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BRING IT ON HOME: A Decolonial Analysis of Musical Instruments in the Penn Museum

Abstract

In conversations focused on decolonizing institutional spaces like ethnographic museums, repatriation remains a contentious goal. Whether museums are willing to change their ethics and practices to relinquish these spoils is one issue, but poor documentation continues to severely hinder efforts of returning objects to source communities. As such, this project reflects on musical instruments in ethnographic archives and their unique representations of cultural heritage, using an 'ukulele (29-58-122) from the Penn Museum's collections as a case study. Investigating the provenance of this instrument and connecting it with the cultural significance of its construction (design, use, etc.) will create valuable discussions of cultural heritage and the disembodiment of objects from ancestral homes. This research interacts with literature on decoloniality and musical repatriation to understand how musical instruments convey cultural heritage. Imagining how instruments might be used as symbols of identity in the hands of their descendants is critical to connecting music with cultural repatriation. The ongoing work of musical repatriation in museum contexts should rethink how these objects are cared for, recognizing them beyond artifacts. By taking insight from musicians or other specialists, museums can begin to treat instruments as objects that "breathe" and allow them to keep producing culture.

Keywords

ukulele, musical repatriation, decoloniality, cultural heritage, anthropology, museum studies, archival research, hawaiian history

Disciplines

Anthropology | Ethnomusicology | Musicology | Social and Cultural Anthropology

**BRING IT ON HOME: A DECOLONIAL ANALYSIS OF MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS
IN THE PENN MUSEUM**

By

Pierre Li Peters

In

Anthropology

Submitted to the

Department of Anthropology

University of Pennsylvania

Thesis Advisor: Timothy Rommen

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Abstract

In conversations focused on decolonizing institutional spaces like ethnographic museums, repatriation remains a contentious goal. Whether museums are willing to change their ethics and practices to relinquish these spoils is one issue, but poor documentation continues to severely hinder efforts of returning objects to source communities. As such, this project reflects on musical instruments in ethnographic archives and their unique representations of cultural heritage, using an ‘ukulele (29-58-122) from the Penn Museum’s collections as a case study. Investigating the provenance of this instrument and connecting it with the cultural significance of its construction (design, use, etc.) will create valuable discussions of cultural heritage and the disembodiment of objects from ancestral homes. This research interacts with literature on decoloniality and musical repatriation to understand how musical instruments convey cultural heritage. Imagining how instruments might be used as symbols of identity in the hands of their descendants is critical to connecting music with cultural repatriation. The ongoing work of musical repatriation in museum contexts should rethink how these objects are cared for, recognizing them beyond artifacts. By taking insight from musicians or other specialists, museums can begin to treat instruments as objects that “breathe” and allow them to keep producing culture.

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INTRODUCTION

Do musical instruments deserve to be played or is their fate to sit in display cases, private collections, or archives of museums? While the questions surrounding my project are constantly evolving, the dominant throughline that guides my research considers the life and afterlife of musical instruments. Part of the framing of this research is understanding whether an object like a musical instrument is “alive” or “dead” once it reaches a museum’s archives, and what the boundaries are. By considering new futures for these cultural objects in cooperation with descendant communities, strict preservation techniques might be foregone in favor of a right for instruments to exist on their own accord or be played/maintained by performers. With these considerations, ethnographic museums might reflect on different needs for different materials in ways that allow them to be preserved through use and an intent to “breathe.” Any musician could agree that instruments survive longer when they are being played, cared for (i.e., cleaned and maintained) by those in communities of knowledge around such tools. When large troves of cultural material are displaced from their context and caretakers, questions naturally come up about what value these objects still have. The different values for communities divorced of their material heritage and museums who hold on to these collections create great tensions around the social life of such objects. In this way, a decolonial future for musical instruments in museum spaces considers how descendant communities might imagine use and conservation when given access to their cultural inheritance.

Coloniality and Modernity

It would be difficult to arrive at the present discourse of musical repatriation without first reflecting on the systems in place that reflect and perpetuate legacies of inequality; the centuries-long project of colonialism. Several scholars have noted that coloniality recurs throughout institutions because our modern existence is inherently colonial. Some connect movements of the Global North's modernity to this process, arguing that our ideas of what it means to be human are charted by problematic courses. Coloniality is aptly defined by Nelson Maldonado-Torres's "On the Coloniality of Being," who argues it "refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labor, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations."¹ This broad grasp at the reaches of colonialism points to these troubled histories which impact nearly everything.

Maldonado-Torres's contribution to this discourse is an affirmation of scholars like Sylvia Wynter, who draws thorough descriptions of the "coloniality of being." In the colonial world, there is a dual-descriptive quality of reckoning with humanity: a dichotomy between *man* and *human*. This ultimately attributes nature to man and culture to human, creating divisions based on how closely a person is recognized as modern.² This theme can be expanded upon by adding in distinctions of ancient or modern, which can become restrictive ladders to compare vastly different cultures. An example of this is described by Wayne Modest, whose work uncovers problematic characterizations of Caribbean people as closer to nature rather than

¹ Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "ON THE COLONIALITY OF BEING," *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2-3 (2007), 243.

² Wynter, Sylvia. "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation--An Argument." *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 3 (2003), 330.

culture in ethnographic museums. Material culture from across the Caribbean is notably absent from museums while objects that display these peoples' adjacency to local flora and fauna is emphasized. This creates a context of ambiguity where Caribbean people are not necessarily modern, but it can neither be claimed that they are entirely ancient.³ In this way, ethnographic museums have become places of colonial description by removing the agency of Caribbean people to represent themselves. Addressing this issue urges anthropological work to shift power towards source communities, creating spaces that become decolonial.

The aim of decoloniality, then, is to intervene in the advances of knowledge, power, and in order to address problems of inequity implicit in the colonial world. One such problem is the weaponization of intellect, where production of knowledge, definitions of culture, and classifying relationships advances violent "othering." These causes of imperialism are described by Maldonado-Torres as the "paradigm of war which has driven modernity for more than five hundred years."⁴ When linking modernity to coloniality, scholars often point to a movement from religious to secular political agents in the process. Explanations of who we are and what we are as humans transitioned from Christian guidance to secular intellectualism, which was implemented through racial divisions.⁵ Early anthropological work linking material culture and human identity had been dominated by intellectuals fascinated with race and the "other," contributing to the atmosphere of colonial museums today.

³Modest, Wayne. "WE HAVE ALWAYS BEEN MODERN: Museums, Collections, and Modernity in the Caribbean." *Museum Anthropology* 35, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 85.

⁴ Maldonado-Torres, "On the Coloniality," 262.

⁵ Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality," 260.

Contextualizing Musical Repatriation

Cultural appropriation is a popular issue in today's conversations about music and other forms of cultural heritage. Delineating musical inheritance is complicated due to the nature of musicians communicating with each other by constantly borrowing ideas, often subconsciously or without credit. In this way, categorizing what styles of music belong to whom can be tangled in a web of musical history. The same applies for musical instruments. Not all pieces played on the modern piano can be attributed to its Italian innovators, but understanding movements of migrants and settlers that carried music with them explains how musical diversity can organize around an instrument or sound.

The conversation around repatriation in music can thus be framed through audio recordings and archives that reflect cultural value of objects. *Research, records, and responsibility*, published in 2015, includes an article by associate curator of the Musical Instrument Museum in Arizona, Jennifer C. Post, which argues “musical instruments, and ethnographic documentation about production and use, retain valuable historical, social and environmental data, even when kept outside source communities in storage or on display in archives, museums and private collections.”⁶ This article points to distinctions between how musical instruments are treated both within and divorced from their source communities. Because music carries varying cultural meaning across different contexts, the instruments themselves inextricably tie to cultural values of their origin. In this way, it seems likely that cultural context and personhood of instruments can be preserved when they are played, rather than existing in collections storage. Decolonial considerations of how products of other cultures

⁶ Jennifer C. Post, “Reviewing, Reconstructing and Reinterpreting Ethnographic Data on Musical Instruments in Archives and Museums,” In *Research, Records and Responsibility: Ten Years of PARADISEC*, edited by Amanda Harris, Nick Thieberger, and Linda Barwick, 134.

are accessed (or de-accessed) must account for participation of these source communities.⁷

Ethnographic practices can also be critiqued, in new standards like those suggested by scholar, activist, and DJ Carolina Bejarano: “Anthropology practice[s] forms of research that distribute power upward, from those being studied to those doing the studying.”⁸ By repositioning power in the hands of indigenous groups, inequitable social and political institutions that annexed these cultural objects can start to be unraveled.

Other conversations about cultural appropriation deal with intellectual property, offering communities a path to repatriated objects when provenance is available. Legal scholar Carol A. Roehrenbeck’s “Repatriation of Cultural Property” (2010) sums up the precedents for art museums and ethnographic museums to return objects that are illegitimately obtained. While this seems to have become a standard in museum practice, objects with unavailable records of provenance become similarly difficult to return to descendant communities. Roehrenbeck’s article offers many different approaches to understanding “cultural property,” a term that transmits across international regulations and conventions. The article concludes by suggesting that nothing has fundamentally changed about the looting of cultural property by museums, but the philosophy of “spoils of war” has eroded as countries recognize a need to preserve their own heritage.⁹ Where Western property frameworks remain mostly unchanged, systems of ownership continue to favor those empowered by colonial life. Because of this, the interwoven aims of

⁷ Robin R. Gray, “Repatriation and Decolonization.” *The Oxford Handbook of Musical Repatriation*, 2018, 722.

⁸ Carolina Bejarano et al., *Decolonizing Ethnography: Undocumented Immigrants and New Directions In Social Science*, Duke University Press, 2019.

⁹ Carol A. Roehrenbeck, "Repatriation of Cultural Property - Who Owns the Past - An Introduction to Approaches and to Selected Statutory Instruments," *International Journal of Legal Information* 38, no. 2 (2010): 200.

repatriation and decolonization exist under tension from strict notions of what it means to claim cultural heritage.¹⁰

What is at Stake?

Arriving in the present moment of efforts to address systemic issues prevalent in cultural gatekeepers like museum spaces, this research works within existing dialogue and contributes possibilities to look at contemporary cases in these frameworks. This project situates itself in moments of coloniality past and present, arriving at the Penn Museum as a site for critical reflection on collection and community access. In particular, the historical significance of the collection – once described by curators as “second only to the Smithsonian” – is tied to its size and cultural value. Despite this, many of these thousands of instruments which remain have been challenged by standards that do not prioritize playability or personhood. In many instances, significant work will be necessary to identify and contextualize valuable pieces of musical history if they have not already been destroyed by decades of neglect.

The primary case study at the heart of this research, is an ‘ukulele from Honolulu, Hawai’i (Figure 1) built in the late 1800s by one of the instrument’s inventors, Portuguese immigrant Manuel Nunes. The instrument (accession lot 29-58-122) is an important spark of the Hawaiian musical legacy which has reached nearly every corner of the world. Through this research, the social significance of this ‘ukulele will be identified through contexts that value the instrument in stark contrast to each other. In the Penn Museum, the ‘ukulele has become a forgotten artifact among an enormous and inaccessible musical instrument collection. As a result, its history and personhood are under-researched, and the voice of the instrument is completely

¹⁰ Gray, “Repatriation and Decolonization,” 735.

lost. In other spaces, like Honolulu’s Bishop Museum, similar ‘ukuleles are revered as components of broad communities of knowledge through caretakers that recognize the vitality of Hawaiian sound so that these instruments can still be played. These different types of valuation lead to different social existence for such instruments, essentially determining whether an instrument lives or dies.



Figure 1. 'Ukulele 29-58-122¹¹

For many, like historian Jim Tranquada, the ‘ukulele embodies the symbols of Hawai’i from past to present. Tranquada writes in his monumental book *The ‘ukulele: A History* (2012) that:

As an instantly recognizable symbol of Hawaii, the ‘ukulele has been many things over the past 130 years: a promise of an island paradise; a tool of political protest; an instrument central to a rich and celebrated musical culture; a musical joke; a symbol of youthful rebellion; a highly sought-after collectible; a cheap airport souvenir; a lucrative industry; an early adapter to new technologies; and the product of a remarkable synthesis of Western and Pacific cultures.¹²

¹¹ Penn Museum, “Images for Object 29-58-122.”

