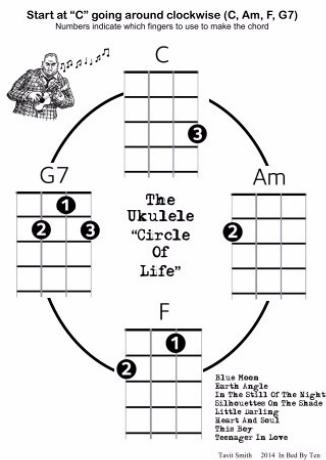


I have also learned that people REALLY want familiar songs that are easy to sing, so I have cut down on introducing new or complicated songs UNLESS it is to introduce new chords, or new chord progressions that I find cool. Also, I have changed my way of handling the first few classes -- and now use a one-chord song, followed by two two-chord songs, before I go to my *Ukulele Circle of Life* (C, Am, F, G7) with four chords.



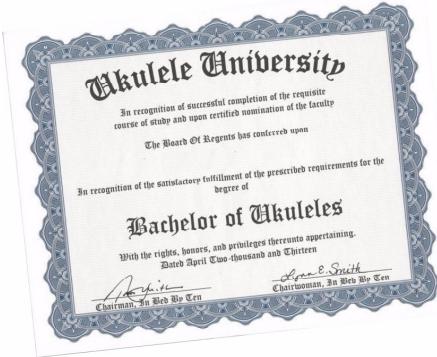
I emphasize the importance of being aware of the chord "shapes" so people get comfortable moving the shapes to play a different chord (ie: The F chord and the C9 – or the G7 and the F#m) (it also makes playing the uke look a whole lot easier).

Oh... and another thing that I think is important is to hold the groups in the same place - every time. You lose people by moving the group around, and you pick up new people when they keep hearing that a uke group gets together at such-and-such a place.

Let's see... what else? Oh... I have decided to buy a projector so I can project the songs against a screen at the front of the class. I recently used a Viewsonic PJD5134 SVGA DLP 3000 lumen projector (Sears has it for \$292.00). I will STILL have the song packets available on our IBBT website so people can print and use them if they wish, but I found that people were expecting me to come with copies and it was costing me \$40/week. I didn't mind the cost, but I realized that the projected songs with chords kept everyone focused ahead (and the singing was louder also!). Plus, six sessions with me NOT paying for music handouts pays for the projector!

What else... Oh, breaking up the 2 hour session by having people come to the front and perform solo at the end of the first hour has been GREAT! People get to know one another, and it builds courage (and a sense of community). Another thing that people have loved is getting a printed "award" when they perform (again, something free!). Some people were too nervous to perform alone and I either ask the group to play along, or I offer to play with them (they still get an award!). Ahh yes... I also give diplomas at our last sessions.





space for socializing). I usually introduce people both before and during the sessions -- most times comically with a joke.

I'm going to keep rambling because I have often thought about posting something about running ukulele groups (I think I've done well having had more than 50 people both in my Florida and Rhode Island groups - if I do say so myself).

SONGWRITING 101



Gonging isn't critical as long as you approach it with a silly attitude! For your first attempts, don't try to write the song of the century, just write a small short piece that's fun. The song of the century will come later (or maybe not, but who cares?).

I found a wonderful website that I think will be a great starting point in your artistic endeavors. Take a look:

<http://mysongcoach.com/write-a-song-in-ten-steps/>

And...

<http://mysongcoach.com/song-starters/>

A very helpful tool to explore common chord progressions that you may want to use for your songs can be found at:

http://www.fothlets.com/chord_progressions

Don't feel bound by the chord progressions you find here. You may want to start with one, but then change the progression around a bit or add different ones. Use some of the chords in the progression as a base for a "bridge" or the chorus of the song. When I wrote "Wah! I Met You In Kindergarten" I started with an idea (the title), and then thought about all of the things that might have happened. I wrote them all down and eventually only used a handful of them for the different "verses". I then picked one melody for the verse, and another for the chorus. I then added chords to the chords and made a "bridge". Not a masterful tune, but I had a lot of fun writing it.

Remember... you're in charge! Have fun, and don't expect your first songs to be anything but FUN!

