

whats going on chords

whats going on chords are essential for musicians and enthusiasts who want to learn or perform the iconic song "What's Going On" by Marvin Gaye. This soulful classic features a smooth blend of jazz, soul, and R&B elements, making its chord progression both distinctive and expressive. Understanding the chords not only helps in playing the song accurately but also provides insight into the harmonic structure that supports its powerful message. This article explores the chord progression, variations, and tips for playing "What's Going On" on guitar or piano, along with common mistakes to avoid. Additionally, it highlights the musical context and theoretical aspects behind the chords, making it a comprehensive guide for learners at all skill levels. The following sections will cover the chord breakdown, playing techniques, and helpful practice strategies for mastering this timeless tune.

- Understanding the Basic Chords in "What's Going On"
- Chord Progression and Structure
- Playing Techniques and Tips
- Common Mistakes and How to Avoid Them
- Theoretical Insights into the Song's Harmony

Understanding the Basic Chords in "What's Going On"

The foundation of the song "What's Going On" lies in its carefully chosen chords that create a smooth and emotive atmosphere. The chords used in the song are primarily seventh chords and extended harmonies, which contribute to its soulful and jazzy feel. Familiarity with these chords is crucial before attempting to play the full progression.

Key Chords Used

The song is typically played in the key of E major, and the main chords include:

- **Emaj7** – A major seventh chord that opens the song with a warm and rich tone.
- **Amaj7** – Another major seventh chord adding a smooth transition between

progressions.

- **B7** – A dominant seventh chord that introduces tension and resolution within the progression.
- **C#m7** – A minor seventh chord that adds emotional depth and complexity.
- **F#m7** – Another minor seventh chord that supports the soulful vibe.

Mastering these chords provides a solid base for performing "What's Going On" authentically. Each chord features a distinct sound that contributes to the overall mood of the piece.

Chord Diagrams and Finger Positions

For guitarists, accurate finger placement is essential to achieve the smooth sound characteristic of the song. For example, the Emaj7 chord can be played by placing the index finger on the first fret of the third string, while the rest of the strings are played open. Similarly, the Amaj7 chord involves fretting the second fret on the D, G, and B strings with minimal finger movement.

Pianists should focus on voicing these chords with their left hand playing the root notes and the right hand emphasizing the seventh and other chord tones to capture the song's richness.

Chord Progression and Structure

The chord progression in "What's Going On" is both simple and sophisticated, blending smooth jazz influences with classic soul rhythm. Learning the progression allows musicians to understand how the chords interact to support the melody and lyrics.

Main Progression

The core progression of the verses typically follows this pattern:

1. Emaj7
2. C#m7
3. F#m7
4. B7

This sequence repeats throughout much of the song, giving it a hypnotic and

flowing quality. The use of major seventh and minor seventh chords creates a laid-back atmosphere that complements the socially conscious themes of the lyrics.

Variations and Bridge

The bridge introduces a slightly different progression that adds harmonic interest. It often includes the following chords:

- Amaj7
- G#m7
- C#m7
- F#7

These changes provide contrast and emotional lift before returning to the main progression. Understanding these variations is important for delivering a dynamic performance.

Playing Techniques and Tips

To capture the soulful essence of "What's Going On," specific playing techniques and approaches are recommended. These help in expressing the song's mood and maintaining its groove.

Strumming and Fingerpicking Patterns

On guitar, a gentle, syncopated strumming pattern works best to replicate the song's smooth rhythm. Alternatively, fingerpicking using the thumb and fingers to pluck individual strings can emphasize the jazzy feel.

Recommended strumming tips include:

- Use a soft touch to avoid harsh sounds.
- Incorporate slight pauses to mimic the song's phrasing.
- Experiment with muting strings lightly to add texture.

Chord Transitions

Smooth transitions between chords are vital for maintaining the song's fluidity. Practice moving between Emaj7, C#m7, F#m7, and B7 slowly at first, then increase speed while keeping clarity. Utilizing common finger positions across chords reduces unnecessary movement.

Common Mistakes and How to Avoid Them

When learning "What's Going On" chords, certain mistakes can hinder the overall sound and feel. Recognizing and correcting these issues leads to a more authentic performance.

Incorrect Chord Voicings

One frequent error is playing incorrect chord shapes or omitting important chord tones, which diminishes the song's jazzy character. Ensure that seventh notes and extensions are included appropriately, especially in chords like Emaj7 and C#m7.

Rushing the Rhythm

The song's groove depends on a relaxed and steady tempo. Rushing through chord changes can disrupt the flow and emotional impact. Use a metronome to practice timing and maintain consistent speed.

Neglecting Dynamics

Ignoring the song's dynamic range leads to a flat performance. Pay attention to volume changes and articulation, emphasizing softer passages and building intensity during climaxes.

