



POLICE's ANDY SUMMER

The tag "supergroup" tends to follow the Police around like a bad smell. Their rags-to-riches success story, riding the crest of the new wave, has provided plenty of copy, much of it less than accurate.

The CSNY's and ELP's don't really belong in the 1980's. The concept is dead, along with the posing guitar ace and the \$4.99 album. Yet those who still want heroes to worship and pin-ups to stick on their walls find the Police irresistible. Three not-so-bad looking guys who produce clean, modern pop music. It sounds good on the radio and you can sing along. A formula for sure, but an undeniably fruitful one.

Guitarist Andy Summers, whose musical pedigree stretches back over 15 years, is quick to appreciate the benefit of having an image. He accepts the necessary role-playing, but is glad that the three members can also now function as individuals.

"We've now reached the point where we

can do that," he says, "and I'm sure this summer will see that happening. I think the reason the band works as well as it does is because it is three very individual people who want to assert their own egos.

"Everyone in this band is ambitious, and wants to do something outside of the band, and I'm sure this is going to happen as a matter of course. However, the central thing that's got us all into this position is being in the Police.

"As long as we can keep it interesting musically, we can all stay in the band. There are no immediate plans to break up. As long as it remains valid and we can be interested, I think we'll go on doing it for a long time.

"But I think it is important, for now, for all of us to get outside the band and do other things, so that when we come back, we'll have fresh perspective, and hopefully we'll be able to do things that seem daring, and not predictable."

Critics have lately accused the Police of

becoming too formulaised in their approach, especially with reference to the last single, 'Don't Stand So Close To Me'. For my money, it's the best they've ever done, though it's hard to deny its similarities to past works. Is it restrictive having an "established sound", or will it allow the band to be more adventurous in the future?

"It's difficult to say, really. My statement on that is always the same: I think it happens anyway. As a band, we've managed to establish a fairly original sound, and I think we deserve a certain amount of credit for that.

"However, we don't want to rest on our laurels. Some people have expected us to veer off on a real tangent, but I don't think we need to do that. The way we work, all our progress has really come from playing on stage and feeling our way together, which is very natural, and it feels right.

"I would say, if you were to look at record one and then look at record five, with five years in between, the difference may seem drastic, but it would have been a gradual and natural process for us. I don't think we have to get perverse and go off on a tangent just to shock people, I think these things will happen naturally, and that's the way it should go."

As far as individual work goes, Sting has a blooming acting career, and Stewart has projects such as Clark Kent. Andy has two albums to make with other people this year ("I ain't saying who"), and is thinking of publishing a book on photography, his pet pastime, and also has some film offers to consider.

"There's no lack of things to do. In fact, I was thinking of having six months off, but it looks like virtually every day is filled already."

In the forthcoming issue of *RIU Extra*, Andy Summers talks more about *Zenyatta Mondatta*, the Indian experience, and his early musical career. Start saving yer milk money.

Full marks to whoever gave the support spot at the Auckland gigs to Penknife Glides. A more impressive and original local band I've not seen in many moons, and they deserved the exposure. Singer Steven Gravelle has bounce to spare, and his no-nonsense vocals and lyrics give the band a sound reminiscent of the Jam in places. A touch of reggae shows here and there, especially in one of their best songs, 'Taking The Weight Off'. 'Better Business' also made its mark. Brother Cliff's spare guitar over Jules Mahony's loping bass and Stefan Morris's understated drumming gave the crowd plenty to dance about, and hopes are high for their new single and (let us pray) an album. Good work.

The Police seemed to be suffering from an overdose of touring and technology. The show had all the signs of a very carefully rehearsed presentation, lacking in spontaneity and emotion. They've obviously done it so many times before, and are beginning to lose interest. The Friday and Saturday shows were virtually identical.

Sting relies largely on his looks for charisma, and has only passing rapport with his audience. Andy Summers concentrates on his playing and moves very little, leaving Stewart Copeland as the focal point. He's a hard-working, flashy drummer, and was especially good value on Friday, when the muddy sound and a variety of technical hitches made the going tough.

Summers makes heavy use of echo and phasing on his guitar, only dropping it for the occasional very-acid solo. Sting works a very basic synthesiser with his feet, and its usefulness is debatable. A constant rush of roadies back and forth on stage to keep such gear working was an annoying distraction.

