

## David Cassidy glad to shed pop idol's life

But he's eager to try on  
a new 'Superstar' role  
on the stage of Starlight

By Robert W. Butler

The Star's arts and entertainment editor

I can identify with what Michael Jackson is going through," David Cassidy was saying. "He's fortunate he's got his religion instead of drugs and alcohol or he simply wouldn't survive."

Ten years ago Mr. Cassidy was riding a wave of pop hysteria not unlike the one that has propelled Mr. Jackson onto the country's front pages. Not only was Mr. Cassidy starring in the highly rated "Partridge Family" TV series, but as a purveyor of "bubble-gum music" he had become a phenomenally popular teen sex symbol whose records sold millions and who could draw 50,000 fans to his stadium concerts. His face adorned posters, school notebooks, lunchboxes, key chains, even bedspreads.

Then, about eight years ago, he said the heck with it.

"Financially you get to the point where you say, 'How much is enough?' The 34-year-old actor/singer said in a recent backstage interview at Starlight Theatre, where he opens Monday in the title role of "Jesus Christ Superstar."

"But it was more than that. I was fed up with having my life invaded. I had to move my furniture from one house to another in the middle of the night because that was the only time the teen-age girls didn't have the place stalked out. I decided I wasn't going to make records just because X number of people out there would automatically buy them. I knew I didn't want to tour or promote anymore, and I saw no point going into the studio if I really wasn't interested in getting behind the record. My last foreign tour was a mob scene; someone was even killed at one of the concerts and the British press tore me to pieces. Maybe they resented the fact that I was an American.

"But I didn't drop out because I wasn't selling records. I made the choice for my own peace of mind. I mean, how seriously can you take a guy whose picture is on the back of cereal boxes?"

On this particular morning Mr. Cassidy has shown up for rehearsals in a plain white T-shirt and tennis shorts. No star entourage, no glitter, no chains or earring. "You know, I met Elvis at age 17, and he was just so sad," he muses. "I bought the whole thing, the star experience. But he was only alive when he was on stage. I had the choice of going for that or becoming a human being again. I'm proud of the fact that even when things were at their craziest, I kept it all in perspective."

Today, eight years after chucking it all, David Cassidy has the luxury of working only when he wants to. He takes roles when he thinks they'll prove challenging—such as the 1979 TV movie "A Chance to Live" that won him an Emmy nomination or a Broadway stint a couple of years back as the star of "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat," which like "Jesus Christ Superstar" was written by Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice.

Acting, after all, was what Mr. Cassidy wanted to do all along. The son of the late actor Jack Cassidy and Evelyn Ward, a Broadway actress, and the stepson of his "Partridge Family" co-star Shirley Jones, he grew up learning the ins and outs of the profession. He made his professional debut on Broadway 15 years ago in the musical "The Fig Leaves Are Falling," and in the late '60s and early '70s he made guest appearances on dozens of TV series ranging from "Marcus Welby" to "Mod Squad." Pop stardom was simply a case of being at the right place at the right time, he said. On "The

Partridge Family" he was required to sing every week, and the press agents and young fans took it from there.

"Before 'The Partridge Family' I felt I was close to becoming a respected actor," Mr. Cassidy said. "But the series changed all that. I no longer have aspirations as a serious actor. After all, you're only a virgin once in the eyes of the industry and I've been tainted." He smiled. "Still, I redeem myself from time to time, and I hope 'Jesus Christ Superstar' will be one of those moments."

In fact, Mr. Cassidy is once again planning a return to the recording studio. Later this month he begins recording a new album in London.

"I think it will be the best album of my life," he said. "I've been working with some great writers, like Brian Wilson, and there's a lot I want to say. About two years ago I started hearing things on the radio that turned my head around, made me feel like a teen-ager again. My own

fantasies have always been along the teen romance line, and now that romance in music is commercial again I'm inspired to give it a try."

Meanwhile, however, he has to tackle "Jesus Christ Superstar." Although the "rock opera" has lost its controversial reputation (when it was first released as a two-disc album in 1970, many churchmen objected to what they called its "humanist" approach to the Gospels; now some of its songs even find their way into church services), it remains an extremely demanding role.

"I'm intimidated by the sheer size of it," Mr. Cassidy said.

"I've never been at the center of a production with a cast of 150, much less playing Jesus Christ. I find myself in rehearsals asking questions like, 'How would Jesus walk?' or 'Would Jesus scratch his head?' Sometimes soon I have to make those choices, to say 'This is the way I'm going to approach it.' I've never had anything as dramatically or vocally challenging before. I'm going to have to become like He is: no drinking, no staying up late, no big meals.

"It's a real testing ground for me as a performer, but if it goes as well as I think it will, I could see this show going on tour."

