



How to Play Campanella Fingerstyle

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introduction

Welcome to this short introduction to campanella ukulele. I've written it for those of you who have been playing ukulele for a while but would like perhaps to do more than just strumming chords.

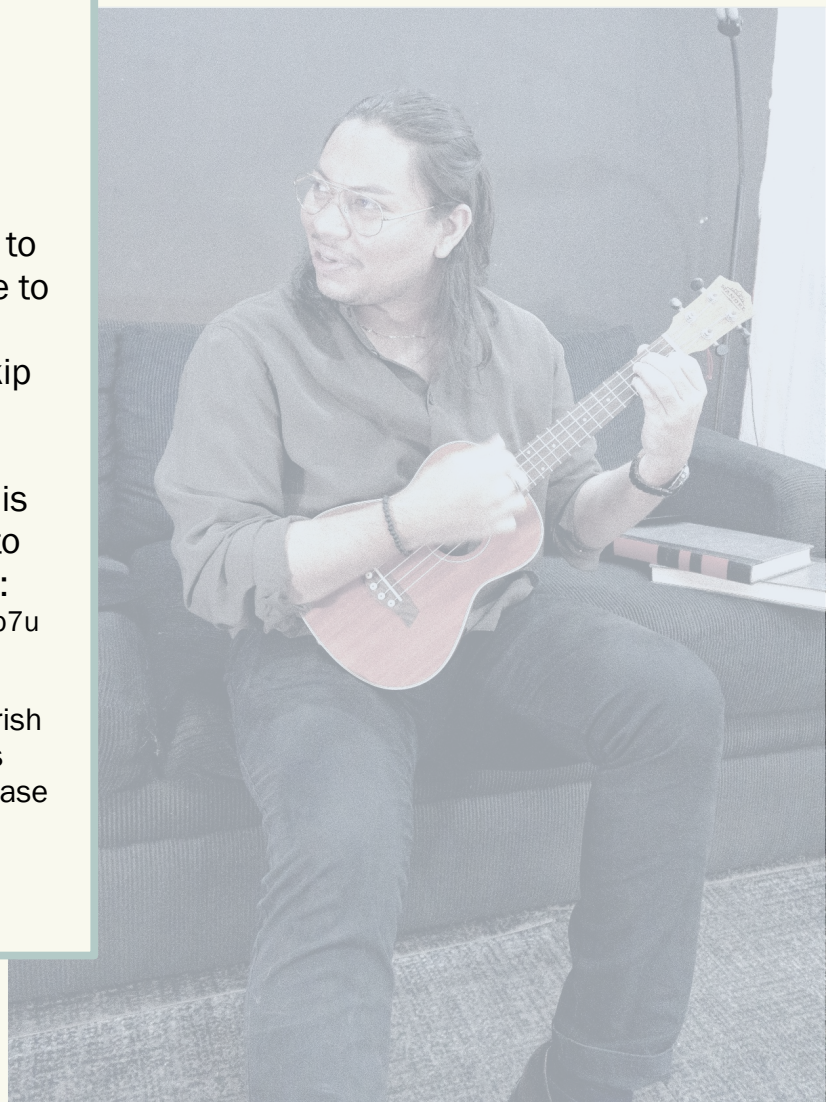
Campanella picking is for me what the makes the ukulele so special.

You'll learn some scales and easy tunes. The scales are to help you learn the fretboard and to show you that you'll need more than one place to play the same notes when working out how to play tunes the campanella way. Feel free to skip straight to the tunes if you want.

You can listen to all the tunes and scales in this book over at my YouTube channel. Click [here](#) to go visit the playlist, or copy and paste this link:

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL0wvQNpzSzhqkp7uC_nCSpqUv26SE53FO

By the way, I've been arranging folk tunes, including Irish jigs and reels, old time fiddle music and classic songs since 2014. If you enjoy this book and want more, please head over to my Patreon and support my work!



To use this guide, you should already be able to :

- Tune your ukulele – campanella needs accurate tuning or it will sound awful! Learning to tune your uke by ear is a good skill to acquire – fretted instruments can't be 100% accurate, so even if your tuner tells you that it's perfect, you still might need to tune your uke "to itself". For example check that the note A on 1st string open sounds exactly the same as the A on 2nd string fifth fret and the 4th string second fret.
- Play a few chords (just the basic, first position chords, you'll start to learn the fretboard here).
- Read tablature. It's a lot easier than standard music notation and is better for fingerstyle and campanella because it clearly indicates where to put your fingers. You can find plenty of tutorials on the Internet.
- Play with your fingernails! You can play without them, but the sound is clearer, louder and crisper if you have nails. Not too long, either, otherwise they'll be breaking all the time.
- Be willing to learn things for yourself through patience and perseverance. Your musicianship will develop faster if you work from the tab and decide for yourself which is the best finger to use (left and right hand). As you will see from the scale practice in this book there is never only one way to play campanella so be a big girl or boy and develop some autonomy. You'll thank me for this advice in years to come.

