

Clown or daydreamer — how can we be sure? David Cassidy talks about his success then and now . . .



My first thought on seeing David Cassidy was, 'Kathy Pope, where are you now?'

She was the leader of the David Cassidy contingent at my school back in the early seventies and someone who, at the time, would have given her life to be standing where I was. I dare say it doesn't cut much ice today — but then!

It's at this moment that I should point out that I once won a David Cassidy album, courtesy of Radio Luxembourg. I lied, and told everyone at school that I'd won a trip to stay at David's ranch. Smart, eh? The only trouble was that as the fictitious day for my departure drew close, there was precious little I could do.

I can't remember how I got out of it, but I do remember selling the album to Ruth Hillier, who was living under the mistaken belief that because it had been sent out by Radio Luxembourg, some sort of glamour was attached to it.

I digress. It's David you want to know about. Well, there he was in front of me: a vision in powder blue — but then so was I. The embarrassing thing was that we both had on practically the same shirt, something we affected not to notice until a passing Arista personage pointed it out. "Same material, too," he said perceptively. Well, as I said, there he was, a vision in blue. His eyes were not of that piercing blueness that graced all those album covers, and he was wearing a light make-up, but not quite light enough. He had on a pair of those little white shoes Nick Rhodes goes in for, and was given to making rather alarming expansive gestures — i.e. when talking about how he wasn't afraid to open up to people, he suddenly threw his arms up and stared into the middle distance as if at a Billy Graham convention, or about to be crucified. Alarming.

Let us go back in time . . . Let me take you back, next, to David's plane arriving at Heathrow all those years ago. He was here to do a promotional tour, his records weren't available over here . . . Over to David . . .

"It was 1972, and what happened was completely crazy. There were 4000 girls at the airport and they tore the place apart. It was complete chaos. I was just on my way back from Italy, where I'd been having a holiday completely alone in an Italian skiing village.

"When I got off the plane in Britain I heard this huge scream and saw these blue flashing lights and thought, 'What the hell's going on?' Suddenly these cops rushed me down the stairs and bundled me into a car. It was crazy, crazy."

The Dorchester Hotel, not known at the time for being well informed on the pop world, had been unfortunate enough to have David staying. Every day, the traffic was stopped due to the fact that a crowd of girls, running into thousands, were milling around outside the hotel.

The Dorchester is also not known for making the same mistake twice, and David was not allowed to grace its hallowed portals ever again.

On David's next visit, no hotel would take him, so he ended up staying on a boat in the middle of the Thames. It made little difference.

"Girls swam out to the launch and in the end we had to get a load of frogmen to pluck them out. We also had to have a team of doctors on stand-by, giving tetanus shots,

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because the Thames was so dirty. "Although I'd had hits in the States, I was totally unprepared for the reaction I got over here, because at the time, I didn't think they even knew who I was in this country. Nobody was prepared for the way it happened, it was just so quick and totally hysterical.

"The head of the record company here kept in touch with me over the years, and it was he who persuaded me to start recording again. He called me about 18 months ago and said, 'I think you should come over here' and I said, 'I think you're right.'"

David isn't worried that the same thing will happen again this time round. As he says, the world's changed since then.

"People are a lot more sophisticated these days, and stars are more accessible, through the media, videos etc. The world, up until the end of the 70's, was somehow quite a naive place.

"George Michael said that I was probably the last person to cause such hysteria and he was right. He told me he could never really understand what I went through because he'd never had to give up his life. And he was right — I did give up my life.

"That's why I had to give that scene up, because I had to give up being a human. In order to succeed I had to become this thing, this idol. I tell you, it's a very unhappy thing to be, to be in that position, it's like living in a vacuum. That's why I gave it up.

"In terms of my own happiness, life holds more than material things for me. I know that being a millionaire doesn't bring you more happiness, if anything it brings you more grief. It brings you more problems and more trouble.

"When you've got money and success, you try to hold on to it. But it's more than that really. I think that I could have lived up to all of the things that had been created about David Cassidy, the superstar, but I decided that the decision that I wanted the simpler things in life again, things I no longer had access to.

"We're taught in Western societies that if you work hard and do well in your career, at the end of the day, you should be able to look back on it and say, 'Well, in some little way, I was important.'"

"What happened to me, was that by the age of 21 I'd been on the cover of every magazine in the world, had a number of hit records and had made a tremendous impact on a whole generation. I also had an image that was created for me by a television show, an image that essentially robbed me of my own identity.

"I was constantly told, 'You've got to sing this' or, 'Don't do that, the fans won't like it'. In the end I didn't know what was what any more. The people who had my ear were not necessarily those who had my best interests at heart — they only thought of my sales. In the end I lost my enthusiasm and decided to leave at the top.



"At the end of the day the only person my decision really matters to is me — and I left the business — it didn't leave me. I'm proud of the fact that I was able to do something very few people have done. When I look back, I don't regret anything.

"I reached millions of people and I touched their lives. I tell you something, I feel very blessed that people respond to me the way they do — I don't know why they do. There're a lot of people who are a lot better-looking than me, who can do things I can't — but what I do, I do well.

