

Going It Alone?

How can you study the Unknown, see the Forrest through ALL the trees.

It is really hard to go it along and even hard to find a good teacher. Good players don't always make good teachers. You can be your own best teacher if you can't find a good one for you.

Organizing and Setting a Plan

Organization can center around the elements of music: **Melody**, **Harmony** a.k.a chords and **Rhythm**. And, putting it all together in arrangements, songs, chord progressions - Making Music.

Melody

This is the one element most non-musician can readily recognize. These we can sing since we where a toddler. A melody can be pre-composed and read or improvised on the spot.

Harmony

This is the chords and chord progressions that make up songs.

Rhythm

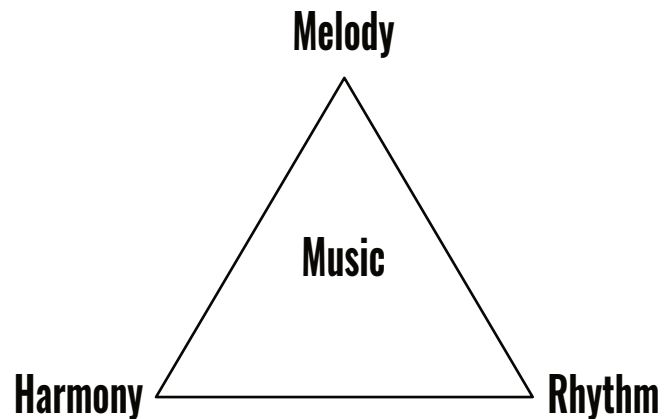
The concept of rhythm is simple. It's the duration of a note, a chord or a pattern.

Rhythm is integrated into every facet of music. A melody is a sequence of pitches with rhythm - **Melodic Rhythm**. A chord progression is a sequence of chords with rhythm - **Harmonic Rhythm**.

Rhythm impacts Melody, Harmony and even Lyrics. It's also a subject in and of itself. **Rhythm is so intuitive, that it's often overlooked as an independent topic of study.**

The organization of the material to study revolves around these three parts of music. How it goes together are the *principles of music* - the theory and finally the physical execution of how to get it to come out of your instrument and or voice.

The organization is the are that this workshop is focused on. It is however not a substitute for a good teacher or mentor.



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Theory

Theory is the body of principles behind music. It includes scales and chord building, intervals, progressions, resolution, harmony, motion, power, color, chord substitution, keys and time signatures, rhythm, melody, etc.

Technique

Technique is the ability to control your hands individually and in combination. It's primarily physical, not a musical skill. The training and development of your hands is a prerequisite and necessary to develop artistic skills.

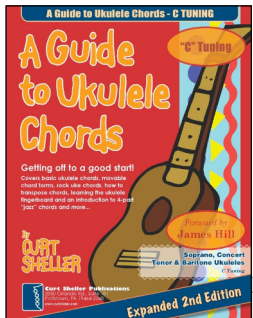
Sports offers a good parallel. Football has physical skills and football skills. Passing, receiving, blocking, running and tackling are football skills. Running through tires, road work, weight lifting, wind sprints and stretching are physical skills. You need both to be successful.

There are many exercises designed to get your hands in shape. Finger independence drills, barres, and stretches are just three good ways to develop your hands. This is one area I personally believe you can't learn on your own. There is simply no way to know ahead of time the *bio-mechanically* most efficient why to play any melodic or harmonic passage. This is where a good teacher can point out any flaws you might develop.

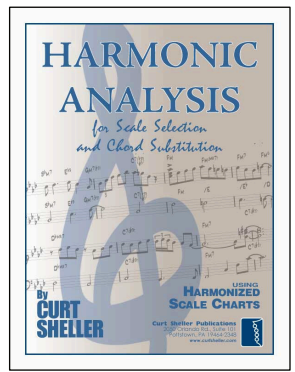
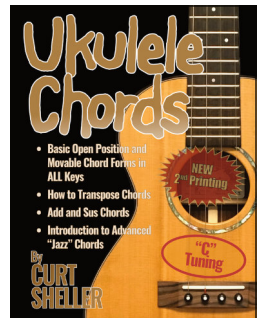
A good source for technique is classical guitarists. I have never meet a classical guitarist that was self taught. With the demanding technique required to play the repertoire they can be a valuable source. This is one area that I've seen on YouTube with good content. There is a 300 year tradition of pedagogy for classical music. We can draw a lot from their experience.

