

| Andy Summers

# I'LL BE WATCHING YOU

Interview: Jeremy Taylor

The Police are back on tour after two decades apart – and this time, strings man Andy Summers is taking a very expensive camera

**THEY WERE BLOND**, they were beautiful, and by the early 1980s they had become the biggest band in the world. And now, three decades after it all began, The Police are back. From London to Los Angeles, Sydney to Paris, the superstar trio of Sting, Andy Summers and Stewart Copeland will be back in the spotlight this summer for their Reunion Tour – which sold out in minutes.

You might think going back on the road was the last thing he would want to do at the age of 64 but Andy Summers, the man behind The Police's distinctive guitar riffs, is unfazed. "To be honest, it's the easiest part for me," he says. "When we started out we had to carry our own gear. Now the band travels in a private jet and everything's taken care of."

It's been some time since The Police carried their own gear. At their peak in 1983 the band dominated the US and UK charts and racked up six Grammy Awards and two BRITs. The Police just couldn't stop churning out the hits: *Message in a Bottle*, *Walking on the Moon*, *Don't Stand So Close To Me* and *Every Breath You Take* all reached number one. Albums *Reggatta de Blanc*, *Zenyatta Mondatta*, *Ghost in the Machine* and *Synchronicity* topped the British charts.

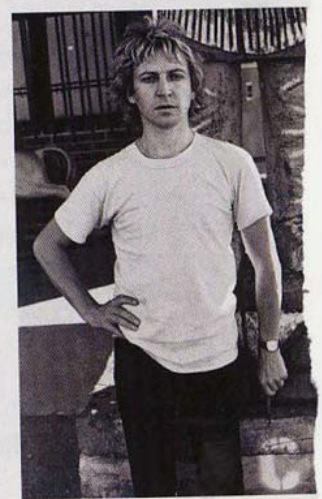
"We were flying high; nearly everything we released went straight to the top of the charts," recalls Summers from his home in LA where he is taking a break from rehearsals for the tour. "It was hard work though, because we were only a trio. Even the 2007 tour is just the three of us. We tried it once with an orchestra and backing but it sounded awful!"

Summers was born in Lancashire but grew up in Bournemouth. He took up the guitar at 14 and spent his teens playing in jazz bands. His slick sounds led to a string of jobs with psychedelic bands during the 1960s, culminating in a spell with The Animals and playing hits like *House of the Rising Sun*. The musician tied the knot with sweetheart Robin Lane in 1968 but the marriage was short-lived. He then married psychology graduate Kate in 1973 and the couple had a daughter, Layla, five years later. By now Summers was working as a session musician for stars such as Neil Sedaka. ▶

Clockwise from left: Stewart Copeland and Sting, Teotihuacán Pyramid, Mexico, 1980; fans chasing the band's limo, Toronto, 1982; various recording sessions at AIR Studios, Montserrat, 1981-82

