



by Simon Frith
**LETTER
FROM
BRITAIN**



Get Back While You Can -
At Twelve Of Nerve

It's teeny bop time again. David Cassidy has been leaping 'round Europe, scattering hysteria "unprecedented since the Beatles." In England, mobs of crazed little girls have been scratching cops, strangling dogs, smashing windows. Jonathan King promises that in six months time Milwaukee will be going equally mad for *our* lads, Ricky Wilde and Simon Turner. You too can look forward to Debbie and the Dreamboats — last single "Donny" ("I had a boy, Donny was his name"), current one, "Boy Named David." Wave your knickers in the air! I'm exhilarated by the energy, by the sound of running, clickety-clack feet, boy! What I didn't understand is how all these orgasmic giggles can be triggered by such bland, pastry-faced puddings as David Cassidy and Donny Osmond. So I went to see David at the Empire Pool, Wembley.

He came out sheathed in white, like a tape worm. For someone whose primary appeal is physical, he's surprisingly clumsy, graceless. Constipated bumps and grinds. Wiggle your bottom at the front row; everyone squeal! David's so little, so young, that his tight-croched cat suit (red vine curled lovingly 'round

his arse) seemed cosy, a new line in Ladybird pajamas. Plain voiced, no range of tone or emotion; just sing loud or soft and always too close to the mike so it's always distorted anyway. The children's party show-off. David played piano (elementary), guitar (intermediate) and drums (advanced). We glowed with pride but he seemed uncertain.

He's got an astonishing lack of stage presence or authority. The screams came, sure enough, but in response to carefully programmed stimuli. Sit on the stage-edge for "I Am A Clown," white rose magically at hand — ooohh; "I love you" (pointing) "and you" (point) "and you" — each finger getting its gasp, each leap its chirrup. But Cassidy never really controlled the audience, no playing with them like Mick Jagger or Noddy Holder. He did his thing (well coached) and they did theirs (well dreamt) and there was a strange gap between them. I don't think David knew what the fuck was going on.

His people didn't care. We were sitting at the back of the PR section and in front of us were all these grey suits, chuckling — every face a dollar bill.

Cassidy was designed by LA show-businessmen who have bizzarrities of their own. Green baize tables, champagne and cigars. There were optimistic place cards — Mr. Rod Stewart, Mr. Elton John — but the only famous people to show up were Mr. Ed Stewart and Mr. Tony Blackburn (DJs) and that figured. Before the show started we got old-fashioned muzak, and David's backing group (The Whole Damn Band) and support act (Kim and Dave — "old friends from Californ-i-a") gave us new-fashioned muzak. "And this here's a song by our favourite writer. A big hand for ... Mr. Bob Dylan!" Dead silence. The musicians were second division session men — bored and bald. Kim, long blond hair and eyes so curly, and Dave, guitar hitched immovably over his back, were clean — harmonies and a tambourine. They all record for Bell and that was the name that was kept ringing, with increasing fervour, in our ears.

David is a Hollywood kid. He likes rock but has obviously never experienced it raw. In among the ballads we got the Chicago "I'm A Man," a stumbling hybrid maybe, but it tugged the gut and got the wildest audience response of the evening. Real rock, its solitary confinement affirmed the distance between David and the star-gazers. LA show biz culture met English football culture and, from an unfair exchange, duly made its million. But no one knew what was being traded. In Manchester, Cassidy's handlers noticed the girls singing "Nice one, David"; by Wembley the song was incorporated insistently into the show. It bewildered the band.

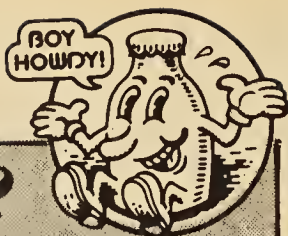
Every girl in the place (and the only males were a scattering of bemused fathers) wore a David Cassidy rosette. They were actually Norwich rosettes (left over from the League Cup final) with new pictures. On the way in were the usual Wembley dudes; rosettes and scarves and programmes and black market tickets. The crowd was a football crowd, swaying, scarves held two-handed high, hands thrusting in the Slade two-fingered salute. The girls descended on Wembley from all over the country like it was cup final day. It was their sense of occasion that made the concert an event; Cassidy's appearance was necessary but his music was not. No stomping encores, the audience was eager to get home and boast to their unlucky friends. The David photos pinned to every budding breast, the posters clutched in every hand, were symbols not of individual yearning but of a group identity. Cassidy was the totem, the sacred object, but the ritual according to rules of which he had no control or understanding. I had a sudden urge to

