

## Interview mit Christopher Davis-Shannon Originalwortlaut

(Hardy C. Lugerth)

- Hey Christopher, you run quite a busy patreon page, where you teach all things ukulele. Knowing about your good musical background - I understand you studied double bass - it's clear that you take music extremely serious without taking yourself too serious. Was there a special event that brought you from the guitar, double bass and your jazz appearances to the uke?

**I think, as with many other folks, I sort of stumbled into the ukulele world. While I had a ukulele around the house as a teenager (it helps that my mother was a music teacher) and ever played one gig with it when I was 17, due to a tragic guitar mishap, it wasn't until well over a decade later that the instrument began to take over my life. My nieces, who were 4 and 7 at the time, wanted to learn an instrument and as the daily music nerd I was tasked with finding something to teach them. I thought ukulele would be a perfect fit due to the small size as well as being able to address both melody and harmony. I bought them each ukes as well as one for myself and off we went. While they didn't stick with the instrument, one now played electric bass and the other cello, I had fallen deep into the rabbit hole. I had already been playing early twentieth century music for years and the ukulele was the perfect addition to that. In addition, as an upright bassist who frequently has to fly to gigs, it was the perfect carry on to bring with me and be able to practice in my hotel room. These days I feel as at home on uke as I do bass.**

- How did your Checking-In series come to be? It's a great idea and shows how deeply interested you are in every aspect of the uke family.

**I'll be honest that it was a bit of a selfish endeavor. I had wanted to start a podcast interviewing musicians for some time mostly so I had an excuse to reach out and pick the brains of people that I admired. The pandemic gave me the perfect chance to do that. I've had a lot of fun getting to know some folks through that series as well as trying to bring lesser known players into the little community that I've cultivated over the years.**

- Your connection to Europe and Germany keeps showing. You have a lot of friends on this side of the big ocean, some of which are the wonderful Charlotte Pelgen, Remco Houtman-Janssen (Ukulelezaza), Marc Gallagher, Jake Smithies, Samantha Muir and many others. Is the European uke society different from the American one?

**Hugely different, but also so much the same. One thing I'll say is that no matter where you are in the world I find people that hold a ukulele in their hands to be some of the humble and cordial people I have ever met. Especially in the UK I think there is a great benefit to the ongoing popularity of Formby keeping the ukulele flame alive. In the states popularity really fell off during the second world war where it continued a bit longer in Europe. In the states many still view the ukulele as a toy, although that sentiment has certainly been changing, where I feel there is a lot more respect for the instrument across the pond. I think the approach to music and culture in general also sees a stark contrast and I feel an appreciation for music in Europe that sometime falls by the wayside in the states. Perhaps it is a bit of a 'the grass is always greener' situation to an extent, but I really enjoy seeing how the instrument brings people together across the world.**

- Your most obvious connection to the old world is, of course, your uke. It's been built by the British luthier Liam Kirby under the brand name of Wunderkammer. Liam is a fantastic and very original guy. How did you find out about him and what can you say about your uke?

**The power of the internet and social media algorithms! I've never been one for fancy instruments, my main guitar and upright bass cost less than \$350 combined, but when I saw one of Liam's instruments on instagram I was in awe. It was art, true old world craftsmanship. I finally decided to**

**send him a message just to solidify in my mind that I could never afford such a fabulous instrument. When he got back to me with the price I couldn't believe my ears and told him to take my darn money. I can tell you that I will be buried with that instrument and that it as much as anything has been an integral part of my brand. What's more important is that Liam is simply a fabulous person and on about the same level of crazy as me!**

- Talking of gear, before your Wunderkammer, you seem to have played mainly Ohana ukuleles and your various banjoleles. But it seems like you don't have hundreds of ukes. Is there a secret uke you hope to have sometime?

**I do have a super secret instrument being made right now, but it's not a ukulele in the traditional sense. As for ukuleles, not really, I think one day I'll likely pick up a Bruko to serve as a backup in case my Wunderkammer ever needs work done on it as I've always loved their simplicity, but the Wunderkammer truly creates exactly the sound I have in my head. There's something to be said for that.**

- You have found your signature sound. And you share it with the world by selling your own signature strings. But, unlike some other artists, you didn't just put your name on some company's stock strings. You developed the strings yourself and you even sell them from home. Tell us a bit about those strings.

**The Magic Ukulele Strings are a testament to me being stuck alone too long in my apartment for the last two years. I have never found a soprano ukulele string that I loved. I played Worth Browns for years and while they're great strings there was simply something missing. It should be said up front that I developed this to suit my Wunderkammer (and starting in the new year Wunderkammer ukulele will be shipping with my strings on them) and I think that everyone needs to find the string that works for their style and their specific instrument. For me the C string on sopranos has never felt right to me. The tension is too far off from the other strings. That's really what I set off to solve and my first attempts were at making an even tension strings set. Sounded great on paper, not so great on the instrument. I ended up with a rather low tension set that truly opened up the sound of my instrument. I had Jake Smithies design the packaging and off we went. So far people seem to enjoy them which makes me happy but, to be honest, all I really care about is that I love playing them!**

- You have a great knowledge of the whole ukulele world, but are somewhat specialized in the works of Roy Smeck, George Formby and Ernest Ka'ai. Not playing Tenor ukes or Low G, you seem to live in a parallel universe from the Hawai'ian celebrities. Do you get invitations from there?

**I really hope to make it to Hawaii one day to play and hopefully study with some of those fabulous players. If anyone in Hawaii is reading this please invite me on out! Although there is certainly a divergence between the Hawaiian and Mainland styles as they evolved over the years some of my favorite players are there. Brian Tolentino, Byron Yasui, Kimo Hussey, the list goes on and on.**

- How do your cat Charlie and the rest of your family feel about you giving so much of your attention for the uke?

**I am lucky to have a very supportive, cat, family, and partner. Charlie is a feral cat who resides in my house and playing music is one of the only things that calms him. I'm blessed to have a partner that doesn't mind that most conversations we have also involve me having a ukulele in my hands; she is a woman of infinite patience.**

- What are your plans for 2022?

**At the very least I'll be releasing an album of accordion and ukulele duets with my good friend Jacques Pellarin this spring. In addition to that some festivals are coming back and I'm very much**

**looking forward to some travel and in person teaching. For the most part I'm going to keep honing my craft, writing music, and traveling as much as possible. We'll see where the winds take me.**

- Thank you for your time

**It's always such a pleasure chatting with you, Hardy. Thank you for having me!**