

Labor of Love

By Mark Wyckoff

Judging from the enthusiasm in Regis' voice, February 1991 was shaping up to be a big month for Cassidy. At the time, he was still, by all accounts, basking in the successful glow of DAVID CASSIDY, his Enigma debut LP.

The record, released last October and featuring eight songs written by Cassidy, was designed to introduce him as a serious musician to American audiences. Ever since "The Partridge Family" show was canceled in 1974, he had struggled to shake his squeaky-clean teen idol image. An Emmy nomination, leading roles on Broadway, and in London's West End — nothing could make people forget Keith Partridge.

But this new album, he believed, would help him shed his Partridge feathers once and for all. And it seemed to be working.

Already the album had spawned one hit single, the self-penned *Lyn' to Myself*. The single spent 16 weeks on the *Billboard* pop charts, peaking at No. 27 on November 17. It did even better on the *Radio & Records* adult contemporary chart, where it topped out at No. 20. Not too shabby for an artist whose last stateside album was released in 1976.

By February, though, *Lyn' to Myself* had long since fallen off the charts. So it seemed only logical that Regis and Enigma would be gearing up for the second wave of Cassidy hype.

Problem was, the hype about the hype was just that — hype. Regis was lying to himself and to the reporter. There would be no second wave, no second single, and no "Tonight Show" appearance. Hell, by this time, Enigma Records barely existed.

During the 1980s, Enigma was one of the hottest, hippest, and most successful alternative record companies in the business. Its roster of artists included Mojo Nixon, the Dead Milkmen, Stryper, Poison, and the Smithereens. The California-based label signed Cassidy in early 1989, after hearing him play three demos on "The Mark and Brian Show," a top-rated morning radio program on KLOS-FM in Los Angeles.

But by July of last year, Enigma's rising star was starting to fall. Reports surfaced in the trades about the label undergoing a "complete restructuring." Regis, already Cassidy's manager, was named CEO of Enigma and brought with him a new stable of managers, people he deemed "Execs with Attitudes."

"Our goal is to be the best mid-sized record company in the business," he said at the time. "With our revamped A&R department... that prize is now within our grasp."

Enigma would never latch on to that prize, primarily because the company couldn't hang on to its money. As 1990 drew to a close, stories of cutbacks and staff layoffs at Enigma became commonplace. By early this year, only 15 people remained from a staff of 70. In May, the company was out of business completely. "Enigma Ent. Dis-

kery Finally Bites the Dust" read the front-page headline in *Variety*.

Enigma's once-bustling redwood office building, tucked away on a quiet Culver City street, was a testament to how far the company had fallen. Only the most persistent visitors — those who were willing to ring the outside buzzer for 15 minutes straight — were let in.

Once inside, there was little to see. Most of the offices were closed and locked tight. The huge neon Enigma clock over the front desk had long since burned out. A new batch of phone books sat on the counter unopened because there were no employees around to use them. Waste-baskets were filled to overflowing. Cigarette butts were carelessly stamped out on the carpet.

This was definitely not a company position to send another David Cassidy single flying up the charts, no matter what the over-optimistic Regis was saying. With the company in such shambles, it's hard to understand why Cassidy even consented to an interview. After all, what was he going to promote — his nonexistent second Enigma single?

Nevertheless, Cassidy was right on time, for the 5 p.m. talk on February 22. Defying the rush-hour odds, he managed to find a spot for his sleek silver sports car directly in front of Le Café, a dimly-lit Sherman Oaks coffee house he had picked for the meeting. "It's a nice place," he said on the phone the day before, as his newborn son, Beau Devin, cried in the background. "Nobody will bother us there."

Cassidy didn't give anybody the time to bother him. He parked his car, dropped a quarter in the meter, and slipped into the cafe so fast that he seemed almost invisible.

On this particular day, Cassidy was definitely not decked out in the rock star garb he had draped himself in for most of his six-month-long promotional tour. The silver-studded leather jacket, the scruffy denim jacket with leather sleeves, the shiny blue satin coat — these were nowhere to be found.

