

Newcastle upon Tyne, England, the United Kingdom
September 25, 1976

Stewart Copeland, an American drummer for the band Curved Air, attends a performance of a local band called Last Exist. Copeland is extremely impressed with the singer and bassist for the band, Gordon Sumner, who by that time was often referred to by his nickname, Sting, going back to the days when he often wore a black and yellow striped shirt that made him look like a bee. Anyway, after the show, Copeland approached Sting and the two ultimately swapped phone numbers.

A few months later, Sting decided to leave Newcastle to join Copeland in London to start a new band. Sting had been mostly in jazz bands, Copeland wanted to start a punk band, and Sting was cool with that as long as he could add his own jazzy sound to the songs. They recruited a guitarist named Henry Padovani to join them. The three played their first show at the Alexandria Club in Newport, Wales on March 1, 1977.¹ The show lasted ten minutes. About 30 people showed up and they got £15 for the gig.² Not too shabby. After that, the band played various clubs around London and went on small tours with the singer Cherry Vanilla, and the bands Johnny Thunders & the Heartbreakers and Wayne County & the Electric Chairs. By that time, Copeland had come up with the name "The Police" for the band, influenced by the seemingly recurring brawls that broke out between punks and law enforcement on the streets of London.³

Also, Copeland was like, "uh hey, we should start recording stuff." And so the Police did, recording at Pathway Studios in Islington. Copeland and his brother, Miles, started a record label, called Illegal Records. Don't worry, it was completely legal. Anyway, Illegal Records released the band's debut single, "Fall Out," on May 1, 1977. It wouldn't have probably got much attention if not for the fact that THE Mick Jagger, the frontman for the legendary band The Rolling Stones, reviewed it for Sounds Magazine, calling it "competently played rock."⁴ Awww, that was sweet of him.

Around that time, Sting and Copeland began playing with the band Strontium 90, and that's how the two got to know guitarist Andy Summers, a veteran in the music industry who had played in many bands over the years. Sting and Copeland were so impressed with Summers that they asked him to join the Police. However, they wanted to remain a trio, so this means that Padovani got the boot. This was, of course, sad for Padovani, but Summers replacing him would quickly make The Police one of the most dynamic power trios of all time. The band played with the new lineup for the first time on August 18, 1977 at a club named Rebecca's in Birmingham.⁵

¹ http://www.thepolicewiki.org/Police_wiki/index.php?title=1977-03-01

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<https://www.southwalesargus.co.uk/news/16405671.newport-punk-legend-remembers-polices-first-gig-joe-strummer-punk-nights-stowaway-club/>

³ <https://www.stewartcopeland.net/701/official-biography>

⁴ Sutcliffe, Phil (1993). "The B-sides and Other Obscure Releases". In *Message in a Box: The Complete Recordings* (pp.57–59) [Boxed set booklet]. A&M Records Ltd.

⁵ Christopher Sandford (2007). "Sting: Back on the Beat". p. 53. Da Capo Press, Incorporated

Over the next several months, the Police would play lots of shows, mostly in England. They often played with punk bands, but never really fit in entirely with that genre. Nah man, their sound was more of a fusion of punk, hard rock, reggae, good old fashioned “British pop,” and an even newer genre called “new wave,” which was basically what punk morphed into once bands started doing weird things with it.

The Police also weren’t making much money. But that’s ok, because when they weren’t playing gigs, a German composer named Eberhard Schoener paid them to record multiple albums with him. And this also gave them exposure to...you guessed it...a German audience.⁶

Meanwhile, Miles Copeland had become the band’s manager.. Remember Miles? The brother of Stewart? Anyway, Miles agreed to loan the band £1,500 to record their debut album. They spent much of 1978 doing so. It took a while partially due to that limited budget. After he first heard the band’s song “Roxanne,” a song about a dude who falls in love with a prostitute, Miles knew it’d be a hit, and he got A&M Records to believe that, too. It released it as a single on April 7, 1978, but “Roxanne” failed to make it on the charts, including the BBC chart. That’s when Miles apparently had the brilliant idea to promote the song by manufacturing controversy by saying the BBC wouldn’t play “Roxanne” simply because the song was about prostitution. He got A&M to promote the song with posters saying “Banned by the BBC,” although this was not true. Regardless, it didn’t manage to build up a bit of hype for the band. More importantly, A&M Records agreed to release more music by the Police. Oh, and later the BBC DID ban their SECOND single, “Can’t Stand Losing You,” due to THIS artwork. Despite that, “Can’t Stand Losing You” became their first radio hit, making it on the UK Official Charts. Oh, and they ended up playing the song on the BBC, anyway! That was their first television appearance. Yeah there it is.⁷ On October 2, 1978.

Based on this success, A&M released the band’s debut album, *Outlandos d’Amour*, on November 17, 1978. It got just mixed reviews by critics upon its release, but today? Oh today it’s considered to be not only one of the greatest DEBUT albums of all time, but greatest ALBUMS of all time. And it did pretty well commercially, eventually getting up all the way to number 23 on the Billboard 200 chart in the United States, and eventually selling more than 6 million copies thanks mostly to the success of the aforementioned “Roxanne,” which A&M re-released as a single on April 12, 1979. It peaked at number 12 on the UK Singles Chart. *Outlandos d’Amour* also featured the hit, “So Lonely.”

