

IN A WEEK, MAYBE TWO, WE'LL MAKE YOU A STAR

Stephen Barnard looks behind the ready-made fresh-faced image of David Cassidy and the media that produces pop idols.

I think it's great, the parents would say,
I think it's great you've got someone,
Someone to idolize, who must look twice his size,
I think it's great you're going through a phase
And I'm awfully glad it'll all be over in a couple of days
Nilsson, 'Mr Richland's Favourite Song'

On 4 October 1973 the BBC television programme *Top of the Pops* celebrated its five-hundredth birthday with a special edition. Much was made of the occasion; the Jackson Five, the Osmonds, Gary Glitter, Mick Jagger and Slade were all seen on film paying, in the latter two cases at least, somewhat dubious tribute to the big daddy of all television pop programmes, and twice the usual number of artists were featured. Extended to an hour's length, the show quickly developed into an orgy of self-congratulation. But the *pièce de résistance*, as far as the show's producers were concerned, was the 'surprise appearance' of American teen idol David Cassidy. At the beginning of the programme viewers saw what they were led to believe was Cassidy's plane still in flight over the Atlantic and about forty minutes later saw the plane actually land and the lad himself disembark. After skipping down the steps to exchange a few pleasantries with the show's co-host Tony Blackburn, Cassidy then mimed both sides of his new record, right there at the airport.

In fact, Cassidy had been in Britain for several days prior to his *Top of the Pops* slot, staying at some secret hideout in the country. The segment had been recorded a day prior to transmission and the plane had taxied in from a private airfield. All that Cassidy's October visit did in fact consist of

was that one television appearance, a brief press conference, and a phone call to Radio One's childrens' request programme, *Junior Choice*, on the following Saturday morning, intended primarily to mislead fans over the time of his departure and so avoid chaos at the airport. No concerts, no interviews, and at first sight hardly worth the time or money involved in making the four-thousand-mile trip from Los Angeles to London.

Ostensibly, the visit took place just to plug the new record and pay homage to *Top of the Pops* on its grand anniversary; but its true importance lay in re-establishing Cassidy in both the hearts and minds of British teenyboppers. The attention of the teen magazines and Radio Luxembourg, whose importance in helping to sustain the whole teenybopper phenomenon cannot be over-estimated, had turned away from Cassidy towards the Osmonds, and young Donny in particular, in preparation for the concert tour of Britain planned by the Osmonds for late October. In this situation, Cassidy's management saw it as crucial that he should put in an appearance on these shores, however briefly, to steal some of the limelight. But there was more to this visit than simple public relations oneupmanship. The facts facing the Cassidy camp were that no record released under either the Partridge Family name or by Cassidy solo had made the American Top Fifty in the past eighteen months and that latest ratings showed that the series was losing viewers at a considerable rate. There could be no doubt in anybody's mind that as a teen idol David Cassidy was very definitely over the hill, while the Osmonds and the Jackson Five were still managing to hold their own. In Britain, however, the situation was different; Cassidy's records were consistent best-sellers and popularity polls still rated him highly. Hence the importance of the British market to Cassidy's management, and hence the lightning visit.

Six minutes singing to a pre-recorded backing track on a drizzly night at an airport did the trick: Cassidy's record, 'Daydreamer', bounced into the British Top Fifty at number eight just one week after release. A week later it was number

one. Shrewdly timed, brilliantly executed, the visit was a testament to public relations engineering at its most effective.

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Do I have to do this all over again,
Didn't I get it right the first time
Peter Tork, 'Do I Have To Do This All Over Again'
(for the Monkees)

David Cassidy is a television star, and the success of *The Partridge Family* marks the first time that television has ever come to terms with pop music *to its own satisfaction*. *The Partridge Family* is produced for American television by Screen Gems, who are owned by Columbia Pictures (who also own Cassidy's recording company, Bell). The Screen Gems organization itself supervises all those aspects of the pop business that are usually decentralized: marketing, networking, promotion, publicity, records, concerts, the lot. The Screen Gems principle is to exploit pop music through the medium of television, and the Cassidy enterprise is the latest and by far the most efficient and successful manifestation of that principle.

