

## With 3 Movable Ukulele Chord Shapes, You Can Play Millions of Songs

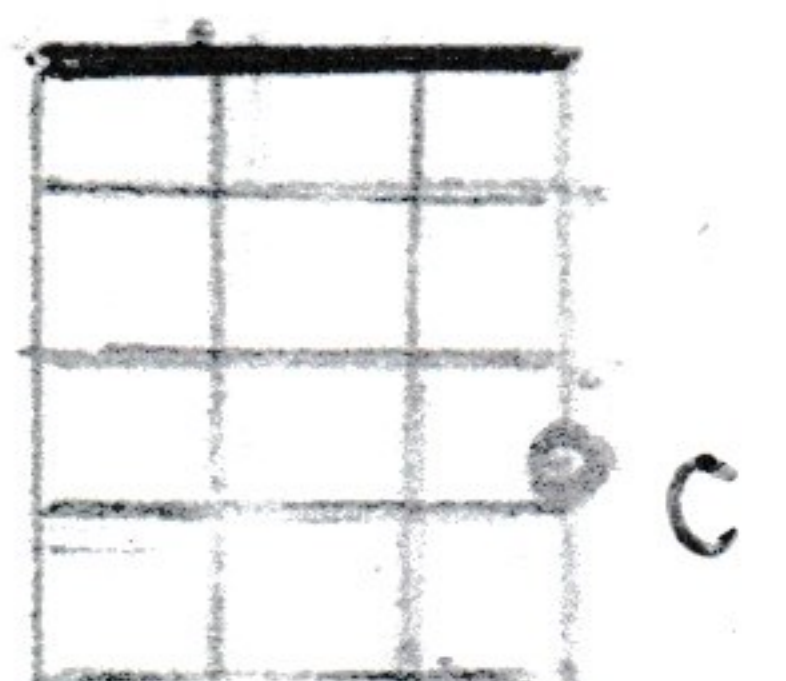
