

Four Strings on a Grand Stage: Nelson Burdette Bailey, Sherman, Clay & Co., and the Making of the Mainland Ukulele Market

Andreas Fischer

Andreas Fischer
Brahmsstraße 18
D-41564 Kaarst
Germany

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Abstract

This article presents a condensed version of the principal findings and interpretive argument developed in *Four Strings on a Grand Stage*. It examines Nelson Burdette Bailey as a teacher-author working within the commercial orbit of Sherman, Clay & Co. during the formative years of the mainland American ukulele market. The evidence places Bailey at the intersection of Hawaiian performance, West Coast music retailing, printed self-instruction, and the conversion of public interest into repeatable amateur practice. Particular attention is given to Bailey's 1914 self-instruction method, his documented collaboration with Keoki E. Awai, the 1916 expansion into related Hawaiian-instrument publications, and contemporary trade claims concerning the method's exceptional circulation. The article distinguishes documented evidence from grounded inference: the commercial reach claimed for Bailey's method is strongly documented in contemporary trade sources, whereas a deliberate Sherman, Clay strategy to recruit Bailey specifically for an exposition-centered campaign remains unproven. Bailey is therefore interpreted not as the originator of Hawaiian ukulele practice, but as a consequential mediator who helped convert performance culture into scalable mainland pedagogy.

Keywords: Nelson Burdette Bailey; ukulele; Sherman, Clay & Co.; self-instruction; Hawaiian music; Keoki E. Awai; Panama-Pacific International Exposition; music education; music trade

1. Introduction: From Performance to Pedagogy

The guiding image of this book is simple, but historically dense: a photographed Hawaiian ensemble on a public stage, a crowd-facing performance culture at the 1915 exposition, and, soon after, printed methods and repertory booklets sold for everyday use. The phrase 'one photograph, one stage, one instructional booklet' is not meant as a slogan detached from evidence. It is a compact way of describing the chain through which the ukulele became legible to mainland consumers: seen, heard, remembered, purchased, and practiced.

That chain helps explain why Bailey cannot be studied as an isolated technician. A successful fad does not become a pedagogical tradition by enthusiasm alone. Somebody has to convert public excitement into sequence, notation, graded exercises, affordable print, and dealer confidence. This study argues that Bailey's

1914 method performed an important part of that work. But it could do so effectively only within a larger scene already energized by Hawaiian performance, especially by figures such as George E. K. Awai and ensembles such as the Royal Hawaiian Quartette.

The subtitle phrase 'the early Americanization of the ukulele' is used carefully. It does not mean that the instrument ceased to be Hawaiian, nor that mainland teachers replaced Hawaiian musicians as the source of meaning. It names a historical transformation in format, distribution, and pedagogy. What had been encountered as live Hawaiian performance in expositions, theaters, and touring circuits was reformatted on the mainland into lessons, solos, songbooks, mail-order promises, and store-based instruction.

Seen in that light, Bailey is more than an isolated biography and Awai is more than a contextual ornament. Together they expose a transfer system. Hawaiian performance supplied prestige, repertory, and the aura of authenticity. Mainland publishers and teachers supplied sequence, duplication, retail reach, and domestic usability. The early mainland career of the ukulele took shape in the tension between those forms.

This book therefore argues for a change of scale. Bailey does not need to be romanticized into a hidden genius. He is more instructive as a working teacher-author-editor whose career lets us watch the making of an American musical market. Once that change of scale is made, the scattered evidence begins to align into a coherent professional picture.

This study relies on a layered evidentiary approach. The most secure documents are official or quasi-official records: copyright entries, patent indexes, city directories, and family-history records that can be triangulated with other sources. Slightly less secure, but still indispensable, are bibliographic records, music-trade advertisements, publisher notices, surviving copies of printed methods, and the corporate context of Sherman, Clay & Co. in which Bailey's publications can be read. The narrative uses all of these levels, but it does not treat them as interchangeable.

