Private Investigations

DIRE Straits

KIT MORGAN transcribes the classical guitar part from this epic 1982 track, taken from the album Love Over Gold. Words: JOE BENNETT.

TIPS

Picking technique

Mark Knopfler always plays with fingers, even on distorted electric guitar parts. Here, he's using a combination of both flesh and nail from the picking hand for a really crisp, bright tone. Many of the lead phrases are picked across three strings, using the index, middle and ring fingers in a 'rolling' motion.

On the CD

TRACK 33

Private Investigations as it appears on the Dire Straits album Love Over Gold

Classical guitar: Kit Morgan

TRACK 34

A complete Total Accuracy backing track, minus the classical parts

Total Accuracy: Stuart Bull – drums; Mick Ash – bass; Pat Adams – keyboards

Engineer – Steve Finch

TOTAL ACCURACY

Additional guitars and FX: Kit Morgan

It's bizarre that Private Investigations is such a perennial acoustic guitar favourite. It's got no chorus, no recognisable vocal tune, and you absolutely never get asked to play it at parties. But one listen to Mark Knopfler's playing on the track is enough to convince anyone of the song's significance - so maybe I'm just going to the wrong sort of parties.

STRUCTURE

The album version opens with a synth drone and 50 seconds of reverberated electric guitar and piano.

This crossfades into the main track (guitar and piano), which is where our transcription begins. The first thing you hear is the main theme, played once through the 12-bar chord sequence, which runs thus: E, Bm7/6 (for 2 bars), A/C#, G/B, F/A, B7/A, Em/G, Gdim, Fm7/b5, B7 and Em.

Next follows the first verse, over which he plays a fairly simple 8-to-the-bar arpeggio part which gives some space for the vocal. The arpeggios get more complex – and faster – after the vocal line has finished. Next, we're into verse two and the arpeggios move up a register, with subtle (classical) vibrato added to the chord by moving the fretting hand from side to side. (In both verses, it's worth noting the unusual shape for F#/m7b5 he uses – it's played as an inversion and covers five strings.)

Verse two leads straight into the Middle 8 (or Middle 10, in this case), in which the guitar plays fairly rapid single-note runs in between the vocal phrases 'so what have you got?' etc.

The first guitar solo is really just an embellishment on the main theme, which gets gradually more complex as it progresses. These licks do sound fairly difficult, but they're all based on scale or arpeggio patterns which are related to the current chord, and several of them rely on the 'rolling' three-finger movement (see the picking technique box above).

The outro begins with those thudding bottom F bass notes, over which the guitar plays the song's most difficult solo, made even more so by the fact that Mark keeps shifting position to achieve changes of tone. From here on, the rest of the section features a two-bar fingerstyle picking riff between Em7 and A7, with occasional stab chords on G and Em7.

The lyrics:

It's a mystery to me
The game commences
For the usual fee, plus expenses
Confidential information
It's in a diary
This is my investigation
It's not a public inquiry

I go checking out the reports
Diggings up the dirt
You get to meet all sorts
If this line of work
Tea and buns
There's always an excuse for it
And when I find the reason
I still can't get used to it

And what have you got
At the end of the day?
What have you got to take away?
A bottle of whisky
And a new set of lies
Blinds on the windows
And a pain behind the eyes

Scared of life, no compensation
Private – Investigations

Mark Knopfler – although best known for electric playing, he's no slouch on a classical guitar.