¹² Jim Tranquada, and John King, *The 'ukulele: A History*, Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2012, 2.

From the social upheaval of a kingdom overthrown by imperialist settlers to ongoing movements for indigenous sovereignty over land and resources, the 'ukulele has accompanied the progress of Hawaiian culture and struggle in the modern era. As a result of over a century of neglect and mistreatment in the Penn Museum's collections storage, this 'ukulele can no longer sing the stories of Hawaiian legacy. Through this research, I recommend that ethnographic museums consider new best practices that center unique needs of musical instruments, particularly with collections as large as the Penn Museum's. At stake is the risk of losing these significant markers of musical history, where inaccessible instruments create barriers for researchers and community stakeholders to continue creating culture. Ultimately, this instrument and countless others in the collection demand better documentation before it can even be made available to visitors or eventually played again. In comparison to its present state, the Nunes 'ukulele held by the Penn Museum should be reinterpreted through dialogues that center community access and control. In this way, musical repatriation should become a driving concern for new conversations that go beyond what is mandated in order to fully consider the life of a musical instrument.

MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS IN THE PENN MUSEUM: Archival Research

“The physical presence of an instrument after all is only the beginning of its reality as a cultural fact.”¹³

For many musical instruments now housed in the Penn Museum’s archives, the plight of provenance (or a lack thereof) presents questions about what functions these objects served in a previous life, and what purposes they hold in their current collections. Often, these cultural materials carry whatever information could be provided by its donor. As such chains of custody further displace objects from the time and space of their source communities, more labor needs to be invested just to make these objects available for discussions. Understanding how objects like musical instruments were amassed in such a trove as the Penn Museum’s gives an insight to how provenance inflects contemporary conditions. Constructing this story about our musical instruments urges a dive into the archives, where records start to paint a picture of their accession. After consulting with the Museum’s own chronicles, a lineage of unwieldy collection practices in parallel to a lack of resources to appropriately deal with these instruments contributes to a future that centers decolonization, community collaboration, and repatriation. The treatment of musical instruments in the historical record can be problematized through a few themes: their ability to be playable objects; the amount of necessary care that is (or isn’t) given; and the representation of source communities through the collections of these objects.

Historical records of the collection largely begin with correspondence from Sarah Sagehorn Frishmuth, a wealthy donor who accumulated antique musical objects spanning the

¹³ David P. McAllester to Donna Stone, 1969 Musical Instrument Collections records, Penn Museum Archives.

world. Just before the turn of the nineteenth century, this woman sparked a crucial relationship with Penn (among other institutions). She donated well over 1,000 instruments to the University Museum in 1899 alone,¹⁴ with many more to be added in the years before her death in 1926. As a result, many of the correspondences between this period seem to scramble to find resources needed to work with such a capacity of materials. Mrs. Frishmuth's donations appear to have caused significant inconveniences for employees of the Museum, from the director downwards. Throughout the early decades of the twentieth century, Mrs. Frishmuth asks a few times about the status of specific pieces in the massive collection, akin to finding a needle in a haystack. Because no completed catalog of instruments was made from the collection's accession onwards, Museum officials and Mrs. Frishmuth were equally inattentive of several important components of the archive.

In a document from February 11th, 1950, the dispersion of Mrs. Frishmuth's collection is described by the following:

Instruments from Africa, the Pacific, and the American Indian were catalogued and stored with the other collections from those various peoples. The Far Eastern instruments were assigned numbers and catalogued rather sketchily; and no cataloguing at all was done on the European instruments.¹⁵

Pieces of this lot were disseminated across buildings owned by the University of Pennsylvania, as well as in places like the Philadelphia Academy of Music, Franklin Institute, and the Philadelphia Museum of Art. However, this report also tells us that Mrs. Frishmuth donated several pianos and keyboards, which were then stored by the Museum of Art "in a building belonging to the Pennsylvania Railroad." Ultimately, this spelled disaster for these precious musical instruments, which fell into such disrepair over years of neglect that they had to be

¹⁴ Rebecca Lindsey, "Sarah Frishmuth: American Sculptor," Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2015.

¹⁵ Joseph Barone to Curator, February 11th, 1950. Musical Instrument Collections records, Penn Museum Archives.

disposed of. Thus, avoiding the necessary care which musical instruments require often means that no one may be able to play – or even see – these objects again.

In other mix-ups surrounding the Frishmuth collection, strings of back-and-forths between the Penn Museum and other institutions highlight an extreme disorganization that has led to precious instruments being lost. Often, outside personnel seeking to even locate pieces of the musical instrument archives could not be met with clear answers. Nicholas Bessaraboff, an employee of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, inquired in May of 1937 about a valuable lute which was referenced several times being stored in the Penn Museum. The lute, an early specimen built by 16th-century luthier Laux Maler, was one of just a handful of extant instruments produced by the prized builder. While Maler precedes Antonio Stradivari by over a century, the quality of his lutes can accurately be compared to the famed Stradivarius violins. Bessaraboff included detailed sketches from a similar Maler instrument held in Vienna, Austria, but the reply is that while the Penn Museum *might* have had it at one point, it certainly has no record of it anymore.

A few other similar cases crop up, like the loss of an 18th-century Johannes Zumpe square piano, an early example of the modern upright piano. Zumpe strived to make the recently innovated instrument more accessible to musicians, marketing his pianos through composers like Johann Sebastian Bach, who played and served as a sales agent for Zumpe.¹⁶ In another letter, a researcher from Haverford College asks for the whereabouts of an Dutch instrument built by the Ruckers family which he describes as the “Mona Lisa of harpsichords.” While many of these instances highlight the loss of instruments valuable to European musical traditions, one can infer a similar neglect towards the entire musical archive. When collections like Sarah Frishmuth’s

¹⁶Metropolitan Museum of Art, “Johannes Zumpe Square Piano.”

and later on in the 1940s Mary Drexel's were formally accessioned, some work seems to have gone into making distinctions over "primitive" instruments. Nonetheless, these categorizations seem to have done little to make space for instruments to be maintained. Non-Western instruments likely also suffered fates of disrepair, but the lack of documentation engenders a heightened inaccessibility for cultural material obtained via colonial encounter. Further divorcing musical instruments from the source communities of knowledge leads to an overall loss of musical culture, which disproportionately affects groups historically misrepresented in museum archives.

In tying archival work on the Penn Museum's musical instrument archives to the ongoing project of decoloniality, it is critical to see how these objects uniquely represent social contexts of their source communities. An interesting moment arrives from a series of triangulated letters written between Mrs. Frishmuth, Penn Museum officials, and artifact dealers from 1904's Louisiana Purchase Exhibition in St. Louis. Mrs. Frishmuth apparently purchased many instruments on display within anthropological exhibits of Ceylon (now Sri Lanka). We know now that race and imperialism heavily tinged such displays of cultural life in Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines among other zones extracted from by the Global North. Many of these items purchased from displays at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition Remain in storage at the Penn Museum, serving as a representation of coloniality in material archives. Among such Sri Lankan instruments collected by Mrs. Frishmuth, 9 drums, 2 cymbals, and a handful of anklets worn by dancers remain in the Museum. These remnants from the deeply problematic 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition connect pieces of musical archives to problematic pasts.

While outside of Frishmuth's souvenirs from St. Louis in 1904, the only other ukuleles in the Penn Museum's collections (2003-31-92 and 2003-31-93) are credited to an ethnographic

display of the Philippine Islands during the Exposition. Reflections on this Exposition criticize this practice of live action “exhibits,” as well as the inhumane treatment of people who performed as cultural actors, often unwillingly. Several Filipino performers died en route to St. Louis, along with a few others during the 6 month-long Exposition. Nearly 1,200 Filipino people— many of whom were trafficked – were displayed in a sort of reservation alongside Apache people from the southwest United States as a show of the nation’s hegemonic strength. Organizers sought performances of cultural traditions that aroused a sense of noble primitivism in audiences, even though harsh traveling and living conditions created tragic realities for the people on display.¹⁷ Skills like totem carving, canoe building, and basket weaving demonstrated a sense of natural ability while implying that these subjugated communities lacked development in economic, political, and academic fields. Music played on “simple” instruments like drums, ukuleles, cymbals, etc. served to disproportionately represent the United States’ imperial realms as primitive in comparison to Euro-American art music genres. Thus, collecting instruments like these purchased from the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition does little to challenge early anthropological approaches that put people on exhibition against their own terms. As objects that directly perform heritage, it is important to reckon musical instruments through their unique ability to convey sonic representations of culture. Many instruments may no longer be usable because of a neglect towards playability, which means the last life these objects lived was under intensely problematic conditions.

While we can hardly blame collectors like Sarah Frishmuth for creating the conditions of oppressive othering by the Global North, their influence on the institution of young museums in the twentieth century has perpetuated coloniality through de-accession and misrepresentation of

¹⁷ Jim Zwick, “Remembering St. Louis, 1904,” University of Syracuse, 1996.

cultural heritage. Donating massive amounts of instruments with little regard for how they might be maintained demonstrates an irresponsibility on the part of the collector.

Archival documents spanning the Penn Museum's history reveal how curators, researchers, and other officials interacted with musicians and musical scholars in Philadelphia and beyond. Beginning in 1944, projects surfaced to use the University Museum as a venue for concerts of ethnic music, underpinned by a feeling that Philadelphia was "far behind in musical developments of this sort."¹⁸ Spearheaded by Joseph Barone – an accomplished director of several musical programs in the area, including the Bryn Mawr Conservatory of Music – these concerts seemed to bridge cultural performance with diverse ethnographic material housed by the Penn Museum. While this performance series could have been a commendatory representation of personhood embodied by cultural heritage, the proposal was flawed because of implicit biases which facilitated an othering of cultural groups invited to perform. In early stages, complaints about a difficulty contacting musicians were inflected with racist remarks akin to notions of "CP (colored people's) time." Barone writes that he wrote to some performers from India after receiving no responses from numerous other musicians, but states that "there is no use expecting a prompt reply, because it seems characteristic of the Orientals to take their good old time."¹⁹ He goes on in this letter from December of 1944 to say that he is not discouraged, but rather a little embarrassed by what he views as a lack of cooperation from the artists. To make matters worse, Barone expands on this rant by saying: "I had not taken into consideration South Americans and Orientals. And Ye Gods! What will I do for an African program?"²⁰ Tainted by these

¹⁸ Joseph Barone to Mrs. Godfrey, December 17th, 1944. Musical Instrument Collections records, Penn Museum Archives.

¹⁹ Joseph Barone to Mrs. Godfrey, 1944.

²⁰ Joseph Barone to Mrs. Godfrey, 1944.

ethnocentric biases, it is no doubt that this program of concerts could only reflect existing attitudes that disaffected non-Western people.

These assumptions made by Mr. Barone on behalf of the performers created awkward situations for performers that also urged flawed representations of musical life. In one letter from November of 1945, Barone writes: “I am not sure, however, that we should go to the expense of hiring a Grand Steinway piano for the purpose, because I do not feel that the few Chinese songs which will be sung require this.”²¹ The organizers opt for an upright piano that is already available, although it needed tuning and would have been placed below the stage on the audience’s level. This scramble to arrange equipment just 4 days in advance of the performance is a direct cause of Barone’s hope that the “Chinese artists would be able to assist each other in the matter.” These different performers likely knew little of each other, since two groups arrived from Yale and another from New York. Furthermore, not considering the interests of performers – who might have enjoyed a higher quality instrument to play – demonstrates a sort of paternalism employed in making decisions on behalf of cultural groups. Expecting this musical community to be homogenous after purporting to represent diverse traditions reflects poorly on these organizers, ultimately perpetuating a lack of agency in descendant communities to control their cultural narratives. When presented with a wealth of fine musical instruments spanning cultures and eras, this performance series organized in the mid-late 1940s did little to demonstrate or improve the status of the Penn Museum’s collection.