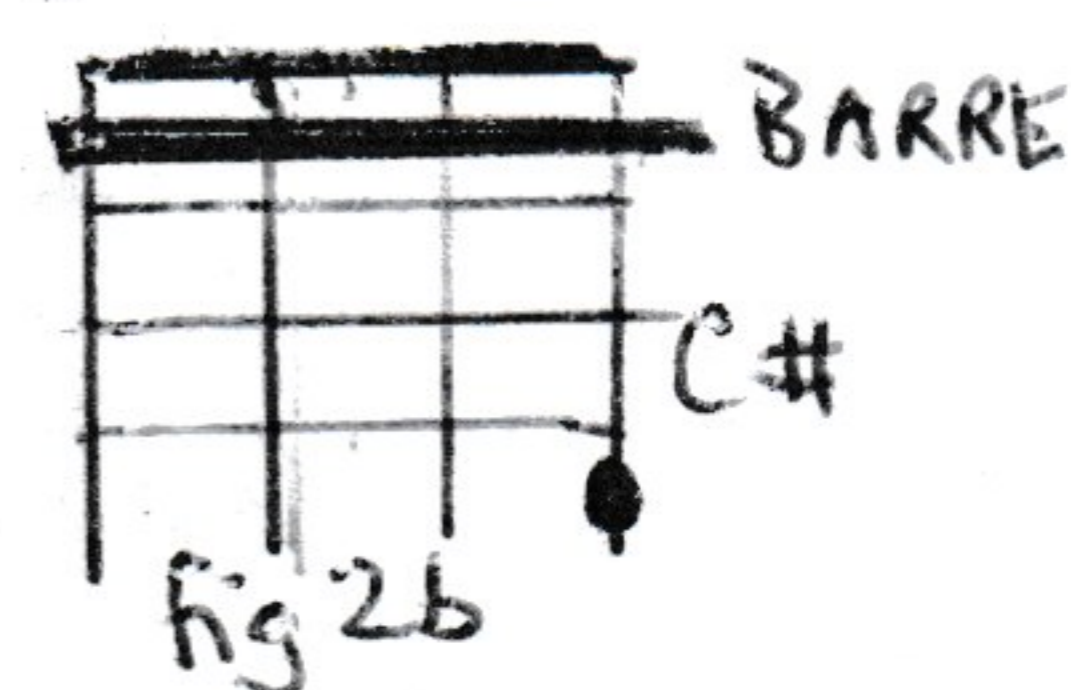
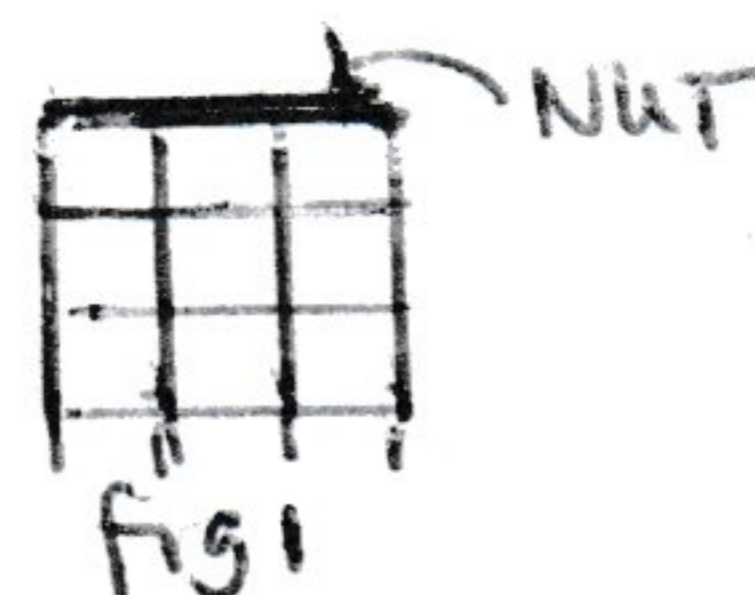
AUGUST 14, 2017

