

## Biography

**We're in the midst of a revolution, albeit a small one.** The ukulele, embraced by mainstream media from Oprah to American Idol, has returned from pop culture exile and become a tonic for modern malaise the world over. It's a beautiful thing.

But what now? What now for someone like James Hill who, since the release of *Playing it like it isn't...* in 2002, has made it his mission to convince skeptics of the beauty, versatility and appeal of this chronically underestimated instrument?

For starters, *True Love Don't Weep*, his first full-length collaboration with cellist Anne Davison, abandons the "bet-you-didn't-think-I-could-do-that" subtext of his earlier work to follow a muse that seems unfettered by supply and demand and uninterested in ukulele evangelicalism. Cello, banjo, bouzouki, fiddle, voices, winds, brass, bells and music boxes entwine with ukuleles of all shapes and sizes through twelve tracks that resonate with folk, old-time, gospel and blues influences. *True Love Don't Weep* isn't a campaign for the ukulele, just an offering of beautiful, sweetly sorrowful music. From the heart-rending *Ev'ry Night* to the cathartic *Obedience Blues* to the slightly demented *Duke's Alley Rag*, the duo – assisted by a handful of talented friends – weaves a broad tapestry of vivid colour and emotion.

Fret-burning, uptempo cuts like *Ode to a Frozen Boot*, *Richard's Reel*, and *One More Lie to Love* show why *Canadian Folk Music* calls James "truly amazing... a serious virtuoso upon the instrument." But it's the meditative introduction to *Sakura*, *Sakura*, the sweet vocal harmonies of *Because*, and the haunting chorus of *Oh! Susanna* that explain the three-year gap between *True Love Don't Weep* and James' "tour de force" third album *A Flying Leap*. After all, it takes time to dig deeper and *True Love Don't Weep* certainly comes from a deeper – often darker – place.

So how does a kid from Canada become what the *Honolulu Star-Bulletin* calls a "rare peer" of Hawaii's premier ukulele players? Nearly three thousand miles east of Honolulu is James' hometown of Langley, British Columbia, where ukulele instruction has been mandatory in many schools since the late 1970s and where James was introduced to the ukulele at the age of nine. To his fourth grade classmates, the ukulele was a means to an end, a way for them to dip their toes into the vast ocean of music. For James, the uke was a sea of possibilities unto itself and inside its tiny wooden shell he saw his life in music. He was hooked.

During his teenage years he honed his skills as a key member of the renowned Langley Ukulele Ensemble under the direction of Peter Luongo. In a full-circle plot twist, James – also a passionate teacher – recently co-authored the *Ukulele in the Classroom* method book series with J. Chalmers Doane, the trail-blazing teacher who pioneered the use of ukuleles in Canadian schools.

These days, James' music is heard frequently on CBC and NPR National radio. He has made TV appearances on *The Tony Danza Show*, *MTV*, *Urban Rush* and *Studio 4 with Fanny Keifer*, and has shared billing with Jerry Douglas, Robert Cray, Lyle Lovett and countless others.

Since turning heads with his early recordings, concerts tours throughout North America, Europe and Asia have broadened James' musical tastes and horizons. And while the sense of budding world-weariness that pervades *True Love Don't Weep* might seem contrary to the ukulele's reputation as a pocket-sized ray of sunshine, the album – a snapshot of two artists coming into their own – radiates a deep caring for music and a certain faith in the ukulele as a four-stringed life-raft for uncertain times.

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