The problem all along in presenting pop music on television has been that television itself has never been a particularly teen-oriented medium. American television is regarded as family entertainment and has to appeal to the widest possible cross-section of the American public to satisfy both the public themselves and advertisers and sponsors. Rock 'n roll was too violent, too raw and too overtly sexual for family viewing and so for some time was only allowed the minimum of coverage on television variety shows, and even then producers insisted on Elvis Presley being photographed from the waist up as a built-in safeguard against complaints from the Mothers' Union. Dick Clark's *American Bandstand* gained advertising sponsorship by diluting the music itself, by making it clean, presentable and safe – in short, making it acceptable for *family* viewing, to young children and adults as well as record-buying adolescents. Ricky Nelson was 'accidentally' launched as a

teenybopper bandwagon rolling, and again Screen Gems-Columbia were the instigators. Conceived, as the Monkees had originally been, as just another situation comedy series, *The Partridge Family* merged the plots of *I Love Lucy* and *Ozzie and Harriet*. But this time the company made absolutely sure of handling the business efficiently and, however coy it may sound, responsibly. They gathered members of Cassidy's family and close friends to handle his personal business affairs, and from the start adopted a benevolent, if somewhat patronizing attitude towards him. The idea appeared to be that if he was cossetted enough he would never have anything to complain about. And it seemed to work.

David was only eighteen at the time. He was the son of Hollywood actor and musical comedy star Jack Cassidy, had acted briefly off-Broadway and had a number of small acting roles in shows like *A Man Called Ironside* and *Medical Centre*. When his stepmother Shirley Jones, herself an Oscar-winning actress of considerable experience, was signed to play the mother in *The Partridge Family* it was only natural – and perhaps inevitable, that her actor stepson should join her in a co-starring role. Cassidy's appeal, like the plot of the series itself, was more fundamentally old-fashioned than that of the Monkees. If the Monkees were based on the Beatles, Cassidy was based on the typical star of the high-school period before the arrival of the Beatles, right down to the song material for which producer Wes Farrell resorted to reviving old chestnuts like 'Walking in the Rain' and 'Breaking Up is Hard to Do'. The show couldn't really fail. David had a ready-made clean-cut image as a typical all-American boy, he could sing, and the publicity machine behind him was the most efficient in Hollywood. The fan magazines just ate him up.

The show achieved very high ratings but, inevitably, Cassidy became bigger than the series, and his records put out under *The Partridge Family* name were soon bringing in more revenue to Screen Gems than the show was. This had all been anticipated, so the next step was to record Cassidy

as a solo artist in his own right, not just in his guise as Keith Partridge. With the release of his first solo album, *Cherish*, in 1971, Cassidy-mania reached its peak, but although Screen Gems went to great lengths to keep their artist 'happy', the pressures on Cassidy soon began to show. An interview that David gave the magazine *Rolling Stone* in March 1972 very nearly ruined his career, exposing as it did not only his frustration at the role he was being forced to play out in public as well as on TV, but also his own attitudes towards sex and drugs, which were too far for comfort from the image of Keith Partridge. For one thing, the article brutally exposed the myth of his virginity. Worse still, the pictures used to illustrate the article were mostly nude or semi-nude, pictures that Cassidy had had taken at his own request but which were never intended for publication. Cassidy only just survived the onslaught of condemnation and derision that followed and the whole episode may well have precipitated a decline in his popularity.

But this was only in America. In Britain in the spring of 1972 Cassidy was still very much an unknown quantity, for while *The Partridge Family* had been networked by the BBC a year previously at peak early evening viewing time on Saturdays, it had been taken off soon after because of lack of response. It took some effort on the part of his record company and the newly-formed British branch of the David Cassidy fan club to persuade Independent Television to buy the series and network it. Of the records, the Partridge Family's 'I Think I Love You' had been a British Top Tenner, but solely on the strength of radio play, and Cassidy's successful British solo singles, 'Could it be Forever' and 'How Can I Be Sure', were never featured in the television series. What the television series did do in Britain was create a hard core of Cassidy followers, but the responsibility for making him so big as a teen star lies not with TV but with the publicity machine employed by Cassidy's management in this country. On his first visit here, Cassidy could be found on a boat moored strategically on the Thames near Tower Bridge; girls jumped into the water to try and reach

him. It all helped. Cassidy became news; such incidents even made the nine o'clock TV bulletins, usually renowned for their staidness and lack of sensationalism. By skilful manipulation of the teenage press and a number of short well-publicized visits, David Cassidy was established in Britain. Nevertheless, his popularity in this country can never be taken for granted; hence the Screen Gems decision to send him over in early October for his record sales are undoubtedly heavily dependent on his TV exposure.

