

## FEATURES

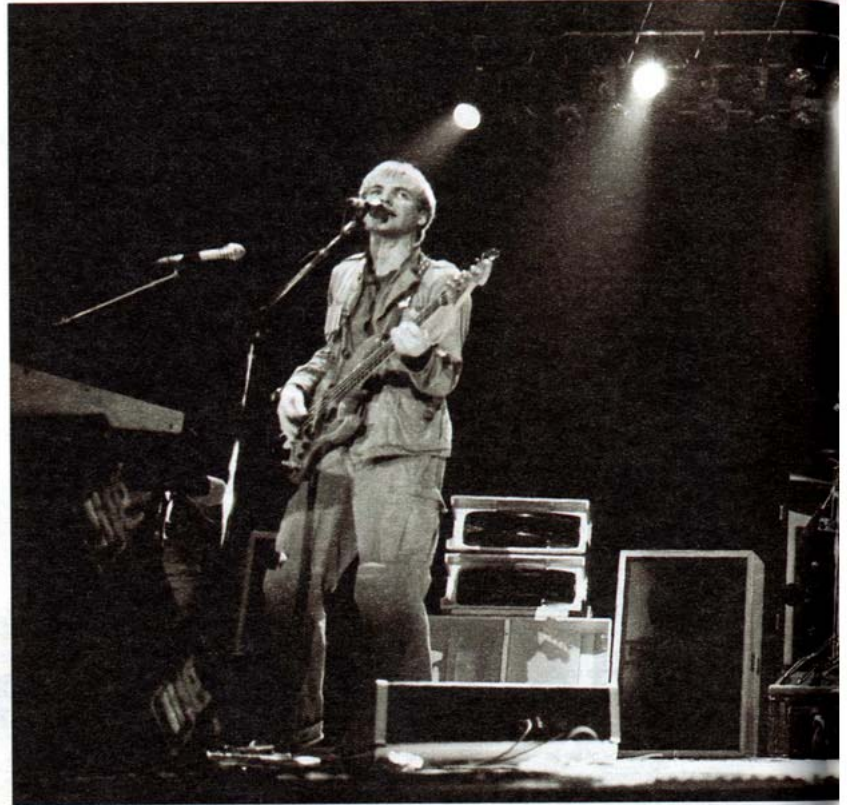
# THE POLICE FILES

**MUSIC** THEY TRAVELLED THE WORLD, MET WOMEN, LEARNT THE BANJO – BUT DID THEY HAVE FUN? IF ANDY SUMMERS' 25,000-ODD PICTURES OF THE POLICE ON TOUR ARE ANYTHING TO GO BY, THE ANSWER IS YES. THE GUITARIST – AND PRODIGIOUS PHOTOGRAPHER – TELLS JOHN PRESTON WHY THEY'RE ABOUT TO DO IT ALL AGAIN

SOMETHING ODD HAPPENED TO ANDY SUMMERS the other day. He went to his favourite neighbourhood restaurant near his home in Venice Beach, Los Angeles – something that he does about once a week. Normally, he sits there without anyone recognising him, or coming up and telling him how much they 'love his work', but this time all the waiters asked for his autograph.

'I think that's when it really sunk in,' he says over the phone from California. 'Ever since then I've woken up every morning and thought, "How much longer have I got like this? How much more time am I going to be able to spend with my wife and kids before I enter this..."' He breaks off and gives a heartfelt-sounding wheeze, before continuing: "... this completely other world?"

At the end of May, Summers and the other two members of The Police – Sting and Stewart Copeland – will start a world tour in North America, ticket sales for which have



exceeded even Summers's most fevered expectations. 'Do you know how long it took for us to sell out Madison Square Garden?' he asks. 'Four minutes. I mean, it's quite hard to wipe the smile off your face after hearing something like that.'

Quite coincidentally – Summers insists – there's a book of his photographs being published next month, too. *I'll Be Watching You: Inside The Police*, consists of 600 of his photographs whittled down from the 25,000 that he took between 1980 and 1983. While it's true that photographers tend to be a pretty trigger-happy bunch, 25,000 photographs still seems a hell of a lot to take in just three years. 'Well, I am an obsessive sort of guy,' Summers acknowledges. 'When I pursue something, I tend to do so very single-mindedly.' In fact, Summers is so loath to be parted from his camera that when he and his wife go on holiday, she periodically has to remind him, 'Life over photographs, Andy.'

Here, in what the press release breathlessly calls, 'a sumptuous volume, beating with musical energy, nostalgia and atmospheric beauty' are pictures of Summers's band-mates on and off stage, along with the occasional picture of a naked woman artfully posed with one of his guitars.

For Summers, photography started off as a way of alleviating the boredom when he was on tour. 'It meant I could say to myself, "I'm not just this moron in a hotel room pretending that I'm leading a normal life" – it made me feel like a living, breathing human being again. It also allowed me to make some sense of what we were going through at the time. Instead of thinking, "There's Sting and Stewart, and Stewart's really pissing me off right now", I was able to see them as these two shapes and as part of a more general composition. In that sense it gave me a degree of objectivity when everything around us was getting more and more out of control. Towards the end of *The Police* we didn't even leave our hotel rooms because it was too much hassle. We just led this existence behind darkened windows and with minders everywhere you looked. Under those circumstances, it became very hard to remember that, at the end of the day, what we were doing was just f---ing pop music.'

