

## DAVID CASSIDY

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State Arts Center. By now, we've got the questions ready. David Cassidy is 21-years old. He's a man. He is also every mother's son. Countless mamas are attracted to his wholesome image. But, his fans, his real fans, are 15 at the oldest.

The small, clean dressing room is not crowded. A couple of reporters, a photographer, David, and his best friend, Sam Hyman. Not crowded with people, that is. Every available piece of furniture, every strip of wall is covered by gifts from David's fans. Love beads, posters, stuffed animals, tie-dyed T-shirts, even a hand-embroidered pillow case.

With some time to spare, David and Sam set about to unwrap the gifts. Some they keep, most they stack up. A future offering to an orphanage or ghetto school. "We can't possibly use all the gifts we receive," David explains.

So far, there's no sign of pre-stage jitters. David and Sam share joking remarks about the gifts. Friends since junior high, David and the dark, curly-headed Sam have shared a house in Hollywood Hills for a couple of years. Part of the Cassidy corporation, Sam is responsible for the retail sales of David Cassidy posters, Luv beads, Luv stickers and so on.

Their friendship is genuine, important to both. On the road, they seem to take care of one another, but in a quiet masculine sense. They wear the same size shirt, and as the haul is inspected, Sam has only to admire a U-necked T-shirt where tiny dogs travel in stripes for it to be his.

Then, there are the love letters. Stacks and stacks of teenagers pouring the essence of their hearts out to David. The words are intense; these kids aren't kidding.

"I believe in my heart, David, that we will be together. We are meant to be. I will wait for you forever."

But, despite the melodrama of it all, despite an emotionality some would find meet for humor, David is gentle. "I really love these kids," he says. "They are willing to do so much without any real hope of ever seeing me. I want to be fair to them."

The picture emerging thus far is not too good to be true. It is too good to be real. David Cassidy: an angel, goody-goody incapable of scowling. That's about when David discovers that a vital piece of his costume is missing. And, under the white crepe jumpsuit he's planned to wear, the missing item is particularly indispensable. Someone is dispatched to David's hotel room. We've all gotten a good laugh out of it. When from the center of the room, from the angel face, we hear . . . "It's a good thing I discovered that."

Meanwhile, the show is in progress. David's background vocalists do solo acts as part one of what we'll call the David Cassidy Revue and Dream Machine. The audience has already begun to scream. All 10,000 of them. And the missing article is still at large. Things are jittery.

To fill the gap, we talk about David's

recent gall bladder operation. He's only three weeks from the hospital. He's tired and the scar, mostly healed, still looks a bit angry. David says he feels well, but being on the road is grueling. "I'm so tired of getting up at six o'clock in the morning," he moans softly.

That's when the loud speaker which brings the concert to his dressing room projects a deafening screech. David looks up sharply from the peanut jar he's been munching from. "Uh oh. I wonder who's out there." He never doubts that the screams are for him.

In the very nick of time, the costume is complete. And we see young Cassidy next on the stage. A small orchestra blasts its overture . . . ending with the strains of a Partridge Family three-million-seller, "I Think I Love You." The guests are nearly crazed. They've waited long for this moment. They've stood for hours in ticket lines, paying up to \$7.50.

They toss flowers onto the stage. In small groups, they count to three and shout, "We love you, David." They gaze at their friends, consider where they are, and erupt into fits of giggles. We've seen some pretty famous rock personalities in concert . . . but we've seen nothing to rival this ovation. David Cassidy wouldn't even have to perform. He could probably simply stand within their vision, and these kids would save their ticket stubs for a long time.

But he does perform. He sings some old songs, and some new songs. He dances across the stage in sort of a miniature Tom Jones fashion. He's full of energy; he's working very hard. He talks to the kids. "I love you all, I really do." They believe it because they have to believe it. The universality of his affection doesn't seem to matter. The philosophy is more, "If he loves everyone, he loves me."

Certain words, "kiss," "love," "cry," send the audience into a frenzy of screams. They reach out for him. He waves. They explode. To the final song. Everybody's favorite. "I Think I Love You." There are tears. There is the sort of laughter that simply releases tension. Somehow they know this is the end. The pitch is heightened. The tension, too. The ladies are satisfied. But, somehow unfulfilled. But, at age 12, they don't

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really understand what it is they want from David Cassidy.

He does. He and his people know that if these girls can get near David, he'll be attacked with love. The song draws to a close. David starts running, the gold chains that dangle from his arms sparkle under the lights. He keeps running. Tosses the mike to a stage hand. The band plays on. The background vocalists sing on. The refrain crashing on their ears, the audience has no notion that David has run right out of the Arts Center, jumped into a motor-running Mustang, and is halfway to his hotel.

It's the game they play to stay in one piece. The Beatles had to. The Stones still mount helicopters to escape raving fans. And Rick Nelson, Elvis, even Frank, years back.

Somehow, it's different with David. He retains only a couple of the qualities that distinguish teen idols. He has the frail beauty of a Bobby Sherman. He has that same family-style wholesomeness Rick Nelson once projected. But, at the same time, he is sophisticated.

Unlike most of his counterparts, David is primarily an actor. In the two years before *The Partridge Family* was conceived, David appeared in segments of several TV shows, including *Marcus Welby, M.D.*, *Medical Center*, *Ironside*, *The F.B.I.*, *Adam-12*, *The Mod Squad*, and *Bonanza*. Without telling his parents, who hoped he'd finish college before beginning a professional career, David landed co-star status in a Broadway show, *The Fig Leaves Are Falling*, which unfortunately closed soon after opening.

Despite his preference for acting, David is also a more serious musician than many of his fellow super-stars. He plays decent acoustic guitar, and works hard to learn more. His musical tastes are well-honed.

That's what we discussed during the come-down after the show. Back at the hotel, David lounged in brown jeans, work shirt, macrame belt and moccasins. Munching on chocolate chip cookies, he told us he had little use for the "heavy" rock groups, Led Zeppelin, and the like. "It's just noise," he said. "But, you know, I don't want to put anyone down. I'm sure they think their music is great."

And the girls. "It's so easy to milk them. If I wave, it drives them crazy. That's just too easy. I want to communicate something to them. Give something back for what they've given me. I want what I'm singing to get it on."

David Cassidy can't explain his phenomenal stardom. He simply accepts it. But, the nature of his private life indicates that he never expected it, that he'll take it while it's there. But, that he'll be just as happy when it flees. Off the job, David stays home a lot, partly because he's recognized and besieged whenever he meets the public. But partly because he and his friends enjoy sitting around jamming on guitars.

In the meantime, he gives his audience what he can. Aware of their fantasy lives, he leaves that part alone. He neither feeds it nor does he feed off of it. Half-child, he is gentle, soft . . . innocent and sexy . . . unjaded, but really very aware.

—LAUREL DANN