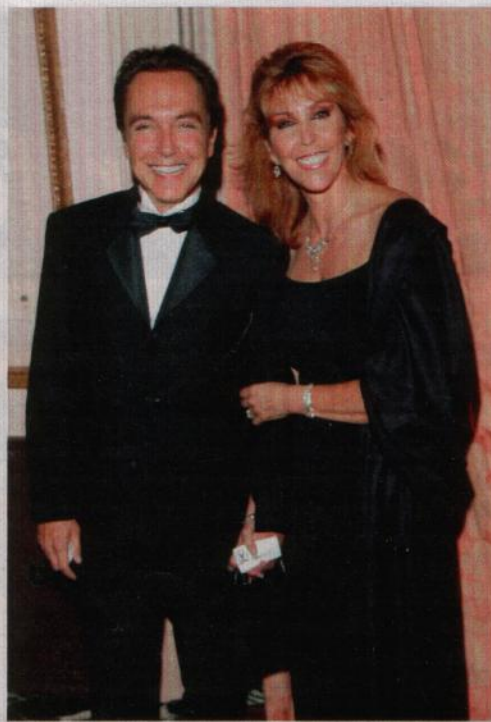


remained a constant: like a member of the Royal Family, he was probably grateful for a form of life that didn't want his autograph.

In 1976, Jack Cassidy died in a fire. Always distant, relations between father and son had been strained to breaking point by David's superstardom. One New York gossip column reported that Jack was 'basking in reflected teeth-gritting envy of David'. It's probably not an exaggeration to say that Cassidy Jr spent much of his adult life recovering from the example of his charismatic, selfish parent. David did have one unplanned child, a daughter Katie in 1986 with an on-off girlfriend, but otherwise, and not surprisingly, he never seemed keen to be a father. It was as though he himself was stuck at the age when, in some unknowing Faustian pact, he had been given the world in exchange for the rest of his life.

It was April 1989, and David was listening to KLOS-FM, a local radio station in Los Angeles, when the host mentioned it was David Cassidy's 39th birthday. 'Hey, whatever happened to David Cassidy?' David phoned in to say he was alive and well and writing songs. The DJ invited him down to the studio to play a couple of songs.



Cassidy with his third wife, the songwriter Sue Shifrin, in 2002. The couple have a 12-year-old son, Beau

'I thought it was just hysteria, like they were seeing me as this demigod.' Did you feel like a demigod? 'No, never'

By the time he got there, a crowd had formed in the parking lot and three record companies had rung to offer contracts. It was the first in a long sequence of career revivals. David Cassidy had comebacks before most of us arrive. Each comeback featured a notable success, but bad luck was always waiting in the wings. An Emmy nomination for a part in *Police Story* led to a spin-off series which flopped; David was acclaimed as the best, though the last, of six Josephs in *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*, a show which was reaching the end of its natural life. Sue Shifrin says, 'David had the Hollywood Dream, then he had the Hollywood Nightmare, now he's just got a life.'

It's been long enough coming. In his defiantly frank memoir, *C'Mon, Get Happy: Fear and Loathing on the Partridge Family Bus*, Cassidy claims that superstardom left him an emotional cripple. That adorable boy who sang on my transistor radio in his pale, wistful voice about love had almost no idea how to form a normal relationship. For five years, he says that virtually the only contact he had with other human beings was with females who wanted to have sex with him. Young girls were never his thing, thank heavens, but there were plenty of 27-year-olds ready to do his bidding. 'Once I got them into my hotel room, I found I could tell them to get down on their knees and bark like a dog or act like a choo-choo train, and they'd do it gladly. I think they were happy just to get close to me.'

Oh. As a grown woman, I can read that and think, well, what did you expect? Somewhere within me, however, I can feel the 13-year-old flinch. Was Cassidy using girls or were girls using him? Feminist art historians talk about the male gaze objectifying women, but no body on earth was ever more objectified than the lissom form of David Cassidy. Candidly, he describes many of his encounters with groupies as 'so lacking in feeling that they were effectively masturbation'. But how much better was he used by several million young females who

locked eyes with the poster on the wall as they struggled to get to sleep?

