

## ALL ABOUT UKULELES

*(Keith Kennard, January 2018)*

I won't bore you with the history of the ukulele (uke for short) – you can Google that for yourself. In fact, most of what follows can be found quite easily but just to be helpful because we're like that....

Ukes usually have 4 strings (yes there are 5, 6, 7 or 8 string versions but don't worry about these custom models played by the experts), usually fluorocarbon filament and come in 3 main sizes soprano (the smallest), concert (bit bigger) and tenor (the largest) – these are all tuned GCEA (from your chin down towards your feet). So, the chords from the smallest to the largest are interchangeable. Apart from the body size being different so also are the neck widths – the neck is the bit you press down to hold a chord.

Going off at a tangent, what is a chord I hear you ask, well, it's a series of notes played at the same time. So if you strum more than one string you're making a chord. If you only play one string its called picking and this is for the big kids – don't worry about it (I was going to say don't fret but that would confuse you).

The neck width matters if you've got any finger joint or wrist issues as the bigger necks can make it easier to hold a simple chord (conversely it might also make it harder to hold a more

complex chord). The classic chord sound is the soprano and the concert sounds very similar. The tenor sounds a bit different.

At this point I should also tell you that there is a tiny model called a sopranino which looks like a toy but must be incredibly hard to play and is tuned the same as the others.

There is also a baritone which is tuned more like a 4 string guitar; and a bass uke which is tuned, well, like a bass.

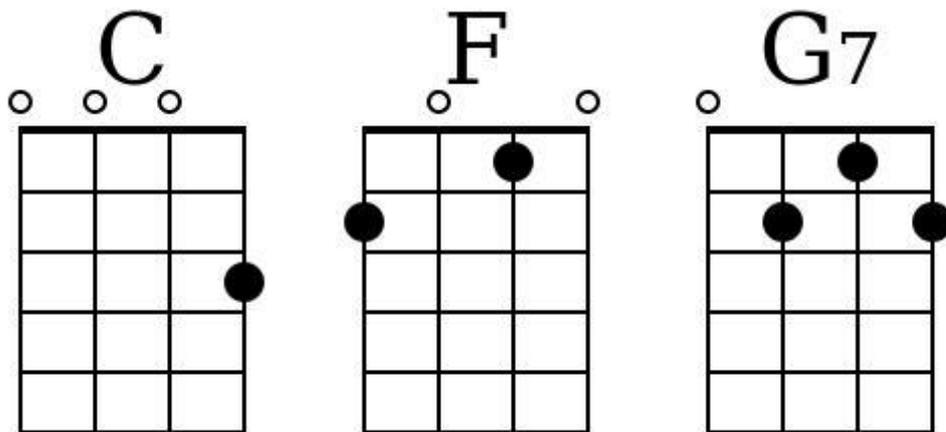
There is also a resonator ukulele – a uke with a resonator body (a resonator is the sort of thing Mark Knopfler used on Brothers in Arms); and a banjo ukulele (banjolele) which is a hybrid banjo body with a ukulele neck. The banjolele was popularised by George Formby and many people mistakenly think that this is what you mean when you confess “I play ukulele”, they’ll say “When I’m Cleaning Windows” – this is no longer funny!

So you want to play ukulele? You can play thousands of songs with 3 chords in the same key. Status Quo made a career out of this and All@C are trying to emulate them.

If you learn C, F and G7 you are there!

The easiest ukulele chord for the beginner is C which looks like this (the left hand vertical line is the string nearest your chin and the right hand nearest your feet, the horizontal lines are the frets and the bold one is the one nearest the tuning bits, this is

called the Nut). All chords are shown for right handed players, left handed versions are available on request (the writer is also left handed), then learn F and thirdly G7



*Our thanks to Phil Doleman ([www.phildoleman.co.uk](http://www.phildoleman.co.uk)) for permission to use these chord charts*

These 3 chords are all in the same key – whether you can sing in this key is another matter but it doesn't deter hundreds of ukers from playing in one key and singing in another – mostly on Facebook and YouTube.

The thing with ukers is, we're passionate about playing ukulele but are, for the most part, rank amateurs who want others to join our ranks. So don't let your singing abilities or lack thereof deter you – you'd be welcomed.

If you need to know more ask.

Or check out any number of Facebook or YouTube tutors:

The Ukulele Teacher is very good: he's English but lives in America; he also sings like you might do if you're new to singing, which is comforting:

<https://www.youtube.com/user/TheUkuleleTeacher>

Cynthia Lin gets lots of good reviews for her easy teaching style too:

<https://www.facebook.com/cynthialinmusic/>

Nearer to home Phil Doleman is brilliant and is happy to answer your questions (believe me, I know):

<https://www.facebook.com/phil.doleman>

Or better still get a book, old fashioned I know but Ukulele for Dummies is very comprehensive and starts at the basics, with a book you can work at your own pace; I've only dipped into it – I'm slow!

You can buy ukes from LIDL, Aldi or Amazon and you get what you get. It might be virtually unplayable, the tuners might not work etc etc but for £20 or so, it might at least tell you whether you feel comfortable. The best idea is to go to a music shop (while they still exist). Now, they might prefer guitars and drums or pianos BUT they might actually have ukes that you can handle, feel, try for comfort. The next and

best alternative is a specialist ukulele store; now it's true that there aren't many and they're not always located where you want them but, and it's a big but, tell them you're a beginner (or improver, or whatever stage you're at) and they'll HELP YOU. Yes, they want to make a sale but they want you to make the right purchase because then you'll possibly come back for more (ukes, strings, straps, tuners, stands etc). By the way, these peripherals you can buy online, but check the reviews and/or suitability for your size of instrument etc.

I have been to the Southern Ukulele Store in Bournemouth (didn't buy) but did buy from them a ukulele (2<sup>nd</sup> hand, sorry pre-used uke and online from their shop) which they set up for me – and they're a great bunch of uke-friendly folk:

<https://www.southernukulelestore.co.uk/about-us/>

I have also made purchases from Matt Warnes at World of Ukes (Carlisle) – not only does he sell ukes and uke-related products but he is also a Member of The League of Ukulele Gentlemen, a professional uke trio so not only does he know what he's doing but he's a thoroughly nice bloke (he appears to be about 9 feet tall); he also publishes the only UK based Uke Magazine which you can only buy direct from him (or via Amazon if you must); it's a bargain:

<http://worldofukes.co.uk/>

If you need to check an honest, unbiased review for a proposed purchase you can't go wrong with Barry Maz of Gotaukulele.

<https://www.gotaukulele.com/>

If he's not reviewed it he'll be happy to help – he also runs a Facebook Ukulele Group where others might be able to help you. In fact, Facebook is brilliant even if you only use it to check uke-related topics, groups, find music for songs you like, etc etc.

The best local store for ukes is Musicroom at Exeter – they have a great selection to suit all budgets.

There is an affliction called Ukulele Acquisition Syndrome (UAS), there is no cure but it's cheaper and less space consuming than motor bikes, cars or even guitars. Symptoms include the urge to get a different sized instrument, banjolele or resonator, or more than 4 strings - always for the different sound.

If you want to know how many ukes you need the answer is always one more!

Welcome to the world of All@C.