

Charleston Hot Shots



Ukulele Class 1

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History

The 'ukulele has been an icon of Hawaiian music for over 120 years, but where did it come from? The original 'ukuleles were a combination of different instruments from the Iberian Peninsula of Europe brought to Hawaii along with plantation workers in the 1880s. It combined elements from several different instruments; the braguinha, the rajão, and the cavaquinho.

The Cavaquinho looks like a little guitar with four strings. The Portuguese sailors brought their cavaquinhos on their travels in the 15th and 16th centuries spreading the instrument to other cultures influencing the Maderia Braguinha, Brazilian Cavaquinho, and the Ukulele in Hawaii. The Rajão, also from Madeira, has 5 strings and its D-G-C-E-A tuning is thought to be the root of modern 'Ukulele tuning. Today's Hawaiian soprano Ukulele has 4 strings just as the Braguinha but is tuned GCEA just as the Rajão.



Cavaquinho

Braguinha

Rajão

'Ukulele

One uke player on a trip to Portugal summed it up by saying "They grabbed a rajão and strummed it for me..... Musically, the rajão and the ukulele are of one piece. The size alone came from the father, the braguinha."

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Where the Ukulele got it's name

When the Ravenscrag arrived in Honolulu on the afternoon of August 23, 1879, it was carrying 419 Portuguese immigrants from the island of Madeira to work in the sugar cane fields. It had been a long and hard journey of over 4 months and some 15,000 miles. In celebration of their arrival, Joao Fernandes borrowed his friend's braguinha, jumped off the ship, and started playing folks songs from his native land on the wharf. The Hawaiians who came down to the dock were very impressed at the speed of this musicians' fingers as they danced across the fingerboard and they called the instrument "ukulele", which translates into English as "jumping flea". You see, that was the image conjured up by those flying fingers.

At least that's one of the stories about the origin of the name "ukulele". Typical to much of Hawaiian history, there are several accounts of how the ukulele got it's name. Queen Lili'uokalani thought it came from the Hawaiian words for "the gift that came here", or "uku" (gift or reward) and "lele" (to come). Another legend says the instrument was originally called "ukeke lele" or "dancing ukeke" (ukeke being the Hawaiian's three stringed musical bow). The name, being mispronounced over the years, became "ukulele".

Another theory comes from a story about Edward Purvis, an English army officer and the Assistant Chamberlain to the court of King David Kalakaua, who was very adept at playing the braguinha. Since he was small and sprightly, the rather large Hawaiians nicknamed him "ukulele", the whole "jumping flea" thing all over again.

Still another version of the origin of the word "ukulele" is attributed to Gabriel Davian and Judge W. L. Wilcox, who was a member of a well-known island family. According to the story, the two men were in attendance at a housewarming party at the Wilcox home in Kahili, where Davian was playing an 'ukulele he had made himself. When one of the guests asked what it was called, Davian jokingly replied that, judging from the way one "scratched at it," it was a "jumping flea". Wilcox, who was fluent in Hawaiian, was asked for the Hawaiian translation and is supposed to have answered, "'Ukulele!".

Over the years, the "jumping flea" legend, the one where Joao Fernandes' fingers were jumping like fleas over the fingerboard, has become the most accepted, probably because that is the coolest story and Hawaiians just love a cool story.

Whatever its origin, the name emerged quickly: the earliest use of the word 'ukulele I have seen in print dates back to 1889.

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The Ukulele becomes Popular

The Hawaiian people took to the ukulele very fast and within 10 years it had become Hawaii's most popular instrument. Much of this can be attributed to Joao Fernandes, the original fellow who jumped off the boat playing his home town folk songs. The story goes that he spent most of his time walking around Honolulu playing his ukulele, spending so much time at this, in fact, that his wife complained! The Hawaiians, who had by now become familiar with the sounds of guitars and other stringed instruments, liked what they heard. They became not only listeners, but students as well. Additionally, the ukulele was easy to learn to play and very portable.



