



Board of Education

Media Information

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Interactive Ukulele Experience at Helen Gorman Elementary on May 30

Kelowna, BC: On Friday May 30 at 12:15pm, hundreds of School District No.23 students will experience some of the 'best ukulele music outside of Hawaii' at Helen Gorman Elementary school. The Langley Ukulele B Ensemble, which consists of musicians in Grades 4 to 12, will be making a rare stop in Kelowna. Following the performance, some students will break into small groups to learn a song from the Langley Ukulele performers.

Rob Steciuk, a Grade 5/6 teacher at Helen Gorman was instrumental in bringing this experience to students in the District. He attended the annual Langley Ukulele Conference in September 2006 and befriended the daughter of "legendary" ukulele conductor Peter Luongo and former member of the Senior A Ukulele group. "I asked her if she would be travelling through the Okanagan on *any* festivals or musical engagements. She said that she did not think it was likely... I worked on her for about seven months." His persistence paid off!

"This is an amazing opportunity to not only listen to a professional performance of Ukulele players, but to be able to work and learn in small groupings with these musical players," says Steciuk. "The things that the Langley Ukulele players can do with the ukulele are truly amazing and I do believe this will inspire some children to continue with the ukulele. There is also a strong correlation of academic success and a strong Fine Arts program. This is just another dynamic to that Fine Arts program—one that is engaging to the student and provides an authentic learning experience."

In preparation for the interactive ukulele performance, Steciuk has taught the basics to intermediate students. However, he promises that even people who have no experience will walk away having learned something.

Langley Ukulele Ensemble performs 50 to 80 concerts per year including performances in Hawaii. The A Ensemble consists of adults; the B Ensemble is made up of musicians ranging from Grades 4 to 12. In July 2003, John Berger, entertainment critic for the Honolulu Advertiser declared: "Langley British Columbia is the nexus of ukulele outside of Hawaii." His comment was made after seeing the Langley Ukulele Ensemble share the stage with the Islands' greatest ukulele legends. The ensemble's music was featured on the soundtrack for the movie "Deck the Halls" starring Danny Devito and Matthew Broderick.

The ukulele is commonly associated with music from Hawaii, where the name roughly translates as "jumping flea". It developed from the small guitar-like cavaquinho, a Portuguese instrument introduced to the Hawaiian Islands by Portuguese newcomers. Typically resembling a short, thick guitar, ukuleles also come in a variety of other shapes. There are oval ukuleles, 'turtle' shapes with one flat side and one rounded side, and even square styles, often made out of old cigar boxes. Famous guitarist George Harrison of the Beatles was an avid ukulele player.

For comments, please contact:

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