

THERE was a time when David Cassidy said he would never perform in public again. It was 1974. He had just completed a wildly successful world tour as the king of the teenyboppers, a spin-off from his gigs on the musical sitcom 'The Partridge Family'. He held a press conference to announce his retirement. He was 24.

"When I played Madison Square Garden, they (fans) turned over three limousines and destroyed six," he says. "I had to leave in the trunk of a Toyota, wrapped in a blanket."

He believed that once he left the limelight, things would get better. They didn't. They got worse; the death of his father, two failed marriages, career setbacks. But there he was now, in stretch leather pants, playing the opening chords to 'I Think I Love You'. The performance is part of an American comeback tour; the opening act by TV sibling Danny Bonaduce. "Good evening. Welcome to David Cassidy's First Annual Ex-Child Star Work Release Program."

The crowd embraced them both like long-lost pets. "I missed you," a woman cried to Cassidy. "Thanks," he said. "I missed you, too."

CASSIDY is 41 now. Still boyish. Still skinny (attributed to Slim-fast). Still long-haired, though it's highlighted with grey, and there are deep crow's feet creeping from his eyes.

He was the first superstar heartthrob for millions of post-boomers. Girls nine, 10, 12, 14 — oh, how they

Hundreds of women went to a bar outside New York recently to see their childhood sweetheart, their first love. **DANA THOMAS** reports.

loved him. They loved him as Keith, the archetypal big brother on 'The Partridge Family'. They never missed an episode, sang along to all the happy tunes — 'I Woke Up in Love This Morning', 'Doesn't Somebody Want To Be Wanted', 'Echo Valley 2-6809'.

Bedrooms were wall-papered with that seductive, skinny kid in hip-hugger jeans. The LPs are now safely stored in attics everywhere — the multi-platinum 'Partridge Family Album', the David Cassidy solo 'Cherish'.

LIKE every teen in 1964, when David Cassidy saw the Beatles on 'Ed Sullivan' his life was changed forever. "The next night," he says, "I went out with my mum (actress Evelyn Ward) and bought an electric guitar." He played in garage bands, jamming covers of Hendrix and Jeff Beck, and daydreamed of being a rock star.

A long, turbulent flight from the Partridge nest

He also dreamed of being an actor, just like his father, the debonair Jack Cassidy. By the time David was 17, he had some bit parts in 'Bonanza', 'Ironside' and 'Marcus Welby, MD'. It was about then that his stepmother, Shirley Jones, was cast as the lead in 'The Partridge Family', a new series based on the folksy singing family, the Cowsills.

The combination of his acting and singing abilities (and probably his relationship with Jones) made him a shoo-in for the role of Keith.

And so it began. Endless hours on the set, then endless promotional appearances. He became a mass-marketed product: lunch boxes, posters, pens, bubblegum cards. Fanzines fabricated his life; groupies invaded it.

"They would be showing up all the time," Jones says. "They would be kept at bay by the guards, but, of course, they'd be hanging outside the gate every time we came out from work. David, for the most part, had to slip away, hiding down in the bottom of the car, disguises and the whole thing."

"I had trouble at my house, because the world thought that David

lived there," she says. "I was the one who had the 3-o'clock-in-the-morning banging on the doors and the door bells ringing and the phones ringing and people camping

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out on the lawn! It was terrible. I had the police there more than once. I felt so sorry for these kids. They wanted to come and live with me. They wanted to be David's sister. Some wanted to marry David."

Then came the 1972 'Rolling Stone' interview, with the Annie Leibovitz photo of David naked —

cropped just below the pubic hairline. This was not the sweet bubblegum pop star the girls wanted to marry. David dropped acid. David slept with groupies. David was self-centred, sarcastic, disillusioned and exhausted. More than anything else, though, David was bitter.

"There'll be a time when this whole thing will be over," he told 'Rolling Stone'. "I won't do concerts anymore, I won't wake up in the morning feeling drained, and I won't be working a punch-card schedule ... I'll feel really good when it's over. I have an image of myself. I'm living on an island. The sky is blue, the sun is shining. And I'm smiling, I'm healthy, I'm a family man."

It didn't quite work out that way. There were still two more years of pandemonium, the climax coming in London, at his second last concert. A 14-year-old girl died; she had a bad heart and got "overly excited".