SUMMARY OF THE TEN STEPS:

1. Start with the title.
2. Make a list of questions suggested by the title.
3. Decide on a song structure.
4. Answer one question for the chorus, and a different one in each verse.
5. Find the melody in your lyric.
6. Begin to add chords to your chorus melody.
7. Choose a question to answer in your first verse.
8. Connect your verse and chorus.
9. Build your second verse and bridge.
10. Record your song.

Twice now I have very briefly (maybe 5 minutes?) talked about “How To Write Songs” with great feedback. Several players have come back a few weeks later having tried it and having written beautiful, and very personal songs. They were very well received by everyone with much applause! And the new “songwriters” were very proud!

Try to find a U-bass player (or simply a bass player -- even a washtub bass player) to add depth to the music. One guitarist would be nice, and if you are lucky enough to find one, a good hand percussionist! I always want to give people the experience of playing in a band.

I think having a website - not just a FB page - is very, very important. Weebly gives me stats which I follow weekly. It also gives me a URL address that I can use to both publicize the group (It's on some of my music and on the kazoos), and get feedback. The feedback is important, but you also need to know that some people are just complainers, and that some - all of a sudden - know how a group should be run. BUT, as the old Armenian saying goes, "If you hear it once, ignore it. If you hear it twice, consider it. If you hear it three times, accept it."

The sense of identity and belonging is important. That's why I tell everyone they are now part of the

Let me focus on a sense of community - as I found that this is probably THE MOST IMPORTANT THING YOU ARE GOING FOR!!!! Not only have my groups spawned other groups, but, I've noticed that people are now coming early and chatting with each other. They are also spending time after sessions to talk! (So, get there early, and leave 10 - 15 minutes after each session – give attendees some



IBBT band, and why I handed out "band membership cards". They didn't cost me anything as I printed them up myself, and they were fun!

Let's see... if I could, I would offer refreshments - bottled water, &c., but I couldn't at the library. Oh... and I pick up every toy uke that I can find in Goodwills and Salvation Army stores – I give them out as awards and sign the backs! It's always fun to hand out a Kermit The Frog or Disney Princess Uke! We've also had our groups sign the backs of inexpensive "real" ukes to give away!

Hmmmm.. what else? Oh... I know. At a bar up here records people at open mic night and emails them the MP3 of them playing, and also gives them a photo of themselves (another reason to have a website, so you can post photos).

Wouldn't it be great to do this! Oh... I also took a group photo and put the date, place, and "IBBT Ukulele Band" on it and printed out free copies for everyone. They only cost me .18 cents/piece. And it's a great way to advertise, as many people said that they were putting the photos "up at work".



Here in Rhode Island I ran a contest called "Take Your Ukulele Out In The World". People had to take pictures of themselves "out in the world" and submit them. We had some very funny pictures! One fellow went to a farm and took pictures of himself playing his uke for barn yard animals.

Another woman took a picture of herself (clothed) playing her uke in a bathtub! We all had laughs over this contest. I gave shaker eggs to all participants.

One last thing, and this is MY PERSONAL belief and policy. I ABSOLUTELY DO NOT EVER want to restrict my group by skill levels. I have taken a lot of flack about this, but I'd rather not teach at all, than to make anyone feel that they either aren't good enough, or can't play, or can't learn, or be too embarrassed to try. I've been in groups in which - if you didn't know more than 15 chords - you were just left to sit there feeling out-of-place. That's why I ALWAYS set aside the first 40 minutes or so to go

over the basics, and play the very easy songs. If people can't be patient with the newcomers, let them find another group.

If you do decide to set aside some portion of your sessions for teaching new learners, I have found that they are NOT interested in learning how to read music, learn theory, or learn the history of the instrument. They just want to play and sing as soon as possible. The sooner you can get someone to learn three chords (usually C, F, and G7 or G), the sooner you have them hooked! Get newbies involved in the joy of making music as quickly as you can! Add additional chords slowly (depending upon your newbie's abilities) – some can learn one chord a week, others can absorb four or more! Use FAMILIAR songs! Nothing will kill enthusiasm faster than giving someone a song they've never heard before. If the tune isn't in their head, it won't be in their fingers.

Again, this is just my personal feeling, and I have (other than the criticism) also been told by people that they stopped attending so-and-so's group because it was too advanced, and that they loved our group because they felt included. My groups are for others to learn, not for me (or anyone else) to show off.

Hope there were a few things of interest in my ramblings. Best of luck!

Tavit