



ABOVE LEFT: Cliff Richard, still a chart fixture in his third decade.



ABOVE RIGHT: David Cassidy, teen star of *The Partridge Family*.

OPPOSITE: The Drifters in their early 1970s incarnation, enjoying a new series of hits in Britain. Lead singer Johnny Moore (seated) joined the band in 1955.

a day, the remainder being shared with Radio Two. The shared airtime included plays, sitcoms and quizzes in the evening, as well as daytime shows that spread across both stations with veteran disc jockeys like Jimmy Young and Jack Johnson. What emerged from this arrangement, inevitably, was pop music of the lowest common denominator, with an emphasis on those records that weren't too raucous and couldn't possibly cause offence to an audience that encompassed all age ranges. In this world, the likes of Edison Lighthouse and the Drifters, with their unchallenging, singalong fare, were only too welcome.

There was an additional complication to Radio One's obsession with the charts: the fact that they didn't necessarily reflect public taste, owing to the long-standing practice known as hyping. 'There was a rumour', commented Brian Epstein of the Beatles' first single 'Love Me Do', 'that I had bought the disc in bulk to get it into the charts. Possible though this would have been – had I the money, which I hadn't – I did no such thing, nor ever have.' Others had fewer qualms. The number of shops that supplied sales information to the chart compilers was strictly limited at this stage, and once the list of the relevant outlets had been leaked, it wasn't difficult for sales to be arranged. 'This was comparatively easy,' admitted Simon Napier-Bell. 'You just phoned a guy called Gerry and told him what you wanted. He figured out how much money he could get out of you and told you that was the price. For instance, for a couple of hundred pounds he'd put you in around 29, or for a bit more you could go higher.'

Pan's People, the resident dance troupe on *Top of the Pops*, who tried to launch a singing career with the 1974 single 'You Can Really Rock and Roll Me'.

The success of the Jackson Five suggested that perhaps the days of the studio groups were numbered. Because there was an inherent flaw in the marketing of identikit records by session players, operating under random names: in the absence of a real group, prepared to go out on the road and build a following, they had a very limited shelf life. Edison Lighthouse's 'Love Grows' was a perfectly fine pop single, but there was no legion of fans holding its collective breath in eager anticipation of what the band might do next. In fact the follow-up, 'It's Up to You, Petula', spent just one week in the charts at #49. These records might be able to produce a speedy and lucrative return on their investment, but they had no longevity and ultimately the entire system was unsustainable.

What was needed for substantial, lasting success in the pop world was the kind of act Brian Epstein had identified back in 1964: 'those who are capable of having a kind of continuous folklore built up around them, so that the public wants to go on hearing *about* them, as well as hearing *from* them'. The huge success of the Jacksons demonstrated the truth of that assessment, as did the arrival of the Osmonds; marketed initially as a white alternative to the Five, and never receiving the praise lavished upon their rivals ('the Osmonds are not even phoney: they are sincerely vacuous,' wrote the *Observer's* television critic Clive James), their various permutations managed to score thirteen hit singles in 1973 alone.

It was notable that this lesson came from America. There the whole cycle had been gone through already. The Monkees had been sold on their television series as a wacky but safe alternative to the Beatles, just as the originals were getting into drugs and being bigger than Jesus, but when they began publicly to voice their unhappiness at not being allowed to play on their own records, the industry concluded that an ever safer version was needed, one that wouldn't be able to rebel because it didn't exist. The result was the Archies, stars of an American animated television series – the music being created by session players – who scored the biggest international hit of 1969 with the bubblegum pop of 'Sugar Sugar', but, like Edison Lighthouse, couldn't retain the public's interest.

And so in 1970, two years after the last episode of *The Monkees* and one year after *The Brady Bunch* had first aired, ABC Television launched a kids' comedy-pop show, *The Partridge Family*, that spanned the two prototypes: the eponymous family were cosily middle-class and played in a band, both on-screen and off. Halfway through the first series, the group's debut single 'I Think I Love You' knocked the Jackson Five off the #1 position in America and, despite the group credit, it was abundantly clear to everyone that stardom was being conferred on David Cassidy, the best looking and most talented member of the family.



Gilbert O'Sullivan (left),
Lynsey de Paul (centre)
and Norman 'Hurricane'
Smith (right).

The Partridge Family didn't arrive in Britain until a year later, but when it did, it was a colossal hit and Cassidy became the biggest scream star of the era, more popular even than Donny Osmond, for where the latter was reviving conventional songs of the pre-Beatles era ('Puppy Love', 'Too Young') in a perfectly phrased but ultimately saccharine style, Cassidy was making the doubt-ridden teen-angst of his material ('Could It Be Forever?', 'How Can I Be Sure?') sound as though he meant every word. So vast was the teen following he accrued that on his first visit to Britain in 1972, he was forbidden to appear on *Top of the Pops*, as Bill Cotton, head of BBC light entertainment, explained to Cassidy's label-boss Dick Leahy: 'He phoned me and explained why he was banning David Cassidy from the studio. He was worried about the security and worried about the thousands of people that followed David everywhere. If he booked him on the show, the whole place would be overrun by young fans.' The existence of such teen stars restored some of the excitement that the nation expected from its favourite pop show. Singles sales began to recover some lost ground, and *Top of the Pops*, after two years' absence, returned to the television top twenty.

Donny and David were the two most prominent American stars of 1972-74, evoking memories of the high-school pop purveyed by Bobby Vee, Bobby Vinton and Bobby Rydell in the days before the British invasion. But by then Britain too had woken up to the need to produce a new generation of musicians, one with the higher ambition of recreating the exhilaration of 1964.

OPPOSITE: Errol Brown of
Hot Chocolate, one of the
most successful chart bands
of the 1970s.