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The History of the 'Ukulele 'Is Today'

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'The past is never dead. It's not even past.' Faulkner's oft-quoted maxim¹ is well suited to the history of the 'ukulele, as this chapter is intended to illustrate. In a recent thesis defence, one of my students was asked why she was so intent in detailing historical facts while obviously aiming at a marketing study. She replied, 'The past makes the present as it is'. How history is seen as a process that includes present and future is crucial to the understanding of cultural studies. Faulkner's enthusiasm for and approach to history is worth being understood by musicologists who deal mainly with real-time subject matters, not only musically but also the underlying cultural processes (Fagnoli and Golay 2009). The 'ukulele is a symbolic item in the perception of Hawai'i as a 'culture'. The history of this popular instrument, however, has seen many twists and turns on its way to becoming an iconic musical instrument for various cultural movements. In tracing the details, including specific approaches to what is called 'music-ing', this chapter highlights the importance of historical depth in ethnomusicological research. Historical depth in such research has also been encouraged by Stephen Wild, to whom I dedicate this

1 Paraphrased from a statement given orally and confirmed by LeClair in his chapter "The "Big Train" and Historical Fiction: Matthiesen, Vollman, Sayles, McCarthy" (LeClair 2014).

chapter. The recent availability of electronic information tools and wealth of details does not necessarily make the task any easier as subject matters are not neatly sorted according to places and times.

Point of departure

The ‘ukulele is said to derive from a small Madeiran lute that was imported by Portuguese musicians to Hawai‘i and there transformed into a very popular string instrument.² My more detailed investigations of the ‘ukulele story lead to the insight that the ‘ukulele is probably an invention by ambitious carpenters in Hawai‘i. The immediate precursor, that is, the model for the ‘invention’ of the ‘ukulele is not the smaller, more elaborate and refined *braguinha*, but the rather simple *rajão*. This is contrary to the rather simplistic illusion of ‘ukulele fans and musicians practising in California that the ‘ukulele’s history dates to the beginning of Portuguese civilisation, eventually reaching the United States in the early twentieth century on the occasion of San Francisco’s World Exhibition of 1915. My research is an elaboration of the history moving through time and place.

Crucial to my approach to development of the historical flow is the analysis of a variety of texts written at different places and times. This progression must be developed in comparison and blended with evidence from sources on organological features such as musical function, repertoire, tuning, and detailed construction, as well as with facts emerging from biographical data of instrument makers and musicians. The long route from being a high-register melody lute in a Madeiran ensemble to the well-marketed and often colourful ‘ukulele used in today’s varying contexts can be partly traced back through stories that are written, told, symbolically depicted, and musically illustrated. My sources are newspaper articles, personal letters, introductions to ‘ukulele method books and ‘ukulele sheet music, published writings and manuscripts of ‘ukulele musicians, recorded interviews, and the standard academic literature analysing some of these texts. The places involved in the sources are as interesting as the story itself. They include Apia, Bremen, Chicago, Funchal, Honolulu, Los Angeles,

2 This chapter is based on long-term research and an earlier paper (Jähnichen 2009) that is here greatly restructured and extended in its discussion, and includes corrected data and additional findings. Further research was undertaken in 2015 after the production of handmade Madeiran lutes had successfully been resumed.

Paderborn, San Francisco, San José, Vienna, and the World Wide Web. That is to say, this chapter traces the 'ukulele's development as a musical instrument and cultural history through some lesser-known sources, which feature a variety of individual contributions to the knowledge and interpretations thereof.

As an instrument that has travelled around the world and carries various meanings important to those who produce it, who play it, and who listen to it, the 'ukulele is an excellent example of early global knowledge transmission that started in the Atlantic region, then restarted in the Pacific.

Cultural migration to Hawai'i

Hawai'i (or the Sandwich Islands, as earlier named by James Cook) must have been a place for immigration by the time that plantation systems were introduced, requiring more labourers than available, the idea of plantations being to produce a volume of products beyond local market demands. As a result of the infrastructure boom, not only plantations were soon in need of more hands as many local sectors of the industry as a whole were lacking manpower to accommodate growing needs. The labour gaps, once all political barriers were removed,³ could be filled by migrants who brought along their culture and their understanding of economy. This took place not later than in the middle of the nineteenth century.

Before that time, contacts with other Pacific Islanders, Chinese, Russian, Spaniards, French, German, Norwegian, or British people who passed by or worked temporarily on the islands might have had some musical influence. However, these contacts could not lead to a dominating or long-lasting impact on the cultural environment as might be observed in the era of agricultural industrialisation. Though reaching Hawai'i may indicate high mobility, traffic between places on the islands or between the islands themselves was technically limited. Single groups of migrants were, therefore, quite isolated and did not travel far from the place they lived. A broadly adopted policy of plantation systems enabled a steady influx of culturally diverse people who were able to shape new cultural conditions through changed mobility patterns and other adaptations.

3 For example, the abolishment of earlier belief systems (*kapu*) and the Mehele reformation of land ownership that enabled the accumulation of land by a few landlords.

Vause described the conditions for *The Hawaiian Home Commission Act 1920*, in her MA thesis (Vause 1962: 106). Kent, drawing on Vause, concluded that:

the entire system operated along the racist line established by plantation interests in the mid-nineteenth century, when a cultural division of labor had been imposed upon sugar production to facilitate exploitation of (and to divide) the proletariat ... Chinese were found in small businesses, Japanese in small businesses, on small farms, and on plantations, Portuguese were plantation foremen and skilled crafts people, Filipinos were plantation laborers, and Hawaiians were low-level government workers, stevedores, and construction workers. (Kent 1993: 83)

The alignment of ethnic origins with professional and social status, when reflected in local narratives over a long period of time, can be considered as a beneficial developmental stage. As such, it might have been one of the factors stimulating cultural redefinitions, marketable inventions, and a spirit of experimenting with socialisation patterns that possibly had been taboo in the past (Haley 2014: 34–52).

The arrival of the Portuguese, the largest group of which was from Madeira, had only in its late stage a strong cultural impact on the islands. With general social restratification and ethnic stereotyping, and with the need for new patterns of socialisation and cultural negotiations, Madeiran Portuguese tried to make use of their craftwork skills in a new environment (Almeida 1992). What contributed to their reputation might have been the direct and well-organised recommendation by the former head physician of Queen's Hospital in Honolulu, Wilhelm Hillebrand. His support paved their way into a higher stratum of lower-paid jobs, giving them the opportunity to accumulate a small business capital. Their impact was strong due to the fact that they immigrated mainly as whole families and in large groups that continued and extended their mostly Catholic religious activities, which significantly included performing arts. The Portuguese, also called Pokiki, were obviously not considered *haole*—outsiders/strangers⁴—the inclusiveness perhaps contributing to their successful integration and survival.