Joao Fernandes

Also thanks to Fernandes, King David Kalakaua heard the wonderful music from this small instrument and learned to play it. Fernandes recalled how he and his friends would go to the king's bungalow where there were "plenny kanakas (Hawaiians), much music, much hula, much kaukau (food), and much drink. All time plenny drink and King Kalakaua, he pay for all." The king designed and played his own instruments, learning from Augusto Dias, at whose shop he was a frequent visitor. He was one of Dias' most ardent patrons and even gave him permission to use the royal seal on every ukulele he made.

Besides Kalakaua, other noble ali'i who played the ukulele were Queen Emma, Queen Lili'uokalani, Prince Leleiohoku, and Princess Likelike. With such royal involvement, it was inevitable that the ukulele would be accepted by the people, so much so that it long ago lost whatever royal aura it may have had and has indeed become the "people's instrument". By the late 19th Century, every Hawaiian music lover was strumming his own ukulele - from taro farmers to fishermen as well as Kings and Queens.



The Hawaiian Quintet, circa 1915

Since the popularity of the ukulele depended on them being around for everybody, manufacturing ukuleles was an important element in it's success story. Eventually, special wood cutting and wood shaping machines were developed to make ukuleles, but the early process of making them was a painstaking art, requiring many hours of work and all hand-made. How many ukuleles were made this way is unknown, but it would appear that the number was not great until the 1910s when productivity accelerated through the use of more modern equipment. The cost of a ukulele at this time was between \$3 and \$5, a considerable sum when you consider many people in those days only made \$5 per month. Many people who could not afford a ukulele made their own out of coconut shell halves, cigar boxes, and other unusual material.

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The Waikiki Beach Boys



Bing Crosby stummin' away with Waikiki Beachboys from left)Pua Kealoha, Chick Daniels, and Joe Minor.

No one epitomized the Hawaiian lifestyle more than the Waikiki beachboys. These men have lived and worked on the Beach at Waikiki from the early part of this century to the present day. But the heyday of the beachboy was the 1920s and 1930s, when Hawaii was still a far off dream for most and the Beach at Waikiki represented a place of mystery and romance. Just the word beachboy conjures up the romantic past: a luxurious pink hotel; tandem surfing on huge, koa-wood boards; nicknames like Splash, Chick, Duke, Turkey Love, and Steamboat; and ukulele music playing late into the night under a full moon. This all happened at a beach once described as "curving in a gentle, flesh-covered arc toward Diamond Head".

Many of the Waikiki beachboys were excellent musicians and composers, including Melvin Paoa, Squeeze Kamana, Pua Kealoha, Chick Daniels and Splash and Freckles Lyons. Legendary beachboy parties were held in the 1920s at the Moana pier (which jugged out from the beach at the Moana Hotel), where from sundown to sunup the beachboys would strum their ukuleles and sing Hawaiian songs.



During the filming of Bird of Paradise in 1931, beachboy Chick Daniels entertains movie stars Joel McCrea and Dolores Del Rio.



Beachboy Panama Dave Baptiste and Mickey Rooney strum away in front of the Royal Hawaiian Hotel.

**More Uke
History Next
Class!!**

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Which First Uke

Ukuleles roughly fall into three pricing categories. Generally the inexpensive ukuleles will sound quieter, not as balanced, and may not be as accurate sounding (intonation) as a more expensive ukulele. Once you reach a certain threshold you are paying for figured woods and blig, not improved sound.

In general, Wooden stringed instruments made out of all solid woods sound louder and livelier, in all, much better, than ones made out of composites like ply. While on the other hand composites are much less prone to splitting and warping in harsh conditions and the quieter sound may be a benefit in some situations.

