

Last fling of a teenage idol

by MICHAEL WALE (who accompanied David Cassidy on his current tour)

DAVID CASSIDY, that musical epitome merchandising dream machine, arrived secretly in London last week in readiness to play six concerts in three days at Wembley's Empire Pool, starting last Friday night.

He is undoubtedly playing out the last eight months of his weenybop idolatry: a particular section of the pop market strictly governed by the age and youthful image of the particular idol.

Cassidy is nearing 23, although he plays the part of an 18-year-old in the American TV series "The Partridge Family," and, indeed, with the help of heavily applied make-up and feline movements on

stage he still can look his mythical age.

He is, therefore, the answer to a lot of little girls' dreams, and the bolsterer of a lot of businessmen's expense accounts.

A hero

In Britain we rely more on the raw material being good, as in the case of The Beatles and the majority of our other successful groups, but in America myths are created. In the past there were The Monkees, who when they came together could not play a note of music. They were picked for their looks. The hits followed built by a TV series.

Cassidy was a teenage TV bit-part actor, who had also appeared in a Broadway

flop, when he auditioned for the pilot show of "The Partridge Family" just over three years ago. When the show got the go-ahead it was David the fan magazines latched onto as the natural successor to a previous American hero Bobby Sherman.

The advantage that Cassidy had, was that he could sing, and soon it was realised that he was a bigger property than "The Partridge Family" itself.

A whole industry grew up around him, an operation aimed totally at little girls from the age of 10 to about 18 (although that might be debatable — 18 can be very old in weenybop terms). Cassidy himself told me last week that on his first two records his voice was electronically made to sound higher than it was, so that he would seem

younger than he was. "But I soon stopped that."

Indeed, the interesting thing about the Cassidy phenomenon is a continuing sand-in-the-oyster feeling between man and management. Last summer he rid himself of his American public relations man Jim Flood. More recently he has discarded that highly important ingredient of the 70s, his record producer. And behind the scenes his current tour has been strangely paradoxical.

Mutinied

He has been touring Europe in a Caravelle, hired by Bell Records, with a party of about 30 including his band and their ladies. Indeed some of the scenes I witnessed were more like that fine old movie "Orches-

tra Wives," as in Madrid when the band and their wives, having been informed we all had to stay in Spain an extra 24 hours, almost mutinied, talked about cholera and malaria shots, and demanded to be flown to Germany in the belief that Spain was a health hazard more like Mexico than anywhere else on earth.

Oddly the woman behind him, Ruth Aarons, was missing from the Continental part of his first and maybe his last European tour. Her place was taken by a 22-year-old girl who, perhaps appropriately, had last worked for a Los Angeles psychiatrist.

Yet she had never been on a pop tour before. There were as well two American law students, presumably working their way through college.

It is a cocoon of neurosis which no doubt is responsible, among other factors, for bringing Mr. Cassidy out in a rash of now famous spots.

Purity

What he represents to little girls is purity, the old-fashioned shining knight in if not shining armour, shimmering figure-hugging outfits. His six London concerts are aimed at satisfying at least 60,000 of these fans.

The result is an incredible business explosion in areas like magazine publishing aimed purely at this market, souvenirs with things like flags with Cassidy's face on them, posters, teeshirts, even special David Cassidy heart-embossed official fan newspaper.



David Cassidy
... "He is a bit over-paranoid about going out."