

## Fallen idol tries different tack

# Presenting the new, improved David Cassidy

By Jerry Parker  
Times-Post News Service

NEW YORK — In the early 1970s, millions of girls put away their Barbie dolls and took up David Cassidy.

They watched him on television's *The Partridge Family*, bought his records, attended his concerts, read David Cassidy comic books, chewed David Cassidy bubble gum, put David Cassidy posters on their bedroom walls and took sandwiches to school in David Cassidy lunch boxes.

Thanks largely to his sometimes hysterical following, David Cassidy, when 21, was earning more money in a night than most people make in years.

He sold 5.5 million copies of his biggest single, *I Think I Love You*. One afternoon he drew 112,000 fans to a Houston show.

His career brought him a Corvette, a mansion in Encino, Calif., and an income of more than \$250,000 a year.

Of course, he hated it. A year-and-a-half ago, he decided he couldn't stand it another minute.

"I walked away from it," he said. "I stopped touring, stopped doing concerts, stopped doing the merchandising. Stopped doing the television show, stopped doing interviews, stopped recording.

"What I really stopped doing," he says, "was feeding a machine that was creating an image that was manufactured, fabricated, false."

He is a mellower 25 years old now, and although he says he is rich enough to retire, he has recently emerged from self-imposed oblivion to resume his musical career.

RCA has just released his album, the first that Cassidy has made in two years, and he has embarked on an international tour to plug it.

As he sprawled in a corner of his suite at the Plaza Hotel the other day, Cassidy's choirboy looks seemed to have taken on a touch more strength, a little maturity; but he retains his essential delicate prettiness.

He looked very much the kid mogul, with his white Keds propped up on the coffee table and his dark glasses firmly in place as he talked business into a telephone cradled against his cheek.

Cassidy has occupied himself with a number of things since he dropped from public view. There are the horses that he keeps on a ranch two-and-a-half hours out of Los Angeles, his new house in Hawaii, his music, and, he says, "a couple of nervous breakdowns."

Defining his terms, he says that, no, he was not hospitalized for emotional problems and never sank



— AP photos

The new David Cassidy (left) says he's shed the gimmickry of David Cassidy

into an alcoholic or drug-induced quagmire. He did seek psychotherapy and he did, he swears, take to his bedroom and refuse to come out for three months.

"I took a long time re-evaluating what I wanted to do as an artist," he says. "I took a long time reassessing my relationship with friends I had lost because of devoting so much time to a career that was . . . fabricated."

Although he once told a reporter, "listen, if they're going to buy lunch boxes, they might as well buy David Cassidy lunch boxes," he came to hate the thought of himself as a commodity being peddled to children.

Cassidy and his friend Bruce Johnston co-produced the new album and wrote several of its songs. Called *The Higher They Climb (the Harder They Fall)*, the record is a tongue-in-cheek chronicle of the rise and fall of a teen idol.

The most obvious trait about the new David Cassidy is his intense bad-mouthing of the old David Cassidy.

What was so dreadful about being the idol of millions of juveniles?

"I took a part in a television series (*The Partridge Family*) when I was 19, playing a 16-year-old," he said. "I finished at 23, playing a 17-year-old. That's the way television is, you don't grow up."

In the midst of it all, Cassidy rebelled via a cover story in *Rolling Stone*. The counter-culture publication photographed him in the nude, then further shattered the sweet *Partridge Family* image by reporting that he watched a *Partridge Family* episode while smoking pot and quoted a 24-year-old woman, with whom he'd had a casual, on-the-road affair, complimenting him on his sexual prowess.

"The network went berserk," Cassidy said with a mean grin. "The Kellogg's people almost didn't want me to do the Rice Krispies commercial. Unfortunately, it wasn't quite as effective as I wanted it to be."

The *Partridge Family* role was especially hard to take because the idealized picture of family life it portrayed is so foreign to his experience.

"I wasn't living at home in a family situation like that. My parents got divorced when I was 4 years old!"

Cassidy is the son of actor Jack Cassidy and actress Evelyn Ward.

"I'm incommunicado with my old man," he said. "I've never known him, and I never will. You can't miss something you never knew and I don't care to, quite candidly."

At 16, Cassidy was one of the thousands of dropouts who converged on San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury district. He was "experimenting" with various drugs — marijuana, amphetamines, LSD — but says he never became a "serious" user.

Mononucleosis took him back to his mother's Los Angeles house. He finished high school and came to New York to be an actor. He worked in the mail room of a garment-district textile firm and took acting lessons.

He got a part in a Broadway flop, *Fig Leaves Are Falling*, and when the show folded Cassidy returned to Los Angeles. Right away he landed several television spots.

A good part as a hemophiliac on a *Medical Center* episode sent letters pouring into the editorial offices of *Sixteen Magazine* — and that was six months before the premiere of *The Partridge Family* in the fall of 1970.

That's when the teeny-boopers began to build his pedestal, that's when the adoration began. But those days are gone now, and Cassidy can walk the streets of New York without being molested.

He says he prefers it that way and will measure the success of his new album — released last week — not in terms of units sold, but in media response and by "getting people to listen who wouldn't ordinarily listen to a David Cassidy album."