young age. They had crystal clarity, uncanny phrasing, and, not incidentally, a knowing touch with grown-up lyrics like "Got to be there in the morning" ("Got to Be There") and "You're too young to know the score" ("Sweet and Innocent"). Ironically, Jackson seemed more at ease with sexually charged lyrics in these early teen performances than he does now as the self-proclaimed King of Pop. His almost supernatural poise lent credibility to "Got to Be There" (a new and improved "I'll Be There") and "Ben" (a beautiful ballad wasted on a rat). Meanwhile, Osmond made the most of the late fifties–early sixties covers he was asked to record ("Puppy Love," "Go Away Little Girl," "Twelfth of Never," and "Lonely Boy").

For a time, Michael and Donny were omnipresent. Taking into account their solo and group efforts, they amassed an astonishing total of forty-three Top 40 hits by the end of 1975, including seven Number 1s. One day in 1972, KHJ Radio in Los Angeles played "Puppy Love" *for a full hour.* And although history has been kinder to Jackson's early music—at least in part because it represents the last days of Motown's golden age—for one brief, shining moment the two were equally lunch box–friendly. In both cases, more than two decades after bubblegum's family affair, the original packaging still lingers; for those who remember Shelley Winters best as the only buoyant object in *The Poseidon Adventure,* Donny and Michael will always be one fifth of the Osmonds and the Jackson 5.

Though David Cassidy, Jeremy Gelbwaks, and Danny Bonaduce shared a surname on TV, most fans conceded they weren't really brothers. The closest thing to a blood relationship on the set of *The Partridge Family* was this: Shirley Jones was David Cassidy's real-life stepmother. But as the writer Sara Davidson observed in 1973, "David Cassidy is visualized less as Cassidy the actor—the only child of separated parents—than as Keith Partridge, who lives in a family with lots of other children." It was testament to Bell Records' faith in the family that every Partridge had to participate musically, or at least learn how to fake it: If you bought a 'Tridge disc having seen the group's TV "jam sessions," you might have thought bored young Suzanne Crough (Tracy) was an actual percussionist. Tolerance for this kind of musical duplicity has all but vanished in the nineties; witness the outrage when lip-synchers Rob and Fab of Milli

Vanilli turned out to be no more musical than tambourine-totin' Tracy Partridge. (Incidentally, there was another television precedent for the Milli Vanilli debacle: Fred Flintstone was onstage lip-synching Rock Roll's "The Twitch" when his bird-powered turntable fell asleep.)

Having adults like mother Shirley and band manager Reuben Kincaid (former *Laugh-In* regular Dave Madden) as chaperones made *The Partridge Family*'s rock-and-roll premise palatable to parents; at least when the band hit the road, there would be a "Nervous Mother Driving." Kids, however, could still thrill to the idea of skipping school, hopping on the magic bus (a Piet Mondrian painting on wheels), and playing groovy music for throngs of hysterical fans. An attractive scenario, but the group's "sets" never seemed to last longer than one song and, although they occasionally performed in alternative venues like a maximum-security prison (magically taming a mob of cold-blooded inmates with "Only a Moment Ago"), their onscreen venue was more often than not a dimly lit lounge containing a crowd of middle-aged men and women.

A much younger audience catapulted the Partridges into the real-life world of Top 40 radio. "I Think I Love You," now everyone's favorite make-fun-of-the-seventies song, broke on the show's eighth episode, the one where the skunk sneaks onto the bus and sends everyone running for the deodorizing tomato juice bath. The song's harpsichord-driven track gave "keyboard player" Susan Dey a lot to do onscreen, but the pseudo-classical trilling wore thin pretty quickly. Cassidy's arch vocal, full of Merrill Osmond–esque mannerisms (*"Wa* think I love you") pushed the limits of tolerance, finally arriving at the too-easy capitulation "If you say, 'Hey, go away,' I will." He wouldn't, though; "I Think I Love You" stayed on the charts for twenty-two weeks. (David/Keith was no Teddy Pendergrass, but he *could* sing, though as late as the pilot episode, he was lip-synching, no one on the production team apparently having bothered to ask if he could carry a tune.)

