

it's friday!

As Seventies teen heart-throb David Cassidy tours Britain again, he reveals

WHEN Zac Efron, the young star of the hugely successful *High School Musical* movies, made a visit to Britain a few weeks ago, there were frenzied scenes of fan worship that we hadn't witnessed for some 30 years — since the time of young David Cassidy, in fact.

Pre-teen girls, not-so-pre-teen mothers and even one middle-aged man who made a desperate lunge for Zac's shiny locks all went slightly ga-ga in his presence.

But if all that seemed reminiscent of similarly hysteria-laden tableaux, well, that's because they were: Zac's dreamy eyes framed by long lashes, the swoony smile, the non-threatening male prettiness... we saw it all before when the young star of *The Partridge Family* became a pop star and went global with hits like *Could It Be Forever* and *I Think I Love You*.

The real David Cassidy of today, at 58 and within sight of his bus pass, treats the comparison with indulgent amusement. 'Oh, in the States they've been comparing Zac to me for a while now, and while I'm very flattered by the comparison, I'm not too sure Zac would be,' he chuckles.

'I don't know his work, but there might be some physical similarity between him now and me back then.

by **Lina Das**

People often referred to me as androgynous-looking and I had a lot of gay fans, which I was flattered by. It was when fans tried to take a piece of you home with them and stick it on their wall that it got difficult.

'Hair-pulling? I had plenty of that — back in the days when I had a lot of hair to pull. But all I can say to Zac is that as long as he does good work, doesn't lose his mind and stays grounded as a human being, he'll be fine, because it's only about the talent and never about how many fans or photographers you've got outside your home. But he'd better fasten his seatbelt because it's going to be a very bumpy ride.'

And Cassidy should know about that. He says he hopes Zac won't have to go through what he went through, which was to lurch from being a struggling actor-cum-singer to signing on to star in a show entitled *The Partridge Family* at 20, then becoming the biggest solo singer in the world before retiring at the height of his fame at just 24.

This was followed by a period of

obscurity, financial straits, depression and, finally, a rebirth as a stage star in shows like *Blood Brothers* and *Time*.

'It's been great,' he says. 'But does fame come with a price? Sure it does. It's a weight, a burden.'

But today he seems distinctly unburdened — the reasons for which become apparent later. He looks remarkably good for a man of 58, and though he may struggle these days to slip into those spangly catsuits of old, he still cuts an impressively trim and compact figure.

The hair is blond-grey and the occasional wrinkle has appeared around his eyes, but as even he concedes:

'I look fine. I've had no surgery apart from an operation I had decades ago to remove the fat under my eyes. My mum looked 30 when she was 60, so I guess I owe it all to genes and hair dye.'

'I was silver-white by the time I was 35, but having grey hair makes me look washed out. My wife and son have both said that grey hair doesn't suit me because I have a boyish face. It was a problem when I was 18 and looked about 12 but it's probably working to my advantage now.'

He is gearing up for a mini-tour of the UK this month, and this may be his last here. 'It's just become so hard for me to leave home and perform abroad, what with all the financial considerations, that I've been giving it some thought,' he says.

'I don't want to say this is definitely going to be the last time I'm going to tour Britain — I hope it isn't — but it could very well be quite a while before I come back.'

David has always enjoyed rabid support here: on his first trip to Britain in 1972, thousands of hysterical teenage girls camped outside the Dorchester hotel in London, serenading him with his own songs and effectively putting him under house arrest in his own suite.

When London hotels refused to accommodate him after that, he chartered a yacht on the Thames, only to watch as his more intrepid fans plunged into the river and swam towards him.

EVENTUALLY it just became easier for him to land at Heathrow, perform on the *Tarmac for Top Of The Pops* and then take the 11-hour flight back to LA once he'd finished the song.

'Those were insane times,' he admits. 'Crazy, and I've probably had more attention than anyone on the face of the Earth save Paul McCartney, Madonna and Michael Jackson. But I never sought the fame; I was always trying to hide from it. And the irony was that even though I had all those fans, the loneliness was terrible.'

