

IT'S LEGIT: David Cassidy, who unveils his "Little Johnny Jones" musical at Los Angeles' Dorothy Chandler Pavilion tonight, reports that he has been preparing for the legitimate romp "like I've been in training for a championship fight, and have never had as much fun in my entire career."

Cassidy's career got its boost into the big time when he was cast as the eldest of TV's "Partridge Family" clan in 1970. During the reign of that show his likeness became the stuff that sold coloring books, lunch pails, sheets, pillowcases, T-shirts. He was selling out concert halls around the country. His records were outselling Elvis Presley's.

By the time the "Partridge" bubble burst, Cassidy was more than ready for a lengthy recuperation from "the hysteria of it all." He took three years off, "and just didn't work at all." In 1978 he returned to star in the short-lived NBC series, "David Cassidy: Man Undercover."

But then things slowed down again, and "I got to the point where I was really frustrated about waiting for good television shows or a good film to come cross my desk. And six months ago, I went to New York to meet with my agents and I told them, 'Look, I want to do good work — wherever that takes place.'"

That trip paid off when he received the offer to star in the revival of the **George M. Cohan** musical, which — with any luck — will make its way from L.A. to national tour to Broadway in December.

That play was written in 1904, but Cassidy feels it couldn't be more fitting for audiences of the '80s. "I grew up in the '60s when it was not chic to be patriotic," says the 31-year-old actor-singer-dancer. "I think there's a whole generation of people who are rediscovering their patriotism."

And "Little Johnny Jones" will be touching this nation's newfound patriotic nerve.