

MESSAGE IN A BOTTLE

(Regatta De Blanc, 1979)

Music and Lyrics by Sting

Figure 6 – Intro, Verse, Pre-Chorus, and Chorus

Regatta De Blanc (loosely translated as “white reggae”) is the album that established the Police as stars in Britain and Europe. The record remains a rock classic and is a telling document of the trio’s emerging musicianship. “Message in a Bottle” is the album’s stand-out track and the first #1 Police single in the UK. Featuring one of the genre’s most unusual and distinctive guitar riffs, the song also contains some of Andy Summers’s most memorable guitar work.

“Message in a Bottle” revolves around Andy’s strange but compelling intervallic main riff. Harnessing his background in jazz and twentieth-century composition, he designed one of the most exotic and immediately recognized figures in rock history. Heard throughout the song in the intro, verses, and outro, the riff is based on *quintal harmony* (chords built on 5th intervals) in C# minor and is arranged in four similar single-note arpeggios. The four quintal chords outlined are C#sus2, Asus2, Bsus2, and F#sus2 and exploit a specific melodic pattern: two ascending consecutive perfect 5ths and a descending leap. The stacked 5ths endow the main riff with its unusual, open sound, while its sequence of changes conveys an Aeolian modal progression in C# minor. The riff is treated with a chorus effect and is harmonized by a second guitar (Gtr. 2) which plays a similar intervallic melody a 3rd or 5th above.

Andy switches to a driving, clean-toned power-chord rhythm figure in the pre-chorus and plays a sustaining C# minor to A major progression during the chorus. Note the palm muting in the Gtr. 2 part of measures 25–28 that serves to thicken the texture and imparts a percussive quality to the strummed pattern. Both rhythm figures are virtual prototypes for the minimalistic “new wave” guitar approach and are prime examples of Andy’s tasteful chording with the Police.

In the pre-choruses and choruses Andy adds slippery guitar fills to the arrangement. These are based on the underlying chord progressions and are largely understated until the chorus. In the chorus Andy plays longer, more involved solo passages, exemplified by the licks in Fill 2. Note his emphasis of the blues ethic in this fill, with its use of the C# minor pentatonic scale and characteristic string bends and vibrato.

Fig. 6

Intro
Moderately fast ♩ = 150

C#sus2 Asus2 Bsus2 F#sus2

Featured Guitars
Gtrs. 1 & 3

8

Fig. 6 shows the musical score for the Intro of "Message in a Bottle". It is set in C# minor (one sharp) and 4/4 time, with a tempo of 150 beats per minute. The main riff consists of four measures of chords: C#sus2, Asus2, Bsus2, and F#sus2. Gtr. 1 plays the main riff with a chorus effect and slight distortion, while Gtr. 2 plays a similar intervallic melody a 3rd or 5th above. The score includes tablature for both guitars and a guitar diagram for F#m7.

Verse

Gtrs. 1 & 2 w/ Riffs A & A1 (8 times)
 Gr. 2 tacet for 4 meas. on repeats
 Gr. 3 tacet 2nd time

3 C#sus2 Asus2 Bsus2 F#sus2 C#sus2 Asus2 Bsus2 F#sus2

1. Just a cast - a - way, ... an is - land lost _ at sea, _ oh. _
 2. A _ year _ has passed _ since I wrote my note,

Gtr. 1

Gtr. 3

w/ chorus & slight dist.
 let ring - - - - - let ring - - - - - let ring - - - - - let ring - - - - - let ring - - - - - let ring - - - - -

4 6 8 2 4 2 | 4 6 2 4 6 7 | 4 6 8 2 4 2 | 4 6 2 4 6 7

* Last note of 1st ending.

Gtr. 2: w/ Riff A1 (on repeats, 6 times, simile)
 Gtr. 3: w/ Riff A (6 times)

7 C#sus2 Asus2 Bsus2 F#sus2 C#sus2 Asus2 Bsus2 F#sus2

An - oth - er lone - ly day, _ no - one here _ but me, _ oh. _
 I _ should have known this right _ from the start.

11 C#sus2 Asus2 Bsus2 F#sus2 C#sus2 Asus2 Bsus2 F#sus2

More lone - li - ness _ (than) an - y man _ could bear. _
 On - ly hope can keep _ me to - geth - er. _

15 C#sus2 Asus2 Bsus2 F#sus2 C#sus2 Asus2 Bsus2 F#sus2

Res - cue me _ be - fore _ I fall _ in - to _ des - pair, _ oh. _
 Love _ can mend _ your life, _ but love _ can break _ your heart. _

Pre-Chorus

Gtr. 3 tacet:

19 A5 D5 E5 E6 E5 E6 A5 D5 E5 E6 E5

I'll send _ an S. _ O. _ S. _ to the world. I'll send _ an S. _ O. _ S. _ to the world.