Based on the success of *Outlandos d’Amour*, the Police played some shows across Europe and in North America throughout 1979. By the time they returned to the studio to record their second studio album, they were already rising stars and making plenty of money. Nigel Gray joined them this time to help them produce. That second album ended up being *Reggatta de Blanc*, released by A&M on October 5, 1979. Yeah, I guess they didn’t like English titles for their albums. *Reggatta de Blanc* was an even bigger success than *Outlandos d’Amour*, ultimately topping the UK Albums Chart, as well as the Australian and Dutch album charts, and eventually

⁶ http://www.thepolicewiki.org/Police_wiki/index.php?title=Eberhard_Schoener

⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=456019521854056>

selling more than 8 million copies. Today it's often considered one of the greatest rock albums of all time. Critics also praised it. And DJs played the heck out of it. *Reggatta de Blanc* featured the hits "Message in a Bottle," "Walking on the Moon," "Bring On the Night," and "The Bed's Too Big Without You." "Message in a Bottle" and "Walking on the Moon" both got up to number one on the UK singles chart. And even though the two songs failed to make it onto the American pop charts, *Reggatta de Blanc* still got up to number 25 on the Billboard 200. The title track, an instrumental, also got the band their first Grammy Award for Best Rock Instrumental Performance.

The Police toured relentlessly around the world throughout 1980, now playing large venues and stadiums in places as far away as China and Australia. Yep, their first world tour, baby. Now that they were way more popular, A&M decided to re-release their older singles like they did with "Roxanne." It was a smart move, because every time they did this the song just got played more on the radio.

Meanwhile, the band got with Nigel Gray again to record their third studio album at Wisseloord in the Netherlands, an AMAZING studio by the way. These were the first songs in which Sting started to write lyrics about politics. The band called the new album *Zenyatta Mondatta*. Man what cool album titles the Police had. Anyway, yeah, A&M released *Zenyatta Mondatta* on October 3, 1980. Even though the band later said they felt too rushed recording it and even tried to re-record a couple of its songs later on, *Zenyatta Mondatta* was another smash success. It debuted at number one on the UK Albums Chart and stayed up there for four straight weeks. On the Billboard 200 in the United States, it peaked at number five, spending almost THREE YEARS on the chart. *Zenyatta Mondatta* did even better commercially than *Reggatta de Blanc*, eventually selling nearly nine million copies. Much of the album's success came from the hit singles "Don't Stand So Close to Me" and "De Do Do Do, De Da Da Da." "Don't Stand So Close to Me," not only topped the UK Singles Chart, but was the top selling single in the entire country for the entire year. Critics also generally adored *Zenyatta Mondatta*, and yet again, the album got the Police another Grammy for Best Rock Instrumental Performance for the song "Behind My Camel."

The Police, of course, toured again to promote *Zenyatta Mondatta*, playing a bunch of shows with XTC...the band. Oh dang just \$9 to see the Police with XTC in Dallas? Heck yeah I'll go.⁸ And then another world tour that wrapped up in March 1981. After a short break, the band returned to the studio to begin recording new stuff now with producer Hugh Padgham. They took their time with this one and got way more experimental, relying way more on synthesizers and other instruments. Despite the experimentation, this might have been their poppiest stuff yet.

A&M released *Ghost in the Machine*, their fourth studio album, on October 2, 1981. Wait *Ghost in the Machine*? An album title in English? Well Sting was heavily influenced by the book, *The Ghost in the Machine*, while writing these songs. The ALBUM *Ghost in the Machine* was yet another smash success, getting to number one on the UK Albums Chart and number two on the Billboard 200. *Ghost in the Machine* featured four singles: "Invisible Sun," "Spirits in the Material

⁸ http://thepolicewiki.org/Police_wiki/index.php?title=1980-11-12

World,” “Secret Journey,” and “Every Little Thing She Does is Magic,” which was another number hit that today remains one of their most popular songs. *Ghost in the Machine* went on to sell more than eight million copies.

By 1982, the band started to drift apart, both literally since they lived in different cities, but also figuratively, because it seemed they were starting to get sick of each other. Sting had pursued acting. Copeland had begun scoring movies. But despite this drifting apart, they were more popular than ever. That year, the band got the award for Best British Group and went on to play their most successful tours yet to support *Ghost in the Machine*. Also that year? A concert film called *Urgh! A Music War* prominently featured them.

By December, the Police had a bunch of new songs they wanted to record. Sting wrote most of them while staying in Jamaica. They returned to the studio, again working with Hugh Padgham. These songs were even more experimental and featured even more synthesizers. The band did grow more frustrated with each other recording this time around, and yeah fights straight up broke out. Still, what resulted ended up being their most successful and most praised album yet. A&M released *Synchronicity*, their fifth and final studio album, on June 17, 1983. *Synchronicity* is often considered their best album and yes, one of the greatest albums of all time. I’m like a broken record here. But *Synchronicity* was NOT a broken record. Critics almost universally praised it. More importantly, critics praise it even more today.

