



SAN FRANCISCO  
**PERFORMANCES**

presents...

*The Robert and Ruth Dell Guitar Series*

# **THE UKULELE ORCHESTRA of GREAT BRITAIN**

George Hinchliffe | Musical Director  
Leisa Rea | Creative Producer  
Claire Risseuw | Tour Management  
Verena Rogler | Sound

Peter Brooke Turner | Soprano Ukulele  
Ben Hales | Baritone Ukulele  
Ben Rouse | Tenor Ukulele  
Leisa Rea | Concert & Sopranino Ukulele  
Guy Hargreaves | Concert Ukulele  
Laura Currie | Tenor Ukulele  
Laurie Higgins | Bass Ukulele

**Friday, May 1, 2026 | 7:30pm**

Herbst Theatre

**The program will be announced from the stage.**

**This series is made possible in part by the generous support of Robert and Ruth Dell.**

**The Ukulele Orchestra or Great Britain** is represented by Arts Management Group, Inc.



## ARTIST PROFILES

*San Francisco Performances presents The Ukulele Orchestra of Great Britain for the third time. It first appeared in March 2022.*

**The Ukulele Orchestra of Great Britain**, that's the one founded by George Hinchliffe and Kitty Lux, has already enjoyed touring in the United States many times. For those who have not yet encountered it, the essential point is that it is an original musical ensemble featuring only ukuleles of various sizes and registers, accompanied by just the natural voices of the performers.

Harsher critics have stated the opinion that the Ukulele Orchestra formed their repertoire based on any music considered inappropriate for the instrument, with a "shopping trolley dash through genres" and musical history. In Europe and America the Orchestra are best known for playing versions of famous rock songs and film themes, sometimes changing these so that the expectations of the audience are subverted. Sometimes a rock song will be changed into a jazz idiom, or sometimes several songs which are known from different genres are combined in one "soup of contrasts."

The founding brief for the group was to have fun and "not to lose money." Incredibly, throughout its forty-year career, the group has succeeded in both not losing money AND incidentally making millions

of dollars. It has been seen worldwide by audiences including members of the British Royal Family and other crowned heads of Europe, at the Houses of Parliament in London, and by many millions of television and online viewers. In one territory, the Orchestra has played to audiences which comprise sixty percent of the population!

When The Ukulele Orchestra of Great Britain began in 1985, the public opinion was that an orchestra consisting entirely of ukuleles in different sizes was a strange concept. This was something that attracted the founders. The Orchestra members at that time had experience of many kinds of music and yet had become tired of the conventions of the music business world as well as the conventions of performance and genre stereotyping which were prevalent at that time. The idea was to make something fresh and entertaining, both modern and old-fashioned, in a different style which deviated from the current performance fashion. People liked the result.

Today, after many years, the Orchestra finds that wherever they go, people are now playing ukuleles, often in groups. Many of these enthusiasts tell the Orchestra that they were inspired to play the instrument after seeing and hearing this, the original Ukulele Orchestra. And now there are many ukulele orchestras, some acknowledging the pioneering work of the UOGB, others claiming ignorance of this rich his-

tory, but none of them existing before this, the original Ukulele Orchestra.

In 2025 The Ukulele Orchestra of Great Britain celebrated 40 years of thrilling audiences with their off-beat humor and four-stringed virtuosity from Tasmania to the Arctic Circle, Windsor Castle to Carnegie Hall.

While it is not normally in the nature of these artists from Britain to "blow their own trumpets," or in this case to "pluck their own ukuleles," it is undeniably a fact that The Ukulele Orchestra of Great Britain has become not only a national institution, but also a worldwide phenomenon.

Among their many international concerts and festival appearances, they have "Sold Right Out" twice at Carnegie Hall in New York, twice at The Royal Albert Hall in London, and also at Sydney Opera House in Australia.

The Ukulele Orchestra of Great Britain has been featured in a CNN report in 2012 and featured on *CBS This Morning* in 2013. The Orchestra has been invited by the British Broadcasting Corporation to play live on air for BBC Radio 3 (the classical music channel) as well as for BBC Radio 1 (the rock, Electronic Dance Music and youth music channel) and live on other BBC channels many times. They have taken part in The Electric Proms (in a collaboration with The Kaiser Chiefs), and the BBC Promenade Concerts at the Royal Albert

Hall in London (The Proms), where they were the “fastest selling late night prom in history,” selling many thousands of tickets for the prestigious Royal Albert Hall in London very quickly.