David Cassidy has now left *The Partridge Family* and is ostensibly planning a career outside television but within pop music – or more appropriately, within show-business. He is in rather an anomalous position. In interviews and on television he comes over as a nice guy thrown in at the deep end of something he did not personally create and only just about keeping his head above water. He admits to feelings of insecurity and unlike his 'rival' in the teen stakes, Donny Osmond, he's old enough (twenty-three this year) to appreciate exactly what he's going through. Yet in a way he is trapped. He is not in the business for money particularly, for kicks, for sex or even for simple egocentric pleasure. He is in the business because the choice not to be is not his. Even now, with his popularity in America very definitely on the decline, he has a contract with Screen Gems to fulfil. They still see him as a long-term investment, in contrast to the Monkees, and they will presumably develop him as a singer in the Andy Williams–Jack Jones tradition. Whether he has the talent to achieve that status remains to be seen.

David is a fair singer, a good actor and a likeable personality, but it could be that none of this is enough to enable him to survive longer than the customary three years a teen idol can expect. At the time of writing David Cassidy is number one.



TV images for pop. David Cassidy (*left*) as clean-cut kid, and Wizzard (*right*) as disguise for Roy Wood, formerly leader of the Move and the Electric Light Orchestra. (Wizzard photo by London Features.)

	<i>Label</i>	<i>Date of chart entry</i>	<i>Highest position reached</i>	<i>Number of weeks in charts</i>
WIZZARD				
Ball Park Incident	Harvest	6-1-73	6	6
See My Baby Jive	Harvest	28-4-73	1	10
Angel Fingers	Harvest	1-9-73	1	8
I Wish It Could Be Christmas Every Day	Harvest	8-12-73	4	6

WONDER, STEVIE (7, 1966)

Never Had a Dream Come True	Tamla-Motown	11-4-70	6	7
Signed Sealed and Delivered	Tamla-Motown	1-8-70	15	5
If You Really Love Me	Tamla-Motown	19-2-72	20	2
Superstition	Tamla-Motown	10-2-73	11	5
You Are The Sunshine of My Life	Tamla-Motown	26-5-73	7	5

WOOD, ROY

Dear Elaine	Harvest	8-9-73	18	1
Forever	Harvest	22-11-73	8	8

(see also: MOVE, ELECTRIC, LIGHT ORCHESTRA, WIZZARD)

BRITISH SINGLE CHART-TOPPERS: 1970-73

				<i>Weeks at number one</i>
1970				
Jan 1	Rolf Harris	Two Little Boys	Columbia	4
Jan 31	Edison Lighthouse	Love Grows	Bell	5
Mar 7	Lee Marvin	Wanderin' Star	Paramount	4
Apr 4	Simon and Garfunkel	Bridge Over Troubled Water	CBS	2
Apr 18	Dana	All Kinds of Everything	Rex	2
May 2	Norman Greenbaum	Spirit in the Sky	Reprise	2
May 16	England World Cup Squad	Back Home	Pye	3
June 6	Christie	Yellow River	CBS	1
June 13	Mungo Jerry	In The Summertime	Dawn	8
Aug 1	Elvis Presley	The Wonder of You	RCA	6
Sept 12	Smokey Robinson and the Miracles	The Tears of a Clown	Motown	1
Sept 19	Freda Payne	Band of Gold	Invictus	6
Oct 31	Matthews Southern Comfort	Woodstock	UNI	3
Nov 21	Jimi Hendrix	Voodoo Chile	Track	1

