

The Ukulele

The ukulele is typically made of four nylon or gut strings. Many famed artists like Eddie Vedder and Jason Mraz have used this instrument to enrich their classical songs.

History of the Ukulele

The ukulele has a rich history and tradition. While this instrument first appeared in Hawaii in the eighteenth century, its roots are found in Portugal.

By the mid-eighteenth century, Hawaii's sugar industry was booming, which created a shortage of workforce in the area. At the same time, Portugal was experiencing economic collapse. The economic downturn forced many Portuguese to immigrate to Hawaii to find employment opportunities in the sugar industry.

Many Portuguese arrived in Hawaii along with their families and *machetes* (an early version of a ukulele). A man named Joao Fernandes was among the passengers. He played the *machete* and sang a thanksgiving song upon arrival at the Honolulu Harbor on August 23, 1879.

Fernandes's performance moved the Hawaiians so much so that it made them obsessed with their version of the ukulele, the *branguinha*. The Hawaiians nicknamed the instrument as the "ukulele," which means "jumping flea." This term refers to the way Fernandes' fingers moved on the fretboard.

It is not clear as to who made the first ukulele. What we know is that it went from Portugal to Hawaii as a *branguinha*. Once in Hawaii and Honolulu, the *machete* changed in size and shape and got reentrant tuning that gave the ukulele its exclusive sound and ease of playability.

While the popularity of the ukulele began to wane with the start of rock and roll in the 1950s, it has made a successful comeback in modern times.

Ukulele Fun Facts

- The first ukulele is said to have been built in 1879; however, it is not clear who invented this instrument.
- Renowned astronaut Neil Armstrong had a great passion for playing the ukulele.
- Initially, the ukulele strings were produced from sheep or cat gut. The modern ukulele's feature strings made of nylon.

Questions about the Ukulele

- 1) All students - How many strings does a ukulele have?
a) 3 b) 4
- 2) Most students - Which two countries does the ukulele have its roots in?
a) Hawaii b) Brazil c) South Africa d) Portugal
- 3) Most students - Why did lots of people move from Portugal to Hawaii in the mid-eighteenth century?
a) They wanted to spend more time in the sun.
b) Hawaii had a shortage in workforce, and Portugal was experiencing an economic collapse.
- 4) All students - What does *Ukulele* mean in Hawaiian?
a) Jumping Flea b) Hopping Ant
- 5) All students - What year was the first ukulele built?
a) 1868 b) 1879
- 6) All students - What material were the strings initially made from?
a) Horse Hair b) Sheep or Cat Gut
- 7) All students - What material are strings now made from?
a) Metal b) Nylon

