

APPlause!

K-12 PERFORMING ARTS

JAKE SHIMABUKURO

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 4, 2026

Schaefer Center for the Performing Arts

Who is performing?
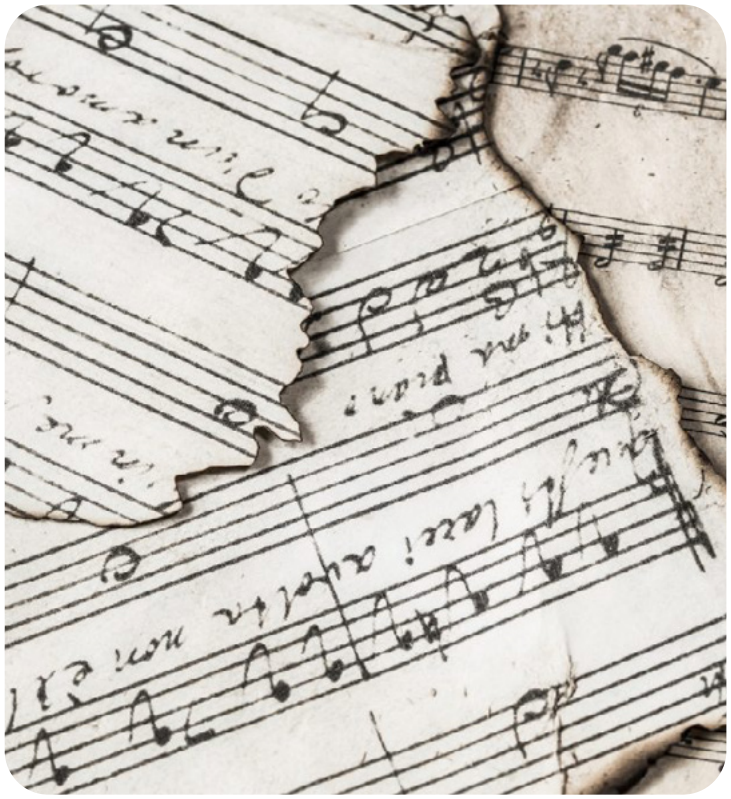


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Jake Shimabukuro

Over the past two decades, Jake Shimabukuro has proven that there isn't a style of music that he can't play. While versatility for any musician is impressive, what's remarkable about Shimabukuro's transcendent skills is how he explores his seemingly limitless vocabulary — whether it's jazz, rock, blues, bluegrass, folk, or even classical — on perhaps the unlikeliest of instruments: the ukulele. Responding to the urgent calls of his fervent imagination, the Hawai'i-born virtuoso has taken the ukulele to points previously thought impossible, and in the process he's reinvented the applications for this tiny, heretofore underappreciated four-string instrument, causing many to call him "the Jimi Hendrix of the ukulele."

Visit Jake Shimabukuro's website





continued

Jake Shimabukuro

Jake Shimabukuro draws material from a variety of sources, and is a master of three different, but linked, ways of generating music: composing, arranging, and transcribing.

Composition is the creation of brand-new musical material. While no artist can be free of outside artistic influence, composers seek to generate music that is completely unique.

A musician creates an ***arrangement*** (also called a "cover") as a way of bringing new flavors to a previously composed piece. Arrangements typically retain some of the original composition's rhythmic, harmonic, and melodic frameworks, but use different instruments and unique musical concepts to create a fresh interpretation.

A ***transcription*** is a type of arrangement intended to be extremely faithful to the original work. Transcriptions typically involve a piece changing instrumentation, being notated in a new key, or, in the case of folk music or improvised solos, being written down for the first time. Transcriptions still bring new ideas to a previously composed piece, but with less freedom than arrangement or composition.

Jake Shimabukuro

continued

> A lot of those are just songs that I really love. I'd sit at home and work out how to play some of them on the ukulele. A lot of it is for my own curiosity. I always wondered, 'Man, what would "Bohemian Rhapsody" sound like on a ukulele?' And then it's my stubborn nature not to give up until I'd figured out how to do it."



