

Bimonthly bulletin on the Ukulele and related instruments
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DEPRIMIT ELATOS, LEVAT ALEXANDRIA STRATOS



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Italy & BEYOND

Editorial. Summer has now come to an end, but the liveliness of Italy's ukulele community has never waned during these past months. As this bulletin reports, the health of our instrument in the country is excellent, with concerts, gatherings, and all kinds of events where it takes center stage, all of which we've tried to highlight, albeit briefly, in our rich news section. This fifth issue, also published in English, appears as the *International Special Number* in conjunction with the *Third Ukulele International Conference (UIC2025)*, an unmissable international event to be held at the Conservatory of Alessandria on October 24 and 25. Registration to participate is already open at www.ukuleleresearch.org. With this issue, we want to take you behind the scenes of stories and projects that combine a passion for the ukulele with broader purposes. Among the most original initiatives is

"L'Ukulele del Sorriso", a charitable project conceived by Gabriele Sagone. The idea was born from his personal experience in the hospital, where he saw firsthand the importance of a smile brought by volunteers. You will also find a remembrance by Elisabetta Chierici dedicated to the luthier from Cento, Mario Maccaferri, a true pioneer who devoted himself to the ukulele, crafting the first instruments made entirely of plastic, which remain collector's items today. We also invite you to read carefully the introductory contribution on the braguinha by Pedro Gonçalves, professor at the Conservatory of Funchal (Conservatório - Escola das Artes da Madeira), who briefly but thoroughly presents the most popular traditional instrument of Madeira Island — and, incidentally, the ancestor of the ukulele. As always, you'll find our regular sections: in addition to the *Jukebox* and the usual ukulele news, *L'incontrario*, where Marco Tregambi offers a new provocation; the music page featuring an original composition by Davide Donelli titled *Lieto fine*; and finally, the unmissable illustration — this time by Steve Sperguenzie (Sinfonico Honolulu). We conclude by wishing you an enjoy-

able read, hoping as always that these stories will inspire you to keep playing, learning about the ukulele, and sharing its music. ♥

BRAGUINHA!

Ol'wood. THE BRAGUINHA: ROOTS IN HISTORY WITH AN EYE TO THE FUTURE *di P. Gonçalves* - The braguinha is the most popular traditional instrument of Madeira Island. In both shape and construction, it closely resembles the ukulele. It is a small plucked string instrument with an hourglass-shaped body, tuned from low to high in D4, G4, B4, and D5. Since the 19th century, the braguinha has been widely played across all social classes, in both rural and urban contexts. It has long served as both a melodic and an accompanying instrument. In the countryside of the 19th and early 20th centuries, it was used to accompany the folk dances of the time, such as the *bailinho*, *mourisca*, and *chamarrita*. In urban settings—especially in Funchal—the braguinha, then known as the *machete*, was used to perform music of strong

European influence, including waltzes, polkas, marches, quadrilles, opera arias, and other fashionable styles. The instrument had a remarkable cultural impact on the region and even fascinated visitors to the island. Empress Elisabeth of Austria (Sissi), for example, took lessons during her stay in Madeira in 1860 with Cândido Drumond de Vasconcellos (1815–1885), the most renowned machete composer, performer, and teacher of the time. Later, in 1879, Manuel Nunes arrived in Hawaii with the *machete*, which would eventually evolve into the ukulele. The braguinha's popularity remained strong until the end of the 19th century, after which it gradually declined. In the 1980s, however, several initiatives were launched to reintroduce it into the region's cultural life. One of the most significant was the program "Modalities of Madeiran Chordophones", developed by the Regional Secretariat for Education. This initiative allowed students in Madeira's public schools to learn the instrument during music classes. Today, about 1,300 students study the braguinha for free in schools across the island. Since 2021, the braguinha has also been included in the curriculum of the Specialized Artistic Education program and in the Professional Instrumentalist Course at the Conservatório - Escola das Artes da Madeira, Eng.º Luiz Peter Clode. This is a crucial step forward, as it enables students to explore and deepen both the technique and repertoire of the instrument, which now includes traditional works, historically informed performance pieces, adaptations from other instruments, and contemporary compositions. More recently, thanks to the efforts of Giovanni Albini—together with his colleagues and students—a new wave of original works by composers of various nationalities has begun to emerge. These compositions, written specifically for the braguinha, mark an important milestone in the modern evolution of the instrument. As part of this ongoing project, several of these works have been recorded by Albini, Davide Donelli, and myself in a newly released album. A companion volume of sheet music compiling this new contemporary repertoire for braguinha is also in preparation. These initiatives are paving the way toward a lasting legacy, offering both conservatory students and professional musicians the opportunity to explore new and innovative soundscapes written exclusively for this unique instrument.

