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Island Music in Orinda

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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

The group plays traditional Hawaiian songs like Pearly Shells and Lovely Hula Hands, with simple chord arrangements and an easy, fox-trot-like meter. Dodge likes to focus on music dating from "ragtime through the 1940's." Students supply their own instruments. Ukuleles are readily available for around \$60, but collectors can spend \$15,000 to \$40,000 on hand-crafted ukuleles or original instruments from the late 1800's.

The class attracts students from throughout the East Bay. Phil and Sandy Steele of Moraga first took ukulele lessons during a cruise to Hawaii several years ago. Their group serenaded shipmates in a per-

formance which included hula dancers; by the end of the cruise 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.

Lafayette Love for the "Jumping Flea"

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22 students, ages three to 70-plus, learn to like the little wooden four-string and show their "ukulele pride." The class is free, although those wishing to borrow an instrument from the music store pay a \$5 rental. Peare explains they'll be learning the "laid back" West Coast style, and reminds everyone they don't even have to know how to read music to enjoy playing. He gets them relaxed learning the thumb strum, and before they know it, everyone is playing "Buffalo Gals."

William and Katie McKinney of Lafayette enjoyed their first lesson. Commissioner Stacia Levenfeld, "This proj-

ect would take away from Moraga's real character; it does not feel right." During the public comments portion of the meeting, Barbara Onoda,

back of a musical underdog", <http://mightyukenomovie.com/>, now playing at international film festivals. Her store stocks Makala instruments made in Petaluma of acacia, mahogany, koa or spruce wood; some painted in tie dye, paisley, checkerboard, flag colors or island scenes. Small enough for a child, nostalgic enough for adults, the little instrument that is the ukulele gathers young and old alike under its four-string spell.

Learn about the next ukulele class by calling (925) 38-0963 or going online to http://www.lamorindamusic.com/uke_class.htm.

speaking on behalf of the non-profit Preserve Lamorinda Open Space, said, "We do not think it is appropriate for the Town to undertake subdivision and development of open-space lands which belong to the citizens of Moraga, particularly lands such as these that are enjoyed daily by a large number of trail users."

Tonight: Moraga Town Council to Discuss Selling Open Space

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"Looking at this project for the third time and walking along the trail again was an eye opener," said Commissioner Stacia Levenfeld, "This proj-

ect would take away from Moraga's real character; it does not feel right."

During the public comments portion of the meeting, Barbara Onoda,

The Staff Report, prepared by Senior Planner Richard Chamberlain and Planning Director Shawna Brekke-Read, points out that the subdivision would not be consistent with a number of policies in the Town's General Plan. The report reads in part, "The potential subdivision would cluster housing in a visually prominent location.....The potential subdivision would also result in residential development of existing publicly-owned open space, rather than preserving new open space."

Planning Commissioner Bruce Whitley was the only one to partially disagree with the Staff Report. "Some elements of the General Plan are missing in the report," he said, "There are many policies that would support the project, such as improved traffic and safety in some parts of the town." Whitley nonetheless concluded, "We should not recommend that piece of property for development."

The two acres in question are part of a 20-acre parcel that the Town acquired, along with the adjoining parcel that became the Moraga Commons Park, from the State of California in 1977 when the State discontinued plans to build a freeway through the town.

The Moraga Town Council meets tonight at 7:00 p.m. in the Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School Auditorium, 1010 Camino Pablo.

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**Kindergarten - 8th Grade
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Saturday, November 5, 1-4pm
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