Technique is how to develop both the fretting hand and the picking, strumming, plucking hand.

Chords

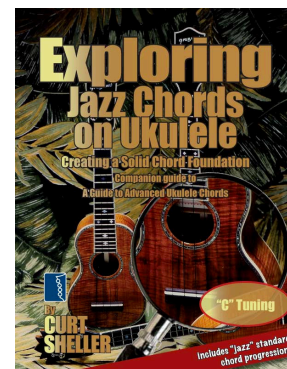


The first thing all ukulele players learn is chords. A 'ukulele player forms these chords by holding down multiple notes simultaneously with their fretting hand. Your opposite sounds the chord by strumming the strings or finger picking the individual strings. There is nothing more fundamental than playing basic chords.



The first thing all ukulele players learn is chords. Chords are played by holding down multiple notes simultaneously on the fretting hand. Your opposite sounds the chord by strumming the strings or finger picking the individual strings. There is nothing more fundamental than playing basic chords.

- **Open Position Chords** in the common keys of C G D A E F.
- **Basic Movable Form Chords** based on the open positions chords.
- **4-Part a.k.a Jazz Chords** - These are all based on the open position C7, G7, A7, E7 and start with the BigSix. F7, Fm7, Fmaj7, Fm7b5, F°7, F+7.
- **Free Form Chords** - You know in the chords, the important notes of the chord and the notes of the neck and create any chord not in the above categories.



Open Position Chords

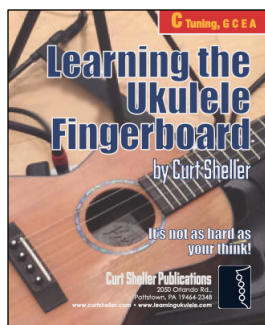
The first 19 chords are the open position chords A, C, D, E, F, G, Am, Cm, Dm, Em, Fm, Gm, A7, B7, C7, D7, E7, F7, G7. These chords are the first chords new 'ukulele players typically learn.

"Barre" Chords

Typically, barre chords or movable form chords are learned next. These chords are based on the open position chords and are the first chords new 'ukulele players learn and have an advantage as chords you can transpose these chords to different keys along the fingerboard. Their disadvantage is that they're harder to play, at least initially.

The ability to play chords and switch them smoothly is the first requirement for playing alone or with a group. It immediately qualifies you for a band in the role of playing background accompaniment. This job is an accompaniment job and does not have the attention given to the lead player but it is your quickest route to playing in a band or at jam sessions!

Notes on the Neck



Like their guitar brethren it's unbelievable how weak ukulele players are on knowing the notes on their own instrument!

No other instrument suffers from this same fate. Imagine a piano player not knowing the note names of the keys or a trumpet player not knowing what notes come out if they push specific valve combinations. An amazingly high percentage of guitar and ukulele players don't know the notes on the neck.

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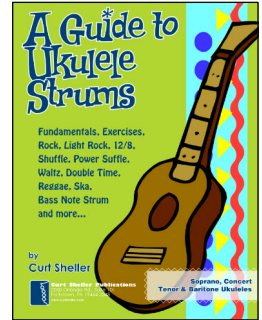
This problem has indeed been created by the guitar world's penchant for tablature and chord picture diagrams, which is also prominent in the ukulele community. Despite this, there is no excuse for the failure on the part of players to learn what is rudimentary on any other instrument.

Strums

This skill is part of the accompaniment role the ukulele is most used for. All songs, besides having chords, have a strum that is responsible for the “feel” of the song. If you play the wrong strum with a song, something will sound off.

The strum helps keep the tempo steady and propels the music forward.

