

# MUSIC CONNECTION

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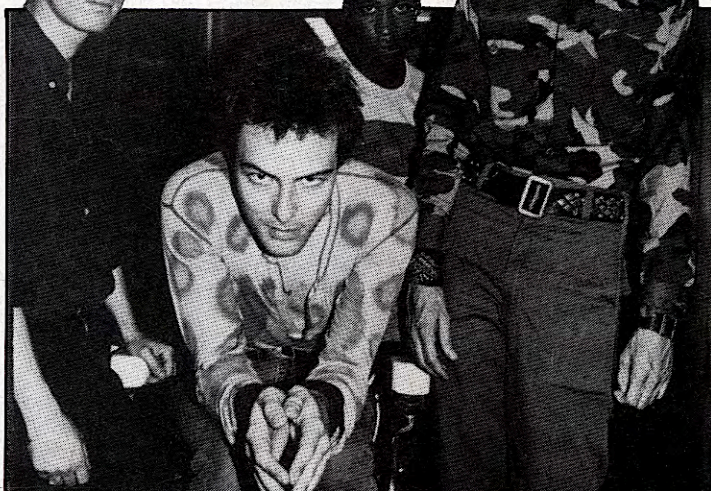


photo by Karen Filter

The Dead Kennedys, one of many groups on smaller labels hoping they can be the exception to the rule and score with increased sales during the holidays.

## Holiday Sales Boom Offers Little Hope For Local Bands

BY IAIN BLAIR

More records are sold just before Christmas than at any comparable time during the year, so it would seem like a good time for smaller independent labels and even local bands to put their vinyl on the marketplace.

It's not, according to an MC survey of many industry veterans, although there are at least a few encouraging signs.

One note of optimism in a generally pessimistic analysis came from Mark Cope, sales manager for Faulty Records.

"We're looking forward to a

very strong fourth quarter," he says. "Although overall sales are down in the record business, our sales are up, so we're definitely not as pessimistic as some of the other independents. We have some of our strongest releases coming out right now, including eight-song EP by D.O.A. at \$6.98 and two LP's at \$8.98 from the Dead Kennedys and TSOL."

The main reason for Faulty's bullish attitude on sales of its punk acts is that the people who will buy the new Dead Kennedys album are not the type, who would even consider purchasing the new Ronstadt album or a greatest hits compilation by the Eagles or Commodores. In that sense, the DK's are only competing with other punk releases, which certainly increases the odds of a purchase.

Putting together a Christmas-season package, though, is a proposition that relies on good timing and a smooth approach, and there are problems even for those, like Faulty, looking for-

Please turn to page 10

Please turn to page 14

## Latest Project Is Joni Mitchell's New Album

## Producer/Engineer Henry Lewy: Sensitivity And Experience In A Supportive Studio Role

BY BEN BROOKS

The name Henry Lewy may not ring a bell, but certainly household names like Stephen Bishop, Joan Armatrading, Van Morrison, Hoyt Axton, Joan Baez and Joni Mitchell do. All these artists have enlisted the special talents of one of the recording arts' most sensitive and and experienced craftsmen.

A man who commands immediate respect, Henry Lewy has a gift few engineers and/or producers ever acquire.

"I don't have a big ego—I guess that makes all the difference," says Lewy, who has literally grown up with the record business. "I feel that my job is to help artists, not obstruct them in any way."

A veteran producer, Lewy is full of enthusiasm for the artists and music he records. Having worked with Joni Mitchell since

her second album, he naturally has a special affection and commitment to her and to her art. "She's the only true genius I've ever met," he says unflinchingly.

The following interview (and one with Mitchell that will appear next issue) bear that fact out. Yet, in Lewy's colorful career, he has also recorded artists like Paul Horn, Buffy Ste. Marie, Jimmy Webb, Minnie Riperton, the Flying Burrito Brothers and many more.

