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Ill Fly Away Guitar Chords Jars Of Clay

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The Enduring Appeal of a Gospel Classic: I'll Fly Away and the Jars of Clay Touch

There are certain songs that feel less like music and more like a shared cultural breath. They transcend generations, genres, and even the artists who perform them. One such song is the timeless gospel hymn, **“I’ll Fly Away.”**Written in 1929 by Albert E. Brumley, this song has been a staple of bluegrass, country, and gospel music for nearly a century. Its simple yet profound message of spiritual liberation and its irresistibly uplifting melody have made it a favorite for campfire sing-alongs, church services, and recording studios alike.

In the late 1990s, a new wave of listeners discovered this classic when the Christian rock band **Jars of Clay** released their own hauntingly beautiful rendition. Their version introduced the hymn to a generation raised on alternative rock and folk-infused pop, giving it a new lease on life. For guitarists, this opened up a fascinating avenue: learning the **I'll Fly Away guitar chords Jars of Clay**style. Understanding how this band deconstructed a traditional hymn into a modern masterpiece is a brilliant lesson in arrangement, dynamics, and emotional storytelling.

This article will serve as your comprehensive guide to this iconic song. We will explore the history of the hymn, dive deep into the specific guitar chords and techniques used by Jars of Clay, and provide you with everything you need to play this beautiful arrangement yourself. Whether you are a beginner looking for simple open chords or an experienced player seeking to capture the band’s unique fingerpicking style, you will find valuable insights here.

The Journey of a Hymn: From Albert Brumley to Jars of Clay

To truly appreciate the **I'll Fly Away guitar chords Jars of Clay** rendition, it helps to understand the song’s journey. Albert Brumley, a prolific gospel songwriter, penned the tune after picking cotton in Oklahoma. He was reportedly inspired by a line from an older hymn, “If I could hear my mother pray again,” which led him to contemplate the idea of flying away to a celestial home. The song was originally titled “I’ll Fly Away” and was included in the 1932 songbook *Wonderland of Joy*.

It quickly became a standard in Southern gospel and bluegrass circles, famously recorded by artists like the Louvin Brothers, Ralph Stanley, and even Elvis Presley. Its chord progression is deceptively simple, usually built on the I, IV, and V chords of a major key, which makes it incredibly accessible for beginner guitarists. However, the simplicity of the chord structure is precisely why it is so powerful; it leaves room for emotional expression and stylistic variation.

When Jars of Clay approached the song for their 1997 album *Much Afraid*, they did not simply replicate a bluegrass version. They stripped it down, slowed the tempo, and added a layer of atmospheric texture. Daniel

G. Lanois once said that the best productions sound like “a beautiful mistake,” and Jars of Clay’s treatment of this hymn feels exactly that: an intentional, fragile, and deeply resonant piece of art. Their arrangement relies heavily on fingerpicked acoustic guitar, ethereal harmonies, and a gentle, building crescendo that mirrors the lyrical journey from earthly sorrow to heavenly joy.

Breaking Down the I’ll Fly Away Guitar Chords Jars of Clay Style

Now, let us get to the heart of the matter: how to actually play the song. The **I’ll Fly Away guitar chords Jars of Clay**version is primarily played in the key of G Major, but with a capo on the third fret. This is a crucial detail that many beginners overlook. By placing a capo on the third fret, the chords are shaped as if you are playing in the key of E Major, but the actual sound is in the key of G. This transposition gives the guitar a brighter, more open tone that suits the song’s ethereal quality.

Let us break down the core progression. With the capo on the 3rd fret, the shapes you will use are:

- E Major (shaped, sounds G Major): 022100
- A Major (shaped, sounds C Major): x02220
- B7 (shaped, sounds D7): x21202

These three chords form the backbone of the entire song. The verse and chorus follow a predictable, yet beautiful, pattern that moves from the tonic (E/G) to the subdominant (A/C) and back, often incorporating the dominant seventh (B7) for tension and release.

The Key of E (Shaped) and Open Voicings

One of the reasons the **I’ll Fly Away guitar chords Jars of Clay**arrangement sounds so distinct is the use of open strings. When you play an E Major chord with a capo on the third fret, you are actually playing a G Major chord, but you are using the open strings (the high E and B strings) which ring out beautifully. This is known as an open voicing. The band, particularly guitarist Stephen Mason, often lets these high strings ring out over the lower notes, creating a shimmering, harp-like effect.

