



Happy Birthday from The Ukulele Orchestra of Great Britain

Dear Spot On!

Thank you very much for your email and for your request, and for taking us to our memories.

I remember our booking at Melling Village Hall. I Remember you and we all remember our village hall experiences!

My first experience with the Rural Touring scheme was when I worked with Cosmotheke, the rip-roaring light entertainment and "updated music-hall duo", which became a quartet as we performed "Pop Goes The Century: 100 Songs in 100 minutes", with one song from each year of the 20th Century, but not necessarily in that order, and not necessarily one at a time! The audience reactions were very positive and we saw that the rural touring scheme was very well organised.

It then seemed a good idea to see if we could introduce my other group to the service. The Ukulele Orchestra started up in 1984. We had played at weekends and evenings near where we lived, and sometimes undertook trips elsewhere, which early on but intermittently including BBC radio and TV, Belgium, America, Canada, Japan.

It was, however, a "famine or feast" kind of operation with flurries of activity and then periods of time without any concerts apart from the ones we organised ourselves in the local pub or club. The factor which made a huge difference to our experience, our act, our reputation and our ability to work full-time was our involvement with the Rural Touring Network. We found that working with relatively small audiences improved our ability to engage. We found that the reputation we gained in one area quickly spread to other venues and villages in the same area,



and then to other areas which also were part of the Rural Touring Scheme, thus meaning that demand for our act gradually increased. We had several years of very positive experiences with the rural touring organisers and venues and the audiences, which we all remember fondly. Eventually, although we liked the village halls very much, we found that we had developed and were able to fill community centres, small theatres, and then larger theatres. Our international appeal also grew. We have now been working for 40 years continually and have toured all over the world including China, Australia, New Zealand, Estonia, Svalbard, Norway, Sweden, Finland, The Netherlands, Denmark, Poland, Spain, France, Germany etc etc We were invited to be part of the proms at the Royal Albert Hall, where we ended up with full houses twice.

So it is true to say that our experience literally went from The Village Hall to The Royal Albert Hall. With sold out shows in each venue. Our experience is that an act which goes down well with a small audience of villagers also goes over well with an audience of 6,000. We honed and buffed our act on the rural touring circuit and we think it was and is a first-class scheme. I think it is absolutely the case that whatever fluency we developed with artistic, administrative, technical and financial matters would not have occurred without the rural touring service. Our strong impression was that the organisers, the artists, the volunteers and the audiences had very positive experiences and contributions, and that the scheme was from the beginning a marvellous idea and worked very well.

George
www.ukuleleorchestra.com

The Ukulele Orchestra of Great Britain performed in Melling Village hall on Friday May 16, 2009

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