



Let Me Entertain You

From piano bars to teaching uke to seniors, it's all show biz

BY CALI ROSE

When I stand in front a ukulele class and see people who have never played an instrument or have been told they can't sing, and here they are, strumming and singing, I say to myself, "It doesn't get any better than this."

I began my career as a professional musician just after I bought my first car, a funky old VW Bug. I jettisoned the front passenger seat so there was room for my PA system. My musician friends and I learned early to cobble together a career, hustling for gigs, networking, and practicing, practicing, practicing.

Working in piano bars taught me to be a good entertainer and to engage the audience, so they feel like they are part of the show. Night after night, I saw how music brings people together. Then a few years ago my husband, Craig Brandau, purchased a tenor Fluke and it changed the air pressure in our house. We both got real serious about learning to play.

I put the piano, guitar, and banjo on hold and began my romance with the ukulele.

It's friendly and portable and turns spectators into participants. But I never expected to be a teacher, to love teaching the ukulele and leading a group. I never realized that the skills I learned as a working musician and entertainer would come in so handy. But it's all show biz, right? Learning to play the uke is not always easy but hey, let's have a good time doing it.

Here's what happened: On a whim I offered an eight-week beginner uke class at my local senior center in Culver City, California. Eight weeks has turned into five years. We named ourselves the CC Strummers and play together every Thursday morning. They challenge and inspire me to

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be a better teacher. I started another eight-week beginner class on Mondays and the same thing happened.

Suddenly I had two huge classes and we were sounding good so we decided to "take it to the streets" because we love sharing the music that makes us happy. One of my mentors said that the audience won't remember what you play, but they will remember how you made them feel.

Today my cobbling continues. It's a laundry list, by golly. I teach four uke classes each week, lead the CC Strummers, and do my own arrangements for our songbook. I teach private students, tool around Los Angeles doing gigs and music therapy with dementia patients. I perform at ukulele festivals and do workshops. I have two ukulele albums, write songs and blogs and of course, practice, practice, practice. I don't cook. Or sleep much . . .

Maybe a few people get their 15 minutes of fame and fortune, but I'm grateful that, after all these years, I'm still making a living doing what I love to do. *u*