NEW YORK—When Madonna and her collaborators sought a ’30s swing feel on "Hanky Panky" and other songs from the hit flick "Dick Tracy," Jeremy Lubbock was the man they called.

When Barbara Streisand recorded her "Broadway Album," when Chicago went after a hit with "Hard Habit To Break," and when teen idol Tommy Page wasted a touch of "class" for his album "Paintings In My Mind," each tapped Lubbock.

British-born and Los Angeles-based, Lubbock is one of pop music's premier arrangers, performing a collaborative role with producers and artists that is oftentimes overlooked and underrecognized in this age of sampling.

While he has also made his mark as a songwriter and producer, Lubbock's reputation has grown largely through his ability to arrange material for artists regardless of genre. Since leaving the U.K. for the U.S. in the late ’70s, he has worked with Joni Mitchell, Michael Jackson, Sting, Neil Diamond, Sheena Easton, Linda Ronstadt, Dianne Warwick, Kenny Rogers, the Brazilian vocalists Djavan & Simone, Manhattan Transfer, and dozens of others. He picked up one Grammy in 1984 for his arrangement of Chicago's "Hard Habit To Break," another for the 1984 Olympic theme "Grace," and four more Grammy nominations and an Oscar nomination for his work with Quincy Jones on "The Color Purple."

Still, Lubbock admits, the call to arrange for dance-pop superstar Madonna was unexpected.

"People in this town do get put in a pigeonhole," he says, "so I admit I was a bit surprised." But his earlier work with Stephen Sondheim on Streisand's disk apparently clinched the assignment, he believes.

For "Dick Tracy"—which is set for release this December as a home video rental title—Lubbock arranged the three Sondheim songs performed by Madonna in her role as Breathless Mahoney:

"I really believe if a kid can't find it at K mart or Wal-Mart, he'll go someplace else to buy," Lane asserts. "In theory, I think the sales we're going to lose are the casual parent shoppers."

In the end, however, Columbia disagreed with the band. Shortly after the initial release of the original "Cherry Pie," a second version was issued, sans the offending paean to the PMRC's core.

"Hankie Panky, on a Count Basie-style setting," says Lubbock.

"That was one of the most enjoyable projects I've ever been involved with," he says. "Madonna knows exactly what she wants and she's got courage to get it."

After the swing feel of "I'm Breathless," says Lubbock, "she actually did say at one point, 'I don't want to go back to the other stuff.'"

PERRY DUFFY