Suggested Interview Topics

What Every Ukulele Beginner Needs to Know
Here’s what every ukulele beginner needs to know, and the order to learn it in:

1. Learn to tune your ukulele.
2. Learn to hold your ukulele.
3. Learn down and up strumming.
4. Learn 5 simple chords.
5. Learn to change these chords easily and quickly.
6. Learn to keep a steady beat with your hands while your voice is speaking something different.

12 Great Practice Strategies for Beginners
Here are some practice strategies for mastering a song. Master each one before going on to the next.

1. Practice changing the left hand chord shapes needed in any given song until you can do them easily and quickly
2. Practice speaking or singing the lyrics with a simple strumming pattern (all down strums on the beat.)
3. Practice the more complicated strumming pattern you want to use without singing or speaking the lyrics. Do not change chords. Simply do the strumming pattern at tempo. You can either stop the strings with your left hand or strum on the back of your ukulele. You can do this along with a YouTube lesson video of your chosen song.
4. Practice the way you did in Step 3 but add the chord changes.
5. Practice the way you did in Step 4 but add speaking the lyrics
6. Practice the way you did in Step 5 but add singing the lyrics
7. Practice fingerpicking the melody with our YouTube video. If the video is too fast, slow it down to 50% or 75% speed
8. Practice your performance of the song with a metronome. (You can download a free metronome app for your phone or tablet.)
9. Record your song with your phone and watch or listen to the audio or video you created. Listen for what you did well and what you need to work on. You can then become your own teacher.
10. Get together with others to sing and strum songs together. One way to do this is to join a ukulele club.

11. When you feel courageous, sign up for an open mic performance at your ukulele club so you have to learn your song from start to finish.

12. Enjoy the ride and don’t be afraid to be a beginner!

Why Learn Ukulele?
- The ukulele is relatively easy to play. With 4 strings instead of the 6 on guitar, it’s smaller, more comfortable because its strings are softer, and the chord shapes are easier to learn and master. People can learn a one chord song in a matter of minutes and can graduate to two-chord songs pretty quickly.
- The ukulele is relatively inexpensive.
- The ukulele is portable.
- The ukulele is sturdy, so you can take it everywhere. You can even get waterproof ukuleles if you want.
- The ukulele is fun.

Why Make Time for Music?
- Music is so good for our brains.
- Music gives us a chance to express ourselves and our creativity.
- Simply spending a few minutes in the evenings to de-stress with music can make your life much happier.
- If you really love music, you’ll figure out a way to carve out some time for it. For me, I like to have time for exercise, healthy eating, reflection and music. With these four elements I feel nourished and taken care of.

Interview Questions

Why is ukulele so popular these days?
I think the ukulele is so popular for a lot of reasons. Here are some of them:
- The ukulele is relatively easy to play. With 4 strings instead of the 6 on guitar, it’s smaller, more comfortable and the chord shapes are easier to learn and master. People can learn a one chord song in a matter of minutes and can graduate to two-chord songs pretty quickly.
- The ukulele is relatively inexpensive
- The ukulele is portable.
- The ukulele is sturdy, so you can take it everywhere. You can even get waterproof ukuleles if you want.
- The ukulele has been featured in many recent popular songs and movies.
Where do you most see new learners struggling?

- If someone has never played an instrument before, they often struggle with the coordination of the rhythm of the lyrics with the steady beat of a strumming pattern. They tend to want to strum exactly with the rhythm of the lyrics, not with the beat of the song. The coordination between the two different musical elements and understanding the difference between rhythm and steady beat is a first step for all music learners. If you already have experience with rhythm and steady beat, you might not understand that “feeling” a beat can be difficult for some learners.
- Learners often struggle with their left-hand fingertips being sore and learning how to strum. Generally people have a lot more trouble with the up strum than with the down strum, so for most people, it’s easiest to learn the down strums on the beat before learning the up strums on the off-beats. Learners have trouble getting the up strum even with the down strum, and with getting their fingers caught in the strings while trying to go up.
- Learners also have trouble with the rhythm of a ‘swung’ strum, what I call “strum 3”. The rhyme “Jack and Jill went up the hill” can help them learn this strumming rhythm.
- People struggle with how to match the chords to the lyrics. It’s hard for them to know where to change chords, or how many chords to play with each word.
- Also tough for many learners are more complicated strumming patterns, how to understand left-hand finger numbers, how to read tab, and how to read chord shape symbols.

What practice tips can you give for ukulele beginners?

1. First make sure you can play all the chords in the song easily and quickly. Practice switching back and forth between chords until that is easy to do.
2. Practice singing or speaking the lyrics in time with the chord changes. Use a very simple strumming pattern, either strumming a down strum for each beat in the song, or simply playing the new chord at each chord change. You can also play one chord on the downbeat of each measure.

Why did you decide to create a book of ukulele folk songs?

