

Rock On

David Cassidy is back for an encore

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Newspaper Enterprise Association

If those who forget history are condemned to repeat it, then the '70s must have just slipped everyone's mind. Because that decade is back with a vengeance, folks. If the Black Crowes and panne velvet weren't enough to convince you, check this out: David Cassidy is making a comeback.

Now, it's not really fair to blame the '70s on Cassidy, or even to blame "The Partridge Family" (he played Keith Partridge) on him. He was, after all, just a young actor looking for work when he got hired to personify insipid commercial pop for an entire generation.

But "I Think I Love You" (which topped the charts precisely 20 years ago) and its lightweight ilk was never the music Cassidy really wanted to play. What he wanted to play was the sensitive-singer-songwriter stuff he's putting on "David Cassidy," his new Enigma album.

"I'm not trying to do anything nostalgic here," says Cassidy, still teen-idol material at 40. "I'm trying to write songs that are current and not rely on my past — the best thing I can do about that is to forget it.

"Hey, I had a good time. It was fun. Creatively it was frustrating, but other than that ... 'The Partridge Family' was probably the last gasp of innocence on American television. And like Elvis used to say, '25 million people can't be wrong.'"

Despite moving millions of albums and selling out stadiums throughout the '70s, Cassidy essentially couldn't get arrested in the '80s. Rather than rest on his TV laurels ("I just didn't fancy myself doing guest shots on 'The Love Boat'"), he decided to go back to his roots as a singing actor (acting singer?) and work onstage and writing songs.

From the relative embarrassment of regional theater and summer stock, Cassidy worked his way back to Broadway and London's West End. There he teamed up with Sue Shifrin, the co-writer of his music and the lady of his life.

And now he's back not only with the LP, but with two films due for release shortly: "Spirit of '76" is the quintessential sendup of the '70s," he explains. "If you ever saw 'Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventure,' that will

give you an idea of the tone.

"And 'Instant Karma' is a satire of Hollywood. I play a ... self-righteous, hypocritical, raving (lunatic)."

All this after only doing one piece of acting (in an episode of "Alfred Hitchcock Presents") in the last decade. Partridge reunion offers were routinely made ... and routinely rebuffed.

"I never felt that the '80s weren't receptive to me," shrugs the re-emerging performer. "I just felt that the business wasn't very receptive to me."

Oddly enough, Cassidy's career got rolling once more after he made a spontaneous crank call to a Los Angeles radio DJ team who speculated aloud on the fate of Keith Partridge.

Now it's all but unstoppable. Coming up is a film project featuring all the dishy Cassidy brothers (David, Shaun, Patrick and Ryan). And, of course, a tour to promote the new disc.

"It's a little ambitious to think I'm going to go back out and pack stadiums," says the self-effacing, erstwhile superstar. "I would like to play 4,000- or 5,000-seat auditoriums — make a little money and feel like I do this for a living.

"But first the album has to take hold. Because an audience wants to hear things they're familiar with, and right now they're familiar with material that's 15 years old."