

"Laser Amplifiers" is a series of interviews that will shed some light on the people who actively help(ed) spreading the LaserDisc love. This entry is dedicated to Ron Dassa, the owner of the Laser Blazer store, one the THE places to buy and rent LaserDiscs in Los Angeles. Laser Blazer was open from 1988 to 2010 in brick and mortar but is still alive and kicking online.

So how did all this happen, what made Ron jump into the LaserDisc business and who did he meet along the way? Let's find out ...

**We all remember the first time we encountered LaserDiscs. When and how did you learn about the format that changed your life?**

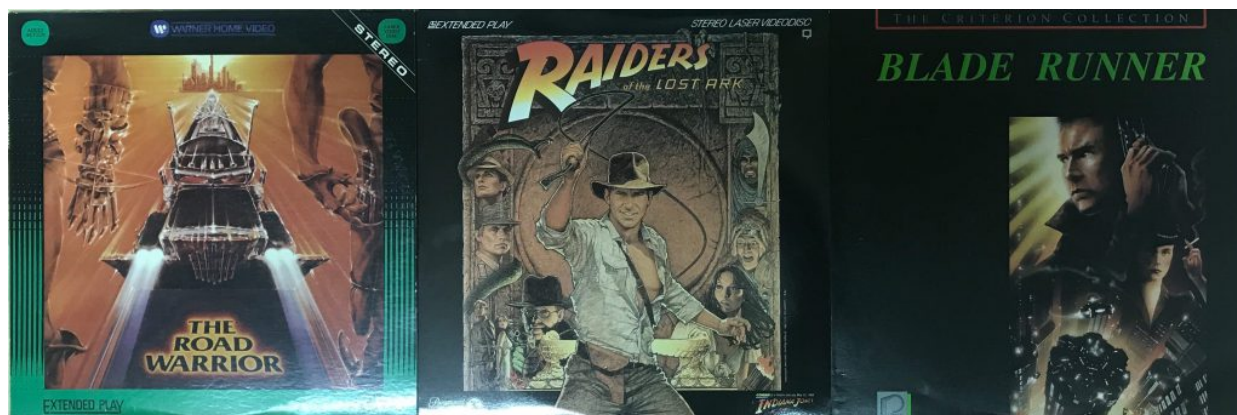


Henry Radio

My first job was at Henry Radio, a high-end audio/video store back in 1983. I worked in the video department as a sales and delivery specialist. On my first day, I had to deliver a 19-inch Trinitron, out of the box, to one of our customers. I plopped it in the back of my boss' station wagon and at the first stop sign the TV rolled at least three times towards the front of the vehicle. Thankfully Sony made a tank of a TV and it survived... as did my job. I remember Pioneer doing an in-store demo and I got hooked immediately. We ordered their LD players, LD's and monitors. When the inventory first came in, we set up a display with five of their monitors and one bin filled with their LaserDiscs. I had fun introducing the format to curious customers. My first player purchased was the Pioneer LD-838

**What was the first LaserDisc you watched and owned and why did you choose that particular title?**

I can't remember my first time, but it was probably a Pioneer demo disc. The first three LaserDiscs I purchased were Road Warrior, Blade Runner and Raiders. Action movies seemed to show off the format best with picture and sound.



**Laser Blazer was one of the first dedicated LaserDisc stores in L.A.. What made you turn laserdiscs into a business and how did you come up with the name “Laser Blazer”?**

After working at Henry Radio and selling the product for about four years, I saw the potential for a stand-alone business. I learned a lot about sales, buying and everything else I needed to know about how to operate a business. At the time there was probably one other guy selling LDs in the valley and I saw the need in the greater Los Angeles area. There might have only been about 1,200 titles when I started. It was a little risky but I took a chance. When I left Henry Radio, they were still invoicing all sales by hand. It could take me up to 20 minutes to write up a 30-disc sale. With the introduction of the Mac, I saw how easy it would be to run a business with a growing inventory and customer base. I had a friend build a custom database and I brought my Mac to work. The store name came about by spewing out anything that had the word “laser” in it. My dad spewed out Blazer Laser because I happened to be driving a Chevy Blazer at the time. I turned that into Laser Blazer. The trailblazer for all optical media. The Ultimate Video Alternative.