The interviews were conducted with Lewy at his home and at A&M Studios during the final stages of Mitchell's new album, *Wild Things Run Fast*.

**MUSIC CONNECTION:** As an artist's catalyst, and a creative person, how do you feel about record labels and the people who work with the product once it's out of your hands?

HENRY LEWY: It's a difficult

thing about record labels. What you think they should do and what they do are often two different things. I really have never

## MCA Publishing Head Looks To Develop New Songwriters

BY JEFF SILBERMAN

When Leeds Levy took over the reins as president of MCA Publishing four years ago, the firm had only three staff writers—one in New York and two in Nashville. Today, there are five staffers in Nashville, one in New York and six on the West Coast. Levy describes the staff increase as an "evolutionary process and a renovating operation. We started by getting new, no-name writers. Robin Lane (of Chartbusters

fame) was one of our first signings."

Over the past four years, the writing roster size fluctuated due to the unknown quality of new writers and MCA's acquisition of the ABC and Infinity publishing companies. "When you're dealing with new talent," it's a grooming and development situation," he states. "Some writers make it; some don't. Two years ago, we started to prune, going from five

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**PUBLISHERS**

J. Michael Dolan  
E. Eric Bettelli

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J. Michael Dolan

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Jeff Silberman

**AUDIO/VIDEO EDITOR**

Jeff Janning

**STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER**

Sherry Rayn Barnett

**PRODUCTION INTERN**

Jeremy Benson

**FIELD AMBASSADOR**

Guy Babylon

**CONTRIBUTORS**

Iain Blair, Ben Brooks, Randal A. Case, David "Cat" Cohen, Steve Coll, Penny Dellinger, Bruce Duff, Sally Klein, Eliot Sekuler

**ORANGE COUNTY BUREAU**

Laine Medina, Editor

Martin Brown

(714) 846-6065

Mail Correspondence To:

P.O. Box 268

Sunset Beach, Ca. 90742

**CORRESPONDENTS**

**SAN FRANCISCO**

Terry Marshall

**SAN DIEGO**

Tad Delano

Thomas K. Arnold

**CHICAGO**

Cary Baker

Moira McCormick

**NEW YORK**

Bob Gibson

Newsstand Distribution: Mader News

(213) 559-0000

Counsel: Donnemfeld & Brent, A Law Corporation

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**MAIN OFFICES**

6640 Sunset Blvd., Suite 201

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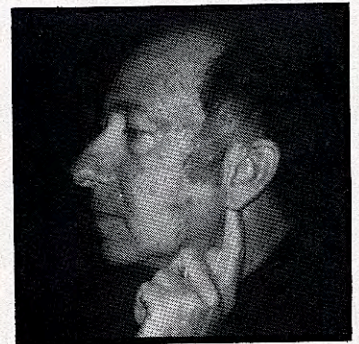
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Mike Pinera, pg. 16



Band Listings, pg. 34



Henry Lewy, pg. 10

**T**he Christmas season is normally the busiest record-buying period of the year, and '82 should be no exception. For local bands and independent labels, though, it'll be tough to get a piece of that action. We examine why in this issue, with interviews with a number of representatives of labels, retailers and distributors.

**Regular Features**

**MC SHOWCASE**  
Jack Mack & Heart Attack . . . 20

**THE PROS' GEAR**  
Kiss . . . . . 21

**ON THE AIR/ TV LISTINGS**  
by Rick Orienza . . . . . 22

**SONGMINE**  
by John Braheny . . . . . 23

**STUDIO SPLICES**  
by Jeff Janning . . . . . 24

**VIDEO UPDATE**  
by Jeff Janning . . . . . 25

**CONCERT REVIEWS**  
Josie Cotton, Translator, Bonnie Hayes & Wild Combo, Asian-American Jazz Fest, Anthony Davis/James Newton . 26

**MC REVIEWS**  
The Heartbeats, Pictures, Mark Mancina, Jan Davis, Che Blammo, T-Birdz, The Brat, Kikk Hansen, Dogma Probe . . 28

