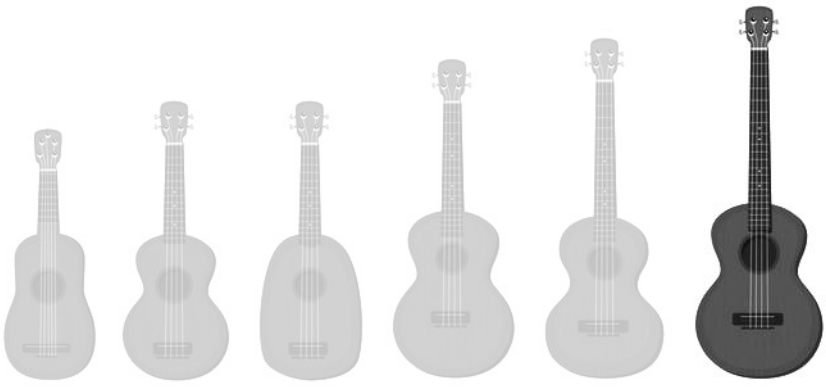
THE EADG-TUNED BASS UKULELE HANDBOOK

John Timney



Introduction

This is the third in my "Handbook" series. The first was for GCEA-tuned ukes (by far the most common tuning of a ukulele) and my second was for DGBE-tuned ukes (commonly Baritone Ukuleles but including some Tenor Ukuleles as well). Those two handbooks were all about chords and chord structure.

This one is different. In the words of Meghan Trainor, it's all about the bass.

No treble.

A LOT of the really general text in this book is cloned from the earlier books but it is ALL directly relevant to the bassists among you.

I learned to play bass guitar (not ukulele you will notice) in a hurry. At a school where I was a teacher, I was an ever-present in the "pit band" for school productions playing electric guitar. For "West Side Story" (nowhere near the easiest starting point for a fledgling bassist) the regular bass player cried off so, with only two weeks to opening night, I picked up a bass guitar for the first time and (I think the phrase is) got stuck in.

I acquired a bass ukulele (the admirable Kala UBass) a few years later. This is my go-to bass instrument but I still pick up the bass guitar every now and then. For those of you with a sneering lip starting to form, the typical bass guitar has FOUR STRINGS. Good enough for me.

Most ukulele players are ***not*** dyed-in-the-wool musicians. I'm not a musician either[1] so much of what is in this book is "pragmatic". Hence the word "Handbook" in the title. Generally, uke-players are people who know a few chords and like to think they can sing a bit. The bassists usually don't even sing. They do get to wear sunglasses though. Even indoors.

If I can understand this stuff, I'm sure you can too.

I'm not writing this book because I'm a great bass ukulele player seeking to impart knowledge. No way. Far from it. I'm a decidedly average player. I have only a rudimentary knowledge of music theory. I'm hoping to learn as much from this book as any other reader and putting it together has, for me, been very useful in fleshing out my knowledge.

I'm assuming several things:

- ✓ You can count up to 8
- ✓ You know that a scale is Do-Re-Mi-Fa-Sol-La-Ti-Do
- ✓ You are happy enough just using a standard western scale rather than anything exotic. If you were expecting the Phrygian dominant scale or the Byzantine scale you are going to be seriously disappointed.
- ✓ You are not tone deaf (this is actually quite rare so you probably aren't)
- ✓ The symbols for sharp (#) and flat (♭) are familiar to you

[1] Before I retired I was a Chemistry teacher and Academic Director of a University International School.

Right through this book I will be using the flat (♭) symbol for **notes** but I will use the regular keyboard symbols # and b for sharps and flats within **chords**. So, talking about the B-flat **chord** you will get [Bb] but for the B-flat **note** you will get B♭. Sharps do not present any problem as the # (hash) is only a little different from the standard ♯ (sharp) symbol. This is simply a reflection on how ukulele music is presented in general. Across the internet, the chord of B-flat is written as [Bb] with the only variety being in the type of parenthesis used. We seldom, if ever, use the sign for "natural" (♮) in this book, but it is here in case you haven't seen it before.

I am, however, going to introduce a bit of notation specially for this book. Bass players play **notes** not chords and there needs to be a typographical distinction. So, where all the regular ukes are playing, for example, a [C] chord the bass might just be playing the note of C. I'll show that by putting it in curly brackets: {C}.

I'm an active member of a ukulele group[2] and I often lead the weekly sessions that we have. We get together on Tuesday evenings to enjoy the communal fun that comes from playing the ukulele in a big group. We euphemistically call these sessions "practice" but, to be honest, the laughter and camaraderie easily exceeds the musicality every time. However, during these sessions a lot of questions come up and this (and the related handbooks for the other ukes) book are an attempt to give answers to at least some of these questions.

This book was written with no strings attached[3]. There is, for my part, no restriction whatsoever on its distribution. I have shamelessly taken inspiration, and more, from other ukulele books across the globe and I seriously don't mind if you have ended up with a copy from any source at all. There is a lot of that sort of thing in the ukulele world and I'm not going to get all copyrighty with anyone. Enjoy. You're welcome. That said, if there is anything in here that **you** have copyright issues with, please let me know. Contact details are on the last page.

IMPORTANT: There are **LOTS** of different types of ukulele and I've tried, across the three handbooks, to at least *mention* all types. However, the **emphasis** - in this book - is always going to be on the **EADG-tuned bass ukulele**.

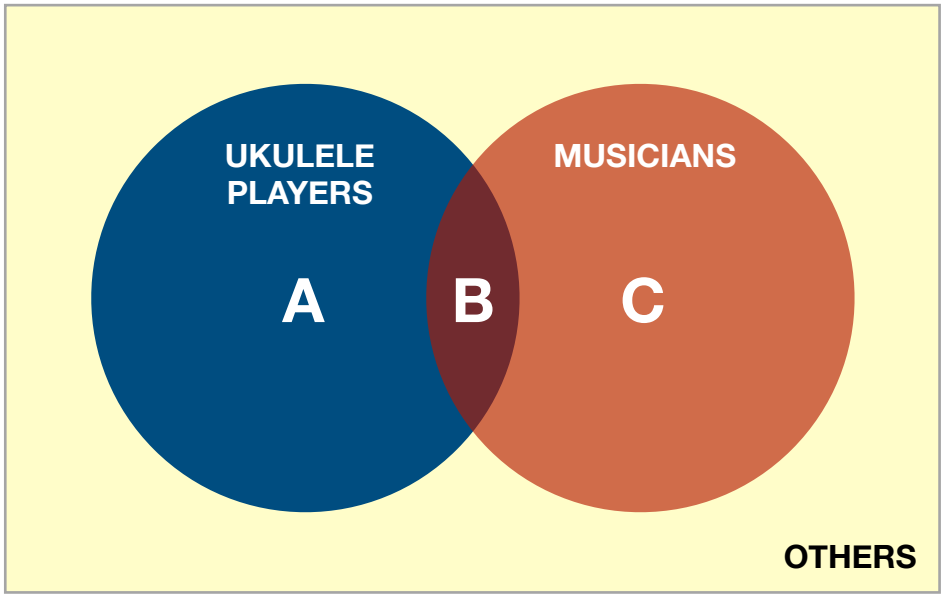
John Timney
North Tyneside
2020

[2] Bay Uke, based in Cullercoats, North Tyneside.

[3] No pun intended. Honest.

Who is this book for?

Unlike most (all?) other books dealing with music theory, you are **not going to be faced with that much musical notation**. This book is for ukulele players, not musicians[4]. The Venn diagram below illustrates what I mean by that statement:



The blue circle is the set of all ukulele players and the pale red circle is the set of all musicians. There is a darker overlap between the two sets: those ukulele players who are musicians. Then there are those who don't play ukulele and don't understand music. I've called them "Others".

So who is this book for?

The "Others" (those in "D")?	Definitely not.
Musicians who don't play Ukulele (those in "C") ?	Definitely not.
Musicians who do play Ukulele (those in "B") ?	Probably not.
Ukulele Players who aren't Musicians (those in "A") ?	Yes!

I see myself as a ukulele player who is not a musician. I'm in Zone A. The eventual aim of this book is, paradoxically, to move ukulele players with no knowledge of music (in Zone A) into the overlap zone (Zone B). This will, ultimately, reduce my readership to zero. I look forward to that day.

Even more restrictive, this book is for **BASS UKULELE** players. Everything here will also apply to bass guitarists but they will not be referred to further. I'm assuming from here on that you are playing bass ukulele in a ukulele group. A solo career isn't really on.

[4] No disparagement intended.

As the bassist in your group (of whatever size) you have a really important function. You act as a timekeeper. Their metronomic beat along the bass line keeps EVERYBODY right. Or puts everybody wrong.

In a way, the bass player is partly a drummer. You have a lot of responsibility in keeping the beat just right. Ukulele groups have a tendency (I think) to speed up through the passage of a song or perform songs at inappropriate speeds. "Too fast" seems, too often, to be the default setting. As the bass player, you can sort this! If your group does have a drummer you are his new best friend. Working together with the percussion guy is a typical partnership for bass players in groups.

How this Book Works

The role of the bass player in a ukulele group (with or without a drummer) can be a high-pressure job. There is (usually) only one bass player (I can't imagine five or six bomp-bomping away). So if he/she makes a mistake, everyone knows. This is very different to the hordes of relatively anonymous strummers who get to make repeated mistakes without so much as a raised eyelid.

Let's set some bass-related goals. After going through this book, you will possibly know a bit more music theory than you do now. You should be able to pick a bass pattern up from the rhythm and at least have a passing acquaintance with a lot more structure in songs. You will also be able to write your own tabs.

This is not a book to simply **read**[5]. It is a book to help you **do**. There are possible suggested activities here. It is, in popular parlance, a ***learning by doing*** book. The activities are built into the text. Hopefully you will spot them as you go. Where they involve weblinks, I have left these in. If you are reading this as a PDF just click on any link you find. If you have it on paper, clicking won't do that much.

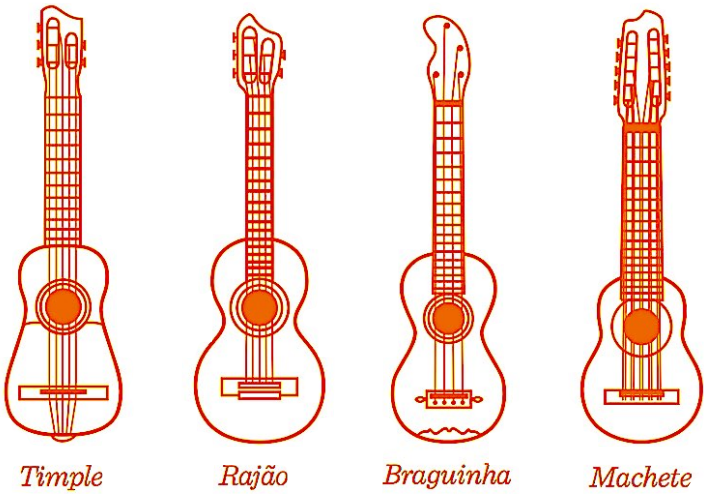
As a useful companion to this book, grab a reporter's notebook for scribbling down what you have done/found/learned for future reference.

As with **any** learning-by-doing book, we are going to make a number of assumptions before getting into the meaty bits. We will have to assume that you have a bass ukulele or bass guitar (although, if you haven't, there is something of a buyer's guide later on). We are also going to have to assume that you know a tiny, little bit about music. Not much, admittedly, but some basic facts.

[5] Apologies for the split infinitive. It did feel good though.

Ukulele Types in General

The ukulele is commonly associated with music from Hawaii where the name roughly translates as "jumping flea". The actual home of the ukulele is far from Hawaii. The ukulele is based on several small guitar-like instruments of Portuguese origin, the Timple, the Rajão, the Braguinha and the Machete, introduced to the Hawaiian Islands by Portuguese immigrants from Madeira and Cape Verde.



One of the most important factors in establishing the ukulele in Hawaiian music and culture was the ardent support and promotion of the instrument by King Kalākaua. A patron of the arts, he nonetheless incorporated it into performances at royal gatherings. Clearly a king worth having! In the UK, I hope the House of Windsor takes note.