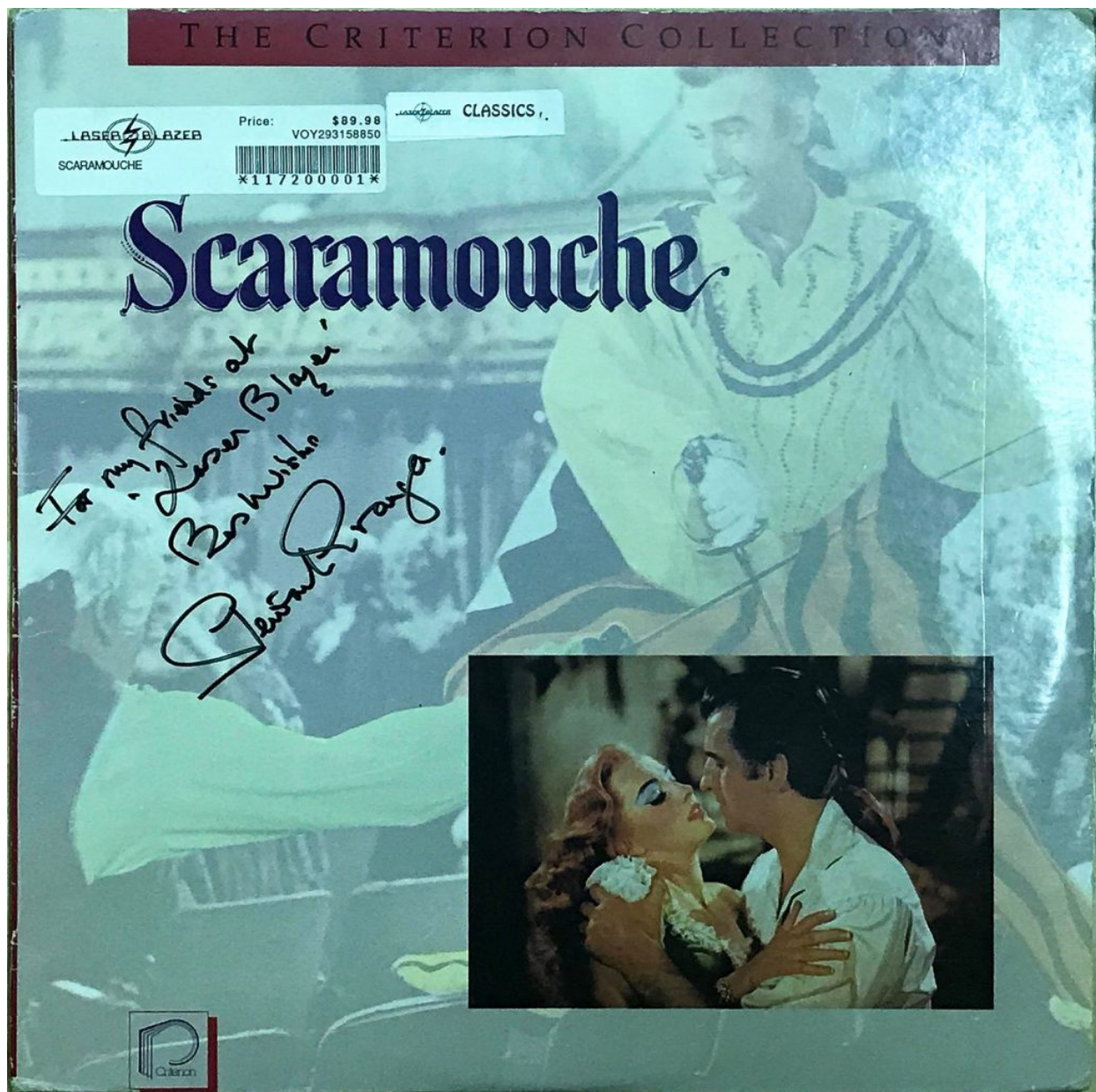
**You had Stewart Granger sign his Criterion Collection Scaramouche for your customers at the store opening in 1988, how did that come about?**

I met Stewart at Henry’s. A lot of stars would shop there and occasionally I would have to deliver and set up their new equipment. While I was setting up his equipment, he would insist on feeding me. He would make me his famous British fish cakes. In his retirement years, he loved to cook, play tennis and watch movies. We would spend hours just talking about “old Hollywood” and the movies he made. We became friends and he was happy to help me get my new business off the ground. I eventually convinced him to get a LaserDisc player when Scaramouche came out.