The book also uses three terms in a disciplined way. "Documented" means that an identifiable primary or bibliographic record states something directly. "Grounded inference" means that a conclusion is not explicitly stated in one source but follows cautiously from several converging sources. "Unresolved" means that a tempting claim cannot currently be secured and is therefore left open. The central Sherman-Clay-Bailey argument of this edition is presented explicitly as a grounded inference rather than as a documented corporate memorandum.

2. Sherman, Clay & Co. and the West Coast Music Trade

A retail empire with a publishing arm

Sherman, Clay & Co. was more than a storefront. It was one of the major West Coast music houses, combining instrument retail, printed music, lesson materials, and brand visibility. That institutional setting matters enormously for Bailey. A successful beginner method rarely emerges in isolation. It is most effective when backed by a retailer that can stock instruments, place advertisements, print instructional matter, circulate catalogs, and align pedagogy with sales. It was exactly the kind of music house that could use a teacher strategically rather than incidentally.

Bailey's extant method bears the Sherman, Clay imprint, a 1917 San Francisco directory places "Bailey Nelson B" with Sherman, Clay & Co., and the company's later trade advertising continued to use the Bailey name as a selling point. These traces support a grounded inference: Bailey was not merely an outside freelancer whose work happened to be printed by the firm. He appears to have been sufficiently inside the company's orbit for his name, his pedagogy, and the firm's commercial strategy to reinforce one another.

The self-instructor as retail technology

The self-instructor is not just a text. It is a retail technology. Its job is to lower the barrier to purchase. A customer can buy an instrument with less fear if a method promises orderly progress, familiar notation, and quick usability at home. The pedagogy of reassurance - no prior knowledge needed, gradual sequence, simple language - is also the rhetoric of market expansion. Bailey's surviving 1914 booklet says exactly that: it is prepared especially for self-study, requires no prior musical knowledge, and proceeds in a consistently progressive manner while remaining useful for teachers.

That last point is crucial. Sherman, Clay did not need to choose between the home learner and the studio teacher. A well-designed method could serve both. It could sell to the hesitant amateur while also providing a practical course outline for teachers who wanted ready-made materials. In that sense Bailey's booklet helped standardize a teaching market as much as it addressed individual learners.

San Francisco after 1906 and before Jazz Age saturation

San Francisco in the 1910s was an ideal city for such hybrid musical commerce. Rebuilding after 1906 did not erase the city's cosmopolitan ambitions; it intensified them. The Panama-Pacific International Exposition of 1915 staged San Francisco's return to world-city status, while tourism, shipping, migration, and the leisure economy gave music houses several publics at once. Hawaiian music, especially when linked to spectacle and exoticism, fit this environment extremely well. Sherman, Clay, as a San Francisco music house, was positioned to profit from precisely this setting. The chronology makes a strategic relationship plausible, but the surviving sources do not yet document a corporate decision to recruit Bailey specifically for the exposition or to make his method part of a formal PPIE campaign.

3. Awai, the PPIE, and the Exposition-Era Market

Document marker

John King describes the Royal Hawaiian Quartette as the house band of the Hawaiian building at the 1915 exposition.

This is the performance environment that later gives special weight to Awai's presence in Bailey's 1916 print record.

The Panama-Pacific International Exposition as amplifier

The Panama-Pacific International Exposition of 1915 did not invent mainland fascination with Hawaiian music, but it amplified it dramatically. Scholarly work on the early ukulele and steel guitar consistently identifies the exposition as a crucial moment when visitors encountered Hawaiian instruments, songs, costume, and staged ambience in concentrated form. The Hawaiian building drew large crowds, and the music performed there connected tourism, fantasy, commerce, and repeated live exposure.

For Bailey's story, the exposition matters because it greatly enlarged mainland exposure to Hawaiian music and formed part of the market environment in which his printed materials circulated. Exposition performance and self-instruction literature were not the same thing, but they were consecutive stages in the same cultural economy. Visitors who had heard or seen Hawaiian music in a spectacular setting became potential customers for the method book, the arranged solo, or the song collection that promised to domesticate that sound. In that sense the exposition was not just a backdrop; it was a major market stimulus from which West Coast music firms, including Sherman, Clay, were positioned to benefit.

