

## Marvin Gaye "What's Going On"

By Douglas Baldwin

In 1971 the United States government was pouring billions of dollars into the perpetuation of a senseless war on the other side of the earth while racism and drug abuse ruled the city streets. Marvin Gaye dared to stand up to conservative, entertainment-oriented Motown Records and deliver an album that reflected the problems of those troubled times. Although initially rejected by his label, "What's Going On" went on to reach #2 on the *Billboard* charts.

Thirty years later, an all-star cast of artists came together to interpret Gaye's classic as a way of raising funds and global consciousness about the AIDS epidemic in Africa. Four days after that recording session, the United States was brutally attacked; in their work, Artists Against AIDS Worldwide felt compelled to recognize the victims of September 11. Whether

you relate to the laid-back funk of Marvin Gaye's original performance, Moby's barren ambient redux, or Fred Durst's burst of compassion via incendiary slabs of down-tuned metal, the power of Marvin Gaye's message remains as vital as ever.

### TRANSPOSITION

For this Strum It arrangement, you'll need to use a capo at the 2nd fret; this transposes the fingered D major-based chords to the sounding key of E major. Never used a capo before? It's a simple device, essentially a clamp that holds the strings down at one of your guitar's frets. Think of the capo as a temporary nut—play your chords the same number of frets above it as you would the real nut. *Voilà!* You've just performed the musically magical act of transposition.

Whenever you use a capo, it's good to know what key you're fingering and to which key the capo transposes you. Play the open 4th string on your capo-less guitar, and a "D" sounds. Then place a capo at the 2nd fret and play the unfretted 4th string again. It now sounds as an "E," as the "new nut" effectively transposes you up a whole step. So, in "What's Going On," the fingered key is D major, and the sounding key is E major.

### A GENTLE INTRODUCTION TO JAZZ

"What's Going On" employs several chords that can be identified as jazz chords. Most folk, rock, metal, and blues music uses chords called triads, which are constructed from a root plus its 3rd and 5th notes. Additional notes can be added to these chords; the folk-rock-metal-

blues axis favors "color notes" such as the 2nd and 4th. Jazz, however, is based on 7th chords, so the addition of 7ths to both major and minor triads lends a jazzy quality to pop/rock music.

In "What's Going On," the (fingered) Dmaj7, Bm7, and Em7 chords all generate a jazzy vibe while remaining squarely in the key of D major. The two extended A chords (A13sus4 and A13) are also typical of jazz-based music, where the chord built on the 5th note of the scale (also known as the dominant chord)

typically receives extensions. The Gm9 comes as a harmonic surprise; that chord is borrowed from D major's parallel minor key, D minor. Looking at its notes (D-E-F-G-A-B-C), dig that Gm9 (G-B-D-F-A) clearly fits in D minor.

### THAT OLD-SCHOOL FUNK GROOVE

Gaye's recording of "What's Going On" clocks in at 104 beats per minute. To get that gentle funk into your strum, use your metronome, and begin by playing even eighth notes with down-strums, as in Fig. 1. Then, add the 16th-note up-strums in Fig. 2, but make them just a little restrained, slightly behind the beat. It's the sound of a gentle revolution, brothers and sisters, where war is not the answer. Peace. ♪



Fig. 1

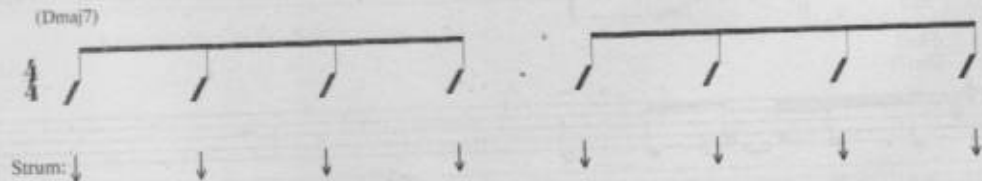
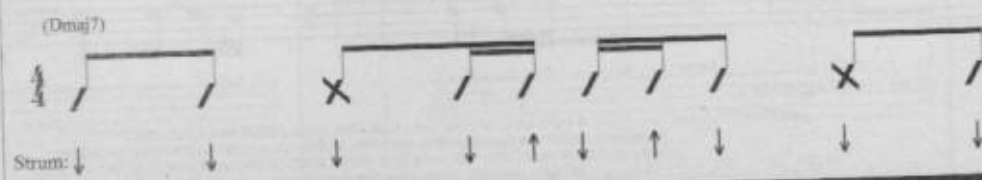


Fig. 2



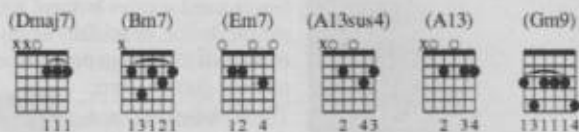
# WHAT'S GOING ON

As Recorded by Marvin Gaye  
(From the Motown Recording WHAT'S GOING ON)

Peace out with the 24 note-for-note tab transcriptions in the new Guitar Recorded Versions songbook Love & Peace Rock (00690475, \$14.95). Contact Music Diapatch to order (800-637-2852, www.musicdiapatch.com).