Composition

Jake Shimabukuro performs his own composition "143 (Kelly's Song)."



Arrangement

In arranging Queen's "Bohemian Rhapsody," Shimabukuro faced the challenge of reducing a song written for four people (and recorded on more than 100 separate tracks) for the tiny ukulele. But even the most complex music is no match for Shimabukuro's virtuosity, as delivered in this performance.



Transcription

Shimabukuro plays a transcription of Bach's Invention No. 4 in d minor and speaks about the challenges and rewards of playing Bach on ukulele.

Artistic Stop



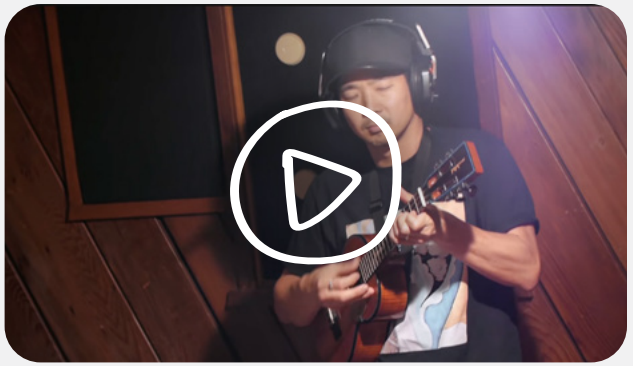
What do you hear?

ARTISTIC STOP

What do you hear?



Eleanor Rigby - Beatles



Eleanor Rigby - Jake Shimabukuro



Eleanor Rigby - Black Pumas

Listen to these three different arrangements of the Beatles' hit Eleanor Rigby.

The first video is the original recording by the Beatles. The second recording is an arrangement by Jake Shimabukuro, and the third recording is an arrangement by Black Pumas.

Consider the following:

What instruments do you hear in each of the recordings?

How do the different instruments change the mood of the piece?

Each of the arrangements uses vocals. How are they used differently?

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What is Hawaiian music?



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What is Hawaiian music?

Asians and Pacific Islanders make up the majority of the population of Hawai'i. Music has always played a central role for all these communities. In native Hawaiian culture mele, or chant, was the most important means of remembering myths of gods and deeds of powerful people.

A mele chant is a poetic form of song that tells a story. They can be classified into two general categories, mele oli and mele hula. Mele oli, as heard in "Mele Pule" and "Mele Kāhea," is an unaccompanied chant, usually performed by one person at ritual occasions such as a birth, death, or the departure of a ranking chief.

Mele oli also recounts historical events and tells stories and legends. Mele hula, as heard in "Anoai (Hula Uliuli)" and "Hole Waimea," is accompanied by dance movements alone or by dance movements with musical instruments such as the pahu (Hawaiian drum) or a 'uli'uli (gourd rattle).

Today, Hawaiians continue to use music to define themselves and celebrate aloha 'aina, or love of land. And thousands of immigrants have adapted their lives as well as their music to this delicate land.

Check out the Smithsonian's website for information on Hawaiian music.







What is Hawaiian music?

continued

The following video provides a performance of a dance for Pele, the volcano goddess, by the Halau ‘O Kekuhi hula ensemble from the Big Island of Hawai’i.

The hula is being performed to mele accompanied by percussion instruments.
Halau ‘O Kekuhi - Hula Performance [Live at First Americans Festival 2004]



What is the history of the ukulele?



