

David Cassidy meets George M. Cohan

By Sandra Kreiswirth

David Cassidy's story may sound like that of many other teen idols who were worshipped by millions in the '70s and then disappeared. But unlike many, Cassidy's on his way back, and his enthusiasm is unbridled.

The 30-year old former star of "The Partridge Family" television series and owner of 18 gold records is about to re-launch a musical comedy career that began when he was 18. The vehicle is George M. Cohan's "Little Johnny Jones" bowing Tuesday at the Chandler Pavilion.

"I loved the show from the moment I read it," Cassidy said during rehearsals in New York. "I felt so fortunate to get this show, I can't tell you. Shows like this come along rarely.

"I really inherited the role from George M. Cohan. He wrote it for himself and gave himself all the hits like 'Broadway,' 'Yankee Doodle Dandy' and 'Life's A Very Funny Proposition, After All.'

"And the character I play is very brave and admirable - someone who's real, honest, straightforward and has a lot of moxie."

And the 1980s' David Cassidy appears to share in the moxie department himself.

Most people remember him as a teen heartthrob, but he did exist as a performer before that time. Cassidy was born to the life. His father was the late Jack Cassidy, one of the stalwarts of musical stage, and his mother is Evelyn Ward who, Cassidy says, was a terrific actress and singer in her own right.

Cassidy made his stage debut as Dorothy Loudon's teen-aged son in the musical, "The Fig Leaves are Falling." He followed that with television guest shots and then came the '70s. As with so many others, Cassidy remembers those days with mixed emotions.

"The whole experience was extraordinary. I'm certainly not sorry I went through it. In fact, I wish everyone could stand at the focal point of that kind of energy - 40,000 people screaming at you - it's remarkable.

But Cassidy admitted it was hard to keep sane during those years. "I'm not sure I did. I know I lost my identity. Actually, I was robbed of it. I had no personal life, I became paranoid and almost a recluse. It really screwed me up.

"Towards the end I went on a world tour, and it was bedlam. Audiences ranged from 25 to 80,000, and by that time no one was reviewing me. They were reviewing the event. We went to Japan, Australia and New Zealand, and the tour ended on a sour note. I decided at that point to end it. I felt there was no longer any place

I could take that teen idol experience. The whole thing was very unfulfilling with the exception of going out and knowing that you moved that many people.

"People can't understand why the Beatles and other groups stopped touring. But it's a horrendous existence going from cars to back kitchen elevators, decoys, being thrown into blankets. It's awful. Someday I'd like to do a short film on 'a day in the life of.' I could paint a very realistic picture about show biz superstardom. It ain't glamorous."

To further complicate matters, Cassidy felt people

On the cover

David Cassidy jumps for "Little Johnny Jones."

never understood the music he played was from the television show and not necessarily a musical extension of himself. "It made things very confusing and caused a real identity crisis for me."

Cassidy retired at the age of 25 for almost three and a half years during which time he tried to thaw out. He began reacquainting himself with old friends and eventually started playing music again - this time in his living room.

In 1977 he met Kay Lenz whom he credits with restoring his enthusiasm. "I think marrying her was a wonderful step that brought me closer to coming back. I kind of warmed up to the business again because she was a working actress."

Cassidy returned to television for the first time in four years in a special two-hour "Police Story" in the role of Dan Shea which earned him an Emmy nomination. "The show was eventually turned into a series," he said "but it was bastardized." NBC president Fred Silverman was anxious to get the series on the air and Cassidy felt the show wasn't given adequate preparation time.

Cassidy considered more TV scripts and when nothing of quality appeared, he went to New York to look for a stage show.

"When I got "Johnny Jones," I knew I was really lucky.

"During all of my rock 'n' roll years, I saw a very negative picture of culture in this country. I sensed a need for optimism and hope and pride. I think there's a tremendous amount of joy in this play. It's a real celebration of America. And the timing is right. Timing is everything. I don't think 'Easy Rider' would work today just as this show wouldn't have worked 10 years ago. But I'm confident the time is right - now."



David Cassidy leads the singing and dancing in "Little Johnny Jones" opening Tuesday at the Chandler Pavilion.

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