

age from 7 to 17, he had to wear earplugs to drown out the cyclone of screams. Fans would habitually climb onto the canopy over the stage bringing the gig to a halt until they could be coaxed back down. And at a White City concert in 1973 – an event compared at the time with the Ibrox football disaster – the crush from the crowd resulted in 800 casualties and the tragic death by asphyxia of Bernadette Whelan.

By the end of 1974, Cassidy was heartily sick of the Partridge Family/ teenybop circus. Although he'd declared his White City concert his last, plummeting record sales and *The Partridge Family* ratings would have forced him to quit anyway. Plainly, Cassidy (who was four years older than Keith Partridge) was no longer a convincing teenager, while many of the girls who'd had crushes on him were now dating.

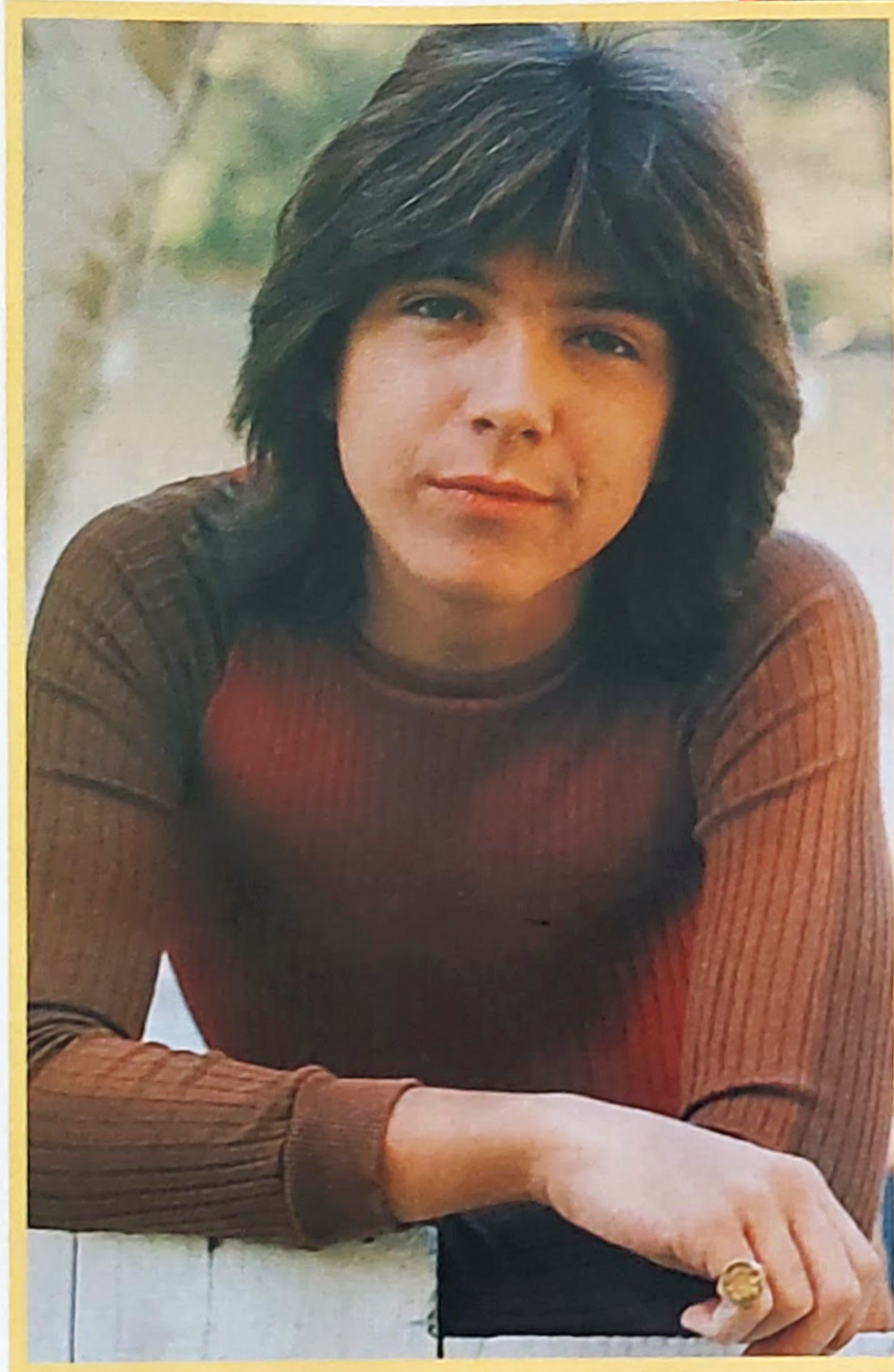
Cassidy was, in any case, relieved to leave behind the whole exploitation racket. Though it was obvious to him from the start that the teenzines had colluded in fabricating his candy-sweet image, he didn't find out until later that his fans were being conned in more ways than one. *Jackie* and other magazines might have insisted he punctiliously answered all his fan mail, but most of it was binned before it even got to him. What's more, Screen Gems had paid him only \$15,000 merchandise profits, although they'd happily raked in \$60,000 from Partridge Family Bubblegum sales alone.

He finally stopped performing in May 1974 – the year *The Partridge Family* ended its run. By Cassidy's own admission, the next ten years of his life were his "darkest". After he retired, he suffered several nervous breakdowns. At the height of his fame he'd never fully taken stock of the fact that his career hadn't gone the way he'd intended it to. Now he was turning to drink and drugs to numb his state of confusion. His father's death in 1976 compounded his misery. An absentee parent for most of Cassidy's childhood, he'd had the cheek to complain to the press that his teen idol son never found time to see him. Yet Cassidy bitterly regretted he hadn't made his peace with him.

Cassidy didn't abandon recording altogether. But he insisted on doing only material that he

Opposite page: David the showman at the peak of his career circa 1974.

This page: the more private David, then (below) and now (right, at a 1994 book-signing)



believed in, though he could ill afford to be fussy now he was considered a has-been. He managed to get a deal with RCA in 1975, and his concept album, *The Higher They Climb, The Harder They Fall*, his last major hit, *I Write*

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The Songs, and his saucy *Get It Up For Love* (banned by the BBC), were all attempts to bury his teenybop image. In 1983 he played the lead in a Broadway production of *Joseph and The Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat*, which took him further still in this new direction. His next comeback – a UK tour in 1985 following the release of *The Last Kiss* – was thwarted,

however. When BMG took over Arista, the record label he was now signed to, they fired all the staff, leaving no-one to promote him.

By this time, Cassidy had not only two failed marriages behind him (to Kay Lenz and Meryl Tanz) but he was broke, having lost a fortune speculating in real estate. He was permanently drunk and feeling suicidal. Things only started to look up in 1987, when he married his current wife, Sue Shifrin, with whom he'd had a fling during his 1973 UK tour. At her suggestion, he had psychotherapy to help him overcome his sense of failure, while thanks to his new agent, Melanie Green, he landed the lead role in Dave Clark's musical, *Time*. Recently, Cassidy, alongside his half-brother Shaun, starred on Broadway in *Blood Brothers* (a play about twin brothers raised apart and reunited in later life).

Present-day David, dad to four-year-old Beau, says he's never been happier. He even admits, nostalgically, that he "still feels like a teenager inside". Could he be referring to sappy Keith? Surely not. ■