COLUKUMN

L'incontrario. UKUARTISTALELE: THE CURSE OF SELF-EXPLANATORY NAMES *by M. Tregambi* - I can't think of anything more mediocre or banal than a musician who includes in their stage name an explicit reference not to their musical genre or lyrical themes, but merely to the instrument they play. As if Beethoven had called himself Pianosven, or Coltrane Coltrumpet, or Hendrix Guitarix... This practice — particularly fashionable and widely accepted within the ukulele community — may grant the fleeting satisfaction of having found a clever pun for one's alter ego (with the added bonus of feeling in tune with the trend), yet in truth, it only adds fuel to the fire of the general flattening that plagues the musical naming landscape. Sheep-like habits are dangerous: they undermine creativity in a world that, now more than ever, desperately and vitally needs it. The imagination invested in choosing a name could — and should — be used in a personal and distinctive way, bringing the

collective fresh air, delightful eccentricity, and a touch of wild uniqueness.

Let's scorn trends! Let's strive to fall out of line! Let's abhor and abolish the norms!

Friends, who have uku- or -lele in your names, don't take these words as a scolding or a call to reject your stage identity, but as a wish for future ukulele players: that they make an extra effort, squeeze their creativity a little harder, and dare more — both personally and imaginatively — thus sparking a virtuous circle that spreads wonder. Only then can we break free from clichés, from narrow niches, from provincialism, and from the cancer of standardization.

After all, we chose to play a wonderfully non-standard instrument! ◀



WELL-KNOWN NAMES

Jukebox. INTERNATIONAL GIANTS *by D. Donelli* - In this *Jukebox*, I'd like to pick up where we left off last time and share with you some tracks where it's the ukulele, and no longer the banjo, being played by some of the biggest names in international music. Let's start with a rock giant, Peter Frampton. His love for music began with an unexpected gift, a banjolele, from his grandmother, who was passionate about music hall and vaudeville. Not by chance, he used to call her 'Vaudeville Nanna'. That gesture sparked his childhood interest in music and eventually led to his parents giving him his first guitar. This story was immortalized in the song *Vaudeville Nanna and the Banjolele*, which I'm bringing you in one of the few live versions where Frampton plays the opening lines on the ukulele.

Perhaps not everyone knows that Van Morrison has also played the ukulele in some of his songs. In particular, he did so on *Keep It Simple* (2008), a highly successful album defined by his unmistakable blend of blues, folk, gospel, and Celtic music. The ukulele fits perfectly into this musical atmosphere and appears in three tracks, starting with the title track, *Keep It Simple*, which I've included in our playlist. But on your own, I also recommend listening to *That's Entertainment* and *Behind the Ritual*: they're truly worth it.

Staying with great voices, I want to mention Bruno Mars, a native of Hawaii whose music is not typically associated with Hawaiian tradition. The delightful *Count on Me*, from his 2010 debut studio album *Doo-Wops & Hooligans*, is an exception. The song is an anthem to friendship, featuring folk and tropical tones with reggae influences that subtly evoke the singer's Hawaiian roots. It's no coincidence that many have noticed a resemblance to the sound of *Over the Rainbow* in the timeless version by Israel Kamakawiwo'ole. If you check out the official *Count on Me* music video or the MTV Sessions, you'll

see Bruno Mars himself playing the ukulele — a true rarity.

As we've often said, the ukulele isn't just an instrument of joy and lightheartedness, but also one of poetry and introspection. In our previous edition, we spoke several times about George Harrison; today, however, we'll listen to his friend Paul McCartney. In 2002, after Harrison's passing, Paul performed this song with the ukulele during his *Back in the U.S. and Back in the World* tours, as well as at the *Concert for George* alongside Eric Clapton, in a moving version that begins with a ukulele intro.

