

Interviews With  
Producers  
Greg Ladanyi, Henry Lewy

# BAM

## THE TUBES CLEAN HOUSE

BY ROBIN TOLLESON

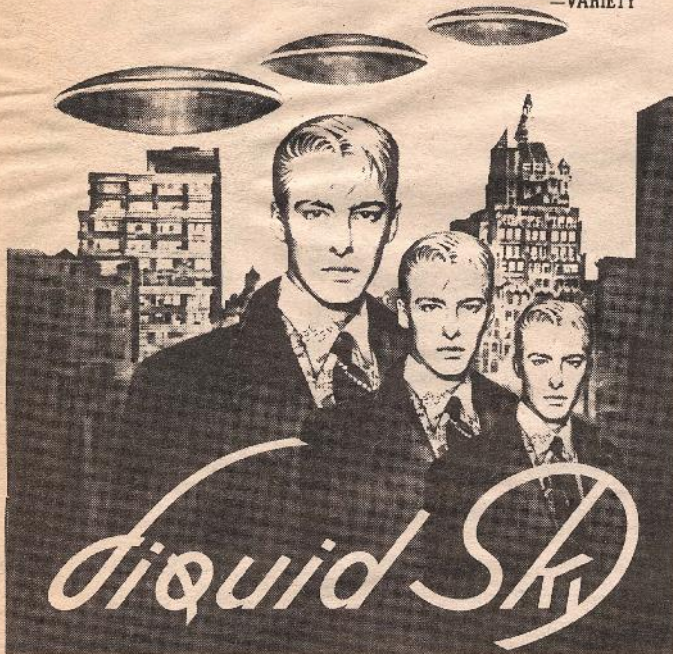


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# TOWER RECORDS

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This issue we offer a special Pro Audio section that features a selection of intriguing new products aimed at the professional musician, as well as profiles of two of the music industry's most talented producer/engineers, Henry Lewy and Greg Ladanyi. Since Phil Spector gave producers such high visibility in the early '60s, there has been considerable interest in these often unsung heroes of the recording studio. Indeed, an entire *auteur* theory of making records has sprung up around some of the industry's most visible producers — everyone from George Martin to Mike Chapman to Jimmy Iovine — suggesting that they, as much as the artists they work with, should be credited with making modern music what it is. Henry Lewy and Greg Ladanyi prefer to stand in the shadows a bit, however, usually working with artists who know what they want from a record. Their job, then, is to help those musicians realize their sometimes abstract visions. And though both are humble about their accomplishments, chances are that the artists they work with — gifted musicians like Joni Mitchell, Jackson Browne, Van Morrison, and Toto, to name just a few — would sing their praises highly. In our features on Lewy and Ladanyi, they talk in detail about their working styles, and by doing so give us all a glimpse of how some of music's most interesting artists take inspiration and turn it into art.



Also in this issue you'll find our second cover story on The Tubes (the first was in February 1978), who are enjoying the most widespread success of their long career. Robin Tolleson finds out what these San Francisco crazies have done to reach the top of the rock heap.

—BJ

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Above: Producer Henry Lewy. Photo: Henry Diltz

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Greg Ladanyi. Photo: Henry Diltz

## Greg Ladanyi:

# Studio Hit-man for the "LA Mafia"

### Dave Zimmer

**STUDIO CITY**—It's getting hot inside Greg Ladanyi's kitchen. There are baked potatoes and chicken in the oven, steak and artichokes on the stove, and they're all cooking at the same time. But Chef Ladanyi remains calm. He's used to handling several projects simultaneously. In the past year, as one of the music business' most in-demand recording engineer/producers, Ladanyi worked his studio wizardry on *Toto IV* (for which he won a Grammy), Don Henley's *I Can't Stand Still*, Warren Zevon's *The Envoy*, David Lindley's *Win This Record*, and now, he's co-producing Jackson Browne's new album and engineering Toto's next.

"I don't take too many vacations," teases Ladanyi, while putting some mushroom sauce on his steak. "I've been working on three or four records at once for the last three years. And for every artist, I try to create different elements that they need, that they want. Henley's album shouldn't sound like Jackson's album. You basically want the listener to be involved with the way each individual artist sees and hears things."