"The media turned it into a circus," Cassidy remembers. "I refused to indulge them. I spoke to her parents on the phone. Sent them

flowers. I didn't go to the funeral. It would have been a circus."

He ended it all soon after. "I felt like I'd worked five years, seven days a week, and been denied this person." He thumps his chest like Tarzan.

And that, it turns out, was the beginning of "the dark period". It lasted 15 years. The first blow was the death of Jack Cassidy, shortly after David's retirement. The two had not spoken in nine months.

"The world perceives him as this enchanting, funny, magical person. The stories. The Irish charm. The wit. The humor. He was also wound-

ed, desperately in need of acceptance and love," David says. "And he was a very selfish person ... for me, he was really not a great father. If he was in a good mood, it was great. If he was in a bad mood, just forget it. And for a kid, the one thing they need is consistency."

Jack Cassidy and Evelyn Ward divorced when David was a tot. He stayed with his mother in Los Angeles. Cassidy then married Shirley Jones, and they had David's half-brothers Shaun, Patrick and Ryan (who, David says, are his best friends). Jones admits that Cassidy was rarely there for David as a



Cassidy, now 41. At 24 (right), he played to 35,000 people at the MCG.



youth. That's when the tension began. It got worse when David became an actor and, subsequently, a superstar.

"My father was very proud and very jealous of me," he says. "Imagine being a consummate professional, someone who is really gifted — I mean *gifted* — and being in the shadow of your wife for 20 years, 15 years. And then 15 years later you're just about to crack it, your son becomes this *thing*."

"Now everybody walks up to you and says, 'Oh wow, you're David Cassidy's father. Oh, yeah, I know you. You're Shirley Jones's husband' ...

"My dad and I didn't talk about it. ... He was never big enough, and I was too immature to know that I had to be much bigger than him." This, says Cassidy, has been "part of my analysis of this last three-and-a-half years".

After his father died, he "went into a tailspin". He had two bad marriages. "One was just dead wrong," he says, "dead wrong. And my career ..." He sighs.

HE was burnt by television, did a little stage, and burnt again in his attempts to return to recording. In 1985, he cut an album for Arista records. The single made it to the top five. The album went Top 20 and gold. The company was bought out by RCA, and, says Cassidy, "they fired everybody in the office that day. The record went from Top 20 and gold to nowhere — in one week."

Then, about two years ago, an LA radio station played his demo tape. When he left the studio, there were about 100 fans in the parking lot. When he got back to his office, there were a stack of phone messages and three were from recording companies. He signed a deal with Enigma and recorded 'David Cassidy', his first American record in more than a decade.

"Just when my record was coming out, two weeks before, they fired all the regional sales people. They fired all the promotional guys. I'm sitting there with a record about to come out and I know it's going to fail. It can't be successful. They've

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got no money. They have no promotion. Who's going to get it on the radio? Who's going to make it happen? Who's going to get records in the stores?"

David Cassidy, that's who. He visited more than 150 radio stations across the country, hand-delivering his new album. He set up record store appearances and signed hundreds of album covers. His single, 'Lying to Myself', made the Top 20.

"In the end," he says, "I felt vindicated. I believed it was good and I believed there were people out there who really wanted to hear it. And I was right. I felt there was such amazing support and dedication. Commitment. People standing for hours, waiting at record signings. I promised them I would go out on tour."

Cassidy has a new wife, Sue Shifrin, who's also his songwriting partner. He has a new son, seven-month-old Beau, his first child. His concert dates are selling out. He's slated to co-star in a new television series next year with his three stepbrothers, stepmother Shirley Jones and her husband, comedian Marty Engels (the show is the creation of Shaun Cassidy, 33, also a former teen star and now a television writer).

David Cassidy plans to record an album next year. It will be another pop album, since, he says, "I'm a mainstream kind of guy". Then again, "I'd love to make an album singing great classic songs. If I could give you a cross between Tony Bennett, Ray Charles, Smokey Robinson — you know, those kind of soulful blues."

He'd like to play at the Winter Garden Theatre, across the street, and coach Little League baseball. Don't worry, though, he'll never become a fuddy-duddy.

"There's still a part of me that's 17 years old," he says with a look of genuine self-satisfaction. "When I pick up my guitar, I still want to rock 'n' roll."

— The Washington Post