

Published October 12th, 2011

## Lafayette Love for the "Jumping Flea"

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Photo Doug Kohen

Somewhere between Tiny Tim's "Tiptoe through the Tulips" and the Brudda Iz version of "Over the Rainbow" lies a resurgence in ukulele popularity. It's showing up on television shows like Glee, and American Idol, and fans say they hear it in the background of music for TV commercials.

A group of musicians and would-be musicians gather monthly on Saturday afternoons at Lamorinda Music in Lafayette. Gary Peare, who's quick to explain he's not a professional musician, becomes the pied piper as he leads his class through the basics of an instrument the Hawaiians nicknamed the "jumping flea."

22 students, ages three to 70-plus, learn to like the little wooden four-string and show their "ukulele pride." The class is free, although those wishing to borrow an instrument from the music store pay a \$5 rental. Peare explains they'll be learning the "laid back" West Coast style, and reminds everyone they don't even have to know how to read music to enjoy playing. He gets them relaxed learning the thumb strum, and before they know it, everyone is playing "Buffalo Gals."

William and Katie McKinney of Lafayette enjoyed their first lesson. Still in their morning soccer uniforms, the brother and sister listen intently while picking up personal tips from Peare. William is a quick study, having played two other stringed instruments (violin and electric guitar) before.

Lamorinda Music co-owner Colleen McCormick says the instrument's popularity came as a complete surprise to her, although considering her family history, it shouldn't. McCormick's 98 year old grandmother played ukulele in a high school band in Los Angeles in the late 1920's. McCormick enthused about "The Mighty Uke" video ("The amazing comeback of a musical underdog", <http://mightyukemovie.com/>), now playing at international film festivals. Her store stocks Makala instruments made in Petaluma of acacia, mahogany, koa or spruce wood; some painted in tie dye, paisley, checkerboard, flag colors or island scenes. Small enough for a child, nostalgic enough for adults, the little instrument that is the ukulele gathers young and old alike under its four-string spell.

Learn about the next ukulele class by calling (925 )38-.0963 or going online to [http://www.lamorindamusic.com/uke\\_class.htm](http://www.lamorindamusic.com/uke_class.htm).

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