

of preteen girls—and it took decades for them to work it out: when they did, in the boy-band era of the late nineties, it became the most dominant style in pop and has shown no sign of letting up. The seventies, though, was an era of freakish experimentation. Most of the teenybop artists of the seventies weren't old enough to buy a pint; some were too young to write their own songs, too young even to get on a bus without their mom. Elvis, Billy Fury, the Beatles, and T. Rex had been pinups who were molded—by management, by record companies—but not contrived; the Monkees had been put together, and were wildly successful, but then revolted and got even better. Boys in their early to mid-teens didn't have the wherewithal to say “No sir, I will not,” and, in the wake of the Osmonds' success, record companies signed up battalions of them.

Most of them made quite awful records, but David Cassidy was not one of them. A little older and wiser than Donny Osmond, Cassidy was blessed with a girlish mane, thick mink eyelashes, and golden Cali skin. He was also a smooth article—five minutes with him and a girl had a past. At first he was an actor and landed a role in an apple-pie sitcom called *The Partridge Family*, about a traveling family band. But he just happened to have a honey-dripping voice. Whenever he opened his mouth, birds suddenly appeared. He was the most swooned-over pop star, by his co-stars, by his tour manager, by boys and girls from six to sixty. Walking on the Paramount lot one day he was spotted by two of the *Brady Bunch* actresses. They fell to their knees and screamed.

The first *Partridge Family* spin-off single, in 1971, was a rickety circus tune with a neat minor-to-major twist called “I Think I Love You,” and it went straight to number one. Very quickly, David Cassidy was all over teen magazine *Tiger Beat*—they hadn't had anyone quite so desirable since the Monkees. And in the tradition of the Monkees, Cassidy didn't want to play ball. He was obliged by his TV contract to make records for Bell, never getting an advance from the label, not even for his solo recordings. When *Rolling Stone* approached him for an interview in 1972, he saw it as his chance to bare all—quite literally. Annie Leibovitz shot him naked, from the waist up, with just a hint of pubic hair. Even now it would be a sensation, truly subversive, an über-pop figure on the cover of the number-one underground paper. “There are people who carry around that issue of *Rolling Stone* and think it's the coolest thing that's ever been done,” Cassidy

said. But parents didn't think so. Crucially, nor did his ten-year-old fans, who loved cuddly, misty-eyed David, not postcoital David with all that body hair. He had violated the trust of young America. Bob Hope pulled out of a planned Cassidy TV special. His profile plummeted, and he never scored another Top 20 American hit.

Luckily, he had only just broken in Britain, where girls were less likely to balk at his naked torso, and so Cassidy became the all-time pinup all over again. Teenyboppers in Britain, like British pop fans in general, were altogether more dedicated and obsessive. In short order, he had a number-two hit in '72 with soft-rocker "Could It Be Forever," followed by number ones with "How Can I Be Sure" and "Daydreamer." His wispiest, breathiest hit was called "I Am a Clown." Poor, sweet, forlorn, sexy David—marshmallows could've bruised this sound.

Musically it hasn't always scaled the heights of Cassidy's powder-puff tower, but one of the best things going for the teenybopper boom was its iconoclasm. This wasn't part of the *NME*'s plan for rock in the seventies—it wasn't meant to be like this. It had been hijacked. And whenever this happens, whenever the gatekeepers try to keep newcomers from getting into the party, pop is the eventual winner.

In 1974 Charles Shaar Murray reviewed an Osmonds show for the *NME*. He was sniffy about everything from the ticket price to the band's musicianship—"the best instrumentalist is Merrill, who's about up to the standard of an average Marquee support band guitarist." Refusenik Murray was just like Irving Berlin—that is, the Irving Berlin who tried to ban Elvis's version of "White Christmas" for being musically unsound. Teenybop pop found the rock press on enemy territory. They didn't get it, and teenybop pop certainly didn't need them.

Surrounded by hundreds of under-sixteen girls and suspicious ushers at the Rainbow, Murray reported how the audience was "weeping and wailing with a terrifying intensity . . ." It was a female reaction to pop that he couldn't understand, and would prefer to silence with muso grumblings. The Osmonds as an entity (their solo records were usually covers of fifties ballads, often pre-rock, universally unimaginative) cut some of the hardest-ever teenybop 45s: "Down by the Lazy River," a version of Joe South's "Yo-Yo" (no. 3), and, best of all, the eco-warrior wig-out "Crazy Horses" (no. 14). They took the Jackson 5 sound, sped it up, threw in some