There are also specialty ukuleles made of various non wood materials like plastic, composites, carbon fiber(Outdoor ukuleles, Flea, Fluke, Blackbird). They range from \$100 – over \$2,000

So in order of quality

1. Low \$ - Composite \$19-\$100 All laminates back, sides, top(mahogany plywood).
2. Mid \$ - Solid Top \$100-\$170 Laminate sides and back and a solid wood top.
3. High\$ - All Solid \$179 up no laminates on top, bottom, sides.

Some inexpensive starter composite plywood name brand ukes include, Makala Dolphin Soprano, Lanikai LU-21 Soprano, Kala KA-T Mahogany Tenor and Ohana Concert C-10

Online Ukulele Sales Mims Ukuleles – Sets up each of her ukuleles. Great customer service, very responsive. <http://stores.ebay.com/Mims-Ukes>

Local Ukulele Sales Shem Creek Music – Advertises the Largest Selection of Ukes in SC 423-A W. Coleman Blvd. Mount Pleasant, SC 29464 (843) 884-1346

Tuners - Geared versus Pegs Peg tuners are harder to tune with but are much lighter. Geared tuners are easier but can weigh the head down.



Peg Tuners



Gear Tuners – No adjustments needed

Peg tuners have to be adjusted. The screw in the middle of the knob has to be tight enough (Clockwise) to keep the string tension from turning the tuner and loose enough to allow you to turn the knob by hand.

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How to Hold the Uke



1. Hold the uke underneath your arm as shown

2. Index finger strumming ----->



Note that the uke is cradled by the right arm - it is also squished between your wrist/forearm and body. The index finger of the right hand is extended, and is used to **strum the strings, right at the place where the neck of the ukulele meets the body**. Guitar players want to strum near the hole - don't. Part of the nature of the ukulele's sound come from the strings being strummed way up there - right in the middle of the part that will be vibrating.

The fingernail of the index finger faces the ground, so that the back of the nail strums the strings on the way down, then the tip of the finger and nail strum on the way back up.

The ukulele is held high on your body - anyone who held a guitar up so high would look foolish. This position allows you to partly hold the uke up in the crook of your elbow. It also helps you to hear the ukulele while you are singing, when it is closer to your head. Your right forearm should point right up the uke's neck.

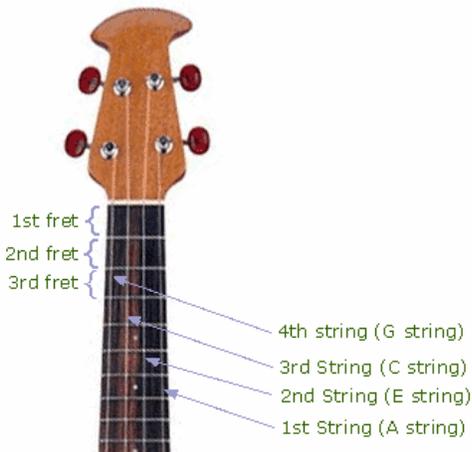
If you are holding the uke properly, you should be able to take either hand away and have the uke stay where it is. That's easy enough for the left hand - just grab the neck between the heel of your hand and your fingers, as though you're making a chord. It's a little trickier for the right hand - you have to keep the whole hand free for strumming, so you have to get used to sort of cradling/squishing it in there.

Give it a try. It's worth getting used to hanging on with just the right arm (not the hand!), otherwise when you are playing songs, the uke will keep catching you off guard by slipping, and breaking your concentration.

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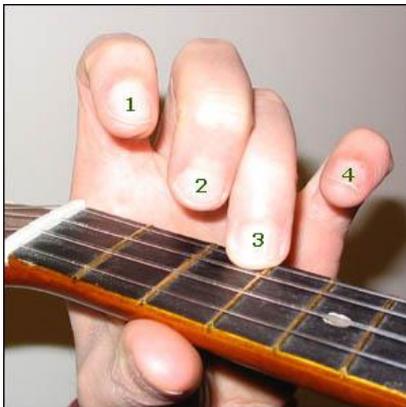
More Uke Terminology

