University of Florida Performing Arts

presents

The Ukulele Orchestra of Great Britain

Sunday, October 21, 2012, 7:30 p.m.

University Auditorium
The Ukulele Orchestra of Great Britain

David Suich
Peter Brooke Turner
Hester Goodman
George Hinchliffe
Kitty Lux
Richie Williams
Will Grove-White
Jonty Bankes

The program will be announced from the stage.
There will be one 15-minute intermission.

Program Notes

The Ukulele Orchestra of Great Britain participation piece

Relentlessly In C was written as a response to a certain style of “American minimalism,” often cited as the beginnings of techno, house music, repetitive beats and club or dance music, among other trends.

In 1969 Terry Riley (http://terryriley.net/) released an album containing his own composition (In C) which came to be seen as a key work, and hugely influential. Although it was called “In C” the tonality of the piece changes in a multilayered flow.

In 1989 The Ukulele Orchestra of Great Britain recorded a quite different and simpler work in “homage” to Terry Riley’s piece. This was broadcast by BBC Radio in 1989. It has been re-broadcast several times including on BBC 6, on Sept. 20, 2010.

Whereas Riley’s piece incorporates various tonalities, the ukulele orchestra piece stays “relentlessly in C,” and is arguably therefore much more “minimalist” than Riley’s piece. The Ukulele Orchestra hopes that nevertheless the performance possibilities of this music offer some amusement and interest to ukulele players and others.
Performance Notes

Relentlessly In C

This piece is about everybody playing something different and improvising within a set structure.

The piece starts and ends with a single player playing the note of C repeatedly (as in section three in the score). This player plays this continuously (relentlessly as it were) throughout the piece. If you get lost at any stage, you can just join in playing this figure.

All performers play from the same sheet of 19 melodic patterns played in sequence. Any number of instruments can play. (Singers could also take part using vowel or consonant sounds.)

The patterns are to be played consecutively. Each pattern to be repeated at the discretion of the performer before proceeding to the next pattern on the page.

The piece hinges on the unpredictable, improvisatory quality which each performer’s choice brings. As the performers work through the patterns, the different combinations make the piece different each time it is performed.

If the performers listen to each other, they will be able to decide when it seems appropriate to repeat a section, to re-repeat a section, or to move to the next section, or indeed, to stay silent for a time.

With sensitivity from all the performers, the performance will proceed with many different combinations of melodic patterns played simultaneously, rather than all the performers rushing on to the next section. Increases and decreases in loudness will probably develop organically. Listen to and be sensitive to these. Cues may be given from the stage to encourage these volume dynamics.

Perhaps the patterns will combine and overlap in ways which are not possible to notate, in polyrhythmic combinations, echoing each other.

Try to stay on a pattern for long enough to make interesting combinations with the other patterns being played. The patterns themselves are simple. It is the combination and gradual change which can make the piece interesting. But, don’t race ahead, or lag behind too much, or the piece could last too long.

Play the rhythms accurately. Try rehearsing them with others in unison first, before attempting the combination of elements. There are audio clips of each section on the website to help.

If a pattern is too hard for you to play, miss it out.

There are two sections which are not repeated: the introduction and section 11. These sections are thus played once only, unlike all the other sections.

When all the performers are at the stage of repeating section 10, a cue will be given for section 11 to begin, after which the repeating process begins again with section 12.

Again, when all the performers are at the stage of repeating section 19, a cue will be given for the piece to end.

Have confidence in what you’re playing.

Listen to what other people are playing.

Don’t rush.
Relentlessly In C

George Hinchliffe © 1989
(The Ukulele Orchestra of Great Britain)

One. Play once only as an intro

Relentlessly "In C"

Two

Three

Four

Five

Six

Seven

Eight

Nine

Ten

Eleven. Play this once.
Wait for cue when everyone is playing Ten.