Ladanyi doesn't feel it's a producer's job to come in and impose a strict sound or studio style onto an artist. "I've always found that a certain amount of dialogue and conversation has to go down," says Greg, "about how you perceive a song. Like, with Henley's 'Dirty Laundry,' we had to create an attitude, a musical rhythm that constantly came on. I heard a demo Kooch (guitarist Danny Kortchmar) made with a Farfisa organ. Then we brought in Steve Porcaro and let

him go crazy with the synthesizers, cued off a rhythm machine, which created this mechanical roll in the tune — which is basically what the lyrics are about... the evening news... it's mechanical, very hypnotic and just runs and nobody ever shuts it off.

"There are tasteful ways you can get more meaning out of a song's lyrics through sound," Ladanyi continues. "It's like a painter making a picture. He's going to make you feel a certain way by using certain colors. In the studio, I paint with sound and harmonizers and echo... without exceeding the point where a record sounds like a bunch of garbage. Done tastefully, it makes you listen to a record a little bit harder."

At recording sessions, Ladanyi says, "I make sure my end of things is together as fast as possible. The less time the musicians have to sit there and get sounds, the more energy they'll have for playing takes. And I have to listen and be able to recognize when something's going to happen before it happens and get it on tape. This requires patience and understanding. Things will come at different times. When you're creating a vibe or a feeling, to get just what you want may take ten minutes, it may take eight hours. But you wait until it happens. From experience, I've learned not to force things."

Greg Ladanyi wasn't born an engineering whiz. In fact, while growing up in Venice, he preferred baseball to piano and accordion. Midway through high school, however, Greg got a taste of rock and roll and "was gone." Not being a player, he initially got into the business at 16 as a manager for several LA-based bands. "I was very vocal and a good communi-

cator," Ladanyi says. "And I developed a very strong will at a young age. I was able to just go for things."

In addition to booking shows, dealing with record companies and investing in band equipment, Ladanyi also engineered and produced some demos "purely by feel" at a small recording studio. When none of the groups he was handling took off, Ladanyi literally went into hiding in the studio, because he had no money to pay off the management debts he'd accumulated.

"I felt like I was banging my head against the wall managing bands," Greg says. "And when I got stuck with all these debts and stuff, the engineering business started looking pretty good." It looked even better when Ladanyi was able to hook up with veteran engineer/producers Val Garay and Dave Hassinger. Of his work with them at the Sound Factory, Ladanyi says, "Some of it was real painful. Some of it was boring. Some of it was great. I was constantly surrounded by all of this talent... Linda Ronstadt, J.D. Souther, I can't remember all of them. It was very intense, but I just dove in. After working for twelve or fourteen hours straight, everyone would go home; but I'd stay four, maybe five more hours and just mix tapes. I didn't sleep much during that time."

Ladanyi's diligence eventually paid off. In early 1976, Jackson Browne hired Val Garay to mix *The Pretender*, but when Garay got tied up, Ladanyi took over.

"Jackson and I learned a lot together," Greg says. "It's with him that I really started to understand how to make a record. He's a very outspoken guy. If he's not hearing

## Henry Lewy:

# The Producer as "Third Ear"

Blair Jackson

**LOS ANGELES** — If you think you know record production styles fairly well and can't, for the life of you, think of what the "Henry Lewy sound" is, don't fret. That's exactly the way this genial, unassuming recording giant would want it. Henry Lewy isn't interested in putting his distinctive stamp on every record he makes. Rather, he likes to think of himself primarily as a conduit — one who facilitates the recording process for artists who already have a vision of what they're after in the studio.

"There are artists who'll say to a producer, 'Do me, because I don't know what I want and I liked this other record you did,'" Lewy says over dinner at a Beverly Hills Chinese restaurant. "For those people, a PRODUCER is a must — someone who will really take control in the studio, work hard to get the sound from all the players and shape the entire project a certain way. I don't like to work that way so much, and most of the artists I've worked with already know what they want because they're artists with their own vision. They're individualistic and to try to change them or shape them to fit *my* preconceived notions would be to take away the heart of the issue—their creativity."