There are several standard ukulele types

Type	Length	Fretboard Length	Frets	Tuning (Common)
Sopranino	16 in (41 cm)	11 in (28 cm)	10–12	D5–G4–B4–E5
Soprano	21 in (53 cm)	13 in (33 cm)	12–15	G4–C4–E4–A4
Concert	23 in (58 cm)	15 in (38 cm)	15–18	G4–C4–E4–A4
Tenor	26 in (66 cm)	17 in (43 cm)	17–19	G3–C4–E4–A4
Tenor	26 in (66 cm)	17 in (43 cm)	17–19	D3–G3–B3–E4
Baritone	29 in (74 cm)	19 in (48 cm)	18–21	D3–G3–B3–E4
Bass	30 in (76 cm)	20 in (51 cm)	16–18	E2–A2–D3–G3
Contrabass	32 in (81 cm)	21 in (53 cm)	16	E1–A1–D2–G2

Virtually all the standard ukuleles have the option to have a “high” or “low” 4th string (the one nearest the ceiling when you are playing). This isn't an option on the bass. Your bass will be tuned E-A-D-G and probably E2-A2-D3-G3. I've not come across a Contrabass Uke. That E1-A1-D2-G2 tuning is like a Double Bass.

*Grab a ruler and check out the measurements of your ukulele. It will almost certainly closely conform to one of those in the table above. If your uke is **bigger than 29 inches then you probably have a bass ukulele**, or worst case scenario, a guitar.*

The strings on the ukulele are numbered from 1 to 4 (regardless of the type of ukulele). The string closest to your nose is 4 and that closest to the floor is 1. I've never understood why this is. It is counter-intuitive, but there we are.

Now, having found out which type of ukulele you have, you need to see if you are still reading the right book:

Type	Length	Fretboard Length	Tuning (Common)	This Book?
Sopranino	16 in (41 cm)	11 in (28 cm)	D5–G4–B4–E5	No
Soprano	21 in (53 cm)	13 in (33 cm)	G4–C4–E4–A4	No
Concert	23 in (58 cm)	15 in (38 cm)	G4–C4–E4–A4	No
Tenor	26 in (66 cm)	17 in (43 cm)	G4–C4–E4–A4	No
Tenor	26 in (66 cm)	17 in (43 cm)	D3 or D4-G3-B3-E4	No
Baritone	29 in (74 cm)	19 in (48 cm)	D3–G3–B3–E4	No
Bass	**30 in (76 cm)**	**20 in (51 cm)**	**E2–A2–D3–G3**	**Yes**
Contrabass	**32 in (81 cm)**	**21 in (53 cm)**	**E1–A1–D2–G2**	**Yes**

If you have a Soprano, Concert or Tenor tuned GCEA you want the companion GCEA-Handbook. Anything tuned DGBE, you want the DGBE-Handbook.

If you are playing a **bass ukulele** or even a **contrabass** you are in the right book.

Still with us? Let's move on.

Anatomy of a Bass Ukulele

The named parts of your bass ukulele are shown below. The bits on a ukulele are essentially no different to the comparable bits on a guitar.

The **NUT** ① has four grooves cut into it to carry the four strings from the four **TUNERS** ② (positioned on the **HEADSTOCK** ③ with the makers name) to the **SADDLE** ④ at the far end of the ukulele. The distance from the nut to the saddle is basically the working length of each string and the 12th fret should be exactly half-way along a string. If it isn't, you have a duff ukulele. It happens.

The **FRETBOARD** ⑤ rides on top of the **NECK** ⑥ and is usually finished in dark brown or black wood. There are bound to be a few **FRET MARKERS** ⑦ to give you a quick visual reference for when you are playing notes or chords up the fretboard. The usual positions are on the 5th, 7th, 10th and 12th but there may be more and they might be in different positions.

The **BODY** ⑧ of the ukulele takes the sound from the strings and lets it resonate within its wooden cavity via the **SOUNDHOLE** ⑨. Often, there is some decorative device (the Rosette) around the soundhole. The **BRIDGE** ⑩ secures the strings so that they are positioned correctly on the **SADDLE** ④. Bass ukes nearly always have amplification.

There are thousands of variations on the ukulele theme. It is virtually mandatory to have a pickup inside the body of the bass so that the output sound can feed through an amplifier. A cutaway body is another common feature that allows you to play high up the fretboard (known as "the dusty end" in some circles). If you use a strap you will need at least one "button" to secure the strap.

Ukuleles do not, as a rule, have a truss rod going the length of the neck and I understand that the Kala UBass is no exception. Guitars (especially those designed for steel strings) usually do. The truss rod is a piece of metal running the length of the neck that can be tightened/loosened to alter the height of the strings above the fretboard. Ukes without this have the neck bonded or glued to the body. Consequently, you can't fit heavy-duty, high-tension steel strings to a uke that really isn't designed to take them. You risk snapping it. Most bass ukes have polyurethane strings that won't snap a neck.

Buying A Bass Ukulele

There is a huge market in ukuleles including bass ukuleles, although, admittedly, the choice offered for basses is a lot less than for GCEA-tuned ukes.. There is no real "entry level" bass ukulele. They tend to be pretty expensive, although bass guitars are quite cheap (irritatingly).

The range of UBass instruments from Kala is well-established but you mustn't feel that that's it. Get Google up on your PC and look at the machines available from the likes of Oscar Schmidt, Luna, Hadean and Ibanez. Expect to pay upwards of £120 for a really cheap instrument stretching up to (easily) £500 for a belter.

You **will** be looking for built-in pickups, integral tuners and other electronics. Amplification is **really needed** with a bass uke. The other stuff is not really necessary though. Save your pennies for your second uke. One of the rules of playing the ukulele is that you are always looking for a better one.

Just about the first thing you will do is change your strings.

Read on...

Putting Strings on Your Ukulele

Your bass ukulele is probably going to have four fat polyurethane (or similar polymer) strings. This isn't always the case. There ***are*** some steel strings out there but be careful. Some of these strings have a nylon core and a metal outer layer. These might be ok, but still be careful.

The choice of strings for your ukulele can be quite overwhelming. The major brands (*viz.* the ones that pop up first in Amazon) are Aquila and D'Addario, with Aquila being easily the most prominent.

Within each brand, there is a lot of choice and different strings have different characteristics. The best advice I can give is to quiz other bass uke players; see what they use. Personally, I prefer D'Addario strings. I have used their strings since I was 15. The company opened its first shop in New York in 1918 so they had a couple of years of experience before I became a fan Many uke players prefer Aquila. I really think it is a personal choice thing.

A lot of uke players (never mind bass players) **never c**hange their strings. They just play on (and on and on) with the set that was on when they bought the uke. I'm **not** one of these people and I change my regular-use ukes' strings **regularly** (every 3-4 months or so). Kala recommends that you change UBass strings every 3-6 months. (In the words of Mandy Rice-Davies: they would, wouldn't they.) It isn't hard and always gives the chance to check over, clean and polish the uke. There is a very good video on YouTube showing how to change your strings.

> *This is worth a look:*
> *Go to YouTube in your browser and type:*
> *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VHLqHIwWEn*

Once you have got your new strings on you are going to need to tune them all. Remember that new strings stretch like crazy and you will probably be re-tuning daily for a few days, maybe even a week, after you put the new strings on.

As for tuners, these are cheap and readily available. If you are playing in a group you will need **accurate absolute tuning**. If your tuner has the option, make sure it is set so that the standard A note is **440Hz**. You really can't go wrong with a tuner like this. Most decent tuners have a bass setting. Use it. If you are just playing on your own you can get away with relative tuning. I wouldn't advise this though. Tune up properly and accurately.

A Small Amount of Physics

You can skip this bit if you don't handle equations and/or numbers.

Although we remember Pythagoras for his "square on the hypotenuse…" stuff, it was in music that he made (I think) his most important contributions.

Imagine a taut string. Like a ukulele string. Not really that hard to imagine.

Pythagoras proposed that the fundamental frequency (*f)* is inversely proportional to the length (*L*) of the string.

$$f \propto \frac{1}{L}$$

So (this is what the "inversely proportional" stuff means), if you **halve** the length you will **double** the frequency. Pythagoras also found that the notes that "went well" together were related to simple fractions of the original string. A long time later, Marin Mersenne[6] fleshed this out a great deal more and gave us three laws that can be combined into one equation.

In Physics-speak and plain English these are:

Physics	Plain English
Frequency is inversely proportional to the length of the string.	The shorter the string the higher the note. Frets help with this as an idea.
Frequency is proportional to the square root of the stretching force	Tightening up a string will make the note higher.
Frequency is inversely proportional to the square root of the mass of the string per unit length	Fat strings make lower notes than thin strings.

Put these together and you get:

$$f = \frac{1}{2L}\sqrt{\frac{F}{\mu}}$$

Where *f* is the lowest frequency (you *can and do* get harmonics mixed in), *L* is the length, *F* is the stretching force and μ is the mass per unit length.
Pretty obvious when you think about it.

[6] "The Father of Acoustics" and an interesting guy all round.

Ukulele Accessories

If you type “ukulele accessories” into Amazon’s search box you will get a vast range of possible birthday and Christmas presents to suggest to your nearest and dearest.

You are going to need a bag to carry your instrument in. Remember: Bass ukes are that bit bigger. Make sure that it has a bit of padding and at least one good-sized pocket to put all your odds and ends in. Some of the flimsy bags that come with cheap ukes really aren’t up to the job. If your uke is anything like the pride and joy it is likely to become then it is worth protecting in a decent bag or (better still!) hard case.

Making sure that your uke is in tune is really important when you are playing in a group. There are always a couple of ukes that are “approximately” tuned and they sound awful! Close enough is **not** good enough.

Your uke needs to be safely stored at home and also when you are out playing. A simple floor stand does the job extremely well. These are often able to be folded up so you can use them wherever your uke is.

The capo is an oft-neglected piece of kit. However, I think it is indispensable. With a concert uke or smaller you probably won’t use it beyond the 3rd fret **but** (believe it or not) they work well on a UBass. I have found it useful up to the 5th fret.

For bassists, a metronome is a really useful piece of kit. Mine gets used a lot and playing along with a metronome is a really good discipline. Remember, a large part of your raison d'être is to keep time accurately and, in the absence of a drummer, it is likely that you are the only one bothering to do so.

Putting a strap on your bass allows you to stand with it, comfortably, for a long time. You may need to screw a button into the soundbox but that isn’t hard. Guitar straps are, usually, **not** suitable. Mandolin straps are fine.

Pickups and Amplifiers

Most bass ukuleles have polymer (often a type of polyurethane) strings. That means that the type of pickup that you would see on an electric guitar won't work on a bass uke. Not to worry. The manufacturer will have sorted this for you. Just plug it in to the amplifier.

The amplifier needs to be suitable for bass notes. Remember, sound waves are vibrations and bass notes have low frequencies. It is really difficult to get small things to vibrate slowly so amps for a bass need to be up to the job.

You might also like to experiment with effects boxes. My ageing Zoom 505 has given years of fun even if the quality of the music produced has been a bit on the low side. It gives "interesting" effects with my UBass.

The Basic Elements of Music

We are going to launch into the music side of the bass ukulele playing now. At this point, I'm assuming that you have a **EADG-tuned bass ukulele** and that it is actually in tune.

There are three basic elements in music: **rhythm, melody** and **harmony**. Whenever you hear a song being played (in modern western music, at least) you will almost certainly hear all three at once.

You will hear the tune (the melody), the beat (the rhythm) and an underlying accompaniment or background of chords and additional singing (the harmony). The chords played during a song are important because they add a lot of extra sounds. You might hear this described as “colour” and the comparison to light is quite appropriate.

We see lots of colours, from deep red all the way through to violet. If we saw things in just one colour (like bats, for example) it would be pretty dull compared to the many colours we do see. Think of your bass as providing the red and near-infrared end of the spectrum. You can leave the oranges and yellows to the baritones and tenors and the greens, blues and violets to the concerts and sopranos. With your bass, you are stretching out the musical experience AND keeping time. It gives us a lot more to listen to. Our ears and brain can cope with complex mixtures of sounds with virtually no problem.

When it comes to getting your hands dirty with sheets of music, to be honest, a lot of what you will come across as a ukulele player are “songsheets”. These are, usually, the lyrics of a song with the chords given mixed in with the lyrics.