Words and Music by Marvin Gaye, Al Cleveland, and Renaldo Benson

Arranged by Adam Perlmutter



Capo II

## Intro

Moderate Soul ♩ = 104

## Verse

\*Emaj7  
(Dmaj7)

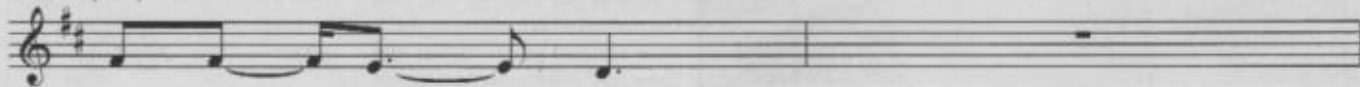
Emaj7  
(Dmaj7)



1. Moth - er, moth - er, — there's - too - man - y  
2. Fath - er, fath - er, — we don't need to  
3. Moth - er, moth - er, — ev - 'ry - bod - y

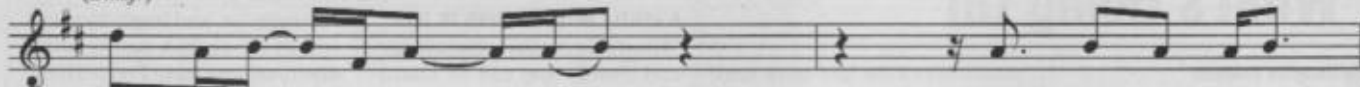
\*Symbols in parentheses represent chord names respective to capoed guitar.  
Symbols above represent actual sounding chords.

C#m7  
(Bm7)



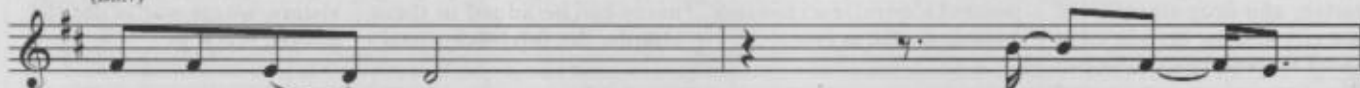
of you — cry — ing. You, see,  
thinks es - we're ca - late. — wrong. Oh, but

Emaj7  
(Dmaj7)



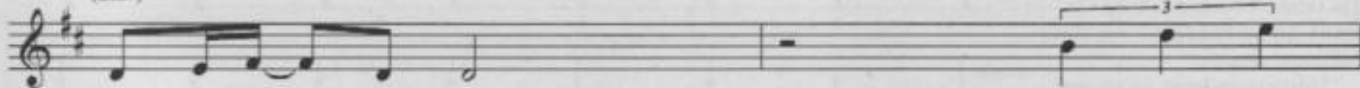
Broth - er, broth - er, broth - er, — there's far too man - y  
war is not the an - swer, — for on - ly love can  
who are they — to judge — us, — simp - ly 'cause our

C#m7  
(Bm7)



of you dy — ing. You — know — we've  
hair con - quer — hate. — long? — }

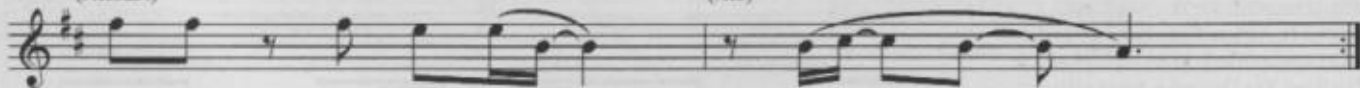
F#m7  
(Em7)



got to find — a way to bring some

B13sus4  
(A13sus4)

B13  
(A13)



lo - vin' here to - day, — hey. —  
(3. un - der - stand - in')

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# What's Going On

## Chorus

Background Vocals: w/ Voc. Fill 1 (6 times)

F#m7  
(Em7)

B13sus4  
(A13sus4)

Pick - et lines— and pick - et signs.— Don't

F#m7  
(Em7)

B13sus4  
(A13sus4)

pun - ish me— with bru - tal - i - ty.—

F#m7  
(Em7)

B13sus4  
(A13sus4)

B13  
(A13)

Talk to me— so you can see,— oh,— what's

Background Vocals: w/ Voc. Fill 2 (4 times)

Emaj7  
(Dmaj7)

C#m7  
(Bm7)

go - ing on,— what's go - in' on,— hey,— what's

Emaj7  
(Dmaj7)

C#m7  
(Bm7)

To Coda ⊕

go - in' on,— ah,— what's go - in' on.—

## Interlude

w/ ad lib Vocals

Am9  
(Gm9)

B13sus4  
(A13sus4)

D.S. al Coda  
(no repeat)

8 4

## ⊕ Coda

### Outro

w/ ad lib Vocals

Am9  
(Gm9)

B13sus4  
(A13sus4)

Repeat and Fade

8 4

### Voc. Fill 1

(Sis - ter.)  
(2. Broth - er.)

### Voc. Fill 2

(What's go - in' on.)