

BARRY MANILOW - CLIVE DAVIS - A Bridge Too Far.

In the 60s and 70s, having had quite a few hit records as an arranger in New York City, I was well aware of the recording scene in the city. In fact, New York had its own version of THE WRECKING CREW, akin to Hal Blaine's group of star musicians who played on all the big hit records coming out of L.A. I was not only aware of the great musicians in the New York studios but also of all the other arrangers in town; they were cohorts.

One of the names I often heard mentioned was Barry Manilow. He was known as a singer/arranger for radio and TV commercials. Part of my career at the time involved not only arranging records—I arranged hundreds of them—but also arranging commercials for radio and TV. So, I was well-acquainted with that whole jingle commercial scene in the Big Apple.

Clive Davis is one of the great record producers in pop-recording history. He had discovered and produced many hit records with Whitney Houston, Janet Jackson, Carlos Santana, Alicia Keys, Patti Smith, Kelly Clarkson, Aretha Franklin, and Jennifer Hudson.

Clive had heard a record out of England called "Brandy." It was written and sung by Scott English and was about a barmaid in a port town in England. It had a bouncy, folksy kind of feel. Clive Davis, being the record genius that he is, thought that if the words were changed from "Brandy" to a girl's name like "Mandy," and if it were slowed down, it could be a hit record.

Clive had signed Barry Manilow to his label and believed this song would be perfect for him. I received a call from Clive Davis to arrange the Manilow project. So, here I was, about to arrange for this "singing arranger." It was the first and only time I was ever to work with Clive Davis.

We discussed the approach to doing the song "Mandy" with newcomer Barry Manilow, who had gained notoriety from working with Bette Midler. Clive Davis asked me, "Joe, can you do this like 'Bridge Over Troubled Water'?" "Oh, absolutely," I said. "All I'll need is a 24-piece string orchestra, a star-studded rhythm section, and a symphony-quality horn section." He replied, "Joe, you got it—carte blanche. Go ahead and do it."

We recorded at Media Sound, NYC. Will Lee was on bass, Jimmy Young on drums, and the recording was engineered by Michael Delugg. Barry Manilow played piano. Two recording sessions were planned for that day. The first was for

the rhythm section: piano, bass, drums, and guitars. Later in the day, we held a second session, an overdub session consisting of violins, violas, cellos, and horns. I had created the arrangements for the strings and the rhythm sections in the style of "Bridge Over Troubled Water," according to Clive Davis's direction.

My experience of the recording sessions as I remember them went something like this. I was running down the rhythm section, when Barry called out for everybody to stop playing—"Hold it! Hold on!" He called me over to ya the piano and made it clear that he wasn't happy with what was going on with the music and wasn't pleased with the arrangement I had laid out. He decided to show the musicians how he thought the arrangement should go. He started banging away at the piano, demonstrating the feel he wanted and calling out directions to the musicians. To me, it felt more like a Las Vegas dance act, a long way from "Bridge Over Troubled Water." Barry took over the session. The track started to feel like something that might accompany the Rockettes at Radio City Music Hall, a long line of beautiful women kicking away in unison. I was not in the mood for a confrontation over egos. After all, I had had a number one record with "Sunny," "98.6," and a bunch of other hits; Barry Manilow, at this point in time, had yet to have a hit record. So, I went into the control room to listen from there.

It appeared for me from my point of view, that like in a Clint Eastwood movie, the door from the hallway to the control room slowly opened, and in walked Clive Davis. His ears perked up as he listened to what was going on. He frowned as he addressed me, "Joe, what is that?" I said, "That's 'Mandy'." "Why doesn't it sound like 'Bridge Over Troubled Water'?" I had to tell him, "Your artist has incited a mutiny, taken over the musicians, and is controlling the recording session." I believe, Clive leaned over the mixing console and pressed the talkback button, speaking to all the musicians and Barry in the studio. Displeased, he said something like, "Hey Barry, do it the way Renzetti arranged it." That was it; that's all he had to say. He released the talkback button, turned to me, and said, "Thanks Joe," before walking out of the building. I took back control, and we recorded it like "Bridge Over Troubled Water." Later in the day, we did the orchestra overdubs, which really made the record soar. "Mandy" was released in September 1974, and by November 1974, it had reached number one. It made Barry Manilow's career as a singer, and it did so in the style of "Bridge Over Troubled Water," the idea of Clive Davis, as he has mentioned in many of his interviews.

A few months later, I was called back to arrange a song on a Barry Manilow album. This album was his debut album titled, "Barry Manilow," cashing in on the success of "Mandy." I arranged "Could It Be Magic."

As the engineers were setting up the studio, Barry and a couple of the guys from the rhythm section, and myself, were huddled in a corner of the studio, having a kind of bullshit session.

Barry was charming us with his fascinating stories about how amazing it was that he had a hit record, how much mail he was getting from teenyboppers all around the world, receiving fan mail by the bags full. He said that all these girls were gushing about how much they loved him and how they would like to marry him. Being pretty much bored, his audience—had to go to their instruments and start the session, and I had to get into the control room to supervise it.

Everybody got into position, and we started rehearsing "Could It Be Magic." The session went well; there were no memorable events on my part. In fact, I found the whole relationship of working with Barry fairly dull. He was not what I would describe as a ball of fun or a great collaborator.

After the session was done, I left the studio, and I never talked to Manilow again. "Mandy" was Barry Manilow's first number-one single. It launched him into stardom. Clive's instincts were right. When Clive Davis had a vision, he gave you the resources to make it happen. "Bridge Over Troubled Water" by Paul Simon had been arranged beautifully and served as the template for "Mandy." Make it big, make it emotional, make it soar. I'm proud of my contribution: a great arrangement, a good vocal, a good song, excellent musicians, a great production, fine engineering—a hit record.

Personally, I like the Scott English record "Brandy" better.