



## Teacher Notes

### General notes

#### The colours

In this first “Rainbow Ukulele” book each string is given a colour, and the notes on the stave are coloured accordingly.

The coloured notes make the stave a friendlier place and help the beginner pupil to make the link between what things look like on the stave and what they feel like on the ukulele.

In the very earliest open string pieces, the colours give the pupil all the information needed to find the right notes. As the fretted notes are added, the colours immediately help the pupil to the correct string, and he/she then has to use the stave lines to make a simple 2-way decision: “open string or fretted note?”

In this way the key concepts of “on the line” vs “in the space” can be learned and absorbed and the pupil is immediately reading from the stave, but without the overload of information that can be so daunting for a novice player.

In a group teaching situation, the colours also give less able pupils a better chance of being able to play along with faster learners, which means they are more likely to stay engaged.

#### Notes or chords?

This book teaches melody playing first and foremost. Simple melodies on the ukulele, with single notes and plenty of open strings, are well within the grasp of pupils as young as Year 2.

The chords are there too, but in the background, so that teachers and pupils can decide for themselves how much chord playing to do and at what stage. Some pupils are ready for chords from Day One; others need to come to them gradually as part of a mixture of activities.

Many of the pieces have other kinds of accompaniments too – drones and simple broken-chord patterns. At this technical level, these can often be more fun and interesting than strummed chords – both for the player and the listener.

## Right hand technique

In this book the pupil learns to pluck with the thumb first of all, and is able to stick to this one simple technique while mastering the basics of the fingerboard.

- However, many of these pieces can be played with a range of right hand techniques – thumb-and-finger, alternating-fingers, or plectrum - and abler and more adventurous pupils can be encouraged to explore these.

## Page by page notes

### Open strings

From p 6 to p 10 pupils should focus on:

- making a clean plucked sound by striking the string lightly and without “hooking” the thumb underneath it
- keeping a steady pulse with two note values
- being able to pluck and change strings while keeping eyes on the page

You will find a nice version of “London Bridge” available as a free download on [www.ringingstringspublications.co.uk/orders-and-downloads.php](http://www.ringingstringspublications.co.uk/orders-and-downloads.php). Pupils sing the song and use a simple pulse on open red and blue strings to accompany themselves. It does not require any notation at all and works very well in the first session with a class.

### P6

A short reading task is followed by the first invitation to the pupil(s) to compose. There are short composition tasks throughout the book. Most pupils respond well to these, as long as there is plenty of input and modelling from the teacher – always be prepared to “go first” and show the pupils the sort of thing which they could do.

This task could also take the form of an aural game - as structured or unstructured as you please. In a 1-1 situation, you could get the pupil to imitate your rhythms on a different string. With a group, you could have 1 pupil on each string - they take turns to originate and imitate rhythms.

If pupils are really having problems getting creative, try eliciting the names of their favourite foods and finding rhythms from these. This has never been known to fail!

At this point pupils would also enjoy playing the open-string version of “Ukulele Tango” (music, backing track and teacher notes available as free downloads from [www.ringingstringspublications.co.uk/orders-and-downloads.php](http://www.ringingstringspublications.co.uk/orders-and-downloads.php)).

### P7

Though the notes now appear on the staff, the pupil does not have to consciously learn the staff position of each note for the time being – the colours do all the work.

Notes are named for the first time - though the teacher can continue referring to colours rather than note names at this stage.

You could try asking a pupil or class why the pink notes are higher up on the stave, or red notes lower down - this could lead to a discussion of pitch and perhaps a game where you play one of the open strings and they name it with eyes closed

### **P8/9**

Open string pieces ranging from very easy (Sailor's Song) to much more challenging (Japanese Bells). In a group situation you can treat Japanese Bells as an extension piece for the more able pupils.

"Pattern Piece" is as flexible as can be. Pupils can make their own pieces by simply playing the patterns in a certain order, or by overlaying them with players on different patterns at the same time. Overlaying the three different note values can be quite a challenge for a class!

### **P10 Song accompaniments**

Song accompaniments are a recurring feature in the book. The first ones use open strings only.

Notice the melody is in grey because there is no need for the pupils to read it at this stage.

Pupils may enjoy singing the songs as well – or you could sing them. Or they can just as well be done as instrumentals. As long as the pupils are practicing the key accompaniment skills – counting and keeping a steady pulse – it really does not matter.

There may be other instrumentalists available – e.g. siblings or classmates who play recorder or violin – who could play the melody with ukulele accompanying.

For "The Keel Row" only the first verse appears in the book. The complete melody and lyrics are available as a free download from [www.ringingstringspublications.co.uk/orders-and-downloads.php](http://www.ringingstringspublications.co.uk/orders-and-downloads.php), as is a classroom performance version of the song where pupils are divided into three groups each plucking a different string. The download version is notated very simply, with colours and numbers, and requires pupils to play at frets 1 and 2 as well as open strings.