"I like the fact that I've brought something into people's lives and I like the fact that I've meant something to them. I've brought light and joy into people's lives — truly meant something to them. I can't tell you what that is like."

At this point, it's easy to snigger. There he is, feet up on the huge conference table at Arista, arms twirling as he emphasises a point. He's even beginning to sound like Billy Graham.

Most people will tell you that David is very big-headed, but then, in a way it would be hard not to be. Remember, this is a guy who has sold 25 million records. Here is a person who had 'I love you' shouted at him by the greater part of the Western Hemisphere. It would be hard for even the most well adjusted amongst us not to regard a renewed career as being only just short of the second coming.

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Is David as good as he thinks he is? Maybe not, if you consider the competition around. But then he's obviously better than some people would give him credit for.

"And I tell you something — there's not an act in the world that wouldn't want to walk out on a stage and have 60,000 people scream that they loved them.

"When you have an audience that loves you, and cares about you like that, there isn't a better compliment you can have. That's a high like I can't tell you. Nothing compares to it, absolutely nothing does."

Which must, one imagines, make personal relationships a bit dicey.

"Not now, though they did then. At that time I had very few personal relationships because I was removed from all that. There was nowhere I could even meet people. I'd hear about some actress who wanted to meet me or something, but it would be really difficult to arrange."



When David made the decision to stop, he seemed to disappear overnight. And he never regretted it.

"I was never one to surround myself with gold records etc. It wasn't me. I kept everything in my closet, had it all stored away. I guess it's memorabilia — all the covers of all of those magazines and all that. The whole lot lives in a locked closet and any time I want to I can go back in.

"I actually put up a couple of the gold records in my office recently and when I looked at them I could hardly relate to them. It feels like it all happened to somebody else in a different life. I went through such a long, dark period in my life after that, looking for a reason to carry on.

"I did have one thing which was my other business, my other passion in my life—horses, so at least I had something else to occupy me.

"I didn't have a load of people trying to make me change my mind. My manager was really close to me and saw that it had got to the stage where it was a matter of life and death for me to be able to give it all up. She saw what was happening — she was blown away by it as well. She couldn't be with me because it was dangerous everywhere I went. Simply going into a hotel was an impossibility.

"See what I mean? You couldn't go anywhere with me, it was like, 'leave him alone — we don't want him!' Everywhere I went I created this incredible chaos, so no-one wanted to hang out with me! I mean, who wants to be with someone like that? You just want to be somewhere quiet with someone. It was really silly . . . anyway, now it's a different story and a different life."

"I call the shots — and boy — I've got more joy out of 'The Last Kiss' being successful than anything else I've ever done. There was no hype, I came from nowhere and I did it. I'm really proud of that."

As far as today's competition goes, David likes Tears For Fears, "a very good album" and he thinks George Michael is one of the best writers around. "He knows better than anyone how to produce a hit."

Duran, he thinks, have produced some good songs in their time. "But they haven't constantly knocked me out. I'd like to hear something different from them now."

He says he's not afraid to fail, or learn from his mistakes. Being ripped off hasn't made him afraid to trust people.

"I think I've always been a very good judge of character. There hasn't been one person who's entered my life that I didn't know the reason for them being around me. A lot of people said, 'Oh, you don't know who your friends are' — I knew who they were, they're still my friends. They were my friends before I was famous, most of them, and if I became a bricklayer they'd still be my friends."

So how does the David Cassidy of today differ from ten years ago?

"I don't feel that I've changed very much. I like myself a lot more, I'm more self-confident and more self-assured, and I'm not quite as paranoid as I used to be. Outside of that, I'm the same."

"I feel that I'm back now to how I was before I started in the music business. I've got a few scars. I felt for a long time very foreign to the 1980's, very intimidated by it. It was all high tech, video blitzed mania. People sitting in front of these little screens all day. For me, being a teenager was about what went on in your car and on the corner at the liquor store. It was about being alive, cruising down Sunset Boulevard.

"I'm very much into passion and romance and the more steamy, darker side of life and that's what my album 'Romance' is about. It's the most revealing work I've ever done."

"The world has always perceived me as a little too nice, a little too clean, a little too perfect and a little too wonderful. No-one can live up to that, and I was never that. I wasn't a dangerous person, but I was wild."

People talk about the price of fame and I wondered if David thought it was maybe a little too high.

"You have to decide what your priorities are in life. I know an awful lot of very famous, very successful musicians who are extremely rich, extremely lost and extremely unhappy."

"I think they're in that state because they didn't jack it in like me. They've been out there living on the edge of their next hit, perpetuating the image of the rock and roll star, and they've become far removed from what life is all about. I see them as being like lost soldiers in a way, marching on."

"Eventually, time will pass them by, and what will they have to show for it? I don't know. I'm just glad to be back on the path."

"The price of fame? Well, if you buy the sort of fame I bought — it's very high! Yes, the kind of fame I've had in my life cost far too much. The kind I have now I can handle. I would say, though, that for Michael Jackson, the price is going to be real dear." **Now he**