Keoki E. Awai and the Royal Hawaiian Quartette

Keoki E. Awai stands at the center of that transfer. Scholarly and heritage sources identify George E. K. or Keoki E. Awai as leader of the Royal Hawaiian Quartette at the exposition, and period captions associated

with surviving photographs identify the ensemble's personnel as Awai with Ben Zablan, Bill Kaina, and Henry Komomua. John King's work describes the Royal Hawaiian Quartette as the house band in the Hawaiian building, playing for visitors and accompanying hula dances. Even if not every identification can be corroborated with equal strength, the central fact is secure: Awai was a key performer at the exposition and a figure of Hawaiian musical authority in San Francisco's performance economy.

That matters because Bailey and Awai later meet on the page. When *The Ukulele as a Solo Instrument* appears in bibliographic records in 1916 under both names, the collaboration links a mainland pedagogue and a Hawaiian performer at the precise moment when Hawaiian music was being reformatted for broad amateur consumption.

From performance authority to print authority

4. Bailey's 1914 Method and the Grammar of Self-Instruction

Primary-source signal

The 1914 booklet explicitly presents itself as prepared especially for self-study.

It also claims that no prior knowledge of music is necessary and that the work is ideal for teacher's use.

What the surviving booklet says

The surviving 1914 booklet, *A Practical Method for Self Instruction on the Ukulele*, gives us Bailey's pedagogical voice in unusually clear form. The title page names N. B. Bailey, bears the Sherman, Clay imprint, and is followed by a copyright notice dated 1914. The introductory matter states that the method was prepared especially for self-study, that no prior knowledge of music is necessary, and that the entire work is arranged in a consistently progressive manner. The same introduction adds that the book is ideal for teacher's use. Few statements could summarize the dual commercial-pedagogical logic more neatly.

The booklet's survival matters for another reason. It anchors the Bailey story in the object itself rather than in later retellings. Too often early instrument history relies on secondary repetition. Here we can still see the product as sold: its format, its claim to usability, its explicit confidence in progressive sequencing, and its association with a major West Coast retailer.

Progressive order and market inclusiveness

Bailey's method belongs to a generation of practical tutors that promised not abstract musicianship but guided entrance into an instrument. The structure is progressive in the classic sense: begin with the instrument as object, establish tuning and basic handling, introduce a limited set of chord or finger positions, move to simple rhythmic and melodic exercises, and then provide increasingly gratifying pieces. This structure mattered pedagogically because it managed frustration, and it mattered commercially because it increased the odds that a buyer would feel early success.

At the same time, the method does not reject notation. Instead it mediates between readers with some prior musical literacy and genuine beginners who need staged access. That is one reason Bailey's book could serve both self-learners and teachers. It could be read alone at home, but it also offered a ready-made sequence for lesson use.

Ukulele, banjo-ukulele, and title variation

5. The 1916 Expansion: Solos, Songs, and Steel Guitar

Beyond the first self-instructor

By 1916 Bailey's name had moved well beyond a single beginner booklet. The Catalog of Copyright Entries records *The Peterson System of Playing the Guitar with Steel in the Hawaiian Manner*, designed for self-study, issued by Sherman, Clay in San Francisco. That title is important for several reasons. It shows Bailey working not only in ukulele pedagogy but also in the rapidly expanding steel-guitar field; it shows the self-study model being applied again; and it places Bailey inside a larger Hawaiian-instrument boom rather than in a narrowly ukulele-only lane.

The steel-guitar title also helps explain Bailey's wider significance. He was not simply teaching one novelty instrument. He was participating in the packaging of a broader Hawaiian sound world for mainland consumers. That is an editorial and pedagogical role, not just a teaching one.

The Ukulele as a Solo Instrument

WorldCat records *The Ukulele as a Solo Instrument: A Collection of Ukulele Solos, with Full Instructions for Playing as a 1916 Sherman publication* under the names of N. B. Bailey and Keoki E. Awai. This record is one of the most important pieces of evidence in Bailey's career. It confirms direct collaboration, places Bailey in repertory production rather than method alone, and suggests a move up the difficulty ladder: from the first self-instructor to material aimed at a more ambitious player who wanted solos rather than merely chordal accompaniment.

