



PHOTO BY ED BOWERS

## Look At Us

BY ED BOWERS

Dedicated To Nick Ray Who Died While He Was Alive

It takes discipline to be us.  
Reward us for being myself.  
We are shadows of the past.

I am just a messenger.  
A fast car took my ancestors  
to The Land of the Free  
Home of the Brave.

I've come a long way to get to the Land of the Dead.

Am I free? Am I brave?

I'm high as a star-spangled flag and want to stay that way.

Forgive us. We never learned how to drive properly.

They enjoy it when we die.  
It makes a good story.

I appear romantic from a distance and so does he.

A billion years of suffering comes to this:  
Both of us once filmed by a drunken white man  
who runs away without paying.

I guess he was broke too.

## The uke's a hoot *S.F. played a role in popularity of ukulele*

BY FRAN LINK

**I**N less than an hour you can learn more about ukuleles than you could have imagined. Maybe you never imagined it would be fun to spend time that way. But it is.

The exhibition at the Museum of Craft and Folk Art in Yerba Buena Center takes you on a journey through the evolution of the ukulele. They call it "the story of Hawaii's Jumping flea," which is a literal translation of ukulele.

While ukulele music plays in the background, you can browse archival materials that tout the re-emergence of the little instrument that was easy for workers to take along into the taro or sugar cane fields.

The ukulele came to Hawaii in 1879 with five immigrants from Madeira, an island off Portugal. Three were instrument makers and two made music. Their virtuosity reached the ears of King David Kalākaua, known as the Merry Monarch, and he played and drank with them. The uke got a bigger boost when Edward Purvis, a British officer, also mastered the instrument and played music written for and by Queen Liliouokalani.

Ukuleles made by the masters — Manuel Nunes, Jose Santos and Augusto Dias — are the first items on display and these instruments are compelling. Of the trio of masters, the Nunes family is the one that continues to perpetuate the craft, with the son and grandsons still producing instruments in Southern California.

The ukulele is much more interesting and intertwined with San Francisco history than I thought when I walked into the museum. Here are some highlights:

- The woods used to make the instrument are many. First was Portuguese madeira, a type of acacia, then the Hawaiian koa, next too-heavy spruce used by the mainland Martin Guitar Co. of Nazareth, Pa., and finally mahogany, which was popular at the 1915 Pan Pacific International Exhibition in San Francisco, the same landmark event that gave us the Palace of Fine Arts.

- The Royal Hawaiian Band took the music to the mainland in 1893 at the Columbia Exposition in Chicago and really popularized the ukulele sound. The next year the expo was in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park with the California Midwinter

International Exposition.

- The Pan Pacific International Exposition of 1915 saw the construction of the Hawaiian Exhibition building in the French Renaissance style by Hawaiian-born Oakland architect, C.W. Dickey. Thousands of ukuleles that were sold there by San Francisco's Sherman Clay Piano Co. were made by Jonah Kumalal, who produced until he died in 1940. A medallion indicating the gold award that he won at PPIE is affixed to the shaft of his instruments.

- 14,100 ukuleles were made in 1926.
- In the 1930s and '40s, the ukulele got a boost from GIs returning from the war in the Pacific.

- Arthur Godfrey gave it a shot in the 1950s with the introduction of TV so the music could be heard and seen at the same time.

- When John, Paul and George of the Beatles were 13, they flirted with the uke. So did Elvis and Bruce Springsteen.

- Acceptance has again risen with the virtuosity of young proponents such as Jake Shimabukuro, aka the Jimi Hendrix of the ukulele, who appeared at the San Francisco Ukulele Festival at Yerba Buena Gardens in early September. Shimabukuro is scheduled to return for a gig at Yoshi's in Oakland Nov. 7.

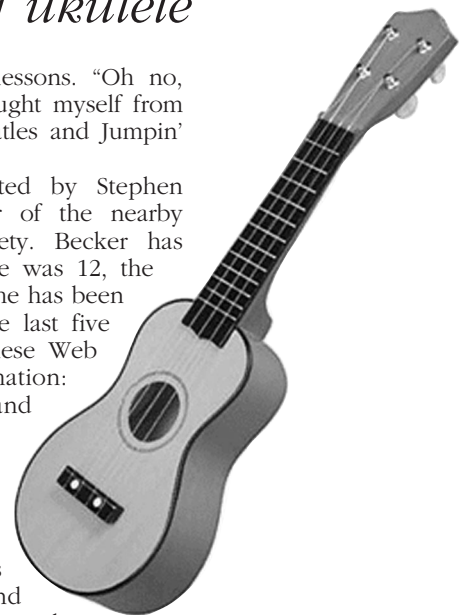
There is an eclectic display of the work of contemporary ukulele makers, from fine wood artisans to much more whimsical versions in the forms of vodka bottles, an Andy Warhol tomato soup can, a Robert Crumb-type cartoon and a Box-a-lele, made from children's lunch boxes.

Finally, on a wall are four ukuleles that you can play. When I was there, a 4-year-old boy was playing along with his grandma, who was strumming quite well. I

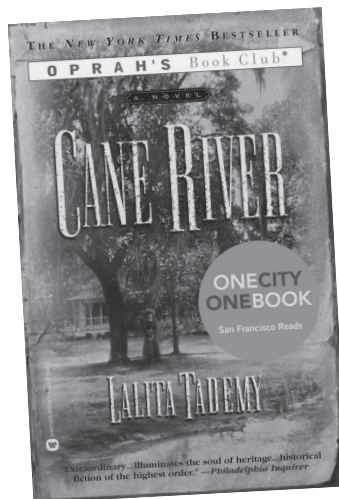
asked if she had taken lessons. "Oh no, honey," she replied. "I taught myself from the songbooks of the Beatles and Jumpin' Jim's '60s Uke In."

The show was curated by Stephen Becker, previous director of the nearby California Historical Society. Becker has played the guitar since he was 12, the ukulele since college and he has been a ukulele collector for the last five years. He recommends these Web sites for further information: [fleamarketmusic.com](http://fleamarketmusic.com) and [Ukulelenoir.com](http://Ukulelenoir.com).

The exhibition ends Oct. 21. The Folk Art museum is located at 51 Yerba Buena Lane, which is unmarked by street signs but connects Market and Mission between Third and Fourth streets. The museum is open Tuesdays through Fridays, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.; weekends, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Admission is \$5, \$4 for seniors, children under 18 are free, as are museum members. For more information: 227-4888 or [www.mocf.org](http://www.mocf.org). ■



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