History of the ukulele

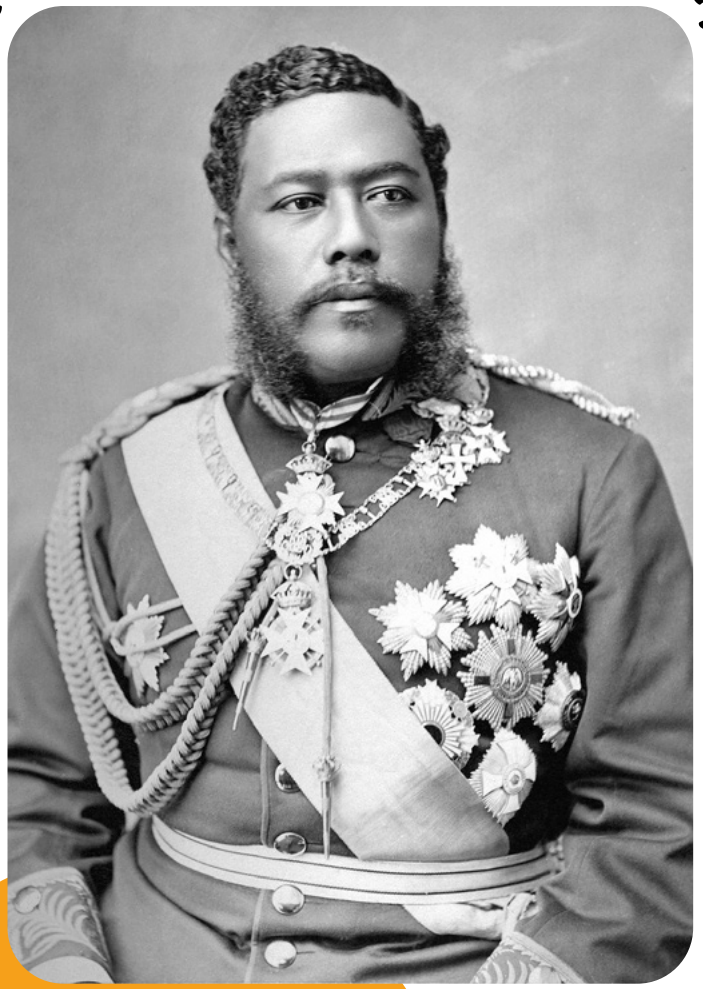
The most familiar Hawaiian instrument is the ukulele, a small type of guitar. The instrument was probably introduced to Hawai'i in 1879 by Portuguese settlers from Madeira who brought a small guitar called the braguinha with them. The settlers included three men — Manuel Nunes, Augusto Dias, and Jose do Espirito Santo — who knew how to make a braguinha (a small string instrument in the guitar family).

The small guitar quickly became popular with Hawaiians, and by 1888 Nunes, Dias, and Espirito Santo were all producing examples for the local market. The instrument was modified to suit local musical tastes, and the Hawaiian ukulele was born. Probably dating from the late 19th century, the ukulele pictured in the link below is among the oldest known ukulele.

