

In Hollywood

By NORMA LEE BROWNING
HOLLYWOOD — "Success to me now is no longer dollars and cents"

So spoke a young man who could well afford to say it. He grossed more than \$1 million last year in his spare time, just working weekends. He'll probably double it this year.

And the revolting truth is he's barely 22 years old.

His name in case you haven't already guessed, is David Cassidy, and his schtick, in case you don't read the fan mags, is thrill-throbbing America's female adolescents.

In short he's America's newest teeny-bopper idol and currently the hottest attraction in show business.

He also happens to be the singing star of a popular television series *The Partridge Family*, aired Fridays on ABC.

No one was more surprised than his own family when David's career took off so spectacularly. Said his stepmother Shirley Jones: "We never knew he could sing. He was just around the house fooling with a guitar like most boys do."

As many TV viewers know, David's real life stepmother is his television mother in the *Partridge* series. In the role of Keith Partridge, David is lead singer and plays the guitar in the family's musical combo. His own records are selling in the

millions, and he is generally credited with selling 98 percent of all "Partridge Family" singles and albums, also numbering in the millions.

David's father is the well-known actor Jack Cassidy, but David has never traded on his family name. When he tried out for the *Partridge Family*, the producers didn't know who he was, though they had already signed Shirley for the singing Partridge mother.

So that sounds like a press agent's handout? Then let David tell it.

"My agents heard they were casting for the show, so they sent me over to try out for one of the roles. I thought it was a straight acting role. They didn't even ask me to sing. A few days later they called me in again. I guess they got up tight when they found out who I was."

"They asked me how I would feel about working with my stepmother—if they should sign her. They'd already signed her, but they didn't tell me that. They were just trying to feel me out."

"I said I thought it would be just great working with Shirley, and they looked surprised. I guess some kids don't get along with their stepmothers, but I think Shirley's the greatest. I'm crazy about her, and we get along fine. She's been a great stabilizing influence on me."

By now, with the *Partridge Family* going into its third season and "Partridge" recordings skyrocketing, David Cassidy is so strongly identified with the show that the real beginning of his almost "overnight" success somehow gets lost in the shuffle.

The fact is that David Cassidy was discovered by the younger generation even before the first episode of the *Partridge Family* had aired. Furthermore, he became a teenage idol not as a singer, but on the basis of

a nonsinging, dramatic role as a child diabetic on an episode of *Marcus Welby, M. D.*

That's quite a swich from the image he projects on the concert stage, gyrating in a skin-tight white jumpsuit to the shrill, ear-shattering screams and wails of what were once called "bobby soxers."

But he is very serious about his acting, and most emphatic in reminding you that that's how he started—in serious dramatic roles. When his teeny-bopper-idol days are over, he

hopes to be ready for more mature and meaningful acting roles.

Over a vegetarian luncheon at the Yankee Pedlar in Burbank, not far from Screen Gems Studios where the *Partridge Family* is filmed, David recently summarized how he feels about his career, where he's at, how he got there, where he hopes to go.

He has been criticized for "commercializing" on his name with David Cassidy posters, David Cassidy bubble gum, love

kits, lunch boxes, photo albums, coloring books, and what not. "Sure, it's commercializing. But if the kids want David Cassidy bubble gum, why not?" he shrugs.

Yet he seems to know how to sort out his values. "Of course, I still care about the money (it pays for his white Corvette), but success means a lot more than that. I still care whether my records are selling because I want to go on singing and making music."

"But I want to become a serious actor, too. I was born

into show business. You know, and so I know its highs and lows. This is one of my high periods, and I'm making the most of it while I can. It won't last forever. I'm trying to use this as a learning and growing period. I think my voice is improving, and now I'm taking piano lessons because I want to know more about the fundamentals of music and composing."

He recalled some of his low periods.

"Four years ago I was walking the streets of New York looking for a job, an acting job. I was in a little rock-'n'-roll group, but what I really wanted to be was an actor."

Couldn't his father have helped him find a job?

"I wouldn't have asked him," he replied politely. "Besides, my father wasn't all that influential."

David did land a role in a Broadway musical "The Fig Leaves Are Falling," which bombed in less than a week.

"My father told me not to be sorry it flopped. He said you learn more from your flops than your hits. But my father was in 35 Broadway shows so he had several flops and an opportunity to learn a lot from them. I've only had one flop so far, so I guess I still have a lot of learning to do."

But a movie talent scout saw his performance in that flop and liked it. "He brought me out here to do a screen test for a movie role which I didn't get, but someone from Universal saw my test so they gave me a role as a 16-year-old drug addict in *Ironsides*. Then I did an *Adam 12* and some others—all straight acting roles, no

singing, but the mail started coming in to the studio and the fan magazines."

However, it was his diabetic role on *Marcus Welby* that started the Cassidy cult.

Five days after the show aired, local TV stations, networks, and the fan magazines were inundated with letters from youngsters asking who he is, and demanding to know more about him. The fan mags haven't been the same since.

One carried his photo on the cover for 24 consecutive months.

Largely because of the fan mags and the Cassidy fan clubs—which demanded reruns of all his TV shows—David was already a "discovery" before his debut in the *Partridge Family*.

In fact he and Shirley made a two-week promotional tour of 10 cities just before the show's debut (September, 1970), and to everyone's surprise, David upstaged his stepmother.

"It was really Shirley's show," said David. "She was the star. All the interviews were set up for her. Everybody knew Shirley Jones. Nobody knew me. I didn't even have a record out yet. But when we checked into the Ambassador in Chicago, the man at the desk asked if there was a Cassidy in our party. He said there was some mail for me. Mail? Man, you should have seen the mail. Bushels of it."

But that wasn't all. His phone rang all night long. And wherever he went, he was showered with hundreds of gifts. In Detroit teenagers scrambled out of bed at 8 a.m. on a rainy morning just to get a glimpse of him entering a TV studio. Other cities, similar stories.

"I was really an unknown," says David. "The only people who knew me were the kids."

Obviously, he projects something from the TV screen that is sure-fire charisma even without singing. But with the launching of the *Partridge Family*, his recordings, and his concert tours, David's career has zoomed to dizzying heights.

How does he analyze his own appeal to the female adolescents?

"I think it's all romance, fantasy with them," he says. "Many are just at that age, 14 and 15 where they're falling in love for the first time, so I'm like their first love. And I'm nice and safe and not very threatening to them because I'm on a television series. It's a kind of romantic hero worship and there's nothing bad or evil about it. Nor anything new about it. Look at Valentino. He had the same trip going."

Speaking of trips, David sends his press agent right up the wall when he freely admits he has experimented with pot. But he also admits, "for me it was a bad trip. The walls got higher and thicker. I couldn't function. So I wiped the slate clean." And he doesn't recommend it to others.

A recent story in the underground newspaper *Rolling Stone* also brought embarrassment to his agents and managers. David obviously is not as angelic as his TV choir boy image.

But across the generation gap and considering he wasn't even born until April 12, 1950, his head seems fairly well screwed on for a kid who hit it that big overnight.