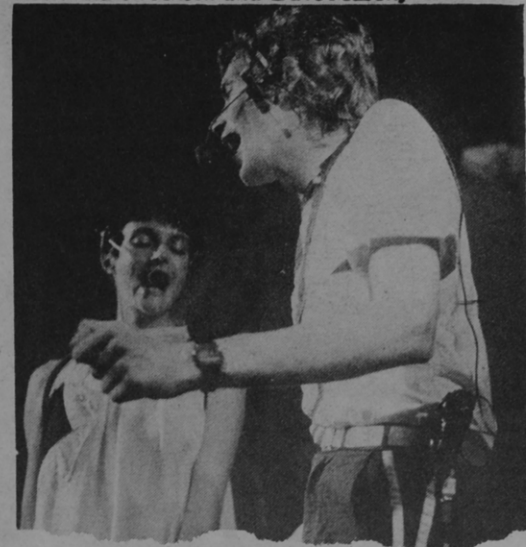
The increasing sophistication of their recorded sound has given the Police problems on stage, and I wonder if they sometimes wish they had an extra pair of hands to help out.

Anyway, the crowd got what it wanted, ie: a replay of the best numbers, sounding pretty much like the records, and a very proficient light show. For me, the high points were the extended versions of 'The Bed's Too Big' and 'Shadows In The Rain', where the band went dub-style and produced some interesting effects. When they dropped a lot of the fancy stuff for the encores, 'So Lonely' and 'Can't Stand Losing You', the Police gave a hint of the power trio that lies beneath.

I still love their records, but live there was a feeling of detachment that no amount of volume and dazzle could disguise. Still, the fans went home happy, and us cynics will just have to dream of what might have been.

Duncan Campbell

Reels' Karen Ansell and Dave Mason, Mainstreet.



Reels' great ideas!

The Reels' chief lyricist, and lead vocalist is Dave Mason, who comes from Dubbo. Drummer John Bliss, and guitarist, synthesist Craig Hooper also come from Dubbo. Polly Newham comes from Orange, another town in New South Wales, bassist Paul Abrahams comes from Bankstown in Sydney's western suburbs, and Karen Ansell comes from Melbourne.

The band was over here for Sweetwaters, and a February tour. Now the Reels are back in Australia for a brief tour and rest, while they sort out a new drummer to replace Bliss, who is leaving. Those who spotted them here can look forward to a return sometime around June.

They started off 2 years ago with 2 singers, guitar, bass, and saxophone, and were doing lots of jazz numbers when Sydney's FM station 2JJ rescued them from Dubbo. They were taken to the big city, where the station put them live on air; a few demos were done; and a few jobs resulted. About a month later the band was approached by Polygram.

1979 saw the release of 'Love Will Find A Way', which became a local hit in Melbourne and Brisbane. The single 'Prefab Heart' followed, and the EP *Five Great Christmas Ideas* (all covers), off which the song 'According To My Heart' has had great success, was on the market late last year. Dave explains the EP's popularity.

"The EP is middle of the road. In Sydney it's being played on all the radio stations. 2CH is the ultimate in MOR, and we're on their high rotation list. They play sick people like Des O'Connor and Val Doonican. Plus we've reached every FM station, including MOR, right through to the more adventurous FM like 2JJ. We've broken all barriers because the song is so accessible. Grandmothers love it, and so do kids. We'll probably never repeat it unless we do something like it again."

The bulk of Reels' material is original. Although Dave writes most of the lyrics, he doesn't place too much emphasis on their importance, stressing the "throw away" character of pop.

"It's totally disposable. Every pop song we do usually is, but the melodies should be strong. We're trying to get away from pop now. Our first album (*The Reels*) was very pop inclined.

While here, the band took time out to record at Mandrill studios, before returning to Australia with the tapes for mixing. They're full of praise for the set up, and the engineering talents of Graham Myre. The session went smoothly, with tracks being laid down for a "heavy metal" EP, *A Change Is As Good As A Holiday*. Guitars were used instead of synthesisers, and a rhythm machine instead of drummer John, with overdubs on real drums later.

Dave puts recording as the band's priority, video clips run second.

"This is purely because you don't have to play live in Australia that much, or here, for that matter, you can get just as far on the recorded product, and video clips, but it depends. If only we had lots of money to spend on live presentation. It bugs us because the live presentation level is very important. We're totally unsatisfied with what we're doing — we'd like to use video and film more."

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