The title itself is telling. To present the ukulele "as a solo instrument" is to argue for musical dignity and sufficiency. The instrument is no longer only a novelty accompaniment device or a travel-sized curiosity. It becomes capable of featured performance through arranged repertory, and Bailey's publishing world claims the authority to teach that upgrade.

Songs from Aloha Land and the printed Hawaiian imaginary

Trade listings and later bibliographic notices also place Bailey within *Songs from Aloha Land*, a 1916 Sherman, Clay collection of Hawaiian songs with ukulele accompaniment. Here the pedagogical horizon broadens again. The buyer is not only learning the instrument but entering a repertory world - one built around Hawaiian-themed songs, arranged accompaniment, and the commercial pleasure of performing cultural atmosphere at home.

6. Collaboration, Mediation, and Attribution

Collaboration without false purity

The Bailey-Awai collaboration should not be treated as a courtroom in which one man must be assigned all substance and the other all packaging. Early twentieth-century music publishing often distributed labor across performance knowledge, arranging skill, pedagogical adaptation, and commercial formatting. A Hawaiian performer such as Awai brought repertorial authority, performance credibility, and cultural specificity. A mainland teacher-editor such as Bailey brought lesson design, notation practice, serial organization, and knowledge of what amateur buyers could use.

That is not an equal or innocent division. Mainland print markets often extracted value from Hawaiian music while controlling the formats in which it was sold. Yet the answer is not to erase Bailey from the story. It is to describe more precisely what kind of work he was doing and what kind of asymmetry the collaboration may have contained.

Bailey as mediator rather than origin myth

The concept of mediation is useful here. Bailey does not need to be imagined as the originator of Hawaiian musical content in order to be historically important. His significance lies in conversion: from performance to page, from local expertise to purchasable routine, from cultural encounter to domestic reproducibility. That kind of mediation is historically powerful precisely because it hides itself. Once the method or songbook exists, later users may remember the instrument and the songs while forgetting the mediating labor that rendered them teachable.

Bailey's career illuminates that hidden labor. His name appears where pedagogy, arrangement, and packaging intersect. The collaboration with Awai makes that intersection visible because it places a clearly Hawaiian performer beside a clearly mainland pedagogue.

Credit, race, and commercial modernity

Any modern discussion of Bailey and Awai must also acknowledge the racialized commercial setting of the Hawaiian vogue. Hawaiian music was promoted to mainland audiences through a mixture of admiration, exoticism, simplification, and fantasy. Publishers wanted authenticity but also accessibility. They wanted names that signaled Hawaiian authority, yet they also wanted materials that fit standardized American print habits. In such a system collaboration could be both enabling and unequal.

7. Reception and Sales: From 100,000 to 'Nearly Two Million'

Trade-source signal

A 1916 trade notice reported more than 100,000 copies of the Ukulele Method sold.¹

By 1925 the Bailey ukulele books and the steel-guitar series were still being advertised as active sellers.

More than a local booklet

Trade evidence makes clear that Bailey's method was not a marginal local issue. A 1916 trade notice reported that over 100,000 copies had already been sold in the United States. In 1925 Sherman, Clay trade advertising described the Bailey Ukulele Method as having sold “nearly two million” copies. These figures originated in contemporary trade reporting and publisher advertising, not in independently audited sales ledgers, and should therefore be cited as historical sales claims rather than exact modern statistics. Even with that qualification, the documented progression from more than 100,000 in 1916 to nearly two million claimed in 1925 is striking.

What matters here is not only raw sales but cultural saturation. A method that sells in large numbers becomes part of the instrument's social memory. It shapes fingering habits, repertorial expectations, what beginners think counts as normal progress, and what dealers recommend when someone asks how to start.

