

On the other side of the world

Greetings from Boswell the Busking Clown, aka James Jackman from Vancouver, Canada

A group of us from The Vancouver Ukulele Circle, including Ralph Shaw, traveled down the west coast to Portland, Oregon, to attend the Portland Uke Fest 2007. Ralph was one of 14 performers hired to perform and double as a teacher to the 115 who attended.

That's where our George comes in. Ralph led a workshop entitled, *George Formby: His Life & Times*.

George remains largely unknown in the United States, and even in Canada he is not a household name. As we know, he refused to tour the states, but he did tour Canada twice.

So, those of us who perform Formby tunes are delighted at the interest they garner from Americans who've never heard them before. As the only GFS member in attendance at the festival, I felt I was obligated to lend my support.

Working from well-researched notes, Ralph delivered an informative biography of George Formby. He also had photographs and other materials, including issues of *The Vellum*.

(I passed my GFS membership card around. What's the use of having one if you can't show it off once in a while?).

It's always nice to hear from GFS members in the far-flung outposts of the Empire

I performed Levy's Monkey Mike. That song is one of my favourites, but it has those throw-away orchestral riffs (The Wedding March, Sailor's Hornpipe, a kind of horror-movie riff, and Rule, Britannia), which are integral to the song. Not many of us have the luxury of a backing orchestra to add those lines, which may explain why it isn't performed all that much.

I, however, have a secret symphonic weapon. It's called a kazoo. I find it hilariously ironic that ukuleleists, smarting from the usual snubbing by guitarists, would snub the kazoo.

I hope to attend this festival again next year. I have plans to conduct a large kazoo orchestra to show everyone how to knock the stuffing out of Sousa's march, The Stars and Stripes Forever.

Safely back at home now, I busk daily in Vancouver's Chinatown. July 2007 marks two years since I started 'woodshedding' with the ukulele and I stopped visiting the barber.

No one is more surprised than me at where the noble ukulele has taken me in such a short time. I never tried to sing until I picked up the uke. If anyone wants to know how I did it... I ukulele daily.



James Jackman from Vancouver

Ralph Shaw: "I have watched Jim go from being a beginner to the obsessed ukulele fanatic that he has become. He sings songs in nine languages and is also an aficionado of the 'forgotten verses' that go at the beginning of many of the songs from the 1920s.

He delighted the audience in Portland during the open-mike concert when he performed two of these rarely sung but delightful relics of bygone times."