

Quick return for a

pop icon

Showbusiness Reporter **GORDON BARR** takes a look at what is happening on the region's stages this weekend

SEVENTIES pop icon David Cassidy is back in the region tonight, just months after last appearing here.

The singer-actor, whose face was on the cover of every teen magazine three decades ago, is at Newcastle City Hall for one night only.

He last played there in November, as part of his first tour on these shores in 15 years.

Back then, tickets sold out within days of release. This time round there are still seats up for grabs.

Cassidy's comeback followed the success of his album *Then and Now*, featuring past hits and new tracks.

"It just seemed the right time," he says. "I wanted to say a big thank-you to my fans over the years who've supported me all this time."

"The album is my life story, in many respects."

Cassidy was one of a handful of American performers who did not cancel their tours last year in the wake of the September 11 terror attacks.

"I owe it to the fans to come over and perform," he said at the time. "What happened was devastating, but I think people need a release from it all, too. Hopefully, I can help take their minds off all the troubles for two hours each night."

When ABC cast Cassidy as its juvenile

star in *The Partridge Family*, it launched one of the most spectacular careers in the entertainment industry. From television to recording and record-breaking concert tours, and from Broadway to Las Vegas production shows, Cassidy, now in his fifties, has established his place in showbusiness history.

Hailing from a family of actors, mother Evelyn Ward and father Jack Cassidy, his fate as a performer was sealed at a young age.

It was to be sheer coincidence that he would star with stepmother Shirley Jones in *The Partridge Family*.

By the end of 1970, the year the show premiered, Cassidy graced every teen magazine cover in the world, had number-ones and award nominations.

Over the next five years his official fan club grew to become the largest in history, exceeding those of Elvis Presley and the Beatles.

He subsequently became the first personality to be merchandised globally; his likeness appeared on everything from posters to cereal boxes; his concerts sold out in the largest venues in the world, which led him to be the world's highest-paid performer at the age of 21.

To date, his records have sold more than 25 million copies worldwide.

"Regrets?" he reflects. "I don't have any. There have been down-times, as well as the highs, but they all make you what you are."

"There's no point in regrets. What's

done is done. You should always look to the future."

For ticket details of David Cassidy's City Hall show tonight, ring (0191) 261 2606.

● **TYNESIDE Stage School** is performing *Smile* at The Customs House, South Shields, this weekend. The musical tells the story of a class of bored, disenchanted schoolchildren.

When a new teacher arrives, he takes them on a magical journey into the past, showing them the schools of yesteryear and letting them see how lucky they are to be living in the modern age.

Incorporating elements of Charles Dickens' novel *Nicholas Nickleby*, the show contrasts the hardship of Whackford Squeers' school with modern pop-rock numbers and dance routines.

Dickens wrote *Nicholas Nickleby* after visiting Barnard Castle and Bowes in 1838.

A visit to the local churchyard soon produced inspiration, in the form of the gravestone of a boy who died at the nearby Bowes Academy, owned by William Shaw.

Dickens visited the academy, but was turned away by Mr Shaw, who had been tipped off by the locals that the author was after gossip and scandal to feature in his latest work.

The school had thrived for years but closed within two years of publication of the novel, ruined by the depiction of a



SMASH HIT: in the 1970s the fan club of David Cassidy, pictured here in his heyday, became the largest in history, beating that of Elvis and The Beatles