Stewart Granger (m.) with Ron (r.) and his brother David (l.)





**What was your all-time best-selling LaserDisc title? And which one was the worst?**

Let's see, I still have 3 copies of Stupids that you can buy right now on LDDb. There were several titles that never sold. We sent most of them back.

The best title had to be Terminator 2. We had a big sale on release date and sold over 1000 on that weekend. I also have several copies for sale on [LDDb.com](http://LDDb.com). To date I have sold 2,175 copies of T2, all versions combined.

**Renting LaserDiscs was a big deal for customers and you were one of the few places to serve that demand. How did you select which titles were for rent and how much did you charge per day?**

We rented about 70% of what was released. Any time we would get a trade-in of something we didn't have, we would add it to the collection. If I remember correctly we had 17,000+ titles for rent. Rentals were \$3 a day unless you were a member which brought it down to \$1.50. Throughout the years, prices changed to keep up with

the competition.

**Your store also featured a section with AV equipment. Was selling LaserDisc players a viable business or rather a vehicle to attract more people to buy or rent LaserDiscs?**



It was kind of a necessity and very profitable at the time. People didn't know what a LaserDisc player was. My specialty at Henry's was hardware sales. In fact, Henry's would supply me with LD players in the beginning until I got established. When I left Henry's I was the manager/video buyer and had built great relationships within the industry. My representative at Pioneer supported my desire to open a business and assured me that I would become a Pioneer dealer. I didn't become a dealer until about 6 months in. LDCA (Laserdisc Company of America) supported me from the get-go. Later, I became an authorized dealer for Phillips, Sony, Panasonic, Kef, Boston Acoustics, Monster Cable and a few others.

**The many loyal customers loved your vast inventory but most of all your dedicated and helpful staff. What were your key criteria to hiring for the store and how did you find the right people?**

The right people found me. I never had to run an ad to look for help. I had a very low turn-over with a staff that loved their jobs. My first employee gave me a coffee mug proclaiming me "The King of Discs".





Most of the time, we were one big happy family. Many of my movie-loving customers became employees along with a lot of film students. Jonah Hill was actually an applicant that we didn't hire... lucky for him!

**"Laser rot" was already a known defect during the heyday of the format. Was that a big issue for your store and how did your customers react to it?**

Not really a huge issue by the time I opened in 1988. The manufacturer would take them back and would fix the problem with a repressing. We did have to check each disc though. Can't tell you how many times the customer thought a small defect in the film transfer was rot. Customers wanted perfection with LD's, and that wasn't always the case.

**LaserDisc collectors are a special crowd. Do you remember any key moment with a customer and what happened?**

Special, indeed! On a busy day in the store, Roger Ebert popped in to do some shopping. A customer, while shopping himself, proceeded to hold up discs and scream across the store, "Hey Roger, thumbs up? Or thumbs down?". He did this several times with different movies until I gave him the thumbs down and got rid of him. Roger was very cool about the situation and, thankfully, came back for return visits.

