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# HI THERE!

We're uked; hooked on the ukulele. We love its sound, its versatility, its looks and its simplicity. It's a real instrument that's real easy to play. With this book we want you to get uked too! We'll show you simple steps that'll get you on your way, even if you've never picked up a musical instrument in your life. Within just one weekend, you'll be able to play your first songs, and you'll learn techniques that are cool enough to last you a lifetime.

Neither of us has a musical background. Actually, we don't know the first thing about music. That's not an apology, but a recommendation.

We. Make. Simple.

We won't hesitate to change chords, if that's what it takes to make a song easier to play. We'll cheat whenever with chords and strumming if that's more comfortable. And if someone with a serious classical music background freaks out and says, 'Oh but you're playing an F-sharp- whatchamacallit when it's meant to be a minor third!' (so to speak), then we just shrug it off and think 'okay, whatever' and go on playing it our way. We'd rather excite people than complicate things.

There are so many people out there who have lost their dream along the way or who no longer enjoy making music. We want to give that back, both the dream and the fun in making music. And the ukulele is the perfect instrument for doing exactly that. It's accessible, encouraging and totally forgiving.

This book will teach you the basic skills you need to play the uke. You'll learn by playing études, exercises that are actually songs. Not your regular *Old MacDonald* shizzle, but really cool stuff. We've enlisted the help of the extremely funky singer-songwriter, Shanin Blake. She's given us exclusive permission to use some of her original songs, and she's even written a few numbers specially for you, to get you started. You'll be learning techniques that aren't at all complicated, but once you've mastered them, they sound really cool and are also interesting enough for the more advanced player. You'll learn to keep your playing simple so you can add your own touch to it by singing along. You will use this book as a guide; a reference containing all you need to learn on paper, and we have videos of all of Shanin's songs, so you can play along with her.

There are two movements involved in playing the ukulele; upwards and downwards. Upwards is about expanding your skills, and downwards is about adjusting your expectations. And at the point where your skills and expectations meet, that's where the fun starts.

We're here to get you uked!

**Liselotte & Barbara**

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Our mantra

DOWNSIZE  
SIMPLIFY  
AND  
SMILE

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# NOTE

Liselotte is musical. And that sometimes annoys me (Barbara).  
She'll cheerfully say, 'Watch; just play it like this and this, you can hear how it goes.'  
But I can't hear it at all.  
And I tell her: 'No, I can't.'  
And then, still cheerful, Liselotte says, 'Yeah, sure you can!'  
And then I see red, because I can't hear it, and I do actually know what I can and can't hear.

For me, the music goes to my hands via my head. I learn mechanically. I put my fingers just here, and then I go up twice and down once. That's how I learn. And I'll get there in the end, too.

For Liselotte, the music goes from her heart to her hands. And though that sounds just beautiful, she's not fully aware of what she's doing and how. That's fine, because she's already doing it, but it does make it hard to explain to others.

So we sit down and figure it out together, until Liselotte understands what she's doing and I can put it into words, then we can teach it together to everyone.

In this book, we take the same approach as in our workshops. I explain (I write) and Liselotte demonstrates (in the photos).

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## NOW WHAT?

If you're anything like us, you'll want to start strumming as soon as possible. Feel free to skip the first part and start immediately on page 44. Later, once you're uked, you can always read more about the various sizes of ukulele, their history and the types of wood, and so forth.

**In part 1**, we tell you a little about our background and that of the ukulele. The important thing to remember is that we're there for complete beginners, and we want you to enjoy playing as soon as possible.

**In part 2**, you'll learn the basics, such as how to hold your uke, and how to tune it even if you're alone on a desert island.

**In part 3**, you'll learn everything about what to do with your left hand; your fretting hand. You'll learn how to play chords and beautiful ballads.

**In part 4**, you'll learn everything about what to do with your right hand; your strumming hand. You'll learn funky rhythms and techniques.

**In part 5** you'll be encouraged to write your own songs.

If you're a beginner, then we do recommend that you stick to the order of the book, because we explain everything step by step, isolate the techniques, and then bring them all together later.

### Note:

read this book with a uke on your lap. When you try the exercises, you'll hear for yourself what we mean, and numbers and letters will suddenly become music!