G

C

V.S.
About The Ukulele Orchestra of Great Britain

The Ukulele Orchestra of Great Britain is a touring musical group which has been delighting audiences, raising the roof, selling out performances and receiving standing ovations since 1985; a group of “all-singing, all strumming” ukulele players that has been active for 27 years, using instruments bought for loose change, which holds that all genres of music are available for reinterpretation as long as they are played on the ukulele. It is owned and directed by the founders and performers, George Hinchliffe and Kitty Lux. Current members also include founding performers David Suich and Richie Williams; Will Grove-White and Hester Goodman (performing with the orchestra since 1990 to date); Jonty Bankes (1992 to date); and Peter Brooke Turner (1995 to date).

The orchestra is celebrated for its rapport with audiences and eliciting a joyous feel-good reaction. A description of the concert’s basis sounds astoundingly simple: eight performers, eight instruments, eight voices, (no gimmicks, no stage set, props or scenery, no fireworks, no special effects, no light show, no dancers, no laptops, no samples). And yet, as millions have enthused over the years, the orchestra tears the house down with music, songs, catchy, emotive, stomping and toe tapping tunes, banter and wit and inexplicably draws the audience in, to a joyous world beyond the conflicts of musical genre or the difference between a serious concert and comedy. Many audience members have attested to the fact that prior to the show, their expectations were slight, and that the actual enjoyment factor in the ukes’ show caused an immense and exponentially increasing burst of goodwill and joy. It is not uncommon for a ‘convert’ to bring friends (ukulele orchestra virgins) along to a show, not telling them what they will be seeing, so that part of the enjoyment for the ‘convert’ is seeing the upwelling and growing happiness in the spirit of the ‘ukulele orchestra virgins’ as they experience a sequence of “Ah Ha” moments and find, through their own senses, the magic of the “impossible-to-verbalize” Ukulele Orchestra Appeal.

The orchestra walks on stage, bows, and somehow instantly communicates to the audience that they are in safe, responsible, friendly and entertaining hands, being totally in command of the art and craft, and mastery of the stage. The audience is made to feel completely at home, perhaps with an irreverent joke, but by then the orchestra is already racing through a solid-as-a-rock comfortingly hot melody, perhaps an old jazz or country standard. This could be followed up, once the audience think they know what the show will be all about, by a gently “wrong footing” joke, as the show changes direction and subverts expectations. But before that has taken hold, we’re already listening to a stomping rock song, and by then, the tide of the unexpected elements is in full flow: humor, cynical and witty comments or changes of direction, classical music, punk classics, a deconstruction of the language of music and the conventions of performance and
pop. At this point, the audience will sit back and allow the orchestra to take the show where they will — all prior assumptions forgotten, as they enjoy the pure entertainment of what the UK Independent called “the best musical entertainment in the country.”

Since the first sold-out concert in 1985 “The Ukes” or the “UOGB” as fans know the orchestra, have released many CDs, albums and DVDs, appeared on TV and radio in many countries, and toured the world during approximately 9,000 days and nights of ukulele action. Though happy to work with external promoters, agents and other media companies, the “UOGB” is a trail-blazer of the currently fashionable business model of organizing all its own affairs, with a healthy schedule of recording, production, licensing, agency and concert promotion and management activities. The orchestra is independent, anarchic, funny, virtuosic, thought-provoking and mind blowing. It has “sixteen-handedly changed the face of the ukulele world.”

The current version of the UOGB’s “Original” show brings the audience a “genre-crashing” ride through popular music; a funny, virtuosic, twanging, awesome, foot-stomping obituary of rock and roll, and melodious light entertainment in a collision of post-punk performance and toe-tapping oldies. It is a rhythm, joyous, thought-provoking journey through songs you’ve heard, songs you’ve forgotten, songs you’ve never heard, and songs you perhaps wish you hadn’t encountered, all transformed into a lively, headlong stream of transcendent sounds, musical delight and warm personality featuring only the ‘bonsai guitar™’ and a menagerie of voices.