'One night I'd played to an audience in New York, and straight after the show I was dropped off at this dump of a motel with no money, no change of clothes and left on my own. At times like that, I wondered what

I was doing it all for.' One wonders what he feels about the likes of Amy Winehouse — someone who has almost been crushed by the weight of her fame and infamy?

'Well, for me it has always been about the work, and I think that now, a lot of people just want to be famous. Not that Amy isn't any good — she is — but if your personal life is that messed up, then what's the point?'

'Once you start getting into the whole freak show deal where your personal life destroys your talent, then it's a crime, really.'

The conflicts between work and personal life have certainly been occupying David's mind of late. As well as his tour, he has an album of his old hits remixed by producer Craig J (who has worked with Madonna and Gwen Stefani), entitled *Dance Party Remix*, which is out in the UK in January, and has also had a pilot TV show accepted by an American network.

'I have a lot of work ahead of me and I can't afford to let anybody down, particularly myself,' he says, before making a revelation of his own.

'I've been in recovery for about a year as I don't want alcohol to ruin my life, my family's life or my professional work ethic.'

As he makes this admission, David seems visibly to relax and appear, well, unburdened. In his 2007 autobiography *Could It Be Forever?* he was candid about his use of drugs, having experimented as a teenager with everything from LSD to heroin. And although he denied that he ever had a problem, either with drugs or with alcohol, he admitted that he used both to 'numb' himself.

So why did it take so long for his problems with alcohol to surface?

'I don't know,' he says. 'I just can't figure out why it took so long for the disease to incubate within me and the only way I can explain it, I suppose, is to equate it with being pregnant — you're as pregnant on day one as you are right before you give birth, but it just doesn't show as much.'

With me, I could go for years without drinking a drop or I'd have a couple of glasses of wine and then go to sleep but I could live without it. And then, suddenly, it became a struggle not to, and drinking became a habit. I never went to bars or clubs, never got arrested, but it became an issue for me because I started feeling bad and lethargic.

'I was sitting at home, drinking wine on my own till 4am and when my son said to me: "Dad, you've got to stop this," it really brought it home to me that I had to address the problem.'

The fact it was David's son Beau, now 17, who triggered his self-appraisal is poignant. David's own father, the brilliant and charismatic Broadway star Jack Cassidy, was a 'raging alcoholic,' says David.

'So were my uncles, my aunt and my grandfather. It's genetic, but it just never took hold of my life until recently, when I realised I had to stop.'

'I don't think I was going through an unhappy period or a



David today: Apart from one procedure 'decades ago', he says he has avoided cosmetic surgery

crisis as such — it's just the way the disease has evolved in me. Now I've stopped drinking completely and I go to meetings.

'I'm very lucky in that I never got to hit rock bottom because I didn't want to ruin my career or my family. But I've felt a great deal of shame about it. There is a certain amount of shame in admitting I'm weak and helpless in this instance, but I am.'

THAT he has admitted a problem and is taking steps to overcome the disease is commendable, but then, David Cassidy is probably more used than most people to digging deep within himself for answers.

David was just three-and-a-half years old when his father walked out — an event that left him with conflicting feelings.

'We had a very turbulent and volatile relationship,' he says. 'But then, my father pretty much had a turbulent and volatile relationship with everyone he knew — I just happened to be his eldest son and the one he picked on. He was an alcoholic and also a manic depressive, and it was such a shame because in those days, the right drugs just weren't available.'

After seeing his father star in the Broadway show *Wish You Were Here*, the young David vowed to become an actor like his dad, hoping subconsciously that it might draw them closer together. Ironically, it was to push them even further apart.

Since divorcing Evelyn Ward, David's mother, Jack Cassidy had married actress Shirley Jones (the couple eventually had three sons — Shaun, Patrick and Ryan — all of whom are now in showbusiness) and when both Shirley and David were cast in *The Partridge Family*, neither

hairspray

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