

YOUNG WORLD

David Slows Down at Home

By BARBARA LEWIS
Pop Scene Editor

NEW YORK (PSS) — While young girls throughout the world bestow David Cassidy with adoration and standing-room-only crowds, he's never quite established himself as a hometown 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 credited 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.

Started as Haberdasher

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



Teeny-bopper idol David Cassidy displays one of his gold (million-selling) albums to Larry Utall, president of Bell Records and the man credited with Cassidy's success.

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.

"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. 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.

Multiplied By 5

In the interim Utall has increased the business more than five times and has brought The Fifth Dimension, 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.

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

"Wes and I knew that Shirley (Shirley Jones, David's step-mother) 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."

Which brings us up to the present David Cassidy, a reigning monarch appreciative of his following, but fearful of its fickleness. He knows his ardent army of devoted fans defected from Bobby Sherman to him and there are now dozens of "David Cassidy" types in the wings, waiting to snatch his mantle. David's intentions, Utall said, are to retain his present following but to try to capture a more mature audience at the same time.

It was with this in mind, Bell's president said, that David agreed to pose for a centerfold-type photo for Rolling Stone in hopes of attracting older magazine readers.

Utall was not ecstatic about the picture, but he is, nonetheless, 100 per cent behind David.

"David is a star and he has aspirations to expand his vistas and do more in other fields. He's impatient for his present audiences to mature and he just let out his frustrations in the Rolling Stone piece."

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Coming: Black Sabbath headlines a bill with Black Oak Arkansas and Gentle Giant at Nashville's Municipal Auditorium on Friday, Aug. 25th at 7:00 p.m. Tickets are on sale now at the Municipal Auditorium Box Office.