



BEHIND THE STAR—Larry Utall, president of Bell Records, is the man credited with David Cassidy's success story. Here they are together admiring one of David's gold singles.

CANCELS BOWL DATE

David Cassidy Proves Hit Everywhere Except At Home

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NEW YORK — While young girls throughout the world bestow David Cassidy with adoration and standing-room-only crowds, he's never quite established himself as a home-town favorite in Los Angeles. It's a situation that not only proves irksome to the 23-year-old idol of teenybopperdom, but it was the reason behind his decision to cancel his August 4 date at the Hollywood Bowl.

"The early ticket returns indicated that David was not going to have anywhere near a sellout crowd, and, rather than wait, he and his manager Ruth Aarons wisely opted to back away," explained Larry Utall, president of Bell Records and the man accredited with sowing the seeds of David's success.

When Utall first met David at a press screening heralding the birth of the Partridge Family, he recalls that David was something special.

"I knew this kid had something. There's no name for it and I'm tired of the word 'charisma.' I just knew this kid had it. And what we did was flaunt it," Utall said.

David's climb to fame followed Utall's own success. The bearded, kindly record company

president, who commutes between offices in London, New York and Los Angeles, started out in life like former President Harry Truman, as a haberdasher. His heart was never in his shop on 14th Street here. It was on Tin Pan Alley, an imaginary thoroughfare traveled by budding songwriters.

Utall sold shirts by day and wrote tunes by night and one day, 17 years ago, at the age of 32, with a wife and two children to support, he decided to go into the music business.

"I just hated the retail business. I had two alarms to wake me up. I just wanted to pound the piano and write music. I used to drag myself down to the shop and then use my lunch hour to try to peddle my songs."

When he finally sold the business he had to borrow money, besides, to buy a small public company, despite warnings of well-intentioned friends that he should stay out of the music field.

Eked Out Living

"Thea Zavin, the vice-president of B.M.I. (Broadcast Music Inc.) was one who attempted to discourage me," Utall said. "Later on, it was she who found the Monument Music company for me."

"For a while I eked out a living and was beginning to think my friends were right when I hit upon the idea of making masters and selling these to record companies. It had never been done before. It caught on. We had three hits and then went out of business. We overextended ourselves."

Utall was back peddling songs again, but this time they were for other writers, which proved more successful than selling his own. He began visiting record companies and trying to interest them in recording songs which his company published.

One of the small concerns he visited was a company called Amy-Mola-Bell. It had been a loser and since they had nothing more to lose they offered Utall a percentage to join them. His math teacher had told him, he remembered, that 50 per cent of nothing was the same as 100 per cent of nothing.

Within two months the company had its first hit, "Midnight Mary," which made the top 10.

Sells For Millions

Seven years later Utall sold the company to Columbia Pictures for \$3.5 million and a contract besides to run the company autonomously. At that time Bell had Dell Shannon, Mitch Ryder, the Toys, and Box Tops under contract.

In the interim Utall has increased the business more than five times and has brought The Fifth Dimensions, Dawn, the Partridge Family and David Cassidy, Mountain, and Michel Legrand under the aegis of Bell Records, now a division of Columbia.

"It's hard for me to realize that I ended up with the biggest stars in the field. Last Christmas Bell had singles in first, second, and fourth place on the Top 30 chart. We had Dawn's 'Knock Three Times,' the Partridge Family's 'Doesn't Somebody Want to Be Wanted,' and the Fifth Dimension's 'One Less Bell.'"

After becoming affiliated with Columbia, Utall was pressed into service as a musical coordinator for the Partridge Family Show, a Screen Gems Production which made it an affiliate of Columbia.

Farrell Chosen

Utall chose Wes Farrell, well known in record circles, to produce the music for Partridge Family show as well as the record.

"Wes and I knew that Shirley (Shirley Jones, David's stepmother) could sing, but David was an unknown quantity. We were prepared to dub his voice if we had to."

"Essentially, after he had the part, he auditioned for us. He cut a tape and it was a smash. I knew this kid couldn't miss. Then when I saw him at the press screening, I knew it for sure. He had everything."

David's intentions, Utall said, are to retain his present following but to try to capture a more mature audience at the same time.