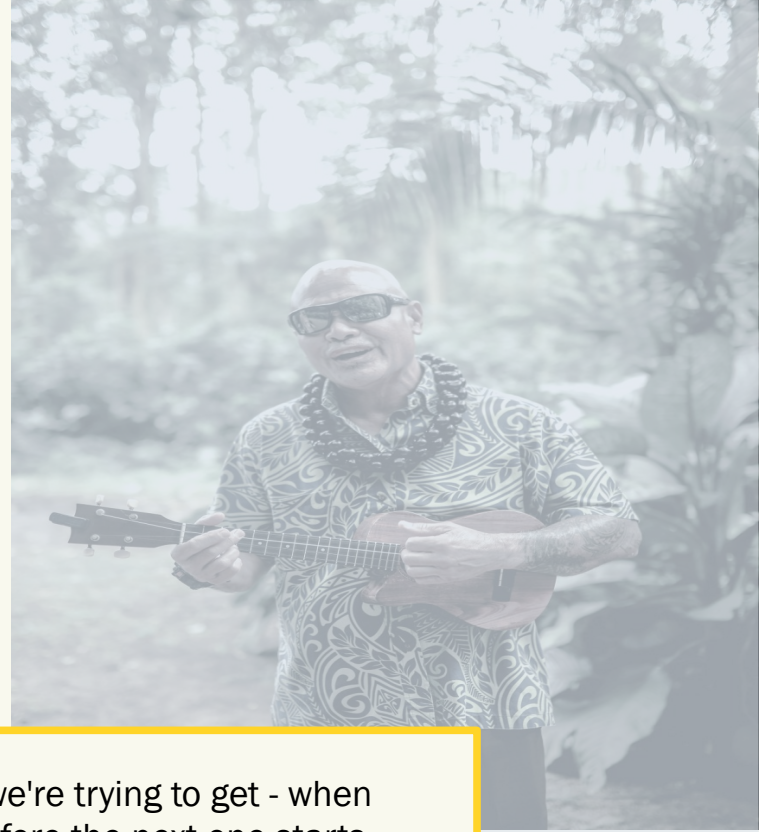


warning:

In Britain, where I come from, ukulele is usually pronounced 'yoo kuh lay lee'. I understand that perhaps 'ookoolaylee' is a more authentic pronunciation but it doesn't sound natural with my British accent. So don't be surprised to see the indefinite article, 'a' – “a ukulele” – and not 'an ukulele'

Please subscribe to my [YouTube Channel](#) for more Campanella fingerpicking videos and tutorials

What exactly is campanella?



The word means "little bell" and that's the effect we're trying to get - when you hear church bells, one doesn't stop ringing before the next one starts - they all ring at the same time. The same for a harp. A harp doesn't have a neck where you can put your fingers to change the pitch of a string, so one string, one note. So campanella picking means avoiding playing two consecutive notes on the same string whenever possible, taking advantage of the re-entrant tuning (where the first and fourth strings are only one tone - two frets - apart). Using open strings as much as you can and alternating between strings rather than playing successive notes on the same string really does make the uke sound like a little harp.

Arranging tunes in campanella is challenging, but ukulele re-entrant tuning (high G) makes it possible. Many of the traditional tunes I've uploaded were first learned on other instruments (guitar, mandolin, whistle) so the first thing I do is figure out the tune on the uke anywhere (i.e. not campanella), then when I'm happy that the tune is accurate, I try to look for different ways to play it avoiding playing two notes on the same string.

Wanna hear it what it sounds like?

Play a C major scale the “normal” way, like this: (use whatever fingers you like to pick, we'll get to right-hand techniques later.

1

T
A
B

0 2 0 1 3 0 2 3

Notice that we move up the scale in the conventional, linear way, moving up the strings one at a time while playing two or three notes on each string. When you change note on the same string you obviously have to stop the sound of the previous sound. Not so with campanella.

