

CONQUERING CHINA

autobiography, *There Was A Little Girl: The Real Story Of My Mother And Me*: ‘Nobody had ever been willing to move so slowly. It must be love,’ she wrote, confiding she was at that point still a virgin and didn’t want to be rushed into anything. George was ‘a remarkable, respectful and patient gentleman who was obviously aware of my hesitance regarding sex... he left without even trying to kiss me. I was so touched by what a real gentleman he was.’ When the ‘relationship’ broke up shortly afterwards, it was blamed on media intrusion...

Officially at least it was back to business as usual, but behind the scenes it was increasingly apparent that Wham! was going to have to split up. George so dominated everything they did that a solo future was assured and whatever he might have thought of ‘Careless Whisper’, if it had been seen as a test run as to how well he could do on his own, it was a test he had passed with flying colours. Increasingly, it became a matter of not if but when. Meanwhile, Andrew grew more interested in motor racing as George began working on more solo projects.

One of these, interestingly, was with David Cassidy, the star of *The Partridge Family* TV series (1970–4), who in later years would also suffer from problems with alcohol and a heavy fall from grace. And when the two men actually did work together, it was a decade after Cassidy’s own days as a major teen heart-throb were over, although he was still seeing some professional success. But it was a curious choice for George, not least because he was coming

to resent his own status as a teen heart-throb and wanted to be taken more seriously, which begged the question of why he was working with the man whose greatest hit to this day remains 'I Think I Love You'. Of course it is entirely possible that he also wanted Cassidy's advice on how to break out of the niche he had carved for himself and become a serious artist.

The number in question was 'The Last Kiss' on David's 1985 album *Romance*. 'I'm still proud of the record,' Cassidy told Culturebrats.com. 'In fact, a little known fact, it was George Michael who I began working with and co-producing some stuff with and actually sang background on it, and he did a great job. He's a terrific artist. At the time, he was just leaving Wham! It was right before his first solo album got gigantic and I enjoyed working with him.' The sentiment was more than reciprocated: disclosing that the two had met because they shared a music publisher, Dick Leahy, George actually interviewed Cassidy in June 1985 for the *Ritz* newspaper, in fact a very trendy magazine that ran for fifteen years from 1976. Cassidy was a 'major career influence' said George, although he might of course have been thinking of the singer-songwriter's attempts to reinvent himself.

Although the piece purports to be George interviewing David, it certainly gives a pretty good indication of the former's state of mind. 'Don't you find that if your image was one thing,' George asked rather pointedly, 'if you have been created or are part of something which

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creates an image, that when you try to do anything which is even vaguely upsetting to that image, even though it's really you, people see it as false, which is very frustrating, obviously?'

Or (talking about Cassidy's re-emergence into the music scene): 'I think, having seen some reviews of the stuff, there are a lot of sympathetic ears and there are a lot of people who would slag you off for no reason. There are also people that would give it an open ear or even a biased beneficial opinion because they have memories of you from their youth and everything, like through rose-coloured glasses.'

Or: 'Was there a point when you said to yourself, "I really miss it?" That is the fascination for me. Every time I think it's getting too much for me, and I'm not enjoying being part of everyone's lives, I do have to say to myself what would my real reaction be if in two years from now I hadn't been in a paper for a year.'

Apparently, it took Cassidy several years before he missed being in the newspapers but that wasn't really the point. The interview is far more revealing about what was on George's mind than that of his subject. Other topics included fear of burnout, something else that appeared very much to be of concern. Somewhat ominously, given what was to happen to both of them, George gleefully related that after the interview the pair got riotously drunk.

Meanwhile, George's extracurricular activities continued. He did some work with Elton John (not at that stage a