**ON RECORD**  
Darius & the Magnets, Storm Riders, Howard McGhee, Rikk Agnew . . . . . 32

**CLUB DATA/ LIVE ACTION CHART**  
by Jeff Silberman . . . . . 33

**GIG GUIDE** . . . . . 36

**PRO PLAYERS** . . . . . 38

**FREE CLASSIFIEDS** . . . . 40

**Articles**

**'82 SONGWRITERS EXPO**  
by Sally Klein . . . . . 8

**AZRA RECORDS: RE-SHAPING VINYL**  
by Bruce Duff . . . . . 9

**MC INTERVIEW: PRODUCER HENRY LEWY**  
by Ben Brooks (cont. from cover) . . . . . 10

**MCA PUBLISHING HEAD LEEDS LEVY**  
by Jeff Silberman (cont. from cover) . . . . . 12

**HOLIDAY SALES WON'T HELP LOCAL BANDS**  
by Iain Blair (cont. from cover) . . . . . 14

**MIKE PINERA: A ROCK SURVIVOR**  
by Randal A. Case . . . . . 16

**THE LONG PLATINUM CAREER OF KIM FOWLEY**  
by Jeff Silberman . . . . . 18

# HENRY LEWY

## ARTISTRY AND EMOTION IN THE STUDIO

Continued from cover

found the answer to that. It's especially frustrating when you work two or three months on an album that you know is good. The artist believes in it and whoever you're dealing with at the label thinks it's great, and yet all of a sudden, nothing happens. You say, "Why?" Once it leaves the creative hands, it becomes a piece of product. The guys who don't really have the capacity to realize the creative aspects of the music respond more to... "Yeah, she did this before and she's appearing here and we can sell so many units of her here." It's that type of attitude. The fact that it's a beautiful piece of art or sensitive piece of music never enters into it. It's very frustrating for the artist and that's why it helps an awful lot if the artist is commercially minded so that they go around to those record people and shake their hands and get to know them.

MC: To get some enthusiasm going for the 'product'.

LEWY: Right. Now you take Van Morrison. The guy's a genius, a fantastic songwriter, loves his work and does a great job. Yet his relationship with the record company and the press is nil. It's

because he doesn't feel he needs it. He feels he's not part of that—he shouldn't have to bother with it. But he's been through an awful lot. He's been around a long time. By now he feels he should be in the studio and do his little gigs around San Francisco and when it comes to being nice to Mr. and Mrs. So-and-so of the record company, it doesn't even enter into his mind. And actually, in a way he's right. He shouldn't have to...but it would help.

MC: Is Morrison a very different person when you're working together with him one-to-one.

LEWY: Oh, yeah. I was very lucky to work with him on *Common One*. The whole album was done in about two weeks in the hills above Nice, France. There were some fantastically magical nights. The basic tracks and vocals were all done live. The only things we overdubbed were the strings and some background parts. The drums were in one corner and the keyboards in one corner and he was standing in another with a hand-held microphone. We tried two or three songs an evening and did two or three takes on each.

MC: That's the epitome of recording in a sense.

LEWY: I think so. I really think that's the way giant records are made. In the old days they used to make records that way. They just went for it. But today with multi-tracking, artists get to the point where they try things five dozen ways and make up their mind what they want. You lose something. It may turn out to be a very perfect record but it's also very cold and you lose the raw

emotion. And I think that most record buyers—unless they're professionals—really respond to that raw emotion more than anything else.

MC: I wonder if that has anything to do with the feeling most of us have that the music of today isn't as exciting as it has been in the past.

LEWY: I'm glad you said that. I find that to be true. I think it's not as exciting. I think it sounds pretty much the same. There isn't enough variety. Now that has a lot to do with airplay also, because these people who make the music say, "If we make something that's original and far out, can we get it played?" With today's tight playlists, probably not. Then there's promotion. There are so many factors that inhibit certain people in the studio. And yet if you're a true creative artist, those things shouldn't inhibit you at all. You should just go for broke. Do what you believe and what you do best.

