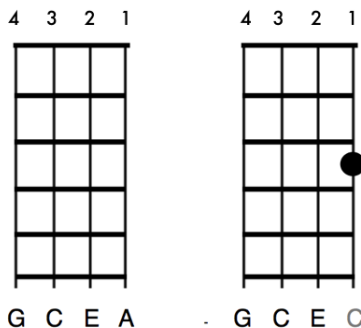


IS THERE A UKE IN YOUR TOOLBOX?

A Workshop for 2020 Washington Music Educators Conference
February 14, 2020
Clinician: Richard Lawton

Consider the ukulele for your music program. This small four string chordophone is accessible and versatile. It can be an excellent tool for teaching triadic harmony or for exploring the American folk and pop catalog. Plus, they are just flat out fun to play!



The standard tuning for ukuleles is a C6 chord. To make a C major chord all you need to do is raise the pitch of the first string to C by putting your finger in the third fret “box” of the first string.

One Chord Songs - Yes We Can Can

Track: *Yes We Can, Can, Pointer Sisters, 1997*

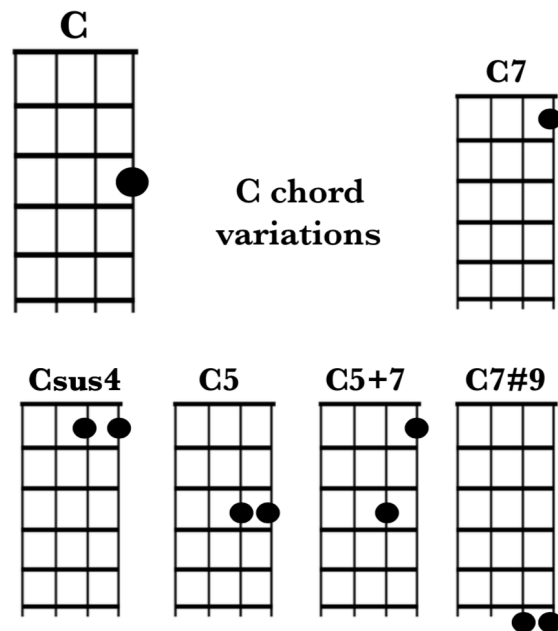
A fun way to get kids up and strumming right away is to let them jam along to a one chord song.

Sequence:

Have the kids strum in a down-up-down pattern matching the phrase, “la-dee-dah.”

Let them try it on the C variations shown and also experiment with chopping on the string to make a *whacka-wacka* effect.

Play the track and let the kids strut and play and groove, as develop a feel for their instrument. **Note** — other cool jam-along one chord songs include *Lime in the Coconut*, by Harry Nilsson (C) and *25 or 6 to 4* by Chicago (Am).



Adding Swing and a Second Chord - Spoonful

Spoonful by Willie Dixon is a blues standard made famous by Howling Wolf. It is in the key of *C*, making it a great way to introduce an authentic blues tune on ukuleles.

Sequence:

Teach this playground chant (learned from Patrick Ware) to establish the hand jive:
Pat legs-clap-right hand-clap-left hand-clap-both hands-clap.

Try this with partners. Teach the following “scat” to cover partner changes:

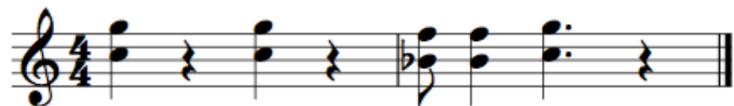
Shoobie doobie yabba doobie shoobie!
Shoobie doobie yabba doobie yay!
Shoobie doobie yabba doobie,
heebie jeebie, jabba joobie,
shoobie doobie yabba doobie jay!

Substitute the words to *Spoonful* for the chant. For the line “that spoon, that spoon, that spoonful,” add a BP tag: snap-clap-snap-clap-snap-snap-clap (hip-hop).

Transfer the *shoobie do* pattern to ukuleles on the *C* and *C7* (both one finger chords). Have the students sing the A section below, accompanying themselves. Point out that the switch to the flatted, or minor 7th (*Bb*), is what gives the song a bluesy feeling.

