



Strumming What You Feel: Understanding Chords Used With Lyrics

I hope that Chapter 1 was helpful in some way. What we will be working with here is finding where to put those chords that just seem to float around in the song somewhere! Let's look back real quick at how we interpreted the lyrics first. I added the chords in where it says verse and chorus, so that you know how many chords you are actually dealing with :

Verse – Am, F, Dm, G / Am, F, G (four chords first line, three chords on the next line)

*I was** down **at the*** *new amsterdam** (7) (4)
staring at this yellow-haired girl (6) (6)
Mr. Jones strikes up a conversation (6) (6)
with this black-haired flamenco dancer (6) (6)
and she dances* while his father plays guitar (8) (6)
She's suddenly beautiful (3) (3)
and we all want something beautiful (6) (6)
Man I wish I was beautiful (6) (6)
So come dance* this silence* down through the morning (9) (6)
Sha **la la la la la la*** yeah (9) (3)
Cut up, Maria! **show me some of that*** spanish **dancing*** (10) (6)
Pass me a bottle, Mr. Jones (6) (6)
Believe in me (3) (3)
Help me believe in anything cause (6) (6)
I want to be* someone who believes (7) (4)

Chorus – C, F, G (only three chords)

Mr. Jones and me* tell each other fairy tales **and we*** (11) (6)

Stare at the* beautiful women (5) (3)

" she's **looking at you. ah, no, no***, she's looking at me." (11) (6)

Smiling in the **bright lights*** (5) (4)

Coming **through in*** stereo (4) (3)

When everybody loves you, **you can never be*** lonely (9) (6)

Am..... F..... Dm..... G

....I was down at the New Amsterdam staring at this yellow haired girl

.....Am..... F..... G

Mr. Jones strikes up this conversation with this black haired flamenco dancer

Am..... F..... Dm..... G

She dances while his father plays guitar. She's suddenly beautiful

.....Am..... F..... G

We all want something beautiful, man I wish I was beautiful

.....Am..... F..... Dm..... G

So come dance this silence down through the morning. Sha la la la la la

Am..... F..... G

yeah....Uh, huh..yeah.

Now, notice that in the verse, you will have four chords for the first lines, and then three chords for the next line. This does not change in the song at all. What you are now looking for is what you might call pick-up notes for the guitar. The chords above are almost right on each word that is picked up. Now that you know there are only four chords for the first line and three chords for the next, you can assume the strumming pattern. The pattern would HAVE to be four consecutive strums in the first line to stay within the lyrics that we have established. For the second line, where you only have three chords, you can assume that you will have to hold one of those chords a little longer. Which would make sense, holding the first chord in the second line, or holding the last? Holding the **last** is the **correct answer**. That allows you to throw some fills in, be it on guitar or another accompanying instrument. I understand it is really hard to not go in too early or late, but remember, you are using the lyrics to establish when you are coming in, NOT the chords. I can't stress enough that you will need to listen to the song to understand what we mean, but with a band like the Counting Crows, they focus on story-telling, as said earlier, rather than instrumental timing.

Now let's take a look at the Chorus, which has only three chords in it. Notice below that the way it is organized is with three chords on the first line, two in the second line, and one in the third line. This is when it gets tricky. Even though you are only playing three very simple chords, in order, you still have to deal with WHERE to play them. Below is what way the chords come in.

C.....FG

..Mr. Jones and me tell each other fairy tales

C..... F

Stare at the beautiful women

.....G

" She's looking at you. Ah no, no she's looking at me."

CF

Smiling in the bright lights

G

..Coming through in stereo

.....C.....F.....G

When everybody loves you, you can never be lonely

Now that we see where the chords go, we can once again assume how to make the strumming sound right. Notice that the C and F chords don't really get much play, but the G chord sure does. The G chord is what we were talking about earlier when we referred to letting a chord move you into another part of a song by holding it out more. You aren't really changing much on timing, because remember we said that there are only three chords, so you will play them in the exact order from beginning to end. What you need to do is try playing the chorus **WITHOUT** using the words. Try to hear the order before applying anything else to it. Did you hear that the G chord actually holds what could be two chords in it using transition. What we mean by this is since the C and the F are only held a few seconds, the G holds onto time just as long as the C and F do, but you just don't change into another note.

That is about all there is to the chord changes in the song. Using the concept of deciphering the lyrics and the chords together should become a little easier for you in all of the songs, not just this one.

