

MEMPHIS UKULELE BAND

Memphis Ukulele Band

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One of Memphis music icon Sam Phillips' favorite sayings was, "If you're not doing something different, you're not doing anything." With a unique ensemble sound and surprisingly diverse repertoire, Memphis Ukulele Band is firmly rooted in Memphis music's maverick tradition.

And like so much great Memphis music, this story starts at Sun Studio. It was there one evening in 2013 that Jon Hornyak, engineer Matt Ross-Spang, and multi-instrumentalist Jason Freeman came up with the idea of starting a ukulele band. They invited a few friends along – critically acclaimed singer-songwriter Mark Edgar Stuart and talented newcomer Kyndle McMahan – and soon found themselves opening for the uke's biggest kahuna, Jake Shimabukuro. That show earned them both an enthusiastic crowd response and the interest of Blue Barrel Records, and in May 2015 they began recording their debut album at Music+Arts Studio.

For all five members, MUB is a genuine labor of love, a ukulele-fueled Traveling Wilburys-style break from their busy musical "day-jobs," which range from Ross-Spang's high-profile production/engineering gigs to Kyndle McMahan's junior-year music studies at University of Memphis. But what started as a fun side gig for house concerts and neighborhood coffeehouses soon took on a life – and devoted local fan base – all its own.

Now, the band eagerly looks forward to bringing their "Ukulele Soul" sound to a national audience with Memphis Ukulele Band's self-titled debut album. The record features 10 covers and one original song – Mark Edgar Stuart's "In-Laws" – and explores the charms of the uke within myriad genres, from pop to blues to reggae to soul.

Nothing is untouchable. MUB takes on "Valerie," the Zutons song made famous by the late, great Amy Winehouse. Perhaps Kyndle's finest vocal performance on the album, it stays true to the edgy-yet-fragile original while at the same time showcasing the young singer's own unique qualities. The album's most elaborate production, "Valerie" remains true to the intimate simplicity that is MUB's trademark.

Then there's "(You Keep Me) Hangin' On," a song that is at the heart of the band's signature sound – ukulele soul. Kyndle's rich, fluid voice rides the Memphis groove of the band's ukes, augmented by a lone cello played by adventurous Memphis Symphony Orchestra cellist Jonathan Kirkscey, in an arrangement crafted by legendary Memphis studio man Lester Snell.

Right at home alongside these classic songs is "In-Laws," Mark Edgar Stuart's original contribution. He sings it wryly – a post-modern Furry Lewis. With its classic theme of marital discord set against jaunty, countrified uke strumming, it's got the feel of a state-of-the-art 21st Century jug band, with a little hill-country stomp tossed in.

The ukulele is an instrument whose low volume and capacity to express a broad range of emotion make it one of the most intimate, evocative and underrated stringed instruments. It's fitting, then, that Memphis – also intimate, evocative, certainly underrated – is the setting for this magical collaboration. The Memphis Ukulele Band's self-titled debut is out on Barrel Records February 19, 2016.



1. I Can Help
2. Everyday I Have to Cry Some
3. Valerie
4. Blue Bayou
5. Take Me Home, Country Roads
6. (You Keep Me) Hangin' On
7. Just Because
8. Brand New Key
9. Lookin' Out My Back Door
10. In-Laws (Mark Edgar Stuart)
11. I'm Living Good

PRAISE FOR MEMPHIS UKULELE BAND

"'Valerie' is breathtaking." - Bob Merlis

"The ukulele may have its origins in Hawaii, but the Memphis Ukulele Band joyously applies the instrument's unique qualities with a regionalistic flair, thanks to smart mix of classic country, R&B and originals and fine vocals." - Rick Clark, Music Supervisor, Hell on Wheels (AMC)

"I call it Southern uke style with the Memphis Vibe." - Geri Valdriz

PUBLICITY

Elizabeth Cawein | Signal Flow PR
elizabeth@signalflowpr.com
901.440.8085 | 901.268.9038

LABEL / DISTRIBUTION (EXCEPT UK)

Blue Barrel Records
901.278.0300
ward@archer-records.com



UK DISTRIBUTION

Proper Distribution
lynn.lancaster@propermusicgroup.com