Now play it the campanella way. Careful, you have to go both up and down the strings:

1

T
A
B

0 2 0 5 0 0 7 5

Sounds better, doesn't it? That's because with the exception of the first two notes, C and D, which you can only play on the C string, you can always hear the previous note. There is a slight dissonance, but rather than being unpleasant, it makes you think of harps or bells – and that can be very satisfying.



Right Hand Practice for Campanella Picking

The most important for campanella is to get that right hand moving. If you're only used to strumming, it's time to free up your fingers and thumb and start using all of them (well, not so much your pinky, but all the others). If you already know how to finger pick, you probably won't need to do these exercises, just skip to the scales and tunes later in the book.

In guitar music, we use numbers for your fretting hand, (1,2,3,4) and letters for your picking hand. These come from Spanish:

P (pulgar) : Thumb

I (indice) : Index

M (medio) : Middle

A (anular) : Ring

So you will see the letters next to the note on the standard notation, like this:



Exercise 1.

Start by placing your thumb on the fourth string (that's the one nearest your chin), your index on the third, your middle finger on the second and your ring finger on the first (nearest your feet), like this:



Now play each string one after the other starting with your thumb (p)

Do it over and over again until it starts to feel natural. When you can do it naturally, choose some other chords to play and practice those. Now you've a better a way to play some of your favorite songs! Playing chords this way isn't technically campanella, but this is how you start...

Exercise 2

Now, perhaps more importantly, we're going to learn the alternating pattern that you've heard millions of times in songs with acoustic guitar. The difference is that with a high G ukulele, the thumb isn't playing a bassline, it's an essential part of the melody. This is one reason many ukers shy away from campanella – they feel that fingerstyle must have a melody and an accompanying bassline. But anyone who has heard pieces by Bach for solo violin and cello will know that great music can be made with just four strings and no accompaniment!

It's good to be flexible with your picking – the previous exercise rigidly sticks to a one string, one finger pattern but that's not always possible or desirable. So try this with the same G major chord (and an F add 9):

The image shows a musical exercise for a high G ukulele. It consists of a treble clef staff with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 6/8 time signature. The melody is written in a single line, starting on the first space (F#4) and moving up stepwise to the first line (G4), then down stepwise to the first space (F#4). The melody is divided into two measures, each containing a half note and a quarter note. The first measure is marked with a '1' above the first note and a '2' above the second note. The second measure is marked with a '2' above the first note and a '3' above the second note. Below the staff, there are three lines of fingerings for the T, A, and B strings. The T string line shows fingerings 2, 3, 2, 3 for the first measure and 0, 1, 0, 1 for the second measure. The A string line shows fingerings 0, 0, 0, 0 for both measures. The B string line shows fingerings 0, 0, 0, 0 for both measures. The notes are marked with dynamics: *p* (piano), *i* (accrescendo), *p* (piano), *a* (accrescendo), *p* (piano), *i* (accrescendo).

Try doing the same thing with songs you already know. If you'd like to do even more fingerpicking exercises, I made a video of different fingerstyle techniques using the same chord progression. There are some classical techniques that have nothing to do with campanella, but any practice is good practice! [Click here to watch it.](#)

Scale Practice

1. Seven Ways to Play a C major Scale

I should say “seven ways to play the top half of a C major scale” - because the first four notes are always played the same way. The first two, C and D, are only possible on the third string as they are lower than all the notes possible on the other strings. Then, to make the scale campanella we can play the E on the second string, open then the F back on the third string, fifth fret.

By learning all the possible variations for the other notes, though, you will start to learn the notes in all positions on the fretboard and understand better how tunes are arranged in the campanella style. They are certainly not equal in terms of playability, practicality or musicality (no.4 is definitely the best way) but they could all come in handy when trying to find the best campanella fingering, so work your way through them, up and down as shown in the video.



1. You will need to make a barre (cover all the strings across the second fret) for this one.

1

2

TAB

0 2 0 5 3 2 2 3 5 0 2 0

2. A bit better, here we have a couple more open strings

1

2

TAB

0 2 0 5 0 4 0 4 0 5 0 2 0

3. B is moved to the second string, seventh fret

1

2

TAB

0 2 0 5 0 7 3 7 0 5 0 2 0

4. That's more like it – the most ear-pleasing way to play the scale!

Diagram 4 shows a musical score for a 4/4 scale exercise. The top staff is in treble clef with a 4/4 time signature. It contains two measures of music. Measure 1 is marked with a '1' and contains four eighth notes (C4, D4, E4, F4) beamed together, followed by four eighth notes (G4, A4, B4, C5) beamed together. Measure 2 is marked with a '2' and contains four eighth notes (B4, A4, G4, F4) beamed together, followed by four eighth notes (E4, D4, C4, B3) beamed together. Below the staff is a guitar tablature (TAB) line with fret numbers. The first measure has frets 0, 2, 0, 5, 0, 7, 5. The second measure has frets 7, 0, 5, 0, 2, 0.