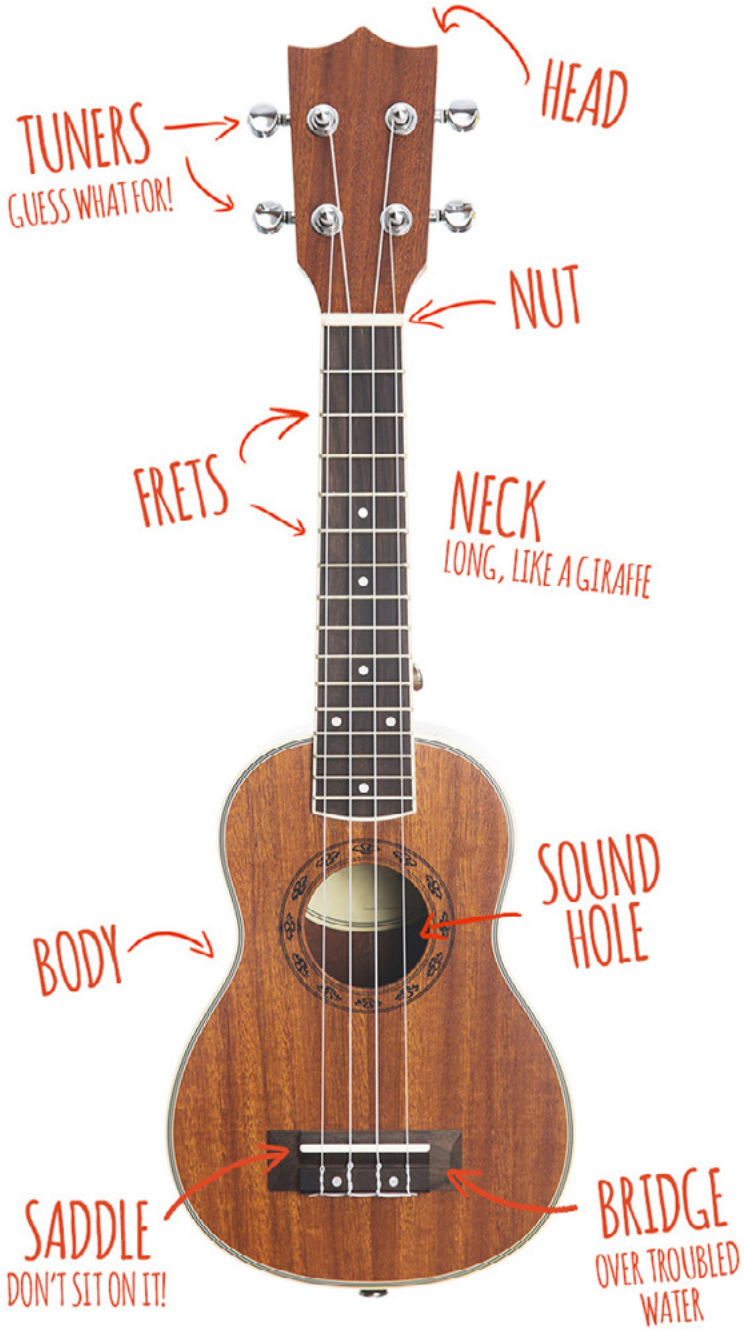
The ukulele found favor in the court of the Hawaiian King David Kalākaua, a champion of both customary Hawaiian music and musical innovation. Under Kalākaua's patronage, the ukulele was adapted to accompany hula dance performances, transforming the more sedate tempo of earlier types of hula into the more lively rhythm characteristic of many hula performances today.

There are several accounts of how the ukulele, which means "jumping flea," got its name. Edward Purvis, a small, lively musician popular in Kalākaua's court, was reportedly nicknamed "'uku lele" and the instrument may be named after him. Alternatively, the rapid action of the musician's figures when playing possibly reminded Hawaiians of jumping fleas. The name may also represent a modified version of a ukeke, a term for the mouth bow, which was previously the only string instrument in Hawai'i.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art has information about the ukulele, including this photo of a ukulele from the 1880s!



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History of the ukulele

continued

Here is a picture of a ukulele with all the parts marked. It is helpful to know these parts when learning to play!

Check out this beginner's guide if you want more detail on each of the different parts!

History of the ukulele

continued



There are five common types of ukulele.

Pineapple

The pineapple ukulele is shaped differently than a standard ukulele. Instead of the classical figure-eight shape that most ukuleles have, the pineapple ukulele has a rounder shape that resembles a pineapple. This shape gives the instrument a louder sound and sweeter tone.

Soprano

The most common type of ukulele is the soprano ukulele. It's the smallest ukulele, has less space between the frets (for small hands), and a brighter tone.

Concert

The concert ukulele, sometimes referred to as the alto, is a bit bigger than the soprano and some would consider it to have a fuller, deeper sound. It's commonly tuned the same way as the soprano. The concert ukulele has a longer neck and more frets. The frets are also slightly more spaced on a concert ukulele compared to a soprano ukulele.

