

Spotlight Hits David Cassidy As Teen Idol of Seventies

By DON LECHMAN
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LOS ANGELES — "I just wanted to thank you from the bottom of my heart for printing the letter I wrote to David . . . I wanted others to see how truly wonderful he is. The day after I read it, I received a letter addressed to me in a handwriting that was very familiar. I was afraid to open it, but finally I did. It was a personal letter from David and I cried and cried. It was so beautiful it makes me sad to think that all I can say in return is thank you, again, David. I love you."

"Jenny
"Tiger Beat
"August, 1971"

The young girl crept slowly down the stairs of the Sea Arena at Marineland. Her goal was only inches away.

Suddenly, a guard whipped around and motioned her to the rear. She made a face at him and started to back up the stairs.

He shook his head and a finger as if to say, "huh-uh. You can look, but don't touch."

Suddenly, the young man with the shoulder-length brown hair and the smoldering hazel eyes turned and flashed the "most beautiful smile this side of heaven."

Ecstasy.

David Bruce Cassidy, the reigning king of teeny-bopperdom, had arrived. It was enough to make your knees watery and the blood rush to your head.

Cassidy and other members of the ABC-TV series, "The Partridge Family," came down to Marineland to film an ecology segment.

David, son of actor Jack Cassidy and stepson of actress Shirley Jones, is the latest of a unique phenomenon:

The teen idol.

It was Frank Sinatra in the 1940s, Elvis Presley in the 1950s, Bobby Sherman in the 1960s and now David. The first two are firmly entrenched as the two musical superstars of the 20th Century. Only time will tell what will happen to the latter pair.

Young Cassidy, no teen-ager himself at 21, is the biggest thing to hit the preteen and early-teen set since Hula-Hoops.

Dozens of teen magazines (usually aimed at the 8 — to 16 — year-olds) sing his praises and carry his pictures. A recent edition revealed more than 70 photos of David.

Articles carry provocative but meaningless titles like "Come Home With David," "Are You a True Cassidy Lover?" "David's Love Test," "David's Hates and Loves" and "David's Dos and Don'ts."

Cassidy items like photo albums, love beads, charm bracelets and love stickers abound.

The singer-actor-musician receives more than 10,000 fan letters a week, most of them declaring their love and allegiance forever. One magazine even carried a series of

"death-threat" letters from a girl who claimed that if she didn't get David neither would anyone else.

David, the son of actor Jack Cassidy and actress Evelyn Ward, was born in New York City. After his parents were divorced, he moved with his mother to Los Angeles as a junior high school boy.

Not until he was graduated from high school in 1968 did he show any specific interest in theater. He appeared with local groups and went to Broadway to appear in a new musical, "The Big Leaves Are Falling."

It was a flop.

He returned to Hollywood to gain parts in episodes of "Ironside," "Bonanza," "Marcus Welby" and "The FBI."

The public was starting to notice him.

David Bruce Cassidy was ready. When he was signed to star as the oldest boy (16) in the singing Partridge Family, the teen magazines were hovering over him like vultures.

Bobby Sherman had almost run his course and a new idol was needed.

David Cassidy and magazine sales rocketed to the top together.

Today David, a slight 5 feet 8, is a teen star and lives in the Hollywood Hills.

What is David Cassidy really like?

In an interview, David didn't seem very happy about having to spend his break with a member of the press again. He swept back the long, brown hair which enshrines the delicate, fine-boned face. Even gross makeup failed to disguise the perfect, boyish features which have stopped millions of girlish hearts.

David, reported to be a quiet and

shy person, is obviously becoming an expert interviewee. Very warm and friendly, he is 21 but looks 16 and talks more like 30.

I asked him outright how it feels to be the heartthrob of millions.

"Unique," he answered bluntly. "I think it's an experience every American male should have. There's nothing like it."

"The timing was right for me. I was in a couple of shows and 'The Partridge Family' did the rest. The teen magazines were ready for me."

Cassidy admits that he is simply a dream figure.

"I'm just someone they think about but can never really touch. They can't imagine meeting me. It's almost like I'm not even real."

"It's scary sometimes," he shook his head.

David admitted that most of the stories produced by the magazines are concocted by vivid imaginations.

"Oh, I write a few things for them, but most of the stuff they steal from each other. I was interested in them at first, but I don't even look at them anymore."

Growing restless, David got up from the lounge and walked to the chair by the door, almost like he was signaling that the interview was over. But he sat down again, threw one leg over the arm of the chair and began to talk.

"Most of the girls are 14 and 15 so they'll grow out of it pretty quick. I expect I'm good for two or three years."

David thinks "The Partridge Family" will make it for seven or eight years on TV but doesn't believe he will stay around that long.