



Roger Morton

DAVID CASSIDY

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from partridge to peacock

David Cassidy, that spearhead of the weenybopper scene, is the perfect example of the machine-made rock star. That is not to belittle him or his work, but merely to underline a department where America has always totally dominated Britain — the creation of television vehicles to launch hitherto unknown artists upon the nation and thus make them into million dollar earning stars. You have only to recall the Monkees and the Archies to realise how successful this method has been.

And so it was that David Cassidy was picked from an audition he did for a new Screen Gems series called *The Partridge Family*. When the series eventually got on the screens in America it was the fan magazines that started the whole Cassidy machine moving. They were looking for a fresh young face to replace Bobby Sherman, who had had a pretty good run, and

so they seized upon the feline Cassidy.

The Partridge Family was being recorded by Wes Farrell — who has the knack of making hits — and he discovered that Cassidy could sing. Although the machine then played its part, Cassidy was also artistically prepared for what was about to happen because he came from a theatrical family. His parents are Jack Cassidy and Evelyn Ward, who appeared in Broadway musicals and shows. When Cassidy senior divorced his first wife he married another actress, Shirley Jones, who was the screen mother of the Partridge Family.

Cassidy's youth, therefore, was spent in touch with the theatre, although at no time was he pushed, or really encouraged, to become an actor. The family originally lived in New York but when his parents broke up he went with his mother to Los Angeles, where he gradually became more interested in the stage. One school holiday his mother was cast in the L.A. production of *And So To Be*. The producer was looking for a young boy who could sing and act. David got the part.

When he left school he decided to return to New York because that was where all the big shows were and he wanted to become an actor. He took a job so that in the lunch hour he could tour around the agents' offices and get his first part. He got the part all right, but it was in a show that came off within days of opening, and that was the end of his New York career.

A Teenager For Ever

He went back to California and concentrated on television bit parts, which is how he came to audition for *The Partridge Family*. It was a series which was both to imprison and create him. Twenty-six episodes a year were filmed on the Columbia film ranch in Los Angeles at weekly intervals, so it all became like working at a factory — especially as Cassidy had to be at the studios from 7am, when he entered make-up, until 5.30, when he usually went off to the recording studios. It was not a life many young artists would put up with for the three years that Cassidy was with the show, but he came through it stoically,

Opposite page: David Cassidy, live on stage. **Right:** David at home in sunny Los Angeles.

his Partridge career finally ending in November 1973.

The Partridge Family story-line was simple enough. The all-white children appeared to run the all-white family, and Cassidy, played Keith Partridge, elder son and a perennial 17-year-old. Cassidy in fact was 23 years old by the time he was due for his release and saw no sense in being a teenager for ever.

The show started in September 1970, and even by then the first Partridge Family single – 'I Think I Love You' – was well on its way to selling five million copies. Cassidy was featured as lead singer and throughout the singing career of the Family, it was his voice and that of his screen mother and real stepmother Shirley Jones that were heard.

Darling David

Soon after his screen and record launch the marketing machine took over. As Brian Epstein had discovered with the Beatles almost 10 years before, you could earn nearly as much again on merchandising your star product, as you could in the recording studio and in performance. Soon American girls were able to buy everything from David Cassidy posters, bubblegum, colouring books, colour slides, and even have personalised official David Cassidy stationery. This latter item came in pink and had David's face permanently captured within a heart. Until recently this side of his business was run by a companion, who to fans, has become part of the Cassidy mythology. Someone whose past could be repeated by any Cassidy fan as faithfully as that of darling David himself – Sam Hyman. Sam and David had been at school together and had remained buddies ever since – at first sharing rumpled bachelor quarters in Los Angeles when neither had any money – until today when the faithful Sam resides in the guest house in David's garden. Cassidy has always explained Hyman's constant presence with the factual statement of stardom that 'you never know who your real friends are'. Hyman is one of the few people he can truly trust.

