GENERAL

billie jean michael jackson chords

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Introduction

When you hear the opening bass line of **Billie Jean**, it's hard not to feel the unmistakable groove that defined a generation. This iconic track, released in 1983, remains one of Michael Jackson's most recognizable songs. For guitarists, mastering the chords that underpin this classic is both a rewarding challenge and a gateway into the world of pop R&B guitar playing. In this guide, we'll explore the chord structures that make up the song, walk through how to play them, discuss rhythmic patterns, and provide practical tips so you can confidently strum or finger pick along to the King of Pop's masterpiece.

Why Learn the Billie Jean Chords?

Studying the chords of a song like **Billie /Jean** offers several benefits:

- Musical Insight: Understanding how a pop hit is built reveals the harmonic language that shaped 80s music.
- Technique Development: The song's chord changes require smooth transitions, making it a great exercise for finger independence.
- Repertoire Expansion: Once you can play this track, you'll feel more comfortable tackling other Michael /Jackson songs or similar pop hits.
- Performance Confidence: Playing a well known classic can boost your stage presence and connect you with audiences.

The Chord Overview

At first glance, the chord progression of **Billie /Jean** might seem straightforward. However, the subtle variations in voicings and the use of suspended and added tone chords give the track its distinct feel. Below is a simplified view of the main chords:

1. D&m7
2. G&m7
3. B&m&m7 (B&m&m is enharmonically equivalent to A)
4. G&m7
5. F&m7 (enharmonically E)
6. B&m&m7
7. D&m7
8. G&m7
9. B&m&m7

Note that the song uses a key of D&m major, which is why the chords are written with flats. If you prefer, you can transpose them to a more guitar friendly key, such as A major or E major, while keeping the same relative relationships.

Chord Fingerings for Guitar

Below are standard open and barre chord shapes that you can use to play the **Billie /Jean** chords on a six string

guitar. Feel free to experiment with different voicings to match the sound of the original recording.

D&m7 (D&m sus 4)

Barre Shape (Root on 1st Fret):

- 1st string (e): 1st fret (D&m)
- 2nd string (B): 3rd fret (F)
- 3rd string (G): 4th fret (A&m)
- 4th string (D): 3rd fret (F)
- 5th string (A): 1st fret (D&m)
- 6th string (E): 1st fret (D&m)

Alternatively, use a simpler open shape:

- 5th string: 1st fret (D&m)
- 4th string: 3rd fret (F)
- 3rd string: 4th fret (A&m)
- 2nd string: 3rd fret (F)
- 1st string: 1st fret (D&m)

G&m7 (G&m sus 4)

Barre Shape (Root on 2nd Fret):

- 1st string: 2nd fret (G&m)
- 2nd string: 4th fret (B&m)
- 3rd string: 5th fret (D&m)
- 4th string: 4th fret (B&m)
- 5th string: 2nd fret (G&m)
- 6th string: 2nd fret (G&m)

Open voicing alternative:

- 5th string: 2nd fret (G&m)
- 4th string: 4th fret (B&m)
- 3rd string: 5th fret (D&m)
- 2nd string: 4th fret (B&m)
- 1st string: 2nd fret (G&m)

B&m&m7 (A 7)

Barre Shape (Root on 4th Fret):

- 1st string: 4th fret (A)
- 2nd string: 6th fret (C&o)
- 3rd string: 7th fret (E)
- 4th string: 6th fret (C&o)
- 5th string: 4th fret (A)
- 6th string: 4th fret (A)

Open voicing alternative:

- 5th string: 4th fret (A)
- 4th string: 6th fret (C&o)
- 3rd string: 7th fret (E)

- 2nd string: 6th fret (C&o)
- 1st string: 4th fret (A)

F&m7 (E 7)

Barre Shape (Root on 2nd Fret):

- 1st string: 2nd fret (E)
- 2nd string: 4th fret (G&o)
- 3rd string: 5th fret (B)
- 4th string: 4th fret (G&o)
- 5th string: 2nd fret (E)
- 6th string: 2nd fret (E)