At one point, Summers's obsession with photography became so consuming that he rigged up cameras on the side of the stage which he could activate by hitting buttons on his guitar-pedal board. He was thus able to perform and to take photographs of himself at the same time. When I put it to him that he seems to have taken narcissism to new heights, Summers concedes that there might be something in this. 'Mmm, it does seem strange, doesn't it? I was going through a divorce at the time so that might have had some-

►1982 'And through all of this there is only one I truly love and she ain't here...'



▼1981 'Better progress today. We are getting past the demo situation and starting to make the album ["Ghost in the Machine", recorded on Montserrat]'



▲1983 'Somewhere over America it feels as if we have achieved full penetration – as symbolised by our magic flying carpet'

**'TAKING PHOTOGRAPHS ON TOUR MEANT I COULD SAY TO MYSELF, "I'M NOT JUST THIS MORON IN A HOTEL ROOM PRETENDING THAT I'M LEADING A NORMAL LIFE"'**

◀1981 'A fruitless day in the studio – doesn't seem like we moved forward. Do we have too much time that is spent thinking about each other rather than making the effort to pull together up and out of this sh--?'





▲ 1982 'Stewart has got himself a banjo and now everywhere we are, there is the bloody banjo - we all play it compulsively'

thing to do with it...' He subsequently re-married his wife, Layla. 'But most of all it was a way of keeping myself in the picture. I don't think it was insecurity; it was just making sure I was in there somewhere.'

Certainly Summers was the least visible member of The Police - the small one with delicate features who appeared slightly distanced from what was going on around him. In rock music this attitude invariably means that, sooner or later, you'll be hailed as the true genius of the band. In Summers's case his air of detachment may have had something to do with the fact that he was 10 years older than the other two, and, thus, more inured to all the hysteria and hero-worshipping.

Running through the book in the accompanying captions is a note of increasing disillusionment; a sense that Summers didn't much care for fame. 'It can be very scary. It's like having huge muscle and walking on eggshells at the same time. All three of us are, I hope, gentlemen. But fame does do strange things to people. I think it's impossible not to feel slightly elevated from everyone else. That can be difficult to live with. Certainly, after The Police split up I felt psychologically shattered and it took me a couple of years to get back down onto Planet Earth.'

**'I ALWAYS FELT WE HADN'T USED UP OUR CREATIVE JUICES AND DIDN'T MAKE ENOUGH ALBUMS'**

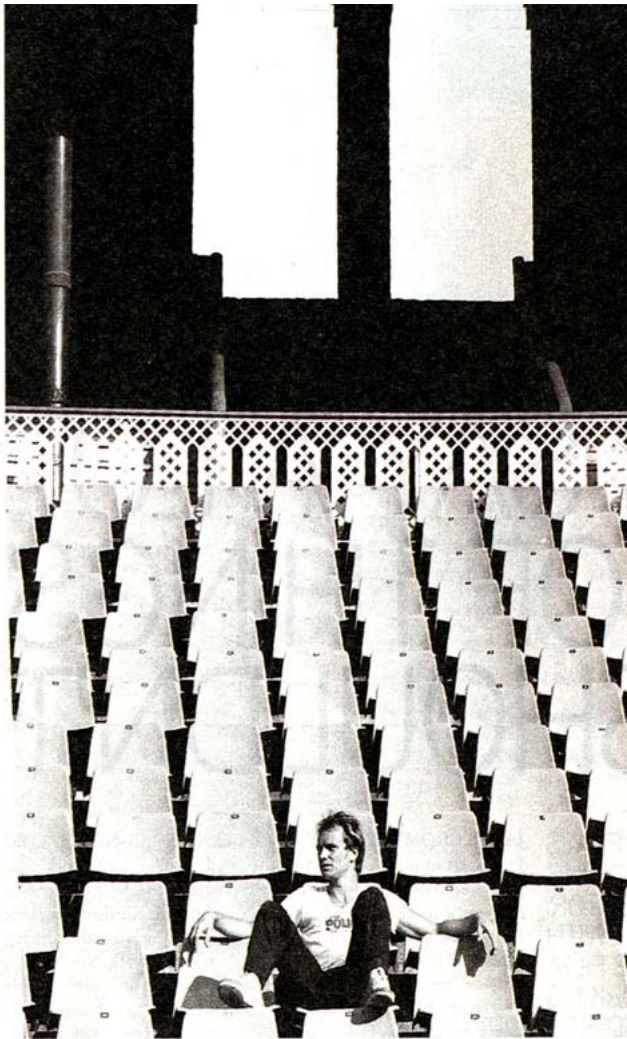
Yet here he is about to descend into the maelstrom once more: a man of 64 with a string of highly regarded solo albums to his name, along with an extremely entertaining and well-written autobiography. 'I know, I know... I can't pretend I didn't have some disquiet about it. In January we spent two weeks rehearsing in Vancouver, and on the way there I thought to myself, "Right, I've got to get through this." But then, after three days, I was beginning to suspect that it would never work. It was as if we were having to cross this extremely rocky psychological terrain, and it's not



