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## Island Music in Orinda

Cathy Dausman



A quintet of ukulele players from Al Dodge's Orinda Parks & Rec class serenaded the crowd at this year's Olive Festival at Wagner Ranch Nature Area. Photo Doug Kohen

Phil had purchased a ukulele. Sandy, sporting tiny wooden ukulele earrings, sometimes plays her father's 60 year old instrument, although not tonight. She laughs about the "danger" of what she calls "Ukulele Acquisition Syndrome" and playing "air uke" (faking it) if you can't find the right chord.

Kandy Petersen and Dawn Kurisu have attended Dodge's classes almost since the lessons began. Petersen, from Moraga, says those outside Orinda "pay extra [but] it's worth it!"

Sonny Foniomoana was born in Hawaii, and now resides in Pleasant Hill. His family moved from Oahu to Alameda in 1953, "trading one island for another," he says, and he keeps in touch with island ways through this class. Dorothy Becker, of Martinez, shows off a ukulele she won at the St. Helena Wine Country Ukulele Festival earlier this year. Becker says the stain used on the wood comes from grapes.

Now considered a traditional Hawaiian instrument, the four-stringed ukulele (tuned to G, C, E and A) was actually imported from the island of Madeira, Portugal in the late 1800's. Phil Steel built his own ukulele with the help of Berkeley luthier Mike DaSilva. His is a curly koa wood instrument made with mother of pearl and abalone inlays and a lei design near the keys. He says it took about 50 hours to make. "Monty" Montague played a ukulele he'd fashioned from a cigar box bearing his last name.

Several students performed at this year's Wagner Ranch Olive Festival, and the group is scheduled to play at the Orinda Holiday Bazaar on November 5. Music, companionship, laughter and "free" Hawaiian language lessons thrown in, make this a class No Ka Oi (the best).

Ukulele classes are on Tuesday nights from 6:45 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. at the Community Center. A new session begins November 1. For class details, call Orinda Parks and Recreation, (925) 254-2445 or go online to [www.cityoforinda.org](http://www.cityoforinda.org).

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