Our fans on social media were interested in this idea. We also took a look at the public domain songs that we had already created tutorials for and sheet music for and saw that many were folk songs. Since we already had materials for ten or so folk songs, a book of easy ukulele folk songs seemed like obvious next project!

How did you decide on the final list of songs to include in your folk songs book?

Rebecca and I went back and forth on this question quite a lot. We wanted to use songs that people would recognize so we checked popularity online. We also wanted to make sure the lyrics felt appropriate, so we left songs that fell into the murder-ballad genre out. As a woman in the time of me-too, I did not really want to sing about domestic violence.

How did you decide on the order of the songs in your folk songs book?

We grouped our songs from easiest to hardest, starting with two chord songs. We also created a separate section for minor songs because they have totally different chord shapes and feel.
**What is your favorite song in the book and why?**
That’s a hard question, because I ended up liking all of the songs. However, some of my favorites are “Shenandoah,” “Turkey in the Straw,” “The Ash Grove,” “Worried Man Blues,” “Big Rock Candy Mountain” and “Lil’ Liza Jane.”

I like “Shenandoah” and “The Ash Grove” because I can fingerpick the accompaniments and the melodies are super pretty. I like “Turkey in the Straw” because I can play fiddle on it as well. I like “Worried Man Blues” and the “Big Rock Candy Mountain” because of the lyrics. I liked “Lil’ Liza Jane” because you can actually perform this song with one chord. The way the song combines simple and sophisticated is really fun.

**Who would benefit from 21 Easy Ukulele Folk Songs?**
Anyone who can play a few chords on the ukulele and wants to improve their playing. Also, more advanced players who want to learn more about “making songs their own” will benefit because we’ve included suggestions on how to change keys, create different strumming patterns, play the melody and create your own chord melodies to these songs.

**How do you and Rebecca work together when you live 2000 miles apart?**
Rebecca and I communicate all the time online with emails and text messages. We have weekly business meetings using Skype, Zoom and FaceTime apps.

**Do you ever get into sister squabbles?**
Yes, but our disagreements help us to create better products for our customers because we work out our conflicts to create a compromise that serves all types of people.

**Has working together as a sister team helped or hurt your relationship?**
Working as a sister team has really helped our relationship because we are in constant contact with each other. We’ve learned over the years that we’re working towards the same goals, we’ve got each other’s backs, we each bring different strengths to our business, we both make mistakes from time to time, and we are both doing our absolute best.

**What have you learned in your 5 years of self publishing?**
Self-publishing is a lot of work! And it’s also a wonderful opportunity to share your creative vision with the world. We’ve both learned a lot about technology, popular culture, using a computer, how to write music, and how to reach out to people.

**Why did you decide to self publish ukulele books?**
I had created a curriculum for my students at school that I wanted to share more widely. Getting a traditional publishing contract is more difficult so we started with self-publishing 21 Songs in 6 Days: Learn Ukulele the Easy Way. Self-publishing seemed like the best way to reach people with our vision of easy ukulele music that people could learn on their own.

Once we got going, we also got a traditional publishing contract with Kjos Publishing for Ukulele for All which is intended for teaching ukulele in school settings.
What is the hardest part of being a Youtube personality?
It’s hard to get used to being on camera all the time. It’s hard to look at yourself and not be overly critical. Sometimes, viewer leave mean comments on a video which can be hurtful, but over time you get used to it and learn to ignore them.

What is the hardest part of being a self published author?
There is constant work and it is not simply about writing good quality content. There is an entire online marketing side which is time consuming and frustrating. You don’t always know if you’re making headway or not. You have to continually be learning new platforms, skills and approaches. It can be hard to know if all your hard work is paying off.

Why do you think people like your books?
I think people like the human element. They like that the video lessons break things down in a way they can understand. Even if they don’t read music, they like the tab underneath the melodies, the suggested strumming patterns and the videos. By listening to the videos and following the sheet music, people start learning how to read music and overcome fears from their past about not being able to understand the complicated language of music.

People also like the encouraging tone that we offer. Since we both have many years of experience teaching thousands of beginners we can confidently reassure our viewers and readers that their struggles are normal and that they will be able to overcome them.

Where do you get your ideas about what songs to do next on your Youtube channel or in a book?
We like to survey our fans for their ideas. We are considering a book of hymns next and have surveyed our fans for titles they would like to see.

For the more recent songs that we choose for Youtube tutorials, we look for songs that are popular, fit the ukulele, and fit my singing style. We also make a point of offering arrangements that are reasonably easy to play, so I will transpose songs to more ukulele-friendly keys so people can play their favorite music.

Why haven’t you done a book of more recent songs?
It’s very hard to get the rights to publish an arrangement of a song that is still in copyright. We both have a finite amount of time to put into our self-publishing business and there is definitely not time to take on contacting copyright holders for print licenses.

It’s a shame because our fans would really like us to publish arrangements of more recent songs. Copyright protection extends to all music published after 1923. That means that music only comes out of copyright after the generation who liked it when it was first popular is already dead.