

this time it was Eric Clapton, in the very last days of Cream, with travel guitar in hand. Same scenario—hellos—light couch conversation—tiredness sets in—it gets quiet again. Twenty minutes later the doorbell rang once more, and it was Donovan! Now, I have been around a lot of stars, but this was a little different than my normal evening-at-home-on-the-couch routine. Enter Donovan—same format from door to couch except Donovan's guitar was acoustic. Once seated, it took him about ten minutes to attain the level of laid-back stupor we all seemed to have gathered together to enjoy that evening. No doorbell this time, but a few minutes later Jackie sauntered downstairs to join us on the now celebrity-ridden couch. Because he had been on the same whirlwind schedule that day as the rest of us, he immediately went from the hellos into the semi-silence du jour.

Rock stars are like hyperactive children in a way, and they can only sit and be quiet for so long. George finally reached behind the couch and pulled his guitar over his head and on to his lap. He then started quietly noodling on something he was working on, and as attentions and volume increased, he in essence gave us all a nice little twenty-minute performance. As he was winding down, Casady plugged in his bass, gently joined in, and then took over center stage (couch) as George faded back into the impromptu audience. Without hesitation or invitation, Jackie eventually joined in a few minutes later and took over from Jack. This thing was now becoming a full-fledged guitar pull.*

* Nashville, Tennessee, is famous for its guitar pulls. Here is how it works. Several artists, pickers, and/or songwriters will get together in a circle and start passing the guitar around. It usually starts out simple and low-keyed with each person playing a current work in process or new song he's just written. When he finishes his song, the person next to him "pulls" the guitar out of his hand and plays his current fave. This may sound blandly uninteresting and maybe not too exciting, but something always happens during a "pull." Given the artistic makeup and competitive nature of people in the entertainment business, something deep down inside each person in the "pull" makes him want to outdo the person before him. These gatherings eventually take on a life of their own, and by the time you go around the circle a couple of times, you are witnessing Carnegie Hall/Grammy Award caliber performances! All the stops are eventually pulled out, and everyone's best material begins pouring forth.

One other magic "pull" night was at my house in Laurel Canyon when four of us witnessed a "pull" that involved David Cassidy (whose musical talent has always been highly underrated) and Roy Orbison. There is something about sitting on the couch in front of the fire three feet from one of the greatest talents of all time while he is belting his heart out on "Cryin'," "Pretty Woman," "Blue Bayou," and the like. It makes today's "Unplugged" seem impersonal at best. My first and still one of my favorite blockbuster "pulls" happened the night I was a guest for dinner at Johnny Cash's house and an after-dinner "pull" developed that included Cash, Waylon Jennings, Jessi Colter, Guy Clark, June Carter, and Rosanne Cash. I have always said that when the cowboys party, they make the rockers look like choirboys with training wheels. This goes double when they start "pulling" the guitar!

Track 32

Save a Partridge, Ride a Cowboy

» *Hollywood, California, Summer 1978*

When asked who my favorite artists to work with as a producer were, I have two that come immediately to mind: Don Ho and David Cassidy. Both were surprisingly incredible talents and highly underestimated by the public. It is amazing what a producer can learn about artists' abilities when you get them under the microscope of the studio where the equipment and technology lay everything open and bare. I could learn even more during the time I would spend with them in preproduction: learning how they think, how much they know, what their shortcomings and strengths are, and how I was going to assemble this knowledge into a game plan with the goal of getting the best possible performance out of them during the recording process. The initial information gathering is an important time because, during this phase, I would not only get an understanding of their artistry and talents, but I also found it very important to crawl inside their nature to find out how malleable they were in terms of being open to new ideas as well as how willing they were to occasionally step out of their regular groove if needed. As a producer, it was just as important for me to ascertain the areas that I needed to stay away from, the buttons I must never push, and the areas that were sacred ground in their artistic makeup.

As a total package, I found David Cassidy to be the most intriguing, the most complex, and absolutely the most delightful performer I ever worked with. David was a superstar; "was" being the operative word as far as his public persona went. This perception by the public was one of the pitfalls of having been a giant superstar and then suffering by comparison in the aftermath when one's career accomplishments never seem to live up to the previous extreme heights of success. In time I found out that David had it all on all the levels needed to qualify as a superstar.

Here's how it all came about.

I got a call from my attorney, longtime friend, and manager-by-default, Dick Whitehouse, saying he wanted to meet me for lunch to discuss something. I asked, "What's up?" and he replied that we would cover that over lunch. When your attorney calls you while you are living in the heat and throes of the recording business, it is either really good news or really bad news. In-between news is reserved for less wobbly occupations. I responded that I had a pretty full plate coming up that day and that it would help if I knew what we were going to spend a couple of hours discussing over lunch just in case it was something that could be handled over the phone. Once again, he told me we would discuss it over lunch.