Gtrs. 1 & 2

7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 | 7 7 7 9 11 9 11 | 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 | 7 7 7 9 11 9 (8)

5 5 5 5 5 5 5 5 | 5 5 5 7 7 7 7 | 5 5 5 5 5 5 5 5 | 5 5 5 7 7 7 (8)

Gtr. 3: w/ Fill 1 (2nd time)

23 F#5 D5 F#5 D5

I hope _ that some - one gets _ my, I hope _ that some - one gets _ my,

4 4 4 4 4 4 4 0 | 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 0 | 4 4 4 4 4 4 4 0 | 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 0

2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 | 5 5 5 5 5 5 5 5 | 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 | 5 5 5 5 5 5 5 5

Chorus

(Gtr. 3: w/ Fill 2 (2nd time))

Gtrs. 1 & 2: w/ Rhy. Fig. 1 (2 times)
C#m

27 F#5 D5 C#m A C#m

I hope _ that some - one gets _ my mes - sage in _ a bot - tle, _ yeah.

Rhy. Fig. 1 End Rhy. Fig. 1

mf

4 4 4 4 4 4 4 0 | 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 | 4 4 4 4 4 4 4 4 | 5 5 5 5 5 5 5 5

2 2 2 2 2 2 2 2 | 5 5 5 5 5 5 5 5 | 4 4 4 4 4 4 4 4 | 5 5 5 5 5 5 5 5

Fill 1
Gtr. 3

mp P.H.

9 9 9 7 9

Fill 2
Gtr. 3

grad. release

11 11 11 9 11 11 9 11 11 11 11 11 11 9 11 11 11

32 A C#m A

mes-sage in a bot - tle, yeah.

Gtrs. 1 & 2

1. F#m7

Gtr. 3

mp semi-harm.

37 C#m A C#m A

Oh, mes-sage in a bot - tle, yeah.

Gtrs. 1 & 2: w/ Rhy. Fig 1 (4 times)

Gtr. 3

41 C#m A C#m A

Mes-sage in a bot - tle, yeah.

grad release P.H.

45 F#m F# F#m7

Gtrs. 1 & 2

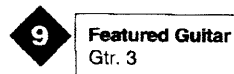
H.H. ter ring

* Signature Licks audio fades out

Figure 7 – Outro Guitar Solo

The outro of “Message in a Bottle” contains noteworthy Summers guitar improvisations. In fact, Andy cites his licks in the outro as personal favorites, describing their import as having “a nice, joyful quality.” Played over a vamp of the main riff, his guitar solo is an elaboration of previous fills, distinguished by a soulful, bluesy feel and tasteful use of space between phrases. Andy crafts his licks from the C# minor pentatonic scale and uses similar string bends and vibrato throughout. Like many blues-influenced rock players, he positions most of his lines in familiar blues boxes at the ninth and sixteenth/seventeenth frets. Note the Albert King-inspired pre-bends in measures 1, 8–9, 24–25, and 33–34. In a similar vein are the wide string bends (minor 3rds) of measures 33–34. Andy judiciously adds the crucial A note to the C# minor pentatonic improvisations in measures 8–10 and 13–14, and D# in measures 2, 17–18, and 26. The former (the minor 6th) reflects the song’s Aeolian mode, while the latter (the 9th) provides a smooth, jazzy passing tone to his pentatonic licks.

Fig. 7



Outro-Guitar Solo

Gtrs. 1 & 2: w/ Riffs A & A1 (till end)

Gr. 3 C#sus2 Asus2 Bsus2 F#sus2 C#sus2 Asus2 Bsus2 F#sus2

8va rake mf

T
A
B

* Signature Licks audio fades in (4 measures).

C#sus2 Asus2 Bsus2 F#sus2 C#sus2 Asus2 Bsus2 F#sus2

loco

C#sus2 Asus2 Bsus2 F#sus2 C#sus2 Asus2 Bsus2 F#sus2

C#sus2 Asus2 Bsus2 F#sus2 C#sus2 Asus2 Bsus2 F#sus2

8va

17 *8va* C#sus2 Asus2 Bsus2 F#sus2 C#sus2 Asus2 Bsus2 F#sus2

21 *Begin fade* C#sus2 Asus2 Bsus2 F#sus2 C#sus2 Asus2 Bsus2 F#sus2 *8va*

25 *8va* C#sus2 Asus2 Bsus2 F#sus2 C#sus2 Asus2 Bsus2 F#sus2

29 *loco* C#sus2 Asus2 Bsus2 F#sus2 C#sus2 Asus2 Bsus2 F#sus2

33 *8va* C#sus2 Asus2 Bsus2 F#sus2 C#sus2 Asus2 *Fade out*