

# Advanced Idiomatic Ukulele Techniques Workshop

By Matthew Quilliam, March 2020



Image: Matthew Quilliam performing at the Isle of Wight Ukulele Festival 2018, Mel Saunders

## 1. Breaks, Pauses and Rubato

Including gaps in songs is a simple yet effective way to create contrast and interest.

**Breaks:** instead of continuously strumming the chords, the strumming hand can temporarily stop. Play a chord on the first beat of the bar and let that one strum reverberate. The tempo of the song remains consistent.

**Pauses:** like a break but the tempo is either temporarily slowed or stopped. Pauses can be used to create tension as the audience awaits the next chord. Pauses can be a silence or tremolo.

**Rubato:** an extension of pauses: a push and pull effect where any slowing down of a section's tempo earlier in the piece must be made up by a faster performance of the next section.

## 2. Dynamics, Fingers and Tone

Rises and falls in volume is a great way to highlight more important parts of songs such as choruses. This can be achieved either through the use of **strumming-hand pressure** or through using different fingers to create different tones and dynamics. Experiment playing different songs in your repertoire in different ways depending on what might suit the feel of the song. Applies to strumming and picking.

**Nail vs flesh:** finger nails create a harsher and louder sound than when thumb flesh strikes the strings. Try strumming with nails on faster, louder and joyful pieces whereas thumb flesh is great for slower and more mellow tones. Thumb strumming is especially popular in the music of Hawaii.

**Extension:** strum with all four fingers suited to fast and upbeat pieces. Creates a 'jangly' feel.

**Hand position:** playing sul ponticello (close to the bridge) creates harsher louder tones whereas strumming towards the middle of the strings (in the 12th fret region) has the opposite effect.

## Where to find and book:

On the web (gig dates and tuition info):

[www.matthewquilliamukulele.wordpress.com](http://www.matthewquilliamukulele.wordpress.com)

Email:

[matthew@quilliam.com](mailto:matthew@quilliam.com)

YouTube:

[Matthew Quilliam](#)

Facebook:

[Matthew Quilliam Ukulele](#)

Instagram:

[@quilliammatthew](#)

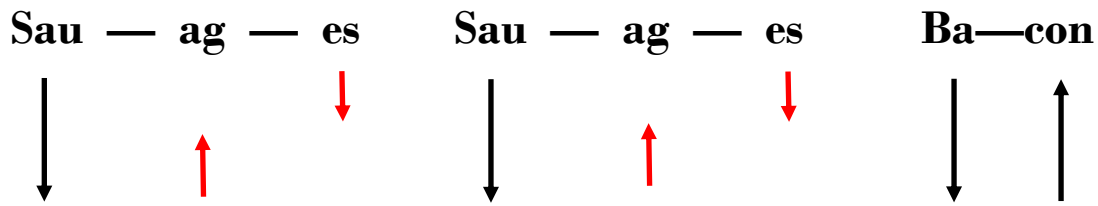
Phone:

07543 263750

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### 3. Formby strumming

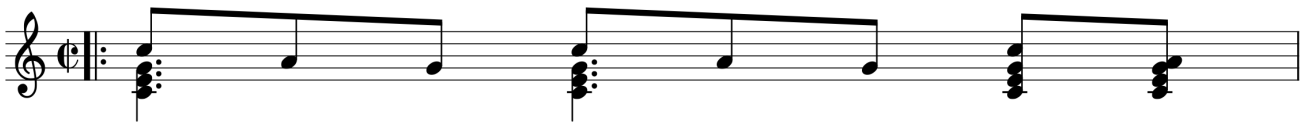
**Split stroke:** a syncopated strumming style invented by British ukulele and banjolele player George Formby which served as the characterising foundation of his playing. Below are several illustrations demonstrating the technique using Matthew’s “Sausages and Bacon” method.