Only a few projects have been undertaken since the Museum’s opening to even begin a comprehensive catalog of these musical instruments within the Penn Museum, each with varying

²¹ Joseph Barone to Mrs. Godfrey, November 27th, 1945. Musical Instrument Collections records, Penn Museum Archives.

degrees of success. One musicologist, Theodore Seder, a graduate student at Princeton throughout the late 1940s, conducted his thesis research on this musical instrument collection, per a letter of reference dated to 1949. Looking at the archives dedicated to some of Seder's work, his work was hardly comprehensive and often met similar roadblocks of missing or damaged instruments. Interestingly, Seder comes up with concrete credit lines for most of the instruments he catalogs, although he follows a precedent of organizing by culture classes rather than by instrument type. Seder's work garnered him attention for the sheer scale of the project, like an article from May 7th, 1950's edition of the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. In the article, Seder is identified as a solitary figure classifying nearly 5,000 instruments held in the Penn Museum's possession.²² From the news report, it seems that Seder's thesis was essentially rooted in a notion of cultural evolution. By highlighting the oldest instrument in the collection – a pair of 4,000-year-old Babylonian bronze clappers – Seder takes a Darwinist approach that explains complex European instruments of the modern era having stemmed from something more “primitive.”

While Seder's enormous task was an important moment for the collection as a whole, he seems to have done little in the way of keeping his records or the instrument archive as a whole accessible to future researchers. Almost no references to the condition of instruments are made in Seder's broader catalog, and his classification system was almost entirely useless outside of his doctoral research. In correspondence between curators for the Penn Museum's musical instrument collection dated to 1968, Seder's work is the “one reason why cataloguing is now so difficult – both his numbers and the Museum's are lost for many of the instruments.”²³ Theodor Seder's system disregarded existing numbering systems set by the Penn Museum, and instead

²² Hugh Scott, “From Accordion to Zither,” *Philadelphia Inquirer* (Philadelphia, PA), May 7, 1950.

²³ Donna Stone to Agi Jambor, October 22nd, 1968. Musical Instrument Collections records, Penn Museum Archives.

used codes to correspond with culture classifications. As a result, the Museum gained little for future curators to inherit, but Seder's efforts did culminate in an exhibit which ran from 1950-1958, "Four Thousand Years of Music."



Figure 2. Archival Image from Four Thousand Years of Music Exhibit²⁴

The exhibit, initially intended to be a permanent display, showcased specimens across historical periods, regions, and cultures. Musical instruments were drawn from the many collections donated to or absorbed by the Penn Museum: Mary Drexler, Sarah Frishmuth's, etc. Displayed prominently was a portrait of Mrs. Frishmuth, painted by renowned local artist Thomas Eakins in 1900. From official photos taken of the exhibit (Figure 2) many of the

²⁴ Penn Museum image no. 41155, Exhibits – "Four Thousand Years of Music" records, Penn Museum Archives.

instruments were in excellent, intact condition despite their age (although playability was not a factor). Still, the displays represented a mere fraction of the collection; some incomplete lists of artifacts show upwards of 600 instruments. A record from the online collections database shows only 274 objects known to have been displayed in the exhibit.²⁵ Other instruments were hung on the walls of the Penn Museum's Harrison Auditorium and remained there after the larger exhibit closed in 1958. After Theodore Seder finished his work within the Penn Museum's collection of musical instruments, energy reduced dramatically. Some instruments were dispersed to other museums, like an ancient lyre from the Royal Cemetery of Ur which now resides in the British Museum. Thus, with little forward momentum to change the fate of the musical instrument collection, many instruments continued to degrade beyond disrepair.

As is evident from extensive documentation in the archival record, personality goes a long way when it comes to spearheading conservation, curation, and research of the Penn Museum's musical instruments collection. Perhaps the biggest personality to have worked in this field was Agi Jambor, a Hungarian-born pianist and classical music professor at Bryn Mawr College who oversaw a project to catalog the extensive collection. In 1968, Jambor took a leave of absence from her teaching position to inherit the post of "Curator of Musical Instruments" at a point when she described the collection as in a sort of crisis. Throughout her tenure, ending in 1971, Jambor put extensive work into overhauling the collection. A letter from Jambor describes the situation, writing that: "The instruments here are almost beyond repair if we don't begin to work on them," and even offers to store some 40-50 instruments in her home to keep them in "good health." Despite the urgent conditions at hand, a critical lack of support for the restoration

²⁵ University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology. "Objects Appearing in 'Four Thousand Years of Music' (Exhibition) - Digital Collections." Penn Museum.

and curation of this massive collection rendered Jambor and her assistant, Donna Stone's efforts fruitless. Jambor penned several grant requests to charitable foundations, media giants, and government organizations over the course of the following years, to no avail. Still, her methods were tested to more creative lengths. In a letter early on in her tenure, Jambor describes a conversation with the Museum's director, Froelich Rainey, to fundraise. She writes that they "decided to try to manufacture walkingstick and umbrella flutes, and from the income we could restore some of the instruments. This crazy hippies would buy it by the tonnes [sic]."²⁶ The lack of funds thwarted necessary remedies for the many issues concerning the instruments collection. As a result, Agi Jambor and Donna Stone could show little for their concerted efforts.

Nonetheless, the Penn Museum's decision to bring Agi Jambor in as curator of the collection reflected a positive shift towards incorporating musical knowledge into curation of musical instruments. Jambor's ambitions demonstrated a need to resuscitate the collection, making sure that these instruments could be brought back to life by sounding again. The status of the Penn Museum's collection at the time was undoubtedly an important archive of wide-spanning musical culture, with Jambor describing it as the "greatest collection of instruments next to the Smithsonian Institution."²⁷ Unfortunately, the significance of the Penn Museum's musical archives was undermined by over-collection followed by decades of mismanagement. As a result, we are left with an inaccessible collection of musical instruments that are barely playable, which begs the question of what purpose this collection could serve. Agi Jambor wrote that her dream was "to expose young people, musicians, performers and composers to sounds

²⁶ Agi Jambor to "Narcissa," Oct 4th, 1968. Musical Instrument Collection records, Penn Museum Archives.

²⁷ Agi Jambor to "David," 1968. Musical Instrument Collection records, Penn Museum Archives.

from faraway countries, faraway feelings and customs,” which seems like a far cry from how these instruments have been used until this point.

By looking at this often-disregarded archive of records on the musical instrument collection, it becomes clear that frustrations and neglect have maligned much of the work and research conducted thus far. The appearance of this Manuel Nunes ‘ukulele in the Penn Museum’s archives show up only twice, the first being donor Clarence P. Franklin’s letter (Figure 3) from 1904 about whether they would accept his instruments.

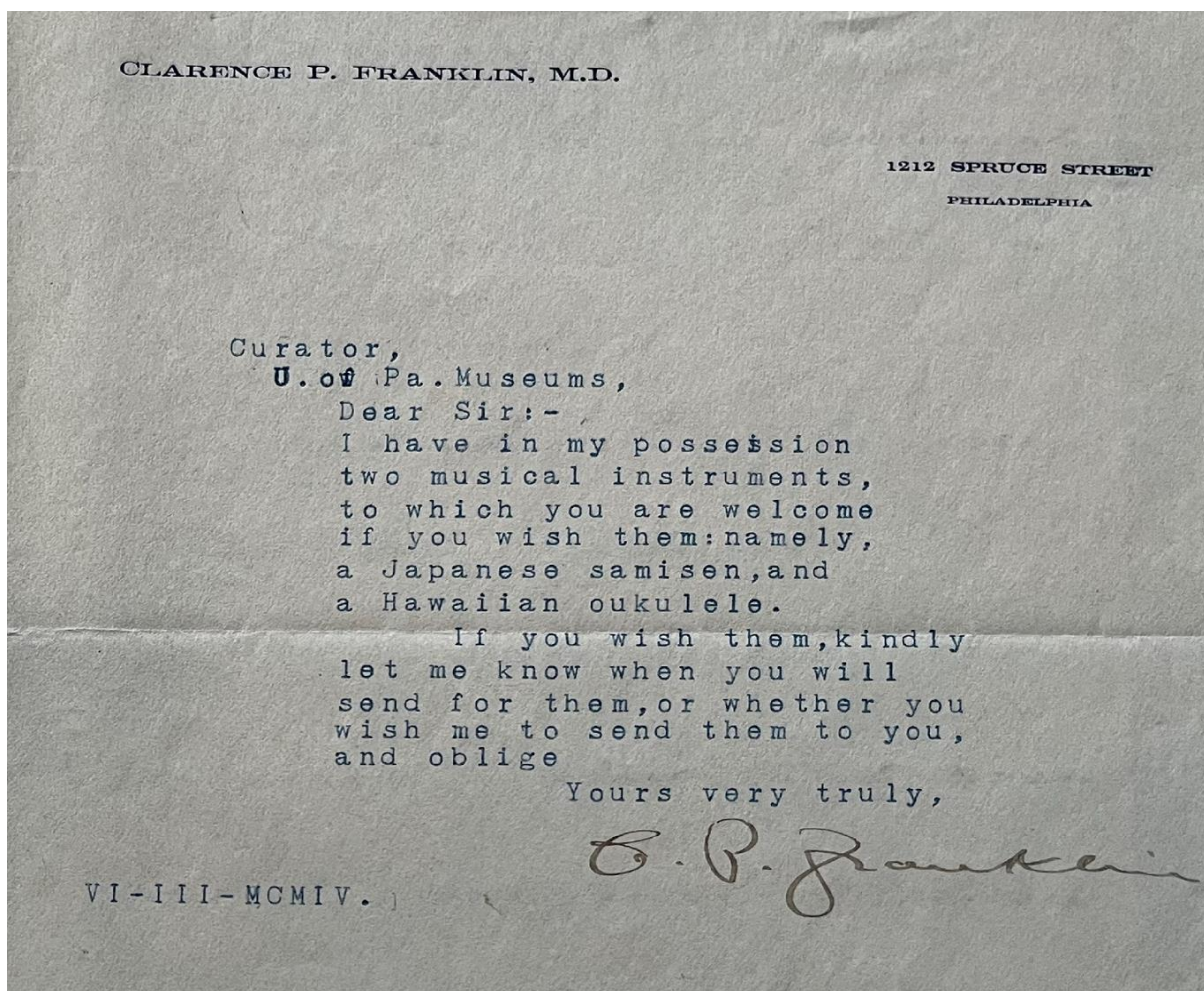


Figure 3. Archival Correspondence from Clarence P. Franklin²⁸

²⁸ Clarence P. Franklin to Curator, U. of Pa. Museums, June 3rd, 1904. Musical Instrument Collection records, Penn Museum Archives.

Although the entire story of the musical instrument collection of the Penn Museum could be determined through archival work, it may be interesting to envision the life of the museum in parallel to the life (or afterlife) of this instrument. Indeed, many of the problems throughout the Penn Museum's history regarding its expansive collection of instruments have significant implications for the musical life it houses. Thus, the case study of the 'ukulele can become a projection of institutional systems which determine the story of historic instruments. In the Penn Museum, it is a case of practices which jeopardize and devalue the significance of this 'ukulele and other instruments of the collection. As discussed further in this paper, new ideas tied to musical repatriation informed by source communities can work to remedy the damages of these practices. By understanding the historical and social significance of this 'ukulele, we can place its present condition in context with imagined futures that center musical communities and their voices.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE ‘UKULELE: Three Madeirans and one “bouncing flea.”

While many scholars have discussed the project of colonialism regarding its effects on life in Hawai’i, relatively few have focused on the cultural products of the islands and their impact on the cultural heritage of the world. Understanding the significance of this ‘ukulele held by the Penn Museum requires a context of the people and landscape it originated from. Up until the moment that the instrument was accessioned by the Museum in 1905, the rapidly changing Hawaiian society was marked by cultural developments that were informed and challenged by colonial encounters. As a result, the history of the ‘ukulele has its own parallels to movements like that of Hawaiian sovereignty, and the life of the instrument is embodied by the unique aspects of island life. By examining how the instrument was developed, and how it eventually rose to prominence, we can begin to understand the processes which translated it to an artifact in the Penn Museum’s collection.

The ‘ukulele, a musical instrument which resembles a pint-sized guitar, traces its origins to Portugal in the early 19th century.²⁹ While a series of adaptations morphed the instrument from its Portuguese roots, the ‘ukulele we recognize today is built from various tonewoods (materials selected to create a distinct timbre or resonance) and usually has four strings made from nylon or other soft materials. The most common configuration is the soprano ‘ukulele, although tone and volume vary substantially with size and construction. The bright, plucky sound of the ‘ukulele can be heard across the world, in the hands of seasoned performers to school children alike.

