

# David Cassidy Fills The Bill As A Teen-age Idol

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WASHINGTON—"Are the car doors locked?" the manager asked. They were.

"O.K., let's go," and they left for the theater.

Minutes later, the big black limousine with David slouching in the back arrived at the Merriweather Post Pavilion in Columbia, Md. and there—spilling out on the entrance road, overflowing the guard rails and metal barricades, was the David Cassidy Fan-atic Club—hundreds of shiny Brownies, eager Girl Scouts, budding Miss America contestants—all waiting for their first glimpse.

They were reaching out to stop the car, straining to see inside, waving, taking pictures, screaming, crying, pressing against the windows.

"It's David, it's David," they squealed. "He's here!"

Meanwhile, David the superstar, totally cool and utterly together in blue jeans and red shirt, waved nonchalantly, then worked his shoulders even lower into the plush upholstery.

A year ago David Cassidy was a 20-year-old teenie-star with guest appearances on "Marcus Welby" and "Bonanza."

Today David, his baby-blue eyes, and his throbbing delivery are part of the folklore. He has the lead role in "The Partridge Family" series.

The Partridges are a jolly, singing ensemble—a sort of rock-and-rolling, Southern California, Trapp Family.

His concerts have been sell-outs, sometimes within a day and a half after the tickets go on sale. "I Think I Love You," the first single from the television show, sold over five million copies, topping charts in England, Australia and Japan as well as in the U.S.A.

The other records have sold more than a million each and are still going strong. Three concerts one weekend produced a gross of about \$115,000.

David fanatics are more in the permanent press league than the funky denim-bottomed Lolitas you find at Rolling Stones or James Taylor concerts. They're braless, some of them, but that's because they're only 6 years old. They get hysterical, but you can be sure they don't rip their clothes off or smoke grass.

The Pavilion management, as in other theaters where David plays, hired extra matrons for the ladies rooms to take care of the girls who faint, and an extra contingent of guards—all nice fatherly men who won't beat up the kids when they try to rush the stage. These fans, perhaps because they're younger, are polite in their own frenzied way; they usually turn back when so directed. They may try again, but Altamont it's not.

Before he appears, the tension finally culminates in ritualistic chanting, "We want David, we want David."

When David finally streaks onstage in a blazing white ensemble, trailing fringe in his wake, all hell breaks loose. Popping flashbulbs, screams, banners waving, girls rushing down the aisles, jumping up and down, clapping, stamping, throwing things—it's a three ring explosion that sends replays of those scenes in "A Hard Day's Night" flashing through your mind.

All the songs sound the same and they all sell millions of copies. David introduces each number with a sort of mumbled commentary. No one knows what he's saying and he doesn't seem to know what he's saying, but it fills up the spaces and gives him a chance to catch his breath.

He strides across the stage when he's singing, giving each side of the house equal time. His style is gawky-young. It reminds you of your brother doing imitations in front of the mirror.

After 12 high-powered numbers and a few plugs for the latest album (they even scream at the commercials) he tears off the stage and into a getaway car that whisks him away

before the mob can get him. The limo remains as a decoy, and when it leaves, carrying the manager and whoever else is willing to risk his life, the crowds are ready and waiting to push up and get their last glimpse of Mr. Perfect. They're disappointed.

David Cassidy is a superstar and he's backed up by a well-oiled merchandising machine. The superstar sends the pre-pubescent masses out to squander their adulation. Then the machine takes over and churns out the records, posters, pictures, magazines, and stamps for the fan mail.

The machine knows how to ascertain the market, gear the product to it, choose the right material, book the concerts, polish the image. The organization knows how to set up a concert to let the most tension build just to the right micro-degree and then, at just the right, precisely-figured micro-moment David gets out there and does it.

It's hard for someone over 10 to figure out just what he does. Acting or singing talent seems irrelevant. A tune he can carry. His voice amplifies well. He works very hard.

He's very pretty. A little scrawny, maybe, but pretty. He has the touch of cherub that Elvis Presley and Paul McCartney have. His eyelids droop marvelously on cue.

It's hard to think of another pop star who's as well prepared for the job as David Cassidy. One can almost imagine the high school psychologist looking at his aptitude tests and saying, "David I think you should plan on a career as a teenage idol."

His father, Jack Cassidy, is a musical comedy and television star. His mother, Evelyn Ward, is not as well known but as an actress, singer and dancer has done everything from Broadway to a flashy, night club dance act. His stepmother is Shirley Jones, Academy-Award winning movie star and his co-star on "The Partridge Family."

He hasn't had to get his nose fixed, lose weight, change his name or lifestyle. The show business environment, the divorced parents, and the family friends with famous faces have prepared him well for the perils of stardom.

The kid is always under control. He knows what he's doing, why and that it won't last forever.

"This is a lot of fun—for now," he tells you. "Of course I don't plan to be 15-year-old Keith Partridge forever. The transitions I'll have to make to do the things I want to do—like make a good film—will probably blow some minds. Sometimes I wish this were all over, but I know it will be some day. And I wouldn't do it if I didn't enjoy it."

Being a big star is hard work. The routine of taping the Partridge Family during the day, recording and rehearsing at night and playing concerts on the weekends is kind of a musical decathlon. On one weekend he did three concerts wearing a surgical belt to hold in the stitches from a recent gall bladder operation.

"No, my mind has not been blown by what's happened this year," David continued in the 20 minutes of sincerity he allocated to the interviewer. "I can handle it. Sure I wish that I had more privacy and more time away from this star routine, but that will come." I asked a four-year-old girl why she loved David. She answered, "Because he makes me so anxious."