The same goes for his ever-present manager Ruth Arons – a former ping-pong champion and a theatrical agent who had always handled his father. Although not used to the world of pop Arons has remained an astute manager, who renegotiated Cassidy a lucrative contract for his last year with *The Partridge Family*.

What happened after the first airing of the TV series was truly remarkable. As the fan magazines like *Tiger Beat*, *Fave* and *16* whipped up the fan fervour his private life vanished completely – he was unable to go out on the street for fear of being mobbed, and twice had to move his address because fans invaded his home. It was a life-style still unbelievable in a Britain whose sole



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source of reference was Beatlemania. It was something that just hadn't happened since the Beatles, and according to the experts was not likely to happen again in their lifetime. The American music business knew differently. With teenagers maturing earlier and earlier the market was ripe for exploitation, and that, as far as Cassidy was concerned, was what happened. He recalls now, "I was given the feeling at the beginning that they could just go out on the street and find someone else. But in fact they couldn't." As time went on it became clear that Cassidy as a property was unique. He could not be replaced by just going on the street and finding someone else. This can be seen now that his reign as a weenybop idol is coming to an end – witness the frenetic efforts to push gleaming, clean-limbed toothsome Williams Twins – the nephews of the gleaming, clean-limbed toothsome Andy Williams. And the repeated efforts in Britain to win through with the easily forgettable Simon Turner, Darren Burn – the son no less of an EMI record executive – and Ricky Wilde – the son, no less, of that one-time British rocker Marty Wilde. What Cassidy had on his side all this time was a youthful feline quality, epitomised in his stage act where he would wear what was akin to a white or black figure hugging cat suit – with usually a giant silver buckle emphasising the litheness of his waistline. Fortunately for him Cassidy has never had any of the weight trouble that has often in the past affected successful rock stars. In fact after a serious illness a few years back he has had a constant need to put on weight.

Weenyboppers

To watch him at work on a live audience is to glimpse much of the reason for his success. On his first European tour in 1973 a typical weenybopper audience, often accompanied by understanding mothers and met outside by equally uncomprehending fathers, would already be shrieking his name an hour before he was propelled on stage. The merchandising men had done their job and little girls were already armed with David Cassidy flags with his face on, as well as waving posters and expertly produced programmes. Cassidy too had done his preparation thoroughly in the picking of the musicians who backed him. He works very closely with a talented Los Angeles singer/songwriter Dave Ellinson and his beautiful long-blond-haired wife Kim Carnes – who have a monthly column in the Cassidy fan club magazine.

Ellinson, who works on many leading L.A. sessions, picks the musicians and in the second half of the show he and his wife add the backing vocals. The musicians, therefore, are of an unusually high calibre for this sort of work – including on keyboard Alan Broadbent, a young New Zealander who helps arrange for the Woody Herman band. In Cassidy's latest sessions under a new producer, Rik Jarrold, who worked on the early Jefferson Airplane and Nilsson albums, he has used even more and funkier musicians like the

legendary session guitarist James Burton.

Bum Rock

On tour the band plays the first half of the show, prior to the interval and the appearance of Cassidy. Despite their quality their efforts are largely wasted as the audience repeatedly screams for 'David, David, David'. When the moment comes, his name is roared by the compere and he is literally thrown at running pace onto the stage. It is a touch of supreme showmanship because, from the front, as his entrance is picked up by the lights he seems to arrive suddenly from nowhere.

He starts to work his audience in a cat-like way, stalking hither and thither, prowling along the front of the stage to the ecstasy of his fans. He represents purity – a safe way of living dangerously – life with a safety net always comfortably beneath it – sexually almost asexual in the manner purveyed once before by Cliff Richard. One paper in Britain coined the phrase

'Bum Rock' to describe his act because of his habit of turning his behind slowly to the audience and wiggling it. Yet this was merely another extension of an act calculated to thrill, to offer but never to harm. Up there on the stage he looks commercially vulnerable – a little-boy-lost among the pressures of success. When he gives radio or television interviews he is prone to reflect this attitude by adopting an almost hushed little-boy voice. He has gone on record in the past, admitting that in the studio they used to try and make his voice sound higher than it was – to get an ever more youthful flavour about his work. It must be said in his defence that he has attacked these methods and finally come to a position in life where he is himself. A young man who realises what has happened – grateful for what has happened –

Below: David Cassidy with his dog. Opposite page, above: David Cassidy on stage; below: David Cassidy smiles for his fans.





