

# Playin' in the (Ukulele) Band *continued from front page*

rently has five guitar students in Vernonia and another five full-time students in Portland. He also has been helping host a monthly open-mic show at the Cedar Side Inn; the next show is scheduled for March 22<sup>nd</sup>. And now he has a class full of ukulele prodigies.

Mitchell's students are mostly retired folks, including one member who drives over from Scappoose, as well as a high school junior, Lauren Glass, who



Lowell Mitchell

Mitchell says is also one of his star guitar pupils. Anyone is welcome to join.

The members of the class seem to enjoy themselves, chuckling at Mitchell's jokes and smiling as they master a difficult chord change. Mitchell is a patient and fun teacher who enjoys seeing his students succeed at learning this new instrument. He is currently teaching them the foundations of playing the in-

strument, slowly walking them through the chord progressions, picking out the pickup notes, and already has them playing several favorites all the way through. The repertoire of songs the class tackles each week includes classic oldies like "Deep in the Heart of Texas," "Five Foot Two, Eyes of Blue," and "On the Road Again," as well as a few 'newer' numbers like "Bad, Bad Leroy Brown" and "Folsom Prison Blues," which Mitchell introduced, in deadpan, as written by "John R. Cash." They have even been working on "The Star Spangled Banner."



Mitchell says his initial motivation for starting the class was to form a band that could fill in as a marching band in local parades. "This could be a good

core of people, along with a horn section, that could provide music in our parades," he says. He has a bunch of instruments available for his beginning students to borrow and hopes to have more people join his group.

"It's a very simple instrument," explains Mitchell. "It's a four-string instrument that is very easy to tune. Even people who aren't musically inclined can get it."

Mitchell says he initially became interested in the ukulele when he was living in Hawaii. Mitchell says he watched a group of local teenage boys playing on the beach. And these kids weren't playing traditional music! "They were playing rock n' roll - playing Jimi Hendrix and just tearing it up," Mitchell says. "They were doing all kinds of stuff you would never dream of playing on a ukulele. They were playing country music as good as any country boy would play it, playing blues as good as any blues dude. It was just mind blowing and I realized that this is just a really versatile instrument."

Mitchell had his mind made up for him, when he later walked into a



music store on Maui. "This guy named George Harrison was there with a ukulele in his hands," says Mitchell.

The George Harrison?

"Yeah, the guy from the Beatles," says Mitchell with a grin. "He was there with his son and only a couple other people in the store. And George Harrison, one of the greatest guitarists in the world, and absolutely, certainly one of the finest slide guitarists in the world, is giving a lecture about how the ukulele is the greatest and most magical instrument. He played three songs right there—it was so cool! Here he is, extolling the wonders of the ukulele and talking about how he would rather be playing the ukulele all day. So I decided I should pick one up and find out what this guy was talking about."

Mitchell says a few years later he came across "Jumpin Jim's Ukulele Songbook" and sure enough, there was a foreword written by George Harrison. "He had written exactly the same stuff he had been saying in the music store - 'easiest, funniest, sing-along instrument ever created - everyone needs one of these,'"

Eventually Mitchell moved back to Portland and started taking ukulele classes at Artichoke Music, who were offering popular classes to large groups of people.

Which made him realize this was something he could do in Vernonia.

Now, Mitchell is teaching people, even tone deaf people, to play an instrument and be part of a band. Maybe it could be a dream come true for you, too.

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