Finally, let's close this *Jukebox* with a queen of music — the legendary Madonna. Who would have ever imagined seeing her with a ukulele? Yet during her *Rebel Heart Tour* in 2015 and 2016, she performed an acoustic reinterpretation of her 1986 hit *True Blue*. Seated on a stack of tires, Madonna strums the ukulele and invites the audience to sing along, revealing an intimate and unexpected side of one of the songs she had dedicated to actor Sean Penn, her husband at the time. It's a dance-pop song with a retro '50s flavor: Madonna's tribute to the girl groups of that era. Bye bye. ♡

NOBLE PLASTIC

Italianness. IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF MARIO MACCAFERRI *by E. Chierici* - When I first approached the world of the ukulele, I never imagined that my homeland — more precisely, the province north of Bologna, near the border with Ferrara — had given birth to a great pioneer of lutherie: Mario Maccaferri.

An artisan who also dedicated himself to the ukulele with a completely personal, flamboyant, undoubtedly eccentric, and deeply visionary style.

Today, everyone knows the town of Cento for its lively and colorful carnival. At school, we studied the paintings of Guercino, whose statue stands proudly in the town's main square, and whose works are still preserved in some of Cento's most important churches. Unfortunately, few people know the story of Maccaferri — a very common surname in this area, clearly revealing the Centese origin of this extraordinary luthier, born in 1900 and who passed away in New York in 1993.

When, thanks to a friend, I discovered that the Fondazione Entroterra was organizing the second edition of the Festival Maccaferri della chitarra centopievese, I just couldn't miss it!

Besides the numerous concerts — meticulously curated and stylistically refined — I particularly enjoyed the "impossible interview", in which the brilliant and engaging Patrizio Roversi portrayed Maccaferri in a hypothetical interview. It was a fascinating tale of his life and his adventure as an artisan and entrepreneur in the New World.

Mario was an enterprising boy who, at only 11 years old, joined the renowned Cento lutherie workshop of Luigi Mozzani. Alongside his evident musical talent, he developed exceptional technical and constructive skills. His career as a concert guitarist began early, but as we know, at that time Italian conservatories regarded the guitar as a "lesser" instrument. It was only thanks to competitions organized by the magazine *Il Plettro* (a distinguished ancestor of this very bulletin!) that Mario was able to earn prestigious teaching positions.

During his travels, he met prominent figures from both the musical and business worlds, including two London representatives of the Selmer company who, impressed by one of his guitars, began a fruitful collaboration

with him. Initially divided between his performing career and his business ventures, Mario was forced to abandon the stage after a hand injury. He then devoted himself entirely to designing musical instruments, expanding his work to include reed production for wind instruments. His reeds were so well-received in the United States that, in 1939, he decided to move to New York in pursuit of the American dream.

The difficulties in sourcing quality wood during the war led him to experiment with plastic, resulting in innovative reeds used by great musicians such as Benny Goodman. When the rise of rock'n'roll caused the demand for reeds to collapse, Maccaferri didn't give up — he reinvented his business, producing various everyday plastic items.

He had already experimented widely... but what about the ukulele? That was the question I asked myself as a spectator during the "impossible interview". Like Archimedes discovering the principle of buoyancy in his bathtub, or Newton under his famous apple tree, our Mario had his ukulele epiphany while on holiday in warm, sunny Miami. There, he met Arthur Godfrey, a beloved radio and television host who often accompanied himself on the ukulele during his shows. It was Godfrey who planted the idea in Maccaferri's mind — the incredible sales potential of an ukulele that was both easy to manufacture and affordable.

Said and done: the Islander was born — the first all-plastic ukulele. Between 1949 and 1968, around nine million units were sold. After the ukulele, Maccaferri extended the use of plastic to other instruments — saxophones, guitars, drums... He never intended to replace wood, but rather to make music accessible to everyone.

Today, Maccaferri ukuleles are collector's items, sought after by true connoisseurs and enthusiasts. And who knows — perhaps soon I'll own one myself. It would be a small tribute to this nearly forgotten genius, and to the town where I was born, which — in an unexpected twist of fate — brought me back to it through the four strings of a little plastic instrument. 🍕

SMILING UKES

Experiences. L'UKULELE DEL SORRISO press release by G. Sagone - L'Ukulele del Sorriso (The Ukulele of the Smile) is a charitable project born with a clear goal: to turn music into tangible support for pediatric wards across Italy.

