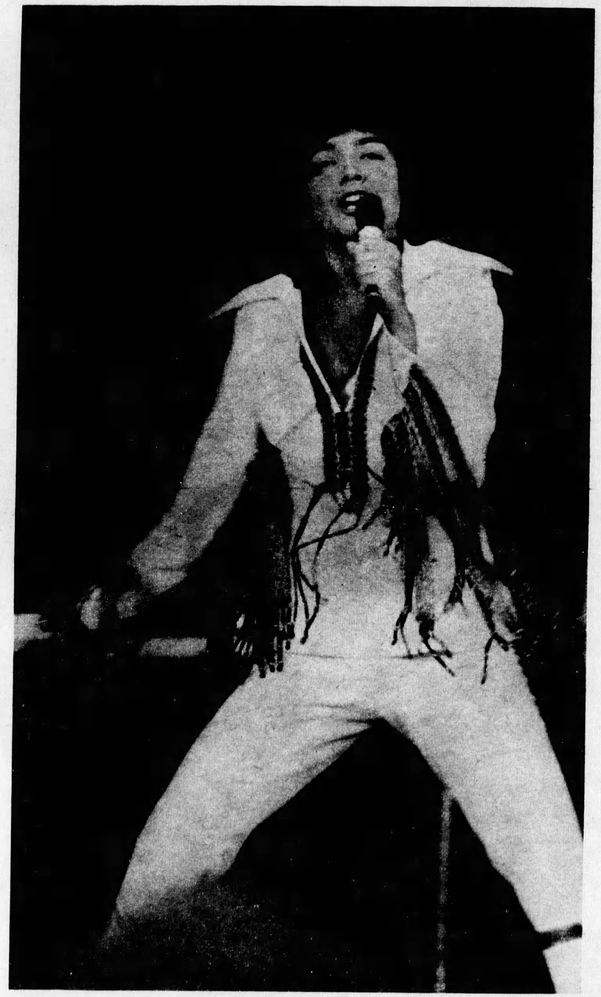
David Cassidy: Teenyboppers' Latest Delight

by Lloyd Shearer



Gyrating, singing David Cassidy performs before thousands of pre-teenagers in New York's Madison Square Garden. Every little movement in his skin-tight white jumpsuit was greeted with shrill screams added to multidecibel rock.

HOLLYWOOD.

Remember Rudy Vallee from the Stone Age? Remember Frank Sinatra from World War II? Remember Elvis Presley, Ricky Nelson, Bobby Rydell, and Frankie Avalon?

Remember the ear-shattering, heart-rending, near orgasmic wail-cries of "Rudy!, Bobby!, Frankie!, Elvis!, and Ricky"?

Add now to that list of bobby-soxer and teenybopper idols the name of David Cassidy, 22, singing star of a television program, *The Partridge Family*.

Cassidy, 5 feet 8, 130 pounds, choirboy face, long brown hair, hazel eyes, soft-spoken, sensitive, safe-looking and perceptive, is the latest in the line of singing sex substitutes who have thrill-throbbed the female adolescents of this country.

Because he is young and inflation is rampant, Cassidy will undoubtedly earn more from his performances than many of his famous musical predecessors.

Last year, for example, he grossed $1,061,000 working weekends during a six-month period. This year, two of his corporations, Daru and Ru-Da, will easily double that figure. Daru and Ru-Da are combinations of David's first name and the first name of his personal manager, Ruth Aarons.

Multiple items

It is not only Cassidy's recordings which are selling in the millions. Recordings comprise only the tip of his commercial iceberg. There are David Cassidy posters at $2 each, David Cassidy photo albums at $1 each, David Cassidy love kits, luv stickers, dresses, shirts, lunchboxes, coloring books. And don't laugh, David Cassidy bubble gum which will bring in an estimated $150,000 in royalties before the year is out.

David's is a typically American, inspiring, Horatio Algeric, chamber-of-commerce legend. Yesterday, a nobody, a sometime dropout, a struggling, depressed youngster. Today, through the accident of face and voice, founder of the Cassidy cult, and as such, an emperor of big business, a business shrewdly fanning the flames by constant publicity.

Month after month the fan magazines repeat the by now tired story of David's life and the titillating details of his new loves, mostly fictional and all platonic. One magazine has carried his photo on its cover for 24 consecutive months. "I went to the editor," Cassidy explains, "and begged him to stop it. But I soon found out it was hopeless. Once they latch on to a good thing, they ride it to the end."

He sells magazines

Fan magazine editors say that Cassidy is the hottest thing since Jackie Kennedy and that they intend to star him until he cools off. "Like it or not," explains one editor, "he sells magazines at a time when marketable show business faces are rare. We just hope he lasts."

At the moment, of course, Cassidy is tabbed the hottest attraction in show business. He sells out wherever he's booked — Bangor, Maine; Madison Square Garden in New York City. Dressed in white on stage to project his youthful purity, he is applauded and greeted by screaming teenyboppers from whom there is seemingly no escape.