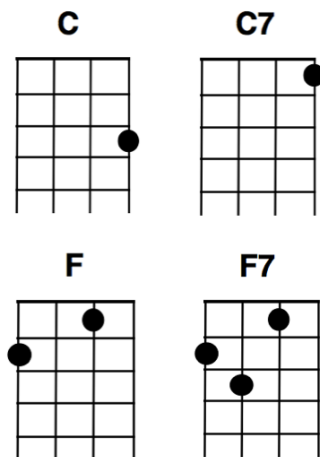
Once they are proficient, introduce *F* to play the B section of the song. Advanced players can add *F7*.

Add the xylophone riff below to the B section.



Well I stepped around the corner
and I stepped around the block
and I stepped right into the bakery shop
I picked two donuts right out of the grease
and I handed the lady a five cent piece
she looked at the nickel and she looked at me
and she said “young man you’re cheating me
there’s a hole in the nickel and it goes right through”
and I said, “there’s a hole in the donut too”
“Thanks for the donut, good-bye.”

C *C7* *C*
Could fill a spoon full of diamonds.
C *C7* *C*
Could fill a spoonful of gold.
C *C7* *C*
Just a little spoon of your precious love
C *C7* *C*
Could satisfy my soul.
Men lies about them. *F F7 C*
Some cries about them. *F F7 C*
Some of them dies about them. *F F7 C*
Everything a fight about a spoon. *F F7 C*
That spoon, that spoon, that spoonful. *F F7 C*



Perform in three groups — one doing the hand jive and singing, one playing ukes, one playing barred instruments. Cover the changes with a ride cymbal groove.

C

Don't forget to bend your blue note

Men lies a bout them

I-IV-V Progression - Wimoweh (The Lion Sleeps Tonight)

The key to successful music-making with ukes (and other chordophones) is to focus on the transitions. I usually follow the following progression when teaching a new song.

Play the transitions only.

Play the downbeat only.

Add the up beats/shuffle beats only. when the rest can be played successfully.

This approach to the classic Solomon Linda tune is a good way to introduce the song or just introduce the concept of triads.

Sequence

Students form a circle. Get them to repeat the phrase “wimoweh” playing it/moving various places on the body, emphasizing the shuffle. We will need three distinct movements following the chord progression. *C-F-C-G (ABAC form)*.

Divide the class, with one group doing the wimoweh dance and singing and the other moving to the instruments.

In the jungle, the mighty jungle,
The lion sleeps tonight.
In the jungle, the quiet jungle,
The lion sleeps tonight

In the village, the peaceful village,
The lion sleeps tonight.
In the village, the quiet village,
The lion sleeps tonight

C **F** **G**

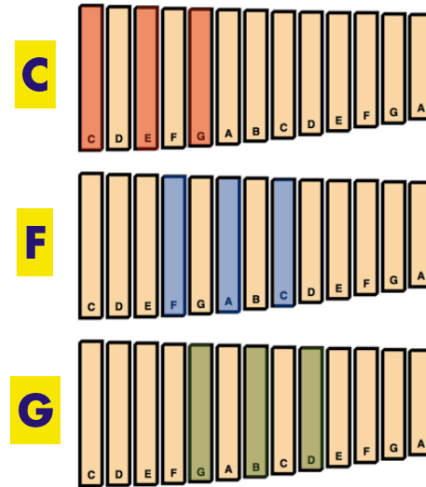
|| 4/4 ||

Have them play the changes on straight quarter note beats initially.

Ask xylophone players to play two notes at a time from the chords, pointing out that some of the notes repeat — for example, *C* is part of the *C* and *F* chord. Use bass bars on *C-F-G* to play the chord changes on transitions.

Add ukuleles now to introduce the sense of shuffle, playing *C-F-G* chords on a *dooba-dabba* up and down strumming pattern.

Switch parts or improvise in C pentatonic on glockenspiels, soprano xylophones or recorders. It isn't necessary to try to play the shuffle on the barred instruments — the ukes have that covered!



Teaching Vernacular and Folkloric Material - Jambalaya

Ukuleles are an excellent way to teach the Great American Songbook, and that includes dozens of two and three chord songs well within the range of beginning players.