FROM THE [FALL 2017 ISSUE OF UKULELE](#) | BY [JIM D'VILLE](#)

You may have heard the old “scientific” myth that as human beings we use only about ten percent of our brains. My own personal observations have shown me that most ukulele players use only 1/12 of the ukulele’s full potential. Why? Because many ukulele players are trapped in the key of C while, as music theorists will tell you, there are actually a full 12 keys to choose from. So what’s behind the average ukulele player’s unwavering affinity for *the people’s key*? It’s easy to play in C, even on a piano. Start on the white key of middle C on a piano and ascend the white keys, one at a time, to the next C note seven keys away and you’ve played a C major scale. No black keys required. If the key of C was indeed the only key, piano makers could save a bundle by getting rid of all those pesky black keys. But, alas, that is not the case.

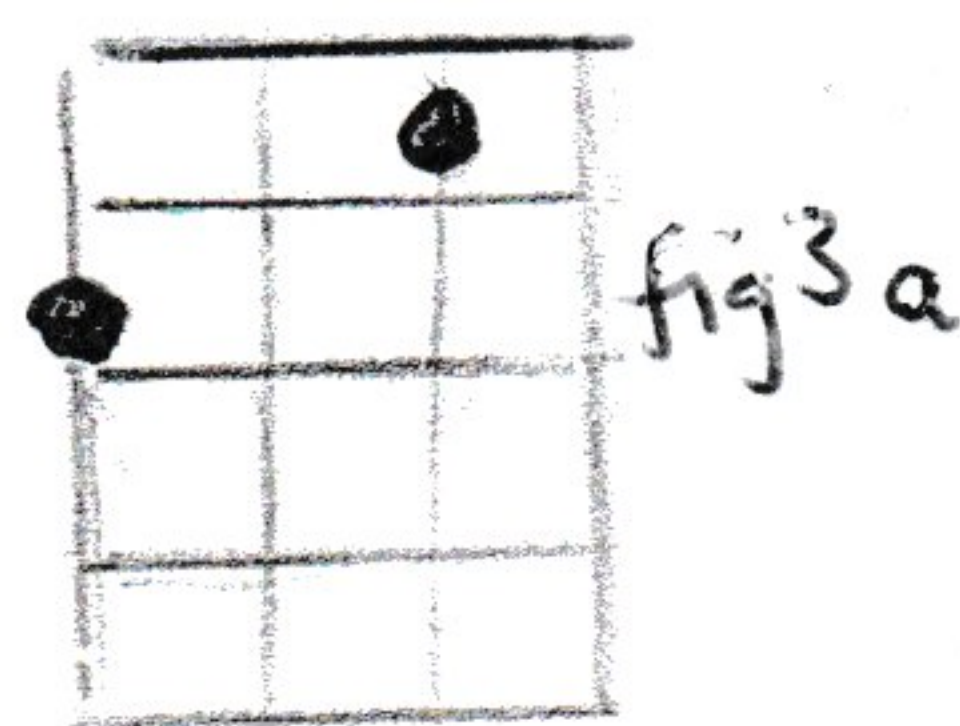
When you were debating between buying a ukulele or accordion, remember the clerk at the store saying, “The ukulele is easier. Just put one finger here and you’re playing a C chord!” That siren song of the key of C has lured many beginning players into the one-key quagmire. There are a couple of ways to escape this Bastille of solitary (key) confinement. You could move to Canada. Above the 49th parallel, the generally accepted tuning of the ukulele is the key of D. So sell your house, get a visa, tune up a whole-step on each string, and *voilà*—you can now play in the key of D!

