keim, Jonah Davis, and Kimo himself. The UGH also offers free ukulele repair services to participating schools.

Participation takes two additional tracks in UGH. First, players and builders are encouraged to work together. “We believe that players become better musicians if they learn how an ukulele is made. This helps them understand what is required for quality of sound and ease of playability,” Chock says. “Players’ input is also invaluable to builders. Both want the voice of the instrument to sound authentic without any mechanical amplification.”

Second, UGH encourages participation through *kanikapila*—group ukulele music get-togethers. This traditional Hawaiian round-robin style of playing enables musicians to share and teach others their favorite tunes. On Oahu, pre-Covid, the UGH held a monthly *kanikapila* at Honolulu’s Bishop Museum.

Since 2018, the UGH has been a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation applying for and receiving grants, which has kept the organization going through Covid. In 2020, instead of charging membership dues, the board decided to accept donations of any

size from anyone wishing to support the UGH. All donations are tax deductible and donors become members for life. Donations help fund grant writing, music instruction, ukulele repair for schools, building workshops, yearly exhibitions, instructional video production for the website, and eventually, Chock’s big dream, an Ukulele Guild of Hawaii Hall of Fame.

“You get from the Guild whatever you are willing to share with its membership: an open book to members’ experiences and building processes, as well as player techniques and practices,” Chock says. “For example, if you want to know any details about my long neck, two octave, papaya baritone, just ask and I will answer to my best ability, no secrets. Our members are versed in many fields, yet some are still neophytes with questions. We are diverse as players, builders, collectors, historians, and aficionados of ukulele. Builders in Japan use techniques like builders in Europe or the USA. These techniques are shared via the Guild. The common thread is love of the ukulele and the willingness to share. It’s the aloha we all have for ukulele that makes it work!”

To lend support or become a member, visit ukuleleguildofhawaii.org.