Theoretical Insights into the Song's Harmony

Beyond practical playing, analyzing the harmonic theory behind "What's Going On" chords reveals why the song resonates so deeply with listeners. The chord choices and progressions support the lyrical themes and emotional content effectively.

Use of Major Seventh and Minor Seventh Chords

Major seventh chords, like Emaj7 and Amaj7, create a warm, dreamy sound that evokes feelings of hope and reflection. Minor seventh chords, such as C#m7

and F#m7, add a layer of melancholy and sophistication. This interplay mirrors the song's balance between concern and optimism.

Functional Harmony and Tension

The dominant seventh chord B7 functions as a tension builder, leading back to the tonic Emaj7. This tension and resolution pattern is a fundamental principle in Western harmony, providing movement and interest within the progression.

Modal Influences

Elements of modal interchange and jazz harmony are present, giving the song its unique color. These influences contribute to the fluidity and emotional depth characteristic of "What's Going On."

Frequently Asked Questions

What are the basic chords used in 'What's Going On' by Marvin Gaye?

The basic chords used in 'What's Going On' are typically Em7, A13, Dmaj7, and G13, giving the song its smooth, soulful sound.

How can I play the intro chords of 'What's Going On' on guitar?

To play the intro chords of 'What's Going On', start with Em7 (022030), then move to A13 (x02022), followed by Dmaj7 (xx0222), and G13 (3x3455). Use a clean tone and play them with a gentle strumming pattern.

Are there any chord variations for 'What's Going On' to make it easier for beginners?

Yes, beginners can simplify the chords by playing Em (022000) instead of Em7, A7 (x02020) instead of A13, D (xx0232) instead of Dmaj7, and G (320003) instead of G13. This maintains the harmonic structure while making it easier to play.

What key is 'What's Going On' by Marvin Gaye played in?

'What's Going On' is played in the key of E major, which is why the chords

revolve around E minor 7, A13, and Dmaj7 chords to complement the soulful melody.

Can I use a capo to play 'What's Going On' chords more easily?

Yes, using a capo on the 2nd fret and playing simpler chord shapes like D, G, A, and Bm can help you play 'What's Going On' more comfortably while matching the original key and sound.

Additional Resources

1. *What's Going On: The Chord Changes That Define a Classic*

This book delves into the iconic chord progressions of Marvin Gaye's "What's Going On." It breaks down the harmonic structure and explains how the chords contribute to the song's soulful and emotional impact. Perfect for musicians seeking to understand the nuances of this timeless classic.

2. *Jazz Chord Voicings Inspired by "What's Going On"*

Explore the sophisticated jazz chord voicings found in "What's Going On" and learn how to apply them to your own playing. The book covers extended chords, chord substitutions, and voice leading techniques that give the song its unique sound. Ideal for jazz guitarists and pianists looking to expand their harmonic vocabulary.

3. *Analyzing the Harmony of Motown's "What's Going On"*

This analytical guide breaks down the harmonic elements that make "What's Going On" a masterpiece of Motown music. It provides detailed charts and explanations of chord progressions, modulations, and rhythmic patterns. A great resource for music theory students and Motown enthusiasts.

4. *Guitar Chords and Strumming Patterns from "What's Going On"*

Learn to play the exact guitar chords and strumming patterns used in "What's Going On." This book offers step-by-step instructions, chord diagrams, and practice tips to help guitarists capture the song's groove and feel. Suitable for beginner to intermediate players.

5. *Chord Melody Arrangements of "What's Going On" for Piano*

This collection presents beautiful chord melody arrangements of "What's Going On" for solo piano. It focuses on combining the melody with rich chord voicings to recreate the song's lush sound. Pianists looking to perform the song solo will find this book invaluable.

6. *Exploring Soul Music Harmony: Lessons from "What's Going On"*

Dive into the harmonic language of soul music through the lens of "What's Going On." The book discusses chord functions, modal interchange, and emotional expression through harmony. It's a thoughtful resource for songwriters and arrangers inspired by soul music.

7. *R&B Chord Progressions: The Case Study of "What's Going On"*

This book examines the chord progressions typical of R&B music, using "What's Going On" as a primary example. Readers learn how to craft smooth and expressive progressions that evoke similar moods and textures. Perfect for composers and producers in the R&B genre.

8. *Transcribing "What's Going On": Chord Analysis and Interpretation*

A practical guide to transcribing the chords and harmonic details of "What's Going On." The book encourages ear training and provides annotated transcriptions to help musicians improve their listening and analysis skills. Essential for aspiring music transcribers and analysts.

9. *From Soul to Jazz: Reharmonizing "What's Going On"*

Explore creative reharmonization techniques applied to "What's Going On," blending soul roots with jazz harmony. This book offers alternative chord options and reharmonization exercises to inspire musicians to reinterpret the classic. Great for arrangers and improvisers seeking fresh harmonic ideas.

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