²⁹ John King, “A Few Words about the Madeiran ‘Machete,’” *The Galpin Society Journal* 58 (2005): 84.

‘Ukulele historian and enthusiast Jim Tranquada – a descendant of Augusto Dias – authored the first comprehensive book on the subject, *The Ukulele: A History* in 2012. His work encompasses the wide range of this instrument as an historically complex instrument that so rapidly became regarded as a part of native Hawaiian culture. In speaking with Tranquada, he offered the theory of Cuban sociologist Fernando Ortiz, whose ideas of “transculturation” describes the interaction between cultures that produces an offspring both like and unlike its parents. The ‘ukulele is certainly an example of this sort of transculturation, where the immigrant instrument became closely adopted by Hawaiians. As a result, the instrument can be recognized as an important depiction of Hawaiian identity and its relation to the world, itself a link between native and outside cultures. A recent rise in popularity of the instrument from the early 2000s onwards has ushered in a sort of “third wave” of attention for the ‘ukulele; the first being the Roaring Twenties and the second following mass-manufacturing developments in the post-World War II period.³⁰ Although much of the popular imagination of the ‘ukulele comes from its use as a novelty sound or children’s instrument, scholars like Tranquada recognize the many dimensions and implications throughout the instrument’s history. As such, the ‘ukulele deserves to be taken seriously as a culturally significant object that carries hidden meanings and complexities in today’s world.

Before the ‘ukulele became a global phenomenon, it arrived to the islands of Hawai’i through the hands of immigrants from Portugal’s Azores archipelago. In 1879, the British vessel S.S. Ravenscrag carried 428 passengers from the islands of Madeira to fill positions in the growing plantation economy of Hawai’i. The landscapes of Madeira and Hawai’i carried similarities in being volcanic archipelagos with lush tropics and strong tourist interest. One early

³⁰ Tranquada, *The ‘ukulele: A History*, 2.

visitor to Honolulu described it as the “Madeira of the Pacific.”³¹ Nonetheless, the two island regions’ histories converged at this point when populations in Hawai’i declined rapidly, and Madeira grew overcrowded to the brink of starvation. The 135 men, 115 women, and 178 children aboard the ship were “engaged readily as house servants and plantation hands,” essentially contracted as indentured servants in Hawai’i for a period of 2 years.³² Among these immigrants were Manuel Nunes, Jose do Espirito Santo, and Augusto Dias; the three men who transformed their familiar Portuguese instruments into the modern ‘ukulele. Aboard the Ravenscrag, the Madeiran immigrants brought with them folk instruments like the 5-stringed *machete*, and the larger-bodied *rajão*. When Nunes, Santo, and Dias’s contracts were up, their transition from fieldhands to cabinetmaking put them on the path to small-time luthiery with these familiar instruments.

The three Madeirans built *machetes* for sale to other itinerant workers, ushering their own troubadour-like culture of musical performance into the Hawaiian landscape. Sugar and taro plantations sounded with the voices of these instruments, which observers called “taro patch fiddles.”³³ To supplement their incomes, Dias, Nunes, and Santos seized every opportunity and traded instruments and parts in addition to building and repairing. Native Hawaiians became intrigued by the *machete* and *rajão* and shared a similar culture of performance in the streets and at work. As a result, the modifications and improvements made to these Madeiran instruments specifically voiced for life in Hawai’i. The instrument shrunk from five to four strings, tuned differently for new repertoires. Subsequent versions had six or eight strings, and the instrument's

³¹ Tranquada, *The ‘ukulele: A History*, 6.

³² Melody Lassalle, "Description of the Voyage of the Ravenscrag to Hawaii - 1878," *Your Island Routes*, 2021.

³³ Karen Sadie Drozd, “The Hawaiian ‘Ukulele: Its Players, Makers, Teachers, and Continuity in Traditional Transmission Processes,” University of Hawai’i at Manoa, 1998.

design became more intricate and ornate as it grew in popularity. The locals named the instrument *ukulele* – Hawaiian for “bouncing flea” – as a depiction of how a player’s strings would skip and strum all over the strings.³⁴

The attractiveness of this new instrument was largely due to its small size, making it portable and relatively inexpensive to produce. They created a shallower body and reduced the thickness of the soundboard, resulting in a brighter sound. The ease of tuning and playing the ‘ukulele allowed it to spread like wildfire across the islands of Hawai’i. In the last quarter of the 19th century, many Hawaiian musicians had an infatuation with guitars, and the ‘ukulele created a storm of excitement around a native sound. The ukulele experienced a surge in popularity in Hawaiian culture and became an essential part of the local music scene. It was frequently played at festivals, social events, and gatherings, eventually establishing itself as an iconic symbol of Hawaiian culture. Members of Hawaii’s royal family (Kalakaua, Lili’uokalani, Likelike, and Leileiohoku) were talented musicians and instrumentalists who influenced the national symbolism of music.³⁵ The royal endorsement of the ‘ukulele propelled it to success among the broader population during this period, leaning into a vital fight for Hawaiian sovereignty. Initially, the ukulele was crafted with koa wood, which is abundant and indigenous to Hawai’i. Koa, discussed later in this paper, is a symbol for *aloha aina* – love of the land – in stark repudiation of Eurocentric ideas of woods picked out for sound quality or sturdier construction.

Looking into the growth of Nunes, Santo, and Dias’ businesses becomes murky as recordkeeping barely exists for much of their history. From labels inside of surviving instruments, we know that they worked in downtown Honolulu, and seem to have moved addresses frequently. The address listed on the Penn Museum’s Nunes ‘ukulele is 46 Hotel

³⁴ Tranquada, *The ‘ukulele*, 41-42.

³⁵ Ukulele Hunt. "Jim Tranquada Interview: Ukulele History." Ukulele Hunt, August 25, 2010.

Street, while another example from 1888 lists Nunes' address as 40 Hotel Street. An historic photograph of Hotel Street from 1890 (Figure 4) depicts a busy commercial corridor in the center of Honolulu's 10-block area of Chinatown. Around the turn of the 20th century, Hotel Street functioned as the city's red-light district, coordinating illicit gambling and prostitution adjacent to the busy harbor.³⁶ While not the most significant aspect of these three pioneers' careers, it is worth noting that their businesses were impermanent and conducted out of necessity. Other research on these figures looks at directories, which give a sense as to how they advertised services or described their own businesses. Manuel Nunes was established as a cabinetmaker in directories from 1884, and by 1885 he was listed as an instrument builder.³⁷ When Nunes established a more formal business, M. Nunes & Sons, in 1909, he credited himself as the inventor of the 'ukulele.



Figure 4. View of Honolulu's Hotel Street circa 1890.

³⁶ Images of Old Hawaii. "\$3 for 3 Minutes." Images of Old Hawaii.

³⁷ King, John, and Jim Tranquada. "The Singular Case of Manuel Nunes and the Invention of the Bouncing Flea." *The Galpin Society Journal* 60 (2007): 86.

Oral accounts of the early ‘ukulele-making business suggest contradictions between archival documents and claims by the three Madeirans as to who first experimented with what eventually became the ‘ukulele. Manuel Nunes was the earliest to be identified as a guitar maker in Honolulu; Augusto Dias was the first luthier to advertise instruments made of Hawaiian wood; and Jose do Espirito Santo was the first to advertise ‘ukuleles for sale in 1898.³⁸ Thus, the difficulty of determining the ‘ukulele’s creator makes it a fruitless task when a more interesting story comes through the fusion of all three creators. Although identifying himself as the inventor of the “original and genuine ukulele” is largely mythical, Nunes undisputedly had the largest and most successful business out of the three. Four years after Nunes’ death in 1914, M. Nunes & Sons continued to market ‘ukuleles manufactured in Hawai’i and available for import to the United States of America. In doing so, the company embraced the explosion of visitors to the islands and spurred fascination abroad by embodying a sort of authenticity.

The exoticization of island life and the commodification of Hawaiian culture was the result of a rapidly growing tourism industry that painted a scene of the cheerful tropics, with the blooming hibiscus and bright sounds of the “bouncing flea.” The rapid dissemination and appropriation of cultural products created challenges for indigenous Hawaiians to claim sovereignty over their land, heritage, and life. As rapidly as the instrument became a symbol of identity for Hawaiians, the ‘ukulele reached steamships filled with tourists eager to bring their own slice of the “exotic” sound home. This early period of ‘ukuleles was rife with instruments that took on symbols of Hawaiian-ness, decorated with motifs of local landscapes and spiritual symbols. Koa wood had been closely associated with the monarchy through spiritual and ceremonial practices: the royal throne was made of koa; Hawaiian royalty slept in koa beds and

³⁸ King and Tranquada, “The Singular Case,” 89.

were buried in koa coffins.³⁹ This variety of acacia was, in ancient Polynesian life, a resource controlled only by the *ali'i*, kings and chiefs of the islands. Until the system of “*kapu*” (“forbidden for use by normal people”) was abolished in 1819, koa wood was reserved for weapons, canoes, and other implements of war as a sign of the monarchy’s strength.⁴⁰ The name *koa* means warrior in Hawaiian language, which continues to reflect the powerful identity of this material. Santo and Dias advertised their instruments as being “made of Hawaiian wood,” and Nunes emblazoned the royal coat of arms (Figure 4), each appealing to a sense of patriotism for native Hawaiians and capturing the exotic essence of authentic indigeneity for onlookers.



Figure 5. Nunes Decal circa 1915-1918.⁴¹

³⁹ Ukulele Hunt, “Jim Tranquada Interview.”

⁴⁰ Keli’i Yamashita, “Koa Wood, the Holy Grail,” Leolani Ukulele, 2021.

⁴¹ Ukulele Hall of Fame Museum, “Manuel Nunes: 1998 Hall of Fame Inductee.”

Tourists who visited Hawaii were captivated by the instrument and subsequently introduced it to the mainland United States and beyond. The ukulele's popularity expanded rapidly during the early 20th century, particularly as a result of its prominent appearance at the Panama Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco in 1915. The exposition featured a Hawaiian Pavilion where ukulele music was showcased, promoting the instrument to the world as a pinnacle of American conquest. Around the same time, Pennsylvania-based guitar maker C.F. Martin & Company began to sell their own 'ukuleles. Founded in 1833, the company is now one of the world's largest manufacturers of acoustic instruments. The growth of this giant in the music industry is owed in part to its profit from growing trends and construction quality. In 1917, Martin sold 2,000 'ukuleles, as many guitars and mandolins as had been sold since 1907 combined. By 1922, that figure had leapt to 5,000.⁴² The transportation of the 'ukulele to the United States spurred further innovation, like improved construction and emphasis on different qualities of each instrument's character. Some Martin 'ukuleles were built entirely from Mahogany, a different wood with unique abilities to project and color the tone of the instrument. Fascination with this Hawaiian instrument was certainly not a passing fad, and the ukulele's popularity continued to grow. Its status as a popular instrument in the early 20th century cemented the future of 'ukulele music in the United States and across the world for generations to come.

⁴² Tom Walsh. "Martin Ukuleles: History." Ukulele Magazine, 2017.

INSTRUMENT ANALYSIS: A closer look at one of the world's oldest 'ukuleles

From looking at the object itself, several observations can be made from condition and features which tell us more about the 'ukulele than provenance would make available. From archival work, we know that this 'ukulele was purchased by one Clarence Payne Franklin, a medical student who made a trip to Australia by way of Hawai'i and Japan in the late 1880s. By June of 1904, Dr. Franklin inquired whether the Penn Museum would accept two instruments he had purchased: a Japanese "samisen" and a Hawaiian "oukulele." There is no record of the other instrument being accessioned to the Museum, but the murky provenance of this 'ukulele invites further questions about how it might have been obtained, how it was stored, and what its purpose today is. The intact maker's label (Figure 6) allows us to identify the 'ukulele as a product of Manuel Nunes' handiwork in Honolulu.



Figure 6. Label inside the 29-58-122 'ukulele.⁴³

⁴³ Penn Museum, "Images for Object 29-58-122."