Other singles hatched by the Partridge Family included "Doesn't Somebody Want to Be Wanted" (Cassidy hated the song's sensitive-guy soliloquy because it threatened his "cool"); "I'll Meet You Halfway" (used in a mid-seventies U.S. Army recruitment ad); and

"I Woke Up in Love This Morning" (no nocturnal emission jokes, please).

There was no end to the TV show's onslaught of gimmicky offshoots: "concept" albums that took the form of a photo album, a family birthday log, a shopping bag, and a Christmas card; a small library of books (including not only novelizations of *Partridge Family* episodes but also every girl's bedside bible, *Boys, Beauty and Popularity and How to Have Your Share of Each,* "written" by Susan Dey); and collectibles that included lunch boxes, trading cards, coloring books, paper dolls, clocks, posters, pens, gumballs, comic books, toy guitars, toy tour buses, bulletin boards, Viewmaster reels, David Cassidy "Luv" Stickers, David Cassidy Choker "Luv" Beads ("Make and Wear Choker Beads Like David Does"), a striped Nehru jacket with David's face on the breast pocket, and, finally, a Patti Partridge doll ("Tracy's Own Performing Doll, which even plays patticake"—yeah, sure, just like Tracy plays tambourine).

The Partridge Family, loosely based on the real-life Cowsills, aired from 1970 to 1974. By 1975, Cassidy had signed with RCA, whose execs felt "confident that his future as a performer, composer, and lyricist, will far surpass his previous accomplishments." Not true, as it turns out, although David's half-brother Shaun would enter the fray two years later with "Da Doo Ron Ron." The elder Cassidy told *Rolling Stone* in 1972, "I said to [Partridge Family producer Wes Farrell], 'I don't want to cut bubblegum records.' And he said, 'No, man, we're not going to cut bubblegum records.' " But they did, and they should thank their lucky stars.

The Partridge Family's only direct musical competition came from their Friday night lead-in, *The Brady Bunch,* featuring TV's symmetrical suburbanite clan. Here was the ultimate healing force for the splintered nuclear family: a sort of wonderland in which two former single parents, each with three kids, lived the good life, notwithstanding minor crises (Peter's volcanic science project, Mrs. Brady's broken vase, Jan's orthodonture). The usually nonmusical Brady kids attempted some prime-time pop of their own, concluding the Peter's-in-puberty episode with "It's Time to Change." This was a stroke of genius by producer Sherwood Schwartz; without an actual vocalist like David Cassidy in the clan, why not include a song

that dodged the question of musicality altogether (Peter's voice is changing, so he can't sing)? The adolescent anthem has not worn nearly as well as Peter's oft-quoted Bogart imitation—"pork chops and apple sauce."

Whereas television responded to North America's runaway divorce rate and the emergence of alternative lifestyles with nontraditional but wholesome TV family units like the ones in *The Partridge Family, The Brady Bunch, The Courtship of Eddie's Father,* and *Family Affair,* pop music marketers stuck to actual families. In addition to the Osmonds and Jacksons, the mid-seventies would see the DeFranco Family going to Number 1 with "Heartbeat—It's a Lovebeat," the Hudson Brothers going to Number 21 with "So You Are a Star," the Sylvers going to Number 1 with "Boogie Fever," and the Bay City Rollers (two of whom were brothers—bet you can't guess which ones) riding a wave of tartan mania to the top of the charts with "Saturday Night." Naturally, there were traditional solo teen idols around in the first half of the seventies—Bobby Sherman, who guest-starred on *The Partridge Family*'s Lionel Poindexter episode, had his last Top 20 hit, "Cried Like a Baby"—but the era's contribution to bubblegum history is first and foremost the Mom-and-Pop pop of the families mentioned here.

Disco, the music of single people having a good time, would come to dominate the pop charts in the latter half of the seventies. As the dance floors of North America heated up, David Cassidy would become an England-only phenomenon; the Osmonds would devolve into Donny and Marie's little-bit-country-little-bit-rock-and-roll variety show; and Michael Jackson would endure a four-year hitless streak before embarking on a legendary (though scandal-plagued) adult career. But while Evel Knievel was still selling tickets to his own funeral and Richard Nixon's office was still ovoid, the pop family unit remained intact, held in place with nothing more than a little bubblegum.