

Return To The Days Of Their Youth

Fans Continue Love Affair With Partridge Family's David Cassidy

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BOSSIER CITY, La. — Going by the sheer decibel level radiating from the audience at Harrah's Hotel and Casino's Convention Center Sunday night, you could have convinced me The Backstreet Boys or Britney Spears were in town.

But the median age of the crowd was not 16, but 45, and they were waving record albums, not CDs. As difficult as it may be to believe with today's proliferation of bubblegum pop, the teen idol is not a new phenomenon.

Thirty years ago, David Cassidy rode the crest of an unparalleled wave of obsessive fan behavior,

buoyed by his success on "The Partridge Family" and a solo music career, with hordes of screaming teen-agers accompanying his every move and buying his albums by the millions. Cassidy's fan base may have aged with him, but as I saw Sunday night, they remain a vital force, every bit as enthusiastic as they were in 1971.

Terri Tiedt and Tammy Cantrell, two mothers from Fort Worth who declined to reveal their ages, said they were longtime fans of Cassidy, but Sunday marked the first time either had seen him live.

"I was too young to go see him way back when," Ms. Cantrell said. Ms. Tiedt added, "This is sort of a childhood dream come true. I've been sort of nostalgic all day, thinking about what a great childhood I had and what a great time (the 1970s) were to grow up."

The pair were well prepared for the moment when the icon of their youth took the stage. The women each sported black T-shirts, identical but for one eye-catching detail: emblazoned on Ms. Tiedt's were the words "I Think," with "I Love You" stenciled on Ms. Cantrell's.

"He'll see us and then of course he'll sing it (his signature song and biggest hit)," said Ms. Cantrell. "He may even ask us to join him."

ON WITH THE SHOW

When Cassidy, still a good-looking man at 50, finally roared onstage in his silk shirt and tight slacks, the screams were girlish and deafening. And when the road-tested icon pursed his lips to begin his soulful rendition of "I'll Meet You Halfway," audience members literally jittered and convulsed with excitement. The atmosphere was electric, and at times a little frightening. (I nearly lost my head when a particularly eager fan attempted to pull the camera from around my neck, in her zeal to get at my snapshots of her teen dream).

But the reason why these fans have remained ravenously loyal for three decades was clear: Cassidy is enormously talented.

I've always considered his music a bit lightweight for my tastes, but I found it impossible to resist the showmanship and sheer exuberance of Cassidy's performance. Attacking each number with a ferocious energy most 20-year-olds would envy, he betrayed years spent honing and adapting his stage persona in Las Vegas and on the Broadway stage, and it was obvious an impressive vocal range still lies within the pipes of the once and future heartthrob, most evident in his energetic phrasing of Otis Redding's "Try a Little Tenderness."

Other highlights of the show included Cassidy's smoldering duet of "River Deep, Mountain High" with Candice Davis-Martin, his co-star from the recent Vegas production of "At the Copa," and fan favorite "Rock Me Baby," which showcased the star's estimable artistry as guitarist.

Most remarkable, however, were the songs that launched Cassidy's superstardom in the 1970s. The "Partridge Family" alum breathed new life into the tired ditties "Get Happy" and "I Think I Love You" with brassy, infectiously Vegas-style swing arrangements that infused each with a new relevance. Unlike some performers I have seen live, who trotted out tired phrasings of their "golden oldies" as if they were bored with them, Cassidy attacked the "Partridge" perennials with



— Staff Photos By Jonathan Perry

AN ICON LOOKS AT 50: Former teen idol and Grammy-nominated singer David Cassidy belts his signature hit "I'll Meet You Halfway" moments after taking the stage at the newly opened Harrah's Hotel and Casino Convention Center in Bossier City, La., Sunday. The crowd was comprised largely of loyal, longtime fans, who had been following the musical icon's career since he starred in the hit TV show "The Partridge Family" 30 years ago.

such enthusiasm that it was difficult to believe he had performed them in excess of 5,000 times.

In a brief interview following the show, Cassidy had no difficulty explaining how he was able to infuse old songs with a contemporary freshness. "I sing them as a different guy as opposed to when I was 19 or 20 or 21," he said.

Also fun were Cassidy's surprisingly self-deprecating sense of humor and adeptness at audience interaction. Betraying no annoyance with one of the more unruly fans, who consistently interrupted him as he spoke between numbers (and repeatedly tried to rush the stage), the singer remarked, "Honey, your lines are done."

But what intrigued me most,

overwhelmed as he still is by idolatry after three decades, was how Cassidy exuded a genuine appreciation for the loyalty of his fans — during and particularly after the show. At a reception following the concert, he stopped for each photo opportunity that came his way and made time for personal interaction, however brief, with virtually every fan who wanted to exchange a few words with him.

"I like taking all the people along with me," the Las Vegas-based father of two said. "A lot of the fans have been fans for 30 years now; some of them have seen my shows in Las Vegas, and some of them have seen my shows on Broadway, and I like being able to give back to them a little bit. That's the deal."



(POST) TEEN-AGERS IN LOVE: David Cassidy, right, reaches for a pen to autograph the T-shirt of a Longview fan as others wait their turn, at a "meet and greet" fan club reception following his concert at Harrah's Hotel and Casino Sunday.