For example, the Bob Dylan classic "Blowing In The Wind":

The [F] answer my [G] friend is [C] blowing in the [Am] wind
The [F] answer is [G] blowing in the [C] wind

Chords like this (the [F], [G], [C] and [Am] above) are called **inline chords** when they are written out this way. The type of brackets is immaterial. You will see **(Cm7)** **[Cm7]** and **{Cm7}** in songsheets. I prefer the **[square brackets]** and I will be sticking to these right through this book. **I'm using curly brackets for notes.**

Inline chords are really useful for getting a lot of information on to a single side of A4. Written out in full properly annotated music, a song might take a fair number of sides of A4, not one. With a songsheet, long and/or complicated pieces are typically reduced to a single side. Most guitar songsheets have the chords above the lyrics and take twice the number of lines. I honestly don’t know why guitarists do this. Convention, I suppose. So the same piece for a guitar would be:

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     F          G          C                Am
The answer my friend is blowing in the wind
     F          G                C
The answer is blowing in the wind
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I think the ukulele way is far better.

There is - somewhere on the internet - the songsheet for just about every song ever written. **Beware!** So many of these are ***very*** poor interpretations of the real music. Someone in their bedroom bashing through a song on an out-of-tune guitar then uploading it to a website with no quality control is, sadly, commonplace for songsheets. There are, however, exceptions and I think Richard G at Scorpex is a real treasure. I would make sure that Richard's site (https://scorpexuke.com) is in your bookmarks. The Ukulele Society of Great Britain (https://usgb.co.uk) also has a great songbook to download (created by the legendary Jim Carey).

There are lots and lots of good songbooks out there on the internet. Explore, but be aware that there is a LOT of rubbish as well as the good stuff. If you are looking for published paper books (as opposed to PDFs) the Little Black Book series of songbooks are, in my opinion, truly wonderful.

It is also worth remembering is that not every song is ukulele friendly. Most are, but there are some that, frankly, don't work. That said, you can always arrange them differently.

I like to work from the published music and create a songsheet that bears at least a passing resemblance to how the songwriter intended it. I also try very hard to put the song in the key it is sung in. This allows the uke player to play along with the track on CD, YouTube or wherever. Often, a song will require a capo to enable you to play along with the original. It is amazing how often the capo is needed on the first fret. Even a bass uke struggles.

If you were looking to develop something of a "house style" for songsheets there are several things to consider.

- Is the font suitable? Lots of fonts are actually quite difficult to read. The Helvetica (or Arial in Microsoft's world) family works well. You wouldn't want a songsheet in ANYTHING ORNATE for example.
- Is the font size appropriate? You may be producing songsheets for players with indifferent eyesight. I think 12 point is fine but others prefer 14 or 16 point.
- Is the chord format OK? There are some songsheets out there that don't specify any chords at all - just a four number instruction: [0003] for [C] for example. I hate these!
- Are the chords easy to spot? Making them a different colour is a good idea. Making sure that they stand out when semi-buried in a word is also a good move: **a[C]lone** is much harder to see than **a-[C]-lone**.
- Are you going to include chord diagrams on the songsheet? Not a bad idea if your players are low/middle ability. As a regular baritone ukulele player, I have to say that the common or garden songsheet with chord diagrams for a GCEA uke is no use to me at all (unless I put a capo on the 5th fret). For a bass uker, chord diagrams are pointless.
- Is there a link to where you might hear the song? The best songsheets have these. Mine usually don't. Enough said.

Lots to worry about then.

Rhythm

We are going to start the actual music section with rhythm because you don't, technically, even need a ukulele for this. This is the **most important** musical component for the bassist. The rhythm or **beat** of the music we are listening to is, 99% of the time, held throughout the song. Most[7] popular music is written to be sung along with or danced to and having frequent and repeated beat changes overcomplicates things. You couldn't really dance to something that changed rhythm. Try it. You'll mostly fall over.

Before launching into this though, I need to clarify a difference that exists between UK English and American English when it comes to what notes are called[8]. In The Canterville Ghost (1887), Oscar Wilde wrote: "We have really everything in common with America nowadays except, of course, language." This really does apply in the names of notes in music:

UK Term	USA Term	Beats
Semi-Breve	**Whole Note**	**4**
Minim	**Half Note**	**2**
Crotchet	**Quarter Note**	**1**
Quaver	**Eighth Note**	**½**
Semi-Quaver	**Sixteenth Note**	**¼**

As this book is written by an Englishman in England, I will be using UK terminology. I see absolutely nothing wrong with the US system, but it isn't the one I'm used to.

The basic rhythm of a piece of music is specified, in the fully written-out sheet music, by the **time signature**. This is usually written in the form of two numbers at the very start of a piece of music. The number on the top tells you how many beats and the number on the bottom tells you what notes are being used to specify the beat. The most common bottom numbers are **crochets** (specified by a 4) and **quavers** (specified by an 8).

The most common time signature is four beats to the bar. A "beat" is usually a crotchet. Four beats in a bar is usually given denoted by a 4 on top of another 4, **without** a dividing line - it isn't a fraction. Writing this on a songsheet has always been a little problematical. I've seen 4/4 and 4:4 and also $^{4}_{4}$ which is, I suppose, as good as it gets but the numbers are quite small if they are going to fit on the same line. I'm going to use the second version in this book where it is needed.

Common time signatures: $\frac{4}{4}$ $\frac{2}{4}$ $\frac{3}{4}$ $\frac{6}{8}$ not $\frac{4}{4}$

[7] This book is all about *western* music. In front of the word music, mentally insert "western" every time.

[8] My thanks to Tim in Seattle for the heads-up on this.

So 4:4 means 4 beats of 4 crotchets in a bar. That is an example of a time signature and 4:4 is easily the most common[9].

To count something like this you chant:

① 2 3 4 | ① 2 3 4…

with the emphasis on the ① and the | line symbol shows where the bar ends.

A close relative of 4:4 is 2:4 where there are only two beats to the bar and to count this one you say "① 2 | ① 2 | ① 2…" with the emphasis on the ① again.

Songs that are in triple time (or waltz time, Viennese or otherwise, if you are a "Strictly Come Dancing" fan[10]) are usually in 3:4 time. Sticking with Bob Dylan for examples, "The Times They Are A-Changing" is in this 3:4 time.

This is counted out as:

① 2 3 | ① 2 3 | ① 2 3….

For reasons more to do with the speed of the song (I think), some triple time songs are written in 3:8. Three quavers per bar. To be honest, I'm not sure whether a 3:8 piece played at half the speed of a 3:4 piece is, in fact, the same. Perhaps this is why 3:8 is quite scarce.

There are more complicated time signatures which are combinations of the simpler time signatures above.

For example, 6:8 time (a fairly common time signature) is really a combination of 3:4 and 2:4 which you would count as:

① 2 3 ② 2 3 | ① 2 3 ② 2 3….

The rarely used 9:8 time signature (basically a triple-triple time) is counted as:

① 2 3 ② 2 3 ③ 2 3 | ① 2 3 ② 2 3 ③ 2 3…

And my all-time favourite time signature is 12:8 - a combination of 4:4 and 3:4 :

① 2 3 ② 2 3 ③ 2 3 ④ 2 3 | ① 2 3 ② 2 3 ③ 2 3 ④ 2 3 …

There are some really weird time signatures out there, but they aren't going to trouble us much.

Every so often you will find 5:4 inserted into a bar (Cat Stevens does this regularly). Songs in 6:4 time work in the same way as 6:8. The legendary "Carmina Burana" is (partly) written in 2:2. When Leonard Bernstein wrote "America" for "West Side

[9] It is also called "common time" and sometimes just has a capital C for a time signature.

[10] Called "Dancing With The Stars" in the USA.

Story" he changed the time signature every bar! It is written as a bar of 6:8 followed by a bar of 3:4 over and over again[11]:

① 2 3 ② 2 3 | ① 2 3 | ① 2 3 ② 2 3 | ① 2 3 ...

Fantastic stuff.

> *Get YouTube up in your browser and have a listen to the following:*
> *I'll Never Find Another You: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KmactMIhrRM*
> *The Last Of The Mohicans Theme: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9tjdswqGGVg*
> *Different Drum: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UMVvRImExKc*
> *Catch The Wind: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J8hjEYTpwE8*
> *See if you can work out the time signatures.*

Getting the time signature right is (obviously) pretty important. This is especially important for the bassists among us. You will need the time signature to develop bass patterns later. Getting the **tempo** (speed) right is also important. There are lots of relatively vague musical statements about the speed at which something is to be performed. For example, ***andante*** is a bit quicker than ***adagio*** but not as fast as ***allegro***. Not all that helpful really. None of these words really tell you **exactly** how many beats per minute (**bpm**) a piece of music should be played at. This is a serious omission if you are coming to the piece fairly cold. How fast, exactly, is fast?

Sometimes a thoughtful composer will put a little symbol on a piece of music that might look like:

♩ = 100

This tells you that there are 100 crotchet beats per minute. I personally think it is good practice to actually tell you the number of beats per minute. So where do we find out what the tempo is in the absence of help like that above? Well, we measure them by listening to the piece of music and working out the number of beats per minute on a website such as the one in the activity below.

> *If you want to practice working out a tempo, go to https://www.all8.com/tools/bpm.htm and put on some music in the background (or in another window on your browser). This lets you work out how fast a piece of music is going (in bpm - beats per minute). If you try "Brown Eyed Girl" by Van Morrison you should end up with a beat of around 148 bpm.*

After a while you will get to be able to approximate tempo quite well. Most songs lie between 100 and 200 bpm. Soft, gentle songs might stray under 100 but not many go higher than 200 bpm. Listen to "Don't Get Me Wrong" by The Pretenders for a song that comes in at around 205 bpm. I think "Me And Julio Down By The Schoolyard" by Paul Simon might even be a little quicker.

[11] Called a Huapango incidentally.

When you are putting “mash-ups” together[12] the **first** thing you try and look for are songs with very similar tempo. Changing key between songs is easy because you are just changing chords. Changing tempo is quite tricky.

For regular ukers, strum patterns are clearly going to be related to the beat of a piece of music and there is (as far as I know) no wholly accepted system of notation for strum patterns on the standard songsheet. You may see DU DU DDDD or something similar (with D = down U = up) or you may see up and down arrows but you never really get an idea of the length (in time) of each strum.

A lot of ukulele classes I've been to seem to spend a lot of time on strum patterns and (in my opinion) this is effort misplaced. It is an **absolute waste of time** for the bass players. Spending a long time on the strum pattern lessens your time getting the songs right. Just go for it. If you know the song then you will "feel" the underlying pattern. I know this point of view will create howls from the purists but I'm happy to risk that. We'll never need to worry about strum patterns for the bass uke so I'm just going to kick them into the long grass.

What you need to worry about is playing in time. Get that metronome into action.

[12] You will do this. I guarantee.

Melody

When it comes to melody, let's start at the very beginning.
A very good place to start.

This bit is really about **singing**. Singing the tune, basically. The words to the song from "The Sound of Music" provide us with our jumping off point for grabbing the basics of melody. As ukulele players, for "melody" you can read "singing the main bit". Anything else comes under "harmony". Quite often in groups (go look on YouTube) the bass player doesn't sing. The just stand next to the drummer and Bomp-Bomp along in a metronomic fog. Paul McCartney was a stand-out exception.

In 99% of ukulele-friendly, popular modern western music we have the very familiar do-re-me-fa-so-la-te-do scale of notes. You might think, as you are singing this to yourself (admit it, you are), that the notes are equally spaced. They're **not**. Put on a number line resembling ukulele frets they look like this:

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
do		re		me	fa		so		la		te	do

You can play four different sets of these notes (called a scale in music) on the four different strings of your bass ukulele[13]. Let's talk through it. Go to your 1st string (the G string; the one furthest from your nose). Play the "open" string. No fingers on any frets. Think of that as "do". Put a finger on the second fret. That's "re". Fourth fret; "me". Fifth fret; "fa". And so on until you get to the 12th fret where, as the song goes, you get back to "do". Not the same "do" though. It is an octave higher.

The "oct" bit comes from the Latin for eight[14]. Whoa, whoa, whoa…. Octave? 12th fret? Hmmm. Well, on our western scale there are **eight notes** in an octave. Count them on the number line above. If you play the open string followed by the note you get on the 12th fret. you will hear that they are the same; but different.

> *Go grab a ruler from somewhere. Measure the length of the string from the nut to the saddle. Now measure from the 12th fret to the saddle. It should be exactly half of the full length of the string.*

By playing the string with your finger on the 12th fret you have halved the length of the string. Almost certainly, you will have a dot (a fretboard marker - nearly always unhelpfully invisible to the player whilst playing) on the 12th fret. You probably have several other dots in other places along the fretboard. We'll come back to these.

