

ARTS & LEISURE

NJPAC gets a double dose of David Cassidy

Former Essex County resident-turned-pop star delivers good tunes and great memories

By David VanDeventer

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It's Saturday night inside the intimate Victoria Theater at the New Jersey Performing Arts Center in Newark, and the audience is clearly enjoying themselves.

"New Jersey loves you, David!" shouts a trio of overly excited middle-aged ladies in unison.

"I love you too!" responds the delighted entertainer, who is smiling and holding court at center stage.

The year is 2016. In a chaotic world that is rapidly being consumed by international turmoil and civil unrest, there is something oddly comforting about the fact that women are still losing their minds over David Cassidy.

For those of our readers who were not around in the early 1970s, it is almost impossible to convey just how huge Cassidy was to a generation of Baby Boomers who were coming of age in that post-hippie, pre-MTV decade. Fueled by a popular weekly television series, called "The Partridge Family," which chronicled the unlikely yet enjoyable musical adventures of a widowed mom and her traveling band of children, Cassidy stepped to the forefront and became a global pop-culture sensation seemingly overnight. As oldest son Keith Partridge, Cassidy was an improbably perfect mix of dreamy good looks, solid lead vocals and on-screen charisma that had millions of youngsters literally wallpapering their bedrooms with his album covers and endless Tiger Beat magazine pin-up posters.

Aided by a series of sold-out tours and a relentless publicity and marketing juggernaut set in motion beyond his control, the barely 21-year-old actor/singer quickly became one of the most famous and instantly recognizable faces on the entire planet. There was Elvis. Rod. Mick. And David. In a free-spirited era that predated the Internet and the inescapable crush of our current social media overload, David Cassidy was everywhere.

Fast forward more than 40 years to discover that a modest-sized wave of "David Mania" is still alive and well. Now a polished, veteran touring act with a long list of successful Broadway, Las Vegas and Hollywood credentials, the 66-year-old heartthrob brought his current "Up Close & Personal" tour to NJPAC for two Saturday shows with mostly successful results. Diehard followers of his early 1970's heyday were most likely disappointed by the dearth of "Partridge Family" hits and a relative neglect of his own catalog of solo material. But for the majority of concertgoers less invested in his glorious past, the performances offered a healthy mix of memorable chart-toppers and eclectic cover tunes all near and dear to the artist's heart.

After opening the set with his perfunctory yet still catchy "Come On, Get Happy" television series theme, Cassidy shared many engaging insights between songs. He was quick to remind fans that he was briefly a Jersey boy from Essex County, having spent the bulk of his elementary school years in West Orange before heading west to California as a pre-teen.

Fronting a cohesive five-piece band that navigated between tight and rocking to loose and jazzy as per the songs' needs, Cassidy was enjoying the opportunity to flex his musical muscles, handling the lead and rhythm guitar parts on many of the heavier selections. "Heartbeat" was imbued with a sexy swagger while the epic Tony Romeopenned "Point Me In The Direction of Albuquerque" gradually swelled in power, transporting many listeners back to more innocent times in their lives.

Despite initially being branded by early detractors as a shameless purveyor of disposable bubblegum music, Cassidy has deliberately retooled his recent tours to pay tribute



JERSEY BOY AT HEART — Above, singer/actor and former West Orange resident David Cassidy gave the NJPAC audiences a lot to get happy about during his two fun-filled June 25 performances. At right, Cassidy takes a moment to exhibit a fan's iconic door-sized poster of him first printed during his 1970's 'The Partridge Family' years.

All Photos Courtesy of David VanDeventer

to and demonstrate his impressive array of musical and personal influences. A rollicking blues number paying homage to his childhood hero, B.B. King, gave way to a surprisingly strong version of Deep Purple's "Hush," and "I'll Meet You Halfway" sounded just as fresh as when it was written for David by Gerry Goffin and Wes Farrell back in 1971.

A poignant tribute to his late father, the stage and screen actor Jack Cassidy, came in the form of a lush, soulful rendition of the Cole Porter standard, "Night and Day." A brisk, one-two punch of tunes made famous by The Monkees got the predominantly female crowds up on their feet and dancing in the aisles. Yet unlike the last few Monkees tours, Cassidy wisely avoided the use of distracting and overwhelming background montages spotlighting his younger days, deliberately forcing listeners to focus on his present-day vocals and musicianship.

After reflecting upon his good times with John Lennon and soldiering through an emotion-filled version of The Beatles' "In My Life," Cassidy switched gears and offered up what may have been the musical high point of his 90-minute set. Revisiting a lesser known 1975 solo track called "Common Thief," which he admitted deals with heartbreak, loss and his own offstage struggles, Cassidy was pure electric. Propelled by a wonderfully funky groove, he and the band were briefly liberated from the shackles and safety net of nostalgia and free to cut loose. Here's to

Continued on third ARTS page



David Cassidy returns to rock Essex County

(Continued from first ARTS page)

hoping he returns to his own songwriting treasure chest soon and dusts off even more of these obscure gems for future audiences.

Oftentimes overlooked by “serious” music critics and rock historians is the undeniable fact that Cassidy was and still is a first-class showman. Whether it was by playfully interacting with the more vocal audience members, graciously displaying various gifts or cheesy 1970’s memorabilia being offered to him, or referring to one swooning female fan as “baby,” Cassidy remembers that the first rule of being an entertainer is to entertain.

After zipping through an unrehearsed yet fun take of “On Broadway,” he proudly revealed plans for a new Christmas album due out later this year. As the evening came to a close, the band launched into a barrage of “Partridge Family” blockbusters. Back-to-back renditions of “I Woke Up In Love This Morning” and “I Think I Love You” triggered a mass stampede of fans to the edge of the stage, mere feet from the beaming singer, thus ensuring Cassidy’s promise of an “Up Close & Personal” concert experience.

Bright houselights signified the close of the evening, leaving the crowds to compare their favorite moments and exchange contact information to share their new photos and videos.

It’s a bittersweet fact that many music lovers who embark upon well-intentioned trips down memory lane often regret undertaking the journey. But not tonight. Yes, it’s *not* 1974 anymore. It’s 2016. But David Cassidy is still around, folks ... and *that* is truly something to get happy about.

David VanDeventer, a frequent contributor to Worrall Media, enjoys focusing on the lighter side of the pop culture universe.



GOOD TIMES — Above left, a guitar-slinging David Cassidy feels the love from jubilant crowds during his two June 25 performances at NJPAC. Above right, a pair of thrilled fans display their original ‘Partridge Family’ memorabilia near the foot of the stage.