The condition of the instrument leaves much to be considered in terms of restoring or conserving the object. When I first saw this 'ukulele, it was clear that little was done to consider preservation or playability in storage. The surface of the instrument carries a patina of dust, grime, and water spots across the body and fingerboard. Little has been done since its accession to care for humidity or conditioning of the object. Whether this came from traveling with Dr. Franklin on his voyages in the Pacific or if neglect across the Museum's collections of instruments is to blame is unclear. With consistent use and upkeep, wooden chordophones like this can survive for well over a century in playing condition. Proper maintenance of antique instruments requires that something be used to protect the porous surfaces from dust and dirt, whether a conditioning solution or natural oils from human hands. Either way, there is a lack of evidence which would suggest practices to maintain the careful handiwork of this early example of an 'ukulele from Manuel Nunes' shop.

There is a significant amount of damage to the instrument which would need to be taken into consideration if this 'ukulele was to be restored. On the back side of the instrument (Figure 7), there is a 7½" long split which runs with the grain. This split extends through the end block, which lifts slightly from the back side as a result of poor humidity control over the past 130-or-so years. On the front side of the 'ukulele, there is a split which starts an inch past the end block and runs into the rosette, approximately 3¾" long. Above the rosette, there is another ½" split which affects the structural integrity of this object less so. One of the most critical areas of concern is that the shoulders at the side of this 'ukulele's body are severely warped. This is another result of poor humidity control, in which little has been done to work with the natural bending of wood over time. If only the splits needed to be repaired, a simple solution could be to have a luthier patch them up from the inside using thin cleats and glue. However, the added

challenges of intense distortion in the pieces making up this ukulele's body present a more difficult, and expensive path to restoration. Essentially, the top and back faces would need to be removed along with the binding and treated to regain its shape before reassembling the entire instrument.



Figure 7. Back side of the 'ukulele.

This type of repair is not unheard of or uncommon to put instruments back in playing condition, and it would lend itself better to the integrity of the “authentic” nature of this ‘ukulele. In my own experience working to build and repair guitars, I have seen this sort of total overhaul done on instruments less rare and less historically significant than this. The ultimate question is what lengths museums with large musical instrument collections could or should go to in order to restore pieces.

Looking closer at this ‘ukulele in the Penn Museum reveals that it has indeed suffered significant damage as a result of a tense relationship between principles of conservation and restoration. A further glance reveals that some of the wear on the object comes from human hands, who made the instrument’s unique voice ring out. At the bottom right side of the rosette

(Figure 8), the wood grain was exposed as rhythmic strumming wore away at the delicate finish. The bare spruce top is a reminder that this instrument is an object that demands to be played and to be used in order to fulfill its purpose. Musicians frequently view this type of player wear on their cherished instruments as evidence of a unique bond they have with each other; the instrument becoming extensions of the instrumentalist and vice versa. One famous example of this is American country music singer-songwriter, Willie Nelson, whose 1969 nylon-stringed Martin (nicknamed “Trigger”) is a testament to the character and superior sound quality of this beloved guitar.⁴⁴ A large hole between the soundboard and bridge, scrapes from years of strumming, and evidence of many repairs categorize the instrument as hard-worn, but musicians might consider it hard-loved.



*Figure 8. Soundhole of the 'ukulele, showing wear and patina.*⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Thalia Capos. "The Story Behind Willie Nelson's Trigger Guitar." Thalia Capos, October 15, 2021.

⁴⁵ Penn Museum, "Images for Object 29-58-122."

While the ‘ukulele is missing a few frets from the fingerboard, divots in the first three add to this story of the instrument having been played and loved. The strings used on these early ‘ukuleles – and other instruments like guitars and violins – were made from “catgut,” cords made from natural fibers of sheep or cow intestine. Until nylon strings were introduced in the mid-century, these catgut strings produced the voice that shaped and mimicked Hawaiian sound. This material takes much longer to wear frets out than do wound steel strings, which are not conventionally found on ‘ukuleles. As a result, this instrument would have been played significantly from the moment Franklin purchased it around 1889 to his donation in 1904. 15-or-so years of frequent use is the explanation for the marks of music-making on this historic instrument, which only compounds the detriment of its neglect over the past 120 years.

On the object, there are several interesting engravings which depict points of history in this instrument’s life. The social significance of this instrument goes beyond its life as a cultural tool and considers the symbolism of Hawaiian culture at home and abroad found in the ‘ukulele. Engraved on the face of the instrument are several depictions of life for Clarence P. Franklin and the Hawai’i he visited. The motif of a steamship (Figure 9) in front of a bright sun represents the rapidly growing tourism industry which brought travelers like Franklin to the islands and circulated their imaginations of culture outwards. This accelerated in-and-outflow to Hawai’i created encounters of difficult power imbalance which continue to challenge how this material is researched and displayed. His initials, “C.P.F.,” are engraved on the bridge and on the top of the ‘ukulele. Additionally, “U of P” is etched as a monogram to signify his own connection to the University of Pennsylvania. Most interesting is an engraving depicting Lē‘ahi (Figure 10), a volcanic ridge which overlooks the popular beach of Waikiki. Located on the island of Oahu, and not far from the city of Honolulu, this place holds significance as a sacred site of reverence

and worship in Hawaiian spirituality.⁴⁶ The earliest colonial encounters to the islands of Hawai'i accounted for indigenous people building sacrificial altars and holding religious ceremonies around the area. Franklin's visit to Hawai'i came around the sunset of its sovereign kingdom, where tensions around the territory's indigeneity and independence came to the forefront. Lē'ahi, also known as Diamond Head, remains a monument for Hawaiians, who fought a bloody battle along its slopes between royalist rebels and the colonist government in 1895.⁴⁷

⁴⁶John R. K. Clark, *Hawaii Place Names: Shores, Beaches, and Surf Sites*. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2003), 60.

⁴⁷ Hawai'i State Parks. "Diamond Head State Monument." Department of Land and Natural Resources, State of Hawai'i, 2012.



Figure 9. Engravings on the 'ukulele.⁴⁸



Figure 10. Detail of Lē'ahi engraving.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Penn Museum, "Images for Object 29-58-122."

⁴⁹ Penn Museum, "Images for Object 29-58-122."

CONTEXTUALIZING THE ‘UKULELE

By looking at these symbols of the Penn Museum’s Nunes ‘ukulele, we can see the types of representation of Hawaiian culture among its own population and for outsiders looking in. The adaptations of the instrument made by Santos, Nunes, and Dias tuned the ‘ukulele specifically for the demands of the unique Hawaiian landscape. The construction of this instrument – descended from the Portuguese *machete* and *rajão* – specifically factored portability, economy, and timbre in favor of active musicians. Its lightweight and simple construction made the ‘ukulele easy to carry around for itinerant musicians – who often worked odd jobs across the islands – and capable of being produced/repared on shorter timeframes.⁵⁰ As a result, the visual and sonic culture of the ‘ukulele spread rapidly throughout the islands.

After speaking with a few experts on history, construction, and heritage of the ‘ukulele, there is a clear consensus that this instrument is one of the earliest examples of the Hawaiian “bouncing flea,” an adaptation of the Madeiran *machete*. Dr. Nuni-Lyn Sawyer-Walsh, president of the Ukulele Hall of Fame Museum and great-granddaughter of Manuel Nunes, offered that they only know of one instrument older than the Penn Museum’s 29-58-122.⁵¹ As such, this ‘ukulele is an invaluable representative for the early life of this instrument, becoming itself a benchmark for Hawaiian culture in past, present, and future. An article written in 2019 by Jim Tranquada for *Ukulele Magazine* suggests that while Manuel Nunes’ work became the most commercially successful of the instrument’s pioneers, “ukulele manufacturing was a boutique business where mass production techniques were unknown” until the first company was formed

⁵⁰ Tranquada, *The ‘ukulele: A History*, 38.

⁵¹ Nuni-Lyn Walsh, email message to author, January 26th, 2023.

in 1909.⁵² Nunes, along with Augusto Dias and Jose do Espirito Santo honed techniques by repairing mandolins, violins, and guitars to support their lutherie businesses. As a result, we can compare the construction of this instrument to others in its contemporary life, tracing a lineage of how the ‘ukulele changed alongside the culture of Hawai’i.

Tranquada’s article includes references to a ca. 1888 Nunes ‘ukulele, a time when visitors and locals began to identify it as the “national instrument of Hawaii.”⁵³ Since Nunes’ business was largely bespoke up until this moment, we can draw clear comparisons between this instrument and the Penn Museum’s, which dates to between 1884 and 1889. The two sibling ‘ukuleles bear striking similarity to each other, but some details suggest a level of variation among Nunes’ handiwork. The 1888 ‘ukulele features a rosette with two purfling inlays, while 29-58-122 features just one. Additionally, the 1888 instrument sports a “mustache” inlay above the endblock. These differences point to a difference in craftsmanship, whether one that was developed through practice or from a customer who paid for more ornamentation. As mentioned before, the labels inside each ‘ukulele bear different addresses along Honolulu’s Hotel Street, suggesting that Nunes’ shop migrated along the busy corridor of the city’s Chinatown over the years. In thinking about the instrument in this way, it becomes clearer what the ‘ukulele looked like and what it took for these to be brought onboard steamships filled with American tourists. The foundations for the rapid growth of the ‘ukulele’s popularity was formed by these immigrant instrument builders, developing a sound heard in every corner of the world.

Because of the rarity of these antique instruments, it is important to compare this ‘ukulele built by Manuel Nunes to other examples of his work and his contemporaries. Only a handful of

⁵² Jim Tranquada. "Ukulele History: 140 Years Ago, the Ukulele as We Know It Arrives in Hawaii." *Ukulele Magazine*, July 23, 2019.

⁵³ Tranquada, *The ‘ukulele: A History*, 44.

these 'ukuleles have survived the years and vary in condition due to different ideas of preservation/conservation. For many keepers of these instruments, playability is an important factor to determining an authentic character. While many of these museum-grade instruments are found in private collections or cultural exhibitions today, their conditions are almost inextricably linked to being living representations of Hawaiian culture. Most examples of late-1800s 'ukuleles survive in playable condition because of careful considerations of restoring and maintaining these objects.



Figure 11. Two Santo 'ukuleles⁵⁴

Two 'ukuleles by Jose do Espirito Santo (Figure 11) are featured in 'ukulele collector Andy Roth's trove, which boasts one of the largest and most important assemblages of these historic and vintage instruments in the world. These instruments date between 1897 and 1900, as

⁵⁴ Jim Tranquada. "Ukulele History."

determined by other historians and experts of the ‘ukulele.⁵⁵ Despite their age, the two ‘ukuleles remain stunning survivors and feature incredible build quality with unique voices that can still ring out. Similar to the Penn Museum Nunes ‘ukulele, these instruments feature a number of similarities with contemporaries like small body size and koa wood construction. Fatally, the Penn Museum ‘ukulele is not playable or found in as good condition as its cousin and sibling instruments. Other examples, like a Santo ‘ukulele held by the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History (Figure 12) appear to be in much better condition than the Penn Museum’s but are not presently playable. Still, this instrument has been featured in displays like a 2004 “Na Mea Makamae o Hawai’i - Hawaiian Treasures” exhibit, indicating that there is interest in featuring musical objects as a part of Hawaiian culture.



Figure 12. Santo ‘ukulele in National Museum of Natural History, accession number 160028.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Maribeth Keane and Brad Quinn. “Ukulele Collector Andy Roth: An Interview with Collectors Weekly,” *Collectors Weekly*, 2010.

⁵⁶ National Museum of Natural History. “Ukulele,” Smithsonian Institution.

The instruments which remain from this first generation of ‘ukulele are the only markers of this early wave, since none of the three Madeirans could build lasting, multi-generational businesses. Small sample size makes it difficult to determine what typical ‘ukulele construction might have looked like. An assessment of similar late-1800s instruments in *Ukulele Magazine* in 2019 by historian Jim Tranquada poses questions around the craftsmanship of these ‘ukuleles. He describes ornate features of these enduring instruments like elaborate bindings, inlays, and book-matched wooden faces, but asks: “did these instruments survive precisely because they are more elaborately decorated and thus more highly valued?”⁵⁷ Combined with the factor that these instruments were entirely handmade, the substantial amount of variation in work continues to complicate accounts of how the instrument developed. There was no benchmark to model each ‘ukulele from, and it appears as though these early examples changed increasingly as the pioneers continued to experiment. Tranquada’s is certainly an interesting question for ongoing research of the ‘ukulele, in which comparing key differences and similarities across these instruments may reveal more about their history.