### THE “C SHAPE”

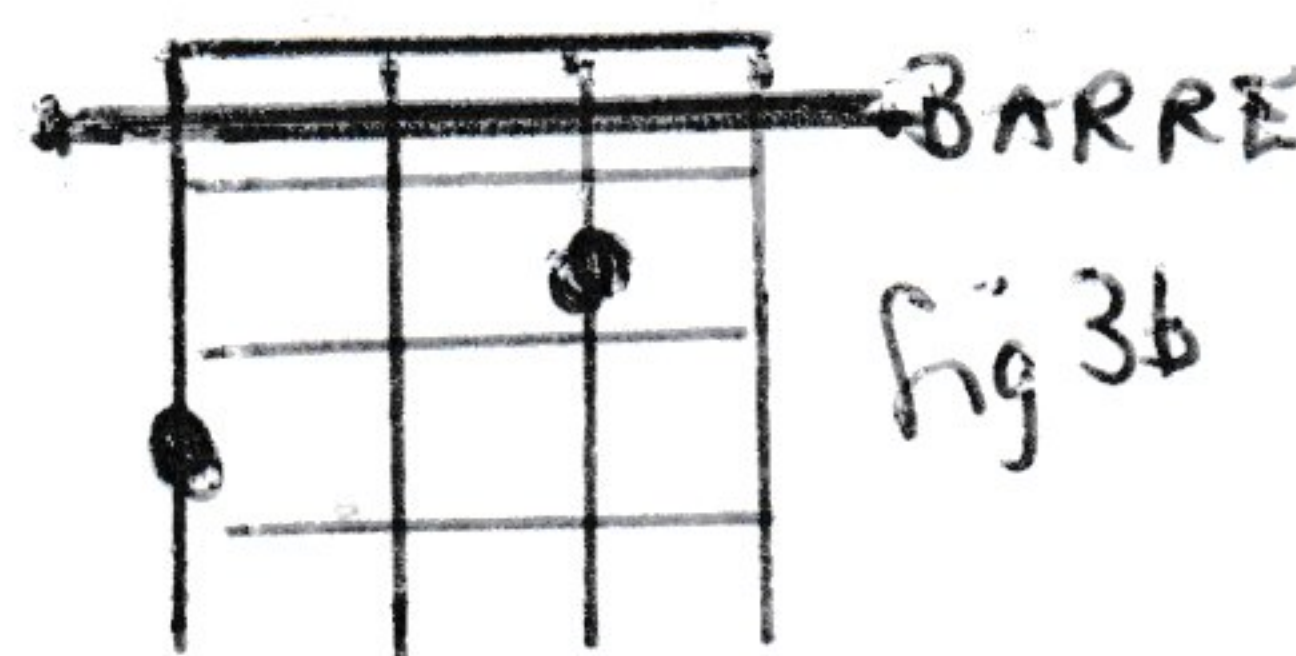


“The Movable Nut System” is a simple method for playing in all 12 keys. The little piece of bone or plastic that separates the fretboard from the peghead is called the nut. (**Figure 1**) Hold an open-position C major chord using your ring finger to hold down the first string at the 3rd fret. (**Figure 2a**) To play a C# major chord, all you have to do is place your pinky finger on the first string, 4th fret (C#) and fret the other three strings at the 1st fret with an index finger barre. (**Figure 2b**). The index finger of your fretting hand is now acting as a capo, or movable nut. By moving this shape up one fret at a time, you will be able to play the I chord in every key until you run out of fingerboard. On a soprano ukulele, that could be as soon as your barre reaches the 8th fret. This is where our second barre shape, the “F Shape,” can help us continue our journey through all 12 keys.

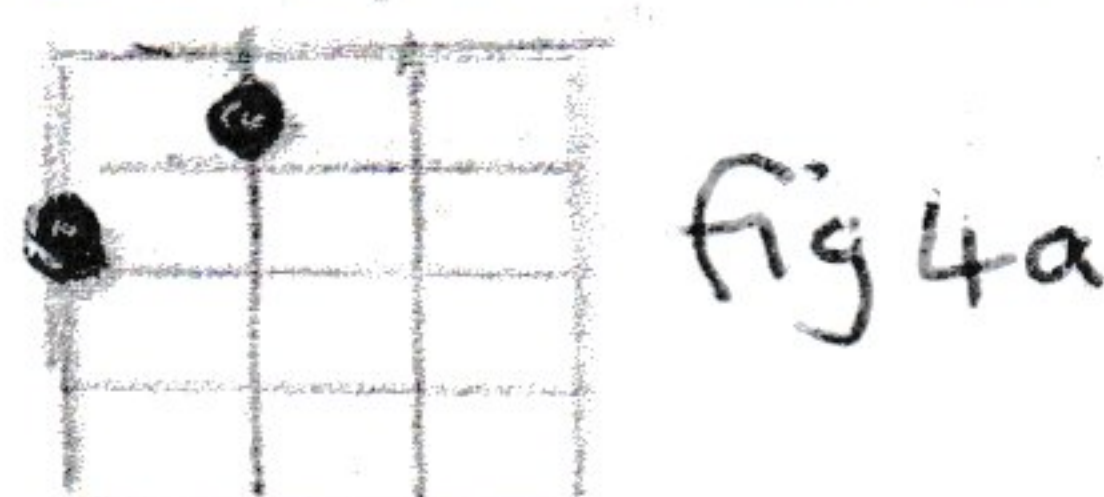
**TIP** When playing barre chords, do not place your thumb on the back of the neck directly behind the barre. Instead, try sliding your thumb toward the peghead to create a fulcrum effect.