⁴ Look up these communal knowledge platforms: HawaiiHistory.org (2015) and Donch.com (2015).

How the invention of the 'ukulele is made possible by the combination of these preconditions, the stage of cultural immigration, the availability of manpower, the need for changes in social life, and the accidental presence of creative individuals, is described in the next section.

The significance of Hillebrand in the story of the 'ukulele cannot be overstated, and the basis for his role is deserving of elaboration. The link arises through Hillebrand's connections with rich friends on Hawai'i who trusted his experience for the choice of plantation labourers (Meier 2005). His ongoing influence and importance is signified by the continuing existence of the Hillebrand Society some 100 years later, as evidenced in the letter shown in Figure 1.

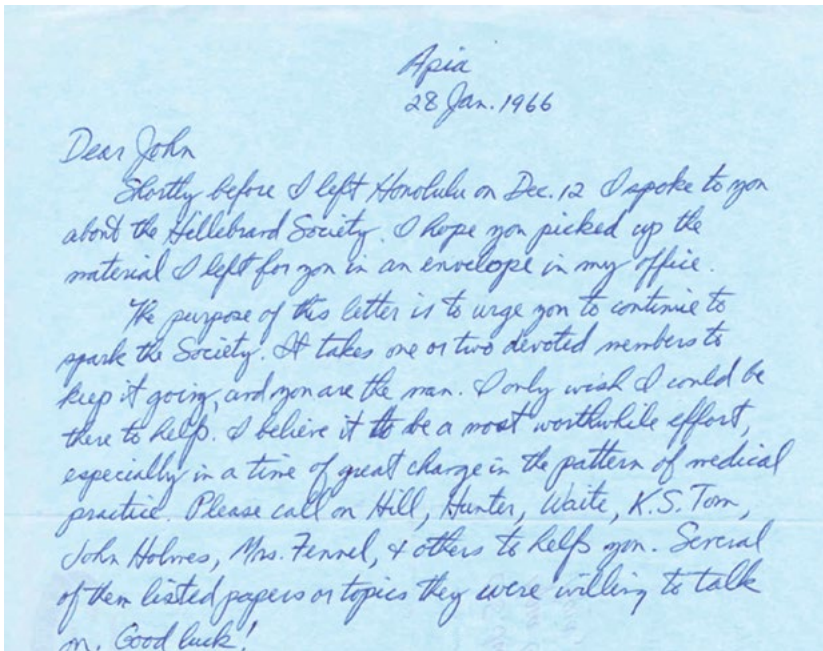


Figure 1. Letter by Charles Judd (written in Apia on 28 January 1966) to John Stephenson, encouraging him to take over the Hillebrand Society in Honolulu

Source: Hawaiian State Digital Archive/documents of the Bishop Museum, Hawai'i

The medical doctor Wilhelm Hillebrand, from Paderborn, Germany, was infected with tuberculosis. Financially secure, he set out to find a climate that would nurture his precarious health. Though he tried the climates of Australia and the Philippines, his medical practice failed and

his health continued to decline. In December 1850, Hillebrand arrived in Honolulu. Apparently, there he found a climate that was good to him, and he stayed in Hawai'i until 1871. In that time he became a friend of Queen Emma, the wife of King Kamehameha IV (Kuykendall 1967). Both the Queen and Hillebrand were enthusiastic amateur botanists, and they brought to Hawai'i a wide variety of plants from the Asian mainland, including the *plumeria* (frangipani) used in weaving leis, the traditional floral wreaths Hawaiians wear and present to visitors.

Prior to Hillebrand's arrival, by 1848, thousands of Hawaiians had died of influenza that was brought in by earlier visitors. Two years later, the island of Oahu lost half its population to smallpox as a result of increasing mobility; faster ships making it possible for the smallpox virus to survive the trip from San Francisco to Honolulu. Kamehameha and Emma raised funds for a hospital and Hillebrand became its first director and presiding doctor. How he was chosen by the board of trustees is symbolic of changes in Hawaiian society (Kludas and Bischoff 2003; Greer 1969; Whitfield Potter, Kasdon, and Rayson 2003: 106).

Hillebrand returned home in 1871, but shortly afterwards went to Madeira Island, which is known for its mild climate, located as it is about 1,000 kilometres from Lisbon, off the west coast of Africa in the Atlantic Ocean. There he published *Flora of the Hawaiian Islands*, one of the world's finest early publications on Hawaiian botany (Rock 2002). Hillebrand witnessed Madeira's bad agricultural conditions caused by a number of plant diseases, among them oidium (powdery mildew) and phylloxera (which, incidentally, also nearly ruined the French wine industry). He already knew the need for sugar workers in Hawai'i and came to know that Madeira was the first place where sugar plantations had been established (in 1425). But the Madeiran workforce, including experienced craftsmen, was no longer required due to natural disasters, and the new circumstances for sugar production on Hawai'i provided an opportunity for Hillebrand to intervene (Haley 2014). Through his friends in Hawai'i he arranged for the barque *Priscilla* to carry the first contingent of 120 Madeiran workers to Hawai'i in September 1878 (Kopitsch and Tilgner 1998). Although there were traditional Madeiran musical instruments on board the *Priscilla*, apparently none of the passengers could play them. The next year Hillebrand hired the barque *Ravenscrag* that brought woodworkers Manuel Nuñez, Augusto Dias, and

Jose da Espirito Santo⁵ and 350 other Madeirans to Hawai'i (King 2007a). Musicians were on board, namely João Luiz Correa⁶ and the 10-year-old João Fernandes, who arrived with his father. João Gomes da Silva was a passenger with a *braguinha*, but he could not play it. He loaned it to Fernandes who played as he disembarked the *Ravenscrag*. Nuñez and his cohorts noticed the amusement of the Hawaiians at Fernandes's energetic performance. Fernandes later played *braguinha* for Hawaiian royalty and at a three-day luau in Waimanalo. However, it is not recorded whether he played *braguinha* repertoire or newly adapted songs.

