

Cassidy Absorbs Teeny Love Wave

By LEO SELIGSOHN

NEW YORK (NNS) — If you don't believe in Peter Pan then you probably won't understand. But there's a wave of teeny love sweeping the nation today that threatens to replace passions once reserved for Barbie dolls, tap shoes and Daddy.

The object of all this mini-madness is a 5-foot-8, 130-pound child-man named David Cassidy who wears his hair down to his shoulders and sings such songs as "I Think I Love You" (5,000,000 records sold in the United States, England, Australia and Japan).

Cassidy's magic is the kind that gives the prepubescent set its first thoughts of playing hookey to get a glimpse of their idol and even maybe — dream of dreams — get his autograph.

Like Peter Pan, Cassidy made his first appearance about two years ago by flying in through a window — the electronic window that looks in on millions of American living rooms and dens.

One glance at guitar-strumming Cassidy acting and singing the part of 16-year-old Keith Partridge on the TV series "The Partridge Family" (described by one viewer as the story of a sort of rock 'n' rolling Southern California Trapp family) and it was zonk — the future mothers of America were transfixed.

SINCE THEN, with the help of savvy promoters and his own astute business sense, Cassidy has taken off like a sprite in windstorm. He has sold more than 16.5 million albums and single records during the past 16 months on the Bell label. None of the songs is anything like the one Maurice Chevalier made famous: "Thank Heaven for Little Girls" But Cassidy might well be singing those lyrics to himself. Without little girls, he would not have

made an estimated \$250,000 last year.

Besides his income from TV and recordings, Cassidy also derives a substantial income for concert tours which fill stadiums with ecstatic "Sesame Street" graduates. At the Merriweather Post Pavilion in Washington, D.C., last year, the management hired extra matrons for the ladies rooms to take care of the girls who fainted.

The son of actor Jack Cassidy and stepson of Shirley Jones, who plays his mother on "The Partridge Family," young Cassidy is modest but assured as he talks about his career.

Does he think he has arrived? "Oh yes, definitely," he says. But there's a faint note of anxiety in his voice and you know why.

It's apparent on his chin, where the stubble of a beard betrays the fact that he can't remain Peter Pan forever. Now 21, his child-man days are numbered. Maybe that is why he is in such a rush to make the most of them.

WITHIN a 24-hour period recently, after he flew into New York from Europe (where he had been touring Italy, France and Switzerland in a camper bus — skiing and thinking, he says), Cassidy met with record company executives, talked with representatives of the music-industry magazine, Cashbox, sat down for a few interviews and talked to Madison Square Garden officials about his upcoming show there. The whirlwind visit ended with Cassidy and his personal manager, James Flood, placing some luggage and Cassidy's guitar in the trunk of a chauffeur-driven limousine and hurtling through rush-hour traffic to make a 6 p.m. flight out of Kennedy Airport for Los Angeles.

Once in the air, Cassidy

may have had a restful flight but it wouldn't have been surprising if the captain, copilot and navigator had taken turns stepping out of the cockpit to get his autograph for their daughters, nieces and perhaps even the granddaughters of the airline president. That's the kind of thing that happened at CBS studios in Manhattan earlier in the day after Cassidy had taped an interview for the "Mike Wallace-at-Large" radio show.

The sophisticated world of electronic journalism turned to jelly as soon as the business at hand was completed, the producer and a half-dozen production assistants crowding around for autographs.

"This for my daughter, please." "This one for my boss' niece, thank you." "This one for . . ." The cozy informality was in stark contrast to the austere and strange technology that had prevailed moments before, with Wallace actually in Moscow working on a "60 Minutes" show. The "At Large" producer filled in, asking Cassidy all the questions, though they had been pretaped by Wallace and will be spliced-in later for airing around the United States.

As Cassidy churned out the autographs — "All my love to Kelly, David Cassidy," "Happy Birthday, Missy, David Cassidy," "Love to Cheryl, David Cassidy" — the young idol was simply making another contribution to the David Cassidy industry, one that rolls out records, posters, pictures, magazines and answers fan mail that Cassidy estimates ranges from 10,000 to 15,000 letters a week.

IN THE LIMOUSINE, heading for the airport, Cassidy had time to mull his meteoric rise in a treacherous firmament where other stars have been known to burn out as fast

as a Fourth of July skyrocket. The actuarial tables of most promoters, in fact, show that the professional lifespan of most bubble-gum-set idols is about two years. And for Cassidy, the two years are about up. So, you ask him about it.

"Two-year span?" he says. "I don't believe that's true. I'm not even at my peak yet and I've been around that long already. Bobby Sherman is an example that there's no age limit.

"Hes very old now, in his upper 20s. Of course, a lot of people never took him seriously and he never reached really big success. I've always had a pretty level head, so naturally I don't expect this to go on forever. But hopefully, by the time it does start to die, I'll want it to."

The big Cadillac is fighting its way through Long Island Expressway traffic now and Cassidy is expressing his views before a small audience — his manager, the chauffeur, myself and my daughter, Susan, due to become 8 years old six days before Cassidy's Garden debut. Sitting next to her idol, she savors the thrill of her short lifetime with a look of mesmerized shyness. But Cassidy's words are not those of Keith Partridge now nor those of Mr. American Boy singing "I Think I Love You" or his latest hit, "Could It Be Forever?"

CASSIDY takes a moment out to ask that the radio be tuned to WABC to see if they're playing his latest record. It never comes on. Susan, who is now passing slips of paper to Cassidy to fill autograph requests from friends at school, decides to pose a question that has been bothering her ever since she sent a fan letter to the star and never got an answer.

"Don't you answer all your letters?" she asks. The star is sympathetic. "I can answer only about 15 or 20 a week. My fan club in Los Angeles has to answer the rest. You have to write to them" he says, smiling.

"How did you get to be a star?" Susan asks.

"I started at the bottom, looking for a job. I tried out for 'The Partridge Family' and got the job," Cassidy says simply.

He makes getting to the top sound far less complex than staying there. "When I look ahead I see a lot of fog, a lot of haze," he says. "I look forward to some kind of transition, though. I have desires to write and produce and maybe make a good film. But not anything Disneyish. That's what I'm into now. And I don't care to do another show like 'Partridge Family.'"

In the meantime, Cassidy is bent on giving his fans what they want while pushing the age-range of his admirers upward. "A lot of my records now are aimed at an older age group. I figure my fans to be 7 to 17," he says.

"I certainly don't see myself as another Frankie Avalon or Fabian, though. They were manufactured. They couldn't sing. I went out and worked. Kids wrote in and said, 'Let's see more of him.' And they bought my records."

SOUNDS SIMPLE, but in a world full of sweet-faced guitar-strummers, why David Cassidy? Flood, his manager, puts it this way: "There's a look to what kind of face is marketable these days. With David, it's a positive sexual quality — a youthful, clean-cut look that is threatening neither physically nor emotionally to young girls."

It was minutes before take-off as the limousine pulled up the terminal and Cassidy, again displaying a knack for winning against bid odds, miraculously had enough time gage and guitar came out of to make his plane. The lug-the trunk and it was a quick "goodbye" before Peter Pan left to fly away.

His small, lone fan stood watching. "He was very nice," Susan said.

And then, expressing the slight disbelief that comes with discovering that a God has turned out to be, after all, just another human being, she said. "You know, I think he had a pimple on his chin."