**Long black lines:** strum all strings in the direction shown. Voice a complete chord shape.

**Short red lines:** hitting top/bottom string in the direction shown. Lift A-string finger here, and on ‘con’

How one cycle of the technique would be notated over a C chord:



Tips:

- Say the words sausages and bacon out-loud as you play, or at least actively say them to yourself in your head. The words and actions will soon synchronise up and your confidence and fluency will vastly improve. (do the same for the ornaments below)
- Repeat the rhythmic cycle continuously throughout a solo, adding the ornaments below where comfortable/appropriate. Remember that each cycle of Sausages, Sausages, Bacon lasts exactly one bar.

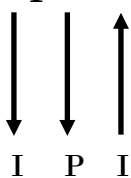
### 3a. Ornaments

Once you get comfortable with the above, try adding in the additional techniques below.

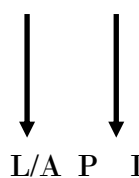
A **triplet** often takes the place of a ‘bacon’, fitting three strums in where there were once only two.

A **fan** can take place the place of ‘sausages’. Usually 2 are played consecutively. Rarely used, for effect.

#### Trip-l-et



#### Round - a - bout



P = pulgar (thumb) I = indice (index finger) M = (medio) middle finger A = anular (ring finger) L = pinky/little finger

#### Extra reading:

- Watch a performance of “Stardust” by Herb Otha San on YouTube, a Hawaiian-Japanese ukulele master, and see how he uses his thumb for both picking and strumming.
- Good songs to practice the Formby technique include “When I’m Cleaning Windows” and “Our Sergeant Major”. Additionally, watch some of Formby’s videos to determine common fretting-hand voicings.
- Check out videos of Eddie Kamae and the Sons of Hawaii and look out for his interesting picking patterns

## Sample Songs

### Example 1: Blue Skies by I. Berlin.

**V1**

**Em B7 G**  
Blue skies smilin' at me  
**C D7 G B7**  
Nothin' but blue skies do I see

**V2**

**Em B7 G**  
Bluebirds singin' a song  
**C D7 G Cm G**  
Nothin' but bluebirds all day long

**Chorus**

**G Cm G**  
Never saw the sun shinin' so bright  
**Cm G D7 G**  
Never saw things goin' so right  
**G Cm G**  
Noticing the days hurrying by  
**Cm G D7 G B7**  
When you're in love, my how they fly

**V3**

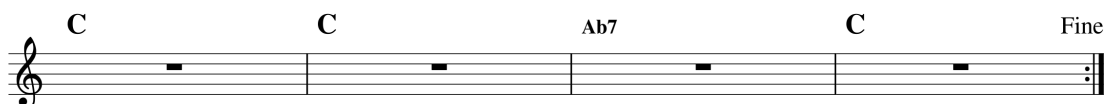
**Em B7 G**  
Blue days, all of them gone  
**C D7 G**  
Nothin' but blue skies from now on

### Example 2: When I'm Cleaning Windows by G. Formby, F. E. Cliffe, H. Gifford

**Solo Chords**



**D.C. al Fine** =  
return to start  
and play until  
Fine.



**Fine** = end here  
having played to  
end and turned  
to start.



**Dotted bar lines**

= repeat section.



### Upcoming Gigs: (for more, visit website)

**Young Musician's Classical Concert, 22nd March**

St Mary of Bethany Church, Woking, 2pm

**VE Day Showcases, 8th May**

Fleet Gurkha Square, Time TBA

Off the Tap Maidenhead, 4:30pm

**Godalming Ukulele Showcase, 29th May**

The Dakota, Godalming, 8pm

**Winchester Ukulele Festival, 30th May**

Winchester Rugby/Football Club, 2:30pm

**Boars Bridge Festival, 28th June**

Boars Bridge House, Bramley, 4pm

**Shrewkfest, 25th July**

Eastridge Farm, Shrewsbury, 7:30pm

**A Night at the Movies, 29th December**

Surrey/Berks/Hants Border, Venue TBA, 7:30pm