

STEWART COPELAND



by Dustin Ransom

As one of the most recognized and heralded drummers in rock, Stewart Copeland's groundbreaking and highly influential playing with The Police helped to catapult the band into superstardom. Copeland's unique blend of reggae, punk, jazz, and rock drumming gave him a sound all his own. He is among the elite group of drummers that can be instantly recognized upon hearing just a few seconds of his playing.

Many of The Police's signature tracks, such as "Roxanne," "Message In A Bottle," "Can't Stand Losing You," and "Every Breath You Take," have been pored over for many years by drum enthusiasts in exploring Copeland's vocabulary and playing style. Yet this series will help to dig deeper in the drumming wizardry of Stewart Copeland, as we focus on deep cuts, live tracks, and some of Copeland's other musical ventures that have hardly been touched on or may have been overlooked completely in attempts to decipher Copeland's drumming.

The Police
"Synchronicity II"
Live! (1995)
Recorded in Atlanta, Georgia 1983

China

The musical notation consists of two systems of staves. The first system shows a 4/4 time signature. The top staff contains a melodic line with eighth and quarter notes, including a star symbol at the beginning and a '7' indicating a seven-measure phrase. The bottom staff shows a complex drum pattern with 'x' marks representing hi-hat hits. The second system starts at measure 5, continuing the melodic and drum patterns, and includes a triplet of eighth notes marked with a '3' above them.

This live version of "Synchronicity II" is burning from the get-go. Copeland's innate ability to propel the music while still giving it color and finesse is simply mind-blowing, and this is no exception. His left foot acts as sort of a third hand, utilizing the hi-hat to fill in gaps between the bell, the bass drum, and the snare. The bell pattern shifts between varying polyrhythms that, combined with the foot pattern, make this an incredibly unique and challenging groove to play over a pop song, or any song for that matter.

The Police
 "De Do Do De Da Da Da"
 Evolution (bootleg)
 Recorded in Melbourne, Australia 1981

Musical score for 'De Do Do De Da Da Da' in 12/8 time. The score is divided into four systems of staves. The first system (measures 9-13) features a complex polyrhythmic pattern with 'Spl.' (snare) and 'Ice Bell' (hi-hat) markings. The second system (measures 14-18) includes 'Octobans' and 'Ice Bell' markings. The third system (measures 19-23) is marked 'Simmons pad'. The fourth system (measures 24-25) is marked 'Spl.'.

Taken from a radio broadcast from the Zenyatta Mondatta tour, this version of "De Do Do De Da Da Da" is full of energy and is impeccably performed. During this breakdown section, Copeland's jazz training comes through mightily as he utilizes what could be considered "rock comping," reacting to what is going on around him through bursts of color and rhythmic creativity. Note his use of Simmons pads in the second half of this excerpt, along with his trademark hi-hat work and polyrhythms throughout it.

The Police
 "Low Life"
 Released as B-Side to "Spirits In The Material World" 1982

Musical score for 'Low Life' in 12/8 time. The score consists of two systems of staves. The first system (measures 1-4) shows a steady bass line with a complex polyrhythmic pattern on top. The second system (measures 5-8) continues the polyrhythmic pattern with various rhythmic markings.

A lesser-known Police track, "Low Life" is also one of the few tunes in the band's catalog in 12/8 time. Copeland extends his trademark polyrhythms based around groups of three over the course of a few bars as every third beat contains a snare/crash hit on the "&" and a bass/crash hit on the next beat. He ends the phrase with one of his other trademarks - incredibly tasty fills.

Born and raised in Boonville, Indiana, Dustin Ransom now resides in Nashville, Tennessee where he earned his degree from Belmont University in commercial music. He is currently an in-demand multi-instrumentalist, transcriber, arranger, teacher, and programmer. Visit him at myspace.com/dustinransom.