Documents of shipping companies (Hawaiian State Archive Digital Collection 2015; Meyer 1971) list detailed data on immigrants. Manuel Nuñez was not in the first group; he arrived with the other two cabinetmakers in 1879, among the passengers on the *Ravenscrag* in 1879 (Figure 2).

(26)			
112	NUNES, Manuel	Age: 40	Sheet #2
1879	RAVENSCRAG	From Madeira (Se)	
Aug			
23	SOLTEIRO.		
170	SANTO, Jose do Esp.'to	Age: 28	Sheet #5
1879	RAVENSCRAG	From Madeira (S. Marie)	
Aug			
23	SOLTEIRO, Companhia Virginia Augusta 34, Filhos: Joao 7, Adelaide 4 Annos, Jose 6 mezes.		
193	DIAS, Augusto	Age: 37	Sheet #6
1879	RAVENSCRAG	From Madelra (S.ta Maria)	
Aug			
23	Casado, Companhia Rosalina de Nobrega Solteira, 35 Annos, Christina 11, Carolina 9, Maria 5 Annos e Augusta 6 mezes.		

Figure 2. Documents of the Hawaiian State Digital Archive on Portuguese Migrants show the arrival of the three cabinetmakers

Source: Hawaiian State Digital Archive/documents of the Bishop Museum, Hawai'i

5 'Jose da Espirito Santo' is the spelling that most often appears in his immigration papers. Only later did Portuguese immigrants quietly correct it to 'José do Espirito Santo'. It is unclear which spelling was preferred by the man himself. In this chapter, the first form is used as it is most frequent.

6 In the Hawaiian State Digital Archives (2015), he is named 'Conca, João Luiz; 25 years old'. 'Conca' might be a misspelling of 'Correa' since both names can look quite similar in handwriting.

This information can be summarised as:

no.	name	status	age
112	Manuel Nuñez	unmarried	40
170	Jose da Espirito Santo	with family	28
193	Augusto Dias	with family	37

Nuñez was the only one of these three cabinetmakers who travelled alone, perhaps the reason that he could initiate activities that only later included his two friends, as some advertisements show (Figure 3).



Figure 3. Advertisements for Nuñez and Dias, from *O Luso Hawaiiano* (15 August 1885)

Source: Collected by King and Tranqada (2007)

How then did the coincidence of Hillebrand’s actions and the arrival of experienced craftsmen lead to the creation of a “ukulele”?

Derivations and variations of the ‘ukulele story

Nuñez may have heard of the inability of the Hawaiians to play Madeiran lutes from those few who had arrived even earlier (i.e. before the two barques) and who were still producing ensemble music of their homeland for dance and religious songs during the many Catholic *festas* (*Canticos evangelicos* 1902). It is known that around 1,200 Portuguese lived on Hawai‘i in 1879, approximately 900 of them from Madeira and Porto Santo. By 1912 a further 8,073 Madeirans reached Hawai‘i: 2,828 men, 1,931 women, and 3,314 children (Hawaiian State Digital Archive 2015). The Hawaiian slack-key guitar was introduced at nearly the same time, no later than 1889.⁷ It can be safely assumed that Hawaiian society would not have been surprised by the appearance of any type of lute.

⁷ For detailed information, see Ruymar (1996).

Manuel Nuñez's older brother, Octaviano João Nuñez (M. Morais 2003: 101–4), was a viola and *rabeça* maker of Madeira who specialised in *rajões*. From watching his older brother at work, Manuel Nuñez knew something of how to make simple instruments. However, Nuñez realised through observation that average Hawaiians may need an easy-to-play instrument to accompany their short, structured songs and, furthermore, that they had an open mind for embracing imports, not only plants and animals. By 1885, all three carpenters started their business with the manufacture of small guitars. But which one was the model on which they based their new production?

This question seems to be crucial to the understanding of the innovative process. In most of the available literature, including websites and compilations of useful cultural knowledge on Hawai'i,⁸ statements about the 'ukulele are extracted from or confirm the following:

A small guitar-like instrument. It is derived from the virtually identical *machete da braça* brought to the Hawaiian Islands by immigrants from Madeira. There is no string instrument native to Hawaii other than the *ūkēkē*, a mouth bow. Three Portuguese instrument makers arrived in 1870: Manuel Nuñez, who opened the first shop in 1880, and his associates Augusto Dias and José do Espirito Santo, who opened their own shops in 1884 and 1888 respectively. The instrument rose swiftly to popularity among the native population: in 1886 ukuleles were used to accompany hula dancers at King Kalakaua's jubilee celebration, and the *Hawaiian Annual* of the same year reported that 'of late they have taken to the banjo and that hideous small Portuguese instrument now called the "taro-patch fiddle"'. The 'taro-patch fiddle' is a large ukulele which appears to be derived from the *machete da rajão*. (Odell and Stillman 2005)

The above text included in the online version of the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* summarises standard knowledge on the introduction of the 'ukulele to the Hawaiian Islands. I suggest the following corrections according to my insights. The main points changed are the types of instruments involved and the sequence of events.

8 See HawaiiHistory.org (2015) and Museum of Making Music (2015).

The 'ukulele is a small lute invented on the Hawaiian Islands (then the Sandwich Islands) deriving from a reductive reconstruction of a Madeiran *rajão*. Three Madeiran cabinetmakers arrived there in 1879: Manuel Nuñez opened the first shop (1880) for the production of these small lutes for the local market; Augusto Dias and José do Espírito Santo, associates who followed him, opened their shops in 1884 and 1888, respectively. The instrument was widely offered as a simplified, more easily played guitar, and was made known to the public, for example, through a campaign on the occasion of King Kalakaua's jubilee celebration, where hula dancers were accompanied with 'ukuleles following an initiative of Princess Lili'uokalani. While the *rajão* played by Madeiran immigrants was first called a 'taro-patch fiddle', the instrument later known as the 'taro-patch' (since 1916) is a double-string 'ukulele.

It is quite surprising that the small *braguinha* or *machete de braga* (also *machete da braga*) is still widely considered as the model for the 'ukulele in standard encyclopaedias and in texts of 'ukulele method books and popular descriptions.