▲ 1982 'Can you succeed without being a narcissist? The world is waiting for our latest self-glorifying exercise, but maybe it will be good music as well'



◀ 1983 'Visited Stewart and new baby son at Bledlow Bridge today. Now I feel like we're Genesis or Pink Floyd - sort of landed English gentry pop stars - bit of a cliché'



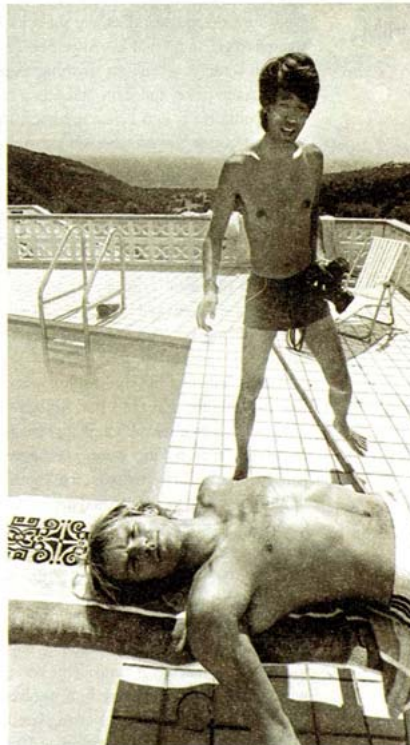
►1980 'Spain-Portugal: Plaza de Toros Monumental, Barcelona; Stadio Román Valero, Madrid; Stádio de Restelo, Lisbon'

►1980 Far right: 'Yeah, I like it here. Oz is like a heady mix of California and Blighty, but then it feels like we can do no wrong at the moment'

▼1982 'The hands strike midnight and the reasoning mind doused by chemistry flies out of the window and you descend once again into the mire of consequence – libertine, sybarite, profligate son of a bitch... the eye is the primary organ of sex'



►1981 'The heat drops you like a stone. Montserrat embraces you in a humid soporific hug so that you feel like a wet rag, and then you have to make music stripped to the bone'



as if we're particularly mellow guys. In fact, we're all pretty pushy and so everything does tend to get tense.

'At one point in particular I thought, "F---, I'm back with this lot again and I really don't want to do it." What made it even worse was that we were being filmed the whole time, so it would have been difficult to walk away. We were caught like fish in the net. But then, all at once, things got better. It was as if the clouds parted; we started joking and suddenly it was as if we'd slipped back into this collective psyche. It's difficult to put into words, but it was a great feeling – something that, in some respects anyway, I realised I'd missed a lot.'

Summers is honest enough to admit that the money was a big incentive; the band stands to earn well over \$100 million from the North American tour alone. 'Well, yeah, of course it's a factor, but it's not the only one. I always felt that we hadn't used up our creative juices and that we didn't make enough albums. It was as if we f---ed off without ever saying goodbye to the world. This is like a chance to make amends.'

There was also a sense that the hand of destiny was hovering somewhere over the Police's reunion – just as it had been over their formation. 'I've always felt destiny had something to do with it,' Summers says. After spells with Zoot Money's Big Roll Band and Eric Burdon's New Animals, Summers – on a bizarre evening in 1977 – found himself impersonating Mike Oldfield at a performance of *Tubular Bells* in Newcastle.

'Mike didn't like performing very much and I was asked to take his place. I wasn't doing anything else at the time and so I said yes. The support band that evening was Last Exit, with Sting on bass and vocals. A couple of weeks later I ran into Stewart on a Tube train in London and shortly after that we formed The Police.'

Thirty years on, and many public squabbles later, they're off again. That, of course, is assuming they don't start tearing one another's throats out before the tour gets under way. There again, Summers tended to stay apart from the fray, with most of the bust-ups – and fist fights – being between Sting and Copeland.

'In one sense I suppose it's quite good that people think we hate one another because they'll come to see us wondering if we're going to have a big fight on stage,' Summers says. 'But if there was any real animosity, we simply wouldn't be getting back together. Although it's true that we have had our differences, I promise you they have been hugely exaggerated. In fact, I'd say there's a real bedrock of love there.'

But didn't Copeland once have a piece of paper stuck to his drums with 'Sting, Is A. C---' written on it? 'Well, yes,' Summers admits. 'That is true; he did it so he'd hit them even harder. But he hasn't done it this time round and, right now, I'm feeling pretty confident he's not going to.' Ⓢ

*'I'll Be Watching You: Inside The Police, 1980-83'*, by Andy Summers, is published by Taschen in a signed and numbered Collector's Edition at £300 a copy; [www.taschen.com](http://www.taschen.com)  
Tour details: [www.thepolice.com](http://www.thepolice.com)