**Laser Blazer was also very popular with celebrity customers, can you drop a few names for us?**

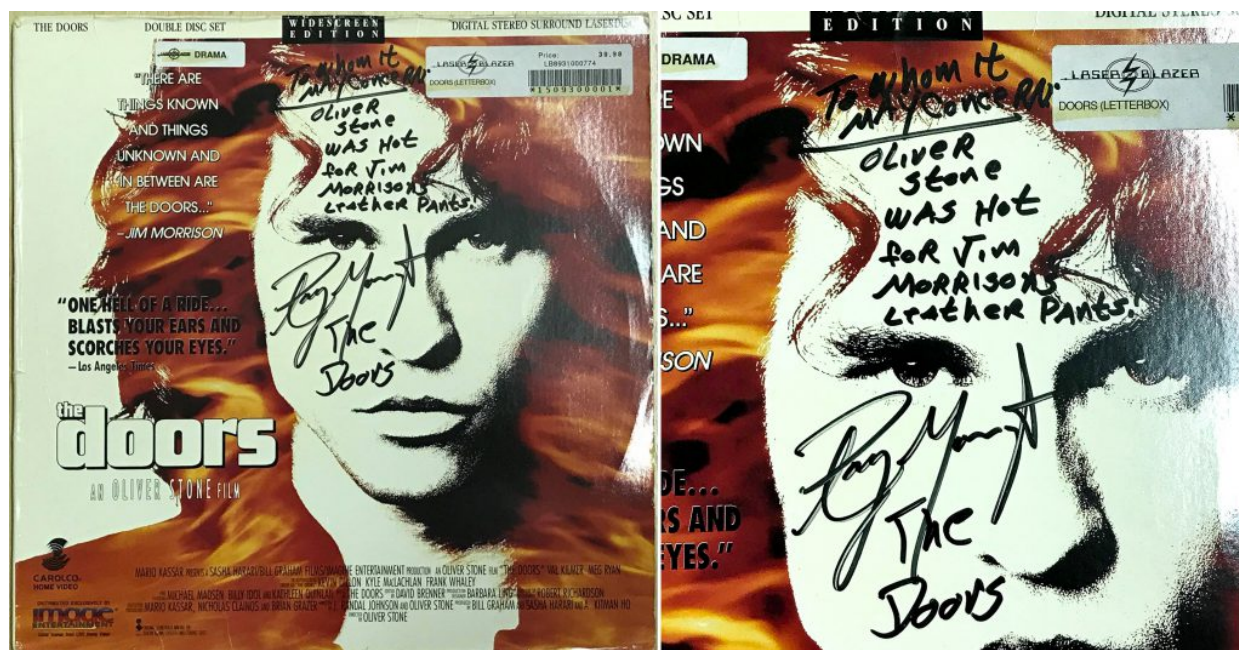
Laser Blazer was located on the same side of Pico, less than a mile from Fox and maybe three miles away from MGM. It's unbelievable how many filmmakers and stars would stop by. I remember Tarantino pulling up in a limo.

He came in, bought a few movies and headed off to the Academy Awards to pick up his first Oscar. Several visits later, he returned in the “Pussy Wagon” from Kill Bill.



I would have to mention a few regulars that were kind enough to do autograph signings like Guillermo Del Toro for his movies Cronos and Hellboy and Ray Manzarek, for The Doors Collection on LD. Others would be Michael and Janet Jackson, Tom Hanks, Sharon Stone, Danny DeVito came in with James Brooks, and Benicio del Toro came in with Antonio Banderas.





Rental copy of The Doors autographed by Ray Manzarek with message to Oliver Stone

There was somebody new every week. Kevin Smith was one special celebrity that I won't ever forget. He was a regular until we became business partners in 2009 when he moved Jay and Silent Bob's Secret Stash into the back of my store. Comic books and movies were a great match. There was one special night where we hosted a poker game to get rid of dead inventory of comics and DVDs. In the middle of the game, Kevin took a bathroom break... the rest is history. Soon after, Kevin told this infamous "Toilet Story" on The Tonight Show while promoting his movie, Zack and Miri. He told the audience that he's telling the story now, so I wouldn't tell it first. **Since you were dealing directly with distributors, you must have gotten a lot of promotional items to advertise their LaserDiscs. What was the coolest piece?**

Not a whole lot of promotional items besides posters. Pioneer did sponsor events with discount hole punched LD's and gave away shirts, key chains, clocks and mugs.





**How many LaserDiscs are currently in your personal collection?**

Currently, I have over 8,000 LaserDiscs listed on LDDb with about 8000 more sitting on shelves. I always considered my store inventory as my personal collection. I will always have something to watch.

**If you had to let go all but one of your LaserDiscs, which one would you keep and why?**

On the Waterfront was one of my favorite movies. I was attracted to it as a young person and it stuck with me. Huge Brando fan. Still holds up today. I could watch it over and over.



