

# Looking Back ON A MUSICAL LIFE IN SHOWBIZ

BY CHERIE YURCO

FOR LIFELONG MUSICIAN DAVID CASSIDY, YOU MIGHT SAY THAT MUSIC AND SHOW BUSINESS ARE IN HIS BLOOD. AND IT ALL BEGAN LONG BEFORE HE BECAME A HOUSEHOLD NAME ON *THE PARTRIDGE FAMILY*.

"Both my parents were from musical families and in the theater," Cassidy says. "My father [Jack Cassidy] was a brilliant singer, and my mom [Evelyn Ward] was the same; my grandmother was an opera singer, concert pianist, and piano teacher; and everyone on my mom's side of the family played instruments."

He lived with his maternal grandparents near Manhattan from about age five until age 11. "There was always music," he says. "I was in the choir and chorus."

## DRUMMING AND STRUMMING

Cassidy's first instrument was a drum set given to him by director Elliott Silverstein. "I loved playing drums, and would tinker around on the piano," he says. "Then I saw The Beatles on *The Ed Sullivan Show* for the first time, and the next day I went out and bought an electric guitar. I was 13 years old." By then he had moved out to L.A.

Still, the music was a side interest. Cassidy's career goal, which he had defined when he was just three years old, remained squarely focused on theater and becoming an actor. In a taxi, coming home from watching his father perform in the Broadway show *I Wish You Were Here*, Cassidy announced to his parents that he would become an actor too. "They turned to me, almost in stereo, and said, 'Fine, but not until you graduate from high school,'" he recalls.

Cassidy auditioned for and joined the L.A. Theater Company during his last year of high school, but music also remained a big part of his life.

"I took guitar lessons and played in a lot of really bad garage bands," he says. And living in L.A., as a teenager in the '60s, meant that he was surrounded by influences. "I saw B.B. King at the Whiskey; I saw Hendrix four times; I saw Clapton and Cream do one of their last shows."

"I just flourished listening to The Beatles, and over the next few years Van Morrison was a big influence, all that R&B stuff, and I got very involved in the blues," he says, explaining the diversity of the music that inspired him. "Jim Densmore, the younger brother of John Densmore of The Doors was in school with me, so I saw *The Doors*."

"A lot of political and social change was going on and I aligned myself with that ideology. It was an amazing time to be a teenager in that environment," says Cassidy, who also had strong support for the arts at home. "I was heavily influenced by the growing freedom and desire to follow my dream as both my parents, and my stepfather and stepmother had. That was my environment: 'Follow your dream, young man.'"

## FALSE START

"So, I graduated high school, and two weeks after, I moved to New York City and got a part-time job in a mail room," he says. There he began studying acting and auditioning for parts. "In the afternoons I would go to two or three auditions." It took him nine months and about 200 auditions, but he finally got a part in *The Fig Leaves Are Falling* and quit his mail room job the same day. However, the show was not a success and it closed after just four performances.

As luck would have it, a casting director from CBS films had spotted Cassidy working on the show and invited him out to L.A. for a screen test. The move back to L.A. proved fortuitous when he got the part of Keith Partridge on *The Partridge Family*, fusing his love of music with his dream career in acting.

On the show, he and his real-life stepmother, Shirley Jones, were the only two members of the Partridge family that actually played their instruments and performed on the group's 10 albums.