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mystery train elvis chords

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Unlocking the Mystery: How to Master the Elvis “Mystery Train” Chords

When you think of the 1950s rock and roll sound that still pulses through the airwaves today, one song stands out for its raw energy, timeless appeal, and unmistakable chord structure: **“Mystery Train”**. Though originally written by Junior Parker, the version that catapulted it into pop culture lore was Elvis Presley’s electrifying rendition. For guitarists, pianists, and musicians of all levels, understanding the chords that underpin this classic can unlock a world of musical possibilities. In this guide, we’ll dive deep into the history, theory, and practical playing techniques of the **mystery train Elvis chords**, ensuring you can not only play the song but also feel its pulse in your own compositions.

The Legacy of “Mystery Train”

“Mystery Train” is more than just a song; it’s a cultural touchstone that bridges blues, gospel, and early rock and roll. The track’s driving rhythm, haunting lyricism, and signature chord progression have influenced countless artists across generations. Here’s why the song remains a staple in the repertoire of musicians worldwide.

From Junior Parker to Elvis

Junior Parker first recorded “Mystery Train” in 1953, infusing it with a slow, soulful blues feel. The song’s title alludes to the metaphorical journey of life, with the “train” representing the passage of time and change. In 1955, Elvis Presley’s version captured the song’s essence but amplified its energy, turning it into a rock and roll anthem. The shift in tempo and arrangement gave “Mystery Train” a new life, cementing its place in the annals of music history.

Elvis’s Take

Elvis’s interpretation introduced a faster, more upbeat rhythm while preserving the underlying blues structure. His vocal delivery, coupled with the electric guitar riffs, created an infectious groove that resonated with audiences. The chord changes remained faithful to the original but were embellished with dynamic accents, making the track an ideal study for guitarists seeking to master blues inspired rock.

Understanding the Chord Progression

At its core, “Mystery Train” follows a classic twelve bar blues progression in the key of A. The simplicity of the chord structure is what makes the song so approachable for beginners yet versatile enough for seasoned musicians to explore advanced variations.

Basic Chords

The foundational chords for the song are A, D, and E. These chords create the backbone of the track’s harmonic framework. Below is a quick reference for each chord in open position:

- A Major: Open A – 0-2-2-2-0-0
- D Major: Open D – 0-2-3-2-2-0
- E Major: Open E – 0-2-2-1-0-0

These open chords provide a bright, resonant sound that’s perfect for the upbeat feel of Elvis’s version.

Advanced Variations

While the basic chords are essential, many guitarists like to add a layer of sophistication by incorporating power chords, barre chords, or jazz extensions. Below are some popular variations:

1. Power Chords: Replace the open chords with power chords for a heavier sound (e.g., A5: 5-7-5-5-5-5, D5: 5-7-5-7-7-5, E5: 4-7-4-7-7-4).
2. Barre Chords: Move the chord shapes up the neck (e.g., A major at the 5th fret, D major at the 10th fret).
3. Jazz Extensions: Add a 7th or 9th to the chords (e.g., A7: x02020, D9: x5455x, E7: 020100).

These variations can give the song a fresh feel while retaining its original structure.

How to Play “Mystery Train” on Guitar

Learning to play “Mystery Train” on guitar is a rewarding exercise that blends rhythm, blues, and rock. Below, we’ll walk through the steps to master the song from basic strumming to more intricate fingerstyle techniques.

Strumming Patterns

The song’s groove relies on a steady, syncopated strum. A simple yet effective pattern is:

1. Downstroke on beat 1
2. Upstroke between beats 2 and 3
3. Downstroke on beat 4
4. Upstroke on the “and” of beat 4

Practice this pattern at a moderate tempo, then gradually increase your speed while maintaining a clean rhythm. The key is to keep the strum fluid and evenly spaced.

Fingerstyle Option

For a more nuanced approach, try fingerpicking the chords. A simple pattern would be:

1. Thumb (p) plays the bass note on the 6th string for A, 5th string for D, and 6th string for E.
2. Index (i) plucks the G string.
3. Middle (m) plucks the B string.
4. Ring (a) plucks the high E string.

Combine this with the chord progression to create a flowing, melodic line that feels like a train chugging along.

Piano and Other Instruments

While guitar is the most popular choice for “Mystery Train,” the chord progression translates beautifully to piano and other instruments. The open chords on guitar become simple triads on piano, allowing for a smooth, resonant sound. Here’s a quick guide for pianists:

- A Major: A C# E
- D Major: D F# A
- E Major: E G# B

For a richer texture, add the 7th chord (A7, D7, E7) and play them as block chords or arpeggios.

Learning Resources and Tips

Mastering “Mystery Train” requires practice, patience, and the right tools. Below are some resources and tips to

help you along the way.

- Tabs and Chord Charts: Websites like Ultimate Guitar and Chordie offer user submitted tabs that can help you verify chord positions.
- Video Lessons: YouTube channels such as “JustinGuitar” and “Marty Music” provide step by step tutorials.
- Metronome Practice: Use a metronome to keep your timing consistent, especially when mastering the strumming pattern.
- Listen to the Original: Compare your playing to Elvis’s version to capture the song’s feel and dynamics.
- Experiment with Dynamics: Vary your attack on each chord to mimic the subtle crescendos and decrescendos found in the original track.

Cover Versions and Influence

“Mystery Train” has inspired countless covers across genres, from blues to country to punk. Artists such as The White Stripes, The Band, and even modern acts like The Black Keys have taken the song and reinterpreted it, often adding their own chord variations or tempo changes. This enduring influence showcases the song’s versatility and the power of its chord structure.

Studying these covers can provide fresh insights into how the basic chords can be transformed. For instance, The White Stripes’ version leans heavily on a single chord, using rhythmic emphasis to create tension, while The Band’s rendition incorporates a more complex harmonic palette.

Conclusion

Whether you’re a beginner looking to learn your first rock and roll track or an experienced guitarist seeking to deepen your understanding of blues inspired chords, “Mystery Train” offers a rich, rewarding journey. By mastering the basic A D E progression, exploring advanced variations, and practicing both strumming and fingerstyle techniques, you’ll not only play a timeless classic but also gain the skills to apply these concepts to countless other songs. Embrace the rhythm, feel the groove, and let the mystery train of your musical journey roll on.

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