These differences can be seen in the Penn Museum’s Nunes ‘ukulele, which appears to have significantly lower of a “trim” than other examples. One example of an 1888 Nunes ‘ukulele (Figure 13), featured in the *Ukulele Magazine* article, shows the detailed work of his shop. The rope binding and endblock inlay are similar to those of the Penn Museum ‘ukulele, but this instrument bears marks of more careful and detailed work. The rosette sports a second ring, and the face includes a “mustache” inlay. In comparison, the 1888 Nunes ‘ukulele would certainly have taken more time and more skilled labor to construct. There are several possible explanations for this, which can be determined with more research on these unique instruments.

⁵⁷Tranquada, “Ukulele History.”

The 'ukulele purchased by Clarence Franklin could have been a model sold without elaborate trimmings to cut costs for the consumer, or it could have been built before Nunes honed his fine luthiery skills to this level. Either way, the interesting questions posed by comparing these instruments reveal more about the complex history of the 'ukulele.

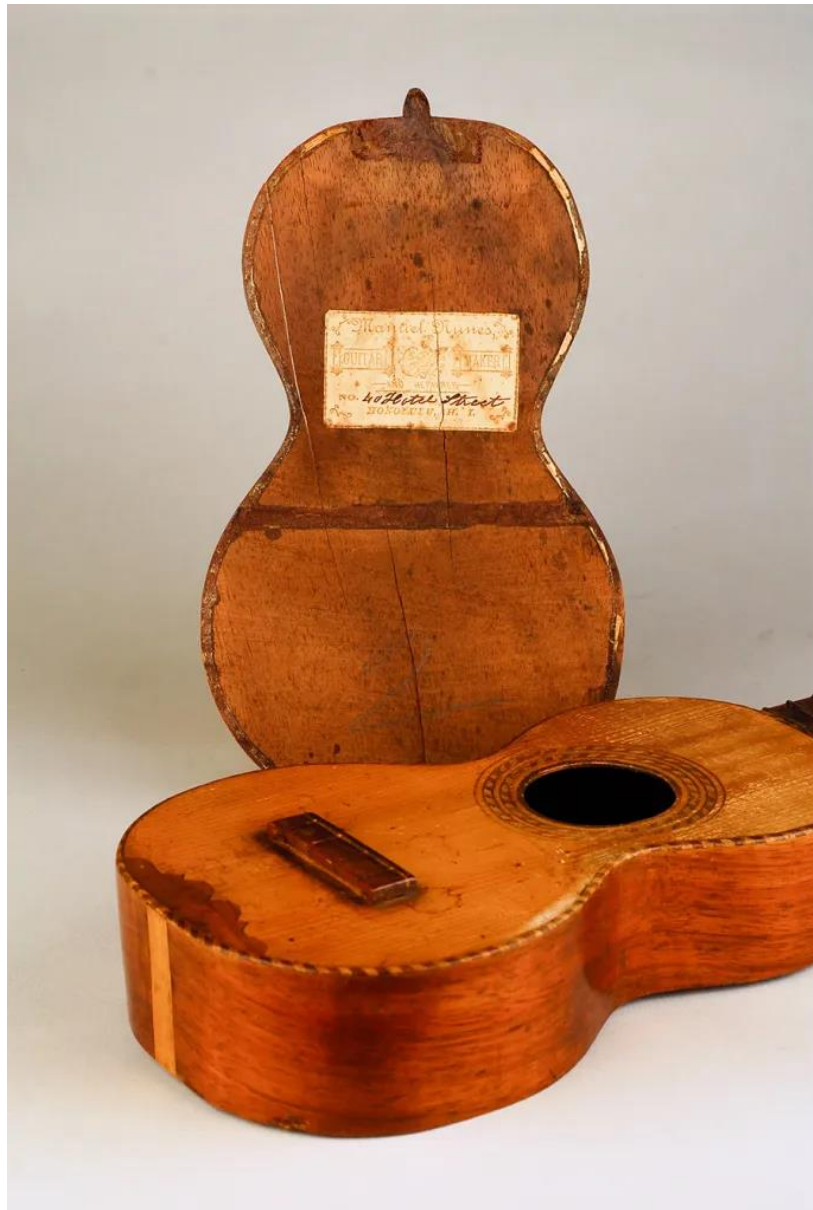


Figure 13. A Manuel Nunes 'ukulele circa 1888.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Tranquada, "Ukulele History."

SOCIAL LIVES OF THE 'UKULELE

From thinking about the archival history of this 'ukulele, the translation of it as an emblem of Hawaiian life to one as an object in a museum presents questions as to what the social life of this instrument was. Anthropologist Arjun Appadurai describes in his 2011 *The Social Life of Things* a sort of “methodological fetishism” of commodities useful in analyzing the societies they circulate within. Appadurai argues that for many “things,” meanings are “inscribed in their forms, their uses, their trajectories”⁵⁹ and that human transactions essentially make these commodities alive. *The Social Life of Things* goes beyond a view that material or economic value makes an object significant and incorporates a sort of cultural biography of things. In the context of this research, the social life of musical instruments transcends its status as an exchanged commodity and urges a life of its own. The future of this 'ukulele held by the Penn Museum, and many other instruments in ethnographic archives should be determined by ability to have a social life; to be played, worn, and heard through performance. All of these interpretations of the 'ukulele in the context of its creation and transportation to the Penn Museum suggest that it was significant in Hawaiian history, but its life in today's world should be discussed further. While this object was once indicative of the export of island life to the rest of the world, the 'ukulele still holds relevance for communicating the legacy of Hawaiian culture.

The social life of the 'ukulele must be discussed in terms of Hawaiian spirituality, which often views objects with cultural significance like 'ukuleles as living components of their own social culture. In Polynesian and Melanesian religion, the principle of *mana* dictates the spirits which inhabit people, places, and things. Mana is not necessarily universal or common throughout Polynesia, but various interpretations of it hold relevance to conversations of musical

⁵⁹ Arjun Appadurai, ed. *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 5.

life in Hawai'i. Mana is described as a sort of supernatural force that may be “good or evil, beneficial or dangerous,” manifesting itself in qualities which make it extraordinary.⁶⁰ There is an evasive nature to describing the vibrant system of mana which intertwines identity, culture, and environment. Mana can be determined as a vital essence or life force which flows through all objects and people, recognized as an important aspect of Hawaiian life. This ancient belief suggests that spiritual energy is acquired through feats of skill or artistry and may be cultivated through training.⁶¹ While the term is traditionally used to describe the sacred places and resources of Hawai'i, mana can also be imparted on the people and materials which make up the landscape of the islands today. Hawaiian musical life is often described in terms of mana today, where instruments like 'ukuleles carry the lineage of spiritual force through their players. Cultivating this mana is essential to traditional beliefs of genealogy and a divine connection between humans, culture, and nature. As a result, Hawaiian instruments demand to maintain a social spirit through activity.

Instruments like this Nunes 'ukulele are still played, maintained, and cherished by performers and enthusiasts in Hawai'i and beyond. For many musicians and interpreters, the 'ukulele remains an important tool for communicating Hawaiian culture. While these historic instruments are certainly rare remnants of the islands' past, interest in keeping these 'ukuleles alive spurs cultural institutions around Hawaiian music. The 'Ukulele Guild of Hawai'i, founded in 2001, serves as an important service to preserve sonic traditions and futures of this music. Although first oriented as a group of craftsmen seeking to construct the highest quality of 'ukulele, the Guild grew to embrace elements of community and performance embodied by the

⁶⁰ Encyclopaedia Britannica, “mana,” 1998.

⁶¹ Treena Shapiro, “Cultivating Mana Lāhui,” *KaWaiOla News*, 2017.

instrument.⁶² In particular, the ‘Ukulele Guild focuses on the concept of *kanikapila*, a term in native vocabulary derived from the Hawaiian words *kani* (“sound”), and *pila* (referring to any stringed instrument).⁶³ Kanikapila refers to a sort of unrehearsed jam session, usually happening near the beach or at family gatherings. This style of Hawaiian music finds its traditional roots in the Hawaiian monarchy, which featured impromptu performances from its own family at royal gatherings. The ‘Ukulele Guild of Hawaiian hosts its own kanikapila on the second Saturday of each month, giving visitors to Honolulu’s Bishop Museum an opportunity to participate, observe, and learn from this tradition. The Guild’s members invite attendees to bring their own instruments or borrow one of theirs at each session, encouraging the community-building aspect of ‘ukulele music.⁶⁴ There is no doubt that this tradition of kanikapila spurred the growth of the ‘ukulele from its inception, and continues to tell the story of Hawaiian culture and music to this day.

Other performers and historians specialize in interpretation of musical materials from the Hawaiian past as their way of preserving the legacy of this instrument. The Ukulele Hall of Fame Museum, founded in 1996, compiles a great deal of historical information on its pages while also recognizing the individuals who contributed to the worldwide history of the instrument. Among its inductees are Manuel Nunes, Jose do Espirito Santo, and Augusto Dias, along with other performers and craftsmen.⁶⁵ There is also a record of various types of ‘ukuleles made in and out of Hawai’i, spanning the entire history of this instrument. Although the Museum has no physical space yet, its use of the internet as a resource still works to preserve the history of the ‘ukulele and arguably makes it more accessible to audiences outside of Hawai’i. This organization is one

⁶² Ukulele Guild of Hawai’i.

⁶³ Hawaiian Dictionaries. Ulakau.

⁶⁴ Ukulele Guild of Hawai’i. "Nov 2019 Hawaiian Ukulele Experience."

⁶⁵ Ukulele Hall of Fame Museum.

of a few which seeks to consolidate people with specialized knowledge in order to create a comprehensive social story. Dr. Walsh told me in our conversations that her research into the history of the ‘ukulele came through an interest in family history as a descendant of Manuel Nunes.⁶⁶ The Museum is a valuable resource in identifying antique instruments, where outsiders can look towards with their unique ‘ukuleles. Walsh identified the Nunes ‘ukulele in the Penn Museum as one of the earliest examples in the world, with only one known to be older than it. Projects like the work done by members of the Ukulele Hall of Fame Museum contribute to determining “missing links” of the musical lineage, and specialized knowledge of the traditions and histories of instruments are critical to preserving the materials and sounds.

Several retail outlets also specialize in vintage, antique, and historic instruments like these earliest examples of ‘ukuleles. While the largest communities of collectors and enthusiasts seem to be in Hawai’i, other stores can be found across the United States and around the world. Gruhn Guitars in Nashville, Tennessee and Vintage Instruments here in Philadelphia have been two of the world’s most renowned specialists in trading collectible and historical instruments since opening in the 1970s. Their online catalogs reveal a few examples (Figure 14) from the early 20th century, mostly from large producers like Martin and descendants of the ‘ukulele’s pioneers.⁶⁷ In Honolulu, instrument boutique Ukulele Friend is a prime example of how the first ‘ukuleles are valued by their communities of knowledge. Moreover, it appears to be one of the only sources in the world that comes across pieces built by Santo, Nunes, and Dias in the 1890s. Ukulele Friend trades in many of the world’s finest handcrafted, vintage, and custom instruments in the world. From the earliest pieces by the three Madeirans to modern displays of ornate

⁶⁶ Nuni-Lyn Walsh, email message to author, January 26th, 2023.

