

He's Still David Cassidy

By Keith Tuber

David Cassidy zones out for a minute. The former teen idol is deep in thought, his steely blue-gray eyes seemingly a million miles and another lifetime away.

"They told me this at my record company—I promise you I didn't plan this when we arranged to meet—but there's a huge poster of me across the street at Tower Records," says Cassidy, returning to the here and now. "They just put it up two days ago. Someone told me they drove by and saw it and said it's amazing. I just saw it, because I've been out of town."

The poster is hyping Cassidy's new Scotti Brothers' album, *Didn't You Used To Be...*. It doesn't take a Rhodes scholar to link the record's title, the promotional tool and Cassidy's momentary concentration lapse with a brief trip down memory lane.

There was a time when Cassidy's smiling face was everywhere—on television, album jackets, lunch boxes, T-shirts, coloring books, even dolls. Starring as Keith Partridge on TV's popular *Partridge Family* from 1970-73, Cassidy caused pre-pubescent and teenage female hearts to flutter—and profit-hungry retailers' cash registers to ring. During the series' four-season run, Cassidy sold more than 20 million albums on the strength of such hits as "I Think I Love You," "Doesn't Somebody Want to Be Wanted" and "Cherish," his first solo hit. The actor/singer was living the life most others only dream of, and while he certainly acknowledged his popularity, he never fully accepted it. By 1974, shortly before he walked away from the adulation thrust upon him, his fan club membership had surpassed that of both the Beatles and Elvis Presley.



David Cassidy

"I knew creatively there was only one way for me to survive," says Cassidy 18 years later. "I had such an impact. I was so locked into this in people's brains, I couldn't walk down the street. I couldn't go anywhere. [The fans] thought I was [Keith Partridge]. There were lunch boxes, records, comic books, teen magazines and everything in the world to support it. All the articles were fabricated about me—'David really thinks of his dream girl as being 14 and wants to take long walks on the beach. What [he] really want[s] to do is hold hands and snuggle up.'"

Musically, Cassidy favored Jimi Hendrix and the Beatles over the Cowsills-inspired pop songs he was recording with the Partridge Family. "I was the only singer/musician in the group," he once said. "You can only imagine what it was like seeing Danny Bonaduce play bass, while I was doing sessions with monster talents [like] Larry Knechtel, Jim Gordon and Hal Blaine."

That chasm eventually became so wide that Cassidy simply walked away from it all.

"I took the responsibility of being that person," Cassidy explains. "A sex symbol, an idol, and having a lot of young people really look up to me very seriously. And the only way to do it [was] to distance myself from it and re-create myself as the real guy. I knew there would be a lot of [flak] that I would have to catch as a result of not coming back and not being this megastar again. I knew from leaving it that there would be a lot of people that would want to write me off, and did. But in the end, as my old man said, 'Tell them I'll survive.'"

His old man was character actor Jack Cassidy, who died in an apartment fire in 1976 while his son was sequestered in premature retirement. At the time of the tragedy, they hadn't spoken to each other for nine months.

There were other hard times during his voluntary exile from show business. He suffered a pair of broken relationships, including his marriage to actress Kay Lenz. It wasn't until he accepted a role in the Broadway revival of *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* in 1983 that he finally got his act together. Nearly four years in therapy helped him come to terms with his childhood feelings of abandonment, success at a relatively early age, and the recurring problems he encountered in his personal relationships.

