

Chapter 1

Preparing to Practise

In This Chapter

- ▶ Looking at three essential practice tools
- ▶ Brushing up on ukulele tab and notation

Many exciting exercises lie ahead in the coming chapters. With your hard work and practice, you're going to see amazing improvements in your ukulele playing, but before picking up your ukulele, take a moment to cover some essentials. In this chapter, you discover three helpful practice tools that enable you to get the most out of the exercises in this book, and you review how to read ukulele tab and notation, which allows you to easily follow along with the exercises I present in this book.

Equipping Yourself with the Right Practice Tools

While the following tools aren't necessary or required to enjoy the exercises in the pages ahead, they can make your practice times more productive and effective.

Tuning up with a chromatic tuner



It's always a good idea to tune up your ukulele every time you practise. Through playing, and through small changes in temperature and humidity, the strings of the ukulele go out of tune. An in-tune ukulele is always more inspiring to play and listen to than one that is out of tune.

In standard ukulele tuning, from the top to bottom string, a ukulele is tuned to a G note above middle C on the piano, middle C, E above middle C, and A above middle C. In this way, a ukulele is tuned: g-C-E-A (the lower case 'g' represents the high g-string).

The ukulele can be tuned in a variety of different ways, but the exercises in this book are created for ukuleles tuned to standard tuning. To learn more about other ukulele tunings, be sure to check out *Ukulele For Dummies* by Alistair Wood.

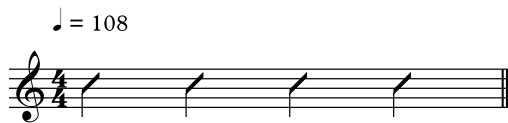


Tuning your ukulele is easy if you have a piano nearby, but more often than not, this isn't the case. The easiest and most accurate way to tune your ukulele is to use a *chromatic tuner*. A chromatic tuner is a small, inexpensive, portable electronic device that listens to each string you pluck on the ukulele and tells you whether that string needs to be tuned higher or lower in pitch. I strongly recommend you purchase a chromatic tuner at your local music store, or if you have a smartphone, purchase and download a chromatic tuner app to your device.

Keeping time with a metronome

A metronome is a small device that helps strengthen your sense of timing (musically referred to as *tempo*) by producing a short, consistent ‘click’ sound. By lining up your ukulele playing with the ‘click’ of a metronome, you improve your timing and rhythm, which creates a more pleasing sounding performance for your listener. You can buy a metronome at any music store or you can purchase a metronome app for your smartphone. Additionally, some chromatic tuners are combined with a metronome for just a little bit more money.

Tempo is measured in *beats per minute* (BPM). Typically, a slow tempo is considered anywhere around 40 to 60 BPM and a fast tempo is considered 120 BPM or higher. For some of the exercises and songs in this book, I notate a suggested tempo at the beginning of the figure. In music notation, tempo is often indicated with a quarter note and a number, as shown in the following figure.



These suggested tempos throughout the book should be seen as a goal. If you set your metronome at the suggested tempo and you are unable to play the song or exercise that fast, slow down the tempo to a speed that allows you to play without mistakes. Then, gradually increase the speed in small increments to play at the suggested tempo.



While practising, don't use a metronome all the time. Sometimes the pressure of keeping time with a metronome can create tension in your playing, which works against you. First, spend time practising the exercises and songs in this book without a metronome, and then, to tighten up your timing and rhythm, add in the use of the metronome.

Tracking your progress with a practice journal

Truthfully, this book contains a lot of exercises. To get the most out of your practice sessions, and to become a better ukulele player, it's important you're practising in a focused way. This means it's best to select a few exercises to work on at a time from different sections of this book. The exercises aren't meant to be tackled all at once.

I highly recommend using a practice journal to focus your practice sessions, and to prevent yourself from getting overwhelmed. A pen and a notebook will do the trick, or you can create an updatable text file on your personal computer.



