SOFTWARE & TECH

Something In The Air Chords Tom Petty

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Unlocking the Magic of Something in the Air Chords: A Guitarist's Guide

Every once in a while, a song arrives that perfectly captures the spirit of its era. Thunderclap Newman's 1969 classic, "Something in the Air," is one of those rare gems. A defining anthem of peace and hope during a time of great social change, the track remains as resonant today as it was over half a century ago. For guitarists, the allure of this song goes far beyond its nostalgic value. The **Something in the Air chords**offer a beautiful, accessible progression that is both satisfying to play and rich with musicality. Whether you are a beginner picking up the guitar for the first time or an experienced player looking to expand your repertoire of classic rock tunes, mastering this song will provide immense joy and a deeper appreciation for songcrafting from a golden age of music.

In this comprehensive guide, we will break down everything you need to know. From the exact chord shapes and the iconic piano-to-guitar translation, to strumming patterns and the emotional theory behind the progressions, you will walk away fully equipped to perform this timeless piece. Let us dive into the heart of the song and discover why these chords have captivated listeners for generations.

The Historical Context Behind the Music

Before we place our fingers on the fretboard, it helps to understand the environment that spawned the song. "Something in the Air" was written by the band's pianist, Andy "Thunderclap" Newman, along with guitarist Jimmy McCulloch and bassist John "Speedy" Keen. Remarkably, the song was produced by none other than Pete Townshend of The Who. It became a massive hit, topping charts across the UK, Europe, and Canada.

The lyrics call for a collective uprising of love and togetherness, with lines like "Call out the instigator" and "Hand out the arms." The musical backdrop needed to be equally uplifting and powerful. The original recording features a prominent piano melody, sliding guitar bends, and a driving rhythm section. For guitarists, replicating the **Something in the Air chords**requires understanding how to translate a piano-based composition onto a six-string instrument. The result is a wonderfully open, ringing chord progression that feels spacious and hopeful.

The Core Chord Progression: Breaking It Down

The beauty of this song lies in its simplicity. The main progression is built on a handful of major and dominant chords that cycle in a way that feels both predictable and fresh. The song is primarily in the key of A major, though it borrows some chords from outside the standard scale to create that distinctive, yearning lift.

The fundamental sequence you need to learn is:**A – D – E – A**

This is the bread and butter of countless rock and roll songs. However, "Something in the Air" adds a crucial twist. After landing on the A chord, the progression takes an unexpected but glorious turn. It moves to a **G chord**

and then resolves back through D to A. This gives the song its anthemic, almost hymn-like quality.

The Primary Chord Shapes

Let us look at the specific fingerings you will use. These are all open chord shapes, making the song incredibly friendly for intermediate players.

- A major (A): Place your first, second, and third fingers on the second fret of the D, G, and B strings respectively. Strum from the A string (fifth string) down.
- D major (D): Your first finger on the second fret of the G string, third finger on the third fret of the B string, and second finger on the second fret of the E string. Strum from the D string (fourth string) down.
- E major (E): This is your standard rock E chord. First finger on the first fret of the G string, second finger on the second fret of the A string, and third finger on the second fret of the D string. Strum all six strings.
- G major (G): There are a few ways to play this. For this song, the traditional open G works best. Place your second finger on the third fret of the low E string, first finger on the second fret of the A string, third finger on the third fret of the high E string, and your fourth finger on the third fret of the B string. Alternatively, you can use the G with the B string open, but the full shape gives more body.

The Iconic Intro and Verse Chords

The song begins with a short, repeating piano riff, but on guitar, the intro is simply a clean, strummed A chord that leads into the verse. The verse progression follows this pattern:

1. Start on an A chord for two beats.
2. Move to a D chord for two beats.
3. Return to an A chord for two beats.
4. Strum an E chord for two beats.

This creates the familiar, driving rhythm of the verses. Listen to the original recording to feel the syncopation. The guitar part is often muted or played with a restrained touch to allow the piano and vocals to shine through.

The Breathtaking Chorus: Where the Song Soars

The chorus is where the **Something in the Air chords**truly come alive. It deviates from the verse pattern and introduces the crucial G chord. The progression for the chorus is:

A – G – D – A

This is the “hand out the arms” section. The shift from A down to G (a whole step down) and then up to D creates a feeling of expansion. It is as if the song is opening its arms wide. To get the full effect, strum these chords with more force. Let the G chord ring out fully before sliding into the D.