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Eddie Vedder  
Quote

## CHILD

In our opinion, it's much more fun to learn to play music on a ukulele than a recorder. You can't sing along with a recorder, and with your uke, you can play almost all the songs that you can play on a guitar.

The best way to inspire children to enjoy making music is to set the example yourself. Let them hear your music. Let them see you enjoy a campfire, make mistakes, invite friends, and practice your favorite song till you get it. In short, let music be part of your everyday life.

At music school, children often have to show what they've learnt after only a few lessons. We think that these performances aren't fun for anyone. Neither for the guests, nor for the players. By contrast, everyone seems to

enjoy singing together, if we're not held back by overambitious self-consciousness. Even if you are though, bluff your way through and pretend you have Irish blood by singing and making music together at every opportunity and occasion. Perhaps then it'll feel normal to our next generation.

### Tip:

**hang up a ukulele in your house and just let it go. Teach the youngest ones (up till the age of 8 or so) a couple of one-finger chords and the basic rhythm (vocal strum), and encourage older children to teach themselves via YouTube. Make sure it's available, and just see what happens. Oh, and don't get frustrated if kids pick it up faster than you do! :-)**

## GOD

The ukulele also has its share of gods. You can be a devotee of Jake Shimabukuro, an absolute virtuoso. And you can't help being a fan of Israel Kamakawiwo'ole, who plays the most beautiful *Over the rainbow* ever. Elvis remains the King on a ukulele too. George Harrison is a good representative of the faith, but for us, Eddie Vedder is God. You might know him as the lead singer of

Pearl Jam, and from the *Into the wild* soundtrack. On the ukulele he creates his own sound, devises totally new chords, and plays the most beautiful, heart-rending love songs. If you haven't heard his Ukulele Album, go straight to Spotify and listen to Eddie. And while you're about it, listen to Sophie Madeleine too. And to Izzy. And of course, to our very own muse, Shanin Blake.



# STRUM



To get a sound out of your ukulele, you have to strike the strings. This is called strumming. When you strum, you strike the strings with a regular movement, hitting all of the strings equally hard or softly. Sweep the ball of your thumb over the strings from the top to the bottom. Congratulations, you've done your first strum. You use strumming to determine the tempo and rhythm of the song. Your strum is the heartbeat of the song you're playing. This means that your timing is very important for making a song sound pleasant and catchy. To help yourself stick to the beat, you can tap your foot in time, or nod with your head. Let yourself move along with the music. Then count along with the beat, 1 - 2 - 3 - 4. On each count, strum downwards once. You can also use a metronome, that classic ticking device you often see sitting on top of a piano. Alternatively, you can use an app on your phone.

## Exercise:

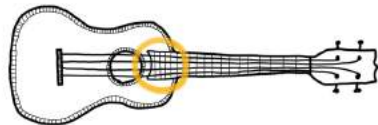
strum downwards with your thumb at a gentle tempo and count regularly from one to four. Count out loud, tap along with your foot, with a count and a strum each second. This is the most important exercise of all in playing the ukulele: sticking to the beat. If you can do this, you'll be set, because you can always simplify your playing. It's better to play a tight, regular rhythm than to try for a funky, irregular rhythm that occasionally runs away with you.