Canon formation through commerce

Canons are often imagined as the result of elite judgment. In the case of early ukulele pedagogy, commerce was equally important. A title becomes canonical because it is printed repeatedly, stocked, recommended, bundled, reissued, and quoted in later discourse. Bailey's method appears to have done all of those things. Trade journals in 1925 still described Bailey ukulele books as in very good demand and noted that the steel-guitar series was widely used. That continued visibility suggests that Bailey was not merely an early starter who was later eclipsed. Under the thesis advanced here, precisely this durability formed part of Sherman, Clay's competitive advantage.

Scholarly work on early mainland methods places Bailey alongside Will D. Moyer as one of the authors of the two most popular early methods. That comparison is useful because it shows Bailey not as an isolated curiosity but as one of the central names in the first mainstream pedagogical wave.

Reading big numbers with discipline

8. Beyond the Ukulele: Professional Adaptation and Material Thinking

The 1923 and 1925 traces

One of the most revealing turns in Bailey's documentary trail occurs after the main burst of ukulele publishing. A 1923 San Francisco directory lists "Bailey Nelson B, Saxophone and Cornet Studio 368 7th Av." In 1925 *Pacific Coast Music Review* printed an advertisement headed "N. B. Bailey, Teacher of Saxophone and Cornet," at the same Seventh Avenue address. These are not stray accidents. Together they show a teacher who had not vanished after the ukulele boom but had repositioned himself inside another instrumental market.²

This matters because it changes the shape of Bailey's career. He was not just a man who happened to write one successful ukulele method and then disappeared into silence. He appears instead as a practical urban instructor capable of shifting with demand, possibly teaching whatever the local market would support while carrying his arranging and pedagogical experience with him.

From plucked strings to wind pedagogy

The move from ukulele and steel guitar toward cornet and saxophone should not be read as a contradiction. Early twentieth-century practical musicians often crossed instrumental lines more freely than later specialist narratives allow. What unified such careers was not a singular instrument identity but a broader competence in arranging, basic theory, lesson organization, and applied teaching.

A later scholarly note also attributes to Bailey a 1926 saxophone-related publication, *The Saxophone in the Orchestra* (The Orchestral Saxophonist), again under the Sherman, Clay imprint. Even if surviving copies of that work are not yet at hand here, the citation fits the broader pattern established by the 1923 and 1925 evidence. Bailey's center of gravity appears to have shifted, but the mode of work - practical pedagogy for marketable instruments - remained consistent.

Two confirmed Bailey patents

Patent indexes provide a new angle on Bailey because they document him not as author or teacher but as inventor. The 1928 Index of Patents Issued from the United States Patent Office lists "Bailey, Nelson B., San Francisco, Calif. Hanger. 1,660,710; Feb. 28." The 1929 index lists "Bailey, Nelson B., San Francisco, Calif. Musical-instrument mouthpiece. 1,705,601; Mar. 19." These two entries are secure and extremely important. They show Bailey operating in the world of practical device design, and they connect especially well with his documented turn toward saxophone and cornet teaching.³

The mouthpiece patent is the clearer musical clue because the title explicitly names a musical instrument. The hanger patent is terser. Its brief title does not, by itself, prove whether the device was intended specifically for instruments or for a more general application. Yet in the context of Bailey's late-1920s wind-

instrument work, the patent still suggests a professional mind attentive to physical handling, storage, and ergonomic use.

At least three patents in the book's evidentiary horizon

Because the user for this edition explicitly requested that the book take at least three patents into account, this chapter widens its frame beyond Bailey's two securely attributable patents. Two contextual instrument patents help clarify the organological world in which Bailey worked. Rocco Antonio Carlucci's 1922 banjo-ukulele patent addresses the mechanics of a hybrid instrument that occupied the same pedagogical marketplace later targeted by variant Bailey method titles. A 1928 patent for a combination hanger and rest for saxophones shows that the practical problems of storage, drainage, protection, and stage handling were live concerns in the very wind-instrument environment in which Bailey was teaching.

The reason to include these contextual patents is not to attribute them falsely to Bailey. It is to show that Bailey's patents did not emerge in a vacuum. They belong to a period in which instrumental markets were intensely material: heads, resonators, necks, mouthpieces, hangers, rests, and portability aids all mattered because instruments were commodities in constant amateur and professional use.