Here are a couple of different ways to use a practice journal:

- ✓ **Create a practice plan for the week.** For example, one day you might work on a couple of major scale patterns from Chapter 11, then, the next day, select a few rhythmic fingerpicking patterns to learn from Chapter 8, and then later on, to cap it off, practise a handful of strumming patterns from Chapter 4. You might mix these things up on the same day, but whatever you decide, write it out, so you know exactly what you're practising throughout the week.
- ✓ **Identify successes and current challenges.** After you practise, take a minute to list out your successes. For example, you might note in your journal, 'Able to successfully

fingerpick Carcassi's 'Andantino' from Chapter 9 at a moderate tempo.' In addition, write out challenges, like, 'Need to work on fretting the notes in measures 7 and 8 of Carcassi's 'Andantino' in Chapter 9.' By writing these successes and challenges out, you can be encouraged in your practice and identify exactly what you need to work on for the next practice session.

- ✔ **Write out measurable goals.** Think about where you want to be in a week, a month, six months, or a year. You might write out things like, 'I want to learn and memorise all C major scale positions from Chapter 11 in two weeks,' or, 'I want to be able to play Tárrega's 'Étude in E minor' from Chapter 9 at 92 BPM in a month.' The more specific you can be in your goals the more it can inform you about how to structure your practice times and help focus you in practising the things that help you reach your goal.

Throughout the following chapters, I give you some more recommendations for how to use your practice journal. Give it a try and see how it works for you.

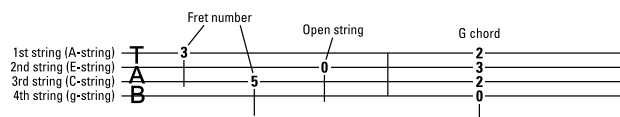
Reviewing Ukulele Notation

Depending on the concepts and techniques I'm teaching you, the exercises in this book are presented in a few different ways. You don't need to be a pro at reading music in order to use the exercises and songs in this book, but it is helpful to review some of the basics.

Deciphering tablature

Tablature, often just called *tab*, is a simplified form of musical notation for the ukulele. Unlike regular music notation, tab shows exactly where to play the notes of an exercise or song across the ukulele's fretboard.

In the most basic way, in ukulele tab, there are four lines, with each line representing a different string of the ukulele, as shown in the following figure.



Tab is drawn from the perspective as if you are holding the ukulele in playing position and looking over the neck of the ukulele down at the strings. In this way, the top line of the ukulele tab represents the bottom or 1st string of the ukulele, and the bottom line of the ukulele tab represents the top or 4th string of the ukulele.

The numbers on each line represent a fret number. For example, in the previous figure, the number 3 on the top line means you press down on the 3rd fret of the 1st string of the ukulele, or more accurately, in between the space between the 2nd and 3rd fret on the bottom string. Likewise, the number 5 on the third line from the top means you press down on the 5th fret of the 3rd string. If you see a number 0, that you means you pluck the open string, without touching the string with your fretting hand.

Tab is commonly used to represent single-note melody lines or fingerpicking patterns (such as those in Part III of this book), but tab can also be used to represent chords. If the numbers

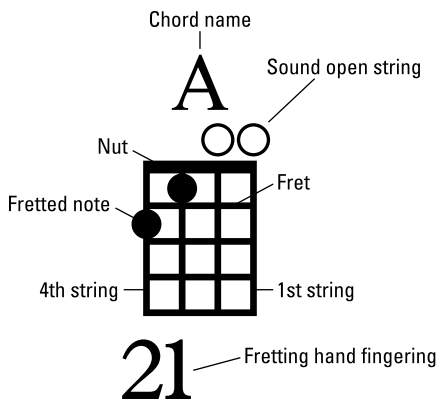
line up vertically across multiple strings, that means you fret and sound the notes across those strings all at once.



Using tab to represent music is advantageous because of how easy it is to read the notes, but the downside to using tab is that often times tablature doesn't express note durations, meaning, it can be hard to tell how long to hold certain notes just from a piece of tab. For this reason, and for your benefit, the tab in almost all of the exercises in this book is presented in combination with actual music notation.

Understanding chord diagrams

A *chord diagram* is a representation of a chord's finger position on the neck of the ukulele. The chord diagram should be seen and read as if you were holding the ukulele up vertically in front of you and looking directly at the fretboard.