To emulate this, you should practice the following:

1. Fingerpicking Patterns: Instead of strumming, use a fingerpicking pattern. A common Travis-picking variation for this song is: thumb (bass note), index (G string), thumb (bass), middle (B string), thumb (bass), ring (high E string). This pattern should be fluid and relaxed.
2. Bass Note Focus: Pay attention to the bass notes. The root note of the E chord is the 6th string (low E). The root of the A chord is the 5th string (A). The root of the B7 chord is the 5th string (B). Alternating between these bass notes is the foundation of the rhythm.
3. Sustainability: Let the chords ring out. Do not mute the strings aggressively. The beauty of this arrangement comes from the overlapping resonance of the guitar.

Chord Variations and Subtle Embellishments

While the basic progression is simple, Jars of Clay adds subtle variations to keep the ear engaged. You will often hear a move from the E chord to a **E/G#**(a first inversion) before going to the A chord. In capo-shape terms, this would be an E chord with the bass note on the 4th string (G#). This creates a chromatic walk-down in the bass that adds sophistication.

You might also encounter an **F#m** (shaped, sounds Am) or a **B7/D#** (shaped, sounds D7/F#) in specific passages. These are not mandatory for a basic rendition, but incorporating them brings you closer to the actual recording. For the intermediate player, trying to add a **C#m**(shaped, sounds F#m) in the bridge section can add a lovely melancholic touch before resolving back to the tonic.

Strumming Patterns and Dynamic Control

I’ll Fly Away guitar chords Jars of Clay rendition is not about speed; it is about space. The strumming or fingerpicking pattern should be gentle and deliberate. If you are playing with a pick, use a soft, slow down-up-down-up pattern, but focus on the downstrokes on the beat to anchor the rhythm. The band employs a technique called “dynamic build.” The verses are played very softly, almost whispered, while the choruses open up with slightly more force and vocal intensity.

Here is a simple way to practice the dynamics:

- Verse: Use a soft fingerpicking pattern. Keep your right hand close to the soundhole. Do not dig in. The goal is to create a bed of sound for the vocals.
- Chorus: Switch to a gentle strum or a stronger fingerpicking pattern. Let the high strings ring out. The chorus is the burst of joy, the declaration of “I’ll fly away, O glory.”
- Bridge/Instrumental: The instrumental break in the Jars of Clay version (around the 2:30 mark) features a beautiful, repeated melodic line on the high strings. This can be played by picking the B and high E strings in a pattern while holding the chord shapes.

Listening and Learning by Ear

While chord charts are invaluable, there is no substitute for listening to the actual recording. Put on *Much Afraid* (or find the track on streaming services) and listen to the guitar. Notice how the guitar part is panned slightly to one side, leaving room for the vocal harmonies. Notice the subtle use of reverb and delay. The band uses a lot of open strings, which suggests they are playing in standard tuning (or maybe drop D, but standard with a capo is most common).

If you are struggling with the fingerpicking pattern, slow the song down to 75% speed on YouTube or your streaming platform. This will allow you to hear exactly where each note falls in relation to the vocal line. The **I’ll Fly Away guitar chords Jars of Clay** style is not about technical virtuosity; it is about **feel**. It is about making the guitar weep, then rejoice.

Essential Skills for Mastering This Arrangement

To truly do justice to this beautiful rendition, there are a few specific guitar skills you should focus on developing.

Fingerstyle Independence

This is the most important skill for playing this song well. Fingerstyle independence means being able to play a steady bass line with your thumb while your index, middle, and ring fingers play a melody or arpeggio on the higher strings. The bass notes are the heartbeat of the song. Practice playing just the bass strings (6th, 5th, and 4th) in a steady rhythm before adding the higher strings. Once you have that locked in, it is much easier to layer the melody on top.

Chord Transitions

The transitions in this song are frequent. You will be moving from E to A to B7 and back again. The key to smooth transitions is **economy of motion**. When moving from E to A, keep your middle finger anchored on the 2nd fret of the A string (it is the same note in both chords: E in the E chord, and A in the A chord). When moving from A to B7, slide your index finger down from the 2nd fret of the D string to the 1st fret of the D string, and place your ring finger on the 2nd fret of the A string. Practice these transitions slowly and deliberately until they become muscle memory.

Capo Usage

As mentioned, the capo is essential. If you try to play in open G without a capo, you will lose the bright, ringing tone that characterizes the Jars of Clay sound. A capo on the third fret is non-negotiable for this specific rendition. If you do not have a capo, you can play the song in open G (using G, C, and D7 chords), but it will not have the same timbre. The capo allows you to use the open high strings, which are the secret ingredient.

Why This Version Resonates with Guitarists

Why do guitarists continue to search for the **I’ll Fly Away guitar chords Jars of Clay**arrangement? It is because the song is a perfect marriage of simplicity and depth. It is easy

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