

# Cassidy's second coming

By Cindy Pearlman

His shag haircut, long and parted in the middle, is an eerie blast from the past.

But where is sister Laurie on piano? Where is mother Shirley Partridge on harmony? Where is brother Danny on drums?

Where is the psychedelic bus that the typical suburban family/rock band drove around in on the hit '70s television series "The Partridge Family" which spawned lunch boxes, action dolls, coloring books and hit records?

All that is gone, relegated to reruns, dusty attics and thrift shops.

But David Cassidy, now 41, is back.

As Keith Partridge, the hip oldest brother on the show, Cassidy graced the cover of every teen magazine imaginable. He was an icon, an idol.

But when the series ended in 1973, Cassidy seemed to drop from sight.

Now he has returned as a solo singer on a nationwide tour. (He'll perform Tuesday night at 9 at the Ventura Concert Theater.) But he isn't promoting an album.

"I just want to get back out there," he says. "I was on a self-imposed exile, but it's great to be back."

Since re-entering the public eye, Cassidy says he has been mobbed. In airports. In public bathrooms. In restaurants.

His act includes many of the old songs which made him famous, such as "I Think I Love You," plus some new material.

He sings in big clubs. He sells out. He refuses to cut his hair. He is actually quite sensitive.

"This feels like old times," Cassidy says, soaked in sweat, standing onstage at Chicago's Park West nightclub.

Believe it or not, Danny Bonaduce, who played Keith's mischievous, red-haired brother Danny on the show, is standing backstage, sipping a soda. He opened for Cassidy with a stand-up comedy act.

"Most people have been so supportive," Cassidy says about his comeback. "They're really rooting for me. I think people respect that I didn't opt for the obvious. I kept my integrity. And I didn't spend the last two decades doing bad sitcoms."

Cassidy did spend the last two decades at his home near Los Angeles, raising horses. He was gone from the public eye, but never forgotten.

Case in point: Two twentysomething girls rushed him the other night at a Columbus, Ohio, airport, carrying old "Partridge Family" albums for him to sign.

"Do you still wear purple?" one girl asked. Cassidy grinned. "I do," he said, "but just not purple fringed vests."

"I embrace my past," Cassidy says. "I don't mind that people ask the strangest questions."

"You know, do I still hang around Susan Dey (who played Laurie on the show). Is Reuben Kincaid my real manager? Do I own the psychedelic bus the 'Partridge Family' used to travel around in? Have I ever tried a new hairstyle?"

And what is with the hair?

"Hey," he says defensively. "I do not apologize for my hair. I had my hair short for 10 or 12 years after the series ended. Of course, the

obvious thing would have been to shave my head. That would be the big break from my past. (But) it's my hair."

Cassidy insists he was never Keith, a distinction which was clearly difficult for many of his fans.

Keith was a goody-goody. Cassidy, on the other hand, was expelled from two public high schools before graduating from a private academy.

Shirley Partridge would have been appalled.

"I was never dangerous," he says, "or an idiot. Well, I guess the idiot part was debatable. I was really wild. Of course, I didn't do time in San Quentin, but school was actually another matter."

Cassidy was born in New York in 1950, the son of character actor Jack Cassidy and actress Evelyn Ward. He was raised by his mother in suburban New Jersey.

"It was a very straight, middle-class existence," Cassidy says. "Very Partridge."

Then the family moved to Los Angeles.

"I didn't show up at high school much," he says. "I would just go around with my friends, play my guitar. I was much more into music and just hanging out than algebra and English."

Cassidy ended up at a reform high school in California.

"At the time it was illegal to drop out of high school, but my own district did not want me since I had so many ditching episodes. So I landed in this bad-boy's school."

"People in there are headed nowhere. It took about five minutes for me to wise up. The students were walking around with knives. I wanted out."

One out was playing guitars and drums. Cassidy also studied acting, then hit the street, landing spots on various dramatic television series.

In 1970 he auditioned for a role in a new show about a mod singing family.

"The Partridge Family" lasted from 1970-'73 followed by 17 years of syndicated reruns. Cassidy's No. 1 single, "I Think I Love You," sold more than 6 million copies around the world.

"It was a tremendous strain," Cassidy says of that period. "I was so frustrated creatively. Everyone saw me as this goody character. People assumed that light music was me. As good as those records were, that was never me."

"At 19 I had been playing in rock and blues bands. I was very much into the British blues thing — (Eric) Clapton, Peter Gabriel. I saw Jimi Hendrix five times," he says.

"If I said I was a Hendrix fan people would look at me with this blank stare and say, 'No way. You're Keith. You like The Carpenters.'"

The sudden fame was also jarring for Cassidy.

"You can never be prepared for that kind of fame," he says. "I went to the teen rags before the 'Partridge Family' came on and I begged them not to put my picture in their magazines."

"They said, 'Yeah, right kid. We won't do that to you.' I ended up pulling in between \$25-\$50 million for these teen publications. Can I tell you what I made from this? Nothing."

"But I'm not bitter," he says, "probably because I came out of the show better than anyone else. I can really understand why all these child actors have problems."

"It's very difficult. Look at Danny Bonaduce. After the show ended he was still Danny Partridge. All they cared about was Danny Partridge. No one knew his name."

"I was a lot more successful. People knew my name. For one or two years I was the highest paid solo act in the world. I saved my money."

Cassidy's comeback was cata-

lyzed three years ago when a Los Angeles radio station decided to celebrate his birthday by calling him on the phone.

"I told them it was lonely at the top and lonelier at the bottom," Cassidy says, laughing.

The station invited him to send in some demo tapes — not that Cassidy was much into his own music at the time. He was raising thoroughbred horses. But he cooked up some demos.

An art director from Enigma Records happened to hear the songs and so did some other music-business bigwigs.

All of a sudden, 12 years after his last U.S. album and almost 15 years since he performed live, Cassidy was a hot number.

He signed a deal with RCA for a 1990 album of rock, blues and a little "Partridge Family" nostalgia, called "David Cassidy." It flopped.

"But to me it was a success," Cassidy says. "For the first time in my professional life it was my own music."

Not that he minds doing the oldies on this tour. That's what his public wants. He knows that.

"Guys come up to me in the rest-room of clubs and say, 'I want to thank you. Keith Partridge inspired me to be a musician.'"

Cassidy cracks up at the thought.

"You gotta have a sense of humor about life," he says. "I define the 1970s as the last gasp of innocence in America."

"Keith is an ahead — in love with himself, in love with his guitar, in love with his hair."

"(He) was a sweet, shallow guy. He was just saying, 'Can I borrow the keys to the bus, Mom?' I created this guy. I am proud of him."

(The Ventura Concert Theater is located at 26 S. Chestnut St. Tickets are available at the box office or TicketMaster outlets.)

Cindy Pearlman is a Chicago-based free-lance writer.