

# PLECTRUM TUNING FOR BARITONE UKE

UKULELE ROB

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The **plectrum banjo** was born in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century as fingerpicking 5-string banjoists looking for more volume in jazz bands dropped the shorter 5<sup>th</sup> string and used a “plectrum,” i.e., a pick, to strum the remaining strings. Tuned **C-G-B-D** (with the lowest string, the **C**, an octave below the ukulele’s **C** string), the plectrum, together with the tenor banjo (tuned like a viola) continue today as mainstays of Dixieland and Trad Jazz.

The **baritone ukulele** wasn’t born until the late 1940s. But did you know that the plectrum banjo and the baritone uke are related?

In 1940 CBS radio star Arthur Godfrey reached out to network staff musician Eddie Connors and asked him to design a “bigger” ukulele for Godfrey to use in performance. Connors not only played plectrum banjo (he’s in the Four-String Banjo Hall of Fame), but also guitar and ukulele. And on top of that he worked for the Vega Banjo Company.

Using shop drawings borrowed from the Martin Guitar Co., Connors designed a “bigger” uke with a 20” scale length (vs. 13” for most soprano ukes, 17” for most tenor ukes), tuned **D-G-B-E**, like the higher four strings of a guitar. Shortly after, the new “baritone” uke went into production by both Vega and Favilla. (Martin didn’t produce its first baritone until 1960.) The rest, as they say, is history.

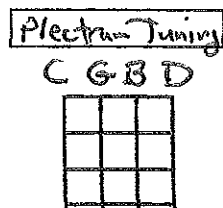


Exhibit 1

Given that Connors may well be the “father” of the baritone uke, tuning your “bari” like his plectrum banjo makes some historical (and a lot of musical) sense. Just drop your D string one full musical step down to C, and your highest string, the E, down to D. And there you are (see Exhibit 1). A whole new world of voicings and fingerings is born.

For our workshop we’ll explore these new chord voicings using two of the great tunes written by master uke and banjo luthier Aaron Keim and recorded by Aaron and his wife Nicole as The Quiet American (teaching and performing this weekend here at the Festival!) Ukulele Rob thanks them for giving him permission to use their songs “I Will Be The One” and “Worth A Million” for our Workshop. (Check out videos of their performances of these tunes at [tinyurl.com/GardenIwill](http://tinyurl.com/GardenIwill) and [tinyurl.com/GardenWorth](http://tinyurl.com/GardenWorth) and be sure to pick up a copy of their wonderful songbook Folk Song Garden while you’re here.)

(And if you don’t have a baritone, come to the Workshop anyway, play the chords your “uke-usual” way, and strum and sing along!)

Let’s start plectrum-ing!

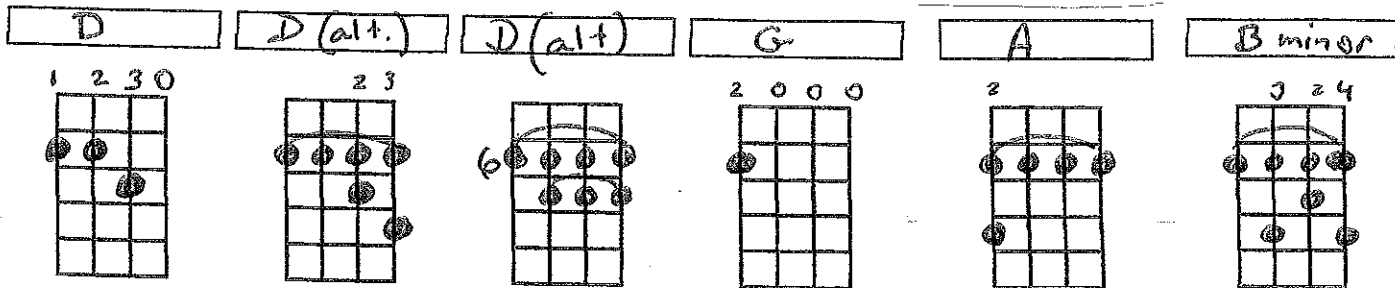
Sources:

Tom Walsh & John King, The Martin Ukulele: The Little Instrument That Helped Create a Guitar Giant (Hal Leonard Books 2013)

Sandor Nagyszalanczy, “Great Ukes: The Birth of the Baritone” (Ukulele Magazine, Spring 2016)

“Eddie Connors - Inducted 2013 - Four-String Performance” (Video, American Banjo Museum 2013)

# Plectrum-tuned Chords



## I WILL BE THE ONE

WRITTEN BY AARON KEIM

from the album "The Quiet American Vol. II"

