

have any or all of these elements, he will gain fame, money and the adulation of millions of dewy-eyed girls. But he will also have problems.

Agent Ruth Aarons has seen the pattern: "Odds are, there is a loving member of the family who is pushing the kid. Odds are, also, this member knows nothing about show business. With more exposure, the professionals move in, and the kid comes up for grabs. When he hits, it's like winning a sweepstakes. It's crazy. An agent or manager turns up, then a business manager, then lawyers. You end up with a whole entourage. It's a commercial Olympics, built around a kid who a few years ago you would have burped and put to bed."

Aarons, who managed Shaun Cassidy, is cautious about the effects of such hoopla: "How much identity can the kid have in terms of knowledge of himself at that age? He begins to seek 'credibility,' and he hasn't even been around that long. After two or three years, he begins to feel emotionally drained and is not mature enough to know what's happened to his life, to his dreams. Usually it ends up in separation, disillusion and defiance. It's the classic case of too much, too soon."

Today's teen idols, particularly Garrett and Cassidy, seem to be aware of that. Garrett says the biggest danger "comes when you start believing what people say about you. I've seen people in the past make the mistakes." And Cassidy, who has had the benefit of his half-brother David's rise-and-crash teen idol experiences, says,

## Teenage idols make a mint on youth rock circuit but face prospect that they may be washed up at 20

"How many people have a chance to feel that adulation in that way? It's lots of fun and exciting, but the most important thing is to mean something to yourself. Being a teen idol is a job and should be treated as such."

It's a risky business, littered with those former idols who squandered their money, believed their own publicity and watched their careers plummet. After the runaway success of *The Partridge Family* and ensuing record and concert fame, David Cassidy stopped his career cold and spent five years on the beach at Maui deciding what to do next. Now, at 29, he is making a singing and acting comeback, also managed by Ruth Aarons. It is a rare young performer—the former Beatles, Elvis and Frank Sinatra are among the exceptions—who can take his audience with him.

"Teen idols last as long as they've always lasted," says Tiger Beat publisher Ralph Benner. "Our reader is

about 12 and stays with an idol until she's 14. From that age on, you can't be in love with a picture in a magazine anymore." Thus, the fame-span for a teen idol is, and always has been, a too-brief 24 months, start to finish.

While Leif Garrett laughs that the best part of being a teen idol is "walking to the bank," Charles Laufer says the dilemma goes a bit deeper: "The ultimate question is whether it's better to have made \$2 million before you're 20 or to never have done it at all."

While that one is being debated, Dick Clark, who has represented the Hip Uncle to several generations of teenagers, is worried about something else. "There's really no such thing as a teen idol anymore," he sighs. "These kids—the Garretts and the Cassidys—are *sub-teen* idols. The whole thing has moved. The younger people are old, and there are no children left, really. There are little babies and then there are young adults. Somewhere we lost a generation. We lost our teenagers."

Sub-teen or teen, the idol business apparently is a necessary one. That aspect hasn't changed. "The basic feelings of the kids are the same as they've always been," says Shaun Cassidy. "To have a teen idol is a very normal fantasy, and that fantasy will continue for a long time." Chuck Laufer insists the need is sociological: "The girls are post-puberty. The idols are a nice, safe release valve for a 12- or 13-year-old girl. A more masculine, burly type of idol would scare her. Face it, we're in the little girl business."

All the way to the bank. **P**

## Who's In, Who's Not and What's Next?

### Who's In:

- **Leif Garrett:** On top even without a weekly television series. Record and concert success should keep him in the public eye.

- **Shaun Cassidy:** After "The Hardy Boys" folded, had to reconsider his career. At 20, a bit long in the tooth for a teen idol but still has charisma. Will concentrate on records and movies.

- **Scott Baio:** Fast-rising star of "Happy Days," the darling of the 10-12 set. Has youth and audience going for him, but can he sing? No one knows.

### Who's Not:

- **Donny Osmond:** Solo teen idol 1971-72, revived with sister Marie 1976-77. Too old for teen audience.

- **Henry Winkler:** "The Fonz" was put on the cover of teen magazines with no response. "He didn't have 'the look,'" says Chuck Laufer. "He looked like a man. He shaves." Bad for teen-idol image.

- **John Travolta:** Also flopped on cover of teen fan magazines, lasting only four months. "John's overpowering," says Laufer. "He's too tall. He's too grown-up."

### What's Next:

No individual has the unbeatable TV-magazine-concert formula, and those in the business fear a repeat of the 1972-74 dry spell, in which there were few identifiable teen idols. So bleak are the prospects for the near future that one magazine is running a series of pictures of aspiring teen idols—some professionals, some off the street. Readers are asked to select the next big teen idol—while those involved in the money-making end pray the one selected has talent, a voice... and that indefinable "something extra."



Fans besiege their favorites: At left, Elvis Presley falls prey to autograph hunters after being drafted into the Army. At right, the Beatles' George Harrison goes on singing while attendant carries out a girl who rushed onto stage of Cow Palace in San Francisco.