Below: Andy Summers, on the road, Arizona, 1980

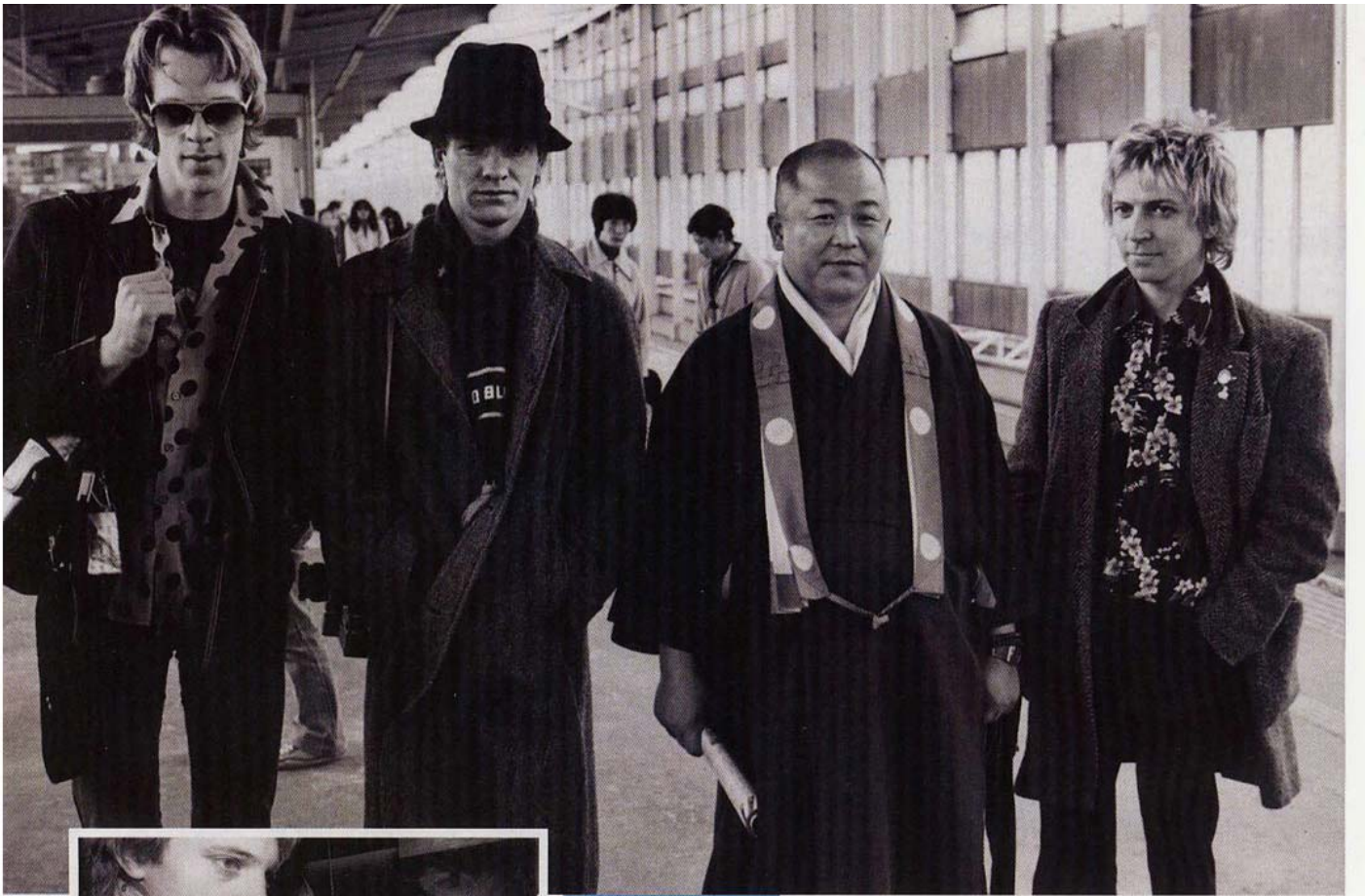
Bottom left: The Police, shortly before Sting started to pursue a solo career



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Photography: Andy Summers, Rex Features



#### Arresting Facts

- The 2007 Reunion Tour celebrates the release of The Police's first single, *Fall Out*, originally released in May 1977. It didn't make the charts but reached number 47 when re-released in 1979.
- The band's trademark blond locks came from their appearance in a Wrigley's Spearmint Gum advert when strapped for cash. The company demanded they dyed their hair blond and the look stuck.
- Summers' three children with second wife Kate are called Layla Z Summers, Anton Y Summers and Maurice X Summers. His first solo album after The Police was called XYZ.
- Sting is married to actress Trudie Styler. She produced Guy Ritchie's film *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels* and also introduced Ritchie to future wife Madonna.

Photography: Andy Summers

“We had a Ford van and used to shift all the equipment ourselves for every gig”

Above: Stewart Copeland, Sting and Andy Summers with a Japanese *roshi*, Kyoto Station, Japan, 1980

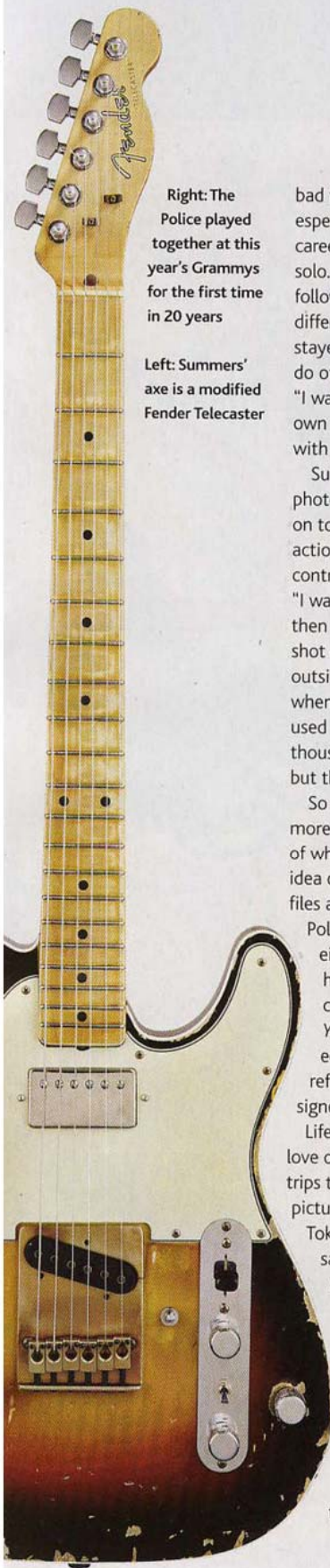
“The Police formed by accident in 1977 when we were brought together to create another band. When a couple of people left, we became a trio,” he says.