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but on the other hand more determined to be treated seriously in the future.

He has an endearing sense of humour. At a press conference in the living room of his suite at the staid Hotel Amigo in Brussels during his 1973 tour he was asked by a Dutch Radio Luxembourg radio reporter how David Cassidy would approach kissing a girl. To which he replied: "First take a rope..."

The Cassidy Spectacular

Musically his contribution has been far less than his commercial worth. He is that precious managerial property, a personality rather than any one type of musical performer. This should guarantee his future, and already the offers reflect this. Film and stage roles are offered in almost greater numbers than musical ones. Yet Cassidy has always seemed to miss being part of the real rock scene. His close friends say that he often asks them to tell him what it is like 'on the road' in rock rather than the Cassidy spectacular with which he tours. In Britain a close friendship has built up with Elton John who, when he thought Cassidy was being laughed at by serious rock musicians in Britain during his last tour, offered to go up on stage and play piano. It was Elton John who held a dinner party during this same tour and introduced Cassidy to Rod Stewart, who proceeded to drink him under the table. This can be seen as Cassidy's attempt to shatter his weenybop image.

In the spring of 1972 Cassidy surprisingly co-operated with *Rolling Stone* magazine in an interview that inevitably ended up being less than complimentary. *Rolling Stone* readers could hardly number among darling David's millions of knicker-wetting teenies. In it he talked about dope and other image shattering experiences. Yet although later in London he decried the interview and said he was mis-quoted, in the long run it was to do his career a lot of good — he was seen to be a real human being for the first time. It almost might have been cleverly engineered that way. The same with a piece in the London *Sun* newspaper during his European tour, which wrote about his liking for wine and a young lady in Madrid. His manager Ruth Aarons so liked this piece that she presented the reporter with a bottle of champagne.

And So On

Even after all this publicity the question most asked is — what is David Cassidy really like? Why should people be bothered? They don't ask it about Mick Jagger or Gary Glitter. Elton John thinks Cassidy was made paranoid by success and that he is at last coming to terms with it. Cassidy must know he will be replaced — although he has never been willing to talk about this.

Cassidy has made and more importantly held his riches. He has a large single-storeyed house outside Los Angeles, with a well-lived-in feel about it (though its gravel drive is guarded by an electronically operated gate). He has land in Hawaii and is taking an increasing interest in horse-racing, with his own red and white check colours and runners at Hollywood Park. This could cause the final break with fan magazine land. After all, horseracing is harder to write about than the death of David's favourite dog Sheesh, his current Irish setter Bullseye, or his favourite long-haired black cat Boots — or even his music.

BACK TRACK

1950: Born April 12.

1972: 'Could It Be Forever' single (no. 2). 'How Can I Be Sure' single (no. 1). 'Cherish' album (no. 2). 'Rock Me Baby' single (no. 11).

1973: 'Rock Me Baby' album (no. 2). March, triple single 'I Am A Clown'/'Some Kind Of Summer'/'Song For A Rainy Day'. October, 'Daydreamer'. November, 'Dreams Are Nothing More Than Wishes' album and 'The Puppy Song' single.

1974: May, 'If I Didn't Care' single. July, 'Cassidy Live' album. August 'Please, Please Me' single.

1975: June, 'I Write The Songs' single. July, 'The Higher They Climb, The Harder They Fall' album. October, 'Darlin' single.

1976: January, 'Tomorrow' single. February, 'David Cassidy' album.