



GEORGE HINCHLIFFE'S UKULELE ORCHESTRA OF GREAT BRITAIN

PHILADELPHIA DEBUT

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

MUSICAL DIRECTOR George Hinchliffe

TOUR MANAGEMENT Viola Farrington

SOUND Verena Rogler

SUNDAY, **MAY 7** @ 7 PM

Annenberg Center, Zellerbach Theatre

There will be an intermission.

PENN LIVE ARTS

22/23 SEASON

PROGRAM NOTES

The Ukulele Orchestra is a touring musical group that 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* exclaimed 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 humor 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 a 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 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 honor to perform, by invitation of The Prince of Wales, at the private 90th birthday party of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II at Windsor Castle.

The Ukulele Orchestra has 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.”

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Jonty Banks

Banks was serenaded to sleep as a child by his father playing Bach on the cello. Inevitably, he learned to appreciate music and knew from an early age that he wanted to be a performer. His formative years were spent playing music and acting. He discovered and fell in love with the bass in 1972. Moving to London to try an acting career in 1980, he met Dave Suich and acted in his show until the bassist left and he took over. He changed from struggling actor to struggling musician. He supplemented his income as a London double-decker bus driver. Banks became a full-time musician in the early 90s, joining the Ukulele Orchestra in 1992 while also recording and touring with Ray Davis, Louisiana Red, Marcus Malone and John Mayall. He can also be heard whistling on many TV soundtracks and commercials. He currently lives in Germany and often performs as a guest bassist with various bands and supported Eric Clapton on the German leg of his 2018 stadium tour.

Peter Brooke Turner

At over two meters tall, 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, has worked

with many well-known showbiz names in the UK and has even lent his uke to Tiny Tim. He fronted his own rock group, Ukulele Kings, in the 90s. Brooke Turner has started the world's first high-altitude drama company, the ATTC (Airline Toilets Theatre Company), which has subsequently produced over 20 high-quality, low-budget songs, sketches and shows (all on Brooke Turner's iPhone) from this oft neglected performance area. They can be viewed online.

Laura Currie

The youngest member of the orchestra, Currie was born in Dumfries, Scotland, and studied English literature at the University of Edinburgh. She started playing the ukulele at 15 after seeing the Ukes in concert and used the instrument to front her first rock band at 16 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, Currie 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. Currie 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. Currie also plays piano, bass and guitar.

Leisa Rea

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

Ben Rouse

Rouse was born in Cornwall but grew up in Hampshire. At age 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 group 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 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.

Ewan Wardrop

Wardrop started playing the ukulele in 1998 but also plays mandolin, guitar and the penny whistle. Wardrop 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 Royal Shakespeare Company and Kneehigh Theatre. He also has an experimental Morris Dance group called the Bo Diddlers.

Chris Walker

Walker 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. Walker'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. Walker has performed on radio and TV, at the Cambridge Folk Festival, Singapore International Arts Festival, Glastonbury Festival, Linz International Street Festival and in many other venues in the UK and Europe. He lives in Cardiff, Wales, which usefully for the orchestra, and like Scotland, is still part of the UK and Great Britain.