

David Cassidy Woos Teen-Agers

By LEO SELIGSOHN
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NEW YORK — If you don't believe in Peter Pan, then you probably won't understand. But there's a wave of teeny love sweeping the nation today that threatens to replace passions once reserved for Barbie dolls, tap shoes and daddy.

The object of all this mini-madness is a five-foot, eight-inch, 130-pound child-man named David Cassidy who wears his hair down to his shoulders and sings such songs as "I Think I Love You" (5,000,000 records sold in the U.S., England, Australia and Japan). Cassidy's magic is the kind that gives the prepubescent set its first thoughts of playing hookey to get a glimpse of their idol and even maybe — dream of dreams — get his autograph.

Like Peter Pan, Cassidy made his first appearance about two years ago by flying in through a window — the electronic window that looks in on millions of American living rooms and dens. One glance at guitar-strumming Cassidy acting and singing the part of 16-year-old Keith Partridge on the TV series "The Partridge Family" (described by one viewer as the story of a sort of rock 'n' rolling Southern California Trapp family) and it was zonk — the future mothers of America were transfixed.

Since then, with the help of savvy promoters and his own astute business sense, Cassidy has taken off like a sprite in a windstorm. He has sold more than 16,500,000 albums and single records during the past 16 months on the Bell Record label. None of the songs is anything like the one Maurice Chevalier made famous: "Thank Heaven For Little Girls . . .", but Cassidy might well be singing those lyrics to himself. Without little girls, he would not have made a

estimated \$250,000 last year.

Besides his income from TV and recordings, Cassidy also derives a substantial income for concert tours which fill stadiums with ecstatic "Sesame Street" graduates. At the Merriweather Post Pavilion in Washington, D.C., last year, the management hired extra matrons for the ladies rooms to take care of the girls who fainted.

Within a 24-hour period last week, after he flew into New York from Europe (where he had been touring Italy, France and Switzerland in a camper bus — skiing and thinking, he says), Cassidy met with record company executives, talked with representatives of the music-industry magazine, *Cashbox*, sat down for a few interviews. The whirlwind visit ended with Cassidy and his personal manager, James Flood, placing some luggage and Cassidy's guitar in the trunk of a chauffeur-driven limousine and hurtling through rush-hour traffic to make a 6 p.m. flight out of Kennedy Airport for Los Angeles.

Once in the air, Cassidy may have had a restful flight but it wouldn't have been surprising if the captain, co-pilot and navigator had taken turns stepping out of the cockpit to get his autograph for their daughters, nieces and perhaps even the granddaughter of the airline president. That's the kind of thing that happened at CBS studios in Manhattan earlier in the day after Cassidy had taped an interview for the "Mike Wallace-At-Large" radio show.

The sophisticated world of electronic journalism turned to jelly as soon as the business at hand was completed, the producer and a half-dozen production assistants crowding around for autographs. "This

As Cassidy churched out the autographs the young idol was

simply making another contribution to the David Cassidy industry, one that rolls out records, posters, pictures, magazines and answers fan mail that Cassidy estimates ranges from 10,000 to 15,000 letters a week.

In the limousine, heading for the airport, Cassidy had time to mull his meteoric rise in a treacherous firmament where other stars have been known to burn out as fast as a Fourth of July skyrocket. The tables of most promoters, in fact, show that the professional lifespan of most bubble-gum-set idols is about two years. And for Cassidy, the two years are about up. So, you ask him about it.

"Two-year span?" he says. "I don't believe that's true. I'm not even at my peak yet and I've been around that long already. Bobby Sherman is an example that there's no age limit. He's very old now, in his upper 20s. Of course, a lot of people never took him seriously and he never reached really big success. I've always had a pretty level head, so naturally I don't expect this to go on forever. But hopefully, by the time it does start to die, I'll want it to."

The big Cadillac is fighting its way through Long Island Expressway traffic now and Cassidy is expressing his views before a small audience.

Cassidy takes a moment out to ask that the radio be turned to WABC to see if they're playing his latest record. It never comes on. Susan, who is now passing slips of paper to Cassidy to fill autograph requests from friends at school, decides to pose a question that has been bothering her ever since she sent a fan letter to the star and never got an answer.

"Do you answer all your letters?" she asks. The star is sympathetic. "I can answer only about 15 or 20 a week. My fan club in Los Angeles has to answer the rest. You have to write to them," he says smiling.

Now, the poker face again as David Cassidy, businessman, assesses David Cassidy, hot property — the anomaly sitting there in buckskin trousers, white sweater-shirt, furry after-ski boots and blue maxicoat. Behind his perfect baby face, you detect the mind of a croupier at Monte Carlo.

"It all boils down to selling tickets. The Nassau County Coliseum wanted me for its opening but there's no need to go after every offer you get. We're going after big stakes, big chips and I want to be able to come back here in six months or a year and maybe

play the Garden again or Shea Stadium. It's all very carefully laid out. We take into consideration the promoter and what he's done; compare one arena to another, consider the time of year . . ."

It was minutes before takeoff as the limousine pulled up to the terminal and Cassidy, again displaying a knack for winning against big odds, miraculously had enough time to make his

plane. The luggage and guitar came out of the trunk and it was a quick "goodbye" before Peter Pan left to fly away.

His small, lone fan stood watching. "He was very nice," Susan said. And then, expressing the slight disbelief that comes with discovering that a God has turned out to be, after all, just another human being, she said. "You know, I think he had a pimple on his chin."