



## “Rainbow Ukulele” Book 2 Teacher Notes

### General points

#### Previous knowledge

Book 2 assumes knowledge of the material in Book 1 - i.e.

- one octave of natural notes (CDEFGABC) in 1st position
- plucking simple melodies with the thumb
- simple note values including rests
- possibly some knowledge of the simplest chords in C major

#### The colours

Pupils who have worked through Book 1 will be familiar with the colour scheme for the notes. Each string is given a colour, and all the notes played on that string are printed in that colour.

In the earliest stages, this approach has many advantages. The musical staff is a beautiful, elegant and really rather simple thing. But we must always remember that the information on the staff is entirely abstract - pitch, note value, etc - and abstract information can take up an awful lot of brain capacity when you are trying to learn a complex new set of motor skills at the same time! The colours add something familiar, something that the brain can process at lightning speed, and above all something concrete, to all the abstract information about pitch, note value etc.

Of course there are other ways of adding the same concrete information. We can write note names, or string numbers, or fingerings, next to the notes. But as soon as we start to put in these extra markings above or below the staff, we are taking the pupil's eyes away from the notes themselves! The beauty of the coloured-strings idea is that pupils keep their eyes on the notes themselves from the very beginning.

Later on, the colours will need to be removed and the pupils will be asked to play tunes with the notes printed black. Of course they will need a little help with this, but they generally make the adjustment very quickly. Try it if you don't believe me! If possible, I prime pupils for the change

by showing them a colour photograph of a face on the computer screen, and then removing the colour to leave a black and white photograph - it is still the same picture, the same person, the same facial expression - with or without the colours. Most of my more advanced pupils are quite used to working with a mixture of pieces with colours (from the main books) and somewhat simpler pieces without colours (from the Black and White Tunebooks, see below).

Another benefit of the coloured string approach is that the changes in colour help to break the large overall note range into smaller, manageable chunks. Beginner pupils can easily focus on one string at a time, and in the early stages they only have to make just 2-way decisions once they have been guided to the correct string (“line or space?”; “open or fingered?”).

By Book 2, the pupil should be reading the C-C note range confidently on the stave, and may well be comfortable reading the notes when the colours are taken away. However, the colour scheme is continued into the 2nd book, and pupils find it just as useful at this higher level, as they cope with a larger note range, patterns of notes lying across groups of strings, and the phenomenon - which is very common in standard ukulele tuning - of the same note cropping up on more than one string and in more than one position.

To ease the transition to reading without colours, and to make sure the pupil can access other books after completing the course, Rainbow Ukulele Books 1 and 2 are each supported by “Black and White Tunebooks”, which feature different repertoire but the same notes as the main books. These can be found as free downloads on [www.ringingstringspublications.co.uk](http://www.ringingstringspublications.co.uk), and they can be studied alongside the main books or done as revision and consolidation at the end.

## **The left hand**

By the end of Book 2, the pupil will have met all the notes (including flats and sharps) in first position up to the 3<sup>rd</sup> fret, as well as the higher notes up to F (1st string 8th fret). Section 1 of the book focuses on the left hand.

## **The right hand**

By the end of the book, pupils will have experimented with plucking with the index, middle and ring fingers as well as the thumb, and explored most of the simple right hand techniques that ukulele players commonly use. This work is all to be found in Section 2.

Right hand technique varies enormously from one ukulele player to another, and the book is always at pains to point out possible alternatives and choices. It is worth noting that there are very few tunes in the book which cannot be plucked “thumb only” if you wish - and this remains a very common technique in the ukulele world.

## **Pick and mix**

Though it makes perfect sense to work through the book from cover to cover, there are many ways in which the Left Hand and Right Hand sections can be mingled.

## Chords

Some pupils are ready for strummed chords from Day One, while others need to come to them gradually as part of a mixture of activities.

In Book 1, the approach is to teach melody playing first and foremost, and to leave it very much up to individual pupils and teachers to decide for themselves how much chord work they want to do, and at which stage. Chord symbols are included above the music (in light print) wherever appropriate, and chord diagrams are shown at the back of the book.

The approach is very similar in Book 2, with some key differences:

- Of course here are more chord shapes (and the music is in a range of keys)
- In addition to the chord symbols themselves, there are often suggested patterns for accompaniment. The patterns (strummed and plucked) are listed and demonstrated near the back of the book.
- Chord shapes come increasingly to the fore as the book progresses. Some of the melodies are punctuated with strummed chords, and later in the book there are pieces based on broken-chord patterns.

## Voices

All the music in Rainbow Ukulele is written single-voiced, even when - as is often the case - bass and treble notes are intended to overlap. This is in keeping with the general philosophy of presenting everything as simply as possible at each stage, and only putting information on the page which will help at that particular stage.

Later on, the more serious pupil will also come across ukulele music written in two or more voices, and of course this notation is often richer and more informative than a single voice. But in the early stages, the extra information is unlikely to improve a beginner pupil's performance – and is in fact quite likely to cause him/her to miscount and lose the simple metre of the piece.