## Exercise:

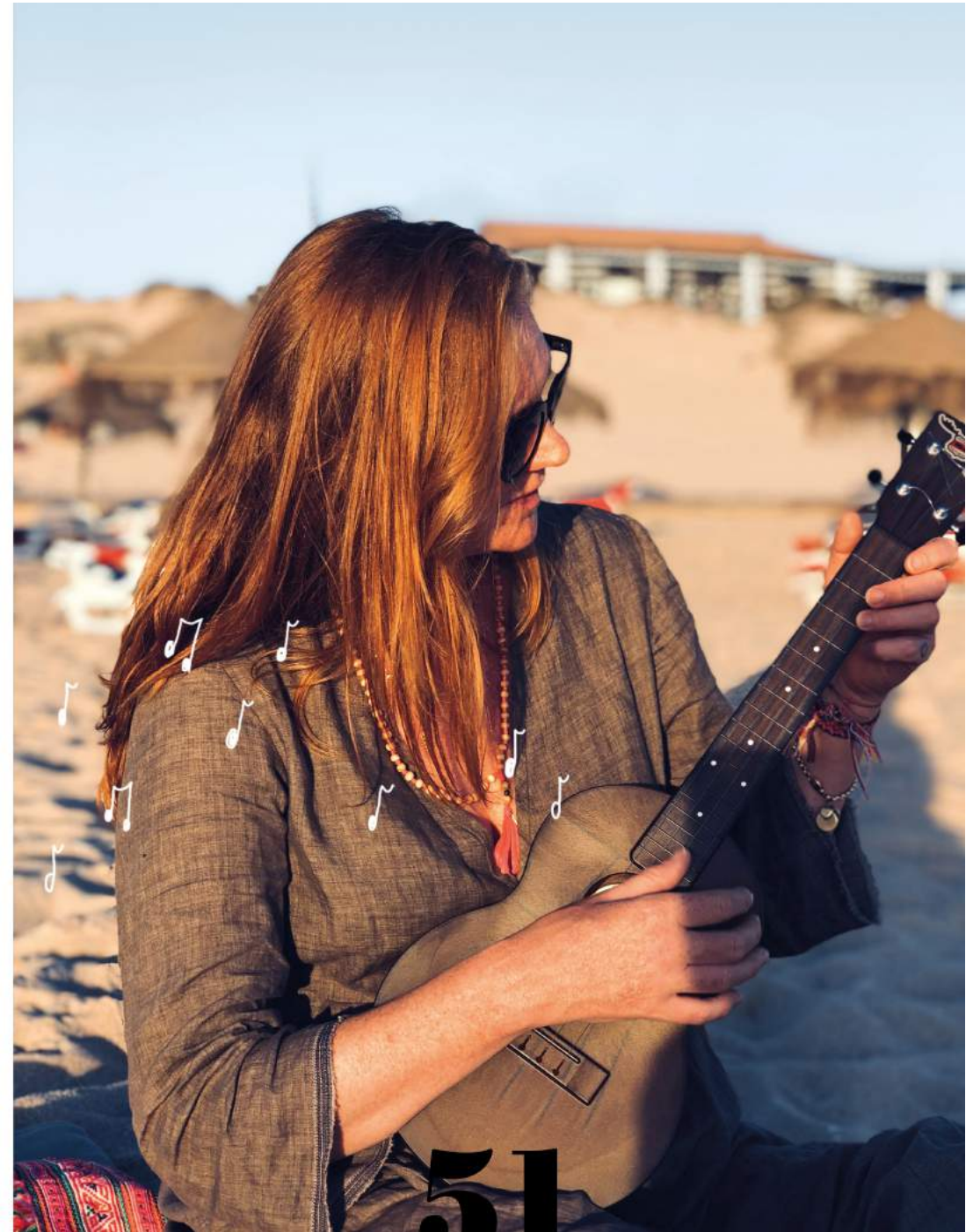
now strum a little faster. Set your metronome to 75 bpm, and play very softly without changing tempo. And then play very loudly without changing tempo. You'll probably notice that you tend to play faster when you increase your volume. You've now also picked up your first chord. This is the Am7 chord, which you play with all strings open, that is, without holding down any of the strings.

## Sweet spot

Most ukuleles give the nicest sound when you strum the strings in the area between the sound hole and the neck, which is called the sweet spot. Try strumming in different places to discover which sound you think sounds best and best suits the music you want to play. (Closer to the neck gives you more mellow tones, while closer to the bridge gives brighter tones.)