If you want to be a cool ukulele player, you definitely have to learn how to talk the talk! Because we ukulelists are a little different, the strings are numbered from the bottom up, if you are holding the uke in a normal playing position (this is the numbered the same way as the guitar, actually). So, the first string is actually the one closest to the floor, and the fourth string is the one closest to your nose (assuming your nose is where it should be). Each string also has a letter name, taken from the musical note that sounds when you play that string with no finger pressing down on it. The letter names, from the 1st to 4th strings, are: G, C, E, A (maybe "George Clooney Eats Acorns" will help you remember?). This diagram should make it all clear:



We also have a confusing little system for telling you where to place your fingers. We will say things like "put your finger on the 1st fret", when what we really mean is put your finger immediately beside the fret, using [proper finger position](#). If you put it *right* on the fret, you would be touching the vibrating part of the string, and you would produce a sort of muffled, "dampened" sound, instead of a nice clear ringing one.

Like the strings, the fingers also have numbers for easy reference. The index is finger 1, the middle finger is 2, the ring finger is 3 and the little pinky finger is 4, like so:



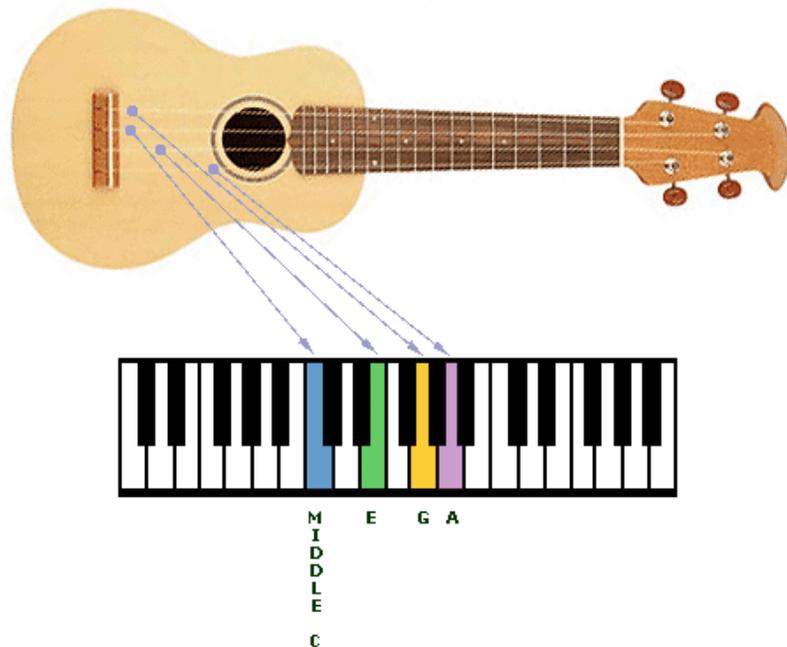
So, putting all the essential information in the above picture into words, we would say the third finger is on the third fret of the 1st string (or "A" string). Got it ???

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How to Tune a Uke

At some point, you must tune at least one of your strings to a reliable external source (like a piano, guitar, pitch pipe, tuning fork, etc.) to ensure your ukulele is in tune with the rest of the world. If you don't do this, you can still get your ukulele in tune with itself, but it will not be possible to play with other instruments and sound good. Similarly, you may find it difficult to sing along with your ukulele chords if the whole ukulele is tuned too high or too low.

The following diagram show how each string of the ukulele matches up with notes on the piano. Simply play the source note on the piano, and then turn the corresponding tuning head on the ukulele, until it matches the pitch perfectly.



Important Note: Always drop below pitch, and then tighten the string slowly and rise to the correct pitch. By doing this you are picking up any slack in this string that might exist between the saddle and the bridge or between the nut and the tuning machines. If you don't do this, the slack will be let off while you play causing the string to become out of tune.

if you're not sure which tuning head controls which string, just follow the string all the way along to the head of the ukulele until you see which tuning head it connects with.