> *Having worked through the 1st string (starting at G) try the 2nd string (starting at D). The same pattern is repeated but the notes are different. On this string you are starting at D, not G. The 3rd string starts at A, but the pattern through the octave is the same. Likewise with the 4th string. It starts at E and ends up an octave higher. You have just played four different scales.*

---

[13] The four strings are 4=E, 3=A, 2=D, 1=G

[14] octopus: eight legs. octagon: eight sides. octane: eight carbon atoms. October: Erm...

The four scales that you have just played all start with an open string and end an octave higher. There are some frets that you haven't used yet. Let's have a look at them.

If you slide back down the fretboard to the open 1st string ("do") you will notice that the next note in the scale ("re") is on the second fret, not the first. So what is on the first fret? Well, it is in between "do" and "re". The difference between "do" and "re" we call a **tone**. So the note in-between the two is half that, a **semitone different**. A note that is a semitone **higher** is called a **sharp** and is given the symbol **#**. So the note above "do" is, if you like, "do sharp" or "do#". A note that is a semitone **lower** is called a **flat** and this is denoted by a special musical symbol, ♭. So just as valid as "do sharp", the note could be "re flat". Just about every ukulele book world-wide uses the letter b to replace the ♭ sign and we will keep to that convention here when we are talking about **chords** but we will use the proper ♭ sign when we are talking rather more formally about music. So expect to see [Bb] in songsheets (viz. B-flat) but B♭ when we are talking about musical scales and chord structure.

The GCEA-tuned ukes have an advantage in learning this because their third string is tuned to a C. For reasons shrouded in music history, the scale that begins with C (the C Major scale) has no sharps or flats so we can use the third string to do this for real. Bear with me for a few minutes here. We will get back to a EADG-tuned focus in a short while.

If we take the number line we used above and replace it with "real" notes we get:

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
C	C#	**D**	D#	**E**	**F**	F#	**G**	G#	**A**	A#	**B**	**C**
C	D♭	**D**	E♭	**E**	**F**	G♭	**G**	A♭	**A**	B♭	**B**	**C**

…depending on whether you want the "inbetweenish" notes as sharps or flats. I've put the "do-re-me…" notes in bold and, as you can see, there are no sharps or flats in the scale that starts with C. This is called the **C Major** scale. On a piano it runs from middle C up eight notes using only the white keys.

Notice that E# (or F♭) doesn't really exist. The same is true of B# (or C♭). It's just a consequence of the way, in western music, we have laid out the notes that make our scales.

I've mentioned "scales" a few times now and you are probably already aware of different scales in different songs. The only ones we are going to worry about here are the major scales(the minor scales get a quick mention). When you see "real" music written down it is on a system of lines and spaces and each set of lines (called a stave) has a symbol (called a clef) at the start. More than 99% of popular music is covered by just two clefs, the **treble clef** (top left) and the **bass clef** (bottom left). Your stuff is all covered by the bass clef.

For us ukulele players, a lot of this is immaterial. You don't get clefs on songsheets. On a songsheet you are likely to get a title, the performer, some lyrics and a lot of inline chords (some of which might be correct).

You will notice on any bit of music that the “curl” of the treble clef forms a cross on the line for the G note. The treble clef is therefore often called the **G-clef**. Similarly, the two dots on the bass clef show the position of the F note and the bass clef is sometimes analogously called the **F-clef**.

Most singing is written on a treble clef. As you might expect a bass line is written using a bass clef. That said, playing a Bass Ukulele (like the UBass or similar) you will be using the same songsheets as the rest of your group.

So, as promised, back to the EADG-tuned bass uke.

The Major Scales

Again, just a reminder, we are working with a EADG-tuned bass uke. So, let's put the four different strings of your ukulele on to our fret number line to see the consequences of key changes. I'm only going to use sharps here (#). We will come across flats a bit later on.

0	1	**2**	3	**4**	**5**	6	**7**	8	**9**	10	**11**	**12**
G	G#	**A**	A#	**B**	**C**	C#	**D**	D#	**E**	F	**F#**	**G**
D	D#	**E**	F	**F#**	**G**	G#	**A**	A#	**B**	C	**C#**	**D**
A	A#	**B**	C	**C#**	**D**	D#	**E**	F	**F#**	G	**G#**	**A**
E	F	**F#**	G	**G#**	**A**	A#	**B**	C	**C#**	D	**D#**	**E**

The key of G major (on your first string) contains an F#. The key of D major (on your second string) contains two sharpened notes (F# and C#) and A major (on your third string) contains three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The key of E major (on your fourth string) has four sharpened notes (F#, C#, G#, D#).

You are probably wondering if there is any pattern here. Of course there is! Music is built from mathematical principles[15] so patterns abound.

The keys that contain sharpened notes are given in their "do-re-mi.." format below. I've only taken it to 5 sharps. Not much is written with 6 sharps or above and confusing notes such as E# (a.k.a. F) creep in. I've also put a number (in red) underneath each do-re-mi note. We are going to need these a lot in the coming pages.

Key	Sharps	Do	Re	Me	Fa	So	La	Te	Do
		1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**
C	0	C	D	E	F	G	A	B	C
G	1	G	A	B	C	D	E	F#	G
D	2	D	E	F#	G	A	B	C#	D
A	3	A	B	C#	D	E	F#	G#	A
E	4	E	F#	G#	A	B	C#	D#	E
B	5	B	C#	D#	E	F#	G#	A#	B

Four of these correspond to open strings. E, A, D and G. That said, you could start more or less anywhere on the fretboard and pick out a scale.

Example: Play the note on the 4th fret of your 3rd string.
It should be the same as your open 2nd string.

[15] Pythagoras (yes, him) worked out the relationships in music based on simple fractions. Triangles? Meh.

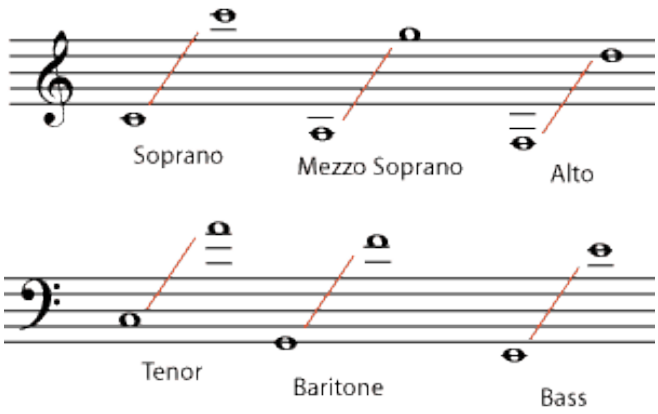
None of your scales so far contain any flattened notes but, as you might expect, there are scales with flats just as there are scales with sharps. The table below is the flat analogy to the table of sharp keys above.

Key	Flats	Do	Re	Me	Fa	So	La	Te	Do
		1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**
C	0	C	D	E	F	G	A	B	C
F	1	F	G	A	B ♭	C	D	E	F
B ♭	2	B ♭	C	D	E ♭	F	G	A	B ♭
E ♭	3	E ♭	F	G	A ♭	B ♭	C	D	E ♭
A ♭	4	A ♭	B ♭	C	D ♭	E ♭	F	G	A ♭
D ♭	5	D ♭	E ♭	F	G ♭	A ♭	B ♭	C	D ♭

So the two tables above contain eleven keys for you to **sing** in. Somewhere between A and G# there will be a key that your voice is happy with[16].

> *Sit yourself at a piano (if available) or with your ukulele and find your vocal range. A lot of people will tell you they are "tone deaf" or that "they can't hit a note". This is not usually true. Only around 2% to 5% of us are genuinely tone deaf. Not being able to hit the right note is usually because the note isn't within your range. So find your range.*

Once you've found your range you can work out what you "are" in terms of soprano, alto, tenor or bass. You are very likely to fit (approximately) into one of the following ranges:



That "top C" is almost *de rigueur* for sopranos although some female voices can get quite a few notes higher. The late, great Minnie Ripperton comes to mind. Similarly the bottom E on the bass clef is a tricky reach for most male voices. So when you encounter music written in four voice parts (often labelled SATB for soprano, alto, tenor, bass) you'll know where to position yourself. Incidentally, if you have ever listened to Thijs Van Leer from the 70's band Focus (listen to "Hocus

[16] Unless you are Tom Waits.

Pocus" at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MV0F_XiR48Qy) you may wonder whether this SATB stuff is worthwhile. He was all of these and more!

If there is a song you are keen on singing but some of it lies outside your range there are a couple of things you can do. You can use a capo (as shown in the ukulele accessories section) on your uke to make all the notes a bit higher. So, if you are struggling to get **down** to some notes in a song, put a capo on the second fret and every note jumps up a tone. On the soprano and concert ukes this is a pretty limited tactic because the frets get close together very quickly. On a tenor or baritone uke you might be able to get to the 5th fret with practice. This doesn't help if you need to lower the notes. A capo can only raise the notes so it only helps if you can't get *down* to some notes. Capos are great when you want to play along to things on YouTube. A lot of bands put a capo on the first fret. Even on a bass uke, a capo comes in handy at this point.

The other (much better) way is to **transpose** the song to a different key. What you do here is shift ALL the notes (and the chords, as it happens) by the same amount, up or down, as you need. This is as important for bass players as for regular uke players.

Let's take our Bob Dylan example from earlier:

The [F] answer my [G] friend is [C] blowing in the [Am] wind
The [F] answer is [G] blowing in the [C] wind

This might be too high for you to sing, so what you could do is drop each chord (and therefore each note in the song) by three notes, so your [F] became [C], your [G] became [D], your [Am] became [Em] and your [C] becomes [G]. What you then have is:

The [C] answer my [D] friend is [G] blowing in the [Em] wind
The [C] answer is [D] blowing in the [G] wind

Of course, it might be that the original was, in fact, too low for your voice and (in the absence of a capo) you might feel that making all the notes a bit higher might be a good plan. So let's put everything **up** a few notes, making [F] into an [A] taking everything from C major to E major. This would give you:

The [A] answer my [B] friend is [E] blowing in the [C#m] wind
The [A] answer is [B] blowing in the [E] wind

Why [C#m] rather than [Cm]? Well, we have shifted the key from C major to E major and, in that key, we have C# rather than C. When you look at this transposition you probably think, no, some tricky chords there. [C#m]? [B]? Back to the drawing board…

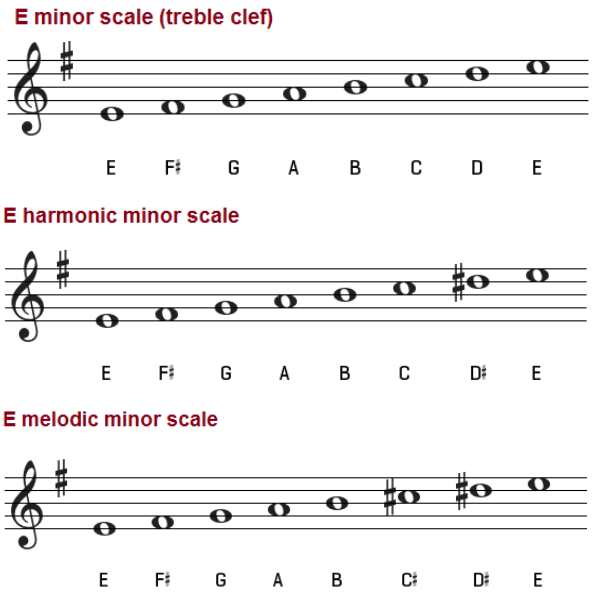
We will do a more on transposing songs later when we are into chords in a big way. For now, just keep the concept at the back of your mind.

The Minor Scales

There was a strongly dropped hint earlier about there being minor scales as well as major scales. Time to have a brief look at these. Unfortunately, they are a little more complicated than the “do-re-mi…” of the “Sound of Music”.

In music theory, the term ***minor scale*** is more complicated than the term ***major scale*** because it generally refers to **three** scale formations – the **natural minor scale** (or Aeolian mode), the **harmonic minor scale**, and the **melodic minor scale** (which changes as you descend) – rather than just one as with the major scale.

Let's look at just one family of these minor keys: E minor.



The "natural" E minor scale contains only one sharp, F#, and is the same going up (ascending) as it is coming down (descending). The "harmonic" scale has the F# as before but also puts in a D# just before the octave. The melodic scale has three sharpened notes (F#, C#, D#) when ascending but only one (F#) descending.
Having been through that you can, to be honest, **forget it**. You don't need to remember it to play the ukulele. Just be aware of the fact that minor keys come in three flavours. Much more important is the fact that minor chords sound different to major chords.

