Andy's ukulele blog

LESSON 1: Know Your Way Around Your Ukulele

Your Trusty Uke

This lesson is a technical guide to your ukulele, naming the parts, that sort of thing.
If you are confident about this already then skip this lesson.

A ukulele is based on a small Portuguese four stringed guitar. It is usually made of wood although some quite serviceable ukes are made of plastic. They come in a variety of sizes, the smallest is the soprano ukulele, then there's the concert ukulele, the tenor ukulele, and then the baritone ukulele. I would recommend using a concert ukulele to begin with, as the fingering is not quite so fiddly as on a soprano uke.

The ukulele has three main parts, the body which is hollow and acts as a resonator to amplify sound, the neck, and the headstock where the tuning pegs are set.

The strings are called courses by posh folk but we will call them strings. They are of varying thickness depending on the note they are tuned to. On most ukuleles they are tuned to the following notes:-

G (above middle C) on string 1 (the one nearest your chin as you hold the ukulele)

C (middle C) on string 2 (the next one down)

E on the next string down, string 3, and finally

A on the lowest string, string number 4.

You can buy a small inexpensive tuning device to help you tune your ukulele.

Each string runs from the tuning key on the headstock, across the nut (made of plastic or nylon with four notches in it) and down the neck over the bridge (also made of plastic or nylon) to its fastening just beyond the bridge. On the way down the neck the string crosses a series of frets, usually made of steel or brass, set in the neck perpendicular to the strings. The frets are numbered string with 1 the one nearest the nut and going on to any number between twelve and sixteen depending on the size oy your ukulele.   The frets are set at semi tone intervals along the neck and allow you to play notes by shortening the strings to the required length when strumming them.

… and that's how you play the ukulele.