



May 29, 2019

1 Million Unique Monthly Visitors

<https://www.songfacts.com/blog/interviews/stewart-copeland-the-police>

Stewart Copeland of The Police



The Police released five albums, each one more successful than the last. After the first (*Outlandos d'Amour*, 1978), they conquered Europe. After the second (*Reggatta de Blanc*, 1979), they ruled America. That was the fun part.

"A curious thing about adulation, it starts to feel like obligation," drummer Stewart Copeland says in his documentary *Everyone Stares: The Police Inside Out*. Copeland bought a Super 8 camera in 1978 and used it to chronicle their wild ride up to their final album, *Synchronicity*, when at their peak, The Police shut it down.

Copeland shot hours of footage but didn't piece it together until decades later, releasing the film in 2006 (it's out on Blu-ray and digital May 31, 2019). Early on, we see unbridled joy and steely determination from Copeland and his bandmates, guitarist Andy Summers and bass player Sting. But as the stakes get higher, so does the tension. By their fourth album, *Ghost In the Machine*, Sting is firmly in control and the levity has vanished.

Post-Police, Copeland became a top soundtrack composer, scoring the films *Wall Street* and *Talk Radio*, and also the TV series *The Equalizer*. He made jazz music with Stanley Clarke in a group called Animal Logic, composed an opera, and formed Oysterhead with Trey Anastasio and Les Claypool. Summers carved out an impressive career as a photographer and solo artist; Sting released seven consecutive million-selling albums, a streak he ended with an album of lute music.

The demise of the band was a necessary creative destruction.

In 1986, two years after their split, The Police played three shows on the Amnesty International "Conspiracy Of Hope" tour, then tried to make an album. All that came of it was more acrimony and an overproduced reworking of "Don't Stand So Close To Me" for a greatest hits compilation. They didn't regroup until a 2007-2008 reunion tour that took in \$297 million but brought the old hostilities back to the fore.

These days, Copeland can look back at his time with The Police with a clear-eyed perspective. It's telling that he edited many whimsical moments into the film, leaving much of the bitterness behind. "When you get to where you're going, the ride is over," he says.



Carl Wiser (Songfacts): When you finally looked at the footage for *Everyone Stares*, what was different about how you remembered it?

Stewart Copeland: It was more cheerful to look at than I remembered it. Strangely, I think it's true of most people that you remember the pain more than you remember the laugh, and it was great to be reminded of what a fun ride it really was.

Songfacts: What were you listening to in those giant headphones from the '70s?

Copeland: We were listening to Human League, Talking Heads and Blondie... in mono.

Also, a guilty pleasure which I can confess after all these years, I was listening to Fleetwood Mac's *Rumours*, even though we were supposedly the revolutionaries trying to burn down their ship. And Split Enz.

Songfacts: Split Enz! Wow!

Copeland: They suddenly busted out. They were two different bands - they played England and they were all strange men with strange makeup and a weird stage production, and then they disappeared. I think they were either from New Zealand or

Australia. Then suddenly they came out with a second album that might have been called *True Colours*, which was just a really great album. We memorized that sucker.

Split Enz

Led by Tim Finn and Phil Judd, Split Enz was a 7-piece band from New Zealand that released their first album in 1975. Their songs were well-crafted, artsy and melodic; their look was bonkers, with clown makeup and gravity-defying hairdos. They were one of the first bands to make the kind of outlandish videos that would rule MTV years later.

Split Enz went through a number of lineup changes, most significantly swapping out Judd for Neil Finn (Tim's teenage brother) in 1977. Their big hit was "I Got You" (from *True Colours*) in 1980, a #1 hit in Australia and New Zealand. They had strong support in the Antipodes, but never had much impact in America or the UK. When they fractured in 1984, Neil Finn formed Crowded House with Split Enz drummer Paul Hester.



Songfacts: Was this all on cassette tapes?

Copeland: Yeah these were on cassettes.

Songfacts: You mention these bands, and many of them had very contentious careers with lots of ups and downs. Did The Police have any band you emulated in terms of what type of career you wanted?

Copeland: No, not really. Because we went beyond all the competition.

It sounds kind of arrogant, but I mean that every band kicks its own ass. *We slew us! We rocked us!* That kind of comes with the turf.

A good chunk of The Police catalog soundtracks *Everyone Stares*, but many of the songs aren't like we remember them. That's because Copeland, using Pro Tools, reworked them, a process he calls "deranging."

Songfacts: You worked from the multi-track masters when you did the songs, correct?