The individual performers have varied backgrounds but a complementary expertise, featuring strong individual voices and instrumental abilities. Their different perspectives and styles coexist in one varied yet harmonious show as they engage with the audience through speech, song and ukulele playing. The effect of encountering the orchestra’s performers is of eight refugees exiled from other diverse and completely contrasting musical groups, all paradoxically coexisting on the same stage; a gang of misfits, a troupe of mismatched pick-n-mix musicians, who somehow work together like clockwork. As though we are seeing Yogi Bear, Sherlock Holmes, Robin Hood, a street hustler, a Noble Lord, Peter Pan, Joan of Arc and Popeye the Sailorman on stage together. Icons and archetypes, cartoons and timeless figures. Yet audiences overwhelmingly relate to the human scale of the UOGB show, the sheer entertainment value, the enjoyment of music and performance, and the diverse range of material the show consists of. Zooming from Tchaikovsky to Nirvana via Otis Reading, to current anthems via 1960s beat instrumentals and duelling banjo-style picking, taking in film themes and Spaghetti Western soundtracks, everyone has a good time with the Ukulele Orchestra.

Using instruments ranging from the very small to the very large, in high and low registers, whether playing intricate melodies, simple tunes, or complex chords (and let’s not forget that with eight performers and thus 16 hands, eight voices and with four strings on each instrument, up to 32 instrumental notes and eight vocal notes can be sounded simultaneously), the orchestra, sitting in chamber group format and dressed in formal evening wear (regardless of the time of day or the venue, whether Glastonbury Festival or Carnegie Hall), uses the limitations of the instrument to create a musical freedom as it reveals unsuspected musical insights. Both the beauty and the vacuity of popular and highbrow music are highlighted, the pompous and the trivial, the moving and the amusing. Sometimes a foolish song can touch an audience more than high art; sometimes music that takes itself too seriously is revealed to be hilarious. As the orchestra’s publicity states: “You may never think about music in the same way once you’ve been exposed to the ukes’ deprived musicology,” as “with instruments bought for loose change,” on their “world tour with only hand luggage,” they bring you “one plucking thing after another.”

The orchestra has inspired thousands of people to take up the ukulele, and to reconnect with music from a fun-orientated perspective. People who had thought they had no musical talent have been moved to begin learning the ukulele and to sing, and to find that musical enjoyment can be for everyone. While a proportion
of the UOGB audience are ukulele enthusiasts who recognize the valuable proselytizing efforts of the orchestra, most of the audiences simply are attracted to the UOGB show as entertainment. Having said that, it is a surprising fact that sales of ukuleles have now surpassed those of guitars; and many music shop owners have contacted the UOGB to say: “thank you” for turning their town on to ukuleles, as sales have gone “through the roof” after a ukes concert. Music shop proprietors have reported what their customers have said: “some performers make their virtuosity look difficult; the effect of witnessing their performance is to make you throw your instrument away in despair, whereas the Ukulele Orchestra make it look easy and fun, inspiring everyone to buy a ukulele and try it for themselves.” The reality of course, is that though the instrument is relatively easy to get a tune out of, many hours of practice are required to play with virtuosity, as with any instrument. But isn’t this the right way to approach things, enthusiasm and inspiration first, with the theory and science and craft following on, through practice, study, hard work and application, when it is required? Without the inspiration and the vision of the benefits, would any of us work at anything?

Many teachers and professional musicians have communicated with the orchestra, grateful for signposts in how to re-frame their approach to music. It is easy to be jaded and bored with a job; the UOGB show how music can be fun and competent, professional yet joyous. Educators have held the UOGB up as an example of how to play music, to retain the playful spirit even while making music as full-time “work.” Sometimes one hears that someone “doesn’t know the first thing about music.” The orchestra points out that it is possible to know the second, third, fourth, things about music, but to literally not know “the first thing about music” (TM), i.e. that it needs to be fun, playful, imbued with the life spirit. So we can say with confidence that the Ukulele Orchestra does know the “first thing about music.”

The Ukulele Orchestra started off as “a bit of fun” (which is not at all the same thing as saying that it started as a joke). After all, music should be playful; we play music, rather than “work” it. The first gig, intended as a one-off was an instant sell out and led to national radio, TV, album recordings and international tours. Since then the orchestra has given thousands of concerts, TV and radio appearances all over the world. There have been tours in England, Scotland, Northern Ireland, Eire, Wales, France, Germany, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, The Netherlands, Belgium, America, Canada, New Zealand, Slovenia, Switzerland, Japan, Czech Republic, Monaco, Spain, Poland, Estonia, Italy, Australia and current plans for China and the North Pole. Broadcasts have been made on six continents.