MC: It seems to me you've worked with a number of very artistic singer/songwriters. Why do people like Armatrading, Morrison and Mitchell hire you?

LEWY: I started out as an engineer. Before that I was a disc jockey. I was a disc jockey in Las Vegas and San Diego and also here at the jazz station KKGQ. So I've always liked music and I've always liked people. I started off engineering way back in the '60s and I just sort of grew up with the industry, really.

I started engineering on The Chipmunk albums. The first folk duo that I did was Bud & Travis. Then I worked with a lot of people who are now very big. I did some demo work with Crosby and Stills just before their first Crosby, Stills and Nash album. We did "Guinevere" and "Long Time Gone." While working with them Crosby told me about Joni Mitchell. He said, "I know this girl and I did her first album. She's about due to do a second album for Warner Brothers. She doesn't need a

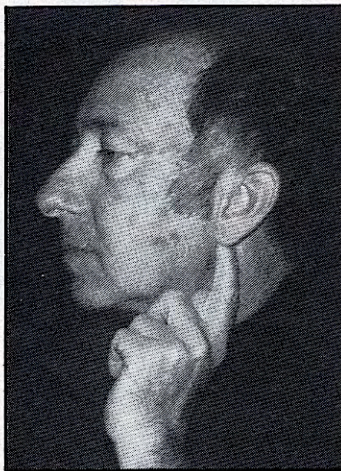


Photo by Bob Burton

Henry Lewy: From the Chipmunks to Joni Mitchell's latest LP.

### Henry Lewy Partial Discography

Joni Mitchell: *Clouds, Ladies Of The Canyon, Blue, For The Roses, Court And Spark, Miles Of Aisles, The Hissing Of Summer Lawns, Hejira, Don Juan's Restless Daughter, Mingus, Shadows & Light, Wild Things Run Fast*  
 Van Morrison: *Common One*  
 Leonard Cohen: *Recent Songs*  
 Stephen Bishop: *Careless*  
 Joan Baez: *Gracias A La Vida*  
 Minnie Riperton: *Minnie*  
 The Flying Burrito Brothers: *The Golden Palace Of Sin*  
 Joan Armatrading: *How Cruel*  
 Jacob Magnusson: *Special Treatment*  
 Bill Hughes: *Dream Master*  
 Keller & Webb: *Accomplice*  
 David Blue: *Stories*  
 Hoyt Axton: *Southbound*  
 Leah Kunkel: *I Run With Trouble*

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*'Joni's attitude was 'I know what I want; I just need somebody to help me do it.'*

producer; she needs an engineer who cares and who listens." I seemed to fall into that category, so I started with Joni as sort of an engineer—not a producer, but more than just an engineer.

**MC:** *There was no one between her and you?*

**LEWY:** At first the company put a producer in, but it didn't work out because she's a very strong woman and she knows what she wants. All she needs is somebody to bounce opinions off. When she first came into the studio she didn't know anything about the tools of the trade. In order to overdub vocals, she had to hold the guitar and pretend like she was playing. But she's a very intelligent woman and a quick learner so that today she can tell me exactly what to do.

So I think through Joni, and my reputation of working with Joni, the other people came to me. Most of the time it was co-production deals—situations where they didn't want anybody to tell them, "Do this or do that or change me and make me into something else I'm not." It was, rather, "I know what I want; I just need somebody to help me do it." There are different producers for different artists. I think I've just been lucky to fall into a groove with people who know their music and have it together but just need somebody like me.

