

Partridge travails oddly entertaining

By Kevin D. Thompson

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They wore garish crushed velvet costumes. Drove around in a funky psychedelic school bus and sang drippy pop songs that carried as much weight as a paper clip.

Nevertheless, when *The Partridge Family* aired on ABC from 1970 to 1974, it was a bona fide hit. And long-haired lead singer David Cassidy was a bona fide pop icon who had a bigger fan club than Elvis and the Beatles . . . combined. OK, cue the dramatic music.

But when the cameras stopped rolling and the cheering subsided, the actors who played the Partridges were forced to cope with instant fame, depression and domestic abuse.

OK, stop the music.

Come on Get Happy: The Partridge Family Story, is a surprisingly poignant and often funny look at what it was really like

to be in one of America's most famous TV families.

The story is told through the eyes of Danny

Bonaduce (Shawn Py-

from), that "40-year-old midget in a kid's suit," as

one TV producer called him. Bonaduce, who nar-

rates the film, may have lived in a squeaky-clean

family on TV, but his real home life was anything but

squeaky-clean. He was often physically abused by

his dad (*Boy Meets World's* William Russ), who was

jealous of his son's fame. If that wasn't enough, the

freckle-faced Bonaduce — are you ready for this, America? —

smoked, checked out co-star Susan Dey (Kathy Wagner) un-

dressing and loved *Playboy*.

We all know Cassidy's deal. He hated playing goody-

goody teen idol Keith Partridge. After all, the guy was a 20-

year-old free spirit who wanted to play rock 'n' roll. When the

show's producers were miffed at Cassidy (a convincing Rodney Scott) for showing too much skin on a magazine cover,

Cassidy shouts back, "I have a life . . . and pubic hair!"

While *Come on Get Happy* is based on a true story, the producers take some dramatic license. The funniest is a fictitious

high noon-like exchange between Danny Partridge and Bobby

Brady of *The Brady Bunch* on a studio soundstage.

Danny: Hey, Brady. Wanna fight?

Bobby: Anyplace, any time, Freckles.

Danny: Oh, yeah? My family is better than your family!

Bobby: Is not!

Danny: We still get higher ratings.

Bobby: That's not true, your ratings suck!

Any movie that shows the ugly side of Danny Partridge and Bobby Brady is worth watching. You'll also see Florence Henderson and Shirley Jones get into their own hissy fit.

ABC was wise to hire actors who look like *Partridge Family* clones. Eve Gordon is particularly uncanny in her resemblance to Jones. The actors also rise above the corny '70s kitsch with moving performances. As the pigeonholed Cassidy and the abused Bonaduce, Scott and Pyfrom are especially effective.

And *Come on Get Happy* is an effective TV movie.

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ON TELEVISION

Come on Get Happy: The Partridge Family Story



■ **Saturday:** 9 p.m.

■ **Watch it on:** WPBF-
Channel 25, WPLG-
Channel 10

■ **The verdict:** A surprisingly poignant and funny look at what it was like being in one of TV's most famous families.