Play the [A] chord on a normal uke. Now play [Am]. There is a big sound difference. The minor chord sounds very different. Sad. Haunting. From your knowledge of ukulele chords so far, you will probably recognise that minor chords **all** sound, in some way, "sad" compared to the major chord.

Every **major** key has a **relative minor** key. In the do-re-mi... scale the major key is **do** and the relative minor is **la**. So for C major the relative minor is A minor. For G major the relative minor is E minor.

We’re going to leave the whole melody thing at this point and move into harmony, a much bigger and (to be honest) more interesting subject.

Harmony

Pythagoras got a mention earlier. He was, as you will remember, a mathematician and philosopher in ancient Greece. We all know the “square on the hypotenuse…” stuff but (in my humble opinion) his *greatest* gift to humankind was working out that the notes that sounded “nice” together were related by simple ratios, 1:2, 3:2 and suchlike. He did this, as you are, with a stretched string. Without going into the whole history of music and the development of the musical scale (a massive tome if ever there was one), what we have today is an approximation of these fractions to give us an “even-tempered” set of notes.

> *J.S.Bach wrote a lot of material (in “The Well-Tempered Clavier”) to get our western ears used to this scale of notes. I strongly urge you to go listen to this on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nPHlZw7HZq4*

Many pages ago I described harmony as adding “colour” to sounds and the next few sections explore this in quite a lot of detail. Our music is based around the combination of “pleasing” sounds. These sounds are all related to notes on the do-re-mi… scale.

The use of the word “pleasing” is controversial. Sounds that were once thought pleasing by the vast majority now aren’t. A lot of what we call Gregorian plainchant is thought quite jarring to 21st century ears. We still use ***a capella*** (Latin: "of the chapel") to describe unaccompanied singing but we don't sing Gregorian plainchant much these days. A lot of the dissonance[17] in jazz is thought the same. Some composers deliberately use sounds that don’t “go” well together to make a point. So, when you hear something later in this book that you think sounds awful, it might just be you.

A lot of sounds come in and then drift out of fashion. In the early part of the 20th century, the use of diminished and augmented chords was rife. These days? Hardly ever. The suspended 4th and 2nd seems, likewise, to be passé these days although ABBA's music from the '70s and '80s is abundantly sprinkled with them. I'm guessing that the power chords of heavy rock will go the same way. I hope so.

Whatever you think of various combinations of notes, ***any*** combination of notes is technically a **chord** but we are not going to really get involved with these. We're playing a bass, after all.

This is where this handbook takes a sharp diversion from the previous two.

[17] A lovely word meaning "lack of harmony"

Playing Notes on the Bass Ukulele

The notes on the bass ukulele are shown in the diagram below.

String	Open	Fret: 1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1	G	G#/A♭	A	A#/B♭	B	C	C#/D♭	D	D#/E♭	E
2	D	D#/E♭	E	F	F#/G♭	G	G#/A♭	A	A#/B♭	B
3	A	A#/B♭	B	C	C#/D♭	D	D#/E♭	E	F	F#/G♭
4	E	F	F#/G♭	G	G#/A♭	A	A#/B♭	B	C	C#/D♭

So, if you put your finger on the third fret of the 3rd string (this is the note in red on the diagram) and play that string - just that string - you get the **note** of {C}.
You will be playing notes nearly all the time (rather than chords) on your bass so it is worth going through the common keys to highlight the notes in those keys.

C Major (no sharps or flats)

String	Open	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1	G		A		B	C		D		E
2	D		E	F		G		A		B
3	A		B	C		D		E	F	
4	E	F		G		A		B	C	

G Major (one sharp; F#)

String	Open	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1	G		A		B	C		D		E
2	D		E		F#	G		A		B
3	A		B	C		D		E		F#
4	E		F#	G		A		B	C	

That's the easy keys over.
Here come lots more sharps and then the flats.

D Major (two sharps; F# & C#)

String	Open	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1	G		A		B		C#	D		E
2	D		E		F#	G		A		B
3	A		B		C#	D		E		F#
4	E		F#	G		A		B		C#

A Major (three sharps; F#, C# and G#)

String	Open	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1		G#	A		B		C#	D		E
2	D		E		F#		G#	A		B
3	A		B		C#	D		E		F#
4	E		F#		G#	A		B		C#

E Major (four sharps; F#, C#, G# and D#)

String	Open	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1		G#	A		B		C#		D#	E
2		D#	E		F#		G#	A		B
3	A		B		C#		D#	E		F#
4	E		F#			A		B		C#

Then we have the keys with flats in rather than sharps:

F Major (one flat; B♭)

String	Open	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1	G		A	B♭		C		D		E
2	D		E	F		G		A	B♭	
3	A	B♭		C		D		E	F	
4	E	F		G		A	B♭		C	

B♭ Major (two flats; B♭ and E♭)

String	Open	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1	G		A	B♭		C		D	E♭	
2	D	E♭		F		G		A	B♭	
3	A	B♭		C		D	E♭		F	
4		F		G		A	B♭		C	

E♭ Major (three flats; B♭, E♭ and A♭)

String	Open	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1	G	A♭		B♭		C		D	E♭	
2	D	E♭		F		G	A♭		B♭	
3		B♭		C		D	E♭		F	
4		F		G	A♭		B♭		C	

A♭ Major (four flats; B♭, E♭, A♭ and D♭)

String	Open	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1	G	A♭		B♭		C	D♭		E♭	
2		E♭		F		G	A♭		B♭	
3		B♭		C	D♭		E♭		F	
4		F		G	A♭		B♭		C	D♭

The trick with these keys is that you should be able to play through a key with (more or less) your eyes shut. These last few pages will give you plenty of hours of practice. For a bass player it is not important to know chords but it is **very important** to know scales.

Just work your way through these scales over and over again:

C major	C	D	E	F	G	A	B	C
G major	G	A	B	C	D	E	F#	G
D major	D	E	F#	G	A	B	C#	D
A major	A	B	C#	D	E	F#	G#	A
E major	E	F#	G#	A	B	C#	D#	E

Then move on to the scales with flats in rather than sharps:

F major	F	G	A	B♭	C	D	E	F
B♭ major	B♭	C	D	E♭	F	G	A	B♭
E♭ major	E♭	F	G	A♭	B♭	C	D	E♭
A♭ major	A♭	B♭	C	D♭	E♭	F	G	A♭

Crack this and it all gets very easy. Don't leave this page without at least getting through C, G, D and F major.

Chords and Root Notes

Listen to just about any song. The bass player is playing note after note in a strict time. Every so often (perhaps) they will do something clever and run up and down a scale to get from one note to another. Bass players needn't worry about chords as such. They just need (as a bare minimum) the **root note**.

The what now?

Well, when you have a chord it always begins with a letter ranging from A to G.
Examples: [Am] [Bm7] [C] [Dm] [Em7] [Fmaj7] [Gm]

You also get sharps and flats appearing in chords:
Examples: [Bb] [Ab7] [F#] [C#m] [A#dim] [Eb] [G#m]

The **root note** of a chord is the note specified in the name of the chord:

Chord	Root Note
[Bm]	{B}
[Fmaj7]	{F}
[Ab7]	{A♭}
[F#]	{F#}

I'm sure you get the idea with this. Just look at the chord and mentally ignore everything after the starting note. You've then got the root note. This is where playing the bass really wins out. Your fellow ukers are pondering on [A#m7-5] and you play {A#}. This is where the sunglasses come in. It really is very cool.

So when you see a songsheet with a lot of chords you can get away with just playing the root note of the chord.

Have a look at this: part of "Don't It Make My Brown Eyes Blue" by Crystal Gayle.

[C] Don't know [Am] when [Dm7] I've been so [G7] blue
[C] Don't know [Am7] what's come [Bm7-5] over [E7] you
[Am] You've found [C]someone [D7/F#] new [D7]
And [F] don't it make my [Em7] brown eyes [F] blue [G7]

There are quite a few tricky bits here if you are a regular uke player. But you're not, you're a bass player. You only need the root notes:

{C} Don't know {A} when {D} I've been so {G} blue
{C} Don't know {A} what's come {B} over {E} you
{A} You've found {C}someone {D} new {D}
And {F} don't it make my {E} brown eyes {F} blue {G}

What has happened is that you have stripped away all the rest of the chord and just left the root note. Remember we are using curly brackets for bass notes.

This is why knowing your notes is so important if you are a bass player. You don't need chords you need notes.

Let's have a look at another piece of a song:

A Whiter Shade Of Pale

Procul Harem

Intro (played very steadily): [G][Bm][Em][G] [C][Cmaj7][Am][Am7] [D][D7][Bm][D7]

[G] We [Bm] skipped the light fan-[Em]-dango [G/D]
[C] Turned [Cmaj7] cartwheels 'cross the [Am] floor [Am7]
[D] I was fee-[D7]-ling kinda sea-[Bm]-sick [D7]
[G] The [Bm] crowd called out for [Em] more [G]

[C] The room [Cmaj7] was humming [Am] harder [Am7]
[D] As the [D7] ceiling flew a-[Bm]-way [D7]
[G] When we [Bm] called out for a-[Em]-nother drink [G]
[C] The [Cmaj7] waiter brought a [Am] tray

For the bass player (just playing root notes):

A Whiter Shade Of Pale

Procul Harem

Intro (played very steadily): {G}{B}{E}{G}{C}{C}{A}{A}{D}{D}{B}{D}

{G} We {B} skipped the light fan-{E}-dango {G}
{C} Turned {C} cartwheels 'cross the {A} floor {A}
{D}I was fee-{D}-ling kinda sea-{B}-sick {D}
{G}The {B} crowd called out for {E} more {G}

{C} The room {C} was humming {A} harder {A}
{D} As the {D} ceiling flew a-{B}-way {D}
{G} When we {B} called out for a-{E}-nother drink {G}
{C} The {C} waiter brought a {A} tray

No ukulele group is going to prepare a songsheet for you with just the root notes showing so get used to stripping a chord down to the root note in your head.

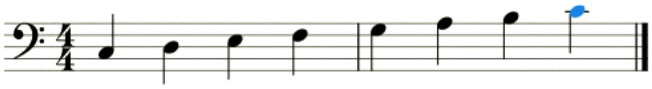
This is a good place to introduce you to tabs.

Tabs

When I was crash-learning the bass guitar the thing that kept me (relatively) sane was tabs, I had grown up using the treble clef and the transition from the treble clef to the bass clef was (I found) quite confusing. I'm better now but still not great. Tabs do away with the whole problem of reading music.

When you write a tab you are showing the player where to put his/her fingers on the fretboard rather than writing music.

For example, the key of C major (using a bass clef looks like):

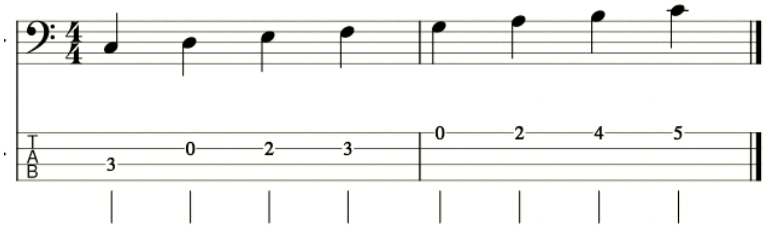


If you were going to play this on your bass ukulele you would, in algorithm format, do the following.

1. Look at the first note and decide what it is.
2. Locate this note on your fretboard
3. Play it
4. Repeat for all other notes

Step 1 is tricky if you don't read music (in particular, if you don't read bass clef).
Step 2 is tricky if you are new to bass and don't know where all the notes are.
Step 3 is easy. Bomp.

When you write the same thing in tab form you get:



The top stave[18] is exactly what we had before. The bottom stave is the tab. This shows you exactly where to put your fingers. Look at the tab stave. The four horizontal lines represent the strings on your uke. The top line is your 1st string. The bottom line is your 4th string. The first note is formed on the 3rd string, 3rd fret. That's a C. Next the 2nd string is open. Then 2nd string 2nd fret. Next 2nd string 3rd fret. USW[19] as our German friends write. You don't need to know the notes you just play them! It is almost like cheating.

We will be using tabs a lot from now on so it might be a good move to have a stab at some of the keys on the next page. Practice makes perfect.