Lewy knows a thing or two about working with creative musicians, too — he has worked on every Joni Mitchell record since her second LP, acting as a combination engineer/producer/listener, as well as on projects with singer-songwriters ranging from Leonard Cohen to Van Morrison to Stephen Bishop in recent years. He also has a long, colorful history in the Los Angeles studio scene working on classical projects by the Mamas & Papas, Crosby, Stills & Nash, and a slew of others. He is one of those rare music industry veterans whom *everybody* loves, and with good reason — he seems completely egoless (in stark contrast to most producers), he understands the artists he works with better than just about anyone else, and he doesn't seem to have an impatient or mean streak in his makeup. No wonder he has made a career of working with the idiosyncratic, the eccentric and the volatile. "I've just sort of sat back and fate has thrown people my way," he says with a characteristic warm smile.

The German-born Lewy began his career in the music business in the early '50s, working as a combination disc jockey and engineer at stations in San Diego, Las Vegas and LA. "That was fun," he says, "but after a while it got a little old, so I went to South America and got involved with this thing called The Dancing Waters,

## Henry Lewy

which was this big German invention I think was last seen with Liberace. It was crazy — it had sixteen centrifugal pumps, colored lights, quite a spectacle, and it was very popular there. Unfortunately, it took fifteen hours to set up and eight hours to tear down so it was exhausting." During this period the freewheeling Lewy also joined a circus.

When he returned to Los Angeles in 1959, he found the radio scene to be stagnant for the most part so he

looked to the music world for inspiration. In the very early '60s, he says, "There was a huge gap between artists and engineers. It was like a war. There didn't seem to be any cooperation at all. There was one good guy, though, named Bones Howe. He was just getting started and he was my idol." (Howe has remained active through the years; he was recently involved in the Grammy and Oscar-nominated *One From the Heart* soundtrack.)

Lewy attempted to bring a little humanity into the recording process after landing his first gig at a small studio called Electrovox. From there,

## Greg Ladanyi

what he wants to hear, he lets you know. And because of my experience as an engineer, when Jackson and I communicated there was no need to translate these thoughts to someone else. I could think them and make them happen."

After working so well together in the studio, Browne asked Ladanyi to engineer *Running On Empty*. "I'd never made a live record before," says Greg. "But I've always done these things where I've had to take these great leaps into outer space." Far from a normal live LP, *Running On Empty* was not only recorded on concert stages, but in hotel rooms, rehearsal halls and on the tour bus. "I basically followed the philosophy that you can record anywhere as long as you follow a certain procedure. On the bus, we set up a control room with a little P.A. board and JBLs in the back while they were playing up front. In the hotel rooms, we used a remote truck.

"From going on the road and hearing how good a guitar solo or vocal performance could be, hearing what the level of energy was," Greg continues, "it became easier for me to capture that in the studio. Like, rather than a vague description, I'd want the bass to sound like it was in the Forum. And it would be up to me to motivate the player, to put him in a place where he wouldn't have to think about it. That's when you can create intense moments of happing and feeling."

Ladanyi is good at helping players explore all corners of their musical vistas. On David Lindley's first solo album, says Greg, "He had this concept of what he wanted to do. But coming out of Jackson's music, which he'd played for years, nobody knew about all of the other shit he could play." Lindley and Ladanyi listened to stacks of reggae records to hear certain sounds and feels. During the sessions, Greg placed a 3/4-inch metal sheet under Ian Wallace's drum set to achieve a more striking drum characteristic. Also, when one of the tubes in Lindley's guitar microphone went bad, a buzz developed that everyone loved. "'Mercury Blues' and all of those other guitar parts sound like they do because of that bad tube," Ladanyi says. "And we were praying that it wouldn't quit on us before the album was finished. After that, I learned that wrongness can sometimes bring out the right thing you never thought possible."

This ability to recognize what fits has helped Ladanyi to get the most of instrumental solos in the context of vocally centered songs. "Solos should be an extension of where the lyric leads," says Greg. "Like with Jackson's songs, usually a statement has been made to a point then there's a release through a solo. Whether it's a barrage of colors or stars or stampeding horses... you leave the scene for a while. Then, when the vocal comes back in, it's outrageous, man. That's the kind of shit you make records for."

