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Cassidy continuing search for success

HOLLYWOOD — In this day of recession, world angst, cynicism and, let's face it, generally low morale, running into a little of that good old corny showbiz "game trouper" spirit is an encouraging thing.

David Cassidy gives the impression of a game trouper right away. He took a critical roasting last year when he brought George M. Cohan's "Little Johnny Jones" to stage. His "Man Undercover" TV series — the vehicle that was supposed to eradicate his "Partridge Family" teen-idol image after David's three-year, self-imposed work exile — came and went within a few weeks in 1978. His 1976 attempt to form a new rock band featuring artists who'd worked with David Bowie and The Beach Boys went nowhere.

But he's diving in again. And he keeps saying things like, "When people tell me I can't do something, I grit my teeth and say, 'I can.'"

Sitting in a Sunset Strip office, he presents quite a different image than he did in his early '70s heyday, when story after story depicted cuddlesome cutie David as pompous, or worse. He looks slightly older and slightly rounder than he did during his TV incarnations. He comes off as down-to-earth, friendly — and slightly nervous.

David is firing up on several work fronts. First, he's about to go to Nashville where famed record producer Larry Butler is going to guide him through the making of his first album in five years. It'll have a country-pop crossover sound and will include a mix of David's songs and songs written by others.



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"I'm going to let Larry produce me," he says of the man who has several of Kenny Rogers' hits to his credit, "which is something I've always found difficult — giving up that much control. But I completely trust his judgment and I think it's necessary for me to come back and start recording again."

Among other things, Butler will select the songs, including ballads, which Cassidy has resisted in the past. "I suppose I fancied myself as being a little tougher than that," he explains.

On the theatrical front, he's hoping plans for another musical project (about which he'll only say, "It's a classic") that would team him with his half brothers Shaun and Patrick will come through.

"Shaun and I have become really close, very good friends — and we'd been talking about working together when the musical idea came up," reports the 32-year-old performer. "It's a bizarre concept for me to think of working with my brothers, who are considerably younger than I. And yet, I know from having worked with my stepmother (Shirley Jones) and my wife (Kay Lenz, from whom he separated last November) that there is a certain chemistry you get when you're working

with people you know very well — and that the audience enjoys it, too."

On the television front, David will soon be playing twins for British TV's "Tales of the Unexpected," an eerie mystery show of the "Twilight Zone" school which is set to be syndicated in this country next fall.

Last year, when "Little Johnny Jones" was about to open in Los Angeles, David talked about possibly moving to New York, "and I'm still toying with the idea," he says.

"I have some good friends there. I was born and raised near New York (New Jersey) and I feel as much a part of it — or more — as I do Los Angeles. But I'm not attached any longer to the idea of having a fixed home. I used to be. But now I just don't feel the necessity of having a little cave, an abode with a little white picket fence."

Is his change of attitude attributable to his newly single status?

"I suppose ... I don't know, really. I like traveling. I like feeling like a gypsy. It suits me. It would be nice to have three or four different places where I could hang my hat."

Still, a gypsy life can be a lonely life.

"Loneliness is something we all share," David says. "I've felt lonely in a crowd, even lonely among people I know. But I don't wallow in it — never have. And I feel fortunate about that because I've known people who do. When I start to feel that way, I usually focus my energy on something that carries me out of it."