## **Fretting with 2<sup>nd</sup> finger**

From p 11 to p 13 pupils should focus on

- building a good left hand shape and the ability to fret a note cleanly
- learning note names C and D on red string
- looking harder at the stave to distinguish "on the line" from "in the space"

### **P11**

You can return to this simple page at any time for a warm-up once learned – and it can be recycled later when pupils learn the E and F notes on p14.

Refer pupils back to p3 for big pictures showing the left hand shape. The most common problem is that beginner pupils want to cup the ukulele neck in the palm of the hand – they need to find a position which enables them to move their fingers more freely and get at the fingerboard properly. Most will get on best if they can learn to rest it on the side of the hand as shown on p3. Some pupils even seem to prefer a "classical guitar" shape for the left hand, where only the thumb and fingertip make contact with the neck.

## P12/13

The two red-string notes are mixed with the other open strings.

The open-string accompaniment parts (small notes) should give welcome relief to pupils who are struggling to fret cleanly.

Also notice there is another kind of composition task at the bottom of p13 – putting notes to a set rhythm. Get pupils to say or clap the rhythm first, then play on a single note, then try the task. Be prepared to give lots of examples yourself.

## Fretting with the 1<sup>st</sup> finger

From p14 - 19 pupils should focus on

- fretting cleanly with the first finger
- reading new notes E and F on the stave
- gradually learning to play tunes which use both 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> fingers on the fingerboard

### *Finger hopscotch*

Pupils will need a lot of reminding to stick strictly to the correct fingering, to keep the left thumb still while switching between fingers and not to look at their left hand all the time while playing! Various kinds of “finger hopscotch” games can be used to reinforce this – done without plucking, so the pupil can focus entirely on the left hand. Eyes open or shut.

## P14

Remember this can be used in conjunction with p11. You can return to these pages frequently for quick warm ups. In a group setting, it is quickest to have more than one book open and get pupils to change pages (and strings) in quick succession.

## P15

Another classic format for a simple composition task – inventing “answers” to set “question” phrases. As usual be prepared to go first: get pupils to play the question phrases repeatedly while you make up a variety of answers.

## P16, 17, 18

The open string notes G and A are gradually added back in to the mixture, to make a scale CDEFGA with only two fretted notes.

The accompaniments for Merrily and London Bridge feature the patterns C-G and D-G. Point out to pupils that during the D-G bars, they do not need to lift the fretting finger – in fact they should definitely hold it down, as we want the note to overlap with the note on the other string.

“Ringing Strings” explores this effect further and the whole piece depends upon the “ringing-on” sound. Pupils will find this piece quite challenging. You can help them by encouraging them to practice it without the blue-string drone (treating the other notes as minims). The drone is easy to add once the shape of the melody is absorbed.

## Fretting with the 3<sup>rd</sup> finger

From p. 20 - 23 pupils should focus on

- fretting with the third finger (G on string 2 - green)
- gradually integrating the third finger with the first two fingers
- learning to “leave the previous finger down” when passing to a higher note on same string (e.g. from F to G on green string)

Again, there are many “finger hopscotch” and fingerboard-tapping exercises that can be used to focus on the left hand without distraction from the right. For example holding down the first finger on F, while wiggling the 3<sup>rd</sup> finger up and down on the G note.

To show pupils the advantage of learning “green G” you could ask them to watch your right hand as you play them “London Bridge” firstly using “blue G” and then “green G”. They will easily see that there is a lot less need for crossing strings when you use “green G”.

As ever there are plenty of old chestnuts among the tunes, and a range of accompaniment possibilities from “long notes on mainly open strings” to strummed chords.

Pupils should almost certainly be ready for a few chords by now if you have not already started. You could start with C, Am, F and G7 (in that order – perhaps teaching one of these chords each week over a month). Pictures are on p.28 and pupils will enjoy playing along with “Island Song” (backing track and chord chart available as free downloads on [www.ringingstringspublications.co.uk/orders-and-downloads.php](http://www.ringingstringspublications.co.uk/orders-and-downloads.php)). There is a melody part too which some of the class might be able to play after learning the notes on the pink string (see next section).

## Completing the C major scale

From p. 24 - 26 pupils should focus on

- learning the new fingered notes B and C to complete a one-octave scale from middle C
- playing tunes with a larger range of notes.
- honing ensemble skills by playing rounds
- preparing for their first paid engagement!

## That's it!

I hope you and your pupils have enjoyed “Rainbow Ukulele”. I am putting together material for a Book 2 so if you have any ideas or feedback please let me know!

Thank you,

Hugh Boyde (March 2013)

## Extra resources

There are lots of extra pieces available as free downloads from the website: ([www.ringingstringspublications.co.uk/orders-and-downloads.php](http://www.ringingstringspublications.co.uk/orders-and-downloads.php)). Some have accompaniment parts, some have backing tracks available as mp3 downloads, and in some cases there are extra teacher notes showing how to exploit each resource to the full.