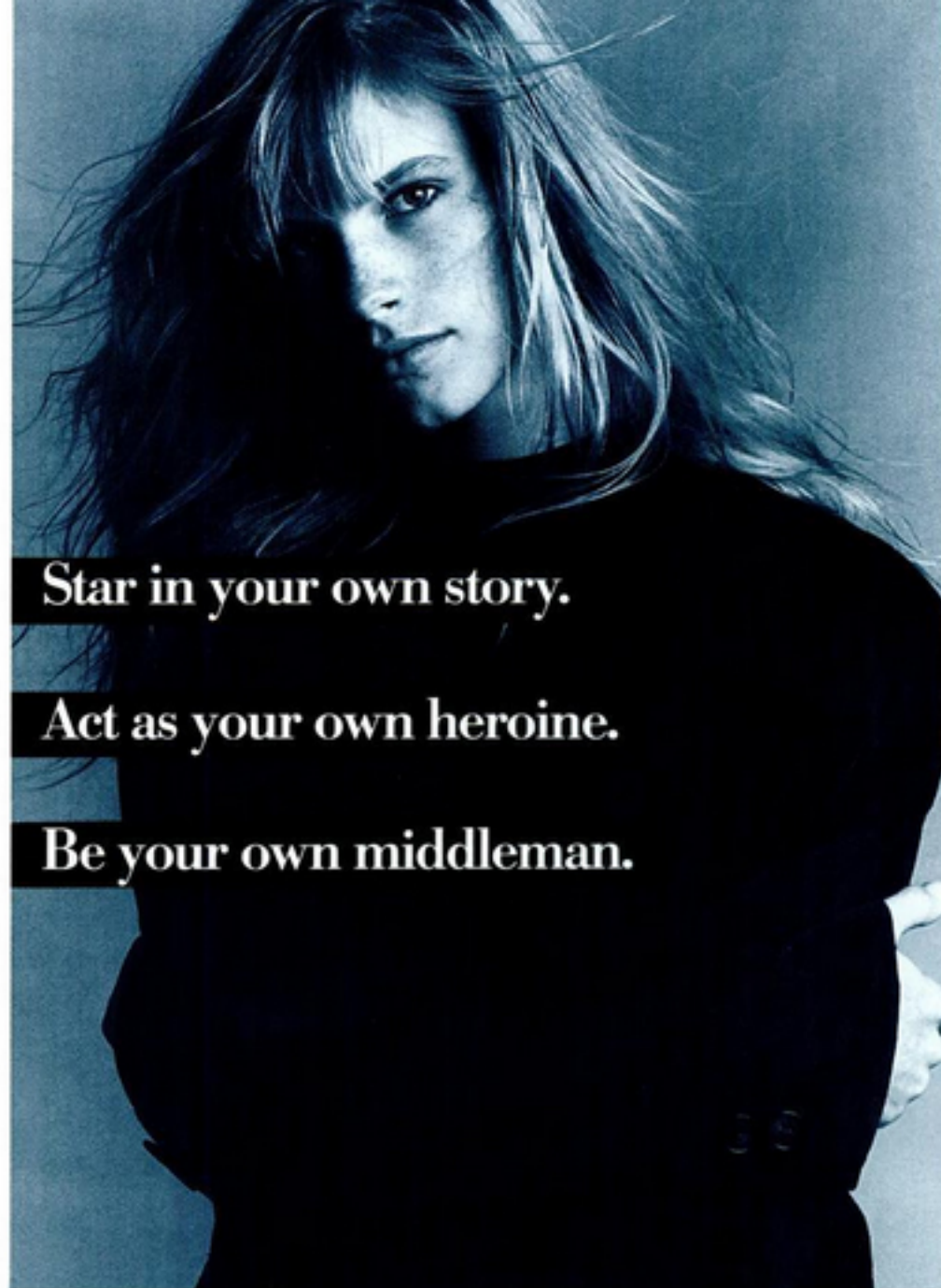
Cassidy is reluctant to talk about his lost years, preferring instead to discuss his return to the industry that made him a star. At the same time, he has heard all the rumors that circulated about him, including the ones about alcoholism and drug abuse.

"I stopped drinking, I started running, and my whole life changed," he admits. "I wasn't alcoholic, but [drinking] helped me stay numb. It

insulated me. [I've] heard all the rumors, and I choose not to comment on them. This is how I feel about it: Drugs have never worked for me. I do not condone the use of them on any level. It's a one-way street. I have stuck by people and helped them kick—musician friends of mine. It doesn't work for me; it doesn't work for them. Either give up or you die, and that's all there is to it. It's a very simple thing. I don't talk about the years that I was basically incommunicado because they are mine. I lived in my own private hell and went through my own metamorphosis. I wished I had left it and had come back three years later, and I was this guy today. It took me a long time to evolve, to be this person."

When Cassidy emerged, he returned to the medium that literally put his face on the map. Cassidy received an Emmy nomination for a guest-starring role on *Police Story*, and while he failed to capture the award, he did win his own series based on the character he portrayed. Alas, network chief Fred Silverman named the show *David Cassidy: Man Undercover*, changes were made, and the result was a disappointing effort that lasted a single season.

Undaunted, Cassidy continued his comeback efforts. He recorded a hit album released in England in 1985 called *Romance*, and appeared in two films: *Spirit of '76*, a spoof on the Seventies directed by Rob Reiner's younger brother Lucas, and the show biz satire *Instant Karma*. His musical reawakening in this country came two years ago after Mark and Brian, KLOS's morning team, invited Cassidy to be a guest on their show after commemorating his 39th birthday. Cassidy obliged, exhibiting a



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self-effacing sense of humor. When the artist played several demos he'd been working on, three record companies immediately began competing to sign him up. The winner was Enigma Records, and David Cassidy's self-titled album—12 years after his last U.S. album and 15 years since he had performed an American concert—generated the Top 20 hit, "Lyin' to Myself."

His current collection is more R&B-oriented than its rock predecessor. He co-wrote nine songs with his wife and partner Sue Shifrin, the same team responsible for the benefit single and video "Stand and Be Proud." That song was recorded with several local choirs days after the Los Angeles riots and has been adopted as the anthem for Peter Ueberroth's "Rebuild L.A." organization.

Cassidy plans to support his latest album with a tour, during which he will perform many of the songs from his Partridge Family years. It has taken him two decades to appreciate his past, and he now enjoys performing the songs that caused him so much angst.

"Now everything that I do, success is a lot sweeter for me," he says. "I can't compare the feeling that I have now. It was fun and all that, but it can never have as much meaning at age 20 as [it does] at 40. I can tell you right now everything about my life is so much richer and more meaningful because I've been without. I have gone through getting kicked in the guts and being unsuccessful, doing small theater. It's been very difficult for me to get over, but I always maintained a sense of integrity about my work. I never did a lot of crap. Even when things were not going well, I didn't use the almighty buck as the lure.... I didn't succumb to that seduction, and I'm really proud of that." OC

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