The orchestra has spawned many imitators. In 1985 when the ukes began, the term “Ukulele Orchestra” could have sounded ironic, as one might hear “The Sahara Desert Sub-Aqua Club.” Over time, the term has become the default label for a group of ukulele players, and indeed the Orchestra can be seen to have popularized the trend for playing ukuleles in groups. Many clubs and ukulele societies exist in many countries now, and the conception of the ukulele as suitable for ensemble-playing, or as a ‘consort’ or as a social activity seems to have been derived from the Ukulele Orchestra. There are now literally thousands of ukulele groups, many of which call themselves Ukulele Orchestras. Some of these are conscious tributes to the UOGB, some have outstanding merit in their own right, while some merely aspire to pass themselves off as the original, fooling some of the people, some of the time. Certainly, a large part of the energy in the current ukulele wave is derived from the oldest and best Ukulele Orchestra; The Ukulele Orchestra of Great Britain.

Beginning in 2012 a wide ranging Ukulele Orchestra tour is underway. This includes the U.K., France, Germany, Sweden, Finland, Estonia, Norway, America, Australia, New Zealand, China, Japan and more.

From the North Pole to Sydney Opera House, via Carnegie hall and Royal Albert Hall (where they’ve already had sold-out concerts), The Ukes of GB (TM) are touring planet Earth with their funny, stomping, toe-tapping, all singing all plucking obituary of rock and roll and melodious light entertainment.
Biographies

David Suich (the long-haired one), is a founder member of the Ukes, has competed at the Glastonbury Festival. You might find him singing *Silver Machine* (Hawkwind) with the Ukes.

Peter Brooke Turner is possibly the tallest ukulele player in the world, has been a Eurovision Song Contest finalist and sings *Smells Like Teen Spirit* (Nirvana) with the ukes.

Hester Goodman was a member of the Hairy Marys, an all female Irish-dance comedy theatre company, and can be heard singing *Teenage Dirtbag* with the Ukes.

George Hinchliffe, founder and director, has played the ukulele since he was 8 and has written a ukulele opera titled *Dreamspiel*.

Kitty Lux, is a founder and director of the UOGB. Her previous bands include Sheeny and the Goys and Really.

Richie Williams, a founder member, has played guitar with many Motown artists and soul reviews.

Will Grove-White has made award-winning movies and TV productions. He had to obtain permission from his head teacher in order to play his first gig with the UOGB.

Jonty Bankes has played bass for many major rock and blues musicians and is a talented whistler.

Ukulelescope

The Ukulele Orchestra of Great Britain collaborated with the BFI (British Film Institute) National Archive to find a host of unusual and little seen short films from the early days of silent film. The Orchestra has added special music written by George and Hester, and a few re-arranged classic pieces of music, and produced a delightfully eclectic evening of music, film, comedy and pathos. This has been performed all over the world to acclaim from film festivals and audiences. *Ukulelescope* was debuted at Slapstick 09 in Bristol as part of the re-opening season at the Bristol Old Vic Theatre. It was an instant sell-out, and was described by the BFI as “a triumph.”

Dreamspiel

The Ukulele Orchestra of Great Britain has produced its very own ukulele opera, which had its debut in London, with lyrics by Michelle Carter, playwright from San Francisco. This is based on dream diaries from 1930s Germany. The songs and dream images are reminiscent of “Beckett, Orwell and Gunter Grass before *Endgame*, 1984, or *The Tin Drum* were ever written,” and are variously “painful, farcical, satirical and theatrical.” Combined with the individuality and diversity of the Ukes, “an audience connects with political realities of ordinary life; its fears, prejudices and ecstasies.”

Ukulele Orchestra music has been used in films, TV, advertisements, plays and commercials, and online video clips have been watched many millions of times. Collaborators with the Ukulele Orchestra have included Madness, The Kaiser Chiefs, The Ministry of Sound and Yusuf Islam (Cat Stevens).

www.ukuleleorchestra.com


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