Open voicing alternative:

- 5th string: 2nd fret (E)
- 4th string: 4th fret (G&o)
- 3rd string: 5th fret (B)
- 2nd string: 4th fret (G&o)
- 1st string: 2nd fret (E)

Chord Progression Breakdown

The main verse and chorus of **Billie /Jean** follow a repeating eight bar cycle. Here's a simplified representation:

1. D&m7 – G&m7 – B&m&m7 – G&m7
2. F&m7 – B&m&m7 – D&m7 – G&m7
3. B&m&m7 – G&m7 – D&m7 – G&m7

Notice that the progression uses a cycle of fourths: D&m7 !' G&m7 !' B&m&m7 !' G&m7. This creates a sense of forward mo keeps the listener engaged. The F&m7 chord acts as a pivot, adding tension before resolving back to the root.

Strumming Patterns and Rhythm

To capture the groove of the original track, you'll need a steady, syncopated rhythm. A popular pattern is:

- Down–Down–Up–Up–Down–Up

Alternatively, try a simple four beat pattern with a slight accent on the third beat:

- Down (beat 1), Down (beat 2), Up (beat 3), Down (beat 4)

Feel free to add palm muting on the off beats to emulate the percussive feel of the studio recording. Experiment with dynamics—play softly during verses and build to a stronger strum in the chorus.

Step by Step Practice Routine

1. Warm Up: Spend 5–10 minutes on finger stretches and basic chord transitions.
2. Chord Familiarization: Practice each chord shape individually until you can switch between them smoothly.
3. Progression Repetition: Play the full chord cycle once, then gradually increase speed as you feel comfortable.
4. Rhythm Integration: Add your chosen strumming pattern while maintaining chord changes.
5. Full Song Run Through: Play the entire track, focusing on timing and expression.
6. Recording & Review: Record yourself to identify areas for improvement.

Transposing for Comfort

If you find the original key of D&m major challenging, you can transpose the chords to a more guitar friendly key. For example, transposing up a whole step to E major yields the following chords:

- E7 !’ A7 !’ C&o7 !’ A7
- B7 !’ A7 !’ E7 !’ A7
- A7 !’ A7 !’ E7 !’ A7

Use a capo on the 3rd fret to maintain the original pitch while playing in a more comfortable position. This approach preserves the harmonic structure but allows you to use open chords that feel natural.

Common Mistakes & How to Avoid Them

- Skipping the Suspended Voicings: The song’s unique sound comes from the suspended and added tone chords. Avoid simplifying them to major or minor chords.
- Timing Issues: The groove is tight. Use a metronome to keep your rhythm steady.
- Over Strumming: The original track relies on subtlety. Practice palm muting and light strumming to match the feel.
- Ignoring Dynamics: The song shifts from low intensity verses to a more intense chorus. Reflect these dynamics in your playing.

Advanced Techniques: Adding Your Own Flair

Once you’ve mastered the basic chords, consider incorporating these advanced elements:

- Finger Picking: Use a syncopated pattern that mimics the bass line.
- Chord Extensions: Add 9ths or 11ths to create richer voicings.
- Use a slide on the transition from G&m7 to B&m&m7 for a bluesy touch.
- Experiment with a muted rhythmic strum on the off beats to add percussive texture.

Transcription & Sheet Music Resources

Finding accurate transcriptions can be helpful. Many guitar tabs and chord charts are available online, but be sure to verify them against the original recording. Some reputable sources include:

- Official Michael /Jackson sheet music published by Hal Leonard.
- High quality guitar tab sites such as Ultimate Guitar with user verified corrections.
- Video tutorials on YouTube where instructors break down the chord shapes and rhythm.

Conclusion

Mastering the chords of **Billie /Jean** pens a window into the harmonic sophistication behind one of the most celebrated pop songs. By understanding the progression, practicing the chord shapes, and mastering the rhythmic groove, you’ll not only be able to play along with the track but also apply these techniques to

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