At this concert the Ukulele Orchestra performed *Jerusalem* and other classics of the Last Night of the Proms, the celebrated 120-year-old concert series which launched in 1895. Around 2,000 ukulele players in the audience joined the Orchestra in playing passages from Beethoven’s *Ninth Symphony*. A DVD of this 2010 BBC Prom concert at The Royal Albert Hall is available to order from the website, [www.ukuleleorchestra.com](http://www.ukuleleorchestra.com). For those who wish to perform with the Orchestra in the comfort of their own homes, chords and words to accompany the Ukes during their 2012 Sydney Opera House concert are available on this DVD.

The Orchestra has recorded and released records, CDs and DVDs on its own independent label and with CBS, Sony, Discath-nique, Longman, Volume, Tachyon and The Ministry of Sound, as well as appearing on Jools Holland’s *Hootenany*.

Original compositions and songs by the Orchestra have been used on television, on film, and in radio plays, as well as in performance by other musicians. They have collaborated with the British Film Institute in providing music for silent films and also musically with Madness, Robbie Williams, Ant & Dec, Yusuf Islam (Cat Stevens), Stefan Raab, Rainer Hersch and a full symphony orchestra performing at the Royal Festival Hall in London. Beatle George Harrison was a well-known fan who established contact and played with the orchestra.

In addition to performing at theatres and concert halls, the orchestra has also packed the crowds in at rock festivals such as Glastonbury, The Big Chill, WOMAD, The Electric Picnic, and before 170,000 people in Hyde Park, as well as playing in seven cathedrals in England and Wales. The group has been commissioned to write commemorative concerts, eg. The Cecil Sharp 100 Year Memorial Concert in 2012 and The 100 Year World War One Memorial Concert in 2014 for Birmingham Town Hall.

One unique feature of this, the original Ukulele Orchestra, is that although there are many examples of collaboration, they have remained a determinedly independent concern. Relying on their own resources and an email list of tens of thousands they continue to run their own recording, publishing and to eschew mainstream advertising and record companies.

Celebrity fans include Sir Paul McCartney, David Bowie, Monty Python’s Michael Palin, Brian Eno, Amanda Palmer, Neil Gaiman, George Benson, Joe Brown and Bette Midler.

The orchestra has many catch phrases which audiences find entertaining. “A world tour with only hand luggage,” for example, referring to the fact that ukuleles are small instruments. Every concert from the first to the present day, has begun with the announcement: “Good evening Ladies and Gentlemen, we ARE the Ukulele Orchestra of Great Britain.” For English speakers, the stress on the word “Are” is a little amusing, suggesting as it does that the orchestra is politely explaining to someone who perhaps thought that a different group was on stage, and that in order to clear up any confusion, they are confirming that they truly are the members of the orchestra.

This orchestra is made up of performers who are different from each other, and with very different musical backgrounds, experiences and performing styles. The ukulele brings them all together. Mr. Hinchliffe says that the work of the orchestra is like a pencil line drawing rather than a multi-colored painting. The palate is limited but the possibilities are endless. The ukulele in the hands of the orchestra is said to be like an iceberg; visible above the water, but with much more hidden beneath; there are spiritual dimensions which are far larger and which are not immediately seen. Within the limitations and the simplicity of the humble starting point of the orchestra, there are many possibilities for exploration and variation. It may be the case that the very nature of limitation (in this case to the sounds of the ukulele) enables wider variations to be pursued (which might seem too extreme in a less limited context). Perhaps the limitation stimulates freedom within a defined context. Too much variety could be confusing, too many limitations could become tiresomely familiar. With their combination of “unity and variety, and simultaneous individualism and collectivism” the orchestra is able to make the best of the over-riding vision as well as the individual talents and personalities in the orchestra.

Because the music is played on only ukuleles in different sizes, the conventions of any given genre might not be present. Sometimes the music sounds like folk music, sometimes, like a music without a tradition. The sounds of the instruments are not typical for most of the music played.

The arrangements of the music are spe-

cially made, often by the Director and Founder, George Hinchliffe, or by other members of the group. The focus is to bring out the spirit of the music, to be faithful to the musical notes, while actually changing the style or genre of the music by the mere fact of playing it on ukuleles. Audiences have reported that the music of the orchestra is variously, moving, funny, stomping, thought provoking, surprising, or inducing the audience by sheer infectious spirit to “tap their toes” along with the beat.

