

The Saga of Teen Idol Ca\$\$idy

By DAVID LAMB

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ALBUQUERQUE, N.M.—They came at him as if on cue, the flashbulbs on their instamatic cameras popping furiously, thousands of girls intent on nothing less than mauling, maiming or at least touching David Cassidy.

Their pounding feet echoed through Albuquerque's tin-roofed coliseum and they reached the stage just moments behind three husky cops, who scooped up the 125-pound Cassidy, rushed him to a nearby limousine, waiting with doors open and motor running, and flung him headfirst into the back seat.

The driver stepped hard on the accelerator and the black Cadillac sped into the night, leaving behind a throng of girls who clutched \$2 David Cassidy posters, \$1 David Cassidy photo albums and \$1 David Cassidy love kits, who chewed Partridge Family bubble gum and wore David Cassidy dresses, David Cassidy blouses and David Cassidy shirts, a few who even carried David Cassidy coloring books and David Cassidy lunch boxes covered with David Cassidy "Luv" stickers ("include 25 cents extra for rush handling").

Nickel and dime stuff? Not at all. The marketing of a teen-age idol has come a long way since the days of Rickie Nelson, Frankie Avalon and Fabian. It's strictly big business, shrewdly promoted and skillfully merchandised.

Consider, for example, 21-year-old Cassidy—also known as Daru Enterprises, Inc.—who plays Keith Partridge, 16, on ABC-TV's Partridge family series. And consider the spending power of his pre-teen audience, an audience considerably younger, wealthier and more exploited than that which swooned over, say, Bobby Rydell, a decade ago.

In a single day recently, the four Partridge Family record albums on the market sold a combined total of 200,000 copies. (A store can buy a record for \$2.25 and sell it for \$4.98 with the performer getting from 1 per cent to 9 per cent and the producer from 1 per cent to 4 per cent.)

Screen Gems, the television subsidiary of Columbia Pictures

which owns the Partridge Family, has earned over \$100,000 from bubblegum royalties this year "and we'll quietly make a fortune on a new line of Partridge Family dresses," a top executive said.

Cassidy, who draws a weekly allowance of \$150 from his business manager, Lee Buch, but stands to earn over \$250,000 after expenses this year, recently grossed \$58,000 for one-night concerts in Amarillo, Tex., and Albuquerque.

As a result of Cassidy's popularity, six-figure deals are negotiated, people struggle to get close to him and related employment extends from New York's record promoters and fan magazine publishers to Hollywood, where Mikal Bales works nearly fulltime designing his show clothes.

So fierce does the competition become for a piece of the action that when Cassidy's contract expired with a talent agency 18 months ago, Ruth Aarons, president of Aarons Management, Inc., which represents Cassidy, tells of being offered \$125,000 "front" money, a sizable under-the-table bonus and a promise of hidden interests in future deals, if she would sign with a certain new agency.

"The word spread like a virus that David's contract was available," she said. "People just started coming out of the woodwork."

In some ways, the most difficult promotion problems are over, for Cassidy, like Bobby Sherman, Donnie Osmond and a handful of other teenybopper stars, have long since made it. But why them? Are they the creation of a public relations genius like the late George Evans who paid "bobbysoxers" \$2 an afternoon to squeal over Frank Sinatra outside the Paramount Theater in New York 30 years ago?



DAVID CASSIDY

(CBS Photo)

"There's a look to what kind of face is marketable these days," said Cassidy's personal manager, Jim Flood. "With David, it's a positive sexual quality, a youthful, clean-cut look that is threatening neither physically nor emotionally to young girls."

Flood smiles remembering that when he first met Cassidy two years ago, Cassidy wanted no part of teenybopper fan magazine interviews. Flood had to remind him that teenyboppers don't read Newsweek or Esquire—but 3.5 million of them do devour a dozen teen fan magazines every month.

No one knows this better than

Chuck Laufer, a former high school English teacher who publishes Tiger Beat (monthly newsstand circulation 400,000), Fave (285,000) and the Partridge Family (300,000).

Laufer has an editorial staff of 30, including four photographers, and his top people are sent around the country to record every stubbed toe and love-sick heart at teenybopper concerts. They respond with about 15 David Cassidy stories a month and sentences that almost always end with an exclamation mark. ("David ordered a steak!")

In a business in which saturation is a key, Cassidy has been on the cover of 24 consecutive monthly issues of Tiger Beat. ("Is David Trapped by Love?", "Scoop: David's Hidden Secret!", "David Cries Out: They Won't Let Me Know You!") the Monkeys were on 29 straight covers and Sherman disappeared this month after making 36 straight.

In the spring, Miss Aarons and Flood will move Cassidy from the tank-town circuit to large auditoriums only in major cities. The hysteria over a young star seldom lasts much longer than two years, they say, and already they are casting about for a solid movie that will challenge Cassidy's acting ability and elevate him from the teenybopper level, a role some other performer and his agent always wait to fill.