

THE DAVID CASSIDY PHENOMENON

By ANGELA TAYLOR

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NEW YORK — They came tripping over their long, peasant skirts worn under bunny-rabbit coats. Their little-girl legs were goose-bumpy from the cold, exposed by their hot pants. Blue jeans ended in platform soles — a sign that you were over 12 and shopped for your own shoes. Even the guards at Madison Square Garden shook their heads and said they'd never seen the like.

Then the lights went out and flashing strobes turned the braces on their teeth to jewels as they joined in a 20,000-voice screech of "David, David!" that shook the rafters of Madison Square Garden on Saturday afternoon with a din that was a distillation of all Excedrin headaches.

SINCE MOST OF the fans were too young to ride the subways alone, they were accompanied by long-suffering grownups who had been pestered into shelling out \$5.50 to \$7.50 for tickets, plus souvenir programs and posters at \$2 each and banners reading "I love you David" at \$1 more.

Parents covered their ears as screech followed squeal and wondered over the phenomenon that is singer David Cassidy, star of "The Partridge Family" television series. The son of Jack Cassidy, the actor, and stepson of Shirley Jones (she plays his television mother), will be 22 next month, double the age of his average fan.

Sure, the mothers had swooned over Frank Sinatra in the 1940s and their elder offspring had mobbed Elvis and, later, the Beatles. However, they'd been 14 or more. But a second-grader yelling "I don't care if he's old. He's beautiful. Give him to me!" is startling even in this age of precocious, television-watching children.

"SHE HAS POSTERS of him all over her room and kisses them every night," said Mrs. Donald

Koenigsberg of her 7-year-old Karen, who blushed to the roots of her blonde hair and flashed a gap-toothed grin. Mr. and Mrs. Koenigsberg had also brought Jeffrey, 11, and had spent \$30 for tickets, plus \$8 more for programs and posters. Their 13-year-old daughter had refused to go — "She says she's too old for such childish nonsense."

David Cassidy's press agents protest that the slightly-built, shaggy-haired and green-eyed singer, whose appeal is frequently described as androgynous, is not just a teeny-bopper idol. ("The pre-sex crowd," an older girl describes his fans.) And indeed there was a goodly scattering of older youngsters among the kid sisters in the crowd.

But many of the girls who have attained true teen-agedom play it cool and insist he's strictly for the kids. Possibly the ladies protest too much.

"Just about everybody in my class thinks he's gross. He's for those younger kids who read dopey fan magazines," said one 13-year-old who attends the Fleming School here. Nevertheless, she turned up in the \$7.50 seats along with 10 of her classmates. "We came just because it was something to do on Saturday."

"WHEN YOU'RE 13 and have had a real date, you don't go in for crushes anymore," said another girl.

"It's the thing to say you can't stand him," confided Susanah Barton, a few weeks short of her 13th birthday. "People say that and then you go to their house and they have his picture and his records all over the place."

"I don't care what anybody thinks," said Jane McDonald, 19, a nursing student. "I stood in line and bought a ticket the first day they went on sale."

Miss McDonald kept a reasonable hold on her emotions, but Diane Good and Marci White, both 14, declared they might faint. They blushed, wept and squeezed each other's hands at the idea that they might get an autograph.

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