



Wednesday, April 26, 2023, 7:30pm  
Zellerbach Hall

## George Hinchliffe's Ukulele Orchestra of Great Britain

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Ukulele Orchestra of Great Britain  
Peter Brooke Turner  
Laura Currie  
Dominic Howles  
Leisa Rea  
Ben Rouse  
Chris Walker  
Ewan Wardrop

George Hinchliffe, *music director*

*Tonight's program will be announced from the stage.  
There will be one 20-minute intermission.*

**T**he Ukulele Orchestra of Great Britain is a touring musical group that has been delighting audiences, selling out performances, and receiving standing ovations since 1985. This all-singing, all-strumming ensemble uses only a fistful of ukuleles and maintains that all genres of music are open to reconsideration and re-interpretation.

The premise sounds astoundingly simple: instruments, voices, no gimmicks, no light show. Yet the *New York Times* wrote that the musicians “extract more than seems humanly possible from so small and so modest an instrument” and millions have enthused over the fact that the orchestra routinely brings down the house with a its lively, touching, and emotive shows, performances threaded with humor and wit that inexplicably draw audiences into a world joyously free of the idea of conflicting musical genres and obliterating the line between a “serious” concerts and infectious entertainment.

As soon as the performers walk on stage, audiences feel that they are in safe hands, at home with friends who are totally in command of the art, craft, and magic of live performance. Sitting in chamber group format and dressed in formal evening wear (regardless of the time of day or the venue, whether at the Glastonbury Festival or Carnegie Hall), the musicians use the limitations of their instrument to create a sense of total musical freedom capable of revealing unsuspected musical insights.

At this point, the audience may well sit back, all prior assumptions forgotten, and allow the orchestra, which has single-handedly transformed the ukulele world, to give what the *Independent* has called “the best musical entertainment in the country.”

The orchestra’s first concert, intended as a one-off bit of fun was an instant sell out and led to national television and radio performances, album recordings and international tours. Since then, the orchestra has

become what the *Observer* called “a much-loved institution,” giving thousands of concerts all over the world. Tours have included all of Great Britain, across Europe, New Zealand, Australia, Japan, China, the United States, Canada, and even the North Pole. In 2016, the orchestra also enjoyed the honor of performing, by invitation of the Prince of Wales, at the private 90th birthday party of Her Majesty the Queen at Windsor Castle.

CDs and DVDs of the Ukulele Orchestra’s performances are available on the group’s own independent label.

At well over six feet, **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, the US, Finland, and Italy. After false starts on the violin, trumpet, and guitar, he finally discovered the ukulele, joining the orchestra in 1995.

He has released three albums under the pseudonym Tony Penultimate and has worked with many well-known performers in the UK; Peter has even lent his instrument to Tiny Tim! He fronted his own Ukulele Kings rock group in the ’90s.

Peter has created the world’s first high-altitude drama company—the ATTC (Air-line Toilets Theatre Company)—which has subsequently produced more than 20 high quality, low budget songs, sketches, and shows (all on Peter’s iPhone) that originate from this oft-neglected performance space. They can be viewed online.

**Laura Currie**, the youngest member of the orchestra, was born in Dumfries, Scotland, and studied English literature at the University of Edinburgh. She began playing the ukulele at the age of 15, after seeing the Ukulele Orchestra of Great Britain in concert and used the instrument to front her first rock band at the age of 16. She began

performing with the Ukes in 2019, and has since toured with the group 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 won 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.

**Dominic Howles** grew up in Jamaica, Hong Kong, and Somerset (UK). He is an experienced double bass and electric bass player and has worked with classical ensembles and well-known jazz artists including Tommy Chase, Stacey Kent, Bobby Wellins, Don Weller, and Julian Siegel. Howles studied at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama and has performed in Europe, the Middle East, and Asia, on television, radio, and theater. He has undertaken, directed, and written various multimedia works and is well-respected as a composer and arranger. Howles' own groups have performed successfully for many years. He is a first-class bass soloist and has an engaging sense of humor, which (...ahem...) is always useful when working with ukulele players. Howles lives in London.

**Leisa Rea** has a background in theater, comedy, writing, and music. She has worked as an actor and director; written for stage, television, and radio; and played with the Ukulele Orchestra for the past 15 years.

Rea has taught stand-up comedy, written for the BAFTA-nominated series, *Miranda* (BBC), performed in her own critically ac-

claimed shows, and was the winner of the inaugural Musical Comedy Awards in 2009.

Away from orchestral duties, Rea brings her considerable experience as a performer and artist to people all over the world through her online ukulele teaching and workshops. Recently, she won an Arts Council of England grant to allow her to train as an audio digital producer.

**Ben Rouse** was born in Cornwall but grew up in Hampshire, UK. At the age of eight, he began playing the drums, turning to the guitar at age 11. At 23, Rouse 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, Rouse decided that a "proper" job might be necessary and earned himself an Higher National Diploma in electronics, but in 2007, he was drawn back to music when he saw the Ukulele Orchestra perform on the *Jools Holland Hootenanny*. The next day, he bought a ukulele. Rouse was soon performing and teaching workshops at festivals around the UK, and in 2014, he was invited to join the orchestra. He has since toured America, China, Europe, Scandinavia, and the UK with the group.

**Chris Walker** originally studied drama but has worked as a musician for many years, giving a huge number of performances with his own skiffle group. He is an experienced ukuleleator, singer, raconteur, administrator, and tea-chest bass player. Walker's experience in theater 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. He has performed on radio and television and at the Cambridge

Folk Festival, Singapore International Arts Festival, Glastonbury Festival, Linz International Street Festival, and many other venues in the UK and Europe. Walker lives in Cardiff, Wales, which, usefully for the orchestra and—like Scotland—is still part of the UK and Great Britain.

**Ewan Wardrop** started playing the ukulele in 1998 but also plays mandolin, guitar, and the penny whistle. He trained as a ballet

dancer and appeared in a record-breaking run of *Matthew Bourne's Swan Lake* on Broadway. Wardrop has a long history in theater and has worked with companies such as the Royal Shakespeare Company and Kneehigh Theatre. He also has an experimental Morris dance group called the Bo Diddlers.

Viola Farrington, *tour management*  
Verena Rogler, *sound*