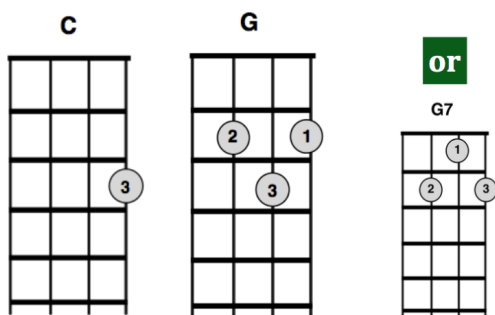
Sequence:

Ask students to play the *C* chord where it appears in the song, playing once each time it appears with a downstroke.

Ask them to do the same thing with the *G* chord (*G7* for more advanced players.)

Next, play only on the transitions. (At each stage do not move on until they can play and sing at the same time.)

Now play quarter note beats, incorporating the transitions.



Jambalaya

Hank Williams

Goodbye **(C)** Joe, me gotta go, me oh **(G)** my oh
Me gotta go pole the pirogue down the **(C)** bayou
My Yvonne, the sweetest one, me oh **(G)** my oh
Son of a gun, we'll have big fun on the **(C)** bayou

Chorus

Jambalaya and a crawfish pie and fillet **(G)** gumbo
'Cause tonight I'm gonna see my ma cher a- **(C)** mio
Pick guitar, fill fruit jar and be **(G)** gay-o
Son of a gun, we'll have big fun on the **(C)** bayou

Thibodaux Fontaineaux the place is **(G)** buzzin'
Kinfolk come to see Yvonne by the **(C)** dozen
Dress in style and go hog wild, me oh **(G)** my oh
Son of a gun, we'll have big fun on the **(C)** bayou

Chorus 2x

Go to eighth notes, adding alternating upstrokes.

Finally, go to the *boombaddy* shuffle. At every stage of development, the versions overlay, so that students who can only play the transitions and those playing the shuffle can play together.

Add the orffestration parts, and you're ready to zydeco!

Jambalaya

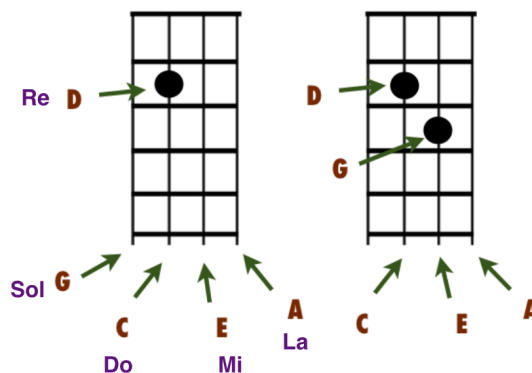
by Hank Williams/orffestration by R. Lawton

The musical score for "Jambalaya" is presented in three systems. Each system includes three parts: Xylophone (Xyl.), Percussion (Perc.), and Triangle (Tri.). The first system starts at measure 1. The second system starts at measure 4. The third system starts at measure 6. The Xylophone part is written in a treble clef with a 4/4 time signature. The Percussion and Triangle parts are written in a bass clef with a 4/4 time signature. The score shows a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with alternating upstrokes, characteristic of a shuffle.

Music from the Orff Volumes – more advanced ukulele technique

Four of the five pitches of the *C Pentatonic* scale can be plucked as open strings on the ukulele. Because that is so, simple pentatonic melodies, as well as accompanying borduns and ostanati can be played beautifully on ukulele.

Those melodies comprise many well known Orff pieces, including nearly all the material in Volume I of *Music For Children*.



Sequence:

Tune your ukuleles to your instrumentarium.

adapted from “Rondo 31,” MFC Vol. I, p. 111

Review with students the note names of the open strings (review also the number names of the strings — A is 1, E is 2, C is 3, and G is 4).

Spend some time getting comfortable picking individual notes by “rolling” the thumb, index and middle figure. (**Note** — rolling on strings 1, 2, and 3 produces an *A minor* chord, whereas rolling on 2, 3, and 4, produces a *C major*.)

Now you are ready to adapt the above. Students should try to develop all three parts, drone, ostinato, and melody, and then play whatever they feel most comfortable with.

To create a rondo, have students develop B sections of equal length working individually or in small groups. This can be easy as playing on open strings only.

Richard Lawton is the general music teacher at Roscomare Road Elementary School in Los Angeles and the recorder instructor in the Los Angeles County and University of South Florida Summer Orff courses. Richard is a past presenter at numerous state and national conferences and the 2018 California Music Educators Association/Peripole General Music Teacher of the Year.

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