- Get in the habit of tuning every single time you set out to play (which is a good idea, since ukuleles go out of tune easily!). Only by regular practice will your tuning skills improve.
- If you have difficulty determining whether you should tune a note higher or lower, try singing both pitches. You can usually feel it in your vocal chords if the note you are tuning is higher or lower than the note you are tuning it to.
- If you have Peg tuners try "pinching" the tuner knob instead of turning the knob.

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What give the uke that Uke sound ????? Reentrant tuning is a tuning of certain stringed instruments such as the ukulele or certain tenor guitars where the strings are not ordered from the lowest pitch to the highest pitch.

On the ukulele this means the 4th string is tuned one octave higher than you'd expect, is referred to as *reentrant tuning*.

Type of tuners - Electronic – It is highly recommended to buy a chromatic make sure it recognizes the notes G C E A

Hand Held



Clip On



Pitch Pipe



How to use the Reverb tuner. Where to get the reverb tuner

<https://reverb.com/item/204704-reverb-clip-on-tuner>



Clip it to your headstock. Press the button on the front until it lights up. Keep pressing the button until the U appears in the face.

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Where to press the strings

Contrary to what you might think by looking at a chord diagram, the best spot to place a left-hand finger on fretboard is NOT in the middle of the frets, but rather immediately beside a fret (i.e. just to the left of it). The reason for this is that it requires for less pressure to properly hold the string down in that location than exactly between two frets, or anywhere to the left of that. If you press down on a string without adequate pressure, the result is often a very annoying buzzing sound!

So, this is bad. Very, very bad:



... and this is the way it should be done!

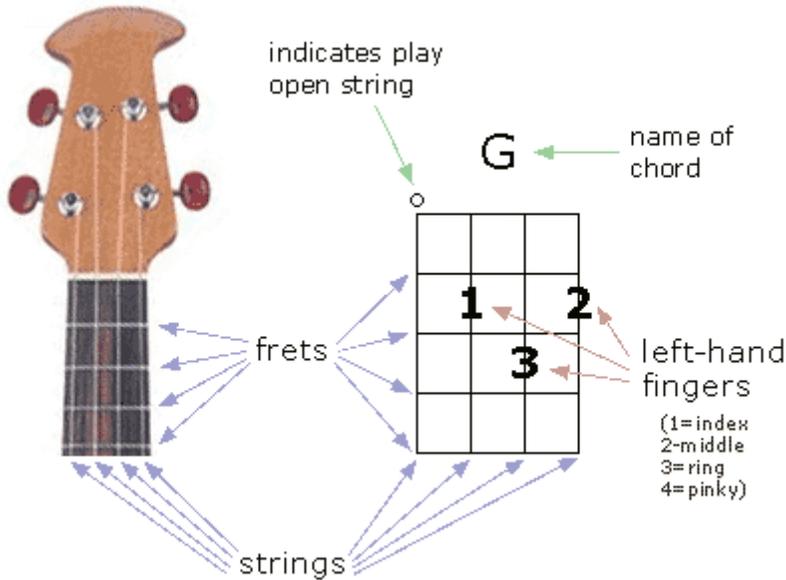


In general, you should press on strings with your finger tips rather than the pads of the fingers, so that you are only pressing down on the string you should be pressing down on. If you are playing a chord and are touching an adjacent string by accident, you may very well stop that string from vibrating, and the lovely note that should be produced by that string will no longer sound.

