

two million copies and going gold almost overnight. *I Think I Love You*, the Partridge Family anthem, was the fastest-selling single of 1970, with worldwide sales of close to five million. Then there was the merchandising: the pillowcases, badges, lunchboxes and pens. For two years, David Cassidy was the highest-paid solo male artist in the world: bubblegum with his face on it generated \$59,000 a month in royalties. His fan club was bigger than those of Elvis or the Beatles. In March 1972, around the time my 11-year-old self must have become aware of him, *Life* magazine reviewed a concert Cassidy gave in front of 30,000 fans at Madison Square Garden. Apparently, the warm-up act was poor, but as the startled male reporter noted, nobody cared: 'It was about as

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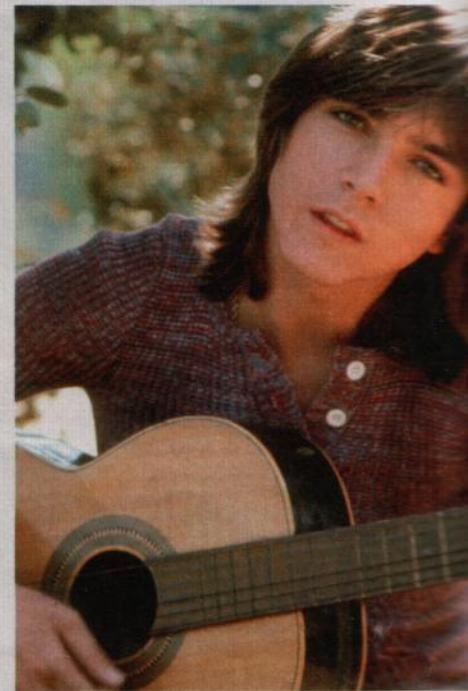
necessary as warming up an arena full of starving tigresses before throwing them a single Christian.'

The contagion, which rapidly spread to Europe, Australasia and Japan, had started in the United States when a handsome but unknown actor from New Jersey landed the role of Keith, the older brother in *The Partridge Family*. A show about a fatherless suburban brood who make a living as a band, the Partridges were essentially the family Von Trapp on a psychedelic bus. Cassidy was already 20 when he began playing the 16-year-old Keith. A troubled young man who had dropped out of high school three times, done every drug going and lost his virginity at an age when most of us didn't even know we had a virginity to lose, he chafed at the squeaky-clean role, despised the clothes ('velvet suits and shit') and longed to play the music of his heroes Hendrix and Clapton, instead of the cooings of the Partridges. He could fight his image, but he couldn't win: Cassidy's impersonation of the flawless Keith soon had hundreds of girls swooning outside the studio gates and millions more miming into their hairbrushes across America.

My friend Sharon, a TV anchor who grew up in Ohio, vividly recalls the onset of teenile dementia: 'Before leaving for school every day in the fifth grade, I used to move past my collaged David Cassidy shrine, carefully stuck to my wall, and kissed the strategically placed photo-spread from *Tiger Beat* magazine that was at mouth level on my door, as if he were my lover. The photo-spread was a four-picture number allowing pre-nymphets like myself to engage in full-on fantasy. The first picture was the shag-haircutted idol with a naughty smile. The second, a knowing look. The third, the big pucker for the BIG moment. And the fourth, that satisfied look a guy has after kissing a fab babe – nine years old! – like me. It was more than I could bear.'

(Outrageously, Sharon claims to have loved David more than I did, but we have agreed to be mature about it so the evidence has been referred for arbitration to an international tribunal in The Hague. Should a third party come in with a rival claim, we will, of course, tear her limb from limb.)

Teen fandom is an uneasy shared activity: who wants to be in a love affair with three million of your closest rivals? Fandom, I can see with hind-



TOP: MICHAEL OGDEN/RETNA; MIDDLE: PUTLAND/RETNA; BOTTOM: MICHAEL OGDEN/RETNA