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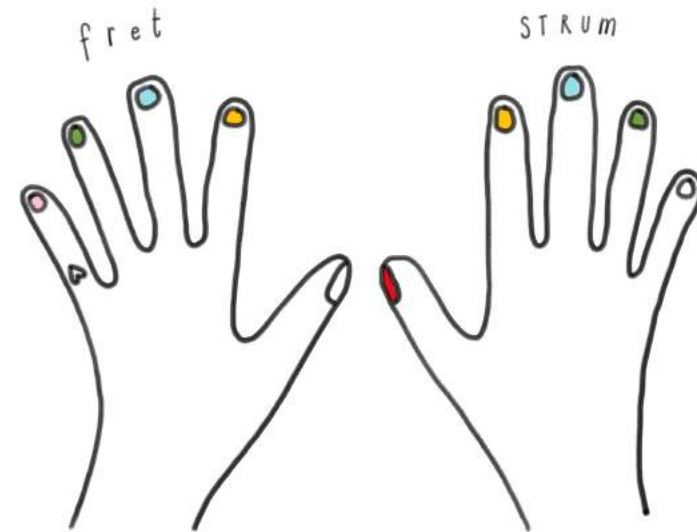


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Reasons to get uked #17

# UKULELES DON'T JUDGE

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## LEFT

Your left hand is your fret hand, which plays on the neck of your ukulele. You make chords by holding down the strings with the fingers of your left hand. It may seem as though your left hand is more important because it makes those beautiful chords, but it's actually far less noticeable if you make a mistake with this hand.

You use CHORD notation and TAB notation to read chords, and you play them with your left hand.

## RIGHT

Your right hand is your strum hand, and you use this to play the strings on your ukulele's body. You use your right hand to determine the tempo and rhythm. This one is actually the most important, and it's a lot more noticeable if you make a mistake with it.

You use strumming patterns and strum beads for your right hand, and tabs for a single open string to tell you the tone you start singing with, or for an intro.

In this part of the book, you'll be learning chords, which means the emphasis will mainly be on your fret hand. We'll keep your other hand, the strum hand, relatively simple for now. Ballads often require very little more than this. In part 4 we'll concentrate on your right hand, which you'll need if you want to make your songs a little funkier. Fortunately, we've developed our own notation for that, so you can learn even the most complex strumming patterns.

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when you're doing it right, you'll notice this funny groove in your finger



# CHORD

A chord is a consonance of three or more notes that you play together and that sound harmonious. Someone has already figured this all out, so you don't have to bust your brain over it.

If you strum all of the strings at the same time, you have four notes (G, C, E and A), which together make the Am7 chord. For all other chords, you have to hold down strings. This shortens the string, giving you a different pitch.

You hold down the string in the middle of the space between two frets, using the fingers of your left hand. You'll need to bring your wrist forward a little to ensure that you can press the string down with the top of your finger without touching any of the other strings.

The following rules are useful to follow:

- ① Use your index finger for holding down strings in the first fret.
- ② Use your middle finger for holding down strings in the second fret.
- ③ And use your ring finger for holding down strings in the third fret.

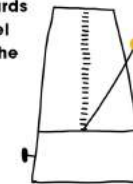
Your pinkie will help you out when you move on to more complicated chords.

## Please note:

**this is not cast in stone.** You might find yourself playing chords in a different way because it feels more comfortable for your fingers, or because it makes it easier for you to move onto the next chord. For example, Liselotte uses an impossible fingering for the D that she swears by and nobody else can manage. Use whatever feels good to you.

## Exercise:

for the C chord, you hold down the bottom string - that is, the 1st string, in the 3rd fret. What is the best finger to use for this? That's right, your ring finger! Hold down the string with the tip of your ring finger and practice this chord by regularly strumming downwards for each beat in four counts. Feel free to use a metronome to do the counting for you.







# CHORD-NOTATION

## CHORD / CHR / CHD

You don't have to be able to read sheet music to be able to play the ukulele. We're really happy about that. You do need notes if you want to figure out the melody yourself, but if you already know a song, or if you watch or listen to a song, you'll hear the melody.

The chord notation is enough to let you to play the ukulele. And chord notation is very simple. You've just practiced the C chord, and this is how it's written down.



At the point in the graphic where the dot is, you hold down a string with a finger on your left hand, and strum all of the strings with the thumb of your right hand. ①



## Tip:

the E is a stubborn stinker that's difficult to master. Where possible, we replace it with the much easier and beautiful E7. ②

Pick your battles wisely, and simplify. Take a look at the D7; that's a barre chord (more information on page 117). You can simplify this by substituting the so-called Hawaiian D7, which is easier and softer. However, this doesn't always work, which is why we'd also like to take away your fear of barre chords.