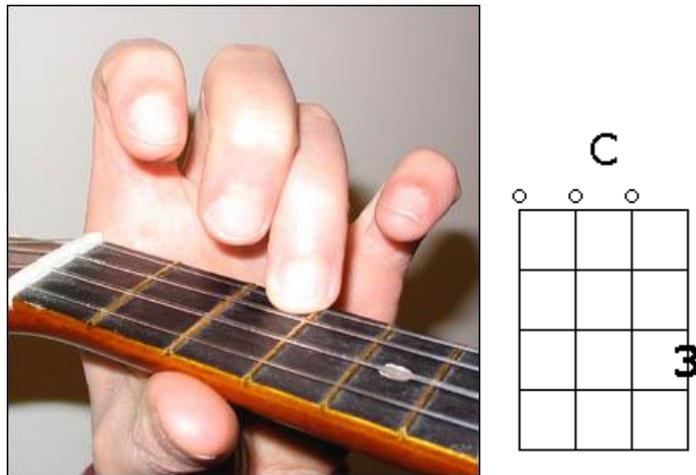
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Chord Diagrams

The standard ukulele chord diagram is simply a vertical representation of the ukulele fretboard. The horizontal lines represent the frets, while the vertical lines represent the strings. The numbers on the vertical lines represent the fingers of the left hand (index=1, middle=2, ring=3 and pinky=4). A little "o" above a vertical line indicates that the open string (a string with no left hand finger on it) below that "o" should be strummed. A little "x", which you probably will rarely see, would mean that you do not strum that open string. This diagram sums it all up:



Now, by way of example, here is a picture of the C chord, followed by a chord diagram of the same chord:



Because there are three little "o"s above the three strings that have no fingers on them, they are to be strummed as well. You can also represent the chord with "0003"

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Your first Chord , The C



Curl your left hand underneath the neck of the ukulele, and place the ring finger of your left hand on the third fret of the first string, as shown in the photograph. This is called a C chord (remember that!).



Strum all four strings in a downward direction with your right hand index finger. Strum fast enough so that all four strings sound at virtually the same time.

With just a little practice and new wardrobe you could be the next Tiny Tim

Believe it or not, there are many songs you can play that require only one chord for accompaniment. Row, Row, Row Your Boat is an example of such a song. Here is "the music" for this song.

/ / / /
Row, row, row your boat

/ / / /
Gently down the stream

/ / / /
Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily

/ / / /
Life is but a dream.

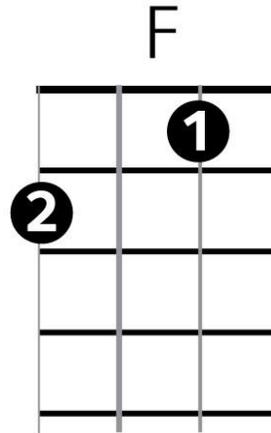
Each slash mark represents a downward strum with your right hand thumb, just as you did before. Make sure you match up the words with the slash marks. The strums should happen when you are singing the words below them, and they should all be evenly spaced apart, time-wise.

Start singing on the note C, which is the note you hear when you play the third string, the thickest string on the ukulele. If you are male, you will probably have to sing this note 1 octave lower.

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More Chords, The F

Here is another chord for you to play, called the F chord. This chord requires 2 fingers. Each finger of the left-hand must meet the fretboard at approximately a 90 degree angle, to prevent rubbing against and muting the adjacent string. Study this picture and reproduce it on your own ukulele:



This diagram is another way of representing this chord or “2010”

Now, strum this and see how it sounds. You should be able to hear all four strings ringing clearly. If any of the strings fail to ring, look closely at the fingers on your left hand to see they are all placed properly. It is imperative that they do not lean against any strings they should not be on.

It is critical that you learn to switch between chords almost instantaneously, so as not to leave any unwanted gaps in your music. To help you do this, always strive to do as little movement as possible. In this case, notice that the third finger on your left hand only moves down 1 fret when switching from the C chord to the G7 chord. Rather than lifting your hand completely off the ukulele and starting fresh when you go to make this change, merely slide your ring finger all along this string from the third fret to the second fret. Fingers that can slide along strings in this manner are known as *guide fingers*.

When you're able to switch back-and-forth between these chords effortlessly, you can accompany yourself on thousands of songs (literally!!). Here is one for you to try. Remember that each slash mark represents a downward strum, and that the strums should all be spaced out evenly time-wise (so you get a nice rhythm going!). The strums should match up perfectly with the words underneath.