The fact that the 'ukulele derives from that early taro-patch⁹ (or the *rajão*) was quite well known to many 'ukulele musicians of the early twentieth century, although we still can find entries in serious academic encyclopaedias describing the 'ukulele as descendant of the *braguinha*. As late as 1979, the story is mentioned in Kanahele's *Hawaiian Music and Musicians*:

The present-day 'ukulele was adapted from the Portuguese instrument called the *braguinha*, which was introduced into Hawai'i in 1878 by the first group of Portuguese immigrants. Oddly enough, no member of the group was able to play it, not even its owner, one Joao de Freitas. It was not until the arrival of the second boatload of immigrants on August 22, 1879, that 'ukulele history really began, for on board the Ravenscraig that docked in Honolulu Harbor were not only the *braguinha* but musicians who could play it and craftsmen who could make it. (Kanahele 1979: 394–95)

This statement is probably directly related to an earlier entry in a Bulletin of the Bernice P. Bishop Museum, where Helen Roberts had written on the arrival of the *braguinha* in *Ancient Hawaiian Music* in nearly the same words (Roberts 1926).

9 Beloff (1997: 79) still mentions the taro-patch as being extended from five to eight strings though it is obvious that the modern taro-patch is derived directly from the 'ukulele.

Mike Longworth, an authority on lute organology, writes that shortly after the 'ukulele was first made by Martin Guitars in 1916, the taro-patch was made. This instrument had eight strings, arranged in four pairs. It, like its sister the 'ukulele, used gut strings. The taro-patch was actually the ancestor of the 'ukulele in Hawai'i. It is said to have been derived from a guitar-like instrument brought to the Hawaiian Islands by Portuguese sailors. However, he considers the evidence given as not well documented and not factual (Longworth 1975), possibly a reflection of his sense for practical issues with the instrument.

Other early observers such as Bailey in 1914, Littig in 1924, or Morris in 1937 have long known how the 'ukulele came into being. Bailey comments:

The ukulele, the typical native Hawaiian instrument of diminutive guitar shape ... was first produced in Hawaii about the year 1879 and sprung into such favor that the old Taro-patch fiddle was immediately dethroned in favor of its smaller brother. (Bailey 1914: no page numbers)

His statement indicates that the taro-patch (the *raĵão*) was the larger predecessor and in favour before the 'ukulele appeared. Littig (1924) agrees to that as well as Morris (1937). Also, Ernest Kaai may have seen it quite clearly stating that the 'ukulele was not an invention, but rather a creation (Kaai 1916).

The 'ukulele is said to be played to accompany songs, this often together with a guitar that might have been the unmodified guitar or later the slack-key guitar (Stillman 1989). Nordyke and Noyes give an example for the accompaniment of the song 'Kaulana Na Pua':

In early performances of this song in the late nineteenth century, Western string instruments, including guitar, 'ukulele, and later steel guitar, as well as traditional instruments of *ipu heke* (double gourd drum), *'uli-'uli* (feathered gourd rattles), and other native products were used for musical accompaniment. Now 'Kaulana Na Pua' is arranged for production by all instruments of the band and orchestra. (Nordyke and Noyes 1993: 35)

‘Ukulele predecessors in the migrating culture

Social aspects

Madeira—the wood island—was untroubled by human civilisation until the first inhabitants arrived with their socially fragmented traditions. They quickly adapted to the truly challenging life on the island. The hard-working farmers and craftsmen with their families left Portugal for different reasons and in waves of a few hundred people, resettling their villages along the valleys and the coastline first on Porto Santo and later on Madeira. From the fifteenth until the eighteenth centuries, the population increased to 120,000; 20,000 were imported Moorish slaves from North Africa.

In the nineteenth century, many Madeirans moved to other places for economic reasons. Diseases often demolished the vines. In 1848 oidium (powdery mildew) ravaged the plants, and by 1853 vine cultivation was almost totally abandoned. Twenty years later, phylloxera crippled the vines again.

Agricultural disasters and a hopeless political situation caused the Madeirans to leave their villages for Guyana, Brazil, Indonesia, and Hawai‘i. In Guyana they were outsiders amongst British, French, and Dutch, even if they were well known for their religious *festas* and their ‘guitars’, called *rajão* or *rezzo*. The Guyanese Portuguese Noel M. Menezes remarks: ‘The Madeiran emigrant then did not arrive in British Guyana devoid of everything but his conical blue cloth cap, coarse jacket, short trousers, and his *rajão*’ (Menezes 2000).

Hawai‘i seemed to be a special location in the history of Madeiran emigrants. The coincidence that caused the resettlement on the Hawaiian Islands is, therefore, a remarkable story.

When the plantation business became weak and declined in Hawai‘i, many of the still poor Madeirans went to the American west coast (Pap 1976), where they eventually engaged in the dairy industry and related cattle husbandry that was beginning to flourish around San José and San Francisco (Holmes and D’Alessandro 1990). The Madeiran immigrants were slightly amused by the fanatic Americans playing the ‘ukulele, to which they attached a colonial history in the name of Infante Dom Henrique, the Seafarer from Portugal.

Cultural aspects

As it was on the Portuguese mainland, the public musical practices of the people on the Madeira archipelago were divided into at least three spheres (Freitas 1992 [1930]):

1. Communal representation that was differentiated according to a specific age setting.
2. Spiritual and/or religious practice that was differentiated according to specific gender roles and intra-cultural or social hierarchies.
3. Entertainment, especially as an important part of 1 and 2 when closely connected to various types of *feira*—festivals of the church (the most important public institution related to traditional cultural affairs) dedicated to different saints of regional or inter-regional spiritual significance.

These three spheres were practised all over the world where Portuguese settled. The migrants realised their musical life always with a strong regard for their local roots and attention to maintaining their values. One component of keeping local roots is involvement with different types of string instruments (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Simple *braguinha* (left) to be repaired (from the 1960s) and details of a *braguinha* newly manufactured according to traditional models by Carlos Jorge Pereira Rodrigues in Funchal (centre and right)

Source: Gisa Jähnichen and Carlos Jorge Pereira Rodrigues

In early nineteenth-century Madeira, two different types of lutes could always be found. One was the costly nine-string *viola da arame*. The Madeiran *viola* was then an instrument of craftsmen and merchants, who were well situated and educated although they were rather amateurs in musical practice. The other type was a small four-string *cavaquinho*, which was called *machete* or *braguinha*, ‘small piece of wood’, an often elaborate and expensive instrument for ladies and other people who were ‘better off’. There were also some simple versions for farmers and fishermen, quite similar to the *cavaquinho* of Lisbon, which was an essential melodic instrument for entertainment (M. Morais 2003).

