

As he drew toward his mid-20s, Tarantino recognised it was time to divert his energy into words and images. Into movie-making: 'I was 22 when I started at Video Archives. By the time I got to about 23, I decided to make a film. It was a film called *My Best Friend's Birthday*; it was a comedy, like a kind of Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis type of thing.'

The stylistic equivalent of so many student films, Tarantino's black and white trial run remains commercially unavailable. Technically limited and modest in its aims, it does, however, contain one notable sequence, which is not Jerry Lewis-style mugging and gurning so much as a tragicomic soliloquy for the TV generation. The speaker is Tarantino himself; his story, recounted to the character's friend, is told straight to camera:

'Out of the blue, I felt depressed for no reason whatsoever, just this dark cloud hanging over my head. I was gonna commit suicide. I was actually gonna commit suicide. I was gonna go up in the bathroom, fill the bathtub with hot water, and open my veins. I was actually gonna do it. Now for a three-year-old to be thinking like that, that's really depressing... You know what saved me?... It was *The Partridge Family*. *The Partridge Family* was coming on, I really wanted to see it, so I said, "Okay, I'll watch *The Partridge Family*, then I'll kill myself." Well I watched it, and it was a really funny episode, it was the one where Danny gets in trouble with the mob. And uh... I didn't feel like killing myself afterwards. It all kind of worked out.'

'We were shooting it for three years, and I thought it was like something really special,' admits Tarantino. 'It was kind of embarrassing when I looked at it again. Ultimately, I think making a movie is like the best film school there ever is. And so, it's

like, I didn't know what I was doing at the beginning, now I know what I'm doing now. And I've had the experience, but now I'm not gonna do it like that any more.'

By the time of *My Best Friend's Birthday*'s completion, leaving dreams unfulfilled, Tarantino was already looking hard at his life: 'I was working at Video Archives for five years, and every six months I would have a Quentin Detest-fest. I would stay up all night and kind of go through all the things that were wrong with my life and give myself credit for nothing, like, You're a fuck-up, you



*The Partridge Family was a sitcom for children about a fatherless family who form a rock 'n roll band. The programme helped launch David Cassidy (top right) on a real career as a pop star. Tarantino's enduring obsession with the show was reflected in his first attempt at a feature – My Best Friend's Birthday – in which the Partridges save a character played by Tarantino himself from suicide.*