

David Cassidy back to theater roots

By Mary Campbell

The Associated Press

NEW YORK — Television's "The Partridge Family" series proved to be a very large detour on the highway of life for David Cassidy.

And the California earthquake this year provided a small but significant traffic bump.

Now he's 43 and back traveling

the serious-theater road he started out on.

People in 23 cities will have a chance to see Cassidy play a kid who grows up in Liverpool poverty in Willy Russell's serious musical "Blood Brothers" on its national tour through May.

Cassidy and his half-brother, Shaun Cassidy, replaced the original Broadway cast's British actors as the Johnstone twins. After 10 months, Cassidy and Petula Clark as Mrs. Johnstone left the Broadway cast and started the tour in Dallas on Sept. 6. Shaun also left Broadway, to write and produce movies for TV. The brothers are talking about working together again someday in one of Shaun's projects.

"Blood Brothers," Cassidy says, is "a complete home run on a professional level. As a life experience, it's even better than that."

"I feel buoyant and optimistic that I get to play this part all through America. People can see me today and my work today." One critic called him "a gutsy revelation."

In "Blood Brothers," the Johnstone twins were separated at birth, Mickey raised by his working-class mother, Edward adopted and raised in the upper-middle class.

"This play has that intangible thing that gets to everybody, it's about brothers, family, mother," Cassidy says. "There's a lot of layers of emotional stuff going on in this play. I think we in America understand the English have a

class system. And I think we all understand how thick blood is."

"When Mickey's life falls apart, he rips the whole fabric of those families apart. There's a sense of incredible loss. It's such a painful thing for us as humans to watch — if you play it for real. It's for real for me every night."

Both Cassidy's mother, actress Evelyn Ward, with whom he grew up in West Orange, N.J., and his stepmother, Shirley Jones, were moved to tears by "Blood Brothers." Jones' sons are Shaun, Patrick, an actor, and Ryan, who works in production for Jim Henson Productions. Actor-singer Jack Cassidy, whose two marriages ended in divorce, died in 1976.

"My brothers and I always got on very well," Cassidy says. "We became very close the day my Dad died. They're three of my best friends. I think of us as a foursome."

Cassidy made his Broadway debut in 1969, in "The Fig Leaves Are Falling," before "The Partridge Family." He replaced Andy Gibb in "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat" in 1983, as he was starting up his career again.

When "Blood Brothers" gave Cassidy a week's vacation, he and his wife, songwriter Sue Shifrin, and their 2-year-old son Beau spent five nights in Mexico, then two in their Southern California home. On the last night, the earthquake hit. The house was wrecked. They weren't hurt. But when they got back to New York, Cassidy says, it really felt like home.