While former English teacher Sting (real name Gordon Sumner) provided the lyrics and became the group's frontman, Summers used a series of special effects attached to his guitar (a Fender Telecaster) to create the Police 'sound'. “Initially we were a bit punk but that went out of the window,” he says. “We started to have a more reggae feel and some people compared us to The Clash. Reggae was big at that time in the UK but not in America.”

The Police got their big break when Stewart Copeland's brother, a music executive, heard their single *Roxanne*. He struck a recording contract with A&M Records and the group toured America in 1979. “Now that was a gruelling schedule!” says Summers. “We had a small Ford van and it was down to us to shift all the equipment and set up for every gig.” That winter the band scored its first UK number one with *Message in a Bottle*, closely followed by *Walking on the Moon*. Stardom was beckoning and the hits followed thick and fast. But success was also a strain, not least on Summers' marriage. The couple divorced in 1981 – only to remarry in 1985.

The pressure took its toll elsewhere, too. By the time The Police had broken up in 1986 there were ▶

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Right: The Police played together at this year's Grammys for the first time in 20 years

Left: Summers' axe is a modified Fender Telecaster

bad feelings among the band, especially as Sting had an acting career and was increasingly singing solo. A string of compilation albums followed but the three pursued different interests. "We always stayed in touch but we wanted to do other things," Summers explains. "I wanted to write and perform my own stuff, as well as moving forward with my photography."

Summers had always been a keen photographer and taken his camera on tour, photographing the band in action by rigging up a remote control unit on his camera. "I was so obsessed with music back then I didn't have a decent camera. I shot everything, from the crowds outside our gigs to the audience when we played," he remembers. "I used black-and-white film and took thousands of photographs. It was a bit of an addiction but they've brought back so many memories."

So much of an addiction that Summers amassed more than 25,000 negatives in the early 1980s, many of which had never been printed before he had the idea of a book. It took him months to sift through his files and come up with the definitive collection of Police photographs. "It's not all glamorous stuff either," Summers maintains. "There are plenty of hotel rooms and tour bus shots from 20 or so countries we visited at the time." *I'll Be Watching You: Inside The Police, 1980-83* is a limited-edition glossy hardback. The £300 price tag reflects the print run of just 1,500 and each is signed by the guitarist.

Life after the band saw Summers indulging in his love of photography still further, with a number of trips to Asia to capture shots of rural village life. The pictures were exhibited in London, New York and Tokyo. "I have a better camera now of course!" he says. "At the moment I can't decide whether to shoot the new Police tour on film or digitally – that's how much times have changed since we last went on the road together."

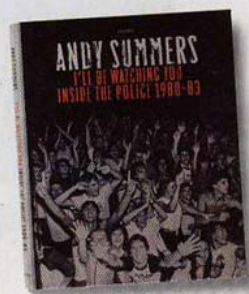
The Police reunited briefly in 2003 when the band was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, a museum in Ohio dedicated to the most influential music-makers in the history of recording. Earlier this year, rumours of a full reunion began to circulate in the music press.



"We were photographed together drinking in a bar at the Sundance Film Festival in January. The press headlines put the reunion idea up for grabs and it became a sort of 'will they, won't they' story," Summers explains. The answer didn't come until February when The Police played together again for the Grammy Awards in Los Angeles. Sting took the microphone and announced: "We are The Police – and we're back!"

All previous acrimony was laid aside. "Sting put the idea forward and the whole tour took off," Summers says. "Playing together again isn't hard. We slipped back into it. I'm just delighted we have a chance to play live again because we fizzled out in the mid-80s. Apart from our original fans there's a new generation who seem to know our music. This may be the first and last chance they have to see us on stage." ●

*I'll Be Watching You: Inside The Police 1980-83* by Andy Summers is published by Taschen ([www.taschen.com](http://www.taschen.com); £300). The Police will play London (8 and 9 September), Manchester (15 and 16 September) and Cardiff (19 October) before going to the US in November; [www.thepolice.com](http://www.thepolice.com))



Photography: Rex Features / © FMIC