Chord Voicing Variations

While the basic open chords work perfectly, adding slight variations can make your playing sound more authentic to the recording. Consider these modifications:

- Adding the 7th: Occasionally, you can slip an E7 into the verse instead of a standard E major. This adds a slight bluesy tension that resolves nicely back to the A chord. The E7 is played by lifting your third finger off the D string (second fret) so that only your first and second fingers remain.
- Suspended Chords: If you want to emulate the piano’s rolling feel, try using an Asus2 or Asus4 as a passing chord before landing on the main A. Asus2 is played with your first finger on the second fret of the D string and your second finger on the second fret of the B string, leaving the G string open. This creates a beautiful, airy texture.

Strumming Patterns and Rhythm

Having the right chords is only half the battle. The rhythm of “Something in the Air” is driven by a steady 4/4 time signature with a strong backbeat. The original recording features a bass drum on beats 1 and 3, and a snare drum on beats 2 and 4.

The Basic Strum

For beginners, a simple down-down-up-down-up pattern works wonders. Focus on keeping your strumming hand loose and brushing across the strings evenly.

A more advanced pattern involves a heavy emphasis on the downbeat of each chord change. Try this:

- Beat 1: Heavy down strum (accentuate this).
- Beat 2: Down strum.
- Beat 3: Up strum.
- Beat 4: Down strum.

This pattern mimics the driving piano chord stabs in the original track. Experiment with muting the strings slightly with the palm of your strumming hand to get a sharper, more percussive sound, particularly during the verses.

Dynamic Shifts

One of the most important aspects of performing this song is mastering dynamics. The verses are relatively subdued. Strum lightly and keep your picking hand near the bridge for a brighter, thinner sound. As you transition into the chorus, move your hand toward the neck, strum harder, and let the chords ring out. This contrast between quiet verses and explosive choruses is what makes the song so emotionally powerful.

Tips for Capturing the Authentic Sound

To truly do justice to the **Something in the Air chords**, you need to consider your gear and technique.

Guitar and Amp Settings

The song was recorded in 1969, largely with vintage amplifiers. You do not need a vintage amp, but aim for a clean to slightly broken-up sound. Too much distortion will muddy the chords.

- Amp Settings: Set your gain low. Turn the treble up to around 7, mids to 5, and bass to 4. Add a touch of reverb for depth.
- Guitar Selection: A Stratocaster or Telecaster works beautifully for the bright, jangly tone. If you have a hollow-body guitar, that will also replicate the warm resonance of the original track. Use the middle pickup position for a balanced sound.
- Capo Consideration: The original recording is in the key of A, but you can play it without a capo. However, if you want to sing along and the key does not suit your voice, place a capo on the 5th fret and play the same shapes in the key of D. This is a common trick to transpose the song to a higher key.

Listening to the Original

There is no substitute for listening to the record. Pay close attention to the bass line. The bass guitar plays a crucial role in outlining the chord changes, often walking between the roots. While you are strumming chords, try to mimic the bass’s rhythmic pulse with your low E and A strings.

Common Mistakes and How to Avoid Them

Even experienced players can stumble on this seemingly simple progression. Here are a few pitfalls to watch out for:

- Rushing the G to D Transition: This is the hardest part of the chorus. Your fingers have to move from a stretched G shape to a compact D shape. Practice this transition slowly. Lift your fingers cleanly off the

fretboard and plant them simultaneously on the D chord. Do not slide your hand; lift and place.

- Overplaying: The biggest mistake is strumming too hard or too much. The song has space in it. Leave gaps between your strums. Let the music breathe.
- Neglecting the Mute: During the verses, you can create a great rhythmic effect by briefly lifting your fretting fingers off the strings after a strum, creating a percussive “chuck.” This is a staple of 60s rhythm guitar.

Expanding Your Repertoire with Similar Songs

Once you have mastered the **Something in the Air chords**, you will find that these same progressions appear in many other classic songs. This is a fantastic way to build your musical vocabulary.

- “All Along the Watchtower” (Jimi Hendrix): Features a similar I-bVII-IV progression (C-Bb-F) that has the same descending root movement as the chorus of our song.
- “Wild Thing” (The Troggs): Uses the primary chords A, D, and E in a straightforward pattern.
- “Sympathy for the Devil” (The Rolling Stones): While more complex, the reliance on open chord shapes and a driving rhythm is a direct cousin to the style used here.

Practicing these songs will reinforce your muscle memory for the chord shapes and transitions, making “Something in the Air” feel even more natural under your fingers.

The Emotional Resonance of the Chord Progression

Why do these specific chords make us feel something? Music theory offers some insight. The movement from the A major chord (the I chord) to the G major chord (the bVII chord) is a

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