The capital letter at the top of the diagram tells you the name of the chord. In the figure above, the letter 'A' indicates that this is an A major chord. Additional letters and numbers might follow the letter to indicate other chord qualities (minor, dominant seventh, major seventh, etc.).

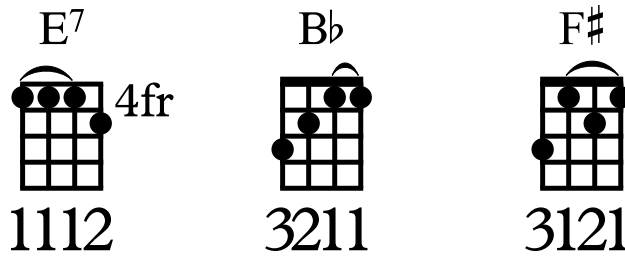
The vertical lines represent each of the four strings of the ukulele. The horizontal lines represent frets. The thick black horizontal line at the top of the diagram is representative of the nut of the ukulele. The black dots represent the notes that are fretted on the ukulele.

The numbers at the bottom of the chord diagram indicate which finger you should use to fret the note on the string. The index finger is represented by the number '1', middle finger by the number '2', ring finger by the number '3', and the little finger by the number '4'.

In some cases, chord diagrams indicate chords played at higher positions on the fretboard. For example, at the right of the E7 chord in the following figure, the number and letters *4fr* indicate the starting notes of the chord are played at the 4th fret. The curved line arching over the three notes on the 4th fret indicate a *barre*; meaning, at the 4th fret, you fret the notes by laying a finger over the strings (usually the index finger). The Bb and F# chords show other ways a barre shows up in a ukulele chord, although you might decide to use your index finger to barre all four strings for these chords too.

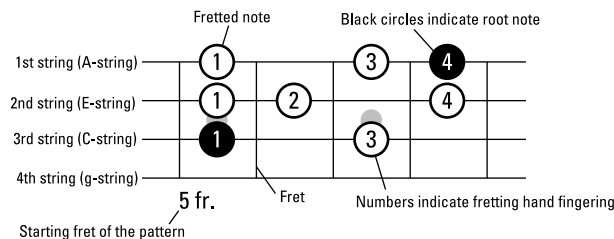


Chord diagrams give you a suggestion for the chord's fingering. You might find alternate fingerings that make more sense and work better than others in the context of certain chord progressions and songs.



Comprehending neck diagrams

A *neck diagram* is a visual representation of notes across the ukulele fretboard. In this book, I use neck diagrams to demonstrate different scale positions and note names across the fretboard. Neck diagrams are like tab in that the top line of the neck diagram represents the bottom or 1st string of the ukulele, and the bottom line of the diagram represents the top or 4th string of the ukulele. The perspective is as if you are holding the ukulele in playing position and looking over the neck of the ukulele down at the fretboard.



Most of the time, neck diagrams are used to show a scale's position on the ukulele fretboard. At the bottom of the diagram, the number and letters *5fr* indicate that the starting note of the scale position starts on the 5th fret.

Each circle represents a note you fret with a finger on the fretboard. Filled in circles represent the root note of a scale. For example, the previous figure shows an F major scale pattern on the bottom three strings of the ukulele. The black dot on the 5th fret of the 3rd string and the 8th fret of the 1st string represents an 'F' note, which is the root note of an F major scale.

The numbers in the circles indicate which finger to use to fret the note. The index finger is represented by the number '1', middle finger by the number '2', ring finger by the number '3', and the little finger by the number '4'. In some examples, where I demonstrate the name of the notes across the fretboard, the name of the note is shown in the circle rather than the fingering.

Reading rhythm charts

A *rhythm chart* is written on a normal music staff, but rather than indicating actual notes, the chart indicates the rhythm of a strumming pattern. The chord diagram above the music indicates which chord you strum.

C

3

1 2 and 3 4 and
d d u d d u

In this figure, the rhythm chart is written in 4/4 time signature; meaning, there are four beats per measure. *Rhythm slashes* or black lines going through the music staff represent quarter notes and eighth notes (more on those in Part II).



The numbers and letters below the chart are what you want to concern yourself most with. The numbers help you count out loud the strumming pattern. The letters 'd' and 'u' indicate which direction to strum across the strings: down or up.