Copeland: The score for the film, yes, I got these multi-track masters and did these "derangements." I did one where I got "[Roxanne](#)," I cut it up, I made a whole different track out of it. I used bits of this and bits of that, and it was kind of cool. Then I did the same thing with "Walking In Your Footsteps." I went over to Sting's place in Malibu and played it, and he said, "Yeah, cool. Do some more, great." Then I played it for Andy, and he said, "Yeah, cool."

“Sting was a master of bait and switch.

Then I made a mistake. I did like seven of them, and went just ape-crazy. I called up the record company and they sent me over the sessions of all the recordings, so I had the multi-tracks, but I forgot to call Andy and bring him back over, and I forgot to call Sting-O and involve him in the process. I selfishly had so much fun doing whatever I wanted to do with the tracks: I took the chorus from this song, and put it

with the verse of that song; I took the lyrics of this song and put it over there; I took this live stuff and jammed it in the middle over here. I just had so much fun doing it that I forgot to call my colleagues, so the next thing they know is that Stewart's off fucking up The Police recordings. You can imagine their delight and surprise.

So they went back into the cookie jar and sat there until I made the film. It was my thing this time, so I could make any film I wanted, but I did get them involved and at this point they had mellowed and they didn't mind me using these tracks as the score for the film.

Songfacts: What's a song that you deranged that you thought ended up better than the original?

Copeland: "[Can't Stand Losing You](#)." I took live elements and studio elements and carved them all up, and I took some of the jams from "Roxanne," which interestingly was the same tempo, and cut it in there. The version of "[Don't Stand So Close To Me](#)" comes from both studio recordings because we re-recorded it - strangely, no one can remember why - but we re-recorded it in a different key and I jammed both of those versions together, which was a hell of a puzzle to figure out the transition keys. I used Sting's overdubs because he did some amazing overdub work with the new version of "Don't Stand So Close To Me," which I used on the original backing track.

Songfacts: Was there something about "Don't Stand So Close To Me" that bothered you all these years?

Copeland: Oh no, not at all. It wasn't that I had problems to fix, it was more like opportunities to do cool stuff.

Songfacts: "[King of Pain](#)" has a mallet line going through it.

Copeland: Yes.

Songfacts: Can you talk about how that came about and what instrument you used?

Copeland: I used a xylophone. Those chords Sting had on a little Casio, which has a kind of clinky sound. We thought, *Let's make it a little more organic and play it on the xylophone.*

With "[Wrapped Around Your Finger](#)," the same thing happened: I just played a tiny little mallet part as an additive, as a bit of decoration, but in that song when we play it live I get off the drum set and I go to a completely different percussion rig where I play the tune on the crotales as well as all kinds of other percussion stuff.

Music Videos

The Police made music videos right from the start, often in unusual places. "So Lonely" finds them in Hong Kong and Tokyo; "Walking On The Moon" was shot at Kennedy Space Center, where Copeland drums on a Saturn V rocket; "De Do Do Do, De Da Da Da" was shot in snowy Canada and shows Copeland with his Super 8 camera. His footage wasn't used in the video, but does appear in *Everyone Stares*.

When MTV launched in 1981, these videos were some of the best in their catalog, made more appealing by the group's status as a contemporary rock band with a foothold in America. *Ghost In The Machine* was the first Police album released after MTV launched. The videos for that one, especially "Every Little Thing She Does Is Magic" and "Spirits In The Material World," gave the band a big boost in the US and made them fixtures on the network.

For *Synchronicity*, The Police (or more specifically, their record company) ditched longtime director Derek Burbidge and went with the team of Kevin Godley and Lol Creme (Godley & Creme), who delivered stunning videos for "Every Breath You Take," "Wrapped Around Your Finger" and "Synchronicity II." These were done in studios, so Copeland got to sit at a drum kit, unlike some of their location videos where he was kitless, pounding away on whatever was handy. "The guitarist can twang his guitar, but what's a drummer supposed to do?," he asked. "I just have to jerk along to the music and feel like a dick."



Songfacts: How did the introduction of synthesizers and keyboards affect you?

Copeland: Not in any profound way. They were secondary to the guitar and we had a guitarist with such a wide vocabulary that we never really needed to use keyboards that much. I just preferred what Andy would come up with.

We all preferred guitar, but there are bits and pieces of keyboards. They both got Taurus bass pedals and we used technology for various things, but keyboards not so much. In fact, "Every Breath You Take," Sting brought it in as a Hammond organ thing but we agreed that we are a guitar band, so Andy figured out that arpeggiated figure with which we are all so familiar.

Songfacts: When Sting brings in a song like "Every Breath You Take," which is suddenly a very personal song, how do you feel about that?