Tenor

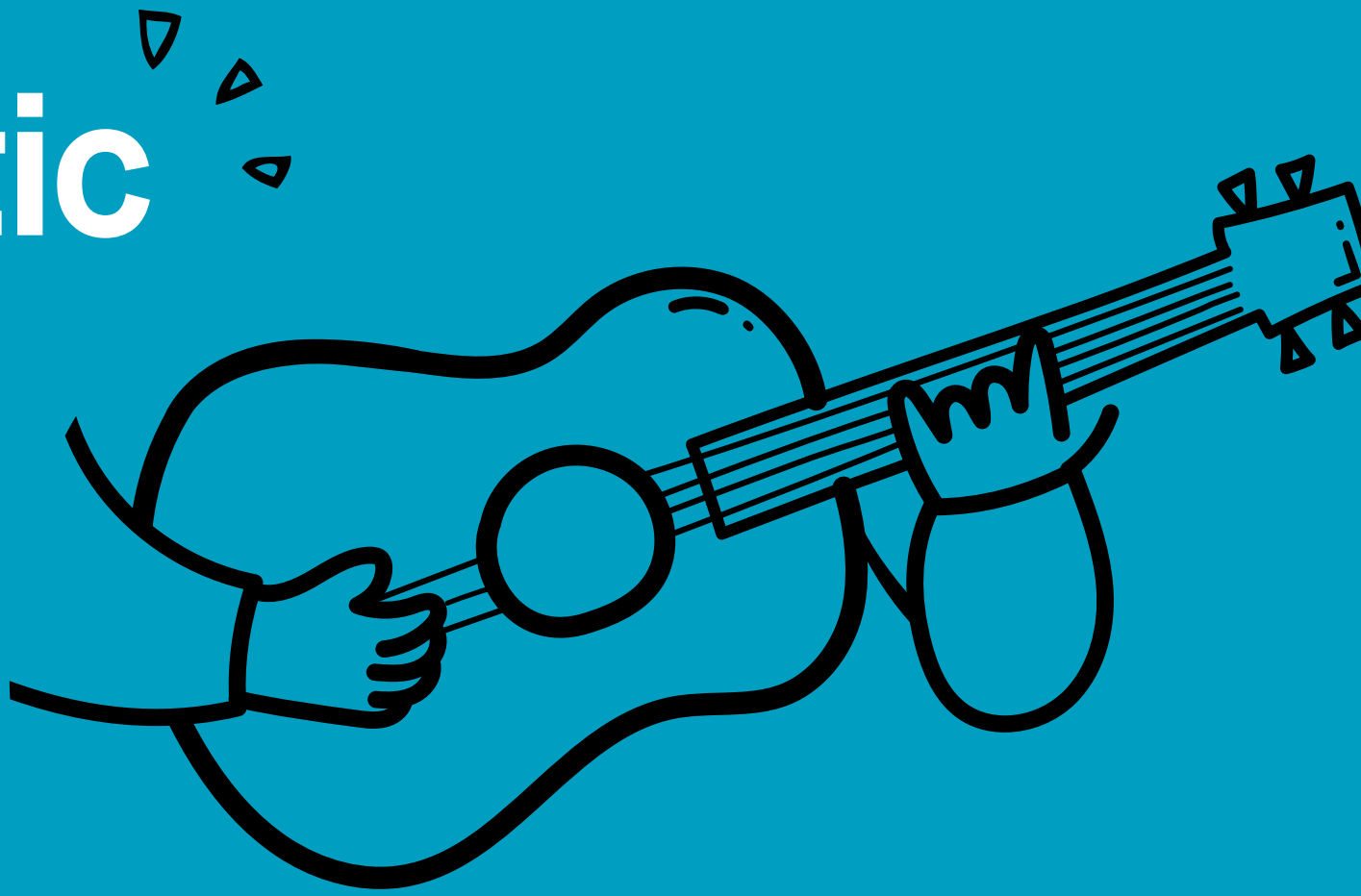
The tenor ukulele is just a bit bigger than the concert ukulele and has even more frets than the concert and soprano. The overall tone is deeper and some people might prefer the larger body.

Baritone

The baritone ukulele is the biggest of the four ukuleles. It is tuned differently, using DGBE, which is equivalent to the tuning of the bottom four strings of a guitar. This produces a significantly deeper sound, and different chord shapes from its ukulele counterparts with the traditional tuning GCEA.

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Artistic Stop



Give it a try!