The idea stems from the personal experience of Gabriele Sagone, a classical guitarist who, in 2019, during a hospital stay, experienced firsthand the power of a smile brought by volunteers in the ward. Years later, when he returned to the hospital as a musician, he decided to create an initiative capable of spreading that same joy many times over.

At the heart of the project is a handcrafted ukulele donated to the cause by the internationally renowned Roman luthier Francesco Verginelli. This instrument is collecting the autographs of major national and international artists, and will eventually be auctioned for charity. The first signature came from Jacob Collier — the British artist, winner of seven Grammy Awards and described by critics as "the Mozart of our time". More prominent names from the Italian music scene will soon follow.

Alongside the auction, there is an active GoFundMe campaign, open to anyone who wishes to contribute. All proceeds — from both the auction and the fundraising campaign — will be donated to organizations that

bring concerts and music therapy to children's hospitals. To ensure full transparency, the funds will be held in a dedicated account until the project concludes and will be distributed with the support of Orchestra Srl, which will oversee how every euro is used by the beneficiaries.



Illustration by Steve Sperguenzie

The project is promoted by the association Comunate APS, which already has experience in charitable events, and enjoys the patronage of institutions such as the "A. Vivaldi" Conservatory of Alessandria and the support of the Municipality of Todì.

The Ukulele of the Smile is not just an auction or a fundraiser — it is a cultural and social movement that brings together artists, institutions, companies, and citizens with a single purpose: to bring music, warmth, and hope where they are needed most.

To learn more and support the initiative, visit: www.ukuleledelsorriso.it.

On July 17, *Alele waha 'ole*, the new album by **Federico Rossignoli**, was released on Bandcamp. The record is dedicated to Hawaiian music from the 19th and 20th centuries, featuring pieces rearranged for ukulele based on original sources.

On August 20, **Julia Traser** (Giulia Pedrana) released the single *Hi You*, a preview of her upcoming album *Perfect Timing*.

Fraternitae and *Words* are the two singles previewing the forthcoming solo album by **Renè Rassi**, titled *Fraternitae*. Both tracks are available on Bandcamp.

News Bulletin. - **TOLVE (PZ):** Sunday, July 20, 9:30 p.m. — Ethno-prog concert with the Salicreta Trio, featuring Danilo Vignola, Rocco Mentissi, and Giò Didonna. Special guest of the evening: Antonio Guastamacchia. **FUNCHAL (PORTUGAL):** Sunday, July 20 — At the Conservatory of Madeira, Davide Donelli took part in the Animusic 2025 conference. He presented a paper titled *The Ukulele in Italy in the Early 20th Century: An Organological and Historical Exploration Through a 1930s Mogar Ukulele*, a historical study conducted together with Giovanni Albini on one of the first Italian ukuleles. For the occasion, Donelli also performed several pieces on this fine instrument. **UNETICE (CZECH REPUBLIC):**