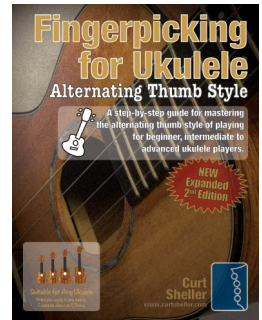
Strumming, the execution of specific rhythmic patterns, captures a most fundamental element of music. That tendency to tap our feet when we hear music can often be traced to the strumming pattern.



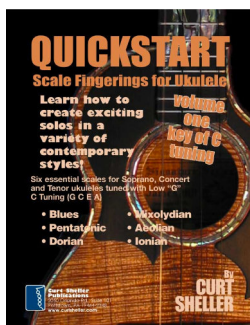
Fingerpicking

Finger picking is an alternative to strumming. Like strumming, finger picking uses the non-fingering hand and produces sound from chords.

Fingerpicking was most common in Folk music, but it has certainly made its way into mainstream contemporary music through singer /songwriters, and country artists. James Taylor is an outstanding fingerpicking artist who has fused Folk, Country, Rock and Pop music into an original seamless form. His influence has been significant ever since the beginning of the Folk – Rock movement. Jake Shimabukuro and James Hill have seamlessly incorporated fingerpicking with strumming on the ukulele.



Scales - Improvisation



Scales are organized streams of notes that can be used to generate melody or improvisation. There are many kinds of scales to learn depending on the musical style you choose. The two most common contemporary scales are the Blues Scale and the Pentatonic Scale. The Blues Scale is used in the darker forms of Blues and heavier Rock Music. The Pentatonic Scale is used in all things Southern: Southern Rock, brighter Blues, Country music and even Motown.

Beyond these scales, there are much more to learn if the music you play needs them. Santana used the Dorian Scale to great effect while Mark Knopfler of Dire Straits made a living from the Aeolian Scale. Jerry Garcia's favorite was the Mixolydian Scale.

Improvisation is the ability to spontaneously create melody over a predetermined chord progression. It involves scales, alternate fingerings, arpeggios, intervallic development, sequences, embellishments, superimposition, rhythm, motifs, development techniques and idiomatic considerations.

Why Learn Scales?

Scales can be used as a technical exercise - a process to get you left and right-hand fingering coordinated. Done correctly, they should reinforce or enable you to learn the fingerboard. Involving your motor skills they will also help you develop speed, strength, and ability to play longer.

While scales are used to write melodies and craft chord progressions, i.e., songs. Initially one would learn them to improvise, "take a solo," learn a lick or riff, play a theme or melody. In all these cases scales are at the root of these skills.

Ukulele scales are often first learned by fingerboard shape or TAB which will get you started. However, it is not the best way to determine the relationship between the notes of the scale, the fingerboard or how to connect them using various fingering techniques.

What scale you learn and start with depending on the styles of music you want to play. For Rock and Blues, you start with the Blues scale. For Country and Folk, the pentatonic scale would be a good start. For Reggae the Major and Natural Minor scales are prominent in that style. Jazz requires the most extensive variety of scales to learn to navigate the, typically more complex harmonic nature of the form. More ethnic styles would require the study of the scales used for those styles.

With the many sources of scales on-line. From showing the fingerboard shapes to videos and articles, there is no shortage of information available. What is in short supply is how to use these scales, efficient fingering, and the principles to navigate the various possible pathways through the scales. The fingering of scales involves specific studies where a private formal survey provides the most benefit.

There is a lot of information available that is just wrong so try to consult a legit expert on the subject. Don't assume that the information is correct because it's in a magazine or on-line. Magazines are notorious for featuring well-known players who can't teach. They often have a very fuzzy idea of what they're doing and what to call specific scales, chords, and techniques.

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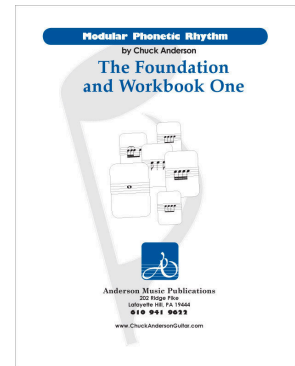
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Rhythm

Rhythm is one of the three primary components of music, It encompasses several aspects. On the one hand, rhythm is the duration of a note or a chord. It also includes tempo, the beats per second as measured by a metronome and the stability of the beat. Rhythm, as in tempo, can vary during a song. Some songs maintain a steady tempo from beginning to end. Other songs vary the tempo. Slowing down is called Ritardando and speeding up is called Acclerando. These are intentional musical effects and not the result of a player not being able to keep time or rhythm. The ability to keep time is one of the most important skills a ukulele player or any musician can develop.