**INTRO:**  $\frac{4}{4}$  | D | A | D | D | D | D |

**D**  
I slept outside the other night 'cause I **G** couldn't find the **D** key

**D**  
I woke up with the dew upon my **A** head

**Bm** **A** **G** **D**  
But I will be the one who sleeps outside for fun

**D** **A** **D**  
'cause I don't mind the dew upon my head

|| **Bm** | **A** | **G** | **D** | ||

|| **D** **A** **D**  
I don't mind the dew upon my head ||

"I Will Be The One" Additional Lyrics

2<sup>nd</sup> verse:

I walked a mile the other day 'cause I didn't have the gas  
I wore the toe and heel right off my boot  
But I will be the one who walks a mile for fun  
'Cause I don't mind the rocks under my feet  
Oooo Oooo Oooo Oooo  
I don't mind the rocks under my feet

3<sup>rd</sup> verse:

I broke my word one time last year to the man who can't say no  
I walked away and I left him sitting still  
But I will be the one who hangs his head for fun  
'Cause I don't mind the cost of being wrong  
Oooo Oooo Oooo Oooo  
I don't mind the cost of being wrong

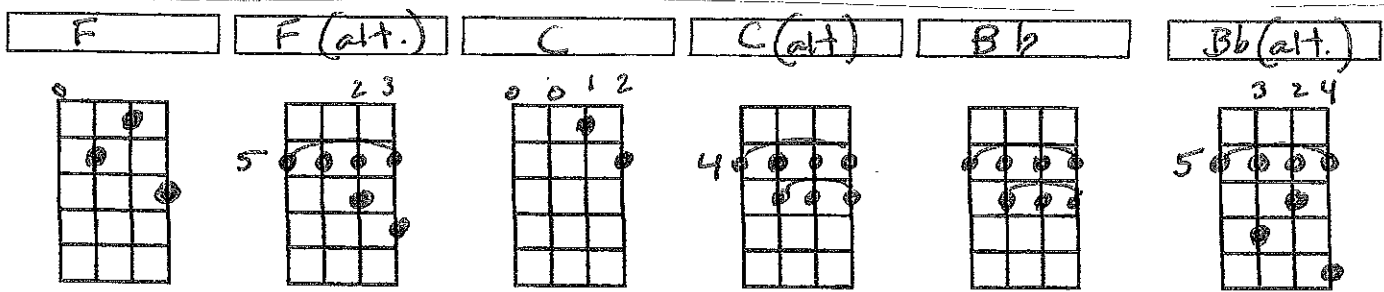
4<sup>th</sup> verse:

I dug a grave the other night 'cause I just lost a friend  
I tore my hands and I ripped the sod apart  
But I will be the one who digs a grave for fun  
'Cause I don't mind the taste of giving up  
Oooo Oooo Oooo Oooo  
I don't mind the cost of giving up

5<sup>th</sup> verse:

I made a wish when I woke today 'cause I just can't look back  
I closed my eyes and I sent it on its way  
But I will be the one who makes a wish for fun  
'Cause I don't mind to give my wishes away  
Oooo Oooo Oooo Oooo  
I don't mind to give my wishes a- [G chord] way - hey  
[Bm chord] I don't mind to [A chord] give my wishes a- [D chord]  
way

# Plectrum-tuned Chords



## WORTH A MILLION

WRITTEN BY AARON KEIM  
from the album "Songs from a Rocking Chair"

**INTRO:** 4 | F | F | F | F C |  
 | F | F | B<sup>b</sup> | B<sup>b</sup> F |  
 | B<sup>b</sup> | 2/4 B<sup>b</sup> | 4 F | F |

**F**

**V1:** Wake up first to see the sunrise

**C**

Start the fire and warm my feet

**F**

She'll be up a few more hours

**B<sup>b</sup>**

**F**

**B<sup>b</sup>**

**F**

Take the time to just be me, take the time to just be me

Reprinted with permission of Aaron & Nicole Keim  
exclusively for the Reno Ukulele Festival 2018

"Worth A Million" Additional Lyrics

2<sup>nd</sup> verse:

Check the beans and trim the brambles  
Pick a flower to bring inside  
Skillet's on, potatoes fryin'  
One more day in paradise, one more day in paradise  
One more day in paradise

3<sup>rd</sup> verse:

She rolls out and we go walkin'  
Up and down these empty streets  
Catch the first glance of hills and mountains  
Mist burns off and we retreat, mist burns off and we retreat

4<sup>th</sup> verse:

I've got a gal, she knows I'm restless  
Takes me in and lets me go  
She don't try to overtake me  
How she does it I don't know, how she does it I don't know  
How she does it I don't know

5<sup>th</sup> verse:

A rocking chair goes forward, backward  
Garden blooms and fades again  
Sun comes up and moon right after  
Days and years go rollin' in, days and years go rollin' in

6<sup>th</sup> verse:

A song like this, it don't mean nothin'  
Just a way to pass the time  
A day like this, it's worth a million  
Find a way to make it mine, find a way to make it mine  
Find a way to make it mine

[Repeat 1<sup>st</sup> verse and use INTRO as the OUTRO]