

The Kiwileles

by **Georgina Barnes**

A ukulele makes a warm, bright sound. It fills a room perfectly.

So imagine the sound of three thousand ukuleles all playing at once.

That's what you will hear at a Kiwilele concert.

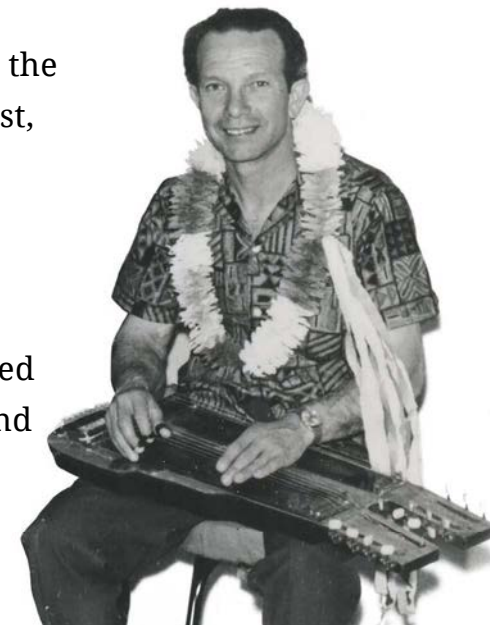
The Kiwileles is a ukulele orchestra that's made up of children. They come from over 130 schools around Aotearoa New Zealand. Every year, they get together to play at a big concert.

The first Kiwilele concert was held in 2007. Only thirty-three schools took part. But the orchestra grew quickly. Two years later, the Kiwileles broke the world record for the number of people playing the ukulele in one place at the same time – 1,400!

East Tamaki School in Auckland is a Kiwilele School. Every student in year 3 and year 4 learns to play the ukulele. They have music lessons once a week. By the time they are in years 5 and 6, the students are skilful enough to play in a Kiwilele concert.

Bill Sevesi

Bill Sevesi helped to start the New Zealand Ukulele Trust, which runs the Kiwileles. Bill was a musician who helped make music from Pacific countries popular in New Zealand. He wanted every child in New Zealand to get the chance to play the ukulele.



Learning to play the ukulele



This is how the students at East Tamaki School learn to play the ukulele.

First, the students learn to strum. Strumming is just like waving to a friend. You should be relaxed and use the whole hand. There are lots of ways of strumming, but the first one the students learn is to simply strum downwards with the thumb.

Strumming

The next step is to play a melody (a tune). The students use one finger at a time to pick the strings. Each string makes a different sound (or note).

Picking out a melody

It's a big day when the students learn their first chord. A chord is three or more notes played at the same time. Each chord is known by a letter. The students learn the C chord first. To play this chord, they press down on the bottom string with one finger and use the other hand to strum all the strings.

Playing a chord

When the students know a few chords, they can put them together to play songs.

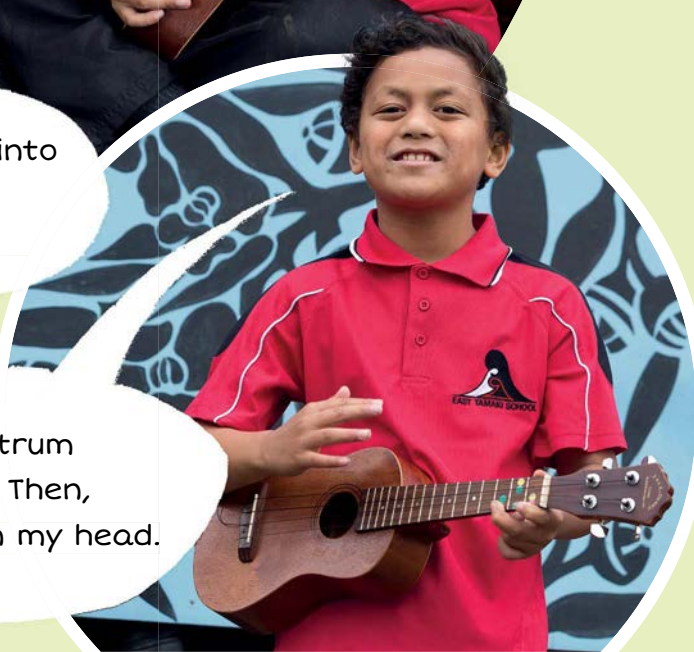
They have a few tips about learning a new song.

When I learn a new piece, I start slowly, then get faster.



It helps to break the song into small sections and repeat each section a lot.

I start by counting the strum out loud to get the beat. Then, as I get it, I just count in my head.



Some chords are hard to play because you have to use lots of fingers. But if you keep working at it, they get easier.

I like tapping my feet when I play. It helps me to keep in time with the music.

The students also practise at home. They try out the chords they have learnt and practise changing quickly from one chord to another. And they enjoy playing and singing the songs they already know. Some students teach their families how to play.

The sweetest sound

Maria Winder is a teacher at East Tamaki School. She is also the Chairperson of the New Zealand Ukulele Trust. She says that learning the ukulele is not only heaps of fun but also helps the brain to develop and grow.

Maria says you can't help but love the ukulele, and that when all the Kiwileles from around New Zealand play at the concert, "it's just the sweetest, most joyful sound".



Maria Winder

And what do the East Tamaki students say about playing the ukulele?

When I play the ukulele, I feel happiness.

I like the confidence of being able to play an instrument.



It's just a really nice feeling being able to play with a group.



I can't wait to be in the Kiwilele concert like my brother and sister.



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The Ministry of Education and Lift Education would like to thank Maria Winder and the students of East Tamaki School for their help with “The Kiwileles”.

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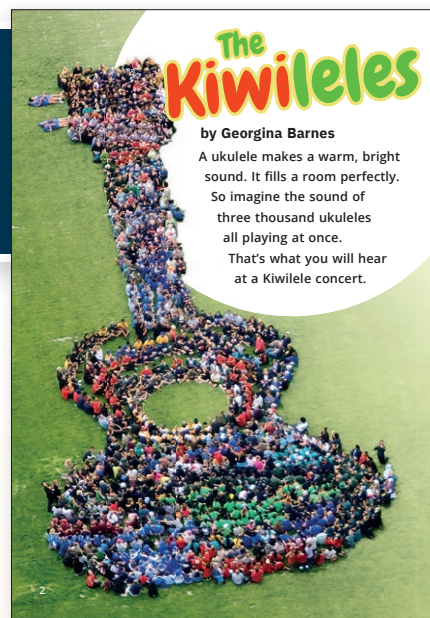
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Published 2019 by the Ministry of Education,
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www.education.govt.nz

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Enquiries should be made to the publisher.

ISBN 978 1 77669 648 2 (online)

Publishing Services: Lift Education E Tū
Editor: David Chadwick
Designer: Simon Waterfield
Series Consultant: Kay Hancock
Consulting Editors: Hōne Apanui and Emeli Sione



JUNIOR JOURNAL 58

Curriculum learning areas

English
Social Sciences
The Arts – Music

Reading year level

Year 3

Keywords

Bill Sevesi, community, concerts, cooperation, East Tamaki School, groups, instruments, Kiwileles, learning, Maria Winder, music, New Zealand Ukulele Trust, Pacific, practice, ukulele