

# The Ukestration Manual



## PREVIEW

CREATING MUSIC-MAKING COMMUNITIES WITH  
THE UKULELE AND THE UKESTRA METHOD

Mark Jackson and Jane Jelbart

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*pg 9* - Originally posted on Ukulele Underground forum [October 2009](#)

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*pg 25* - Bob Beale

*pg 36, 38* - Audience member (using M. Jackson's camera)

*pg 54* - Groovy Banana [www.groovy-banana.com](http://www.groovy-banana.com)

*pg 63* - Penny Creighton

*pg 65* - Groovy Banana

*pg 77* - Audience member (using M. Jackson's camera)

*pg 85* - Audience member (using M. Jackson's camera)

#### THE GENUINE MESSAGE

This book has been nurtured by 8+ years of direct ukulele teaching and leadership experience; 100s of hours of cogitation, reflection, writing and editing; and many dollars spent in support, relief teachers, editing, osteopathic treatments and artwork. Please respect our right to earn a living as we help others to help others make music.

#### THE LEGALESE

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[www.gwynnethjonesillustration.wordpress.com](http://www.gwynnethjonesillustration.wordpress.com)

From Mark: Thanks to Jane who is my ideal partner in music, business, life and love.

From Jane: Thanks to Mark for the marvellously creative (and sometimes chaotic!) journey we are travelling.

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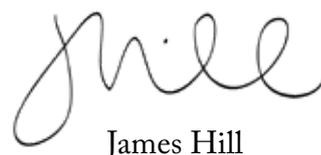
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## FOREWORD

Mark Jackson and Jane Jelbart have personality to burn. For years, the dynamic pair have led ukulele groups, taught lessons, organized festivals and performed internationally. They have done all of this with charisma, humour and passion. But this book isn't about them. It's about you.

When I started reading *The Ukestration Manual* I was curious to see how much personality Mark and Jane had infused into the book. Too little personality and their words would fall flat. Too much personality and their method might seem to depend on their own combined charisma for its success. Thankfully, they got it just right. From “nurturing inclusivity” to avoiding the “cult of the book”, to the “Four Column Approach”, this manual is full of transferable ideas and strategies that Mark and Jane learned the hard way so you wouldn't have to.

It would have been easy for Mark and Jane to write a “Ukestration Memoir” chronicling their ukulele adventures and mythologizing their success. But that's not the book they have written. This book isn't a memoir, it's a manual. It's not about “look what we did” but rather “look what you can do!”



James Hill

# PREVIEW

# Chapter 1



# PREVIEW



# Chapter 1

## INTRODUCTION

For eight years we have run a successful community music business in a way that, to our knowledge, is unique in the world. Whilst there are travelling ukulele heroes (think James Hill, Sarah Maisel or Jim D'Ville), being part of our local community is really important to us. Most times, it comes down to 'we like to live near the beach, we like gardening, and our parents need looking after'. These imperatives limit our travelling because for the most part, we make a living from running ukulele groups in our local community.

Many groups in the world-wide ukulele movement are focused on singing and strumming. There is an incredible number of volunteer-run ukulele groups whose dominant focus is playing good ol' songs with little to no musical instruction. Some of them may also consider that earning money from running an ukulele community is tantamount to sacrilege. However, we are musicians who need to pay our bills and who want to live in, and with, our local community.

The first motivation for writing this manual was for ourselves – to analyse and describe what we did and why. Secondly, we feel passionately that our approach is well thought out and appropriately structured, and many who have done our workshops over the years agree. We hope this manual will help others achieve something similar.

### 1.1 Essentials of the Ukestra Method

The Ukestra Method, our business and our life is based on three interrelated essentials:

**Music:** teach people the skills to make music.

**Community:** create social communities through that music.

**Sustainability:** operate within a structure that affords long-term personal and/or financial sustainability.

Whilst the ukulele is highly effective for realising these concepts, for us, it has to be about the **music**, and teaching music, not just the ukulele. We would not still be involved unless we felt we were enriching our community with music-making and learning.

We call ourselves community musicians, and without **community**, the ukestras would not have had such a widespread and tangible effect on so many lives.

*A community musician builds communities of players using a teaching approach which is as much social as it is musical.*

Finally, we have chosen to operate sustainably through a business structure; that is, we have found a way to have fulfilling, financially-supported careers as locally-based community musicians. **Sustainability** is a critical issue, whether it refers to money or operational issues – preventing other teachers and leaders ‘burn out’ was an additional motivation for writing the book. Our model, therefore, offers a long-term and sustainable strategy for re-invigorating community music-making.