**MC:** *Did Joni lead you in that direction or do you think that there's something about you that makes you especially right for that role?*

**LEWY:** Yeah, I like people, I'm sensitive to their moods, I enjoy music and I've got lots of patience. I think that's the secret

word in the recording business. You've got to have patience and if somebody wants to try something you can't say, "No, it's not going to work." You can't force things on artists. Joni's come into the studio and said, "I want to do this or that and I say, "really?" And we do it and three or four days later I say, "that's great. It was so original but it sounded real strange when I first heard it."

**MC:** *What's it like for you working with Joni Mitchell musically and personally?*

**LEWY:** Joni keeps changing. She loses one audience and gains another. She is a growing person. She constantly comes up every year with new likes and dislikes.

*'There are so many factors that inhibit certain people in the studio, and yet if you're a true creative artist, those things shouldn't inhibit you at all.'*

She doesn't even remember the tunings of her old songs! I feel I'm a very good friend of hers. I'm in love with her. I respect her. She's the only true genius I've ever met. She's as good a painter as she is a songwriter. They go hand-in-hand. She started out as a painter and the songwriting came second. When she talks about music she expresses it in the form of colors and shades of light and so forth. She does all her own album covers. She doesn't like to sell her art, and so she's running out of space to store it. When she's not working on an album, she's painting in her loft in New York.

**MC:** *What are your favorite Joni*

*Mitchell albums?*

**LEWY:** I like *Blue* very much. Of course I like *Court and Spark* and then *Don Juan's Reckless Daughter*.

**MC:** *Is Joni concerned about having hit records at all?*

**LEWY:** Joni's conscious of hits. She would like to have a hit. She always says, "Why did so-and-so have a hit and not me," and yet she's not going to sacrifice style or integrity just to make it commercial.

**MC:** *As an engineer/producer, have you always had plenty of work through the years?*

**LEWY:** Yes. I've been very lucky in that the telephone rings and somebody says, "Hey, come and make an album." But right now business is very slow. I really don't know where my next projects are going to come from. I've been listening to acts and I haven't heard anything that's really excited me. A lot of music sounds like the other.

**MC:** *What do you think of the 'new music'?*

**LEWY:** I think it's in a process of evolution. I don't think it's settled down yet. You know how short these fads are. There's punk rock and this and that, but they last a very short time. And out of it usually comes something better. I think the best group that's impressed me lately has been the Police.

**MC:** *Today record companies don't seem to want to take a chance on somebody they're going to have to develop over several years.*

**LEWY:** I know, it's a pity. Small labels do, but when you're dealing with a corporate entity, you have that aspect of it where they want quick success or nothing. They also want somebody who tours constantly, which some artist just don't want to do. So there's a dilemma for the singer/songwriter. I wonder if were Joni to start out today if she'd have a chance...

Next issue, *Music Connection*, exclusively interviews Joni Mitchell

**AZRA**

*Continued from page 9*

Richards' knowledge of distribution has also enabled him to help out groups in terms of distributing independent wax. He says, "So many groups will put every penny they have into a record, and a month after it comes out they're still sitting on a thousand records, no one wants it and they don't know where to go. We don't release that much, but we've gotten so many other bands that have walked in with their finished record and we've gotten it distributed. If there are bands out there that have product that they've finished and they can't get it distributed, we'll distribute it for them. We don't charge for that." Richards also expressed interest in hearing master tapes of groups. "Any group that walks in here with a master tape, we'll talk to them and see what we can do for them because (by recording the master) they've solved half the expense factor." He feels this is a good way to work with groups because "if they've got their money in that tape, they've got something to recoup and they're going to work harder to recoup their share of the money."

Groups with vinyl coming out on Azra in the near future include EP's by Special Forces and Vixen, a leaf-shaped reissue of some vintage tracks by the Leaves, who were Turtle Jim Pons' original group, most famous for the first version of "Hey Joe", and a four group sampler from Pittsburgh, which will appear to be made out of chrome. Also, local dadaist Zoogz Rift has a Christmas single coming out, as do avant-garde electro band No-Y-Z, who are releasing an LP. Erika will also release an album by L.A. poster goddess Angelyne.

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