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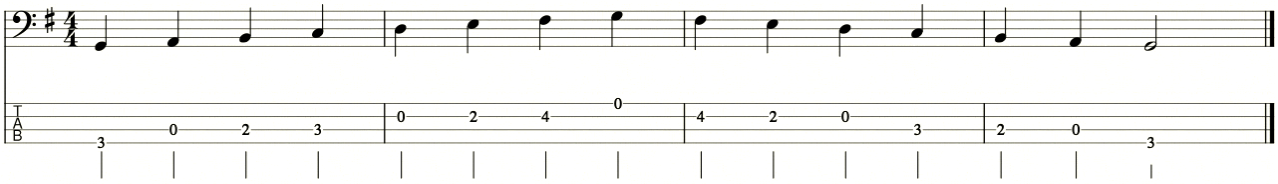
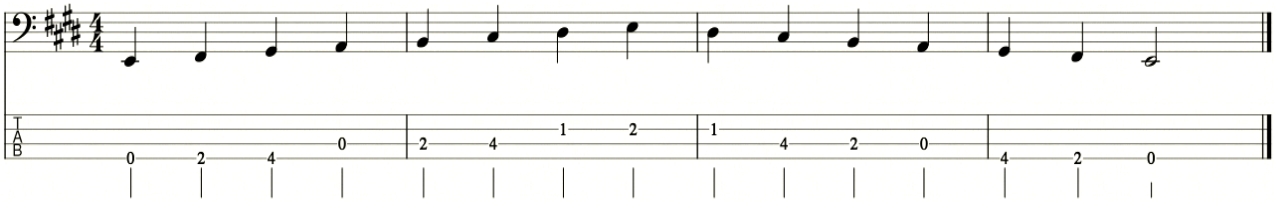
[18] The stave (staff in the US) is the set of horizontal lines used to represent notes in western music.

[19] und so weiter = and so on = etc.

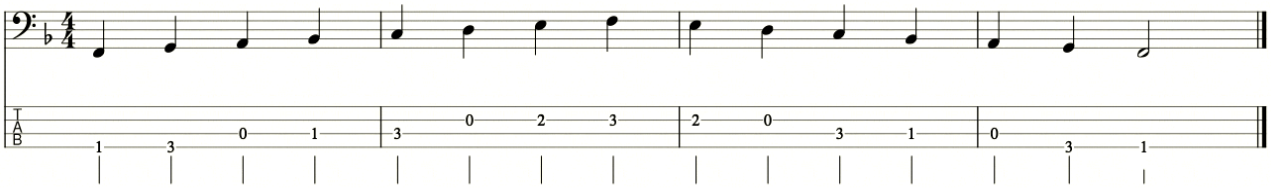
G Major



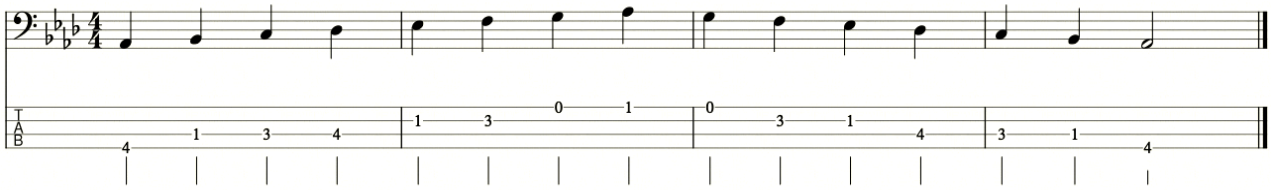
E Major



F Maior



A♭ Maior



You can probably play each of these keys (two of which are quite tricky) more or less straight away. The miracle of tabs. More later.

Families of Chords

In any major key, you will find that there are chords that “go well” with each other. Think of these as “families” of chords.

If we get rid of all the unimportant[20] keys we can look at the families of chords in the main, important keys that we play music in every day. I know that some of will protest at C# major being removed (amongst others) but we need to keep this in the real world a bit. All the keys from five flats to five sharps are included. That’s plenty.

KEY	#	♭	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Musical Designation		I	ii	iii	IV	V	vi	vii
C	0	0	C	Dm	Em	F	G7	Am	Bdim
D♭	0	5	D♭	E♭m	Fm	G♭	A♭7	B♭m	Cdim
D	2	0	D	Em	F#m	G	A7	Bm	C#dim
E♭	0	3	E♭	Fm	Gm	A♭	B♭7	Cm	Ddim
E	4	0	E	F#m	G#m	A	B7	C#m	D#dim
F	0	1	F	Gm	Am	B♭	C7	Dm	Edim
G	1	0	G	Am	Bm	C	D7	Em	F#dim
A♭	0	4	A♭	B♭m	Cm	D♭	E♭7	Fm	Gdim
A	3	0	A	Bm	C#m	D	E7	F#m	G#dim
B♭	0	2	B♭	Cm	Dm	E♭	F7	Gm	Adim
B	5	0	B	C#m	D#m	E	F#7	G#m	A#dim

So a **chord** is formed from two or more notes being played together or (in an *arpeggio or broken chord*) slightly apart or “spread out”.

The "Musical Designation" line is important when you are looking at song structure (which we will be doing towards the end of the book). Where a chord progression is given as:

I - vi - IV - V

...you are looking at the first chord, the 6th chord in minor form (hence the lower case letters), the fourth chord and then the fifth chord (often as the 7th rather than just a major triad).

So, for this progression in C Major this is [C] [Am] [F] [G7].
For D Major it is [D] [Bm] [G] [A7].

[20] From a ukulele point of view.

Take this further; the famous canon in D major by Johann Pachelbel doesn't **have** to be in D Major. The chord progression is:

I - V - vi - iii - IV - I - IV - V *{and then repeat ad infinitum}*

So in D Major it is [D] [A] [Bm] [F#m] [G] [D] [G] [A] but you can easily play the same sequence in another key. Just look up which Roman numeral applies to which chord in the table above.
How about G Major? [G] [D] [Em] [Bm] [C] [G] [C] [D]

So what does this have to do with bass players?

Well, you might not just want to bomp-bomp on root notes all your life. You might want to add in other notes that fit. I'm in no way suggesting that you start playing chords on your bass uke but you might like to offer some variation in your bass lines.

So which notes are "acceptable" combinations for bass players? Let's have a look at the chords in the C Major family (from I to vi) to start with:

C Major Chords				
Chord	Number	Root note	3rd	5th
[C]	I	{C}	{E}	{G}
[Dm]	ii	{D}	{F}	{A}
[Em]	iii	{E}	{G}	{B}
[F]	IV	{F}	{A}	{C}
[G] or [G7]	V	{G}	{B}	{D}
[Am]	vi	{A}	{C}	{E}

So, say you were coming up to a [C] chord in a song. You know already that playing the root note {C} is fine, but you can also play a 3rd ({E} in this case) or a 5th (a {G} in this case). That is because the chord of [C] contains three notes: C+E+G so you on your bass uke can play any of those three and sound fine. I tend to forget the 3rd and just concentrate on playing root notes and 5ths. The technical reason for this is that the 5th is present in the major and the minor form of the chord but the 3rd is flattened in the minor chord. It sounds better as well.

So rather than just play the root note, mix it up a little by adding in a 5th. A lot of songs use the [C] [Am] [F] [G] sequence. You could just play {C} {A} {F} {G} but, alternatively, you could play: {C}{G} {A}{E} {F}{C} {G}{D} where you are playing the root note followed by the 5th.

The next most common key for ukulele songs is G Major where we have:

G Major Chords				
Chord	Number	Root note	3rd	5th
[G]	I	{G}	{B}	{D}
[Am]	ii	{A}	{C}	{E}
[Bm]	iii	{B}	{D}	{F#}
[C]	IV	{C}	{E}	{G}
[D] or [D7]	V	{D}	{F#}	{A}
[Em]	vi	{E}	{G}	{B}

And a couple of others just to give you the overall idea...

F Major Chords				
Chord	Number	Root note	3rd	5th
[F]	I	{F}	{A}	{C}
[Gm]	ii	{G}	{B♭}	{D}
[Am]	iii	{A}	{C}	{E}
[Bb]	IV	{B♭}	{D}	{F}
[C] or [C7]	V	{C}	{E}	{G}
[Dm]	vi	{D}	{F}	{A}

D Major Chords				
Chord	Number	Root note	3rd	5th
[D]	I	{D}	{F#}	{A}
[Em]	ii	{E}	{G}	{B}
[F#m]	iii	{F#}	{A}	{C#}
[G]	IV	{G}	{B}	{D}
[A] or [A7]	V	{A}	{C#}	{E}
[Bm]	vi	{B}	{D}	{F#}

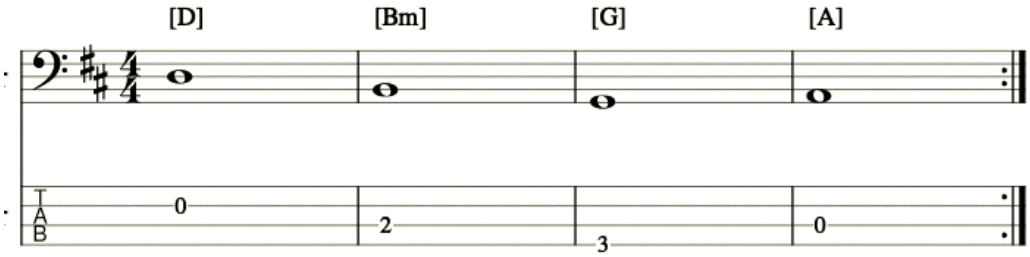
You could quite easily create a table like this for every key, but life's too short.

Moving from Chord to Chord

Remember, you aren't going to get a songsheet written out specially for you. You will get the same thing as all the others in your group: lyrics and in-line chords.

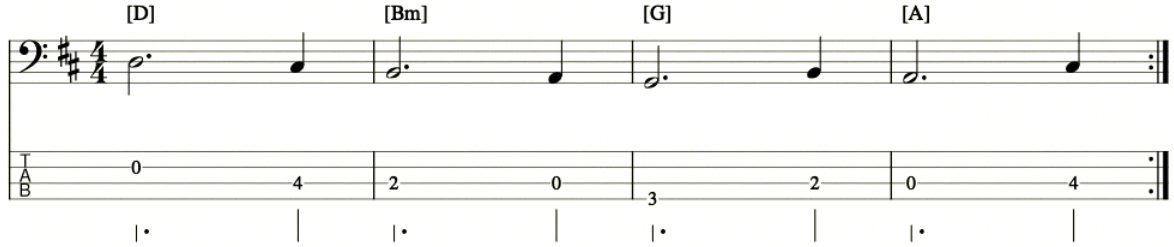
So how do you turn this into an interesting base line?

Imagine you were playing a song that was [D] [Bm] [G] [A7] over and over again with one bar per chord. The simplest thing you could play would be the root notes. What this looks like in musical terms is:



The lines+dots combination at the right-hand side instructs you to repeat. You can see how this translates into tabs.

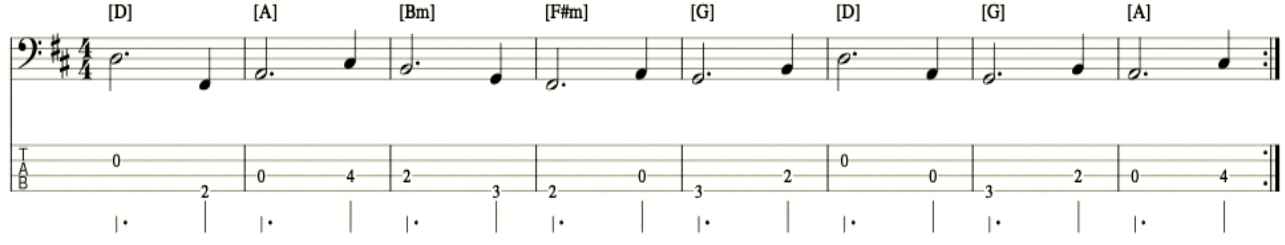
Instead of just playing the root note you could add in a transitional note:



The odd lines and dots underneath the tabs[21] show how long the notes are. Basically, if you are counting ① 2 3 4 in each bar (with the emphasis on ①) the first (root) note takes up ① 2 3 and the transition note takes up 4.

You can carry out a transition from most chords to most other chords using this 3+1 style. Just pick a note (in the key), often between where you are and where you want to be, and stick it in before you play the root note of your next chord.

Here's good old Pachelbel again:



[21] The app that this music was written on is Musescore 3. A fantastic piece of (free!) software.

The notes transitioning between each chord are usually between the chord but sometimes not. It doesn't really matter that much to be honest, and there are a lot of ways of playing this bit of music.