## Fun facts:

- The orchestra was asked to provide music for broadcasts about the World Cup.
- The orchestra has played WOMAD festivals in two continents and in two different centuries.
- The orchestra has performed many times at London’s 100 Club, joining the venue’s history with The Sex Pistols, Louis Armstrong, Billie Holliday, Glen Miller, BB King, Muddy Waters, The Who, The Kinks, Metallica and The Rolling Stones.
- The orchestra maintains its independence, in relation to record companies, management, publishing and touring and has its own CDs, DVDs, mailing list of tens of thousands, YouTube channel etc.
- The orchestra has been a crossword clue in the *New Musical Express*, the newspaper which was for many years the key publication for popular music in the UK.
- In addition to performing at Carnegie Hall in New York on more than one occasion, the orchestra has performed at The Carnegie Hall in Shetland, the islands midway between Scotland and Norway.
- The orchestra has performed in the arctic, at the Polar Jazz Festival in Svalbard, but also in Tasmania, North and South Islands of New Zealand, and on both the east and west coasts of Australia.

## Peter Brooke-Turner (Soprano Ukulele)

Born in Portugal and growing up in the Soviet Union, Brazil, America, Finland, Italy and Britain, Peter dominates the skyline at over 2 metres tall. After false starts on the violin, trumpet and guitar, he turned to the ukulele and joined the Orchestra. Peter has worked with many showbiz greats, even lending his uke to Tiny Tim. Away from the tuxedo, Peter has an alter ego, ‘Tony Penultimate’, whose musical shenanigans and albums have a website all of their own.

**Ben Hales (Baritone Ukulele)**

Ben Hales is a musician, composer and songwriter based in London. He spent the 2000s playing guitar with chart-topping, yearning man-band 'Aqualung', the 2010s writing music for BBC sketch shows ('Watson & Oliver', 'Dick & Dom', 'Count Arthur Strong') and the 2020s making theatre with several companies, including his own - 'Splendid', in places like Battersea Arts Centre and Shakespeare's Globe. Ben is hoping the next decade will feature more ukuleles.

**Ben Rouse (Tenor Ukulele)**

Ben is a multi-instrumentalist who plays guitar, mandolin, violin, saxophone, flute, trumpet, banjo and ukulele. His background as an all-rounder led him to form the rock band 'Purple Monkey' and the folk duo 'Teapot Junkies'. Ben has also released several albums of his own original music. Born in Cornwall, he now lives on the west coast of Wales, where he enjoys sailing, making his own electric ukes and a bit of astronomy. But not all at once.

**Leisa Rea (Concert & Soprano Ukulele)**

Leisa has a diverse background in performance, music, directing and writing for stage, television, and radio, working with many established names including, Miranda Hart (BBC) Jack Rooke (Channel 4), and Live at the Apollo comic, Jen Brister. She's produced her own solo shows and written a raft of original songs for Musical Comedy Award winners 'Adams & Rea'. Leisa has Irish-Italian heritage, plays uke, guitar and percussion and lives in London.

**Guy Hargreaves (Concert Ukulele)**

Guy is a seasoned performer and theatre maker from Lancashire with a background in acting, dance, clown, puppetry and music. He has directed shows for The National Youth Theatre and made short films about friendly ghosts for his local Carnegie library. He's appeared in iconic British television programmes, ('Coronation Street' and 'East Enders') as well as penning his own solo show about letter writing, ballet dancing and growing up. Guy is a keen artist and hill climber. Sometimes he combines the two.

**Laura Currie (Tenor Ukulele)**

Laura was born in Dumfries, Scotland and joined the Orchestra shortly after graduating from Edinburgh University. She started playing the ukulele at the age of fifteen after seeing the Ukes in concert and, inspired, fronted her first rock band a year later. Away from the Orchestra, Laura performs under the stage name Ra and releases her own original material. Her eclectic mix of self-produced YouTube videos have garnered an active online following. Laura also plays piano, bass and guitar.

**Laurie Higgins (Bass Ukulele)**

Laurie is a professional bass player from Dorset, who has many years of experience playing and recording with a huge variety of artists including Robbie McIntosh, Mutter Slater and Steve Jones. Having studied jazz and composition, he is also busily involved in writing and arranging music, as well as in music education. Laurie continues to provide the 'heartbeat' for the Ukulele Orchestra with his signature sound, as the group tour in the UK, Europe, America and across the world.