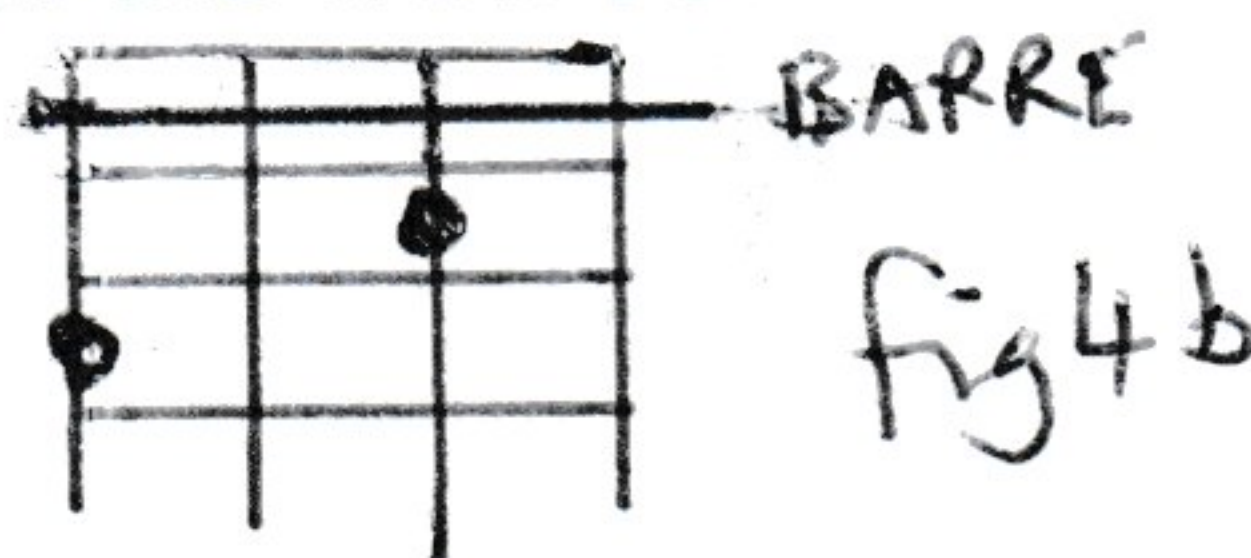
### THE "F SHAPE"



Hold an open-position F major chord by fretting the fourth string at the 2nd fret with the ring finger and the 2nd string at the 1st fret with the middle finger. (**Figure 3a**) Now, move that shape up one fret toward the soundhole and use your movable nut (index finger) to barre all the strings at the 1st fret. That's an F# major chord. (**Figure 3b**) Move the shape up one fret at a time through the keys of G–G#–A–A#, etc. Usually by the time we reach C major, at the 7th fret, with this shape the tone will start to sound thin. To fix that, let's learn one other movable nut shape lower down on the fretboard.



### THE "A SHAPE"



Since we are starting with an open-position A major chord, we'll call this the "A Shape." Fret the fourth string at the 2nd fret (again using your ring finger) and the third string at the 1st fret (middle finger). (**Figure 4a**) Now, repeating what we've done with the previous shapes, move this A major shape up one fret and use your index finger to barre at the first fret. That's an A# major. (**Figure 4b**) Some of you might recognize this as the first position Bb chord (especially if you only barre the first and second strings with your index finger). That's because A# and Bb are enharmonic chords—one chord with two different names. Now move this shape up one fret to B major and finally one fret up to second position C major. You've now come full circle (Circle of 5ths, that is), and can play the I chord for each of the 12 keys.

## PUTTING IT TOGETHER

Now that you can play the I chord in all 12 keys, you can use these same three shapes to play the IV and V chords in each of the keys. This will allow you to play millions of three-chord songs in the key of your choosing.

By using the Moveable Nut System, you'll gain the confidence to play in all 12 keys, even D#/Eb! You'll also be able to find the keys that best match your singing voice. My favorite reason for learning to play in all 12 keys is that you'll be able to play your favorite recorded songs in their original keys. Employing the movable nut system will not only open up the

fingerboard to playing in all keys, it's also the starting point for learning to play extended chords, chord inversions, scales, and more

### **DAILY CONSTITUTIONAL**

A worthwhile exercise to practice every day is playing the I (one) chord of all 12 keys using these three different shapes. Say each chord's name out loud, as you play it, to help you learn.

- Use the first barre shape, the "C shape," to play through keys C–C#–D–D#–E–F.
- Now, drop down to frets one, two, and three for our second shape, "the F shape," to play F#–G–G#–A.
- Finally, using our third barre shape, the "A shape," play the last three chords, A#–B–C.