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Jambalaya

[F]Goodbye Joe, me gotta go, me oh [C]my oh

Me gotta go pole the pirogue down the [F]bayou

My Yvonne, the sweetest one, me oh [C]my oh

Son of a gun, we'll have good fun on the [F]bayou

Chorus

[F]Jambalaya, a-crawfish pie and-a fillet [C]gumbo

'Cause tonight I'm gonna see my machez a [F]mio

Pick guitar, fill fruit jar and be [C]gay-oh

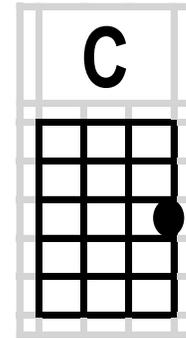
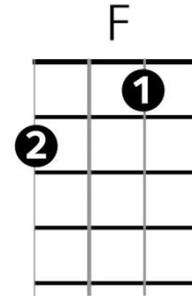
Son of a gun, we'll have big fun on the [F]bayou.

[F]Thibay-deaux, Fontaineaux, the place is [C]buzzin'

Kinfolk come to see Yvonne by the [F]dozen

Dress in style, go hog wild, me oh [C]my oh

Son of a gun, we'll have big fun on the [F]bayou.



Repeat Chorus

[F]Settle down far from town, get me a [C]pirogue

And I'll catch all the fish in the [F]bayou

Swap my mom to buy Yvonne what whe [C]need-o

Son of a gun, we'll have big fun on the [F]bayou

Repeat Chorus

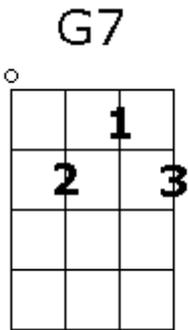
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More Chords, The G7

Here is another chord for you to play, called the G7 chord. This chord requires 3 fingers. Each finger of the left-hand must meet the fretboard at approximately a 90 degree angle, to prevent rubbing against and muting the adjacent string. Study these pictures carefully (they are two views of the same thing), and reproduce it on your own ukulele:



This diagram is another way of representing this chord or “0212”



Skip to My Lou

C

/ / / / / / / / /
Lost my part-ner what will I do

G7

/ / / / / / / / /
Lost my part-ner what will I do

C

/ / / / / / / / /
Lost my part-ner what will I do

G7

/ / / / / / / / /
Skip to my Lou my dar - ling!

C

CHORUS

C

/ / / / / / / / /
Gone a - gain, skip to my Lou

G7

/ / / / / / / / /
Gone a - gain, skip to my Lou

C

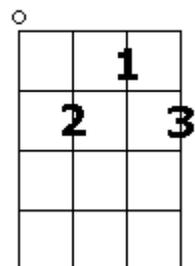
/ / / / / / / / /
Gone a - gain, skip to my Lou

G7

/ / / / / / / / /
Skip to my Lou my dar - ling!

C

G7



Visit



theUke.com

Sloop John B

We [C] sail on the sloop John B My grandpappy and me
Around Nassau town we did [G7] roam
Drinking all [C] night, Got into a [F] fight
Well I [C] feel so broke up I [G7] want to go [C] home

Chorus

So [C] hoist up the John B's sail
See how the mainsail sets
Call the Captain ashore Let me go [G7] home,
let me go [C] home I wanna go [F] home,
Well I [C] feel so broke up I [G7] wanna go [C] home

The poor cook he caught the fits and ate up all our grits
And then he ate up all of our [G7] corn
Let me go [C] home Let me go [F] home
This is the worst trip [G7] I've ever been [C]on

Chorus

The first mate he got drunk And broke in the Cap'n's trunk
The constable had to come and take him [G7] away
Sheriff John [C] Stone Why don't you leave me [F] alone
Well I [C] feel so broke up I [G7] wanna go [C] home

Chorus

End