## Page by page notes

### Note review - p2/3

On p2 and p3 the focus is on:

- revising and consolidating the notes from Book 1

The fingerboard diagram on p2 is a very powerful aid to visual memory, and a neat way of locating the notes on both the fingerboard and the stave at the same time. The diagram is used in this book whenever new notes appear, and a complete chart up to fret 5 can be found on p28. You (or your pupils) may wish to download a blank version from the website to use for revision activities.

The “suggested accompaniment pattern” numbers refer to the list of patterns on p26-7.

Though it is assumed that the pupil is plucking “thumb only” in the first section of the book, the tunes on p3 would also be very suitable for practising plucking with “walking fingers” see p13.

Extra repertoire in Rainbow Ukulele Black and White Tunebook #2: p1.

## The Bb note - p4/5

On p4 and p5 the focus is on:

- learning how to find a “flat” note on the ukulele (subtract 1 from the fret number)
- flat signs as accidentals and in the key signature
- tunes and accompaniments in F major and D minor

It is worth pointing out that F major and D minor are both easy keys from the point of view of chord shapes and accompaniment - as long as you keep away from the subdominant (IV) chord!

If you are mixing work from Sections 1 and 2 of the book, then the tunes on p4-5 could also be plucked with a mixture of thumb and walking fingers, in a style similar to p15.

Extra repertoire in Rainbow Ukulele Black and White Tunebook #2: p2-3.

## Introducing sharps - p6 - 8

From p6 - 8 the focus is on:

- learning how to find a “sharp” note on the ukulele (add 1 to the fret number)
- sharp signs as accidentals and in the key signature
- tunes and accompaniments in G major and E minor
- understanding how flat/sharp notes can have two names

There is also some chromatic scale work. This allows for some new sounds, and is also an excellent finger drill, as the fingering system for the ukulele is generally “one finger per fret”. Notice that this is the first time the pupil has to use the 4th finger.

Again these tunes can be plucked “thumb only” or you could take ideas from the right hand markings on p13 and p15.

Extra repertoire in Rainbow Ukulele Black and White Tunebook #2: p3-4.

## Going above fret 4 - p9 - 10

On p9-10 the focus is on:

- reaching fret 5, either by staying in 1st position and extending the 4th finger, or by shifting the whole hand into 11nd position
- understanding that from now on, finger numbers and fret numbers are no longer automatically the same

Extra repertoire in Rainbow Ukulele Black and White Tunebook #2: p5.

## Further up the fingerboard - p11 - 12

On p11-12 the focus is on:

- finding the high notes DEF in Vth position
- shifting smoothly and confidently between 1st and Vth position
- understanding how other, lower, notes can also be played in Vth position when convenient (e.g ABC notes can all be found on the green string in this position)

If aiming for a faster speed, “Perpetual Motion” is much easier to pluck with walking fingers on pink and green strings, and thumb on red (see p15).

“Mountain Pass” is very effectively played “thumb only” with the thumb brushing the chords as well as the single notes. However it could also be plucked in the same way as “Aloha Oe” on p21.

Extra repertoire in Rainbow Ukulele Black and White Tunebook #2: p5.

### **Plucking with i and m - p13 - 19**

On p13-19 the focus is on:

- achieving more fluency on single strings by plucking with “walking fingers”
- achieving more fluency on string crossings by combining finger and thumb plucking

See general note above about the right hand. The book is extremely flexible in its approach, and alternative styles are always shown (e.g. the “thumb and finger plectrum” technique on p14).

Remember that the pieces in Section 1 can always be recycled for extra practice with the right hand. It can be very beneficial to learn the same piece in two different right hand styles and it encourages pupils to make their own decisions about how they would eventually like to play. See notes on pages in Section 1 for possible links.

### **Mixtures of single, double and triple notes - p20 - 22.**

On p13-17 the focus is on:

- arrangements which have more variety of texture, with single notes interspersed with two- and three-note chords

See general note above about how some pupils (and professionals!) will always prefer to play “thumb only”. The alternatives shown here are very important and pupils should be aware of the different techniques and also how they result in quite different sounds.

### **Adding the ring finger, p23 - 24**

On p23-24 the focus is on:

- pieces which move rapidly across all four strings
- plucking with the thumb, index, middle and ring fingers (Timr, or pima as it is known in the guitar world)

Both the final pieces in the book are quite challenging and not every pupil will be ready for them straight away! But more able pupils will enjoy being stretched a little.

## Reference pages

At the back of the book is a useful reference page for chord shapes. For simplicity's sake I have stuck to the ones which are needed for the pieces in this particular book, and avoided any need for barre chords (except for the Bb which needs a half-barre).

The accompaniments page takes the pupil through the simplest patterns for accompanying in duple and triple time. In real life, it would be very unusual to stick to a single pattern for the whole of a song – but for a pupil, it gives a very useful start. Some pupils will prefer to stick to the security of the simple “serving suggestions” in the book – others will need no encouragement to make up their own ideas and variations.

If you are looking for fan strums, split strums, triple strums and the like, you will not find them here. They are too hard for this level, and also they are so much better taught with a video than with a book!

## And that's it!

These books have been a great pleasure to write, compile and to use with my own pupils. I do hope you and your pupils have enjoyed “Rainbow Ukulele” Books 1 and 2 just as much!

Thank you,

Hugh Boyde (Oct 2015)