

Movable Chords



THE SECRET TO
INSTANTLY
INCREASING
YOUR CHORD
VOCABULARY



The secret to instantly increasing your chord vocabulary!

Rediscover the ukulele

Breathe new life into those tired old songs you've been playing at the club, impress the other members and have more fun! Learn what just one finger and a tiny bit of music theory can do and how to go beyond chord shapes that have had you stuck at the first and second frets for years.

As anyone can see, the ukulele fretboard doesn't stop at the third fret. So what are all those other frets higher up on the neck for, anyway?

How does one learn how to use those frets and the rest of the neck to spice things up and add interest to songs?

As you apply what you're about to learn in the following pages, remember - there is no substitute for LISTENING. From jazz to rock to country - all the greats spent a LOT of time sitting by their record player lifting that needle and replaying their favorite parts as they learned how to emulate what they heard. If they can take the time to do it, so can you.

So dust off those old favorites, revisit them with an open ear, strum along and HAVE FUN!

- Mitch Chang

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Noteworthy Ukulele Players (surprised at some of these names?)

George Harrison
Tiny Tim
Bill Tapia
Jake Shimabukuro
Benny Chong

Ohta San
Lyle Ritz
James Hill
Troy Fernandez
Abe Lagrimas

Byron Yasui
Bryan Tolentino
William H Macy
Greg Hawkes
Johnny Winter

The Ukulele Fretboard

G-C-E-A Tuning

	G C E A				Fret Number
Nut	G	C	E	A	Open
1	G#	C#	F	Bb	1
2	A	D	F#	B	2
3	Bb	Eb	G	C	3
4	B	E	G#	C#	4
5	C	F	A	D	5
6	C#	F#	Bb	Eb	6
7	D	G	B	E	7
8	Eb	G#	C	F	8
9	E	A	C#	F#	9
10	F	Bb	D	G	10
11	F#	B	Eb	G#	11
12	G	C	E	A	12

Courtesy Santa Cruz Ukulele Club



First things first: let's establish a basic understanding of the CORRECT terminology. This will help immensely in communicating with others.

Top is Bottom, Down is Up

As you can see in the diagram above, the open strings of the ukulele are tuned to G (My), C (Dog), E (Has) and A (Fleas); the diagram depicts the ukulele as viewed from the front.

Most people think that, because of the way you hold the ukulele when playing, the string closest to the ground is the "bottom" string. Contrary to popular belief, that string is actually called the "top" string, otherwise known as the "first" string; it is tuned to "A".

Another common switcharoo is "up and down". Put your finger on the first fret of the first/top/A string and pluck that note. Now move that finger to the fifth fret of the same string (should be a dot there called a "fret marker"). The sound went "up" from a Bb to a D (see diagram), therefore this is what we call "up". Always think of the sound, not which way your fingers/

hands are physically moving. Moving from fret to fret is also known as a half step. From Bb to D, your finger moved UP four frets/half steps. Simple enough, no?

Set the Barre

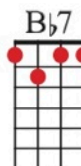
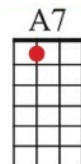
Okay so the open strings of the ukulele are tuned to G, C, E, and A. This means that when you pluck each string without pressing anything down, these are the notes you hear.



Now, looking at the diagram to the left, if you were to lay your index finger across the entire first fret, thereby shortening the ukulele, your ear would then be hearing G#, C#, F and Bb. Laying that finger across the entire fifth fret would give us C, F, A, D. Covering the strings of a whole fret is called a "barre". Guitar capos are based on this concept of shortening the guitar neck and raising the pitch; your finger mimics this effect.

Now Raise the Barre!

Play the A7 chord. Instead of using your index finger as you probably normally would, use your middle finger. Now slide that finger UP to the second fret of the same string and barre the entire first fret with your index finger and strum. Can you guess what chord you just played?

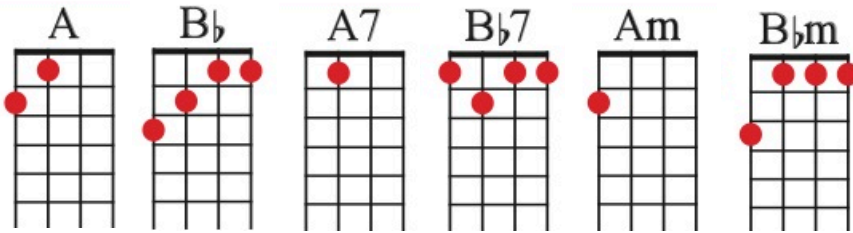


If you guessed Bb7 you'd be correct!

Why is that so? Well, your barre finger: Shortened the ukulele by one fret = Shortened the ukulele by a half step = Raised the sound of A7 one half step.

To illustrate this further, slide that whole Bb7 chord shape up to the third fret (index finger is covering the third fret). You moved up two frets = the chord now sounds two half steps higher = you now have yourself another way of playing C7 - how cool is that!

And this, ladies and gentlemen, is the secret to taking the basic chord shapes you already know and easily and instantly learning new chords!



