

David Cassidy: The world's his apple now

By Leo Seligsohn

NEW YORK — 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 five-foot, eight-inch, 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 US, 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 a windstorm.

He has pulled sellout crowds in concerts all over the country, including a screeching 20,000 at Madison Sq. Garden two weeks ago. And his next major stop is Boston, where he will perform at the Music Hall this Saturday at 2 and 7 p.m.

He has sold more than 16,500,000 albums and single records during the past 16 months on the Bell record 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.

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



David Cassidy

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's why he's 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 Sq. Garden officials about the 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, co-pilot and navigator had taken turns stepping out of the cockpit to get his autograph for their daughters, nieces and perhaps even the granddaughter of the airline president.

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. He's 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. Susan, 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.

Now, the poker face again as David Cassidy, businessman, assesses David Cassidy, hot property — the anomaly sitting there in buckskin trousers, white sweater-shirt, furry after-ski boots and blue maxicoat. Behind his perfect baby face, you detect the mind of a croupier at Monte Carlo.

"It all boils down to selling tickets. That's why I'm playing at the Garden and not Copacabana. Will I fill the Garden? Sure, I will. I know it sounds a bit tacky to say that, but I'm sure I will. We should be sold out before the opening . . . It's all very carefully laid out. We take into consideration the promoter and what he's done; compare one arena to another, consider the time of year . . ."

"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.

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." A record-industry spokesman is even more explicit: "His charisma is

that he is unisex. His fans don't want to date a real boy. If he were virile, these Teenies and Littlees couldn't relate."

And what does Cassidy think about all those little people who find him so unisex? "I don't get up in the morning, look in the mirror and say, 'Hi there, star.' I can only say that I try to be a real person to my fans."

It was minutes before takeoff as the limousine pulled up to the terminal and Cassidy, again displaying a knack for winning against big odds miraculously had enough time to make his

plane. The luggage and guitar came out of 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."

(c) 1972 Newsday