9. Discussion: A Scalable Learning Format

From stage to everyday method

The story reconstructed in this book begins on a public stage and survives in print. Hawaiian music gained powerful mainland visibility through performance, above all at the Panama-Pacific International Exposition and in the mediated memory of ensembles such as Awai's Royal Hawaiian Quartette. But visibility alone does not create durable pedagogy. The bridge from public wonder to everyday use had to be built through booklets, store systems, repertory choices, and repeatable lessons.

The interpretive thesis of this revised edition is that Bailey's work became an important part of the bridge by which Sherman, Clay & Co. could convert ukulele interest into instruction, repertory, and sales. The sources securely establish Bailey's publications, his association with the firm, and the exceptional sales reach claimed for his method; they do not yet establish a documented corporate decision to recruit him specifically for that strategic purpose. His 1914 method turned fascination into sequence. His 1916 publications expanded the field from elementary study to solo repertory, Hawaiian song collections, and steel-guitar self-instruction. His collaboration with Awai linked mainland publishing to Hawaiian performance authority. The commercial sequence is nevertheless visible: exposition-era curiosity coincided with expanding instruction and repertory, while contemporary trade sources document very large sales claims for the Bailey method. A direct causal chain from PPIE planning to Bailey's employment, however, remains an interpretation rather than a documented fact.

Bailey's historical scale

Bailey should therefore be remembered at the scale the evidence supports. He was neither the sole maker of the mainland ukulele boom nor a negligible name on a forgotten booklet. He was a consequential mediator in the early Americanization of the ukulele: a teacher-author-editor working within a strong commercial institution whose publications gave Sherman, Clay a powerful pedagogical vehicle for the mainland market. Whether he was deliberately recruited as the specialist through whom the firm intended to secure that market remains an open research question.

Recovering Bailey also helps rebalance ukulele history itself. It reminds us that the instrument's mainland history is not only about origin stories, star performers, or later revival cultures. It is also about publishers, store systems, working teachers, serial methods, and the humble print forms by which beginners were taught

to imagine themselves as players. Seen this way, Sherman, Clay becomes visible not only as a retailer but as an active producer of pedagogy.

10. Conclusion

What remains to be done

This expanded edition does not close the archive. It opens it. Future work could locate more surviving copies, establish fuller edition histories, recover Bailey's saxophone publications in detail, identify the full text and drawings of the confirmed patents, and above all clarify the concrete business relationship between Bailey, Awai, and Sherman, Clay. For the hiring thesis advanced here, a direct corporate trace would be especially valuable.

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4N. B. Bailey, A Practical Method for Self Instruction on the Ukulele (San Francisco: Sherman, Clay & Co., 1914).

5John King and Jim Tranquada, The 'Ukulele: A History (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2012); see also the exposition-related sources discussed in Four Strings on a Grand Stage.

6WorldCat, bibliographic record for N. B. Bailey and Keoki E. Awai, The Ukulele as a Solo Instrument: A Collection of Ukulele Solos, with Full Instructions for Playing (San Francisco: Sherman, Clay & Co.).

7Bailey, A Practical Method for Self Instruction on the Ukulele, introductory matter.

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8U.S. Copyright Office, Catalog of Copyright Entries, Musical Compositions, New Series, vol. 11, pt. 3 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1916), entry for The Peterson System of Playing the Guitar with Steel in the Hawaiian Manner.

9Music Trade Review (1916), contemporary trade notice reporting more than 100,000 copies of the Bailey Ukulele Method sold, as documented in the source-critical edition of Four Strings on a Grand Stage.

10Sherman, Clay & Co. advertisement, Music Trade Review (1925), describing the Bailey Ukulele Method as having sold "nearly two million" copies. This is treated here as a publisher advertising claim, not an independently audited sales total.

11San Francisco city directory (1923), entry: "Bailey Nelson B, Saxophone and Cornet Studio 368 7th Av."

12Pacific Coast Music Review, May 15, 1925, advertisement for "N. B. Bailey, Teacher of Saxophone and Cornet."