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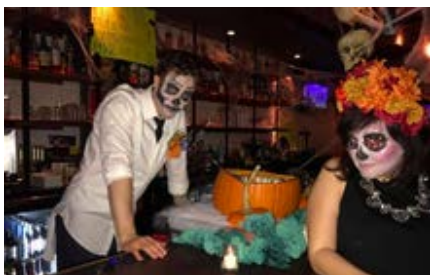
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Coleman Saunders/for PhillyVoice

Bette Midler, Yo-Yo Ma and Jimmy Buffett are some of the luminaries who have played with ukulele virtuoso Jake Shimabukuro.

October 19, 2017

The fast fingers of Jake Shimabukuro

The ukulele sensation is plucking strings with the stars

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Learning to surf, hula and play the ukulele are what Hawaiian children do while growing up in paradise.

"That's our birthright," Jake Shimabukuro said. "It's normal."

Shimabukuro, 40, embraced the ukulele, but how he plays it is not the norm. While casually strumming the often overlooked instrument as a child, Shimabukuro turned the ukulele on its ear.

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"One day, I was messing around with my ukulele and I started playing [Cream's] "Sunshine of Your Love," Shimabukuro said while calling from his Hawaiian home.

"I was like, 'This is pretty cool, I'm playing a rock song on the ukulele.' I soon discovered that I could play other guitar parts, violin lines and piano on the ukulele. The options were limitless."



Kayoko Yamamoto/for PhillyVoice

"I get to do what I love. I never imagined anything like this was possible but I've been incredibly fortunate," said Shimabukuro.

Shimabukuro, who delivers an acclaimed version of the Beatles' "Eleanor Rigby," signed a recording contract in 2002 and became a star in Hawaii and Japan. However, he didn't go worldwide until his aforementioned rendition of the Beatles "While My Guitar Gently Weeps" went viral in 2005. After the song scored more than 15 million views online, a number of noteworthy musicians, such as Yo-Yo Ma, Cyndi Lauper and Jimmy Buffett, asked if Shimabukuro would join them in the studio or on tour.

"It's been beyond my wildest dreams to play with such amazing artists," Shimabukuro said.

"Who could have ever guessed that a guy playing the ukulele would be playing with Yo-Yo Ma and Jimmy Buffett?"

Diversity is the norm for Shimabukuro, who will perform Sunday at the Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts.

He came of age with an array of sounds in his home.

"Growing up, I loved all different styles of music," Shimabukuro says. "I didn't understand that there were different genres. To me, it was just music. I didn't think that this was jazz, this was blues and this was funk. They were different classifications to other people, but to me, they were the same. I remember listening to Miles Davis, Tower of Power and Japanese folk songs. Since my parents played every style of music, that had such a positive impact."



Coleman Saunders/for PhillyVoice

Jake Shimabukuro

Shimabukuro's parents were very proud of their son when fellow native Hawaiian Bette Midler asked him to play with her in England in 2009.

"That was one of the highlights of my career," Shimabukuro said.

"What surprised me was that she wanted me to fly over to play just one song. I said, 'Are you sure you want me to fly to the U.K. with you just to play one song?' We played before the Royal Family and I got to shake the Queen's hand. It was incredible. It was something that I never thought was possible."

Shimabukuro says he never dreamed a ukulele player could pack theaters.

"It's just beyond anything I've ever imagined. I get to do what I love. I never imagined anything like this was possible but I've been incredibly fortunate. I don't take it for granted. I work hard in the studio and onstage. I'm aware of how lucky I am."

Jake Shimabukuro appears Sunday, Oct. 22 at the [Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts](#), 3680 Walnut St., Philadelphia. Tickets are \$33 and \$40. Show time is 7 p.m.



[Ed Condran](#)

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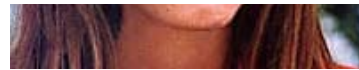


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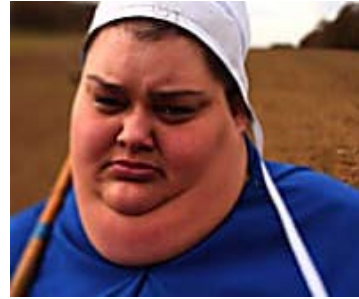


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