⁶⁷ Vintage Instruments and Gruhn Guitars.

craftsmanship, the tonal and aesthetic personality of each instrument is highlighted by specialty stores to display the life of these ‘ukuleles.⁶⁸



Figure 14. Leonardo Nunes 'ukulele circa 1920 (left) and a Martin 'ukulele circa 1916 (right)

Searching through Ukulele Friend’s catalog reveals a trove of valuable instruments, spanning the entire history of Hawaiian music. The site lists five examples of instruments made by Manuel Nunes in 1895, four ‘ukuleles and one rajao.⁶⁹ In spite of the restoration and repair work undertaken to keep these 130-year-old instruments in playing condition, they remain extraordinarily valuable collectibles and artifacts of Hawaiian history. One instrument (Figure 15) is described as the following: “A very serious collectible piece which many museums have never seen. The face, back, sides, and neck of the instrument was entirely handcrafted of Hawaiian koa wood. It’s very light and there has been some restoration work needed to be done to return this historical piece to playable order.⁷⁰” The sounds of the instruments are also detailed

⁶⁸ Ukulele Friend.

⁶⁹ Ukulele Friend.

⁷⁰ Ukulele Friend. “1895 Manuel Nunes Ukulele.”

with phrases like “remarkable projection” or “warm and well-balanced tone” to delineate the unique characteristics of each piece. One video presentation made by Ukulele Friend features Hawaiian trio NUE performing on three of these historic instruments in 2021: an 1890 Dias, an 1886 Santo, and an 1895 Nunes ‘ukulele. The three performers present these ‘ukuleles with songs and stories, relishing a unique opportunity to assemble three of the earliest instruments in the present moment. One performer took a breath from inside the soundhole and commented that it felt like “someone’s mana is still in here,” describing the spiritual experience that connects these ‘ukuleles to the spaces and people it occupies.⁷¹ While these ‘ukuleles are certainly valuable historical relics of Hawaiian culture, their value is inherently tied to their ability to be played and heard.



Figure 15. Manuel Nunes 'ukulele circa 1895.

⁷¹ Ukulele Friend, “Vintage Ukulele: 1890 Dias Ukulele, 1886 Santo Ukulele, 1895 Nunes Ukulele | music by NUE,” YouTube, 2021.

Resources like the experts who run Ukulele Friend are invaluable to projects like academic research of ‘ukuleles and Hawaiian music because they can inform a considerable amount of specialized knowledge in the field. Provenance of an instrument being sold, like in a museum, needs to be thoroughly investigated so that the story of the instrument can be accurately translated as it is exchanged. The example of the Nunes ‘ukulele in the Penn Museum shows what happens when these instruments are severed from the crucial processes of circulation among musicians and enthusiasts. Conversely, institutions like Honolulu’s Bishop Museum are excellent representations of collaborating with source communities and experts to tell the most complete musical history. Opening in July of 2020, the Bishop Museum held an exhibit which highlighted the contributions of Hawaiian music to the world’s sonic landscape, the longest-lasting being the ‘ukulele and steel guitar.⁷² Instruments native to Hawai’i, like those of King David Kalakaua or international star Israel Kamakawiwo‘ole depict the importance of a sovereign sound in Hawai’i and beyond. Instruments from foreign stars like Johnny Cash and Tiny Tim represent the widespread influence of Hawaiian music throughout the past century.⁷³ Many of the instruments on display were on loan from private collectors, signifying the importance of that community in continuing the legacy of Hawaiian music. While the sounds of ‘ukuleles can be heard across the world, they are often disembodied from the life they originate from. As a result, most of the expertise on these instruments is still native to Hawai’i, concentrating most of the activity around ‘ukuleles today.

⁷² DeSoto Brown, “Kaula Piko: The Source of Strings – The Story Behind the Exhibit,” Bishop Museum, 2020.

⁷³ Ramois Chavonne. “Bishop Museum exhibit explores Hawaii’s musical contributions to the world.” Honolulu, *HawaiiNewsNow*, 2020.



*Figure 16. Close-up of a display in the Kaula Piko exhibit*⁷⁴

The Bishop Museum’s *Kaula Piko: The Source of Strings* exhibit (Figure 16) was on display for under a year, unfortunately landing at the peak of the first COVID-19 waves in Hawai’i. However, the exhibition successfully and faithfully communicated the lineage of Hawaiian music from the early royal marching bands to present-day icons. Thus, the musical heritage of Hawai’i must be understood by piecing together objects like the ‘ukulele in the Penn Museum with displays of voice and social life of instruments. *Kaula Piko* sought to unite the groundbreaking individuals who revolutionized the music of Hawai’i – and the world – with oral and social histories of the islands. Curators at the Bishop Museum, like Dr. Sarah Kuaiwa, worked together with local musicians, collectors, and builders to ensure the fullest narrative of Hawaiian music was portrayed.⁷⁵ As a result, the earliest ‘ukuleles could be featured through

⁷⁴ Bishop Museum, “Kaula Piko: The Source of Strings,” Bishop Museum, Honolulu, 2019.

⁷⁵ Bishop Museum, “Kaula Piko.”

collaboration with organizations like the Kealakai Center for Pacific Strings. Kilin Reece, a local musician and luthier, founded the Center in a mission to research, restore, and celebrate storied Hawaiian instruments (Figure 17).⁷⁶ The groundbreaking work undertaken by the Kealakai Center suggests an active movement to promote the rich cultural legacy of music native to these islands. Going forward, it would be interesting to see how collaborations between local non-profit cultural organizations and institutions like museums might become a more permanent project.

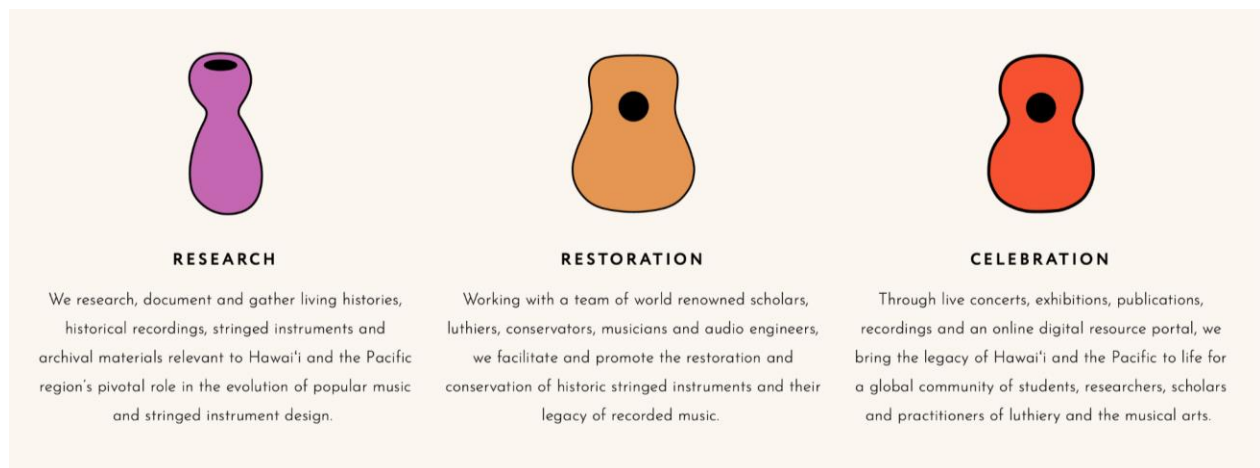


Figure 17. Mission Statement of the Kealakai Center.

⁷⁶ Kealakai Center for Pacific Strings.

‘UKULELE FUTURES: Going beyond one instrument.

As discussed in the instrument analysis, the current status of the ‘ukulele leaves much to the imagination in terms of “resurrecting” it. All the damage to the instrument is not irreversible, but difficult conversations need to be had about what should be done with this ‘ukulele and the many other instruments. The future of this instrument is not for me to determine but is something that the Penn Museum must work towards with communities who know and love the ‘ukulele. In conducting this research, I hope to shed light on an important artifact – one of many in the Penn Museum’s collection – that deserves to have a life again. Much of the storytelling of Hawaiian musical legacy speaks to the disembodiment of sound from the peoples and landscapes of the islands. There is no better metaphor for this than the ‘ukulele, one of the oldest known survivors, divorced of context and personhood. As present and future generations of Hawaiians continue to generate their own stories of musical legacy and measure their distance from the past, objects like this Nunes ‘ukulele can become important reclamations of identity through sound.

Communities of experts on the ‘ukulele can be found in Hawai’i; just as other source communities exist for the many instruments held in the Penn Museum. Consulting with these people – through organizations like the Kealakai Center for Pacific Strings, the Ukulele Hall of Fame, the Bishop Museum, or the Ukulele Hall of Fame Museum – is a vital process for the future of all stakeholders. In doing so, the Penn Museum can recognize that there are communities who know more about and can take better stewardship of these instruments. The Kealakai Center, for example, has recently received support from musical industry giants like the Fender and Martin guitar companies to construct an online resource that showcases the treasured instruments of Hawaiian legacy. There is no doubt that an instrument like this ‘ukulele would be received with eager anticipation of new opportunities to highlight musical stories of Hawai’i.

The systemic issues present throughout the history of the Penn Museum's musical instrument collection pose serious questions about its scientific value today. A guidebook titled *Ethnic Musical Instruments: Identification–Conservation* published in 1970 by the International Council of Museums details some frameworks which still inform museum practice around instruments. In the first pages, identification is introduced for curators who might deal with smaller musical instrument collections where no ethnomusicologists are on staff. Musical instruments are meant to be identified on “two quite separate levels: typologically and culturally.”⁷⁷ Typological categorization relates to organology, a process of naming and grouping types of instruments which today finds itself in a critical discourse. Cultural identification is necessarily difficult because of the considerations of people and geographic areas. The document provides a general guide on how to catalog instruments, while describing that “without such essential information the instrument has no scientific value.”⁷⁸ Questions must be answered upon its accession about the use of the instrument within its ethnic group, from function to place and from person to storage. Most of the instruments in the Penn Museum lack this type of rigorous documentation, which protocols over 50 years old deemed scientifically necessary. The lack of a complete catalog in accordance with ICOM standards (Figure 11) challenges any research purposes of keeping dead instruments in the Penn Museum.

⁷⁷ Jean L. Jenkins, *Ethnic Musical Instruments: Identification--Conservation.: Instruments De Musique Ethnique*. London: H. Evelyn for the International Council of Museums, 1970, 8.

⁷⁸ Jenkins, *Ethnic Musical Instruments*, 50.

IDENTIFICATION AND CATALOGUING

When he has acquired an instrument, the collector must attach an identification card (a model is given below), on which the following information must be completed: field inventory number, price, and reference to any photograph or sound recording. In addition, if there is time, it is desirable to complete the card before dispatching the instrument because the information on the card is essential for museum registration.

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|--------------------|----------------|----------|----------|---|-----------|--------------------|-------------|--|--|--|-------|--|---------------------------|------------------|--------------------------|------------|--------|--|-------|--|--------------------------|--|----------------------|--|-----------------|--|---|--|-----------------|-------------|----------------|
| <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 5px;"> <div style="text-align: center;">○</div> <p>Object No</p> </div> <hr style="border-top: 1px dashed black;"/> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse; text-align: center;"> <tr> <td style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Area</td> <td style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Sub-Area</td> <td style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Tribe</td> <td style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Category</td> </tr> </table> | Area | Sub-Area | Tribe | Category | <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%; border-bottom: 1px solid black;">Museum No</td> <td style="width: 50%; border-bottom: 1px solid black; text-align: right;">Field inventory No</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2" style="border-bottom: 1px solid black;">Designation</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2" style="border-bottom: 1px solid black;">Object found <input type="checkbox"/> received <input type="checkbox"/> bought <input type="checkbox"/> from</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2" style="border-bottom: 1px solid black;">Place</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="border-bottom: 1px solid black;">Date when found or bought</td> <td style="border-bottom: 1px solid black; text-align: right;">Collector's Name</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="border-bottom: 1px solid black;">Field trip or Expedition</td> <td style="border-bottom: 1px solid black; text-align: right;">Price paid</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2" style="border-bottom: 1px solid black;">Origin</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2" style="border-bottom: 1px solid black; text-align: right;">Maker</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2" style="border-bottom: 1px solid black;">Ethnic group, or Species</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2" style="border-bottom: 1px solid black;">Material & Technique</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2" style="border-bottom: 1px solid black;">Function or use</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2" style="border-bottom: 1px solid black; text-align: center;">○</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="border-bottom: 1px solid black;">Museum photo No</td> <td style="border-bottom: 1px solid black; text-align: center;">Negative No</td> <td style="border-bottom: 1px solid black; text-align: right;">Field photo No</td> </tr> </table> | Museum No | Field inventory No | Designation | | Object found <input type="checkbox"/> received <input type="checkbox"/> bought <input type="checkbox"/> from | | Place | | Date when found or bought | Collector's Name | Field trip or Expedition | Price paid | Origin | | Maker | | Ethnic group, or Species | | Material & Technique | | Function or use | | ○ | | Museum photo No | Negative No | Field photo No |
| Area | Sub-Area | Tribe | Category | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
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| Designation | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
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| Date when found or bought | Collector's Name | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Field trip or Expedition | Price paid | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Origin | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Maker | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
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| |
|-------------------------------------|
| Description and Condition of object |
| |
| |
| |
| Measurements |
| |
| |
| Remarks |
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| Collection file No |

Figure 18. Identification and Cataloguing form found in *Ethnic Musical Instruments*.