Copeland: Well, they are all personal and mysterious but I never even bothered with the lyrics. I just listened to the riff and the track and I would discover at some later point what the song was about. Half the time I would be surprised because Sting was a master of bait and switch. I was with him a couple of weeks ago doing a documentary about music and I asked him, "Why didn't you make 'Every Breath You Take' a nice song that people could get married to? What's the matter with you?," and we laughed.

But consider that the last three albums I had only heard the songs about half an hour before recording the drums that are now etched in history. They got a chance to redo all their vocals, all the guitar overdubs, everything else they got a chance to redo, but the drums, they were laid down.

Sting had a technique of revealing only one song at a time, which is darn crafty and actually was very effective because rather than listen to seven songs and form opinions about them, we had to focus on one. We all had songs, but when Sting would say "OK, I've got one more," we'd all get real excited. He'd be showing Andy the chords and while they are doing that I'm thinking about the rhythm: *OK, right, verse, chorus, A, F-sharp minor...* When I figured out in my mind what to do with the rhythm, we'd do a take, and another take, and maybe three or four takes. Usually we'd use Take 2 because it was tidier than Take 1 but still had some sparkle. Then we would go on tour and I would figure out how to get from the chorus down into the verse in a much more efficient way, a more slick way, and I'd think, *Wow, I wish*

I had done that on the record, but the record doesn't suck totally so I guess it worked out.

Years later, considering all those drum parts, whenever I'm feeling low, I just go to YouTube and I look up "Stewart Copeland's 10 most important drum solos," and there's nerds out there analyzing them: "What Copeland decided to bring introduced the notion..." I feel like telling them a couple of things. "First of all, guys, I was high!" Which actually isn't true - I was straight as a judge. Later on that day yeah, but not when we were laying down tracks because there was so much pressure on me. But, it was all made up on the spot. All this classic, legendary stuff that they are arguing over was completely spontaneous.

Songfacts: Which is interesting because when you do soundtrack work, you have to make the music match the scene.

“*Jazz fans are the best:
They will put up with
anything.*

Copeland: Oh, it's all deeply considered, that's a whole different world. Drumming and composing are two almost unrelated exercises - they both use completely different parts of the brain. Playing drums is an experience: it's something that you *do*, it's not something that you think about. It's a completely physical exercise - it's in the moment: Whatever comes out is what it is. Whereas composing is all mental, it's all thinking, it's all considered and you plan and so on. There's no planning with the drums, and it drives my bandmates crazy because I'm an unthinking monster on the drums. Get over it... so sue me.

Songfacts: You can see that in *Everyone Stares* when Andy comes over to you and tries to tell you that you're going too fast.

Copeland: Too fast, yeah! My long-suffering bandmates. World War III going on behind them.

Songfacts: How did you feel about your breakout hit with The Police being a song about a prostitute?

Copeland: Are you asking if my morals were insulted by this? C'mon, I was a leather-clad wannabe rock star! So, no, I did not experience any *moral quandary* over this despicable glorification of sleaze and perfidy!

Songfacts: But did it seem at all strange when you're playing to the adoring crowds for the first time and the big hit song is "Roxanne"?

Copeland: Well, it was banned by the BBC... Not. In fact, they declined to put it on the playlist, but as far as we were concerned, BANNED! "Banned by the BBC, you see! That's how revolutionary we are!"

But it's just a song, and there are songs about this, there are songs about that. You know, "[Wooly Bully](#)," what's that about? To the extent that there was cause for concern would be the extent to which we got a thrill from it. We were a punk band, officially. That was our mission, that was our purpose.

How The Police Got Their Name

Copeland named the band in ironic tribute to his father, who worked for the CIA and later started a private security service. The only American in the group, Stewart was born in Alexandria, Virginia, but lived in Beirut for much of his childhood.

Songfacts: You clearly have plenty of punk rock in you, as you can see in the film when you are going bananas on your drum kit, especially the part where you're standing up, bashing away at them. I think it was during a German filming.

Copeland: Yeah, we were miming on a German TV show. Interestingly, although we were miming, what the camera is hearing - because the camera has a microphone - is not only the playback which is coming through speakers that we're miming to, but also the noise that we are physically making on the stage, which is me banging the shit out of those drums, so you can hear me banging the drums on top of the playback.

Songfacts: What was the most contentious song to record with The Police?

Copeland: "Synchronicity." We went back and forth... Oh no, definitely "Every Little Thing She Does is Magic." By this time, we all had home studios and we'd all show up at the studio with fully-produced platinum demos, and in the case of "[Every Little Thing She Does is Magic](#)," he had been up at this studio in Montreal where he and a keyboard player [Jean Roussel] had created a demo where if he could have just dropped it, it would have been a hit right there... *who needs a band, who needs anything... this is a hit! Right off the bat!* And of course, we wanted to turn it into a band track.

