

The Police: Still magic after all these years

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PHOTOS BY STEPHEN COHEN,
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When The Police last toured, they were arguably the biggest rock band in the world, and when the band went inactive soon after, **live review** they ended their career while they were on top. So, when a reunion tour was announced earlier this year, many people were thrilled, but some were cynical. Was Sting short on cash or something?

But you know, whatever. Back in the day, The Police were a great band made up of three great musicians. Sting is a gifted songwriter, a fluid bass player, and he has that distinctive tenor voice. Andy Summers knows that less is truly more — he is that rare guitarist who doesn't feel compelled to cram every song with superfluous fills, trills and solos. And I have never met a drummer who thinks Stewart Copeland is anything less than a brilliant percussionist. In other words, The Police would be walking in some mighty big footsteps when they played Louisville.

Mother Nature graciously provided a picture-perfect summer evening on Saturday, and Churchill Downs provided a suitably historic setting, with the added bonus of improved acoustics — open-air rock concerts just sound better. The crowd was pretty diverse, but the majority of those in attendance were old enough to have purchased *Zenyatta Mondatta* (on vinyl, of course) when it was a new release. Um, that would be 1980.

Fiction Plane opened the festivities. In an amazing coincidence, Fiction Plane's front-man just happens to be Sting's kid. But they were actually not that bad, although they aren't exactly stadium-worthy (they played a free show at Coyote's later that night, bless their hearts).

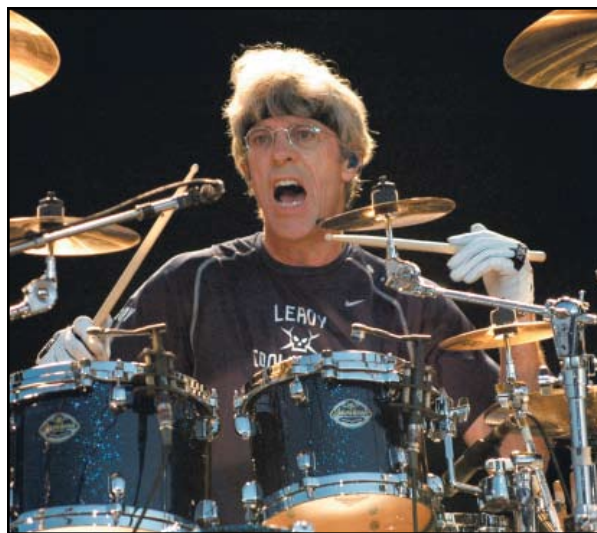
When the headliners took the stage, the magic truly began. They opened with "Message in a Bottle" and piled on hit after hit, bludgeoning the audience with the fact that, yes, indeed, The Police *still are* one of the all-time greats.

They mixed things up a bit, playing some tunes just as you remembered ("De Do Do Do, De Da Da Da," "King of Pain") and mutating others with slinkier rhythms and extended instrumental sections ("Walking on the Moon," "Wrapped Around Your Finger"). Summers cranked out several noisy, metallic guitar solos, while Copeland hopped back and forth between his standard kit and a mobile percussion station that included bells, wind chimes, a xylophone and perhaps even a kitchen sink.

They were tight but not rigid, and the performance pleased those who came to hear the big hits and the folks who came to see a trio of talented musicians show off some chops. Long story short, The Police were fantastic.

Arresting, even. ■

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Above, Sting shows off what yoga can do for a 55-year-old man.

The extraordinary Stewart Copeland (left) alternated between his standard kit and a mobile percussion station.

Guitarist Andy Summers (right), who still knows that less is truly more, cranked out several noisy, metallic solos.

Joe Summer (bottom left), who happens to be Sting's son, fronted the warm-up band, Fiction Plane.