July 25–27 — Ukulollo, a regular guest at many editions, participated in the 13th Czech Ukulele Festival, performing alongside numerous international artists. **ANZIO (RM):** Saturday, July 26 — The Rimbombante space hosted a Tropical Party with Adriano Bono & Calypsonians, offering live music ranging from calypso to ska, rocksteady, reggae, and dub. **ORNAGO (MB):** Sunday, July 27 — An Home Concert featured Pedro Gonçalves on braguinha, accompanied by Davide Donelli on ukulele and guitar. The program included works by E. Kaai, C. Drummond de Vasconcelos, P. Esteirero, G. Orfão, and G. Albini. **LUGANO (CH):** Thursday, July 31, 8 p.m. — As part of the Lugano Beat festival, Calabrò coi Colibrì performed their set *Traditional Jazz with Humor*. **CAORLE (VE):** Friday, August 8 — At Duna Verde, I Fringuelli di Honolulu entertained the audience with their fun, holiday-style repertoire. **APRILIA (LT):** Friday, August 8 — Baraonda Events presented an evening with Tubadu and AgroSoundSystem. **LIDO DI JESOLO (VE):** Friday, August 8 — Onemanpier and his Ukulele Sexy Trio performed live for Crazy Live Summer Vibes. **MARATEA (PZ):** Saturday, August 9 — At the town's marina, Adriano Bono's Reggae Circus enlivened the evening with its mix of live music and circus arts, featuring Svenka and Cinquepalle. **DIANO MARINA (IM):** Saturday, August 9, 9 p.m. — At Il Vallo di Gorlieri aps, El Bastardo y Los Muertos gave a 100% Rock'n'Roll concert. **SORIANO NEL CIMINO (VT):** Sunday, August 10 — During the *Trekking degli Asinelli* event, there were children's activities and a ukulele performance by Alessandra Scaraggi. **CASTROVILLARI (CS):** Saturday, August 13 — Danilo Vignola & Giò Didonna were invited to perform at the Festival dei Quartieri, organized by the local administration and Dolce Sara Eventi aps. **LATINA (LT):** Friday, August 15 — At Lido del Sandalo, Tubadu performed for the Sandalo Live Summer Musicseries. **CASTEL MADAMA (RM):** Friday, August 15 — At Osteria Brikke, the trio EssepiUKUerre (Stefano Vetturini, Daniele Vacca, and Dario Bellaveglia) presented their new project on Roman folk songs with the ukulele, combining light sounds, witty lyrics, and refined arrangements. **MILAN:** Saturday, August 23, 10:30 p.m. — At Spirit de Milan, the usual Holy Swing Night took place, this time featuring Fabio KoRyu Calabrò and his Colibrì band. **DUBLIN (IRELAND):** August 23–24 — Alessandro Pedroni participated in the 14th Ukulele Hooley Festival, performing on the main stage and presenting his latest song *Sammy the Seal*, written to raise awareness and support for Seal Rescue Ireland. **GENZANO DI LUCANIA (PZ):** Friday, August 29 — At Fontana Cavallina, Danilo Vignola & Giò Didonna were special guests at the 11th edition of "Tra tarantella e taranta, i sapori della musica". Musical performances featured Tammorrasia and Doimari. **CELLE FIGURE (SV):** Saturday, September 6 — At Molo Crocetta, Honky Tonk School presented the Rockin' Soul Rumble Night with El Bastardo and La Terribile. **BIOGLIO (BI):** September 12–14 — The Ribotà cultural and music festival took place, featuring Alessio Camaiti, who led the workshop *Four Strings for Everyone* and the narrated concert *Rex Ashwind and the Sound of the Ukulele*, with a program ranging from Iz to Elvis, from Laurel & Hardy to Taylor Swift. **UNITED KINGDOM:** July 4 – September 6 — Max De Bernardi & Veronica Sbergia performed over thirty shows, many of them sold out, during their **UK Summer Tour**.

UKULELE

Lieto Fine

Davide Donelli

Andante ♩=88

Musical notation for measures 1-4. The piece is in 4/4 time with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The melody is written in a single treble clef. The guitar part is shown on a four-string ukulele with strings labeled A4, E4, C4, and G4. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-3 and 0 for open strings.

Musical notation for measures 5-8. The melody continues with eighth and quarter notes. The guitar part includes some double stops and fingerings like 7-5 and 3-2.

Musical notation for measures 9-13. This section features a change in texture with chords and a first/second ending bracket. The guitar part has many double stops and fingerings such as 0-2, 3-3, 2-2, 1-1, 0-0, 2-2, 3-3, 5-5, and 3-3.

Musical notation for measures 14-17. The melody continues with eighth notes. The guitar part has many double stops and fingerings such as 5-5, 7-7, 6-6, 4-4, 5-5, 4-4, 2-2, 3-3, 0-0, 0-0, 2-2, 3-3, 3-3, 3-3, 2-2, 2-2, 0-0, 0-0, 0-0, 0-0, 2-2, 2-2, 2-2, 2-2.

Musical notation for measures 18-21. The melody continues with eighth notes. The guitar part has many double stops and fingerings such as 2-3, 2-0, 1-0, 2-0, 0-0, 2-0, 2-3, 2-0, 3-0, 4-0.

Musical notation for measures 22-25. The melody continues with eighth notes. The guitar part has many double stops and fingerings such as 6-7, 5-7, 4-5, 4-5, 0-3, 3-2, 3-0, 3-0, 2-3, 3-0, 2-3.

Musical notation for measures 26-29. The melody concludes with a final note. The guitar part has many double stops and fingerings such as 2-3, 2-0, 1-0, 2-0, 0-0, 2-0, 2-3, 2-0, 4-0.