



David Cassidy

The Growing Pains Of An Aging Teen-Age Idol

By Sandra Shevey



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THE LIFE span of a sex symbol is short when you're just another pretty face. At 23, David Cassidy is worried. He shows it in the frown line that creases his brow, as he protests, "I'm just an average American kid. I drink beer. I used to go to church on Sunday, and I don't dig Shakespeare or Picasso."

David is uptight. "It's always been succeed, succeed, succeed from the time I opened my eyes. It's drummed into our heads. We're all conditioned to working so much, instead of enjoying our lives, and allowing some time for work and a lot more time for pleasure."

The millionaire superstar was sounding off in his plush suite aboard a cruise ship, on his way to Mexico to film an episode for TV's "The Partridge Family."

"If I had to surround myself with friends from this business, I'd be so disillusioned. It's all—'Hello. What was your last job, and who's your agent?'"

Destined For Oblivion?

The props of Cassidy's charisma lie idly around his cabin: a sunlamp, a camera, Playboy magazine, and a Holden Caulfield baseball cap with a visor brim. Still full of vim and vigor, Cassidy wonders if he's destined for oblivion. Look at what happened to Fabian, Frankie Avalon and Ricky Nelson. And where is Bobby Sherman today? He knows that teenyboppers are a fickle breed. His fans regularly turn off and tune in to somebody new—like upcoming Tony deFranco, age 14.

Cassidy's big year was '72. At that time he was getting 3,000 letters a day. Today he averages 250 a week. Pre-teen fan magazines used to run 15 stories a month about David. Now it's dwindled to one or two. And although Cassidy has amassed eight gold records, he hasn't had a million seller in over a year.

The David Cassidy love machine is threatened with extinction, and with it a battery of merchandising gimmicks: bubble gum, lunchboxes, dolls, 3-D postcards, coloring books, color slides and "David Cassidy Dresses." Last year his Daru Enterprises Inc. grossed upwards of \$250,000 from royalties on more than \$20 million worth of nonrecord goods tied to David's name. So Cassidy doesn't have to worry. All his money from TV and otherwise has been wisely invested in tax-free municipal bonds, oil stock and land.

This season "Partridge" is slotted opposite "All in the Family," a tough show to beat. In any case—good ratings or bad—he wants out of his contract. "After four years I've had enough. Now I want to do films and selected concert dates," says David. Last year from weekend gigs alone Cassidy earned \$1 million. Yet TV can make or break a teen heartthrob.

Cassidy peers out of the porthole, maybe remembering that Bobby Sherman's TV cancellation cost him fans. "There are a lot of things we wind up doing that we don't want to do, but that we do for whatever

reasons: 'It's good for you to do. It's right for you to do. It will make somebody else happy.' We sacrifice for other people. I don't have to be here, quite frankly. I could just not show up, if it gets down to it. I could just say, 'Look, I can't take it. Find somebody else.'"

Rooted To Reality

For the time being this is wishful thinking, and David is rooted to reality. He waits for a call to report to the set for a scene aboard ship. A look of suppressed anger and revenge clouds his young face.

"Fame is a curse," he gripes. "I had to move three times this year, once at night." David now lives in a Spanish stucco house surrounded by a seven-foot-high wire fence, on two acres in the San Fernando Valley. "There are always fans at the gate. I get crank calls day and night, and I have to come and go huddled on the floor of my BMW."

Yet the magic and power of success thrills David. "I wanted it all my life. From the day I can remember I wanted to be in show business. I remember seeing my father (Jack Cassidy) up there on the stage—I must have been 3 or 4 years old. I think the play was 'Wish You Were Here' and it was New York City, 1953. I was sitting in the balcony, and I can recall him walking on stage and me yelling, 'Hi, Daddy,' or 'There's my daddy.'"

To millions of American girls,
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Aging Teen-Age Idol

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nearly all under 16, David Cassidy is an unfulfilled promise. His hazel eyes are cool, his thin mouth is hard, his coltish body (5'7" and 120 lbs.) seems like a unisex model. He struts around the compartment in a pair of faded jeans and a loose, open-necked cowboy shirt, which reveals a hairless chest and the scar from a gall bladder operation.