Instead, he was sporting a comfortable pair of black jeans, black T-shirt, and a dark blue pinstriped windbreaker. The famous Cassidy coif, showing just a touch of gray on the sides, was tucked under a blue "ASCAP Rocks" baseball cap. For a man who was less than two months away from turning 41, he looked remarkably youthful.

Missing, along with signs of age and the rock star clothes, was the rock star attitude. For most of last year, during every interview, Cassidy would put on a decidedly genuine, but overly hyper, "It's great to be back" mask.

Every chance he could, he'd irreverently poke fun at his Keith Partridge image. "Yes, I DROVE THE BUS!!" he'd scream, alluding to the Partridge Family's psychedelic school bus. "I'M SORRY I DROVE THE BUS!" Then he'd launch into a plea for people to help him locate the vehicle so he could blow it up. If he was lucky, in between the myriad of questions about his Partridge past, he'd be able to sneak in a few words about the new album and his plans to tour in '91.

But as Cassidy sat down at a corner table and ordered a Calistoga, it was clear he had

Did they leave you
Busted, bruised, and battered
Empty pockets, just starin' at the moon
Did you give the best you had
But your best just wasn't good enough
Are you feelin' you ain't man enough
Well, look out pal, 'cause it shows.

David Cassidy wrote these words in 1975, encapsulating the deep frustration he saw emanate from a close friend who was in the throes of a relationship turned sour.

Some 16 years later, that first verse from *Love in Bloom* could well sum up Cassidy's own mindset over the past few years. He has, indeed, been left busted, bruised, and emotionally battered. His bouts of frustration, however, have been rooted not in romance, but in the record business.

During the past six years, David Cassidy — the actor/singer who soared to stardom on the wings of "The Partridge Family" — has seen his last four record deals go by the wayside, crashing and burning amid a flurry of mergers and mismanagement. His latest deal-gone-bad, with now-defunct Enigma Records, cost him what could have been a hit album and tour. Not only that, it has left him tied up in litigation, unable to sign with another record label.

"It has become a very ugly, messy thing again and it has taken all of the good will that I had about the record business again," he said. "I don't know how many more times I can go back to this with the same enthusiasm that I had and believe it's all going to work out this time."

Cassidy, though, is refusing to let these business troubles keep him from making music.

"My natural tendency would be to say 'Oh, screw it' and give up and just say 'I'm not going to go through this frustration again.' But I feel like I came so far and I just... I feel like I want to play. So I'm going to carry on and just do it."

The end result of this stiff personal resolve is Cassidy's first American tour since the early 1970s, which kicked off September 14 at Hershey Park in Hershey, Pennsylvania.

Cassidy's decision to tour is a gutsy one. He has no album to promote, no record company to financially back him. Worse

yet, he's hitting the road at a time when even established touring acts are having trouble drawing crowds.

David, though, says he can't worry about those factors.

"Ultimately, it was either tour this way or maybe not ever do it again," he said on the phone from Los Angeles in late August, where he was rehearsing. "I'm certainly not promoting anything. This is not about doing a major arena tour to try and recreate the past. I'm just going out now for the fans and for me. I feel like a lot of good has come from the last record and I want to continue on the course that I set. For me, it has been a personal kind of triumph."

To understand what he means by "personal triumph," one must delve into the downfall of Enigma, the downfall of his other record deals, and how Cassidy reacted to those events.

In an interview in February, Cassidy admitted he had known for several months that Enigma's demise was near. But, ironically, it seemed as if he was the only one who would admit it. Even in the early months of 1991, Enigma CEO Joe Regis was still clinging to the notion that the company would survive.

"Next week would be the perfect time to come out and talk to David Cassidy!" gushed Regis, then Cassidy's manager, as he talked to a reporter. "We're going to pick David's new single then and at the end of the month, he's gonna sing on 'Johnny Carson.'"