The *braguinha* was not only striking due to its small dimensions; it was to a certain degree functionally in competition with the violin from the mainland, the latter occasionally being a replacement for the *braguinha* in noble circles. In 1846, the lute teacher Manuel Joaquim Monteiro Cabral composed and compiled a score booklet in which we find the instruction ‘Arranjadas para Machete e Guitarra’ (using the ‘gallant’ names *machete* and *guitarra* for the *braguinha* and *violão*, respectively) as edited by Manuel Morais. This booklet demonstrates the social reinterpretation of the supposed low status of *braguinha* playing in that period of time, as can also be seen in one of the manuscript pages shown in Figure 5, which contains a number of copy mistakes from the original score for violin.

Most of the people who were willing to leave Madeira for reasons of improving their living conditions were down-to-earth farmers and the families of craftsmen, who could at most afford a simple *rajão*.¹⁰ It is still the most-used instrument in rural ensembles, and many young musicians start their guitar career with a Madeiran *rajão*.

10 The *rajão* remains today a symbol of pastoral harmony and the pure joy of life as the instrument is less sophisticated and far more robust than the other two lutes.



Figure 5. Manuscript page from the collection of teacher Manuel Joaquim Monteiro Cabrál (1846). This piece for *braguinha*, also known as the *machete*, is called 'Rita Polka'

Source: Reproduction, Gisa Jähnichen

Of the many lute makers in the nineteenth century, only a few were known for their ability to produce lovely, elaborate *braguinhas*. Two of them belong to the Nuñez family (possibly an uncle to Manuel Nuñez) and his son:

- Nuñez, Octaviano João (1812–1870); identified on a *machete* label as: 'Octaviano João Nuñez / Artista de Violas Francezas / Guitarras, Rabecas, Rabecoës / e Machetes / Rua de S. Paulo, No 35 A. / Madeira'
- Nuñez Diabinho, João (c. 1850–1927), son and successor of Octaviano João Nuñez. (King 2007b)

These men did not leave for any other part of the world, being quite well situated due to their capabilities and their achievements. They preferred to remain on Madeira, unlike some other family members who worked in the same business, but who were far less successful, Manuel Nuñez being one of these. In the end, his instrument-making qualities being of this less-successful nature, he produced mainly furniture.

One of the excellent *braguinhas* of Manuel Nuñez's uncle can be seen in the main collection of the Historical Art Museum of Vienna, Austria.¹¹ John King (2007a), one of the fanatic 'ukulele musicians and researchers in the United States, advises on his website 'Nalu Music' that fans and other friends of the 'ukulele's history should visit the prototype of the 'ukulele's direct ancestor. The curator of the museum in Vienna himself got in contact with these 'ukulele fans to discuss a special exhibit. He seems to be yet another victim of a very creative story on the 'ukulele, since he is convinced about an immediate connection between his original nineteenth-century *braguinha* and the 'ukulele.

In the late eighteenth century, the so-called *violão*-type was invented in the Portuguese mainland. It can be seen as a parallel development to the later-introduced Spanish guitar that was for a long time called 'French guitar' due to its regional origin. This lute type also reached Madeira, but not until the late nineteenth century.

Instead, the Madeirans developed the *rajão*, a unique instrument, universally convenient, cheaper, and stronger than the *viola da arame*, and blending perfectly with the sound of the other two lute types. Local instrument makers increased production of the *rajão* rather than forcing people to spend their hard-earned income on violas. Not only lute makers, but also other craftsmen (cabinetmakers or millworkers) joined the attractive *rajão* business. The *rajão* was preferred by most of the musicians for its tuning and playing techniques, which allowed it to substitute for the other more expensive lutes. In Figure 6, a typical ensemble of lutes is shown. It features two *rajãos*, but only one of each of the other lutes.

Figure 7 shows clearly the steps in Nuñez's work (along with that of Dias and Santo) to develop a small *rajão*, something appropriate to Hawaiian needs. They removed the D-string (marked with a cross) of the *rajão*, then they reduced the size of the *rajão*, or used a vastly simplified *braguinha* model. The tuning of the new instrument is a slight modification of the *rajão* tuning and is re-entrant, that is the G string is an octave higher than one would normally expect it to be. The tuning gave rise to the mnemonic 'My Dog Has Fleas'.

11 'Machete (Machete de braco), Octaviano João Nuñez, Madeira, early 19th century. Portuguese descant guitar with 4 strings, SL 333, CL 224.'



Figure 6. Typical ensemble of lutes today (a group from Santana, Portugal): (from left to right) *braguinha*, *rajão*, *rajão*, *viola da arame*, and *violão*. Observed at the *feira* in Arco São Jorge, June 2007

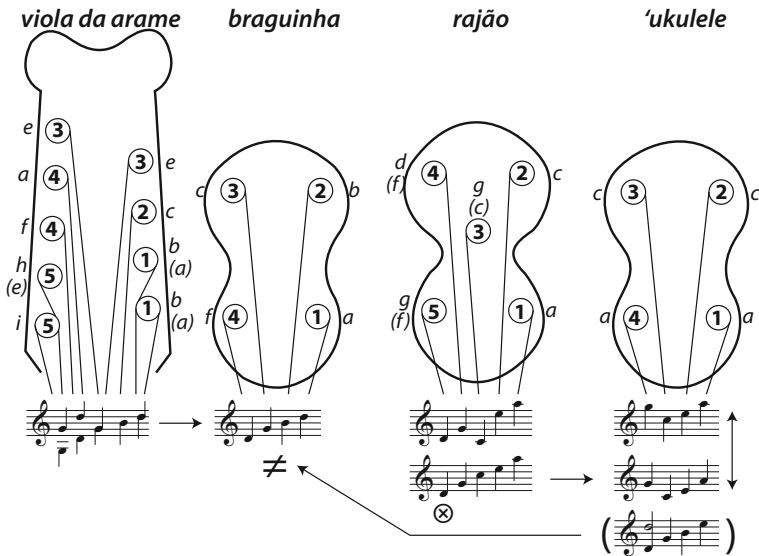


Figure 7. Tunings of the *viola da arame*, *braguinha*, *rajão*, and *'ukulele*. Letters (a, b, c, d, e, f, g, h) show different string gauges and possible variations in parentheses (the letters do not indicate pitches or string tunings). Numbers show the order of strings, from left to right in decreasing order. Repeated numbers show the same pitches or pitches separated by an octave. The double arrow indicates the range of registers in which the *'ukulele* can be tuned; one of these, shown at bottom right, is a clear departure from the tuning of the *braguinha*

The complicated sound of a typical Madeiran ensemble that included the nine-string *viola da arame*, the *braguinha*, and later *rajão* didn't fit the musical demands of Hawaiian players. Each lute in the Madeiran ensemble realises a specialised musical function in the ensemble. Only the *rajão* combined both melody-shaping and harmony-supporting functions and therefore could easily become a gateway—the 'ukulele—into another musical culture.

