

DAVID CASSIDY

The pre-teens 'Peter Pan'

By LEO SELIGSOHN
Newsday

If you don't believe in Peter Pan, then you probably won't understand. But there's 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 U.S., 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 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.

Nobody's predicting what may happen on March 11 when Cassidy makes his New York debut at Madison Square Garden, but the medical office there, which has had experience treating girls overcome with emotion, is ready.

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's why he's in such a rush to make the most of them.

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



Is David Cassidy's song "Thank Heaven for Little Girls"?
... the idol of teenyboppers earned about \$250,000 last year

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."

Cassidy is expressing his views before a very 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 turned to WABC to see if they're playing his latest record. But 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.

"Do you answer all your letters?" she asks. The star is sympathetic. "I can answer only about 156 or 200 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 a desire 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 the 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." 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 kiddies couldn't relate."