

The Boy Next Door Is a Millionaire

by Mary Alice Kellogg

He has appeared in 16 movies, 20 TV shows and his own TV special. His two record albums have sold more than 1 million copies each. He is chairman of his own corporation: he has a lawyer (who draws a salary), a personal manager (who gets 10 percent), an agent (10 percent) and a business manager (5 percent). He drives an expensive sports car and has purchased side-by-side mansions for himself and his family. The two volumes of his autobiography are selling briskly.

He is Leif Garrett, and he is just 17.

Shaun Cassidy has sold more than 7 million records. Raised in a show business family, he has appeared in a popular television series, made a movie, toured in summer stock, broken attendance records on the rock concert circuit. Recently, he began to examine seriously where his years in show business have taken him. "For the first time, I'm enjoying being a kid," says Shaun Cassidy at age 20.

Their faces are on the covers of magazines their parents never heard of. Their records sell. Their concerts are jammed with weeping, worshipping young girls. And if you think Frank Sinatra, Ricky Nelson and the Beatles were big, consider this: any member of the current crop of teen idols can generate from \$30 million to \$75 million in wholesale business each year, through the miracles of modern packaging and merchandising.

The good news is that today's teen idols look and sound more wholesome than their predecessors. They are non-threatening, vulnerable, sweet and androgynous in appearance. Their songs are of puppy love and surfing.

For those who enjoy Cinderella stories of youngsters catapulted to fame, the bad news is that teenage idolatry has been elevated to a science. It is now a big-stakes formula using young performers to produce megabucks for agents, record companies and manufacturers while selling

old-fashioned hero worship to adoring adolescents.

"The disintegrating family unit has a lot to do with it," says Steve Adler, vice president of the Merchandising Corporation of America. "After a kid is 2 or 3, you put him in front of the TV, then send him to movies and concerts. Instead of identifying with the parent, the kid begins to look up to TV and entertainers as surrogate parents."

And business cashes in. In the '50's and '60's, a teen idol was lucky if he had a good business manager and agent. While there were such things as Beatles sneakers, Elvis hats and Dick Clark shampoo, the cashing-in on celebrities was less organized. Today, a teen idol can expect to have his name and face on a variety of products, from gum cards to clothing. Last year's Sears Christmas catalogue featured seven different products with Shaun Cassidy's name, from a pink nightshirt to a "Shaun Cassidy solid-state portable disco amplifier."

There's a lot of money to be made selling to the 10-19 age bracket, which

accounts for 23 percent of total record purchases in the U.S. "It's a multi-million-dollar business," says teen magazine publisher Charles Laufer.

It's also a business still based on those who have a little something extra—a charisma that sets teenage hearts fluttering. "You must always start with something the public wants," says Dick Clark, who has parlayed the teenage market into his own production conglomerate. But to be a full-fledged, contemporary teen idol, a youngster should have a weekly television show, fan magazine support and be able to sing (concerts and records are the biggest money-makers for young talent).

This new formula has been somewhat altered for Leif Garrett, who does not have a weekly TV show (and therefore doesn't have his name on any products); for Shaun Cassidy, who had a weekly show but lost it; and for Scott Baio, an up-and-coming teen idol who has a show, *Happy Days*, but hasn't yet cut a record.

If a teenager is lucky enough to



Teenage audience worship of young singers has been an American phenomenon since the 1940's. This shot of a Frank Sinatra crowd dates from Hollywood Bowl in 1943.



SHAUN
CASSIDY



LEIF
GARRETT