

Ukulele Fight Club

The Ukulele Fight Club came about when I talked to a friend named Johnny Vegas about getting some folks together to jam on ukuleles at the bar he was tending. This was around Feb of 2010. We started to get together every week. It was originally made up of pro musicians that weren't working on Wednesday nights and Johnny wasn't hosting his Wed Night Stag Nights. There is a great video of us doing an open mic just a 100 feet from the bar where we met. We just walked down the alley, did our three songs and piled off the stage. It was a stage set up for duo/trio groups and we had over ten people on it. It is funny at the end of the vid-



eo seeing all of the people coming off the stage! It was sometime during these jam sessions that Johnny made a poster that invited folks to come to a ukulele fight. I loved the poster and Johnny and I came up with calling ourselves the Ukulele Fight Club. That was the beginning. Interesting side note that most people don't know about St. Louis and the ukulele is we have the oldest ukulele club in the country here, the SLUG's. They are around 39 years old now!

The Flea Bitten Dawgs came about because of a song. I've been involved with a local community radio station, KDHX 88.1FM, for over 26 years. Starting in 1999 one of the DJ's and myself have hosted benefits



for the station. I had a core group of top St. Louis jamband musicians that would help me with these shows. Our first year it was an all acoustic show without using a PA! The next year was an electric jam. Every year was something different. In 2010 I came up with the idea of a night of Grateful Dead music played on ukuleles! The group consisted of 12 ukulele players, a drum kit, percussion, bass, keyboards plus a sax player and a trumpet player. It was a big success! From there we started doing it every year. Last year we

changed the donation to a group called TOCO which is a small not for profit which helps families in need. PBS did a segment for broadcast about my involvement with ukuleles and the Whole Earth Nuclear Ukulele Orchestra, which is the name of this group.

This might seem off track but you'll understand why this fits into the Dawgs beginnings! As a promo for the first show I asked David if he'd play a song with me and have it recorded at KDHX. Before we started to work on the song David had been very anti-ukulele! The song I wanted us to learn was Irving Berlin's "Russian Lullaby" which was a favorite with Jerry Garcia and David Grisman hence the Grateful Dead angle for the show. David didn't own a ukulele at the time so I loaned him one of mine on a Thursday, we rehearsed the song on Sunday and Monday, and went to KDHX on Tuesday to record the song. Neither he nor I knew they planned to video the song so we are dressed like we just came from cleaning out the basement! That video has over 10,000 hits on Youtube. The whole time we rehearsed in David's kitchen his wife kept shouting at us, "That's really great..." As we rehearsed we go off into jamming on other songs and just having fun on the ukuleles. It was because of that song that we formed the band. The name is derived from the fact that David Grisman was called the Dawg in the Garcia/Grisman duo and that the word ukulele means jumping flea in Hawaiian. That's where the name "Flea Bitten Dawgs" came, we are old dawgs bitten by fleas!