

# C'mon get happy

## Partridge Family TV movie spoof good as original show

Scripps Howard News Service

It's a sentence no one expects to write, but darn if it isn't true: The TV movie about the Partridge Family is pretty good.

I know. Me, too. The thing is, ABC's Saturday movie "Come On Get Happy: The Partridge Family Story" is not just better than it should be, it's a kick.

What makes this thing (at 9 p.m. Saturday) work — and believe me, making it work is no easy trick — is that it takes the same view of the Partridge phenomenon, if you can call it that, that most of us have now. Which is to say, What the heck were we thinking?

The approach to this brief history of the ABC series that ran from 1970 to 1974 is dryly ironic, and just spoofy enough to be funny without wearing thin.

There's the moment, for instance, when the group is filming and lip-syncing to its first song, "What's the little girl playing?" a network executive asks

"Tambourine," says a producer  
"I don't hear a tambourine," the exec says.

"It's the only instrument," the producer says, "light enough for her to hold."

Or there's the studio-arranged photo op that has the Partridges face off with the new family in town, the Brady Bunch. The background music comes from a Clint Eastwood Western.

That's pretty much the tone throughout, bemused and a little corny. It manages to neither take itself seriously nor belittle the original series.

And the casting is smart. ABC found people who look like the originals, then had them underplay their parts. Eve Gordon looks, sounds and moves like Shirley Jones/Shirley Partridge without crossing over into the territory of a "Saturday Night Live" skit.

It portrays Keith/David Cassidy (Rodney Scott) as a cynical pop star who wants to be a hard rocker; Laurie/Susan Dey (Kathy Wagner) as love-struck over Cassidy; the small kids as simply annoying, and Danny/Danny Bonaduce (Shawn Pyfrom) as, according to a network executive, a 40-year-old midget in a kid suit.

Danny, a smart-mouthed, hard-edged kid who, among other things, roughs up the littlest Partridge boy for \$20 and sneaks around Dey's trailer to watch her undress, is the centerpiece of this film. That's no

surprise, since Bonaduce is a producer-consultant and the unneeded voice-over.

Even that is not overdone; not too much, anyway.

The movie is at its worst when it gets "dramatic," as in a scene with the Partridge cast trying to deal with Danny's angry father, an out-of-work TV writer who feels eclipsed by his son.

But there aren't many of these, and most end with cheesy, 1970s-style music that used to signal scene changes in cheesy, 1970s dramas.

When the show gets canceled after four seasons, the Partridges get together at the wrap party to

sing "one last song," which makes no sense but captures the feel of the series in a delicious bit of double-layered satire. Then the family dog barks approval.

"Come On Get Happy" is hardly a classic work of television, but it's a surprisingly entertaining Saturday night movie. And, as Bonaduce says, it could be worse: "I could've been a Brady," he says.

This is not the last of it, by the way. NBC has its own Partridge Family movie in the works, that one based on tales from David Cassidy, which, if nothing else, will tell us if he has as good a sense of humor as Bonaduce. You suspect not, don't you?