

Mighty Uke Day 3 - WOW!



What a weekend! Now that I'm finally coming back down to earth after all the excitement of Mighty Uke Day 3 and the weeks leading up to it, I'd like share a few thoughts about it all with you.

When we held our first Mighty Uke Day in 2010, I never dreamed that two years later we'd be featuring the one and only James Hill in Old Town Lansing. Mighty Uke Day 1 was basically a sampling of ukulele music centered around the showing of *Mighty Uke: The*

Amazing Comeback of a Musical Underdog, the delightful documentary from Tony Coleman and Margaret Meagher. Local performers like The Fabulous Heftones, Rachael Davis, Magdalen Fossum as well as the Lansing Area Ukulele Group all pitched in to make it into a fun mini-festival. In 2011, we actually had a budget; renting a venue, bringing in Lil' Rev from Milwaukee and Gerald Ross from Ann Arbor, hosting workshops at Elderly Instruments and Gallery 1212, and reaching out to more uke groups around the state and beyond. We didn't lose money and even raised some to support the special education music therapy program at the RESA school in St. Johns.

This year was more challenging, nerve-wracking, and in the end; better than ever. I had originally reached out to Daniel Ho; a wonderful player and songwriter from Hawaii who lives in L.A. (that other one in California). It turned out that he had a busy international touring schedule planned and couldn't work Lansing into the mix. I really had no Plan B and was at a bit of a loss of what to do. Tony Coleman offered to put me in touch with James Hill and I thought, "What the heck, it's worth a shot." James was interested and put me in contact with his manager, who I met in Toronto to seal the deal. After the initial euphoria of "James Hill is coming to Mighty Uke Day!", the next thought was "Yikes; what did I get myself into?" I was looking at the dollars I had committed to, facilities I needed to secure, personnel to organize and help, and was feeling a bit overwhelmed. But, with the help and support of all of you, it was a success beyond my wildest imagination.

There are so many people to thank, and I'm sure I will miss someone, but here goes . . .

Our sponsors: Ticket sales and workshop fees pretty much pay for the commitments I have to make to headlining performers. But there are so many other expenses including renting a venue, printing and other publicity, food, opening acts, lodging, postage, travel, supplies, etc. Our sponsors help make it possible to give our attendees and performers the experience you all deserve. A big shout-out to Mya-Moe and the Old Town General Store for their underwriting of our main stage concerts on Friday and Saturday night; without you, we could not have secured the Creole Gallery for Mighty Uke Day 3. Thanks to Stan Werbin and Elderly Instruments (the finest ukulele store in the world) for getting the word out about our event via their email blasts. Elderly, Lanikai, Kala, Nalu, and the Mighty Uke Movie all donated instruments to help support the Clinton County special education music therapy program and other soon to be announced musical charity efforts in the Lansing Area. In addition, a beautiful little quilt handmade by Cindy Mielock and a painting by CW Snook not only added to the tally for the charities but added some artistic flair to our offerings. Aquila donated strings for our Uke Maintenance workshop. Once again, Sir Pizza let us take over their restaurant for our open mic and strums. Thanks again to all of you for getting behind our efforts.

Our people: The larger this gets, the more impossible it is to be a one-man show. Throughout Saturday, I keep saying "This is bigger and crazier than ever, but it's all under control." I was the least-stressed I've ever been during one of our festivals and I owe most of this to our capable, enthusiastic, and hard-working Mighty Uke Day committee and volunteers. Jon Benallack was a great support to me in terms of advice, graphic design, and leading the Build Your Own Uke workshop. Mitch Chang, who just moved here from that other LA, has hosted many uke events in California and Hawaii and helped keep me focused on priorities surrounding our festival. Steve Szilagyi sort of got dragged into it all at the last minute and served as a stellar stand in for me as the spokesperson for Mighty Uke Day when I couldn't. Chuck Deyo again did an excellent job organizing, scheduling, and running the open mic and pitching in whenever needed. And, last but certainly not least, Sara Wagner who recruited and scheduled our awesome team of volunteers (more about them below), helped get the word out to various uke organizations and the press, and basically took on whatever I threw at her. From a personal standpoint, I want to acknowledge the contributions of Rhea Van Atta who was a great sounding board for my ideas and put up with my restless energy and sleepless nights, all in the midst of undertaking the opening the Old Town General Store; I couldn't have survived it without her. We had a great crew of volunteers who helped us with merch sales, tickets, setup/teardown, and more. (A special shout-out to Terry and Laura Hill for their early-

morning help getting Sir Pizza ready and to Dave Pasant for running the Sir Pizza radio show and morning strum in my absence.) I hope everyone appreciates the great work this team did to put on Mighty Uke Day 3.

The press: The media seems to love our quirky little festival and really helped us get the word out. Thanks to Cynthia Canty at WUOMs Stateside, Mark Bashore and Current State at WKAR, Anne Erickson at the Lansing State Journal, Rich Tupica at the City Pulse, and MJ Galbraith at G-Live magazine.

The music: What an amazing lineup we had this year! Friday night, Susan Picking started things off with a uplifting set of original music, accompanied by Steve Szilagy on bass and Mitch Chang on ukulele and percussion. Julianna and Andy Wilson of The Springtails gave us a taste of what to expect from their upcoming CD, and we can't wait for its release. Then, Danielle Ate the Sandwich took the stage and had not only enraptured us with her voice and songwriting, but had us rolling in the aisle with her spontaneous and self-deprecating humor. She's a great performer and certainly gained a lot of new fans.

Our open mic performers and featured artists showed us what a versatile instrument the ukulele is. There were too many good acts to list them all, but they offered a complete afternoon of top-notch music outside of our evening concerts.

For the big show Saturday, we were warmed up with the solo stylings of homeboy Ryan Rodriguez and transplant Mitch Chang and then were treated to a rollicking set by Strangers in the Night; led by the Alligator Man himself, Stan Werbin. After a brief intermission, James Hill and Anne Janelle took the stage with ukuleles and cello. For the next hour-plus, we were treated to a world-class performance by the two full of great songwriting, musicianship, and chemistry between James, Anne, and the audience. We all know how great James is and he didn't disappoint, but I was particularly impressed by Anne's voice, playing, and musical arrangement skills. The evening wrapped up with James' signature version of "Billie Jean" and a big strum/sing along with the crowd. We all floated out of the Creole on an ukulele cloud nine.

You: And of course, I want to thank all of you who came from near and far to be a part of Mighty Uke Day 3; it's not much of a festival if no one comes! We had people from New York, Indiana, Ohio, Illinois, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Alabama, Virginia, Canada, and all around the state visit our festival and Old Town and I saw many beautiful, smiling faces. Attendance at the concert, open mic, featured performances, and workshops were above and beyond expectations.

I value your feedback on our festival; we try our best to refine and improve it each year. I will put together an online survey that I hope you take a few minutes to fill out; your input is very important to our continued success. (Last year's responses were invaluable in our 2013 planning.) My mind is already thinking of new and cool ideas for next year, so keep checking in on our Mighty Uke Day Facebook page and here on our website for information as things start to come together. In the meantime, go to the Facebook page and enjoy all the wonderful video clips, photos, and memories people are sharing from the special days we spent together May 10 & 11.

Uke on,

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