

## David Cassidy: teen dream from the TV screen

'CAN AMERICA'S TOP rock group prevail against the evil machinations of a fat but deadly enemy agent – without blowing their cool?' ran the blurb on the back cover of a 1970 US novelette. The writer went on to describe 'America's top rock group' thus: 'They're a high-voltage six-pack of talent and energy – five groovy kids plus one beautiful, mini-skirted Mom – an all-American super-singing weapon.' And just who were 'America's top rock group'? The book's title provided the answer: *The Partridge Family*.

In November 1970, the Partridge Family's 'I Think I Love You' reached the top of the US charts while 'I'll Meet You Halfway' and 'Doesn't Somebody Want To Be Wanted' both made the Top Ten the following year. But it was not through recording rock songs in the family garage that the Partridge Family had made it to the top; it was through being six TV actors contracted to a series about a clean young American family whose hobby was making music together. The kids had the usual problems – what to wear to high-school dances, unsightly braces on their teeth, disastrous blind dates and unrequited crushes. The fact that they had to go out on the road and play in the family pop group was almost incidental to the show's plots or the programme's appeal. The Partridge Family had more in common with 'The Brady Bunch' or 'My Three Sons' than it did with 'The Monkees' (where music had played an essential part in proceedings); nevertheless, spin-off records credited to the Partridge Family (and played by Hollywood session musicians) made the charts. And they made a pop star out of David Cassidy, the actor who portrayed Keith and, apart from the occasional contribution by Shirley Jones, was the only cast member who actually sang on any of the recordings.

### Shirley's boy

David Cassidy was born in New York on 12 April 1950, the son of actor Jack Cassidy. After leaving college, David took up acting himself, working for the Los Angeles Theatre Group. By 1968, he was landing regular TV work in such series as 'Ironside', 'The Survivors', 'Marcus Welby MD', 'Bonanza' and 'The Mod Squad'. Then in early 1970, his stepmother Shirley Jones was contracted by Screen Gems-Columbia (who had been behind the Monkees show) to star in a new pop-oriented soap opera entitled 'The Partridge Family'. Jones – a screen actress/singer of some repute who had starred in *Oklahoma!* (1955), *Carousel* (1956) and *The Music Man* (1962) and won an Oscar for her performance in *Elmer Gantry* (1960) – suggested that her stepson play her son Keith in the TV show. Cassidy's pretty, fresh-faced looks were in keeping with the traditional US teen idol image; also, he was a competent singer.



'The Partridge Family' was an immediate hit, although the music that accompanied it was dull and staid even by teenybop standards. Producer Wes Farrell wrote or co-wrote many of the songs himself, making up the numbers by dredging up old hits like Neil Sedaka's 'Breaking Up Is Hard To Do' and Gene Pitney's 'Looking Through The Eyes Of Love' and re-arranging them with more than a degree of mediocrity. But Cassidy's baby face and breathy vocals sold the product, and it was inevitable that he would soon be recording in his own right.

### Confessions of a pop idol

In 1971, 'Cherish', a solo reworking of the Association's 1966 hit, reached Number 9 in the US charts, while the first album released under his name, also called *Cherish*, sold a million. The LP's music was bland, sanitised, middle-of-the-road pop – but with the force of TV and teen magazines behind him, Cassidy's success seemed unstoppable. But then, in March 1972, the actor/singer was guilty of a disastrous error when, in a *Rolling Stone* interview, he made some 'startling' confessions. He loathed his role in 'The Partridge Family', he said. He had dabbled with drugs and he quite liked sex! The Keith Partridge boy-next-door myth was exploded and his popularity in the States began to dwindle.

Cassidy's three 1972 singles, 'Could It Be Forever', 'How Can I Be Sure' and 'Rock Me Baby' all failed to reach the Top Twenty so, in mid 1973, Cassidy and management turned their attentions to Britain, where a teen-pop revival was in full swing. Furthermore, 'The Partridge Family' was being networked on English television – a fact that had helped 'I Think I Love You' and 'It's One Of Those Nights (Yes Love)' into the UK Top Twenty and

'Breaking Up Is Hard To Do' and 'Looking Through The Eyes Of Love' into the Top Ten. In April 1972, Cassidy's solo 'Could It Be Forever' had reached Number 2, while 'How Can I Be Sure' had given him a chart-topper six months later.

### Leaving home

In October 1973, Cassidy arrived in London to try to capitalise on his fame. A couple of interviews and a mime to his new record 'Daydreamer' on 'Top Of The Pops' was enough to send the single to the top. Yet, although this seemed to augur well for the future, Cassidy was by now tiring of his teen-idol role. At the end of 1973, he left 'The Partridge Family' – the series ended as a result – and, after a hysterical London concert in the spring of 1974 during which a fan was crushed to death, he decided to reshape his career and attempt to appeal to a more mature rock audience.

Signing to RCA, Cassidy enlisted the help of such reputable figures as ex-Beach Boy Bruce Johnston, Poco's Richie Furay, Mark Volman and Howard Kaylan (alias Flo and Eddie) and Harry Nilsson to produce the aptly-titled album *The Higher They Climb The Harder They Fall* (1975). But this, and his subsequent albums *Home Is Where The Heart Is* (1976) and *Gettin' It In The Street* (1977), revealed only an average talent and a dearth of ideas.

Cassidy had been a victim – initially a willing one – of an American entertainment industry that had long since realised that almost anything could sell provided the packaging and image was right and sufficiently exposed. The music had been secondary to swoony looks and hints of sex. Cassidy made a surprise comeback to the UK charts in early 1985, having signed to Arista, with the Top Ten single 'Last Kiss' from an album entitled *Romance*.

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