5. Here we swap the positions of B and (high) C, this can be useful when the same two notes repeat – you can avoid playing them in the same place by alternating with the previous positions.

Diagram 5 shows a musical score for a 4/4 scale exercise, similar to Diagram 4 but with swapped positions for B and C. The top staff is in treble clef with a 4/4 time signature. It contains two measures of music. Measure 1 is marked with a '1' and contains four eighth notes (C4, D4, E4, F4) beamed together, followed by four eighth notes (G4, A4, B4, C5) beamed together. Measure 2 is marked with a '2' and contains four eighth notes (B4, A4, G4, F4) beamed together, followed by four eighth notes (E4, D4, C4, B3) beamed together. Below the staff is a guitar tablature (TAB) line with fret numbers. The first measure has frets 0, 2, 0, 5, 0, 8, 4. The second measure has frets 4, 0, 5, 0, 2, 0.

6. B and C move up to the 11th and 8th frets respectively. Good to have this option sometimes.

Diagram 6 shows a musical score for a 4/4 scale exercise, similar to Diagram 4 but with B and C moved up. The top staff is in treble clef with a 4/4 time signature. It contains two measures of music. Measure 1 is marked with a '1' and contains four eighth notes (C4, D4, E4, F4) beamed together, followed by four eighth notes (G4, A4, B4, C5) beamed together. Measure 2 is marked with a '2' and contains four eighth notes (B4, A4, G4, F4) beamed together, followed by four eighth notes (E4, D4, C4, B3) beamed together. Below the staff is a guitar tablature (TAB) line with fret numbers. The first measure has frets 0, 2, 0, 5, 0, 11, 8. The second measure has frets 11, 0, 5, 0, 2, 0.

7. The high C is on the third string. I like to play harmonics instead of fretting the note because the uke's neck is short so fretted notes this high up have very little sustain. Play the harmonic by touching (not pressing down) the string directly above the 12th fret and pluck the string as you would normally with your right hand.

1 2

T
A
B

0 2 0 5 0 7 <12> 7 0 0 5 0 2 0



A minor

A minor is the Aeolian mode of C major – it has all the same notes, just played in a different order. When you start with the sixth note of any major scale, it becomes minor. That's because a minor scale is identified by the third note – it's three semi-tones (frets) higher than the root. So A major would be A B C#, and A minor is A B C, just as in the C major scale.

For the G and A on the 12th fret, it's easier (and nicer) to play harmonics. Otherwise, you'll have to make a barre with your little finger (pinky). Tricky, but doable with practice. Notice too, that when descending, it's easier to play the D on the fourth string, 10th fret rather than the first string; 5th fret.

Musical notation for the A minor scale in 4/4 time. The notation includes a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (Bb). The scale is shown in two parts: ascending (1) and descending (2). The fret numbers for the ascending scale are: 0, 7, 5, 8, 12. The fret numbers for the descending scale are: 8, 10, 7, 0. The notation also includes a tablature section with fret numbers for the strings (T, A, B) and a diagram of the fretboard showing the scale positions.

Or you could play it like this (a bit awkward but at least you're really getting to know the fretboard!) - you'll need to make a barre on the 7th fret:

Musical notation for the A minor scale in 4/4 time, showing an alternative fingering. The notation includes a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (Bb). The scale is shown in two parts: ascending (1) and descending (2). The fret numbers for the ascending scale are: 0, 8, 7, 13, 12. The fret numbers for the descending scale are: 13, 10, 12, 7, 0. The notation also includes a tablature section with fret numbers for the strings (T, A, B) and a diagram of the fretboard showing the scale positions, including a barre on the 7th fret.

G major: high up the neck! It's a bit unnatural to jump from open strings up to the eleventh fret, but can be very useful in campanella picking.

1 2

TAB 0 11 8 7 10 12 8 11 0

E minor : The relative minor of G major, starting with the open E string. Barre on the 5th fret:

1 2

TAB 0 6 0 7 5 5 7 0 0 6 0

D major

1 2

TAB 2 0 6 0 7 5 7 0 6 0 2

F major

You could change the root from second string, 1st fret to third string, 5th fret. That would make it a little easier and maybe smoother but I still prefer the sound of the F on the 1st fret.

