



You say yook-ulele, I say ook-ulele



MEGAN ANDERSON

Hawaiian shirts dominated the dress code at the Playmakers event over the long weekend in Albany, where the ukulele was a star of the program.

For the punters who hadn't voluntarily attired themselves thus, a slew of printed shirts festooned the venue's back wall. They arrived in the suitcase of Hawaiian ukulele maker David Hurd, who sold them for just \$15 apiece.

It was that generous spirit in which Hurd and his fellow luthiers approached Playmakers, the event where instrument makers and musicians unite for a confab about (mostly) stringed things.

Nuggets of wisdom — from ideal fretboard length to the relative merits of pear-wood guitar tops — were freely dispensed across the weekend of presentations at the Eclipse Museum.

Idiosyncratic dual-holed guitars, sublime Smallman specimens and an angular creation dubbed "the

Wintonbeast" were picked over.

Experts included Harry Fleishman from the US, David Hurd and his ukelele-playing compatriot Doug Tolentino from Hawaii, Greg Smallman from Esperance, David Worthy from Victoria, Alan Warburton from Albany and New South Welshman Neil Graham, who shared his skills in "hotting up" harmonicas. Among the big revelations was a point about pronunciation. It's not yook-ulele, corrected the Hawaiian contingent.

It's ook-ulele, meaning "jumping flea", said the Hawaiians, who appeared bewildered at Byron Bay musician Azo Bell's playing style. The man with the giant hand span admitted that his flamboyance with a uke has accounted for a collection of trashed instruments. The delicate lilting technique (and falsetto vocal) of Doug Tolentino was nowhere in Bell's uke-spinning repertoire.

Playmakers, the brainchild of Albany musician Rod Vervest, had its genesis in 2002, but this is the second year it has been exclusive to the Perth International Arts

Festival's Great Southern program. Given Albany's voracious uptake of festival events since the PIAF annexe moved south in 2003, it seems as fitting a centre as any for a dedicated musical forum.

For the intrigued punter, the Playmakers concert was a reminder of what it's all about in the end. Technical discussion made way for joyous playing, kicked off by Linsey Pollock drawing melodious sounds from camp stools, garden hose and bagpipes made from rubber gloves.

There are few bills on which such playful wizardry could sit alongside the pin-drop artistry of Craig Ogden's classical guitar, dirty blues harmonica from Jim Conway and Scott Wise, ragtime ditties and Hawaiian love songs.

By the end, the Playmakers stage was crowded with musicians as Andrew Winton played lap steel on the Wintonbeast. He professed to be having the best fun of his months-long tour.

He was not alone.



Playmakers:
Flinders Park
Primary School
music teacher
Mike Staude
leads his young
charges on
ukuleles.
Picture: Bob Lipinski

WHAT'S ON TODAY

The War of the Roses (Parts 1 and 2): His Majesty's Theatre, 1pm and 7pm.

Giselle: PCEC, 7.30pm.
Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: The Playhouse, 7.30pm.
Antigone: Subiaco Arts Centre, 8pm.
Tony Allen: Beck's Music Box, 8.30pm

Films: Buddha Collapsed Out of Shame (Somerville); Lemon Tree (Joondalup), 8.30pm.
Great Southern program: Details at perthfestival.com.au/greatsouthern