I kept pressing him until he gave me a snippet of what the subject matter was. He told me that he had been approached by a manager about producing a particular artist, but that being said, he still refused to disclose

David Cassidy and me in session at Larabee Studios in Hollywood. David would not allow cameras in the studio, but my oldest son, Kevin, who was assisting on the sessions, took these shots on the sly. Because the studio was kept dim and he couldn't use a flash or be obvious, the pics are quite loose.



who it was. I kept pressing the point and finally was able to establish that it wasn't a new artist but an established artist who had had a giant hit record or two in the past. I then wanted to know if by "established" he meant just "established," or were we talking "famous" here? He made it clear that the proper classification was "famous." That was all the information I was going to get out of him. Lunch or nothing, take my pick. I told him OK, but it would have to be a late lunch because I had to wrap up a couple of things first. We agreed to meet at Martonis, which was a popular music biz hangout in a semi-seedy part of Hollywood. Martonis was legendary for all the deals that went down all hours of the day and night in its darkened interior. It was ideally located a few blocks from Hollywood and Vine amidst a plethora of recording studios and record companies.

I actually got there first and was halfway finished with a scotch mist when Whitehouse walked in. In perfect timing with his seat hitting the chair, I said, "OK, we're here—who is it?"

"David Cassidy," he replied, putting his chewing gum in my drink for effect and to match my rudeness up to this point. I was a very hip producer by my own account at the time; by mistaken general music industry consensus, David Cassidy had fallen into the has-been category. As far as I was concerned, he was a teenybopper artist, and I was the Outlaw dude who used to be with the Beatles. Not a good career move, as far as I could tell. But to be honest, my career was on the verge of tanking if I didn't come up



with a hit soon, and also, in reality, David was a legitimate artist with a strong record-company commitment and a lot of good ideas for a new album. I guess you could say that we were fairly equally matched at that time—two creatively desperate song-laden souls looking for a home back on the charts.

Anyway, my immediate response was a definite no, and my body language let Whitehouse know that I was not happy with the lunch topic or the state of my Juicy Fruit-infused Chevas Regal. I just wasn't interested in the project—period. Lawyers are used to verbal abuse and illogical responses, so without a change in the sideways, lean-back position he had taken in his chair, he simply said he anticipated my response and had gone ahead and made dinner reservations for David and me for 7 p.m. that night at the Imperial Gardens Japanese Restaurant and Sushi Bar on the Hollywood end of the Sunset Strip—regardless of what I wanted to do. "Now hear me out," he said. "I think this is a good project for you, and all I am asking is that you meet with David before you make up your mind. He has already agreed to you producing his album, if he feels good about it after having dinner with you. All I'm asking is that you meet with him at the Imperial Gardens, do the meal deal, and then tomorrow give me a call. I am picking up the tab, so you have nothing to lose. If you still say no, I will accept your decision and make the appropriate phone calls to his management."

The Imperial Gardens was a real hot spot, popular with the music people, and in those days was enjoying the popularity of the sushi craze that had recently hit the Hollywood set. The sushi bar was downstairs facing out to the glitzy street, and in the upstairs dining room of the restaurant there was a separate area set aside for private dining. These were little mini-rooms enclosed by shoji screens, with pillows and low tables where you could sit on the floor Japanese-style in total privacy yet still have a sense of the ambiance. It was a place where the rich and famous could dine without fans disturbing their meal. I showed up right on the dot at 7 p.m., and when the shoji screen was opened, I found David Cassidy already sitting there. We introduced ourselves and then immediately started talking—nonstop for over three hours. We closed the place down. We were best friends five minutes into our dinner meeting. The ritual of the sushi meal and the plush little environs created the perfect setting for us to really get to know each other, and that night the cowboy and the partridge joined forces.

I called Whitehouse the next day and said it was a definite go and that I was truly excited. I also sincerely thanked him for hanging in there with me.

I told him that David had great ideas and we were actually getting to work on things that afternoon. It's pretty amazing how things unfolded because we became virtually inseparable for about two months with our relationship morphing in and out of creative synergy and just being good friends having a good time. David turned out to be a super talent and possessed the most incredible laugh I had ever heard. It came from deep down inside and was genuine and warm. It made you want him to be happy just so you could hear it. The project went well on all levels except one: upon completion, the ever-looming record company/artist management/attorney politics entered the picture with the net result being that the album to my knowledge never got released in America, although as a publisher I have been notified of licensing requests pertaining to international release.

We were very disappointed by this outcome, but David went on to star in a TV show called *David Cassidy—Man Undercover*. The legendary David Gerber produced the show, and I was hired as the music producer and arranger for the title song, so our little team of two managed to stay together a little longer. The NBC TV series lasted only one season with its opening segment airing on November 2, 1978, and the final episode airing on January 11, 1979.

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As is the way in the entertainment business, over time we drifted out of each other's lives. Because we didn't know the separation was going to be permanent, we never said goodbye. We were almost brought together by a mutual friend in the early '90s and came within less than an hour of hooking up with each other in London. Unfortunately, his flight was late getting in and mine took off on time.

It has been very pleasing to me to see his talent prove out in the long run. Not only did he once again become reestablished as a big star overseas, but he then continued on as an incredible stage success in the United States.

David and I had spent an intense six months together, and I don't believe I ever enjoyed my chosen vocation more than I did when I was working with him.

I miss things like that.

"I think I loved it!"