

George Hinchliffe's

Ukulele Orchestra of Great Britain

Jonty Banks
Peter Brooke Turner
Laura Currie
Leisa Rea
Ben Rouse
Chris Walker
Ewan Wardrop

The programme will be announced from the stage. There will be a 20-minute intermission

The Ukulele Orchestra is a touring musical group which has been delighting audiences, raising the roof, selling out performances, and receiving standing ovations since 1985. This all-singing, all strumming group has been performing for 38 years using only a fistful of ukuleles and maintaining that all genres of music are available for reinterpretation.

The premise sounds astoundingly simple: instruments, voices, no gimmicks, no light show. Yet the New York Times exclaim that 'they extract more than seems humanly possible from so small and so modest an instrument' and millions have enthused over the years about the fact that the Orchestra tears the house down with a lively, touching, catchy, emotive, stomping show, threaded with humour and wit which inexplicably draws the audience in, to a joyous world beyond the conflicts of musical genres and transcending differences between a serious concert and entertainment.

As soon as the performers walk on stage, the audience feels that they are in safe hands, at home with friends who are totally in command of the art, craft, and magic of the stage. Sitting in chamber group format and dressed in formal evening wear (regardless of the time of day or the venue, whether Glastonbury Festival or Carnegie Hall), it uses the limitations of the instrument to create a musical freedom as it reveals unsuspected musical insights.

At this point, the audience may well sit back, all prior assumptions forgotten, and allow the Orchestra, which has sixteen-handedly changed the face of the ukulele world, to give what the Independent raved as "the best musical entertainment in the country".

The first gig, intended as a one-off bit of fun was an instant sell out and led to national radio, TV, album recordings and international tours. Since then, the Orchestra has become what the Observer called "a much-loved institution" giving thousands of concerts, TV, and radio appearances all over the world. There have been tours in Britain, across Europe, Scandinavia, New Zealand, Australia, Japan, China America, Canada and the North Pole. They also had the honour to perform, by invitation of The Prince of Wales, at the private 90th Birthday party of Her Majesty the Queen at Windsor Castle.

The Ukulele Orchestra have released CDs and DVDs on their own independent label. The orchestra's music has been used in films, plays, and commercials. The Financial Times praised "The sophisticated sound they make – both percussive and melodic – is at once hilarious and heartfelt"

Musical Director: George Hinchliffe
Tour management: Viola Farrington
Sound: Verena Rogler

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Ukulele Orchestra of Great Britain
Performers' biographies**

Peter Brooke-Turner

At over 2 metres tall, Peter Brooke Turner may well be the tallest ukulele player in the world – he is certainly the tallest in the Ukulele Orchestra. He was born in Portugal and grew up in the Soviet Union, Brazil, America, Finland and Italy. After false starts on the violin, trumpet and guitar, he finally discovered the ukulele and joined the Ukes in 1995. He has released three albums under his pseudonym Tony Penultimate and has worked with many well-known showbiz names in the UK and has even lent his uke to Tiny Tim. He fronted his own 'Ukulele Kings' rock group in the 90s.

Peter has started the world's first high-altitude drama company – the ATTC (Airline Toilets Theatre Company) which has subsequently produced over twenty high quality, low budget songs, sketches and shows (all on Peter's iPhone) from this oft neglected performance area. They can be viewed online.

Laura Currie

The youngest member of the orchestra. Laura was born in Dumfries, Scotland, and studied English Literature at the University of Edinburgh. She started playing the ukulele at the age of fifteen after seeing the Ukes in concert and used the instrument to front her first rock band at sixteen years old. She began performing with the Ukes in 2019, and has since toured with them across China, France and Switzerland.

When not touring with the orchestra, Laura performs under the solo stage name Ra. She writes and releases original songs and covers, and one of her collaborative singles was recently featured in a Netflix show.

Laura has garnered an active online following for her eclectic mix of elaborately self-produced YouTube videos. During the Covid-19 lockdown in the UK, she used these video editing skills to produce the Ukulele Lockdown series that the Ukes released weekly on Youtube. Laura also plays piano, bass and guitar.

Leisa Rea

Leisa has a background in Theatre, Comedy, Writing and Music. She's worked as an Actor and Director, written for Stage, Television, and Radio, and has played with the Orchestra for the past 15 years.

She's taught Stand Up Comedy, written for the BAFTA nominated series, 'Miranda' (BBC), performed in her own critically acclaimed shows, and was the winner of the inaugural Musical Comedy Awards in 2009.

Away from Orchestral duties, Leisa brings her considerable experience as a performer and artist, to people all over the world, through her online ukulele teaching and workshops.

Recently, Leisa won an Arts Council of England grant to allow her to train as an audio digital producer.

Ben Rouse

Ben was born in Cornwall but grew up in Hampshire. At the age of 8 he began playing the drums, turning to the guitar at age 11. At 23, Ben formed the rock band Purple Monkey, which became a popular band along the South coast of England. At 25, he decided to

learn the violin and mandolin and formed the folk duo, Teapot Junkies, releasing two albums of original material. He went on to teach himself the saxophone, flute, trumpet and banjo.

At 30, Ben decided that a proper job might be necessary and earned himself an HND in electronics, but in 2007 was drawn back to music when he saw the Ukulele Orchestra perform on 'Jools Holland Hootenanny'. The next day he bought a ukulele and began performing and teaching workshops at festivals around the UK until, in 2014, he was invited to play with the Orchestra. He has since toured America, China, Europe, Scandinavia and the UK with them.

Ewan Wardrop

Ewan started playing the ukulele in 1998 but also plays mandolin, guitar and the penny whistle. Ewan trained as a ballet dancer and appeared in a record-breaking run of Matthew Bourne's Swan Lake on Broadway. He has a long history of working in theatre on an international stage, and has worked with companies such as the The Royal Shakespeare Company and Kneehigh Theatre. He also has an experimental Morris Dance group called the Bo Diddlers.

Chris Walker

Chris studied drama originally but has worked as a musician for many years, including giving a huge number of performances with his own skiffle group. He is an experienced ukuleleator, singer, raconteur, administrator and tea-chest bass player. Chris's experience in theatre and in venues of a bewildering variety means that he is comfortable bringing both a seriousness and a devil-may-care lightheartedness to performances with the Orchestra. Chris has performed on radio and TV, at the Cambridge Folk Festival, Singapore International Arts Festival, Glastonbury Festival, Linz International Street festival and many other venues in the UK and Europe. He lives in Cardiff, in Wales, which, usefully for the Orchestra, and like Scotland, is still part of the UK and Great Britain.

Dominic Howles

Dominic grew up in Jamaica, Hong Kong and Somerset. He is a very experienced bass player, using double bass and electric bass, and has worked with many well-known jazz names and in classical ensembles. He has worked with Tommy Chase, Stacey Kent, Bobby Wellins, Don Weller, and Julian Siegel and many others. He studied at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama and has performed in Europe, the Middle East and Asia, on TV, Radio and theatre. He has undertaken, directed and written multi-media work, and is well-respected as a composer and arranger. His own groups have performed successfully for many years. He is a first-class bass soloist and has an engaging sense of humour, which is .. ahem... always useful when working with ukulele players. He lives in London.