**Do you still watch LaserDiscs? And if yes, are you a CRT, flat screen or projector person and why?**

I still have fun watching LD's on a CRT in my office. At home I have two laser players set up, one in my bedroom and one in my home theatre. It is a ten seat theater set-up projecting on a 120-inch diagonal screen. The seats are courtesy of Laemmle Theaters. They are 30 year old seats that are just comfortable enough for you to sit for two hours and then you need to leave the theater. Perfect. Spinning a Pioneer Elite DVL 91 LD player and can also watch DVD and Blu-Ray. Haven't made the step to 4k.

**Everybody does it differently, how do you structure your collection/inventory: A-Z, by genre or something else?**

My collection was divided into several categories. In the sales section, we separated New Releases, Criterion, Children, Musicals, Foreign and Employee Picks. The rest of the titles were alphabetized A-Z. We also created



seasonal sections for Oscars, Holidays, etc. Within each section everything was alphabetized A-Z with titles like 2001 under T. It was a similar set up for Rentals, with the addition of more genres such as Comedies, Drama, Action/Adventure, Mystery, Horror and more.



**As an active member in the LaserDisc Forever! group on Facebook, are you surprised that there are still thousands of passionate LaserDisc fans around the globe?**

I'm not surprised at all, but it is nice to see everyone in one place. Brings me back to the by gone days. There has always been a strong presence in Europe and Japan and it seems like the U.S. audience is starting to grow again. I've been selling on LDDb for over ten years. It is nice to see this group growing so rapidly. It's been fun seeing new ways to share the excitement of the format. Nothing like people sharing videos of themselves opening boxes of newly purchased LaserDiscs.

**Did you also notice an increase in demand for LaserDiscs with the rise of social media?**

Now that people have a place to communicate and share their common interest, it brings a lot more awareness to the format. I do see new people getting involved, that's the exciting part. The value of the LD is getting stronger which is good for sellers as well as collectors.

**Please complete this sentence: Without LDDb I would be ....**

Resurrecting Laserblazer.com. In fact I will probably be doing that soon. I closed my brick and mortar store in 2012 but still sell online. I will continue using LDDb for my LD listings and my Amazon store for DVD's and Blu

ray. On my web site, I will add photos, videos, merchandise and other nostalgia to remind you of Laser Blazer's past and future... Our 30th anniversary is April 11, 2018.



**Laser Blazer is still the biggest LaserDisc store on LDDb. How does this work for you and is it a full-time business?**

It's a side business. I think LDDb is a great resource. It's the most comprehensive list of what's available on LD throughout the world. Whether you are looking for information on different versions or remasters of LD's, LDDb has it all. It's the best way to buy discs as opposed to looking at a video of some dude flipping through a bunch of first pressings with rot and having to messenger them to see if what you want is still available. LDDb has a Wish-List and Best-Offer system. With the Wish-List option, you have first dibs on your must-have LD's. Best Offers are great for both sellers and buyers. It allows me, as a seller, to correct any over-priced items that were entered years ago when the market was different. As a buyer, it's a great way to try to get a deal. I won't be offended by low offers. Just probably won't accept them if they're not reasonable. I can't tell you how many times customers were hesitant on making an offer because they were afraid it might offend me.

**With close to 10,000 discs for sale, are you selling old stock from the Laser Blazer store days or do you still go out and hunt discs in the wild?**

Most of what I have is old stock which I originally bought from the studios and distributors as well as tons of customer trade-ins. I've been buying LD's from Pioneer from 1988 to 2000. To date, I have sold 361,513 LD's and rented them 439,471 times. When I decided to list my collection on LDDb, it took me a couple of years to go through all of the LD's that customers dumped on me at the beginning of the end of LD's. Everything is now organized and alphabetized. There was a time I dropped the trade-in price to 0.25 a piece because of the overflow. People just wanted to make space for the new LD, DVD. I am still on the hunt and get satisfaction from filling holes in my current collection. I still strive for the best selection on the planet. I'm picking up a collection of over 2,500 next week from an old customer.

**Thank you, Ron!**





Ron lives in Los Angeles, California where he works as a freelance video editor, plays drums and watches a lot of movies on a lot of formats.  
Still thinks Netflix sucks.

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If you haven't ordered from Ron yet, please make sure to check his [Laser Blazer LDDb Store!](#)

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