David fondles the St. Christopher medal that adorns his bronze skin and complains he's a helpless victim. "It hurts to be cute all the time, to be constantly discussed, at the mercy of everybody. I'm tired of people asking me why I do this or that, or how I got where I am, and saying 'this was good' or 'that wasn't good.' I'm tired of that. I find I'm being talked about as a piece of merchandise: 'Cassidy's done this' or 'Cassidy's worth that.' I'm sure there's validity to it, but I don't enjoy it personally. It gives you an eerie feeling, and soon you start talking about yourself like that, thinking that way. When you're famous, everybody wants a squeeze and if you allow it they'll own you 24 hours a day."

Yet, if he had it to do over again, David probably would go the same route. Typically, he wants the money without sweat and sees no reason why it should not be that way. The bad side irks him.

"I'd Like Every Male To Step Into My Shoes —For A Moment"

"When you get into a situation of a million girls screaming and yelling at you, it's not attractive. It can be scary. It's bigger than life. You can't enjoy people who are clawing and looking at you like some kind of freak. Yet I'd like every male to step into my shoes—for a moment—to know what happens to anyone in that position; to go out there and experience that kind of intensity when it's just hysteria. It happened to me. It happened to Lennon, and it'll happen to 20 other guys who are in that position. But you can't explain it to anybody. It's the gloss of it; the consummate male trip—a million girls after you, maybe more!"

The makeup man arrives and dabs some pancake on David's acne-marked face ("It's from

nerves," says David). He lays the bunny costume for the masquerade sequence on the bed and departs. David looks resentful. "Show business is like school or the Army. You wake up at 6 a.m., snap out of bed, eat breakfast and get ready to work. It's all yuk.

"I need some time to hang out, to do what I want to do, and not worry about having to be somewhere early in the morning. I'd like some time for my personal life—meet a girl and have a real relationship. Now I'm like a zombie, and I'd like to let my emotions mature."

Cassidy is prematurely cynical. His parents divorced when he was 5, and David was shuttled between them and his grandparents. "I went from being a nice, middle-class kid in West Orange, N.J., to becoming a Beverly Hills brat—all my friends drove Rolls-Royces—before 'getting straight' and starting on a stage career in New York City."

He got a featured role in the Broadway flop, "The Fig Leaves Are Falling," followed by a return to the coast and two years of successful appearances on "Ironside," "Marcus Welby," "Bonanza," "Medical Center" and "The Mod Squad." Then came "The Partridge Family."

"When I first read for the part of 16-year-old Keith, I thought, 'Are they kidding? Who acts like this? Who talks that way?'"

So David tried to take him out of that synthetic shield. "In the show I'm so unreal, such a dummy. I play a chauvinist pig—a guy who's totally hung up on feeding his own ego. He's always trying to do some girl or to command a situation. So I made him funny; I'd do comical things and make nutty expressions. Pretty soon they began writing me that way."

From inside his cabin, David looks longingly outside and spins wistful daydreams about escaping to Maui (in Hawaii) where he owns 25 acres. "In nine months I'll be out of my contract, and then it's one last concert tour—worldwide—before taking off. I'm going with three guys and we're going to build a house and run it on our own generators. And we'll grow organic vegetables, breed thoroughbred horses, and house stray dogs."

Cassidy insists, "I don't need people going clap, clap, clap all the time. I don't want that. Some people have it in their blood. Shirley Jones could stop performing, but my father never could. He craves that kind of acceptance and needs constantly to have people approving of him."

The younger Cassidy stares at his likeness in a pinup poster. Irritated-



David and the rest of the Partridge family, with Shirley Jones as the mother in the center. "In the show I'm so unreal, such a dummy," David says.

ly he looks away, avoiding his own image and the legend it represents. "People think I'm that boy on the show—that saccharine, smiling Jack that comes across every week and sells cereal. But I'm not," he proclaims. "The media has brainwashed everybody into thinking I'm the white knight.

"I do enough—but there are many things written about me that are untrue. Those fan magazines are so contrived—like David's dream girl and David's kiss, and what it would be like to, and what I think about, and what I regret—when really I haven't regretted anything."

Few teen-age idols go on to bigger and better things. Presley did it and Sinatra did, and Anka's coming along. Has Cassidy their talent or depth? His ability has been hyped to maturity. Can he go back and learn what he's been faking all along?

He mentions his new album, and that he's written some of the songs himself. He remembers, "When I cut my first recording I didn't know what to do, or where to stand. They had to place me, show me, stand me up in front of a mike and say, 'Sing.'"

He seems to be saying he conquered something new, and he'll do it again.●