Control all the strings and you can move an entire shape up or down the ukulele neck and instantly get new chords... without learning any new finger positions!

You don't always have to barre an entire fret either - sometimes you just need to cover a couple of open strings like in the B \flat chord where

you're probably used to using your index finger to hold down both the first and second strings while your middle and ring fingers hold the others. You just never thought of this as a barre or movable chord.



By the way - when you play the B \flat chord - notice how the NOTE B \flat is being pressed down at the 1st fret of the top string and at the 3rd fret of the bottom string? (Refer to the fretboard chart on the previous page) Sliding that B \flat chord shape up two frets to the third fret gives you a C note on those strings, therefore you are now playing the C chord, just like when we moved B \flat 7 up to C7 on the previous page.

Now all you have to do is memorize the notes on either (or both) of those strings - and where they fall in relation to your fret markers - to know what chord you're playing.

Exhibit A: Let's say you have a song in the key of C and the chords

are C, F and G. You can play all three chords just by placing the B \flat chord shape at the 3rd fret (C), 8th fret (F) and 10th fret (G)...and not even have to change finger positions!

Exhibit B: Simply slide the B-flat chord shape up/down the ukulele neck to play this song.

Sittin' On The Dock Of The Bay

C (3) E (7)

Sittin' in the mornin' sun
F (8)

I'll be sittin' when the

F - E - E \flat - D (8-7-6-5)

evenin' come

C (3) E (7)

Watchin' the ships roll in
F (8)

Then I watch 'em

F - E - E \flat - D (8-7-6-5)

roll away again

Exhibit C: Is it even possible to play an angry song on the ukulele?

Anarchy In The UK

G (9) F (8)

And I.....wanna be.....

E (7) D (5) C (3)

.....anar - chy!

Main riff:

C - F - E - C

Major, Minor, Dominant 7th

Whenever you build upon a certain basic chord to create barre/movable shapes, the quality of that chord always stays the same.

As you can see from the chord diagrams to the left, barring the A major chord at the first fret yields a B-flat MAJOR chord. Barring the A7 chord at the first fret gives you B-flat 7, still a dominant 7th chord, and barring the Am chord at the first fret still retains its minor tonality even though it's based on the B-flat note.

Notice how B \flat , B \flat m, and B \flat 7 all differ by just one finger?



Apply the concept of movable chords to the chromatic slides you learned in Lesson #1, The Best Strumming Lesson EVER and the left hand muting technique taught in Lesson #2 Advanced Strumming Techniques to really see how easy it is to get the sounds of your favorite songs!

You already know how to play the chords below as "open" chords. Now memorize how to play each chord at least two more ways to get different sounds from the other strummers in the group!

To play C using:

F Shape: Barre 7th fret

A Shape: Barre 3rd fret

To play G using:

F Shape: Barre 2nd fret

A Shape: Barre 10th fret

To play Bm using:

Am Shape: Barre 2nd fret

Dm Shape: Barre 9th fret

To play Em using:

Am Shape: Barre 7th fret

Dm Shape: Barre 2nd fret

To play D7 using:

A7 Shape: Barre 5th fret

C7 Shape: Barre 2nd fret

To play E7 using:

A7 Shape: Barre 7th fret

C7 Shape: Barre 4th fret



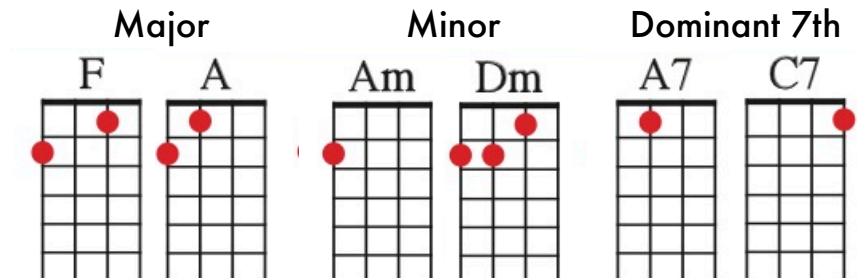
In my opinion, the best ukulele chord book out there is Roy Sakuma's *Treasury of Ukulele Chords*. Pick up a copy and see how the concept of movable chords flows through each page.



Bryan Tolentino (L), Jeff Peterson (R) and Pomaika'i Keawe Lyman at the 2009 Aloha Falsetto Festival in Los Angeles. Photo by Marsha Aguon

Mix and Match

Of course, it's not always practical or possible to use one chord shape for a whole song. That's why I recommend using different shapes based on the basic chord shapes you already know, at least two for each chord type:



Now just "add barre" and you've suddenly increased your chord vocabulary tenfold! Notice how the Dm shape only leaves one string open (therefore you just need to cover that one string) while Am, A7 and C7 leave three open, requiring a whole barre.

Go through the songs you already know and try substituting these chord shapes for a fun, easy way to add interest, and in many cases, more authenticity to those tunes!

Enjoy!
- Mitch Chang