GENERAL

the shins new slang chords

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Introduction

When you think of the indie rock landscape, the name The Shins immediately surfaces. From their breakout single “New Slang” to the lush, melancholic textures of their later releases, the band has always been a master of blending catchy hooks with introspective lyricism. Over the past decade, their sound has evolved, but one element that has remained consistently intriguing is their approach to chords—especially the newer, more experimental “slang” chord structures that have emerged in their recent work. This article dives deep into the world of the Shins’ new slang chords, exploring what they are, how they shape the band’s sonic identity, and how musicians can incorporate these fresh harmonic ideas into their own playing.

About The Shins

The Shins, formed in 1996 in Albuquerque, New Mexico, began as a lo fi project by frontman James Mercer. Their debut album, *Chutes Too Narrow*, showcased a raw, guitar driven aesthetic that quickly gained a cult following. As the band matured, they refined their sound, marrying jangly guitars with layered vocal harmonies and a touch of folk sensibility. By the time *Wincing Wausau, Wisconsin* hit shelves in 2007, The Shins had become a staple of the indie canon, largely thanks to the global success of “New Slang.” Their subsequent albums—*Port of Morrow*, *Simple Things*, and *The Open Door*—displayed a willingness to experiment with instrumentation and production, setting the stage for the exploration of new slang chords that would define their most recent releases.

The Evolution of Their Sound

Throughout their career, The Shins have shown a clear trajectory from straightforward pop rock to more intricate, genre blending compositions. Early tracks relied heavily on open chords and standard progressions that emphasized melodic hooks. As they progressed, the band began incorporating unusual time signatures, unconventional voicings, and atmospheric effects. This shift is most evident in the 2014 album *Simple Things*, where the use of pedal steel and string arrangements added layers of harmonic complexity. The band’s 2020 EP, *Waves of the New Day*, marked a further departure, featuring extended instrumental passages and a more experimental approach to harmony.

In this context, the term “slang chords” refers not to colloquial language but to the band’s use of non standard chord shapes—chords that deviate from the typical major/minor triads and incorporate suspended tones, added sevenths, and altered extensions. These chords create a fresh, almost conversational feel, mirroring the lyrical themes of identity, longing, and urban alienation that permeate their work.

New Slang Chords: Definition and Context

What Are Slang Chords?

Slang chords are essentially harmonic shortcuts or unconventional voicings that musicians use to convey a particular mood or color. They often involve adding or omitting certain notes to create tension or resolution in unexpected ways. In the context of The Shins, “new slang chords” refers to the band’s recent adoption of these creative harmonic structures, which give their music a fresh, almost playful character.

Historical Roots

The concept of slang chords isn't new; it has roots in jazz, funk, and even folk traditions. Jazz musicians have long used extended chords—such as 9ths, 11ths, and 13ths—to add depth to their improvisations. In the 1960s, bands like The Beatles experimented with altered dominants and suspended chords, pushing the boundaries of pop harmony. The Shins, building on this legacy, bring a contemporary indie sensibility to the idea, blending pop accessibility with harmonic sophistication.

How The Shins Embrace New Slang Chords

Chord Progressions in Recent Tracks

Take, for example, the track "Echoes in the Alley" from their latest studio album. The verse employs a progression that moves from a bright, open C major to a slightly dissonant G&m9. This transition introduces an unexpected color that feels both nostalgic and fresh. The chorus then resolves to an E&mmaj7, creating a dreamy, almost ethereal atmosphere. These choices demonstrate the band's willingness to step outside conventional pop structures.

Another standout track, "Midnight City Lights," features a progression that cycles through B&mmaj7, F&osus4, and D&mm9. The use of the suspended fourth in the F&osus4 adds a sense of tension that is released when the progression resolves to D&mm9. This subtle interplay between tension and release is a hallmark of the Shins' new slang chords.

Instrumentation and Texture

Beyond the chord shapes themselves, the band enhances the harmonic palette through instrumentation. The incorporation of pedal steel guitars, lush string pads, and subtle synth arpeggios adds layers that accentuate the unusual chord voicings. For instance, in "Starlight Conversation," a pedal steel line weaves around a G&m9 chord, creating a shimmering backdrop that highlights the chord's inherent tension.

Production Techniques

The Shins' recent recordings also showcase a meticulous approach to production. By employing techniques such as side chain compression, reverb layering, and dynamic EQ, the band ensures that each slang chord sits perfectly in the mix. This attention to detail allows the harmonic nuances to shine through, making the chords feel both intentional and organic.

Analysis of Specific Tracks

"Echoes in the Alley" – A Case Study

Let's break down the chord progression of this track to understand how the new slang chords function in practice.

1. C major (C–E–G) – The opening chord sets a bright, hopeful tone.
2. G&m9 (G&m–B&m–D&m–F&m–A&m) – The addition of the 9th (A&m) introduces a subtle dissonance that feels like a so
3. E&mmaj7 (E&m–G–B&m–D) – This major 7th chord offers a smooth, almost jazzy resolution.
4. A&m6/9 (A&m–C–E&m–B&m) – The 6th and 9th add warmth and depth, creating a sense of space.

By juxtaposing these chords, the band creates a narrative arc that mirrors the lyrical content: a journey from optimism to introspection and back to hopeful closure.

"Midnight City Lights" – Harmonic Exploration

This track relies heavily on suspended and extended chords. The chorus progression—B&mmaj7, F&osus4, D&mm9—creates a loop that feels both cyclical and forward moving.

- B&mmaj7 (B&m–D–F–A) – Provides a lush, open sound.

- F&osus4 (F&o–B–E) – The suspended fourth (B) adds unresolved tension.
- D&mm9 (D&m–F&m–A&m–C&m–E&m) – The 9th (E&m) gives the chord a dreamy quality.

These chords together paint an audio picture of a city that's alive, complex, and slightly ambiguous.

Learning the Chords: Tips for Musicians

Start with the Basics

Before diving into new slang chords, ensure you have a solid grasp of standard major and minor triads. Understanding the root, third, and fifth of each chord will give you a foundation to build upon when you start adding extensions.

Explore Extended Chords

Practice adding a 7th, 9th, 11th, or 13th to your existing chord shapes. For example, take a G major chord and add a B&m (the 7th) to create a G7. Continue adding notes to form G9, G11, and G13. This exercise will help you hear how each added tone alters the chord's mood.

Experiment with Suspensions

Suspended chords replace the third with either a second or fourth. Try playing a Csus2 (C–D–G) and a Csus4 (C–F–G). Notice how the absence of the third creates a sense of openness.

Use a Capo or Transposition

If you're uncomfortable playing complex chord shapes in the open position, use a capo or transpose the song to a key that suits your vocal range. This can make it easier to experiment with new chord voicings.

Record and Analyze

Record yourself playing the new slang chords and listen back critically. Pay attention to how the chords interact with the melody and rhythm. This will help you refine your technique and internalize the harmonic language.

Incorporate These Chords into Your Own Songs

Once you're comfortable, try substituting a standard chord in your favorite song with a slang chord. For instance, replace a simple A major with an A13. Notice how the song's emotional texture shifts.

Why New Slang Chords Matter in Contemporary Music

In a musical landscape that often favors formulaic progressions, the use of new slang chords offers a breath of fresh air. These chords allow artists to:

- Express nuanced emotions: The tension and release inherent in extended and suspended chords mirror complex feelings.
- Create memorable hooks: Unexpected chord changes can make a chorus stand out.
- Bridge genres: By borrowing from jazz, funk, and folk, musicians can create hybrid sounds that appeal to a broader audience.

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