

CALGARY HERALD

NEIGHBOURS

THE COMMUNITY WEEKLY

TRUCKS
IN IT FOR THE LONG
HAUL SPECIAL SECTION

HALLOWEEN
WOULD YOU DO THIS
TO YOUR PET? PAGE N7



BABY BOOM
BABY & TOT SHOW
A BIG HIT PAGE N3



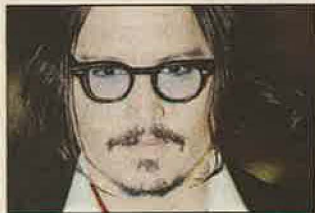
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In the
**CALGARY
HERALD**
this weekend:



Kia's Sportage
gets a whole lot
sportier
Friday in Driving



New movies:
Johnny Depp's
The Rum Diary
Friday in
Entertainment



Try the mellow hues
of milk paint
for a rustic look
Saturday in
Life at Home



Try this tasty
recipe from Rush:
Karaage Chicken
Sunday in Mix

Inside this week

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Stuart Gradon, Calgary Herald

Mike MacLeod, at home with some of his ukuleles, says more and more people are embracing the cheerful, easy-to-learn instrument.

Do you ukulele?

EXCLUSIVE
To your Calgary
Herald newspaper



ANGELA BLENKHORNE
FOR NEIGHBOURS

Besides playing hockey, there's nothing more Canadian than sitting around the kitchen on a long dark winter's night, playing instruments and sharing a musical connection. In Calgary, there's an underground musical movement afoot with an island twist — folks are rediscovering the ukulele.

Long known as the musical symbol of Hawaii, the ukulele is enjoying a popular resurgence.

Ukulele means "jumping flea," in reference to the speed with which fingers move on the strings and frets.

Learning to play is easy — its size is perfect for fingers big or small. You can learn to strum three chords and be playing actual songs in as little as a half-hour. It's

convenient to transport and impossible to pick up without putting a smile on your face.

The key to finding Calgary's ukulele community is simple, according to Mike MacLeod, a fixture on Calgary's fretted instrument music scene. He suggests new players "buy a good quality ukulele, take a few lessons, and connect with other players through workshops and performances."

MacLeod owns The Acoustic Guitar, offering one of the best selections of high-end fretted instruments in Western Canada.

Banjos, mandolins, guitars and, of course, ukuleles line his walls — walking into his studio is to a music enthusiast what walking into a Ferrari showroom is to a car fanatic.

MacLeod emphasizes the importance of buying a quality instrument. He explains "it keeps its tuning and actually sounds like a ukulele."

SEE UKULELE, PAGE N5

UKULELE: Try it?

This keeps students interested in continuing to learn. This type generally starts in the \$160 range.

For those with more modest budgets, there are less expensive options available, but MacLeod cautions a buyer should do some research and try a few out first. If you're into online bargains and the price seems too good to be true, you'll likely end up with a dusty instrument in the corner.

Basic lessons can be found by searching on Google or YouTube, but the instantaneous feedback from face-to-face lessons will help new players progress more quickly.

Attending workshops also gives players a concentrated forum to bounce ideas and styles off one another.

Several local workshops are held annually and vary from single to multi-day events held at venues around our city and nearby mountain communities.

In November, MacLeod is hosting a ukulele workshop in Calgary with James Hill, the Canadian ukulele virtuoso who has been deemed by the Honolulu-Star Bulletin as "a rare peer of Hawaii's premier players."

Those fortunate enough to participate have the unique opportunity to learn from one of the world's best players, whose approachable personality leaves no room for ego in his ukulele case.

Hill polished his skills as a teen in the Langley Ukulele Ensemble in Langley, B.C., then earned a music degree at the University of British Columbia.

He's been touring the world ever since, putting his unique spin on ukulele playing, including fresh takes on pop classics — think Michael Jackson's Billie Jean on four strings.

If you miss out on the workshop, you can catch Hill's performance on Friday, November 18 as part of the Fish Creek Concert series.

MacLeod would like to see a ukulele club re-established in Calgary — and you don't have to master the instrument to participate or benefit.

Playing ukulele as a group helps foster a stronger sense of connection with other players, he says, and the satisfaction of creating and relating through music.

These clubs are extremely popular on the North American west coast from Vancouver to Seattle to Los Angeles, which alone boasts three separate clubs.

"All it takes is a few like-minded players to stand up and say they're interested, and a place to gather to play," MacLeod says.

"These can be informal open mike events or small breakout sessions to work through a song or two as a group."

It could easily begin in someone's home. Posting signs at live music halls, coffee shops or on an online forum might be just enough to generate action.

Whether you want to make the crowds swoon like Elvis in Blue Hawaii, or just strum beside the fireplace until next summer, you may want to consider joining Calgary's most novel — and sometimes secret — music society.



Courtesy, Kevin Kelly

Ukulele musician James Hill, touted as one of the world's best players, will host a workshop here in November.