

Cassidy wants image change

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

They watched him on "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 their peanut butter sandwiches to school in David Cassidy lunch boxes.

Thanks largely to this sometimes hysterical prepubescent following, David Cassidy, at the age of 21, was earning more money in a single night than most people make in years. He sold 5.5 million copies of his biggest single, "I Think I Love You." One afternoon in Houston, he filled 56,000 seats in the astrodome twice.

His career brought him a Corvette, a mansion in Encino, Calif., and an income in excess of 250,000 a year. Of course, he hated it. A year and a half ago, he decided that he could not 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 though he says that he is rich enough not to have to work again, 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; though he still retains the essential delicate prettiness that young girls might envy as much as lust after.

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

A photographer was present, and Cassidy's dark glasses stayed in place as long as the shutter clicked. "I woke up late and my eyes are swollen," he said, adding that he had got 15 hours' sleep the previous night and none the night before. "And you didn't tell me I was supposed to have



my picture taken," he said, wagging a finger at his publicity woman. "Naughty, naughty, naughty."

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 into an alcoholic or drug-induced quagmire. He did seek psychotherapy and he did, he swears, take to his

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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. And he came to hate the music that he was singing to them.

"My record company didn't care about me as an artist," he said. "They didn't understand my saying, 'I don't want to record this anymore. It's all the same.' They said, 'you're making money, why not?'"

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 kind of tongue-in-cheek chronicle of the rise and fall of a teen idol.

"It's like putting a cover on the last five years of my life," Cassidy said. "I lived the personification of the American Dream. People no longer want to become movie stars," he said, scratching his nose with his thumb as he talked, as he does quite a lot. "People want to become rock and roll stars."

The seven gold record albums that he did for Bell Records notwithstanding, Cassidy calls his new effort "the first album I've made that's representative of me as an artist." RCA, in its publicity material, says it is the album that "finally allows Cassidy to emerge as the knowledgeable, mature musician his stalwart fans always knew him to be."

Well, maybe, but the most obvious trait about the new David Cassidy is the intensive bad-mouthing of the

old David Cassidy, the one to whom the stalwart fans were attracted in the first place.

What was so dreadful about being the idol of millions of juveniles? "I took a part in a television series ('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. They don't let you grow up.

"In the beginning it was sort of fun. I never thought it would be anything that would be taken seriously. I never thought people would look at me as that person on the television show."

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 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."