Transposing: Changing Key

Most of the time, we ukulele players are just bashing out someone else's music, but there will come a point where the key it is written in is simply not suitable for your voice (or that of your singer, if not you). This is where you need to be able to change key. If you need to go **up** a little you can always use a capo, but there are times when even this will not do and a capo is no use at all if you want to go down (e.g. when the key a song is written in is simply too high for your voice).

Changing key is known as **transposing**.

If you have your ukulele music in an editable format (e.g. Word on a PC or Pages on a Mac) you can change it within the software. **Be careful when doing this**. Imagine transposing from C major to G major. If you are changing all the [C] chords to [G] you may already have some [G] chords in the song. So when you change *them* to [D], all the ex-[C] chords change as well. Utter chaos!

What I do (because I always use [ ] square brackets for chords) is to change the right-hand bracket to a curly bracket so that my chords look like [}. This means that I can transpose the chords and change the curly bracket back to a square bracket as I do so. Unchanged chords will have a curly bracket in there and be relatively easy to spot.

If you are changing key on the fly as you play it gets a little harder. Most of us can go up or down (a little harder) a key (C $\Longrightarrow$D or G $\Longrightarrow$ F for example) but it usually pays to scribble the new chords on to the music rather than overload an old brain when it is already busy.

The big trick in transposing (if you are not a bass player) is to make sure that the "flavour" of the chord remains. If, for example, it starts as a minor 7th it must end as a minor 7th.

The table on the next page will help in transposing. It won't give you any help in keeping the "flavour" of the chord but it should help in getting the "shift" right. There are some notes doubled up. In every case I have put the less common one (in usage terms) in brackets. For example: Bb (A#).

Transposition Chart

G	Ab (G#)	A	Bb (A#)	B	**C**	C# (Db)	D	Eb (D#)	E	F	F# (Gb)	G
Ab (G#)	A	Bb (A#)	B	C	**C# (Db)**	D	Eb (D#)	E	F	F# (Gb)	G	Ab (G#)
A	Bb (A#)	B	C	C# (Db)	**D**	Eb (D#)	E	F	F# (Gb)	G	Ab (G#)	A
Bb (A#)	B	C	C# (Db)	D	**Eb (D#)**	E	F	F# (Gb)	G	Ab (G#)	A	Bb (A#)
B	C	C# (Db)	D	Eb (D#)	**E**	F	F# (Gb)	G	Ab (G#)	A	Bb (A#)	B
C	C# (Db)	D	Eb (D#)	E	**F**	F# (Gb)	G	Ab (G#)	A	Bb (A#)	B	C
C# (Db)	D	Eb (D#)	E	F	**F# (Gb)**	G	Ab (G#)	A	Bb (A#)	B	C	C# (Db)
D	Eb (D#)	E	F	F# (Gb)	**G**	Ab (G#)	A	Bb (A#)	B	C	C# (Db)	D
Eb (D#)	E	F	F# (Gb)	G	**Ab (G#)**	A	Bb (A#)	B	C	C# (Db)	D	Eb (D#)
E	F	F# (Gb)	G	Ab (G#)	**A**	Bb (A#)	B	C	C# (Db)	D	Eb (D#)	E
F	F# (Gb)	G	Ab (G#)	A	**Bb (A#)**	B	C	C# (Db)	D	Eb (D#)	E	F
F# (Gb)	G	Ab (G#)	A	Bb (A#)	**B**	C	C# (Db)	D	Eb (D#)	E	F	F# (Gb)

Instructions:

- Always start at the column with C at the top (shaded light yellow).
- Decide how many notes **up** (moving right) or **down** (moving left) you want to go.
- Locate this column.
- Any note in the central column becomes a note in your new column.
- Remember to keep the "flavour" of the chord.

Example:
Transpose [C] [Am] [F] [G7] [Dm7] [A+] up so that the [C] becomes [F]
Start at the central column. The "new" column is seven to the right.
So:

[C] ⟹ [F]	[Am] ⟹ [Dm]	[F] ⟹ [Bb] (or [A#])
[G7] ⟹ [C7]	[Dm7] ⟹ [Gm7]	[A+] ⟹ [D+]

How do bass players cope with transposing?
Easy - you don't have to remember the "flavour" the chord.

Strumming Patterns and Bass Players

There is a fairly standardised (but a long way from universal) notation for strumming.

- d : down strum.
- u : up strum.
- – : pause or missed strum i.e. moving your hand either up or down but not hitting the strings.They are most useful to give you an indication of the timing of the strums.
- x : indicates a "chunk". Strumming down and following through so the underside of your hand lands on the strings creating a ‘chunk’ sound.
- (d) or (u) : A muted down/up strum. Strumming as normal but with your fretting fingers resting on the strings to stop them ringing. It sounds like a chunk but you can do them with strums in either direction.
- **d** or **u** : when in bold that means the strum is emphasised (i.e. give it a bit more volume).

Most of this has nothing to do with bass players - you aren't playing chords, you aren't strumming.

There is also (sometimes) information given as part of an inline chord. Easily the most common is the **splang** which is where you give a dramatic single strum. Often seen at the end of a piece. Look for an exclamation mark as in **[G]!**

The simple time signatures can be played really easily with this notation:

4:4 Steady **d** d d d | **d** d d d... **one** two three four

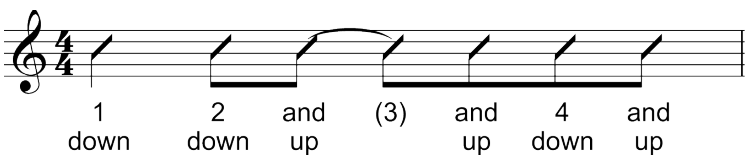
3:4 Waltz time **d** d d | **d** d d... **one** two three

On the bass (using the d to mean "play an appropriate note" rather than do a strum) this comes out as:

4:4 Steady **d** - - - | **d** - - - ... **one** two three four

3:4 Waltz time **d** - - | **d** - - ... **one** two three

There is a particular rhythm, the Calypso pattern, that is so well used that it is worth a longer look.



To play this calypso strum on ukulele, strum:
down, down up, up, down up while counting *1, 2 and, and, 4 and*.
Bass players. Stop trying. Just play on 1.

There are millions of songs (not all of them Calypsos) that use this beat.

A lot of reggae/ska music has a very interesting variation on the normal strumming pattern in that the strings are muted on down strokes but played on up strokes.

> *Go and listen to The Specials and "Message to Rudy" for a classic ska beat.*
> *(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cntvEDbagAw)*

Muting strings is a really good technique to perfect and very easy to do on the bass. You use your right hand, rather than your left. To play along with The Specials you need to play:

(d) **u** (d) **u** | (d) **u** (d) **u** ....

For bass players playing reggae you can play on the (d) when the ukes aren't playing. The best way to increase your proficiency with keeping in with what is being strummed is to play your bass uke. Lots.

Beginnings and Endings

When you are leading a song (with whatever size group you are in) you will have the job of starting it and finishing it. If you are not leading then you need to be aware of what the leader is doing. There is **no escape** from beginnings and endings. I've not noticed many bass players leading sessions but, you never know, stranger things and all that.

The **beginning** of the song will need to be counted in. Some leaders take absolutely no notice of the tempo (as in beats per minute) or the time signature of the song and begin everything with "1, 2, 1,2,3,4". This simply doesn't work. It particularly doesn't work when the song you are singing is in triple time.

The time signature may or may not be noted on the songsheet. It usually isn't, so - Rule #1 - you **need to know the song**. The time signature is going to determine your beginning. It will be probably be in 4:4 or 3:4, or some variant of these. Just before you start a song, get the tempo fixed in your head. Tapping the body of your uke helps. A quick strum through of the first line before you launch the song will give you the starting note.

For 2:4 or 4:4 songs you can count in thus:

Spoken: ① ② ③ ④

There is a catch to this. Some songs don't have an introduction and the singing doesn't start on the first beat of the bar.
For example, the Herman's Hermits classic:

There's a [F] **kind** of hush [A7] all over the [Dm] world to-[F7]-night

The "There's a" takes up two beats, so you would count this in as:

Spoken: ① ② "There's a"...

And you would hope that the rest of your group would join you at "**kind** of hush" where the bar actually begins at "kind".

For songs in triple time (3:8, 3:4, 6:8, 9:8, 12:8) you need to count through a bar before launching off.

For example, if you were going to have a go at Simon & Garfunkel's "America" you would need to count your team in with a few triplets:

Spoken: ① ② ③ ② ② ③

Intro: [C] [Cmaj7] [Am] [C] [F] [Fsus4] [F]
[C] Let us be [Cmaj7] lovers we'll
[Am] Marry our [C] fortunes to-[F]-gether [Fsus4] [F]

That count works for 3:4, 3:8 and 6:8. It isn't so great on the relatively rare 9:8 and 12:8. You are better to count through a full bar.

A lot of songs have a very general introduction. You might want to tell the audience about the song while you are playing an intro which means that it can't be a specified length. This is called a **safety** and you may well see these noted on songsheets[22]. A safety might go on for many bars and might be one chord or a sequence to be repeated:

Intro: [C] *{safety}*
Intro: ||: [C] [Am] [F] [G7] :|| *{safety}*

The ||: and :|| denote the start and end of a section to be repeated. The *{safety}* instruction basically means "as many times as necessary".

If you are playing a safety you will need to tell your group it is ending. And then count them in to the main body of the song appropriately.

When the song is off and running you can breathe easily for (usually) just over 3 minutes. Then you have an **ending** to negotiate.

Your biggest hope, when performing, is that the audience will go wild with applause. To fulfil their part of this agreement the audience need to know **when** to go wild with applause; they need a **definite ending**. In my experience, "fade out" is one of the worst possible instructions you can give a uke group and the audience is simply left bewildered. Make your ending as definite as possible. Even if it is the terribly cliched "cha cha cha" ending. However you do it, make the ending crisp and definite.

> *My advice? Get a group of uke players together (this is usually the opposite of herding cats - uke players coagulate better than warmed blood) and practice some beginnings and endings.*

22 You'll certainly see them on my songsheets.

Tabs

We've seen tabs already covered a little, but what if you want to write your own but you don't have tab-writing software?

So, tabs (which is short for tablature, incidentally). For those ukulele players who aren't musicians, the tab is a really fast and simple way to learn how to play a tune or a riff (more common on the bass).

The basic idea behind the tab is that it tells you where to put your fingers. Let's have an empty tab frame (of four bars) for our EADG-tuned bass uke to get the ideas across:

```
G|--------|--------|--------|--------|
D|--------|--------|--------|--------|
A|--------|--------|--------|--------|
E|--------|--------|--------|--------|
```

You will notice that the font I'm using on the frame has changed from Helvetica Neue to IBM's `Courier New`. There is a really good reason for this. Courier was developed with all characters having the same width. If I put two alphabets next to one another you will see the effect:
Helvetica Neue: ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ0123456789
`Courier New:` `ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ0123456789`

In the Helvetica font, the letters have different widths.
The letter I is much narrower than its neighbour H, for example.

```
In Courier New, all the letters have the same width.
I has the same width as H. This means that the letters will
always line up directly beneath one another.
```

This property is good news when you are writing tabs for the ukulele.

Let's take some of that frame above and put the scale of E major on it.

```
G|--------|--------|
D|--------|----1-2-|
A|------0-|2-4-----|
E|0-2-4---|--------|
```

So, when you play this tab you start with the E string being open (0). The next note is also on the E string on the second fret as is the third note on the 4th fret. Then the fourth note is on the B string with your finger in the first fret (1). And so on. The vertical lines | are to show you where the bar-lines are. A lot of tabs omit these. Wrongly in my opinion.

Tabs like this can show you where to put your fingers to get a particular note but they don't tell you how long the note actually is. Unfortunately, there isn't a good way of doing this easily. A proper program for writing tabs usually costs real

money[23]. I tend to make do with using a fixed number of spaces in each bar. In the example above I have used eight spaces per bar. That means we can define notes down to 1/8 of a bar; a quaver. Were I to use 16 spaces we could go to as short as a semiquaver.

The same A major scale in quavers (half beats) and minims (two beats) are:

```
G|-----023|320-----|
D|--013---|---310--|
A|02------|------20|
E|--------|--------|

G|--------|--------|----0---|2---3---|
D|--------|0---1---|3-------|--------|
A|0---2---|--------|--------|--------|
E|--------|--------|--------|--------|
```

It takes a bit of organising to show the note lengths this way but once it's done, it's done.

Of course, you don't just have to have single notes on your tabs. Notes can be played together. Chords, in other words.

