

# Growing up with David Cassidy

By Charles Ferruzza

David Cassidy's memories of his teen idol years during the early 1970s, when his television show, "The Partridge Family" kept millions of teenaged girls glued to their TV sets every Friday night, are far from nostalgic.

"It was a nightmare!" the actor recalled in his tiny dressing room at Starlight Musicals, between rehearsals for the musical "Jesus Christ, Superstar."

"Nothing but madness and paranoia and the loss of identity and privacy and being exploited and all of the things you would imagine it would be," Cassidy continued.

The son of the late actor Jack Cassidy and actress Evelyn Ward, David Cassidy was not exactly born in a trunk...but had plenty of exposure to the theatre world, enough to want an actor's life of his own at a very early age.

"I had a very normal childhood. Remember, when I was little, my father wasn't famous yet and my mother wasn't famous, so I didn't get any special treatment. I lived with my mom and dad until I was four, when they were divorced. After that, with my mother and grandparents in a very small town in New Jersey. My mother would take me into Manhattan to see my father perform. In 1953 I watched him do a matinee of 'Wish You Were Here' and then I knew. The minute I saw my father onstage I knew. It's too cute for words, I know, but when we drove back to New Jersey, I remember telling my mother that I wanted to be an actor. I never had another thought about what I wanted to do with my life," Cassidy said.

Cassidy studied acting after moving to Los Angeles as a teenager and shortly after graduating from high school, was cast in a TV pilot for a situation comedy starring his step-

mother, actress Shirley Jones. The premise of the show, a widow who travels across the country with her singing brood of five children in a multi-colored bus was novel enough, but it was the shaggy-haired David who immediately caught on with the teenagers of 1969. With his impish grin and smart-aleck attitude, Cassidy was the ideal fave rave for the teen beat set...their devotion to Cassidy not only catapulted the program into the Nielsen ratings for four seasons, but made the first single introduced on the show, 'I Think I Love You,' a four million copy seller.

"Seventeen hours a day, seven days a week and every lunch hour I spent doing interviews and having photos taken with two or three people waiting outside. I never had a free moment to myself for five years! I can't remember a single day going by. It was all like a 90-mile an hour blur," Cassidy recalled.

Cassidy "retired" from show business after a world singing tour in 1975 ("The Partridge Family" was cancelled in 1974), rediscovering the theater scene in the late 1970s. In 1981, Cassidy received good reviews for his work in a Los Angeles revival of George M. Cohan's 1904 musical, "Little Johnny Jones."

"Right now I prefer the theater to TV and film," Cassidy admitted. "But it's only because I'm doing something I like doing. This is demanding, exciting...and scary."

To prepare for his role as "Jesus Christ, Superstar" Cassidy played in another Tim Rice/Andrew Lloyd Webber musical, "Joseph and The Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat" earlier in the summer. He played the Kenley Players in Ohio.

"This is one of the most difficult, if not the most difficult, things I've ever attempted," Cassidy said. "Vocally I've never done anything quite demanding as this. It's a 3-octave range! I'm learning the part while I'm doing it and keep thinking, 'Can I do this? Is it going to work?' But I feel really good about it, it's going to be great."

And what does Cassidy feel about his former teenaged fans, now quite grown-up, who will be sitting in the audience at Starlight Musical's during "Superstar's" one-week run, from August 5 to August 11?

"It's quite gratifying, actually," Cassidy said. "They're no longer silly. They've had a chance to look back and reflect on the influence I've had on them. I've had really nice, wonderful exchanges with fans...people come up to me all the time and say, 'You were the most important person in my life.' I can only say thank you, although it means a lot to know I've reached or touched that many people. I did have an influence upon them, I knew then and I'm aware now that there are millions of people around who carry me with them in that respect."