

Cassidy also brought on board a host of friends to help him, including Kim Carnes (who, with her husband David Ellington, were part of his live backing band) and Michael MacDonald. The record, a mix of show tunes (Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Bali Hai*), standards (Peggy Lee's *Fever*), and originals, was the first time Cassidy came close to speaking his own voice. "I'm singing me, my thoughts, everything," Cassidy said at the time. "It's a piece of me — my whole life is in that album, and all the dreams I've ever had. If people don't like it, they don't like me."

Although *Dreams* hit No.1 in England, the record stiffed in America. After four years spent fruitlessly bucking his image, Cassidy was weary, bitter, and disillusioned. By 1974, he was sick of spending 14 hours a day filming and then another six hours in the studio recording. He couldn't even have weekends to himself; Saturday and Sunday were reserved for doing one-nighters around the country. And so, in the midst of a massive, five-continent world tour the Australian press had dubbed "World War III," Cassidy announced he was retiring from it all. No more tours, no more TV show. When his sell-out stand at England's Wembley Arena ended, he vowed, so would this phase of his career.

He stuck to his promise, too. When the tour ended in June 1974, he withdrew completely from the public eye. He spent a big chunk of time at home, in his room, just "thawing out." He felt robbed of his identity, of his soul, and he went through "two or three nervous breakdowns" trying to steal it back.



Photo by Mark Sullivan

By 1975, Cassidy had scrapped together enough of his sanity to return to the public eye and he signed a long-term contract with RCA Records on February 21. Cassidy's terms were simple and non-negotiable: He would have total creative control over the records and he would not tour or promote.

The resulting albums, *THE HIGHER THEY CLIMB*, *THE HARDER THEY FALL* in 1975 and *HOME IS WHERE THE HEART IS and GETTIN' IT in the STREET* in 1976, marked a decided change in Cassidy's sound. The records were grittier, darker, more personal, and more rock-oriented than anything he'd ever done. He produced all three (the first two with Beach Boy Bruce Johnston, and the last with Gerry Beckley of America), wrote most of the songs, and played on almost every track. Once again, Cassidy collaborated with a plethora of musical buddies: Dewey Bunnell from America, Flo and Eddie, Bill House (who played guitar for Little Richard), Beach Boy Carl Wilson, Ricky Fataar, Poco's Richie Furay, Harry Nilsson, Jim Keltner, and Mick Ronson.

Even though he stayed busy recording, Cassidy refers to these years as his "retirement." RCA had offered him the chance, at its expense, to indulge artistically, and he took full advantage. Instead of trying to cut hit songs, Cassidy was content to play with his musical friends. They'd lock themselves in the studio, sometimes for days on end, and just sit around and jam.

"He tired me out," Bruce Johnston said, recalling the *HIGHER THEY CLIMB* sessions. "He always wanted to work at night, all night and then on into the day. He was serious about it, though. If you look at the credits on the album, 'Produced by David Cassidy and Bruce Johnston,' that's no lie. He worked his butt off on those and did a great job."

In Britain and Europe, at least, the records were appreciated. *HIGHER THEY*

CLIMB, a concept album about the rise and fall of a rock star, hit No.22 on the British charts and spawned two Top 20 singles. In Germany, *Bravo Magazine* named it album of the year.

With the record, Cassidy's dark and irreverent sense of humor about his fame came through for the first time. On *Masacre at Park Bench*, a dialogue piece written and performed with Phil Austin of Firsigh Theater, Cassidy plays himself as a dirty, washed-up drunk sleeping under a newspaper. And on *When I'm a Rock 'n' Roll Star*, Cassidy satirizes the myths of rock stardom:

*Gonna drive 'em insane
They'll be humming my name
While I am rolling in fortune and fame
Talking obscene, in my black limousines
And my picture's on the cover of all those
teen magazines.*

Cassidy used his songwriting as a musical catharsis, but he still could not put all his demons to rest. By the third RCA album, released in November 1976, Cassidy's artistic well had run dry. He stopped recording, he stopped playing, and he retreated once again to reevaluate his life and his career.

His 1977 marriage to actress Kay Lenz, along with the thriving horse-breeding business he owned, gave him the impetus to come out of "retirement." In May 1978, he returned to television, playing an undercover narcotics officer in a two-hour "Police Story" episode called "A Chance to Live." The show drew big ratings and netted him an Emmy nomination for best dramatic actor, but his success was short-lived. The resulting series, "David Cassidy—Man Undercover," bombed in the ratings and was quickly canceled.

Despite his Emmy nomination, good acting roles dried up for him. Producers