This week, David Cassidy begins his farewell tour of the UK. He says he will do the odd one-off concert in future, but he worries about the expense, about the exchange rate for the dollar, and about leaving his son for any length of time. (Cassidy has become a dedicated parent, determined to allay the sins of his own father.) What he doesn't say is that he has always been good at choosing the right moment to go with dignity: to leave the audience while you still have an audience to leave. His previous farewell tour was exactly 30 years ago to the month. Concert halls turned into battle scenes with stretchers and ambulance personnel giving first aid to teenyboppers suffering from hysteria. Many simply fell off their platform shoes. But farce turned to tragedy when, at a White City concert, 14-year-old Bernadette Whelan was killed.

'A girl died,' corrects Cassidy, 'she wasn't killed. She died. There was no violence going on, there was incredible pushing and crushing. She was way up in the back, she had a heart condition.' He called Bernadette's parents and told them that, because of the media circus, he would not come to the funeral. He sent flowers and a card, though. I can't help thinking of poor Bernadette, who had written David so many letters that never got an answer.

Back then, when I was among the screamers, it simply didn't occur to me that David could be afraid of us. He says he still remembers the first time it happened. He was in Cleveland, Ohio, on a float taking part in a parade. *The Partridge Family* had been on TV for only 10 weeks. 'There were 40,000 kids following me down the street, the police were not on top of the situation. It was chaotic. They were grabbing at my hair and my clothes. I made it to the car, which was instantly smothered, girls crawling all over it. On the roof,

covering the windows. Black. Darkness. All you heard was this thumping on the roof and the screaming. You just had to make sure you had a really smart driver because it's a mob. It's a mob. It has its own consciousness, its own mind.'

If they had got hold of him what did he think they would have done?

'Well, I think they wanted to take a piece of me home so they could have it next to their bed or something. Like a scalp for their wall.'

Did it feel primitive?

He nods, really animated now. 'It is very primitive. I've had a lot of time to think about it. When young girls get excited, the pitches in their voices go way up. Imagine the level of intensity, being at the focal point of 30 or 40 thousand people. What that feels like to have that come at you - it's a powerful weapon. I remember thinking I wish everyone could stand in my shoes for just five seconds and feel what it felt like to have that love screamed at you.'

I must be looking dubious because he leans towards me, so close I can feel his breath, and softly and very sweetly, he says, 'I want you to know that I love you.'

'I love you!' This time he says it much louder.

'OK, let's intensify that 10,000 times. Allison, I LOVE YOU.'

Fair enough, I can see how that could be quite persuasive.

Cassidy says he now thinks all the screaming at the concerts was pre-sexual, or at least some kind of rehearsal for it: safe sex. 'Back in 1973, I thought it was just hysteria, like they were seeing me as this demigod.'

'Did you feel like a demigod?'

'No, never.'

My turn to laugh: 'Come on, you wouldn't be human unless you felt pretty pleased with yourself, 20 years old and all those girls throwing themselves at you.'

'I can't tell you I wasn't happy with myself. But I was never sure whether it was about me. I mean I was a sexually active guy, but I never thought of myself as being sexy. When I see myself back then, I was skinny, my hair was fluffy, I looked kind of feminine. I wasn't a big bully kind of guy so I guess I wasn't threatening.'

He says that in the States, the audience was split 80:20 between female and male. Here it was more like 99:1. 'I guess in Britain it was not cool for boys to admit to liking me.'

'No, you were a fairy, I'm afraid.'

He nods. 'I knew what the guys were saying, I knew they were drawing moustaches on my picture and blacking out my teeth. I understood it, I would have felt the same way.'

How odd it is to sit here after all these years and talk to him like this. I feel as though I'm observing an operation on myself. 'The David Cassidy I was in love with, it wasn't you, was it?'

He has picked up a red guitar and starts to strum quietly. 'Not if you watched the TV show and believed what you read in the magazines, no.' He says that even the voice wasn't his. Wes Farrell, who produced the Partridge Family records, altered the tape speed, raising the pitch of David's voice so that on the records he sounded younger, girlier. (This matter of pitch is sexually complicated: it's a fact that the girls screamed loudest for the Beatles when they went into falsetto.)

One day, David went to see Chuck Laufer, who ran the biggest group of teen magazines, to