So we tried it fast, we tried it slow, we tried it reggae, we tried it punk, we tried it as a bossa nova. We tried every which way, but nothing. To the extent that we did it different from the demo was the extent to which it didn't sound like a hit anymore. So, eventually, in a morning grump, I show up at the studios and I say, "Guys, I tell you what, just play me your fucking demo, lead me through the changes and see if that works." So, they put up the demo and Sting is standing over me pointing out where the verse, the chorus and all the different pieces are. I kind of knew that by now anyway because of all the different versions we had done, and then I just cranked out one take of *OK, play the fucking demo and I'll play along and see if that works*, and it kinda did.

Songfacts: "Message In A Bottle," at the end of the song it goes on for quite a while with "sending out an SOS."

Copeland: Yes, with overdubs that I regret.

Songfacts: Really?

Copeland: Well, I added this kind of snare and crash cymbal and just overdid it... where was Andy when we needed him? Because usually it was Andy who was the limiter of our indulgence. He must have stepped out of the studio.



Songfacts: But what about the listener? If you're a listener and you like pop music, mainstream stuff, what does opera do to you?

Copeland: Well, that operatic sound is going to piss you off. I love it, I'm all for it, but generally modern listeners are a little bit alienated by the strenuous aspect of opera singing: It sounds like they're trying too hard. It's not soft and sexy.

Songfacts: What about jazz? How does that compare with modern listener taste?

Copeland: Jazz is more fun to play than it is to listen to, and jazz fans I adore because they are great fun to play to. Jazz music itself, not so much, but jazz fans are the best: They will put up with anything. They pay good money to hear all your shit.

Pop musicians like myself, our careers are spent exercising discipline, staying out of the way of the topline of the vocal, being tasteful and knowing your place. In jazz, your place is the Cosmos: play everything you've got *now*. Don't step aside for anything. Let us have it.

Now, for the listener - the normal, sane listener - that could be described as indulgent and annoying, but for the jazz listener, they can't get enough of it, which is why I say I love to play for jazz fans. Playing jazz music is fun because you can do all that stuff, but listening to it? I'd rather listen to J.J. Cale.

Songfacts: What about the classical music listener?

Copeland: Very different thing, orchestral music. I do a lot of that. It's much quieter and it has more dramatic impact because of the vocabulary of the instrument. The orchestra *is* an instrument and it has a lot wider range of sound and volume. A rock drummer operates at a dynamic range from 8 to 13. In the orchestral environment the dynamic range is 0 to 4, but within that, you get more power. It's not as loud but it's more powerful.

Songfacts: What's the most important thing you learned from Andy Summers?

Copeland: That the guitar is not just for noodling. He expanded the vocabulary of the instrument beyond guitar solos, guitar parts and rhythm guitar into tracks like "Walking On The Moon" and "Tea In The Sahara" where you can't hear somebody playing the guitar but there's this orchestral envelope around the whole track that is something that Andy created.

We argue about who came up with this, but one day when we were on the road, we got a call saying, "OK guys, the money has dropped, you are now rich." We happened to be in New York City that day, so we went straight down to Manny's Music and bought everything in the store: amplifiers, guitars, Taurus pedals, Roland Space Echoes, every darn thing. Sting and I both got two Stratocasters, one next to the other, and both of us still use them - 40 years later I'm still playing it.

The gig that day was out in Long Island at My Father's Place [*A popular club on the North Shore of Long Island. The show was on March 29, 1979*], and that was the soundcheck from hell because we were plugging in and playing with all our new gear.

I had the Space Echo. We had heard dub, but it never occurred to us that we could actually try it live, so I put an echo on the snare, on the microphone, put it through my Space Echo and I got this "dak, da-dak, da-dak, dakida, dakida, dakida," and you could build up rhythms there. In fact, I discovered that with a dotted 8th note delay, if you go "dun, dun, dun, dun, dun, dun, dun," the result is "dakida, dakida, dakida, dakida," and each repeat is not a repeat of the immediate note preceding it, it's a repeat of the note before that, which gives it this interesting kind of wobbling rhythmic effect. I was doing that on the drums, and Andy was doing that on the guitar, and we figured that out. Years later, everybody's doing it - check in with U2 and part of their sound is that delay line effect.

Songfacts: Finally, what is the most important thing you learned from Sting?

Copeland: It's hard to point to any one. So many things that we discovered together and that we learned from each other. I don't think I could put a finger on it.

May 29, 2019

Everyone Stares: The Police Inside Out is available at eagle-rock.com/the-police

[Interview with Andy Summers](#)

[Interview with Kevin Godley](#)

photos (2,3): Eagle Rock Entertainment