And though, in the past several years, Ladanyi has made records with Browne, Henley, Lindley, Linda Ronstadt, J.D. Souther, Phoebe Snow, Karla Bonoff and other solo artists, it wasn't until 1982 he recorded a band, namely Toto.

"Conceptually, it's very different," Ladanyi says. "With a solo artist, it all revolves around one person and you cast supporting parts. But with a band like Toto, there are six personalities that have to come across and they all have to be connected. It becomes a much larger animal."

Ladanyi recently worked with another band, The Plimsouls. He mixed their new LP, *Everywhere At Once*, which has a powerful, driving sound. Greg feels, "The two basic elements in a record essential to capture are in the beginning and in the end. The tracking and the mixing are the two places I really shoot from the hip on."

In the studio now cutting basic tracks for Jackson Browne's new album, Ladanyi says, "We actually are recording in this huge warehouse. I had to build a control room in this little room shaped like a cube and the sound pressure was driving me crazy, until I opened up this window, which now works as a bass trap. Everything goes out this window." For these sessions, Greg says, "Jackson has hired a band, a group of guys he's playing with like a real band. He wanted that unity there for this record." (Which, from all indications, will be Jackson Browne's hardest, most rock and roll album yet.)

Beyond finishing up the Browne and Toto projects, as well as a new Don Henley album, Greg says, "I'd like to completely develop a new artist. I'm not talking about managing, I'd like to mold the live thing, a personality, the recording — everything that has to do with how they are received in public. I'd like to develop an artist that people can count on. It's elemental in what I look for in myself. I always want to do things people can count on." □



Joni Mitchell and Henry Lewy at A&M's soundstage. Photo: Henry Diltz

he worked a three-year stint at Liberty Records' studios on La Brea, where he helped engineer the original Chipmunks sessions on the studio's four-track. As a freelancer working out of Gold Star studios and others, he worked on early demos by such legends-to-be as Jackie DeShannon and Leon Russell, "who seemed to be a very special talent, even then," he says, but it wasn't until he took a job at United & Western studio that he really blossomed as an engineer.

"That's when I came into my own. I was second engineer behind Bones on the legendary Mamas & Papas albums and all those classic records by Johnny Rivers. It was fantastic working with Bones; I learned so much. He was very relaxed and he made everyone else feel comfortable and relaxed. He operated the way I like to operate — making the artist feel at home in the studio, letting the artist dictate the session and then, if it's not right, becoming more active."

In the late '60s, a series of friendships led him to a demo project with David Crosby and Stephen Stills — those sessions eventually snowballed to become the first Crosby, Stills & Nash album. It was Crosby who introduced Lewy to his most important

client: Joni Mitchell. "David told me he had just split up with Joni and he was looking to help her find someone who would help her make her second album. She didn't need a producer per se, but more a third ear, a catalyst between her and her material." The first Lewy-Mitchell collaboration was *Clouds*, and since those innocent first days, the two have worked on eleven other albums that have taken each of them through innumerable changes in musical styles, from folk-rock through Mitchell's abstract jazz explorations. Lewy's role, like Mitchell's music has changed over the years.

"I was a teacher and listener at first," he says. "When we first got together, she didn't know anything about the studio, really. When we'd overdub vocals, for instance, she was so insecure that she had to hold a guitar, and that sort of thing. As the years went on, she picked up the engineering aspect more and more and today she knows what a studio can do for her and she knows how to get what she wants. She had a producer on her first album who lasted three or four days," he laughs, and then turning serious, adds, "Joni has to be free to try things out. That's how she makes records. She'll come into the

## Henry Lewy

studio with a song one way and it'll end up being completely different when the record comes out. In between there are all the different ideas she tries out. Some of them are good, some of them aren't. She has the intelligence to know when something is or isn't working out."

Lewy, who was nearing completion of Mitchell's *Wild Things Run Fast* LP last autumn when we first spoke, explained in some detail the process Mitchell typically uses in recording her albums: "She comes up with the arrangements she does from listening carefully to her own piano or guitar parts. She has a very interesting style — she's essentially self-taught and she actually invents her own chords frequently — and she can hear in her parts the components of the fuller arrangement. When Joni gets musicians in the studio, the first three or four takes are usually for listening. She doesn't want to think too much about them — she just wants to play, and frequently you get some real magic happening in those takes."