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Nov 28	Dave Edmunds	I Hear You Knocking	MAM	7
1971				
Jan 9	Clive Dunn	Grandad	Columbia	3
Jan 31	George Harrison	My Sweet Lord	Apple	5
Mar 6	Mungo Jerry	Baby Jump	Dawn	2
Mar 20	T Rex	Hot Love	Fly	6
May 1	Dave and Ansell Collins	Double Barrel	Technique	2
May 15	Dawn	Knock Three Times	Bell	5
June 19	Middle of the Road	Chirpy Chirpy Cheep Cheep	RCA	5
July 24	T Rex	Get It On	Fly	4
Sept 18	Tams	Hey Girl Don't Bother Me	Probe	3
Oct 9	Rod Stewart	Maggie May	Mercury	5
Nov 13	Slade	Cos I Luv You	Polydor	4
Dec 11	Benny Hill	Ernie	Columbia	4
1972				
Jan 8	New Seekers	I'd Like to Teach the World to Sing	Polydor	4
Feb 5	T Rex	Telegram Sam	T Rex	2
Feb 19	Chicory Tip	Son of My Father	CBS	4
Mar 18	Nilsson	Without You	RCA	4
Apr 15	Royal Scots Dragoon Guards Band	Amazing Grace	RCA	5
May 20	T Rex	Metal Guru	T Rex	4
June 10	Don Maclean	Vincent	UA	2
July 1	Slade	Take Me Back 'Ome	Polydor	1
July 8	Donny Osmond	Puppy Love	MGM	5
Aug 12	Alice Cooper	School's Out	Warner	3
Sept 2	Rod Stewart	You Wear It Well	Mercury	1
Sept 9	Slade	Mama Weer All Crazee Now	Polydor	3
Sept 30	David Cassidy	How Can I Be Sure	Bell	2
Oct 14	Lieutenant Pigeon	Mouldy Old Dough	Decca	4
Nov 11	Gilbert O'Sullivan	Clair	MAM	2
Nov 25	Chuck Berry	My Ding-a Ling	Chess	4
Dec 23	Little Jimmy Osmond	Long Haired Lover From Liverpool	MGM	5
1973				
Jan 27	Sweet	Blockbuster	RCA	5
Mar 3	Slade	Cum On Feel The Noize	Polydor	4
Mar 31	Donny Osmond	12th of Never	MGM	1
Apr 7	Gilbert O'Sullivan	Get Down	MAM	2

					<i>Weeks at number one</i>
Apr	21	Dawn	Tie a Yellow Ribbon Round The Old Oak Tree	Bell	4
May	19	Wizzard	See My Baby Jive	Harvest	4
June	16	Suzie Quatro	Can The Can	RAK	1
June	23	10 cc	Rubber Bullets	UK	1
June	30	Slade	Skweeze Me, Pleeze Me	Polydor	3
July	21	Peters and Lee	Welcome Home	Philips	1
July	28	Gary Glitter	I'm The Leader of the Gang	Bell	4
Aug	25	Donny Osmond	Young Love	MGM	4
Sept	22	Wizzard	Angel Fingers	Harvest	1
Sept	29	Simon Park Orchestra	Eye Level	Columbia	4
Oct	27	David Cassidy	Daydreamer	Bell	3
Oct	17	Gary Glitter	I Love You Love Me Love	Bell	4
Dec	15	Slade	Merry Christmas Everybody	Polydor	3

	<i>Label</i>	<i>Date of chart entry</i>	<i>Highest position reached</i>	<i>Number of weeks in top 10</i>
CHACKSFIELD, FRANK				
World of Frank Chacksfield	Decca†	5-3-69	10	—
CHAMBERLAIN, RICHARD				
Richard Chamberlain Sings	MGM	14-3-63	8	3
CHARLES, RAY				
Modern Sounds in Country and Western Music	HMV	26-7-62	6	1
Modern Sounds in Country and Western Music, Vol. 2	HMV	21-2-63	15	—
Ray Charles' Greatest Hits	HMV	18-7-63	16	—
CHECKER, CHUBBY				
Twist with Chubby Checker	Columbia	25-1-62	13	—
For Twisters Only	Columbia	1-3-62	17	—
CHER				
All I Really Want to Do	Liberty	30-9-65	7	3
Sonny Side of Cher	Liberty	19-5-66	11	—
<i>(see also: SONNY AND CHER)</i>				
CHICAGO				
Chicago 2 (DLP)	CBS	24-1-70	6	7
Chicago 3 (DLP)	CBS	29-8-70	14	—
CHICKEN SHACK				
40 Blue Fingers Freshly Packed	Blue Horizon	26-6-68	12	—
OK Ken?	Blue Horizon	12-2-69	9	1
CHRISTIE, TONY				
With Loving Feeling	MCA	17-2-73	19	—
CHURCHILL, SIR WINSTON				
The Voice of Sir Winston Churchill	Decca	11-2-65	6	6
CLAPTON, ERIC				
Eric Clapton	Polydor	5-9-70	14	—
History of Eric Clapton (DLP)	Polydor	16-9-72	20	—
Eric Clapton's Rainbow Concert	RSO	10-11-73	19	—
<i>(see also: MAYALL, JOHN; CREAM)</i>				
DAVE CLARK FIVE				
Session with the Dave Clark Five	Columbia	16-4-64	3	11
Catch Us If You Can	Columbia	12-8-65	8	3