If the Penn Museum can't keep up with practices from the 1970s, there needs to be serious investigations into what practices it can maintain. The conversation needs to begin by taking a full account of the collection and recognizing that the scope is beyond what the Museum can handle. After this, source communities should be invited to control what is done with their cultural heritage. From looking closely at the collections database, there are still 4,054 musical instruments held in the Penn Museum. Coming up with this figure involved going beyond looking up “musical instrument” in the online search, which only came up with 140 items. The instruments have since been divided among the sections of the Museum, as shown in Table 1:

| | |
|----------------------------|------|
| Africa | 813 |
| American | 1362 |
| Asian | 745 |
| Education (not curatorial) | 95 |
| Egyptian | 44 |
| European | 1 |
| Historic | 266 |
| Near Eastern | 209 |
| Oceanian | 451 |

The Penn Museum's collection of musical instruments, once purported to have rivaled the Smithsonian's, is undoubtedly a large collection. For there to not even be one ethnomusicologist on staff to maintain these instruments is a detriment to the life of these objects and the communities they represent.

Records indicate that much of the collection has moved around since its early days with Frishmuth's donations. Only 954 instruments are recorded as being gifts of Mrs. Frishmuth, a figure much smaller than the correspondence of that era would suggest. Much of what happened (or happens) with the musical instrument collection is a mystery because so little of it is accessible or on display. Since the collection has been a part of the Penn Museum, there are 281 instruments known to have been deaccessioned by various means (sold, given away, traded, or discarded), of which 193 were donated by Sarah Frishmuth. Two of these instruments have been repatriated to Tlingit communities in the Northwest Coast: a rattle and a drum (accession lot 1925-13) from indigenous Alaskan anthropologist Louis Situauka Shotridge. Repatriation is not an unattainable future for most of these instruments, given the precedents already established and the dire situations for much of the collection.

As the Penn Museum considers new opportunities for repatriation beyond legal frameworks like NAGPRA, musical instruments deserve to be part of the conversation we invite source communities to have. In this way, power can be distributed towards the ones previously being studied to do their own research and produce culture with their own materials. Additionally, curation within spaces like the Penn Museum should look towards examples like that of the Bishop Museum to create exhibits that focus on the life of musical instruments. Curation practices detailed in industry standards like ICOM's *Ethnic Musical Instruments* are not rigid enough as to bar restoration but create space for repair such that instruments can be heard. Musical repatriation doesn't have to look like all the instruments being returned to their respective communities but can involve restoration or other aspects that prioritize musical life. However, these decisions need to factor in the accessibility of objects to source communities and their agency in the process of repatriation. Keeping instruments under-researched and nearly

forgotten reflects that a resource as large as the Penn Museum's collection is a perpetuation of colonial legacy. As a result of nearly a century of neglect, many historic and valuable instruments require significant work (like this research project) to reattribute personhood or else they become broken links in the musical lineage of the world.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

This research seeks to connect personhood back to cultural materials like musical instruments by showing that they exist as ongoing, fluid, depictions of heritage. Musical instruments carry a unique element in that they each have distinct voices that tell different stories of human culture and society. Removing objects from communities of knowledge and de-accessing them – or destroying them – propels the systems of inequality which overturned the Global South in favor of imperialist looting. Thus, it is no stretch of the imagination to consider the discourse of musical repatriation in strong parallel with decolonial work. By muzzling the voice of musical objects like the Manuel Nunes ‘ukulele in the Penn Museum, the world is stripped of an important link to the continued performance of culture.

From looking at archival records of institutions like the Penn Museum, I was able to trace a number of systemic issues detrimental to the condition of musical instruments past, present, and future. The over-accession of instruments spurred by collectors like Sarah Frishmuth created unwieldy amassments of objects with no consideration for how they might be maintained or displayed. From the early 20th century onwards, biased ideas of the primitive “other” influenced displays of the collections. While the Penn Museum held their “Four Thousand Years of Music” exhibition for a successful 8 years, it represented a small fraction – just 274 pieces – of the overall collection. Principles of cultural Darwinism seeped into projections like this one as well as performances in the Penn Museum, creating a difficult depiction of nonwhite music as primitive. As a result of what had already been decades of neglect, the collection was in an intensely poor condition when the first curation of musical instruments began in the late 1960s. Agi Jambor’s desperate attempts to fundraise failed not because of a lack of energy, but because of total frustration with the systems involved in getting more support. Barriers like a lack of

cataloging, poor maintenance, over-collection, and failure to tend to unique needs of musical instruments created a perfect storm of overall failure.

The collection, which was once purported to rival the Smithsonian Institution's, has been reduced to a hoard of mostly broken, lifeless instruments. Because so few museums – especially encyclopedic, ethnographic ones – boast instrument collections as large as the Penn Museum's, difficult comparisons must be made when considering spaces like musical instrument museums. The challenges of these different spaces create different priorities about how to document and present instruments, but it can be suggested that these museums can learn from each other. While most museums would not offer guests an opportunity to open display cases and play their instruments, many curate with an understanding of how music should be communicated differently to other aspects of culture.⁷⁹ Many institutions offer audiences a chance to hear the instruments on display, whether through interactive displays with sound recordings or other means. This is a strong step in the right direction to begin returning a voice to musical instruments in storage. Newer practices go beyond the rigid lines of conservation practice and prioritize keeping instruments playable and accessible for musicians that can perform with them. Examples of this can be found everywhere from private collectors to large cultural institutions, who recognize the importance of keeping instruments alive at any cost.

Jim Irsay, owner of the NFL's Indianapolis Colts, has made a point of collecting and preserving some of rock's most historic instruments. Guitars previously owned by Prince, Jerry Garcia, David Gilmour, Bob Dylan, George Harrison, etc. demonstrate the importance of musical instruments in our cultural landscape. Irsay's stewardship of these guitars has overseen loans to new generations of performers that commend, continue, and challenge these musical

⁷⁹ Sophia Alexandria Hall, "The most spectacular musical instrument museums you can visit across the world," ClassicFM, 2021.

legacies.⁸⁰ The instruments— many of which are valued from the high six-figures upwards of millions of dollars – go beyond a display of wealth and show an appreciation of their life. A piece written for Guitar.com in 2021 describes how Irsay is “keen to get the guitars in his collection into the hands of musicians.” In contrast to collectors in history like Sarah Frishmuth, Irsay’s commitment to playability and display shows an appreciation for the continued life of musical instruments. Whereas Frishmuth hoarded precious instruments and let institutions like the Penn Museum figure out what to do with them, better collections practice should focus on maintaining musical relics for future generations. In this way, the disintegration of a barrier between public and private collections can be reorganized around making sure these instruments are playable. While these iconic cultural relics are extraordinarily valuable, collectors like Irsay demonstrate an understanding of the personhood and voice of instruments over the material value of such instruments.

National institutions like the Smithsonian and Library of Congress have followed a similar pattern of opening collections to musicians, with focus in recent years to showcasing extraordinary instruments. Performances by the Smithsonian Chamber Music Society occasionally take advantage of instruments considered to be the pinnacle of Western classical construction. A concert in 2016 of Mendelssohn’s Octet featured four instruments built by Antonio Stradivari and four by his teacher, Nicolo Amati.⁸¹ Again, these historic instruments are used despite their remarkable monetary value so that musicality remains at the forefront. The implications of instrument wear – like small marks from accidental bumps into a music stand – are understood by curators who loan them out for over a dozen concerts each year. Other

⁸⁰ Chris Vinnicombe, “The greatest guitar collection on Earth,” Guitar.com, 2021.

⁸¹ Sadie Dingfelder, “The Smithsonian’s fine instruments are for playing, not for looking at,” *Washington Post*, 2016.

institutions use these performances as opportunities to make instruments' voices heard for the first time. In September of last year, the Library of Congress invited American singer and rapper Lizzo – also a classically trained flutist – to play a 200-year-old crystal flute owned by President James Madison. During her show in Washington, D.C.'s Capital One Arena, Lizzo brought out the flute and declared that she was the first and only person to play it.⁸² The Library of Congress' flute collection counts more than 1,800 pieces, making it the largest one of its kind in the world. There is much to discuss about this reclamation of a founding father's artifact as a symbol of Black female empowerment, but it also has created opportunity for more of this sort of work to happen. These few examples are just a small representation of how musical instrument collections can be reoriented to face musicians and prioritize performance. Nonetheless, it is important to keep these public examples of access in mind as conversations of musical repatriation bring source communities towards their own stewardship.

While the 'ukulele is not an instrument entirely indigenous to the islands of Hawai'i, the processes of colonial encounters underpin the translation of it from Portugal to Hawai'i and from Hawai'i to the rest of the world. We have seen the type of institutional harm done by imperial collection practices which amass great deals of goods but underrepresent these nonwhite communities. As a result, unique and valuable pieces of the global cultural heritage have been de-accessed. The results of this work determine that musical instruments are indeed significant cultural objects with lives of their own, which demand specific and necessary care to ensure they continue to produce culture. As a result, blanket practices in ethnographic collections which apply conservation theories broadly need to be retooled for cultural needs of materials.

⁸² Rachel Treisman, "Lizzo played James Madison's crystal flute onstage in D.C., proving history rocks," *NPR*, 2022.

Ultimately, this project concludes that de-accessing important cultural products like musical instruments perpetuates the legacy of colonialism and severs the essential lasting process of circulation. In disrupting the player-to-player, teacher-to-student, performer-to-observer flow, the instrument becomes socially dead in and beyond its communities. The archival components of this project linked amassments of musical instruments in museums to periods of over-collection as a result of power imbalances. As a result, institutions like the Penn Museum are faced with questions of how to deal with these legacies. Musical instruments remain in better condition when they are being played and maintained, and new standards for redistributing power towards source communities need to account for unique qualities of these objects.

The story of the ‘ukulele did not end when the Nunes instrument entered the Penn Museum in 1905, nor did it end with one its most recognizable performers, Tiny Tim’s, death in 1996. In Hawai’i and beyond, the ‘ukulele is a living, breathing figure of musical joy when it is connected to musicians and listeners. With cases like the Kealakai Center for Pacific Strings, the internet and its access to online databases has been a boon for expanding the reach of Hawaiian stories of their own music. The formation of digital communities has allowed ‘ukulele enthusiasts to share knowledge and innovation around the instrument. Historian Jim Tranquada attributes much of the growth of this so-called “third wave” of ‘ukulele fever to online collaborations which can lead to connections in the physical space.⁸³ Other innovations like the Kanikapila Project incorporate the rich and resilient legacy of Hawaiian music with programs of music therapy, utilizing tools like the ‘ukulele to address physical and emotional challenges.⁸⁴ The nonprofit has developed ‘ukulele-based initiatives which increase access to music and music

⁸³ Ukulele Hunt, “Jim Tranquada Interview.”

⁸⁴ Kanikapila Project.

therapy. As part of its programming, events like fundraising for local medical centers are supported by contributions from musical communities surrounding the 'ukulele. Generosity from acclaimed performers like the legendary Kimo Hussey and virtuoso Jake Shimabukuro continue to keep the instrument alive and push it towards new frontiers in spreading musical *aloha*, Hawaiian love and fellowship. Imagine what possibilities lay in store if this 'ukulele in the Penn Museum was returned to the hands of its proper caretakers and performers; how many generations of Hawaiian past, present, and future could be represented?

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