

The wee small hours of the morning are a special time on city streets. The everyday throng, with its clamour and sense of purpose, has been replaced by a sparser set of individuals, whose motivations and provenance are harder to assign – whether they're sucking on a street-side cigarette, falling asleep on a bus or just mooching down the road. These moments are the inspiration for one of the more unlikely denizens of the metropolitan penumbra. The one-time blond-topped guitarist of The Police, Andy Summers once stared down from a million posters on girls' bedroom walls. But now he's on the other side of the camera lens, using it to capture a series of fragile, atmospheric, Edward-Hopper-like moments. Some of these have been brought together for his first major solo show, which features more than 30 images of cities from London and Toronto to Mexico City and Stonetown, Zanzibar.

Summers, now 63, is quick to assure me that he's doing more than indulging a rich person's hobby. "I'm an artist. I bring an artist's eye to the composition," he says. As a youngster in Bournemouth, he was

Camera noir

Once a pin-up in The Police, Andy Summers now works on the other side of the lens. **Simon Hardeman** met the guitarist to discuss the first major exhibition of his atmospheric black-and-white photographs

inspired by his brother's photos, but it wasn't until the late 1970s that he started to take it seriously. "It was when I was in The Police," he explains. "I made a decision to do it properly." He subsequently published *Throb*, a photo-essay on the behind-the-scenes life of the band.

Now resident in Los Angeles, Summers is almost never without his beloved Leica, and sees his work as being in the tradition of the great photojournalists. "I'm a big fan

of Henri Cartier-Bresson, and I think Robert Frank is probably the best photographer in the world," he says. Cartier-Bresson posed some of his most iconic shots, but Summers is adamant that his are almost all "found" moments. "I've developed this technique of roughly focusing and setting the exposure for a shot by pointing the camera at something the same distance away, and then swinging round quickly to get the shot." But he doesn't steal the

images. "I'll often talk to people, and ask them if they mind me shooting them, and give them some money – not much, just a couple of dollars."

Summers's music has moved on since The Police ("I haven't played pop for a very long time"); he now plays a lot of jazz-fusion. He appreciates it when I say that many of his images would work as cover shots for jazz albums, and David Bailey, no less, thinks the same. In Bailey's foreword to the



upcoming exhibition, he says: "You feel they should have a soundtrack of a lonely saxophone on them", and compares them to Brassai's images of Parisian streets.