Flora Fox, the late granddaughter of Manuel Nuñez, lived in California and was the owner of one of the first 'ukuleles. She, as cross-cultural witness, told Dan Scanlan from Grass Valley, California, the following on her 104th birthday:

'I have that ukulele ... but a bigger one. My grandfather was the originator of the ukulele. He made the *rajaos* [*rezzaos*]. And then from there he went to Honolulu. And the Hawaiians couldn't play that big guitar, so, he made a small one. That was his idea. I've got one hanging in my room. And I and my sister, we used to entertain quite a bit on different places singing Hawaiian music. Now, what's this?'

Scanlan: 'This ukulele is made by your uncle [Leonardo].'

Flora Fox: 'Oh, yes, but what I have is larger than this. How it happened: He made guitars, but the Hawaiians (didn't) couldn't learn to play the guitar. So he decided to make it small, to make this ukulele.' (Scanlan and Fox 2002)

Scanlan confirms that the invented instrument could be played using the same fingering for making chords on the guitar, but with no bass. Like the *rajão*, it could be used for melody and rhythm, in ensemble or as a solo instrument. Of course, this can only be said retrospectively, due to the fact that the guitar was unknown to average Hawaiians at that time, hence its tunings or bass strings also remained unknown.

As the 'ukulele grew in popularity, the *rajão* faded away. Some players later wanted more volume, so Nuñez doubled each string and appropriated the *rajão*'s pre-'ukulele nickname for the new instrument: 'taro-patch'. Many bands in Hawai'i as well as in California, the next landing place of the Madeiran-Hawaiian settlers, adopted not only the 'ukulele but also the new taro-patch after the San Francisco World's Fair in 1915 (King 2007a).

Later, the company Martin Guitars would also make a taro-patch. The 'ukulele expanded even more in the 1920s with the creation of the *tiple*, a 10-string 'ukulele, on which the two outer strings are doubled and the two inner strings tripled.

Figure 8 is a chart that summarises the similarities of shapes, gauges, tunings, string varieties, ensemble and solo functions, repertoires, and social and ethnic associations. It shows that the *rajão*/*'ukulele* was the common instrument, and it served the function of guitar amongst the Hawaiians. Furthermore, the *rajão* was actually 'the instrument' of the Madeirans everywhere in the world.

The 'ukulele reached its commercially supported crest of popularity as an exotic souvenir after the Panama-Pacific World Exhibition 1915 in San Francisco made Hawai'i one of the first holiday destinations of the United States. Following that event, nearly 80 per cent of the instruments were produced outside of Hawai'i on the US mainland, some of them of such poor quality that a petition from Hawai'i clamoured for removing the misleading stamp 'made in Hawaii'.

	<i>braguinha</i> or <i>machete da braga</i>	<i>rajão</i> or 'taro-patch'	'ukulele	modern taro-patch	<i>tiple</i>
shape/dimension	+		X	→	←
tuning		+	X	+	+
string variety		+	X	+	+
ensemble function		+	X	+	+
solo function		+	X	+	+
repertoire	→	←	X	+	+
social association		+	X	+	+
ethnic association	→	←	X	+	+
time:		... 1878	1880	1910	1920 ...
places:	Madeira	→ Hawaii	→ + United States	→	world

Figure 8. Similarity chart for *braguinha*, *rajão*, 'ukulele, modern taro-patch, and *tiple*. The chart includes a timeline and places of main activities.

Note: X = 'ukulele feature that is compared; + = matching the 'ukulele; → ← = dependent on adjacent column

Because the *braguinha* was traditionally produced in a much more sophisticated way than the simple *rajão*, not every cabinetmaker could create a proper *braguinha* with a bright and well-carrying sound. *Braguinhas* can be considered the equivalent to violins in an ensemble;

that is, as melody instruments rather than a harmonically supporting instrument, such as the *viola da arame*. Only the *rajão* could render both functions, therefore making it the preferred instrument of those who could not afford the costly variety and who were also satisfied with a less-brilliant sound.

Figure 9 shows a comparison between a *rajão* from 1900 used on Hawai‘i, a Madeiran *rajão*, and a Nuñes taro-patch from 1910. Both instruments, the *rajão*/taro-patch and the ‘ukulele/taro-patch, were often called by the same name, although they were definitely different. The modern taro-patch is an extended ‘ukulele.



Figure 9. Unlabelled *rajão* (Hawai‘i, 1900), Madeiran *rajão* (1906), and Nuñes (modern) taro-patch (Hawai‘i, 1910)

Source: King 2007a

Meanwhile, during the rise and distribution of the 'ukulele over the entire world, other multicultural combinations were created, for example, the Hawaiian 'ukulele, Spanish guitar, Madeiran *rajão*, all played by Hawaiian girls with leis posing for a postcard, as shown in Figure 10.



Figure 10. 'Ukulele, guitar, and *machete da rajão*. Hawai'i, c. 1900

Source: Coloured photo: Shlomo Pestcoe, open access

Manuel Nuñez didn't try to teach Hawaiians to play these instruments, nor was he a musician. What he did was the following: by observation he discerned the true musical interests of Hawaiians and the time they were willing to invest in new experiences. The complicated sound of a three-layered ensemble of different instruments with their various Madeiran textural functions could not work well. Therefore, he formulated an unusual business idea, which he elaborated together with his two friends, Augusto Dias and Jose da Espirito Santo, both good cabinetmakers and prospective specialists in *rajão*/*'ukulele* production. They opened their shops and—as a special marketing trick—they arranged meetings with the king's family to introduce their creation. Princess Lili'uokalani was herself very interested in music and composed in her lifetime more than 250 songs that were accompanied by the 'ukulele. Possibly her most famous work is the song 'Aloha Oe', which later became a movie song hit (Reyes and Rampell 1995).

Many dictionaries and articles wrongly point to the small *braguinha* as the ancestor of the Hawaiian ‘ukulele, probably because of the similar shape and dimensions. But shape alone is not sufficient cultural proof when taken in isolation from musical and social function.