Developing Your Ear

The development of the ear brings your musical insides – out. Music is the only hearing art. As such, the ear acts as the intermediary between your musical ideas and the execution of these ideas. Solfeggio, the Italian art of sight singing has been used for centuries to develop musicianship. Ear training contributes to the ability to play what you hear. There are virtually unlimited applications of ear training from working songs out by ear to improvising to writing. The European tradition of ear training has been far more stringent than that of the United States.

Reading

Reading is the ability to reproduce music from written notation. It includes five phases; note recognition / alternate note locations, rhythm recognition, fingering considerations, communication terminology and interpretation.

Reading can be at a casual pace to learn a musical passage or at a pro level having never seen the music before.



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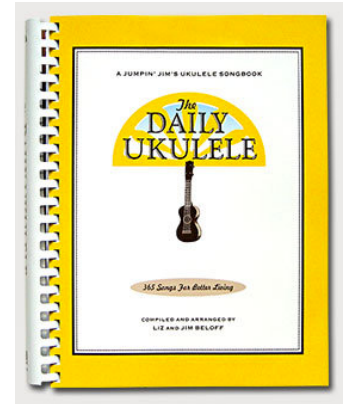
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Songs - Repertoire

A song is like a recipe and there are the ingredients. If you are missing an ingredient you run out and get it. Or, substitute something that will work in its place.

- **The Melody** - This is the most recognizable part of most songs. Learn to play the melody as if singing it and someone accompanying you.
- **The Chords** - What chords do I need. What substitutes can I use.
- **Improvisation** - This is creating your own melody on the fly. It actually comes from the four sources that you explored with scales: *the scale, intervals, arpeggios and sequences.*
- **The Chords and the Melody Together** - This is the hardest to do. Think of what a piano player can do with two hands and ten fingers and you have to put it into four fingers and four strings.



This area is your song list, your repertoire, what you can play from beginning to end. Without a repertoire, you have nothing to play. An audience is certainly not interested in listening to scales, arpeggios or exercises of any kind.

They respond to songs no matter what style of music you play. It could be original or cover but one way or another, you need to learn songs.

What does it mean to learn a song? The singer-songwriter's version of learning a song would be to memorize the chords, the strum or finger pick, the melody, the form, the chords and the lyrics. The jazz guitarist and ukulele player version is to learn the single note melody, the chord changes, the form, the melody and chord version (combining single note melody and chords) and the

improvisational structure. Unless you use the lyrics as inspiration for the mood and feel of a song, lyrics are not part of the instrumental process.

“Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent. Genius is almost a proverb. Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent.”

- **Calvin Coolidge**
former US President

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Musical Idioms

Musical Idioms is the study of music and the musical styles it involves well developed categories as; Rock, Blues, Country, Jazz, Bluegrass, Classical, Folk, Urban and Fusion. It also includes subdivisions and specializations.

Songwriting

Songwriting is the creation of original music based on a single melodic line with a chord progression. Lyrics may or may not be included.

Arranging

Arranging involves the choice of instruments, tempo, rhythmic feel, form, intros, endings, interludes, solos, harmonies, and instrumental accompaniment of a song.

Composition

Composition is the creation of original music based on multiple simultaneous and compatible melodies. It historically involves the classical forms but frequently includes more sophisticated levels of contemporary music.

Orchestration

Orchestration involves the choice of instruments for a composition. This choice is based on the ranges and colors of the instruments which best represent the mood and creative intent of the composer.

Interpretation

Interpretation involves the ability to perform a song or composition in a unique and personal way. These skills involve a interrelated set of disciplines which include, theory, ear training, technique, dynamics, embellishments, phrasing, and rhythmic flexibility.



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