

# Bubblegum Bust

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## Teen Idol Industry Hits Slump As Cassidy, Osmonds Grow Up

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DAVID CASSIDY  
... new direction

By MEGAN ROSENFELD

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Washington Post News Service

It was an eventful year for the bubblegum entertainment industry. David Cassidy, for four years the idol of millions of teeny- and weeny-hoppers, has announced he's leaving "The Partridge Family" and is going off to "live a little." Donny Osmond's voice changed. Merrill Osmond became the first of the singing Mormon brothers to get married (the fans are taking it okay) and two of the Jackson Five got married. One of them (Tito) even fathered a child, and also faces charges in California of receiving a stolen amplifier and tape recorder. (A family spokesman says Tito has receipts to show he paid for the stuff and they're sure the case will be thrown out of court.)

The multi-million dollar bubblegum industry — a record, concept, magazine and souvenir-producing establishment aimed at America's (roughly) 20 million girls between the ages of 5 and 15 — has been gaining momentum in recent years through the phenomenal success of its handful of top teen idols.

Following the methods of other pockets of special interest in the entertainment field (rock, pop, young adult, family,

etc.), the bubblegum crowd churns out hit records and television shows, souvenir autograph books and pillow cases with the same professional wizardry that has made the entertainment industry an industry.

The hit records may not be the best sellers of the year, and perhaps few over 21 have ever heard of David Cassidy or the Osmonds, but the power of their screaming, rabidly devoted fans is strong enough to make these stars (and others) millionaires. Donny Osmond is only 15, but his face and persona have helped sell over 18 million records.

At the moment, however, the bubblegum fun industry is in a slump.

Record and magazine sales are down, and concerts may take weeks to sell out rather than hours. Cassidy, whose first single, "I Think I Love You," was released in 1970 and sold 5-1/2 million copies, didn't even get into the charts with his latest album, "Dreams Are Nuthin' More Than Wishes." The highest the Osmonds' latest record reached on Billboard Magazine's chart was 58, which hardly compares with their former ability to get into the top 20 just by releasing a new record.

The reason, say the editors, press agents and managers, is that the industry is in a state of "transition."

"The screamers in the first row four years ago are now 18 or 19 and married," said Jackson Five tour manager Jack Nance. "They aren't buying records." And today's young teens are waiting for their own show business idols.

The stars and their fans are simply growing up, and in many cases the love affair is ending. In addition, industry sources complain, there are no new Number One Fave teen idols yet surfacing, no irresistible teen-age heart throbs to inspire the kind of devotion that demands posters for the bedroom walls, records to dream with and concerts to scream at.

"This happens every now and then," says Gloria Stavers, editor of the senior of the teen magazines, "16." "Of course they're still hundreds of girls who say they will love Donny till they die, but basically my girls are bored with him."

Miss Stavers has been a teen fan mag editor for 16 years, and she's seen the cycle, the boom period and the cooling off, many times.

"I really can't explain it," she says after calling to an assistant for a glass of water and two aspirin. "I think if you want to fall in love you'll fall in love — if you don't, you don't."

Chuck Laufer, who publishes Fave, Tiger Beat, Tiger Beat Spectacular, and Right-On, has a theory that all teen idols have a 2-1/2-year (give or take a few months) "flush" period for merchandising and idolatry, and that the current depression is due to the fact that David and Donny's cycles have simply run out. But he thinks the girls are ready to fall in love if presented with the appropriate material — namely the DeFranco Family, five Italian Canadians that his company is "handling" ("please don't say 'managing,'" he says).

After a year of grooming and looking for the "right material," the three brothers and two sisters have a No. 4 record, "Heartbeat — it's a Lovebeat." Their father has even quit his job as a custodian in a nickel plant in Ontario and moved to Los Angeles.

Laufer says the next teen idol is undoubtedly going to be Tony DeFranco, 14, the youngest and lead singer of the group.

"The mail is Tony all the way," he reports. "It's comparable to what we got for Cassidy and Donny at this stage. The kid's a natural."

The DeFrancos have not yet

started doing live performances — Laufer says they are not quite ready — but he tested them out with a free show for 7,000 girls in Buffalo just to see if "the fever was there." According to him, it was. The group's bubblegum rock sound and wholesome family image, modeled on all the other teen stars and their bouncy, simple songs, may be what the screamers are waiting for.

There are other hopefuls featured in the glossy pages of the dozen or so fan magazines, including Andy Williams' adolescent twin nephews, who sing; the 5-year-old star of a commercial for a chain of California hamburger carryouts; and a pretty Australian singer of the advanced age of 23. And for the first time since Annette Funicello stole the hearts of millions in her heyday on the Mickey Mouse Club, a female is trying for the attention of the young audience.

She is Marie Osmond, 14, sister of the brothers. Marie is being promoted as "a star in her own right," according to one of the family's press agents, and will be booked separately.

Her first single has made No. 7 on the charts. It's "Paper Roses," a melancholy tale of false love, which she sings in what is being called a "country pop" style produced by country-and-western music veteran Sonny James.

The rest of the Osmonds, who have sold over 18 million records to date, seem to have shifted the focus of their mass adulation overseas, Great Britain in particular.

Heathrow Airport in London was recently closed to incoming rock groups indefinitely as a result of the pandemonium caused by Osmond's fans at their arrival last year. Airport officials expressed concern "that fans on hand to greet the American rock group might riot and be maimed or killed."

Tickets for the group's concert at the 3,000-seat Rainbow Theater in London went on sale over a month ago. Girls started queuing up the day before the box office was due to open, so the unfortunate



DONNY OSMOND  
... changing voice

box office manager decided to open at midnight.

The stir created by those who arrived at the official opening time of 11 a.m. Sunday forced the scheduling of an additional concert, for which tickets were sold through a lottery.

For the first time, the brothers had to end a concert early when fans rushed the stage in Manchester and several were injured (all were treated and released).

"The Osmonds really get upset when fans get hurt," said a spokeswoman.

They have added a choreographed karate ballet to their act, which previously included rock music, juggling, strobe lights and a barbershop quartet.

Their latest album is also a departure from their usual bippety-bop rock. Christened "The Plan," it represents the five Mormon brothers' "philosophy on life and how they see it."

Lush with orchestral strings and rigged with electronic wizardry sounding like an infant's cry, it comes off as remarkably reminiscent of the Beatles "Sgt. Pepper" album, except that, well, they aren't the Beatles.

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David Cassidy's press agent was worried about just what questions the 23-year-old star was going to be asked.

"He wants to be considered grown-up now," she said. "He's fed up with all those 'what's your favorite color' interviews."

Indeed, after nearly four years as the object of fanatically passionate hero-worship from millions of girls ranging from age 4 to 16, David has had it. "The Partridge Family," the television show that catapulted him into the dreams of millions, has also had it, having been rescheduled opposite "All in the Family" this season.

"It was a wonderful experience," Cassidy said recently in a phone interview from California, "but it's been real hard for me to slip into that Keith Partridge suit and try to have fun with it lately. Contractually I couldn't leave. It's (See ADVICE, Page 7)

### THE FACT IS:

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- On August 11, 1920, nine men went on a hunger strike in Cork Prison, Ireland, for 94 days. They owe their lives to expert medical attention.
- The longest recorded period for which a person has voluntarily gone without sleep is 11 days, 18 hours, 55 minutes.
- A man in England averaged drinking more than 4 bottles of wine per day for 23 years. He is believed to have emptied 35,688 bottles.

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