The main consumers were Hawaiians, both rich as well as poor. So, Nuñez and his friends made ‘ukuleles of different sizes and materials. String sets, too, were made simpler and cheaper than on the Madeiran islands, an important selling point for the consumers. The reduced variety of string gauges (see Figure 11) delivers yet more evidence that the ‘ukulele derives from the *rajão*.

	<i>viola da arame</i>		<i>braguinha</i>	<i>rajão</i>		<i>‘ukulele</i>
	A	B		A	B	
carrinho nº-10	1	3	1	1	1	2
carrinho nº-9	2		1			
carrinho nº-4	1	1	1	1	2	2
toeira * carrinho nº-9				1		
toeira * carrinho nº-4	2	2				
bordão da guitarra de fado nº-41	1	1	1		2	
bordão da guitarra portuguesa nº-41				2		
bordão da viola francesa nº-73	1	1				
latão nº-4	1	1				
<i>total strings</i>	9		4	5		4

Figure 11. Variety of string gauges for the *viola da arame*, *braguinha*, *rajão*, and ‘ukulele.

The Portuguese specifications on the left refer to different types of strings, e.g. *latão* is brass, a mixture of copper and zinc. Following each of these specifications is a number preceded by ‘nº’ that refers to special material compositions of this type. Both the string name and the number result in different gauges for the strings and subsequently different pitch ranges for individual instruments. Two combinations of strings are listed for the *viola da arame* and *rajão*

The *viola da arame* needs seven or eight strings of different gauges, the *braguinha* needs four, and the *rajão* three or four. The ‘ukulele needs only two different gauges; cheap versions use only one.

Easy to play and tune, the 'ukulele became the bestseller of all varieties of Portuguese lutes in history. But the question is: When does one instrument begin to be another? Furthermore, why is it called 'a Portuguese lute' when the changes occurred in Hawai'i?

Hawaiian migrants, craftsmen, and farmers were quickly assimilated in the United States, as well as on Hawai'i. They brought their Portuguese way of life and their cultural thinking with them. The big boom of 'ukulele and later taro-patch began under the leadership of a few businessmen such as Leonardo Nuñez, the son of Manuel Nuñez, who co-operated with non-Portuguese singers and musicians.

Now, in the third millennium, one can find more than 1,000 rich collections of 'ukuleles, taro-patches, banjo ukes (a banjo with taro-patch tuning), and all of the other 'ukulele-like instruments in the United States. They are all waiting for proclamation of their heroic history of adventures as originally Portuguese instruments travelling around the world.

Some musical aspects

It is quite possible to create historical-looking instruments and legends around their origin, as I have shown. But it is very difficult to understand why the three instrument makers—Nuñez, Dias, and Santo—were forced to be creative.

Portuguese *festas* always have their locally defined musical repertoire. This repertoire needs special musical skills that have their roots in the song and dance traditions of the Portuguese mainland as well as of the Atlantic Portuguese islands.

The terms *puntoado* and *rascado* are playing techniques associated, in Europe, with lutes and guitars and their respective historical development. Madeiran musicians are acquainted with two other very important concepts called *varejemento*, which deserve a closer look. The first is a kind of synchronised playing of dance patterns. It creates a 'limping' rhythm that can rarely be transcribed into European music notation using conventional methods. The second concept is a kind of metric separation within dance patterns. In other words, without knowledge of the dances, the lute playing is not really comprehensible.

An example regarding the first concept can help clarify the situation. The piece 'Cana verde' (Figure 12) was recorded by Ernesto Veiga Oliveira and Benjamim Pereira in 1960, when there were no spectrographic tools. Transcription of the piece into a conventional five-line staff is difficult because the rhythmic structure is 'unthinkable'. Domingo Moraes, a colleague of Oliveira's, tried but he did not succeed for a very basic reason: he did not consider the relation between musical rhythm and the rhythmic dynamic of the steps of the dance—steps that do not follow evenly distributed beats, but rather the time sequence needed for the distance covered. The single beats are not regular, but are as long as the respective steps (Figure 13). Only this correlation enables a solution for the problem as we must observe how the piece is danced and know that the musicians are following the dancers.

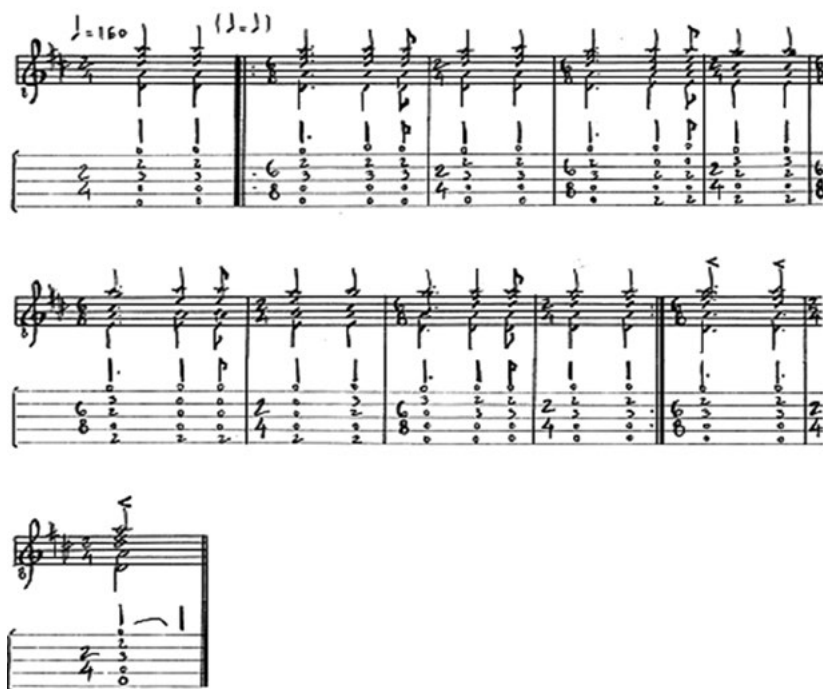


Figure 12. 'Cana verde'

Source: Recorded by Ernesto Veiga Oliveira and Benjamim Pereira (1960) and transcribed by Domingo Moraes (1960)

The second feature, that of metric separation within dance patterns, is very common on Madeira. Normally, the instruments have to play the main structure. However, the dancers are constructing another rhythmical shape overarching the main structure (Pereira Rodrigues 2007). Therefore the repertoire was, as can be assumed, one of the main problems in introducing Madeiran lutes into Hawaiian society: the Hawaiians could not cope with the strange new rhythms. A new instrument would require not only another shape than the common *rajão*, it would have to be made for another type of music. And so it was. This important move of the 'ukulele creators allowed a young (new) 'entertainment industry' to pick up the 'ukulele and the modern taro-patch quickly, all by opening up the repertoire to new possibilities whilst ignoring the *festa*/dance context.