"The last time I went to a movie," he recalls, "kids and their mothers were crawling over their seats trying to get at me. Last summer when we were shooting a *Partridge Family*, a horde of girls swooped down on me. I ran into the men's room. I wasn't safe even there. I tell you it's scary and it's frightening but I love those girls.

"I really do, and I think it's because I understand them. Many of them have reached that age, 14 or 15, where I've become their first love. They identify with me. I know it's all vicarious. But they don't. They fantasize a lot. They dream of me. They talk to me. They think of me. I'm part of their dream world. All kids have dream worlds. Boys want to grow up to be great athletes. Girls want to grow up and take good guys for good husbands.

"You ask me how I feel about the millions of little girls who would gladly tear me to pieces for a souvenir? I love them, because they're good and wholesome, and they regard me as safe and trustworthy. I can feel the spirit across the footlights. Those people out there, those kids who come to hear me sing—they love me. And I try to return their love. And maybe it sounds hokey and corny, but I feel it's genuine. Maybe when I get older and more sophisticated, I'll turn cynical. But right now I'm not. I'm a realist. I've been in show business for years.

"As you know I come from a show business family. I know about ups and downs. This is one of my up-periods. I think I'm taking it in stride despite all the pressures."

Pressures increase

What are the pressures which confront a young man who virtually overnight becomes a top teenage idol by appearing on a weekly TV series, recording two albums, and cutting two hit singles, "I Think I Love You" and "Doesn't Somebody Want To Be Wanted?"

First, comes the danger of taking himself too seriously, of going on an ego trip, of mistaking luck for talent, of succumbing to the swelled head.

To date, the virus of conceit has not infected young Cassidy. He remains likable, considerate, polite, seems to maintain an inner self-composure beneath an exterior of shyness.

Presley's pattern

"I think," he says, "I'm pretty level-headed. I expect success to change me but not to spoil me. I never dreamed this sort of thing would happen to me. Two years ago I was just another young actor trying to get a break, trying to improve his skill. Then I caught on. How long will this popularity last? I don't know.

"I expect that I may repeat the Presley pattern, not exactly like Elvis, but something similar. I'm going to peak, then I'm going to go down and level off. And then hopefully, I can regenerate myself and have people look at me not so much as an idol. Like I don't think they look at Elvis now as an idol. He's sort of built-in like he's a good performer, a good singer. And I think I'm as equally equipped as he is to withstand the pressures of this business.

"I still want to act, you know. That's how I started in playing dramatic parts on a lot of TV shows, *Marcus Welby, Mod Squad, The FBI*—but I know I'll never stop singing. Whether I end up selling records is another thing, but I know I'll still make out, still make singles, still make records. My voice has grown and matured over the last two years. It's a lot better now than it was. You know, I'm pleased with it. I think I sing fairly well."

David Cassidy was born into a show business family in New York City on April 12, 1950, and nurtured on celebrity and personal turbulence which often accompanies it. His parents, actor Jack Cassidy and actress-singer Evelyn Ward, were divorced when he was 5. His mother subsequently married and divorced a second husband, director Elliot Silverstein. His father married actress Shirley Jones who plays his mother in *The Partridge Family*.

Excited New York girls drown out all music as David Cassidy performs, but no one seems to care. Audiences such as this make him today's hottest performer.

David's father Jack Cassidy offered advice: "Don't be sorry you were in a flop; you'll never learn as much from a hit."

David's TV family: Shirley Jones, David's stepmother in real life, plays the mother of five children in "Partridge Family."

Like many children of Hollywood, Cassidy encountered school trouble. "I couldn't make the grade at a lot of public schools," he admits, "Emerson Junior High, Hamilton High, Uni High, but I finally did well at Rexford, a private school in Beverly Hills. I graduated and then took a semester at Los Angeles City College. But I left. I just didn't want to become anything at the time. Luckily I had a high draft number, 346, so there wasn't much danger of my being drafted."

In Broadway flop

After dropping out of Los Angeles City College, David worked with the Los Angeles Theatre Group, appeared in summer stock and won a costarring role in his first Broadway musical, *The Fig Leaves Are Falling*. It bombed in less than a week which prompted his father to tell him, "Don't be too sorry you were in a flop; you'll never learn as much from a hit."

David never traded on his family name. When he tried out for *The Partridge Family*, the producers weren't aware of his show business parentage. They didn't even ask him to sing. They bought his looks, best described by his press agent Jim Flood as "representing a positive sexual quality, a youthful, clean-cut appeal which is neither physically nor emotionally threatening to young girls."

The "Cassidy Look" is frankly androgynous. It combines the appeal of an innocent boy with the prettiness of a young girl. David's TV stand-in significantly enough is a 23-year-old girl named Jan Freeman.

At age 22 it is unlikely that David will outgrow his "Look" for some time. What then lies in store for him; a lengthy career as a teenybopper idol?

The show biz experts estimate that the success span of a contemporary teen heartthrob ranges from two to three years unless his image is reinforced by periodic motion picture exposure.

Without feature films, David Cassidy's time on top is limited, which is probably why he's making it while he can—not only in his concert appearances but in bubble gum, TV residuals, and of course, in David Cassidy love kits which consist of photos and the story of David's life—price, one dollar.