Musical notation for the F major scale in 4/4 time, starting on the second string, 1st fret. The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of one flat (Bb), and a 4/4 time signature. The scale is written in two measures, each containing four eighth notes. The first measure starts on the second string, 1st fret (F) and the second measure starts on the second string, 5th fret (F). The fretboard diagram below the staff shows the fingerings for each note: 1 (1st fret), 0 (open), 6 (6th fret), 5 (5th fret), 8 (8th fret), 10 (10th fret), 6 (6th fret), 0 (open), and 1 (1st fret).

D minor : relative minor of F major

Musical notation for the D minor scale in 4/4 time, starting on the second string, 1st fret. The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of two flats (Bb, Eb), and a 4/4 time signature. The scale is written in two measures, each containing four eighth notes. The first measure starts on the second string, 1st fret (D) and the second measure starts on the second string, 5th fret (D). The fretboard diagram below the staff shows the fingerings for each note: 2 (2nd fret), 0 (open), 5 (5th fret), 0 (open), 6 (6th fret), 5 (5th fret), 6 (6th fret), 0 (open), 5 (5th fret), 0 (open), and 2 (2nd fret).

G minor

This is the relative minor of Bb

Musical notation for the G minor scale in 4/4 time, starting on the second string, 1st fret. The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of two flats (Bb, Eb), and a 4/4 time signature. The scale is written in two measures, each containing four eighth notes. The first measure starts on the second string, 1st fret (G) and the second measure starts on the second string, 5th fret (G). The fretboard diagram below the staff shows the fingerings for each note: 0 (open), 8 (8th fret), 6 (6th fret), 10 (10th fret), 6 (6th fret), 8 (8th fret), 10 (10th fret), 0 (open), 10 (10th fret), 7 (7th fret), 10 (10th fret), and 0 (open).

Some Tunes to Learn!

All the tunes have a video demonstration, you can find them and the scales at this link:
https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL0wvQNpzSzhqkp7uC_nCSpqUv26SE53FO

London Bridge is Falling Down

Let's start with an easy nursery rhyme. I've put the right-hand fingering that I use but like I've said, it's up to you to find a way playing that suits you best.

Lovely Joan

This English song is in the Dorian mode. For each scale, there are seven modes, one for each note. The Dorian mode is the mode that starts (and finishes) on the second note of the scale and is very common in Celtic music. To get a feel for it, try strumming the chords D minor (the second chord in the family of C major) then change to C major. Lots of Irish tunes have this kind of chord change with a few embellishments here and there.

The Plains of Waterloo

This is a really pretty tune from the 19th century, about a woman searching for her lover who never returned from fighting in the Napoleonic wars. As you can see from the score, it's arranged in the key of C, but there are as many F#s as F naturals, so what key is it really in? A lot of folk music use modes, that's where the tune is based on another note of the scale than the tonic. If there are F#s in the piece, then it could be in C mixolydian mode, which is the key of G, but going from C to C.

Ode to Joy

Try this easy classical piece, Beethoven's Ode To Joy. To increase sustain and maintain the campanella voicing, we're going to play Fs on the second string, first fret and the third string, fifth fret, and As on the first string, open and the second string. This is a good piece to build up your speed – once you've got the hang of it, practice playing it faster and faster.

Polyushko Polye

I've loved this tune since I first heard it as a child, those Russians sure have some stirring songs to raise the spirits. Get someone to accompany you with strummed chords, it sounds great for two ukuleles or a uke and a guitar.

Bransle des Sabots

A bransle (or branle or brawl) is a dance from medieval or renaissance times. This one is by a French composer called Thoinot Arbeau who lived in the 16th century.

Jon's Jig

If you've mastered all the pieces so far, you should be ready for this one, it's quite a bit harder to play.

The Rose Tree
J. S. G. G.

