

23 December 2010

Subject: Christmas Greetings and annual thanks to the Ukastle Ukestrans - a reflection on 2010

Hi Ukastle Ukestrans,

This is an email to say thanks for a fantastic Ukastle Ukestra year.

It really has been extraordinary. I am a bit uncomfortable with the 'p' word, but I am 'proud' of what has occurred with this initiative. Local musician Maureen O'Brien summed up the value of this work in a recent blog (<http://octapodartsandculture.wordpress.com/2010/12/14/connecting-the-dots-to-hit-the-right-note/>). I was chuffed when I read this - a peer 'got it'.

We have had an incredible year, including:

- Our first public performance in May at the Olive Tree Markets, with some of the performances going up on the web.
- The establishment of a 'uke slush fund' and talk of a community group being established to think about organising other things uke
- Mike Gallagher initiating the once a month on Sundays Minmi pub uke jam
- The creation of a welcoming community of uke players which seems to appeal to people of all abilities, from Conservatorium trained musos to those who have decided to face the challenge of uke playing despite rather demanding impediments - (Congrats particularly to Mark Hemmings on this front, and thanks to Willis for your patience and quiet appreciation of our human music making).
- About 160 people 'going through' their uke initiation
- Dennis stringing us all along on his Hawaii dreaming and luring many of us into performing at the 2011 Honolulu Ukulele Festival
- Two well paid 3 hour performances at the newly opened Charlestown Square
- Performances at the Wallsend and Darby St Fairs
- Recording songs at the TAFE
- The friendship and new musical projects which have come out of people meeting each other
- The initiation of a ukulele revolution in the Lower Hunter
- The commencement of a ukulele outreach program by Ukestra members at the Soul Cafe
- 3 different workshops by national / international people, including Jim D'Ville, Mike Dickison, Rose Turtle Ertler & AJ Leonard
- An utterly fabulous Christmas concert up at Maitland.
- Being accepted to play at the Melbourne Ukulele Festival in February.
- More? What have I left out? What highlights have there been for you?

Some people have been (almost) unstinting in their participation from the beginning, including Dianne, Christine, the Bond Boys, the Gallaghers, Al, & Betty & Ted, with some latter arrivals also contributing very strongly. Too many to name. Except Pavo. I need to point out Pavo who has been wonderfully supportive.

John Dickinson needs to be outed. A cable from Wikileaks recently named him as the strongest supporter of ukulele advocacy at the Ukastle Ukestra (and LakeMacUkestra) and his generosity and passion in teaching and guidance for new people has inspired many. Thank-you John.

I thank everyone for their support. I am humbled by how many people have appreciated this initiative and the way I do things. It is indeed a privilege (and source of wonder!) that my, at times,

shambolic approach is forming the core of a new lifestyle and vocation for me. It is constant and vigorous work, but soooo enjoyable, productive and satisfying. Thank-you for being at the core of that for me.

In 2011 I still expect to be doing Tuesday evenings 6:30pm - 9:00pm. I have decided to cease offering beginners lessons at the beginning of each session. This is so we can focus on rehearsing and improving our playing in a more concentrated fashion. John may still occasionally take some beginners. However anyone you know who wants to learn, please tell them that I am now running once a month Beginner Uke sessions (on a Saturday). The first one is on Saturday 8 January, at the Five Islands Recreation Club (Speers Point), at 10am. It will be for two hours and will cost \$20. I need people to contact me beforehand though, so I can organise ukes etc.

For those who are on this mailing list but we haven't seen for a while, you are more than welcome to turn up when time & interest allows. However please also don't hesitate to ask me to take you off this mailing list if it no longer interests you.

Have a joyous Christmas, and I will see some of you on Tuesday 4 January when we resume. However I will be taking a week off in late January (having holidays in Victoria). I won't be available on the 18th of Jan. But being the active bunch you are, I expect some of you will gather anyhow.

Keep spreading the word, and make sure you play that ukulele under the Christmas tree!!!

What a year!

With gratitude,

Mark.