Synchronicity topped both the UK Albums Chart and Billboard 200. Heck, it was at the top of the Billboard 200 for 17 weeks. The album had significant crossover appeal, turning the Police into a household name. Now even grandmas were listening to the band, for crying out loud. This was because it featured FOUR songs that were all played A LOT on the radio: “Wrapped Around Your Finger,” “King of Pain,” *Synchronicity II*,” and “Every Breath You Take.” All were top ten hits on the rock charts, but “Every Breath You Take,” in particular, stands out because it is, by FAR, their biggest hit ever, since not only did it spend eight weeks at the top of the Billboard Hot 100 and four weeks on top of the UK Singles Chart, but more impressively because it currently has more than 2.1 billion streams on Spotify and its music video has 1.3 billion streams on YouTube. The song won two Grammys, including Song of the Year, and was the fifth-best-selling single of the 1980s. Yep, the whole decade. *Synchronicity* went on to sell more than 15 million copies worldwide.

To promote *Synchronicity*...not that they really needed to...but anyway to promote *Synchronicity*, the Police went on their biggest tour yet, playing huge shows all over the world. Indeed, several journalists were now calling them the “biggest band in the world.”⁹ A great example of this peak “Policemania?” Well, a show the band played on August 18, 1983, at Shea Stadium in New York City. With the help of this new thing called TicketMaster, concert tickets could be sold over the phone. Well, due to this, the Police sold 55,000 seats at Shea stadium so quickly that they opened up the playing field to the audience, quickly selling an additional 15,000 tickets. Notably, this was something the Beatles didn’t do when they played a famous show at

⁹ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/music/sevenages/events/stadium-rock/police-play-shea-stadium/>

Shea Stadium 18 years prior. So the Police played a bigger show there than the Beatles, which is a bit crazy to think about.

The Police played sold out shows at giant venues for the rest of the tour, playing their last show...uh...for a while on March 4, 1984 at the Melbourne Showgrounds in Melbourne, Australia.¹⁰ You see, by that time, Sting was determined to pursue a solo career, and that solo career ended up being very successful and kept him pretty busy. During that time, the band had decided to take a long break, and wouldn't reunite again until they played three more shows in June 1986 as part of Amnesty International's A Conspiracy of Hope tour.

The Police then planned on recording new stuff in July, but just before heading back to the studio, Copeland broke his collarbone in a horse-riding accident. Even without the accident, the band was not getting along at all...constantly fighting. Due to all this, they ultimately weren't able to record much and soon broke up after this.

Now, they may have had a nasty breakup, but that didn't mean they stopped being friends. Over the next couple of decades, Sting, Andy, and Stewart would occasionally meet up, sometimes performing. They even played a random set at Sting's wedding in 1992. Hey speaking of Sting, he went on to have a hugely successful solo career. Both Summers and Copeland also stayed full-time musicians after The Police broke up, working with various groups and for various projects. Many today consider Copeland to be among the best drummers of all time.

The Police joined the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2003, their first year of eligibility. The next year, Rolling Stone magazine ranked the band number 70 on its list of 100 Greatest Artists of All Time.

In 2007, the Police reunited for a world tour to mark the band's 30th anniversary. They played a memorable performance of "Roxanne" at the Grammys.¹¹

Today, the Police are more popular than ever. Or...uh...I should stress that the BAND the Police are more popular than ever. I just want to make sure I'm clear about that. But yeah, the band remains culturally relevant, and their songs just as fresh sounding as they were in the late 1970s. They were innovative and truly had their own, unique sound that combined punk, new-wave, reggae, and even new age and jazz. The Police are also one of the best rock trios of all-time. Really, when you listen to their songs, you might have to be reminded of the fact that there were only three of them.

The Police have sold more than 75 million records, making them one of the best-selling bands of all time, despite only releasing five studio albums.¹² And not a dud in there, man. All five

¹⁰ <https://ultimateclassicrock.com/police-last-concert/>

¹¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mdp3IG3goA0>

¹²

<https://www.scotsman.com/arts-and-culture/interview-sting-on-bringing-his-debut-musical-to-scotland-287972>

studio albums sold well and hold up amazingly well. As the legendary Rick Beato recently pointed out <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eEWRyugvjgQ> And I think Rick is right. The Police are definitely a band that will still be played in the year 2100. Their music is timeless. The Police will probably always be around. Just like, ya know...the police.

A shout out to my youngest daughter. She's a big reason why I decided to make this video. I caught her listening to "Every Breath You Take" in her room and asked her how she knew about that song. Her answer? The show Stranger Things. Thank you Stranger Things. Kate Bush also deeply appreciates you, by the way. So what's your favorite Police song? I think mine is "King of Pain." And uh, which band should I cover for this series next? Let me know about all that down below and thanks for watching.

Sources/further reading:

The Police: Every Little Thing by David Stafford and Caroline Stafford

Purchase here: <https://amzn.to/4bPxTfd>

Walking on the Moon: The Untold Story of the Police and the Rise of New Wave Rock by Chris Campion

Purchase here: <https://amzn.to/3UOkMnl>

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