Lewy says he likes to use just guitar-bass-drums or even guitar-drums when the song is new because "if there are too many players, she has a tendency to lose the intricacies of her guitar playing and she'll play *with them*, instead of them playing *with her*. And since her guitar is the heart of the arrangements you lose something when that happens."

In the case of *Wild Things Run Fast*, "When she came into the studio, she really didn't know what direction she wanted so we ended up doing every song a few times using different musicians. This is what we did with *Mingus* also, until it all clicked into place. All of a sudden she'd say, 'This is how I wanted it to be.'" Indeed, there were even some radical changes in arrangements between the time Lewy played me early mixes of Mitchell's new material and when the record came out, including the replacement of Don Henley's vocal on "Dream Flat Tires" with a more soulful outing by Lionel Richie.

In the overdubbing stage, Mitchell looks for colors to add to her already developed musical sketch rather than dominating textures. Comments Lewy, "She's essentially a painter [painting has long been her biggest passion, as a look at any of her recent album covers shows] and she thinks of her music in painterly terms. She'll talk about adding a color here or there, or having a skeleton and fleshing it out with more tones." It is not surprising, then, that the musicians she chooses for her records and tours are frequently individualistic players who lend her music a very specific hue, be it bassist Jaco Patorius, whose distinctive sound has certain horn-like sonorities [or her current bassist and new husband Larry Klein] or guitarist Pat Metheny's bright, almost choral sound, and on down the line. There is a musician perfect for the sound in her head and she finds the player every time. And of course much of Lewy's studio work is with Mitchell alone, helping her double and triple her voice and guitar, helping her achieve the clean but layered effect

she has favored traditionally.

"What I love about Joni," he says brightly, "is that she never sits still for a second. She's always thinking, always moving forward. She grows with every album, which is, ironically, one of the things that turns some fans off. They get used to her doing one thing and then she changes. She soaks in things constantly. She has a real appetite for new ideas." Certainly a larger one than either radio or the majority of the record-buying public, who have not embraced her various forays into jazzier styles in quite the same way they did her folk albums. As a result, albums like *Mingus* and her shockingly underrated masterpiece, *Don Juan's Reckless Daughter* (which Lewy agrees is easily among her best), went largely unheard. "Of course we were very disappointed that those records didn't find a wider audience," Lewy says, "but it's not part of Joni's personality to sit down and say, 'I'm going to make this sound commercial.'" If she had, the world would have never heard the largely inaccessible "Chair and Sky," much less the side-long opus from *Don Juan*, "Paprika Plains," which remains perhaps her most fully realized — and least discovered — work.

Henry Lewy isn't looking for the next gold record for his wall, though obviously he hopes every project he works on will be successful. He knew, for example, that when he traveled to France to record Van Morrison's contemplative *Common One* LP he wasn't going to top the charts. "That's not why I ever take a project," he says sternly. "He is quite probably a genius and it was a thrill to work with him. We had some truly magical evenings in the studio — that's why you do it. Van is a man of very strong convictions. He is the way he is. Some people say, 'He should try to sell his record more, do interviews,' and that sort of thing. But that's not him. His music is him and I was hired to help him make his music sound the way he wanted."

Of late, Lewy has been most involved developing a few younger artists (as well as working with Leonard Cohen on a spiritual music project), most notably LA singer-songwriter Jude Johnstone who he feels "is an enormous talent, a very emotional songwriter." Lewy says, "I like young artists because you see so much enthusiasm and so many fresh ideas. Sometimes the sessions are less than perfect, but what you sell with a first-time artist is *emotion*. You don't want an album by a young artist to sound mechanical and that is the danger."

He laments that "there is no development of artists by record companies anymore. They want to make records that sell only. How do you do that? There's no guarantee. So what has happened is they've inhibited people's natural creativity so artists look at what's already successful to help them decide what to do. What does that do to an artist?"

That is why Lewy works with several young artists on spec and has continued to work with Mitchell, Leonard Cohen and others who refuse to compromise their art. "It is an art," he says wistfully. "I can't look at this as *just a business*." And that explains why Henry Lewy has no shortage of admitting clients—and friends. □