## 1.2 Who are we?

### Mark Jackson

Mark has an honours degree in social geography and began postgraduate studies, on two separate occasions, focusing on community inclusion and community currencies. Although not completing these studies, he did swagloads of academic work for both before being derailed by (unsurprisingly) ... music. He has been a performing musician since 1978 and is also fortunate to have worked in the mental health sector, which helped him develop understanding and compassion for a wide spectrum of behaviours.

### Jane Jelbart Ph.D

Jane has a doctorate in marine ecology (go figure!) and was a university researcher and science tutor. She has worked in adult education most of her life. However, Jane also has a rich recreational life in music – primarily singing and playing various instruments including piano, guitar and percussion. After meeting Mark, (and more importantly the ukulele), she has seen the light, and changed direction in her professional and recreational life. She still swims in the ocean most days.



### 1.3 A brief history of our ukestras

Inspired by various community musicians in Victoria, the Melbourne Ukulele Kollektive, and with the help of an Australian Government small business grant (called NEIS), in 2009 Mark began teaching ukulele to groups of people in Newcastle, NSW. Luckily for him no other ukulele groups were operating in the city at the time.

From a single local ABC Radio interview, local postering and the occasional festival or market gig, the weekly Tuesday night group just kept growing. A daytime ukestra was started in the suburbs, swiftly followed by the establishment of two regional ukestras, one hour out of the city. After seven months, Mark was running four ukestras per week, at four different locations. A year later, Jane began running her own weekly ukestra, and soon thereafter a choir, whilst still holding down full-time work.

A number of ukestrans suggested they would like to see ukulele classes for their grandchildren in different schools in the region, and after various trials and errors, in 2011 Mark started teaching ukulele in a couple of schools. At this point, he had established enough work to provide for one sustainable income.

In December 2011 there was a lucky break when the local newspaper ran a feature article on Newcastle's ukulele community, centred on the ukestras. From this, student numbers grew enormously, and by mid-2012 an additional two adult ukestras were started (Jane was now working part-time at her 'day job').

In July 2012, Mark and Jane officially entered a business partnership and a year later Jane quit her job as a marine ecologist and became a full-time community musician. Significant publicity followed, both through normal media interactions as well as via involvement in events such as a major ABC (Australian Broadcasting Corporation – the Australian Government-funded public broadcaster) concert to 2000 people, a talk and performance at TEDxNewy, an audition and brief appearance in the promotion for *Australia's Got Talent*, and numerous local festivals.

Since 2013 we have had enough revenue to support two modest incomes and have been able to travel both nationally and internationally sharing our teaching format.

We have had moderate business growth, mostly limited by how busy we don't want to be! At present we run nine ukestras and two choirs per week, and each month run a singing event (One Song Sing) and two beginners workshops. Although we no longer teach in schools, children are always welcome to our ukestras and they come along occasionally.

We currently employ one teacher, three teaching assistants, a book keeper and an administration assistant, who all work casually (three to six hours per week). We perform and teach at festivals around Australia and overseas as *Jack n Jel* and have our own creative life as performers, but most of our income is derived from the ukestras and choirs.

## 1.4 Ukestration, the Ukestra Method, and how to read this manual

It is assumed that you, the reader, are already a competent ukulele musician, or can easily acquire that competence, particularly if you play guitar. Consequently, there is no attempt in this book to teach music theory or technique.

This manual covers all aspects of building and running group classes, and woven into that is how a sense of community is created and nurtured. Our aim is to provide sufficient information and reflections to help you start one amateur group of about 20 players. We'll take you through chapters on our motivations from a community perspective; the attributes of effective community leaders and teachers; class planning; the performance and skill development journey; and the centrepiece of our the Ukestra Method – Ukestration – which is how we approach song selection and arrangements.

Some readers may also be interested in our companion manual, *The Business of being a Community Musician*. It is a guidebook rather than a formula, and so readers are encouraged to apply the knowledge and experience we've gained as they see fit, to their own situation.

We also recommend reading Joshua Waldman's 2017 publication *How to Start and Grow an Ukulele Group*. This well-written and easy-to-understand book covers many of the how-tos of running an ukulele group from the voluntary perspective. Joshua knows why it is good for him and for the community, and we have referenced parts of his text that address particular details.

## 1.5 Some useful terminology

Communities are bound together by language and there are a number of terms which have gained common usage amongst our ukulele community. Four in particular are used throughout this book.

**Ukestra** (yoo-kess-trah): a group of people who learn, practise and play the ukulele together – an ukulele orchestra.

**Ukestran** (yoo-kess-trun): an individual member of a ukestra.

**Ukestration** (yoo-kess-tray-shun): a way of arranging songs into different parts for the ukulele (and vocals) that are suitable for different skill levels.

**The Ukestra Method:** our approach to creating and fostering music-making communities using the ukulele.

# PREVIEW