1 2

p *a* *p* *i* *m* *i* *p*

0 5 0 5 0

3 4

p *i* *m* *m* *i* *p*

2 0 5 0 5 0

5 6

p *a* *p* *i* *m* *i* *p*

0 5 0 5 0

7 8

p *p* *i* *p*

2 0 0

Lovely Joan

1 2 P H

0 7 0 1 2 0 2

2 5 0

3 4

1 0 5 0 2 0 3 0 1 2

5 6

0 7 5 7 0 0 0

5 5 0 0

7 P H

0 3 3 1 2 0 2

5 0 4 4 0

The Plains of Waterloo

0 7 7 0 7 5 7 0 2 2 2

4 5 0 0 2 0 2 2 0 2 5

7 8 9 2 0 7 5 0 2 2 2

10 11 12 0 5 0 8 0 2 0 2 2 0 2 2 0

13 14 15 0 10 8 10 0 8 0 2 0 7 9 8 0 7

16 17 18 19 10 8 10 0 8 7 5 7 0 7 5 7

20 21 22 23 0 2 2 2 0 5 0 8 0 2 0 2 2 0 2

Ode To Joy

The image displays a musical score for the piece "Ode To Joy". The score is written in 4/4 time, with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The notation is presented in a guitar-specific format, featuring a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The score is organized into six systems, each containing a musical staff and a corresponding guitar-specific notation (TAB) system. The TAB system uses numbers 0-6 to indicate fret positions and includes symbols for string selection (T for Treble, B for Bass) and bar lines. The piece begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The first system shows the first three measures, with the TAB system indicating the fret positions for each note. The second system shows measures 4 through 6, and the third system shows measures 7 through 9. The fourth system shows measures 10 through 12, the fifth system shows measures 13 through 14, and the sixth system shows measures 15 through 16. The piece concludes with a double bar line at the end of the sixth system.

Polyushko Polye

The musical score for "Polyushko Polye" is presented in four systems, each with a guitar staff (treble clef) and a bass staff (bass clef). The key signature is one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The score includes chord symbols (Am, Em, F, E) and fret numbers for both hands.

System 1: Chords: Am, Em. Measures 1-2. Bass line: 8, 0, 5, 7, 0, 0.

System 2: Chords: Am, Em. Measures 3-4. Bass line: 7, 0, 5, 7, 0, 4.

System 3: Chords: F, E. Measures 5-6. Bass line: 0, 5, 0, 2, 0, 5, 0, 2, 4, 4.

System 4: Chords: F, E. Measures 7-8. Bass line: 0, 5, 0, 2, 0, 5, 0, 2, 4, 4.

Bransle des Sabots

The image displays a musical score for a piece titled "Bransle des Sabots". The score is written on a single system with four staves. The top staff is a treble clef staff with a 2/4 time signature. The bottom three staves are guitar-style tablature staves, each with a 'T' (Treble) and 'B' (Bass) label. The tablature uses numbers 0-8 to indicate fret positions. The music is divided into eight measures, numbered 1 through 8. Measures 1-4 are in the key of D major (one sharp), and measures 5-8 are in the key of A major (two sharps). The piece concludes with a double bar line and repeat dots at the end of measure 8.

1 2

3 4

5 6

7 8

T
A
B

8 5 5 7 0 7 0

0 5 8 5 7 5

5 7 0 7 5 7 0 7 0

3 0 3 2 0

Jon's Jig

1. 2. 3. P H 4. P

5. 6. 7. P H 8. 1.

9. H 10. 11. 12.

13. 14. 15. 16. P H

17. 1. 18. 2.

TAB

2 3 0 3 5 0 3 5 0 2 0 2 0 5 0 5 5

0 0 0 4 4 0 5 2 0 2 0 5 0 5 5

3 0 3 5 0 3 5 0 2 0 2 0 0 0 0 2 0

0 0 0 2 3 5 2 2 5 2 5 8 10 12

0 0 2 5 5 5 5 0 9 12 12

8 10 0 2 3 5 2 2 5 2 5 5 0 2 0 2 0

9 12 5 5 5 5 5 0 5 0 2 0 2 0

0 1 0 0 1 0 5 0 1 0

5 0 0

More Resources

I hope you enjoyed this introduction to campanella fingerstyle. It's not easy to do, but I think the rewards are worth the effort. I was never really interested in playing ukulele (I've been a guitarist for more than forty years) until I stumbled on the potential of re-entrant (high G) tuning.

All the tabs and tutorials I've ever done are available to patrons. If you'd like to support my work and get access to hundreds of Irish tunes, Old time fiddle music, medieval and renaissance pieces, folk songs and more, join me here:

<https://patreon.com/jonsukulele>

You can have a look at all the tunes that are available here:

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1OsKOCxKAhBk7QQcgyLgx6sY9sid3xnUSeBfb5jodU1k/edit?gid=1618442710#gid=1618442710>

If you found that you are not quite ready for campanella fingerstyle you can also download my fingerstyle course which teaches you all the basics using rock riffs and licks, there are no boring exercises. And I also have the tabs for five fingerpicking studies. You can get them both here (available to everyone on the free tier of Patreon):

<https://www.patreon.com/posts/64527831>