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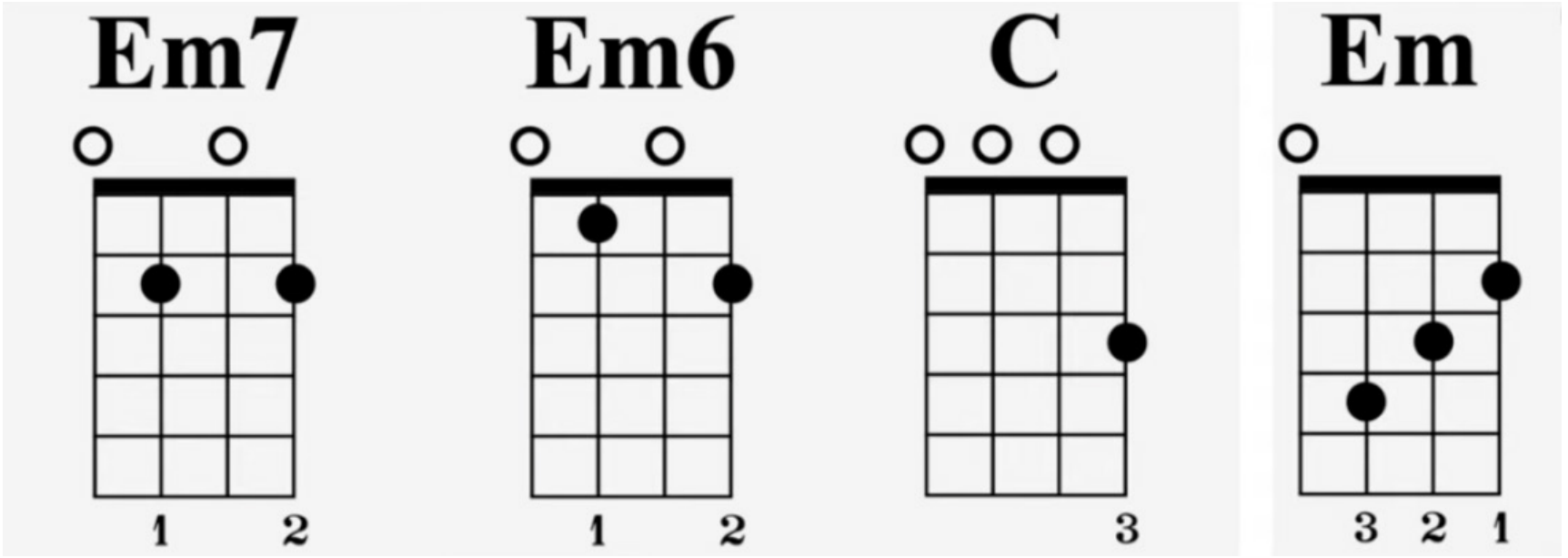
ARTISTIC STOP

Give it a try!

Do you or a friend own a ukulele? You can try playing Eleanor Rigby yourself!