Let's leave tabs there. There is lots more to learn but we can save it for the next book.

23 Although "MuseScore 3" doesn't and is awesomely good once you master it.

Ukulele Maintenance

Ukuleles, like every instrument, need to be cared for but this isn't really difficult. I'm assuming that your uke lives (with you) in a relatively safe environment and not a war zone. I'm hopeful that the worst you have to face is the odd bump, the oil on your fingers, the heat of the sun, the changes in humidity and general wear and tear. If you want your uke's life prolonged, whether it is laminated or made from solid wood the following might be of some guidance. This applies to all ukes, not just bass ukes.

Hold securely when playing

Dropping a uke from a sitting position is seldom fatal but the bodies can crack. This gives a buzz when you play and it sounds rough. Dropping your uke from a standing position might be a **lot** more costly. Prevention is much better than a cure. Fixing a cracked uke should be done by an experienced luthier but you might want to carry out a bit of a cost/benefit exercise here. Luthiers aren't cheap. Your uke might not be worth it. {Gasp}

Several things on your uke are prone to damage. Scratches and dents to the body are obvious (to all). It is possible to break the joint where the neck meets the body. Dropping and impacting the tuning heads might cause real problems in tuning your uke. The tuners bend surprisingly easily and the gears are easily knocked out of true. The bridge/saddle might (in extreme cases) become detached but these can be glued back easily enough with epoxy resin. All in all, dropping your uke from a height it is one of the worst things you can do to it.

Be careful with your plectrum and capo

When you are using a pick, make sure that it doesn't abrade your uke's body, especially when strumming that little bit harder. That may cause ugly scratches and ukes seldom have the scratch resistant panels found on a lot of guitars. If you use a capo, be gentle. Improper placement and removal of a capo can cause neck dents.

Watch out for the build-up of dirt

Ukuleles are prone to grease buildup from natural dirt and the oil from your hands. The result is a sticky instrument that is unpleasant to play. To prevent this from happening, make cleaning your uke after every playing session a habit. For the body, thoroughly wipe it with a microfibre cleaning cloth to remove dirt and dust before storing it. When removing built-up grime or dried oil and sweat, clean it with a slightly damp cleaning cloth and make sure to remove all smudgy marks on the body. Dry it with another clean cloth after. If your uke is painted or has a shiny finish, you can use polish products to keep its gloss.

The fingerboard is slightly harder to clean but a microfibre cleaning cloth will do the job fairly well. Very carefully rub the fingerboard with the cleaning cloth to remove dirt and oil. You can also slip the cloth underneath the strings to clean there as well.

Storage

Never leave your uke by a fireplace, heater, oven, radiator, in a car or in a place with direct sunlight. The heat can warp your uke's wood and make it brittle and much more prone to cracking and breaking. Avoid placing your uke (even in its case or bag) in a place where it might drop. Keep your uke away from places where it might get wet from spilled liquids.

Changing your strings
The truth is, there is no one rule stating when or how frequent you should change your strings. It is really up to you. I tend to change mine three or four times every year on the uke that I play most often. But there are things that signal the need for a new set of strings. Ukulele strings do not deteriorate as fast as guitar steel strings. However, they do pick up oils from your hands. Make it a habit to wipe them after playing to remove the picked up oils. Doing so will prevent dirt from sticking to your strings.
From time to time, run your fingers along the strings in search for nicks or grooves cut into them. These notches or cuts are caused by the pressure from the frets or the natural stretching of the strings. These can affect your uke's tuning and intonation and any nick is a sign of imminent breaking.
Brand new strings tend to go out of tune often because they are still stretching. This problem gets solved when they are finally stretched to their optimal tension. If you find your strings constantly going out of tune, you might consider restringing with a high-quality (cost ⇔ quality) set.
Also, while you have your old strings off and before you put your new ones on, take the opportunity to clean your uke really thoroughly.

Humidity
Humidity is a measure of the amount of water vapour in the air. The wood used in ukuleles, although processed and cured, still absorbs and releases moisture. After all, wood is an organic material. Too high and too low humidity can both harm your ukulele. Keeping the right amount of moisture in your ukulele's wood in relation to the humidity is a must to keep it in top condition. Your ukulele should be stored in a place with 40% – 60% relative humidity. When there is too much humidity in the air, the wood tends to swell, the tuning keys and frets corrode quickly, glued joints loosen, the neck might bend. Heightened fret action and neck bending are the usual signs of swelling in ukuleles. When there is too little humidity in the air on the other hand, the wood gets dry. This leads to the shrinking of top and back of the uke, loosening the braces and causing fret buzzing due to the lowered fret action. When wood is deprived of moisture, it is much easier to crack and break it.
I would **not** consider (as was suggested on a uke blog I read recently) buying a hygrometer to monitor the humidity. You feel and respond to humid conditions much quicker than your uke. If the room you are storing your uke in feels hot, stuffy and humid, your uke will be absorbing moisture and going wrong. Being too dry is, in the UK especially, much less of a problem.

Bags versus Cases
If you travel for shows or gigs, it is smart to buy a hard-shell case with a latch that locks to protect your uke from possible accidents. Keeping your uke locked in a hard-shell case is the safest way to travel with your instrument whether on a plane, bus, train or even just your own car. Bags are always going to be cheaper but they don't compare favourably against a good case.

Take care of your uke. Properly cared for, it will last you long enough to save up for a new one.

Song Structure

Sooner or later you are going to want to write your own material or - at the very least - seriously tinker with somebody else's material.

I have a problem with a lot of "I wrote this" material. There seems to be a notion out there - not everywhere, admittedly - that songs written for the ukulele **need** to be funny. I suppose I hold George Formby partially responsible for this. Everything he sang (I don't know if he actually wrote any of it) had a comedic cast to it. There is no real reason why this **must** be the case but the "funny little ukulele" motif seems to be extremely durable.

So let's suppose you want to write (or tinker with) some music, serious or otherwise, for the ukulele. The first thing you are going to need is a tune[24].

There are plenty of sites on the internet which will give you all manner of simple chord progressions to get you off and running writing your own music. Now, I just used the term "chord progressions" without explaining it and this is going to need some adumbration. We met these earlier in the "Families of Chords" section. A chord's position in the family is denoted by a Roman numeral We use capitals for major chords, lower case for minors:

I	ii	iii	IV	V	vi
[C]	**[Dm]**	**[Em]**	**[F]**	**[G7]**	**[Am]**

In every case below, I'll be using chords from C Major, but you can, of course, use any key you want to use,

Two chord songs:
The easiest songs (you probably learned ukulele on these) have two chords...
[C] {four bars} [G7] {four bars} or [C] {two bars} [G7] {two bars}
Songs like "You Never Can Tell" (Chuck Berry) and "Dance The Night Away" (The Mavericks) fall into this category.
"That Was Your Mother" on the Graceland album (Paul Simon) uses [C] and [F]

Three chord songs:
There are millions of these! Often the structure is:
[C] [C] [F] [G7] or [C] [F] [G7] in a triple-time structure. Have a listen to "Twist And Shout" (The Beatles) to hear this in action.

An extension of this three chord structure is 12-bar blues.
Each chord in this sequence is one bar long:

12-Bar Blues: [C] [C] [C] [C] [F] [F] [C] [C] [G] [F] [C] [C]

Now, you can tinker on with this *ad infinitum*...

Try this: [C] [C7] [C] [C7] [F] [F7] [C] [C7] [G7] [F] [C7] [C]
And this: [C] [C] [C] [C] [Fm] [Fm] [C] [C] [G7] [Fm] [C] [C]

---

24 The tune trumps the lyrics in most cases. We remember Verdi and Puccini, not their librettists.

But you will get bored pretty quickly (it is 12-bar blues after all).

You can add a "turn around" in the 12th bar. Instead of the [C] to end, put in a [G7] and then you can start again.

Four chord songs
In the late 50's & 60's there were a lot of songs that had a simple [C] [Am] [F] [G7] theme running through them and you might do a lot worse than make this a starting point for your *opus magnus*. This is called the **I–vi–IV-V Progression** and Wikipedia has an ever-growing list of these songs.

If you are going to use as well-known sequence like this, you might like to push it into keys that are less familiar to you. As you struggle with the chords you will probably come up with some chord progressions that you hadn't initially thought of.

Try these:

C major:	[C]	[Am]	[F]	[G7]
E major:	[E]	[C#m]	[A]	[B7]
G major	[G]	[Em]	[C]	[D7]

You might like to use what is called the **I–vi–ii–V Progression**. Starting with [C] this becomes [C] [Am] [Dm] [G7]. You can see that the [F] chord has been replaced by its relative minor: [F] $\Longrightarrow$ [Dm]. Again, the list of this type of song is very long.

Some interesting chord progressions come about when you throw in a chord that nobody was quite expecting. Don't be too ambitious here, but there are notes lurking in little-used chords that might be of some use. For example, if you are singing the **note** C you will feel happy with [C] and [Am] and [F] to go with that. But what about [Fm] and/or [Ab]? They both contain C and might be a welcome change from the predictable.

Five chord songs
There are lots of these and a good percentage use the **I–V–vi–iii–IV Progression** which is [C] [G] [Am] [Em] [F] in the C major chords.

If you want to get into these progressions in a big way there is an excellent website:

https://www.hooktheory.com/theorytab/common-chord-progressions

Plagiarism/Recycling
You also might like to delve back into the repertoire of classical music for inspiration. For example, the extremely well-known "Canon in D Major" (Pachelbel) which has the chord sequence:

Canon in D major: [D] [A] [Bm] [F#m] [G] [D] [G] [A] *{then repeat}*

You can do a LOT with this. Up the tempo, change the key, change the beat; whatever you want.

Indeed, you could do this with any number of classics. You wouldn't be the first! Billy Joel used Beethoven's "Sonata Pathétique", Ralph McTell and the Beach Boys

both used Bach's "Jesu Joy of Man's Desiring" to make very different songs, and Paul Simon purloined Bach's "St Matthew's Passion" for his "American Tune". There are plenty of other examples. It isn't quite plagiarism. More like recycling.

Let's assume that you have a tune so we can move on.

When it comes to lyrics we are blessed in the English language by the range, number, variety and malleability of the words in our dictionary. We have a huge range to choose from. But how to get started? One technique is to take a set of lyrics from elsewhere and rewrite them in your own words. Keep the lyric patterns (initially) and stick to the same theme. You'll find that, pretty soon, you will have a song lyric that looks quite different from where you started. Polish it up, give it your style, add your tune and {gasp} you have your own song. And it needn't be a funny little ukulele song.

When you are happy with what you have written, learn how to perform it. Let's face it, nobody in the world is going to do **your** song as well as **you**. Listen to some early Bob Dylan masterpieces. They are so rough! But brilliant. I wouldn't put it on YouTube straight away. Perform it at a few "open mic" sessions first. There may be several things you would want to tweak before releasing it on an unsuspecting world. Audiences are usually full of constructive critics. They will tell you what they like and don't like and - perhaps most important - how you could make it better.

Whatever you do, whatever you produce, enjoy doing it.

Joining A Uke Group

There are ukulele groups all over the UK, USA, Canada, Australia... Wherever.

The best/fastest way to find one near you is to get on to Google and type your area and "ukulele group". This will get you some results.

Alternatively, information is available at:

https://www.gotaukulele.com/p/ukulele-clubs-and-societies.html

http://ukulelehunt.com/2010/03/10/ukulele-clubs-and-groups-in-the-uk-and-ireland-2/

https://ukulele.social/LocalGroups

https://www.ukulelemusicinfo.com/ukulele-clubs-and-societies/

Some groups have entry standards. Most don't. Enthusiasm counts as highly as talent. A good singing voice is often more useful than a good playing technique.

Usually there is a fee to join the group and a weekly fee to be paid for the sessions you go to. From what I can see around the UK, this won't bankrupt you. The group I am part of charges £5.00 as an annual subscription and £2.00 per weekly session. So, for about £100 a year I get a great deal.

If you are an absolute beginner, it might be worth getting some tuition before joining a group. Some groups have a teaching function but most don't.

Whatever group you join, have fun.

When you have joined your group you will quickly come to the realisation that the "World Of The Ukulele" is quite massive. Before long you'll be at festivals and concerts. It really is a lifestyle choice.

Another Rule #1: Enjoy!

Contact Details

Well, that's it. I hope that **some** of this has been useful.
If you are a standard GCEA uke player, look for the book on that and bass players will need their own book. Get in touch if you would like either.

Dr John A Timney
johnatimney@icloud.com