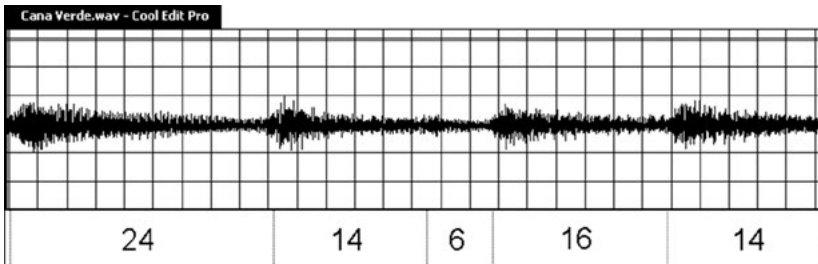


Figure 13. Rhythmic relationship according to the smallest unit found through measuring the distance between the high-volume levels (plucking the strings) within two bars ($6/8 + 2/4$). The relationship 24:14:6:16:14 is an unimaginable rhythmic structure that would divide a bar into 74 pulses and the two bars into a relationship of 44:30 when being analysed in isolation from patterns of the dance steps

Later on in the 1920s, just as Nuñez, Dias, and Santo had sold their creations as Portuguese originals, the newly created instruments were integrated into early 1920s American musical life (in California) as local sound colours of Hawai'i. Professional 'ukulele players such as July Paka, William Ellis, and especially Ernest Kaai explored the solo capabilities of the 'ukulele, a function that their originators intended by choosing the *rajão* as the functional prototype. Additionally, there was a need for the de-Hawaiianising of the repertoire. The repertoire was to change rapidly again in the 1930s and 1940s, when 'ukulele playing started to be outmoded compared to other professional musical entertainment (King 2007a).

Now, a century later, we can observe a revival of the 'ukulele movement. Many clubs and insider groups are not only practising music, they also research the history of their beloved musical instrument and collect data relevant to their historical 'heroes' like Arthur Godfrey, Jesse Kalima, Frank Austin, Kazunori Murakami, Kahauanu Lake, and Herbert Ohta (Beloff 1997; Fayne 2012). In 1998, a group of motivated amateurs organised a meeting between Madeirans and descendants of Madeirans who had emigrated to Hawai'i and the United States. They came together for concerts in Funchal (the capital of Madeira) and Lisbon (Pereira Rodrigues 2007) and played the ancient *mourisca*, a dance that draws on the mixed culture of Portuguese and Moorish people on Madeira. In a recording of the event, one can hear the rhythmical difficulties that occurred between the Madeira limping style and the more rhythmically rigid efforts of the American 'ukulele players.

Outlook

Dan Scanlan, the colleague whose enthusiasm motivated my research, expressed his dreams about the relationship between *braguinha* and 'ukulele in the song 'O luto filho', closing with the words 'sharing future history':

I sit into the little shop
 To 'Oficina' de Carlos Jorge
 an ancient *braguinha* on his wall,
 yes, it's sunshine far, far away.
 O *luto filho*, foreign of the distant sea,
 O *luto filho*, sharing future history.

The Madeira musicians were not really happy about the enthusiastic world travellers, the Americans who claimed to be adopted as wild children. The history as told by the Americans, as spurred by romantic imagination, was not true. Scanlan himself wrote in a paper presented at a conference on alternative music movements in Long Island:

It can be said that the *braguinha* is the father of the ukulele. But it is also true the *rajão* is the mother of the ukulele. The ukulele took the physical size from its father, but got its attitude, personality and tuning from its mother, the *rajão*. (Scanlan 2004)

Many things could be modified such as the number of strings and their size, their tuning, the shape of the body, the tuning pegs, or the wood used. That could have been with specific purpose or incidentally. However, the very subject of reinterpretation of the music itself turned out to be the deciding clue in order to discover the real story. And it is still ongoing ...

Carlos Jorge, the man celebrated Dan Scanlan's song, 'created' a *rajinha* or *bragijão* (figure 14). His friend Mario André, the leading *braguinha* player of the aforementioned reunion concerts, began exploration of some 'ukulele-like sounds, as can be heard in an innovative recording from June 2007 (Father and Son Reunion 2007, mentioned in Scanlan 2004). Could this be the beginning of a new chapter?

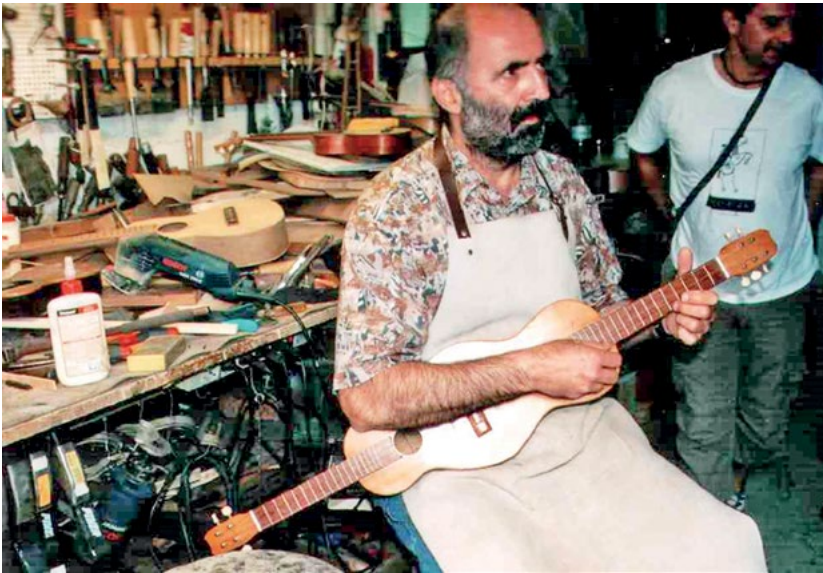


Figure 14. Carlos Jorge Pereira Rodrigues in his workshop with his new 'invention': a *rajinha*, just in case we cannot accept the history as complete

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