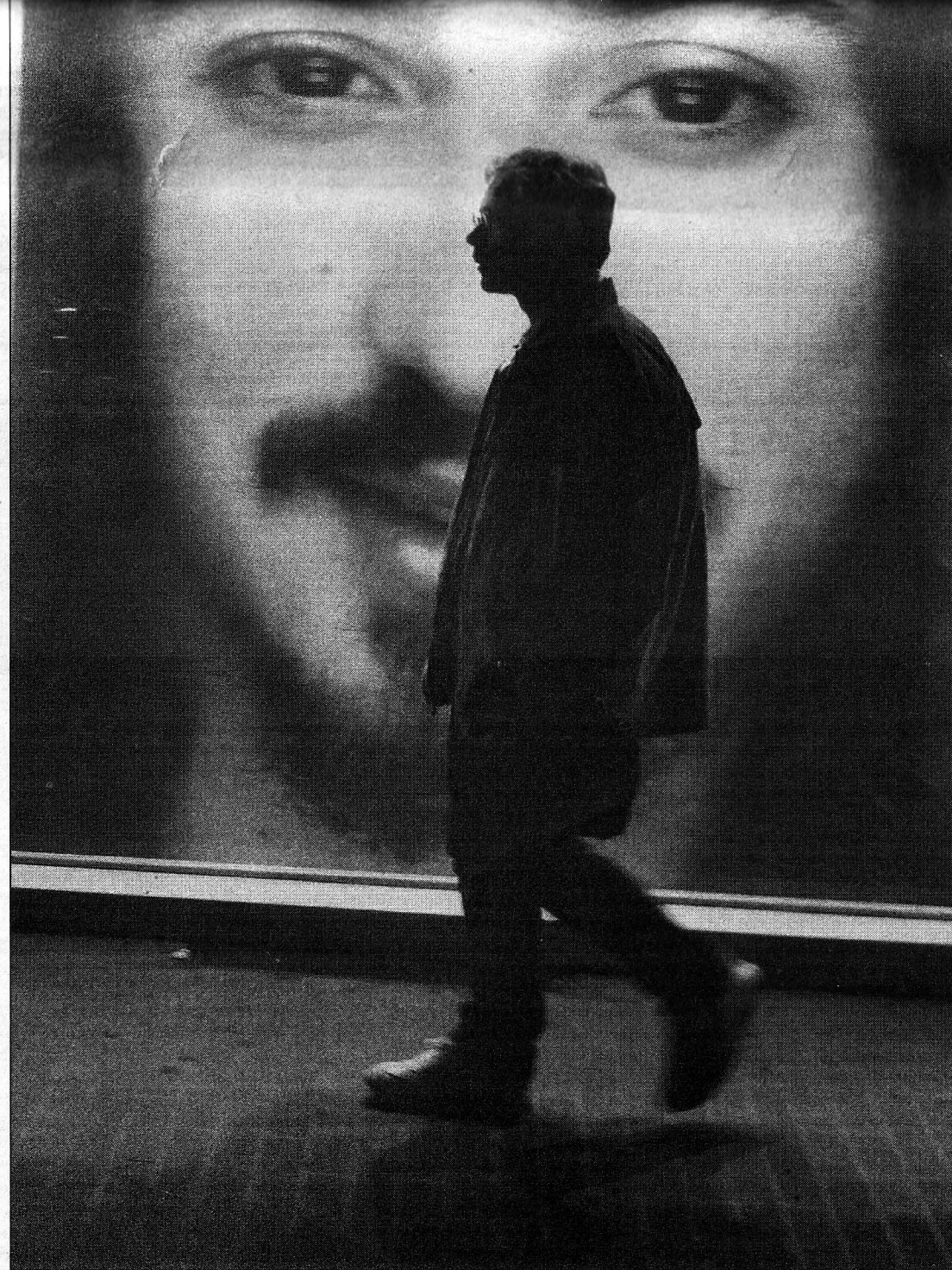
I wonder whether Summers hears music in his head while he's taking the shots. "No, it's not like synaesthesia. But I think of the composition in musical terms. I've been realising how similar a photograph is to a chord on the guitar, to the way you assemble the different notes." Not so similar, though, that they might be interchangeable: asked to choose between a guitar or a camera, he doesn't hesitate. "Guitar, definitely. Music is the superior art form."

Almost all the photographs in his upcoming London show, which is called *City Like This*, feature a solitary person, often apparently taken unawares, and with the appearance of being part of but at the same time alienated from the cityscape in the mid- and long-distance. Summers plays down any suggestion that this reflects his state of mind. "I sent the gallery a lot of photos, and these are the ones they chose. I also do a lot of crowds, for instance." But there is a mood set by his preference for capturing scenes in black and white, and he admits

that this can help romanticise images of street folk. "Definitely I like the blackness, the darkness of these late-night times, and I don't think they would work in colour. I use it occasionally – I've just taken some photographs in Africa – but there's something special about black and white." He's also passionate about traditional film. "Digital is so much easier, but there's something about the pattern of film grain."

It seems that, for Summers, photography is a kind of netherworld into which he escapes from the bright lights of his musical career. "I did some gigs at Pizza Express in London, and afterwards people were coming up to me and saying how good the gig was, and so on, but as soon as I could I nipped out into Soho with my camera. It was raining, and I got some great shots." But those bedroom-wall posters are never far away. "It can be strange. You're out with your camera and people start pointing, saying: 'Look who's over there!'"

City Like This is at Beaux Arts, Cork Street, London W1 (020-7437 5799; www.beauxartslondon.co.uk) 6 April to 7 May



Night and the city: (clockwise from far left) 'Garibaldi Square, Mexico', September 2002; 'Seville', September 2003; 'Figure, Hong Kong', February 1981; 'Face and Figure, Italy', August 2002