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The Wailers: "Light A Fire" (Island). An arty reggae record with fashionably long cuts, several over five minutes. Some good songs (a great version of "Stir It Up," also "Kinky Reggae") almost ruined by an exceptionally stupid package. Not that it's ugly — who cares? — but it does fall apart, as cardboard cigarette lighters held together by one rivet are wont to do. Mine is in the garbage, so this is docked two notches for space: **C plus.**

The Edgar Winter Group: "They Only Come Out At Night" (Epic). Good solid rock record. **B.**

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be a promoter. Imagine what those chicks would do with a battle of the bands: David Cassidy vs Donny Osmond, or, rather, David Cassidy's girls vs. Donny Osmond's girls. Stretford End would pale.

Every press report has compared Cassidy-mania to Beatlemania but the concert I went to wasn't like that at all. The noise level was different: the screaming wasn't continuous, every song was audible. The Beatles never had such a solidly female audience and for all Paul's twitching, it was their music which attracted the audience — David could chant OM for an hour and not lose a shout. In fact, Cassidy's concert was complete confirmation for Pete Fowler's argument (in *Rock File*, edited by Charlie Gillett [New English Library; England only]) that there's a new generation of teenagers (Cassidy's audience was aged between 12 and 17) for whom music is a tangential interest, a background and context for the more important activities of hanging around and having fun.

The boys use Slade as their stockade, on street corners and the dance floor. Cassidy is the girls' show. He comes out of the culture of the bedroom and the pin-up, of Jackie and gossiping in corners. A girl's group identity is built on her idol — no poster, no friends. Cassidy's records are less important than his pictures, than the constant contact his fans have through everything they read. Seeing him in person is not important for the power of the actual experience but for the status it confers. In every group of Cassidy girls one or two can now swagger a little more proudly. Sure the Cassidy hysteria has been stirred and faked by the media for their own circulation ends but this, too, is part of

the game. How do you think it feels to be an Osmond girl and see bloody David Cassidy in the *Sun* every day?

What's depressing about the whole teeny-bop thing isn't the shrill excitement of all these chicks; it's not even their gross exploitation. Rather, it's the horrible blandness of the music involved. For the uncommitted, David Cassidy's performances are plainly boring and Donny Osmond's performances are stodgier than school porridge. This music hasn't a single one of the qualities I'd associate with rock. Various reasons for this have been suggested: these kids are young and will grow into rock; it's some sort of anti-big brother and sister backlash; it's part of an eternal youth cultural style. My suspicions are different. I think rock has always been an essentially male culture. After all, who buys Englebert Humperdinck? Or Cat Stevens? Or Leonard Cohen? Or, as Elvis put it: "Little sister don't you do what your big sister done."

P.S. Last week Slade's "Cum On Feel the Noize" went straight to number 1 — the first record to do that since the Beatles? Something's happening.

REWIRE YOURSELF

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for a moderately priced turntable, and \$200 for what the industry refers to as a transcription turntable, although that term doesn't happen to mean anything. Garrard is the biggest offender in this area since the consumer can't help but be confused when the salesman offers him the same brand name for anywhere from \$49.95 to \$199.95 and has trouble explaining the exact difference involved in the price changes. United Audio Products' line of Dual turntables have adopted a better tack. All Duals are priced in the same general category, between \$100 and \$200 and they've designed their equipment to show you that you really do get what you pay for. Thus you feel much more secure buying a lower priced Dual, in terms of the essential quality involved, than you would buying a cheap Garrard. Dual has just introduced a new turntable, their 1214, which is the lowest priced model in their line at \$109.50 and which I'd recommend to anyone who wants a turntable with record changer facilities. The Dual 1214 has all the basic features of higher priced Duals such as a very dependable motor, a low mass tonearm that can track down to less than two grams, and a factory set anti-skating system.