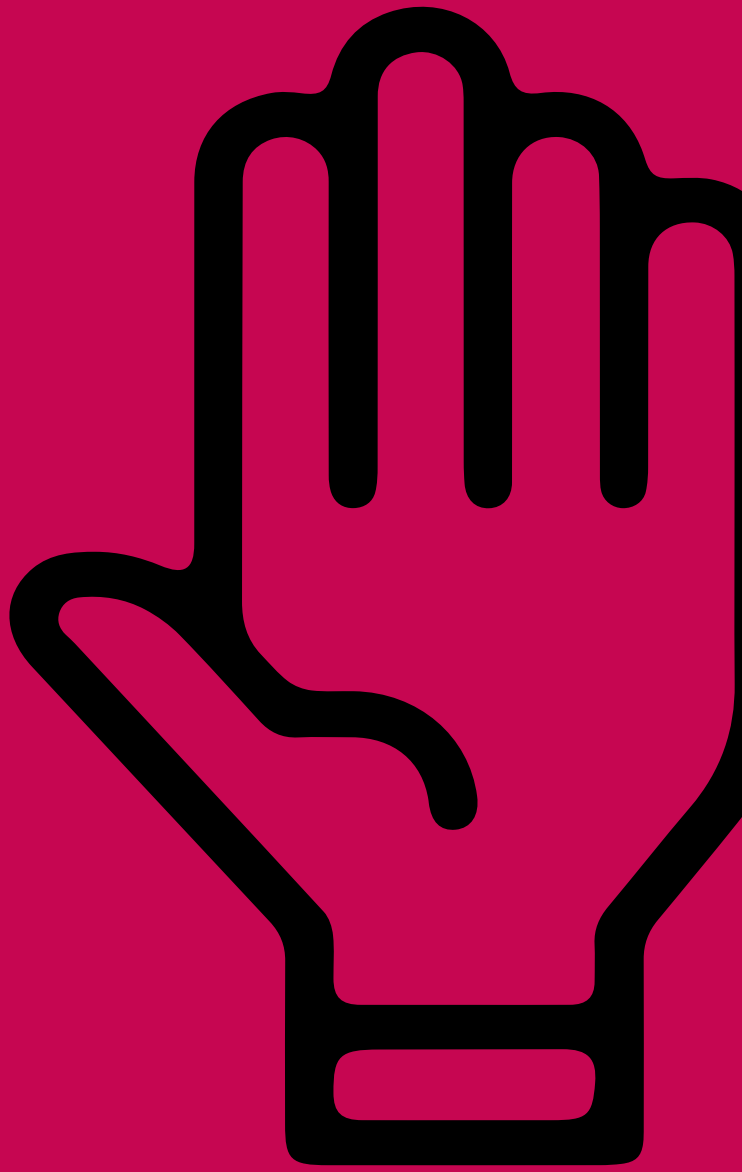
Here is a YouTube video that you can play along with! The video will go through 3 different levels. Before playing along, take a look at the chords used for the piece.

The 1 is for your pointer finger, the 2 is for your middle finger, and the 3 is for your ring finger. Remember you can play the entire song just using the C and Em chords and a down strum!



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Artistic Stop



Listening Detective

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ARTISTIC STOP

Listening Detetctive

[Listen to this video of Jack Shimabukuro playing a holiday favorite on ukulele!]

Watch and listen to the performance again, then complete the following activities.



For this task, you need to get your detective ears ready for some careful listening.

You also need a piece of paper and some crayons or colored pencils. With your careful listening, you are going to create images based on the clues you hear.



Activity

Step 1:

Try to listen with your eyes closed. As you listen, what images come to your mind? How does the music make you feel? What words would you use to describe the music?

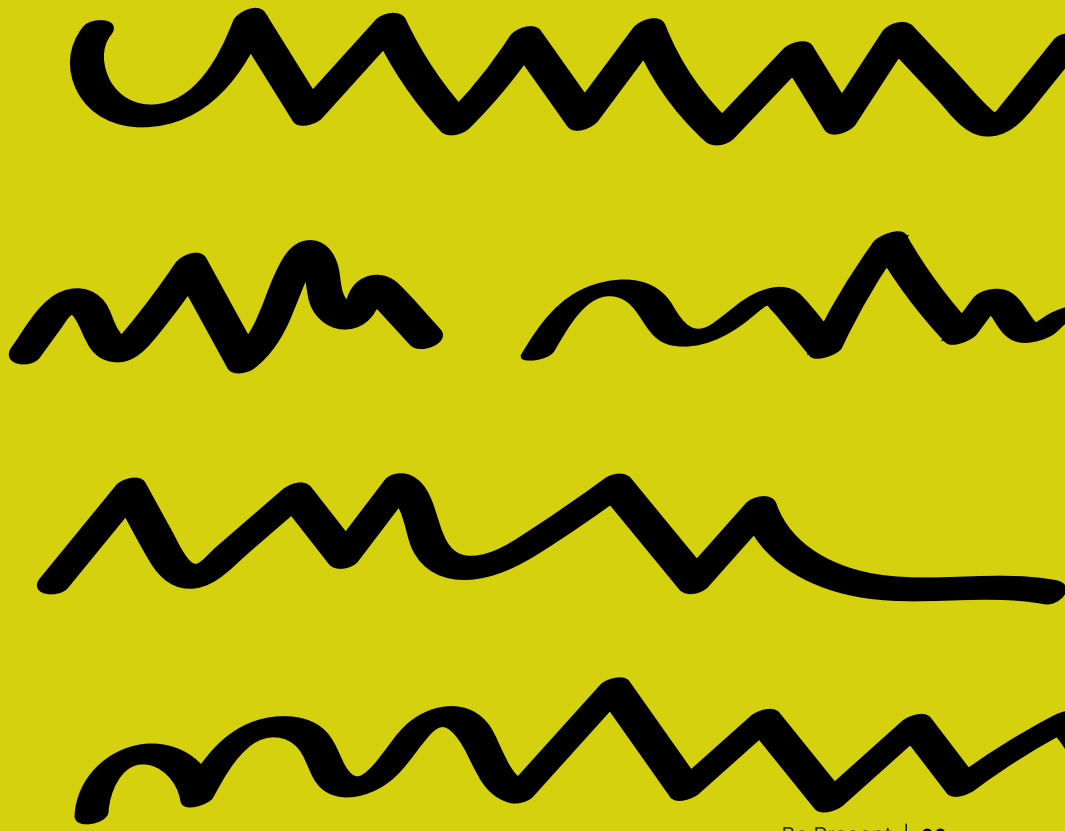
Step 2:

Get your piece of paper and your colored pencils and draw anything that comes to your mind. It can be colors, feelings, shapes, people, or places.

There is no right or wrong picture. Let your imagination run wild and be as creative as you can!

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How can I write about the perfromance?



How can I write about the performance?



We hope the performance inspired you to share a little about what you saw with friends and family! Don't worry if you've never written about music before. You don't need to use any technical terms.

Write a postcard to a friend.

Do you think any of your friends or family members would have enjoyed the performance? Write them a postcard, so they can hear all about it. Draw a picture of what you saw on stage or what you imagined in your mind while you were listening to the performance. Write about your drawing.

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Write a creative review of the performance.

Imagine that you are writing a review about the performance for other high school students who didn't attend. Your review should include the logistics (what happened and where) and your opinion (was the performance worth attending). But most importantly, you want your reader to understand the experience, what the performance felt like, even though they weren't there themselves. To do this, you should use language that captures what music feels like.

Here are some options to get you started:

Share...

what it felt like for you personally listen to the music. Use as many senses as you can to describe the experience of watching the performance. Tell us about your emotions and what was going through your head as you watched and listened. How does your background (e.g., your experiences or your familiarity with Hawaiian music) affect how you experienced the performance?

Compare...

the music to something else you know about. Use similes and metaphors to show us how this comparison works (e.g., "The ukulele sounded like rain on a tin roof." "The music was like a boom of thunder.").

Mimic...

the structure of the songs in the concert. Were the sounds smooth, percussive, slow, or fast?

Try...

stretching out your sentences with extravagant adjectives or repeating soft and slippery "s" sounds. Was the music.... snappy? Chop. Cut. Break up your sentences. Use strong verbs.

Experiment!

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ums.org

APPlause!
K-12 PERFORMING ARTS

ENRICHING LIVES, SPARKING IMAGINATIONS, AND INSPIRING A LOVE OF LEARNING THROUGH THE ARTS!

Arts education and outreach programming at Appalachian is committed to connecting university arts resources to a broad spectrum audience of community arts patrons, teachers and learners in the campus community, and in the public, private and home school network across our region. In doing so, the series strives to broaden and deepen arts experiences for audiences of all ages, while ensuring access to the arts for young audiences, building future audiences for the arts, and inspiring a love of learning through the arts.

Every season, affordable music, dance, film, and theatre events are offered to students and their teachers from K-12 classrooms across the region. Students experience everything from high-energy acrobatics and Appalachian music to international dance and literary classics brought to life through theatrical productions. In recent seasons, thousands of students across our region have attended APPlause! Series events.

This academic year, the APPlause! Series offers compelling programming to connect to K-12 classrooms, thanks in large part to generous donors who believe in supplying educators with arts programming that will spark creativity and inspire a love of learning.



THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS!

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