

# David Cassidy offers insight into world of teen idols

By Mike Hughes  
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**"D**on't call me 'David (former teen idol) Cassidy,'" says David Cassidy, the former teen idol.

Yes, he knows the territory. Half a lifetime ago, he watched that inexplicable sea of ga-ga faces.

"Being an idol, standing as the focal point of 40,000 people, is a phenomenon," says Cassidy, 41.

His comments provide a brief, thoughtful core to an otherwise wild-eyed special. "Idols," tonight at 9 on the Fox network (KAME Channel 21 in northern Nevada), looks at the strange world of worshiped teens.

Here is what passes for a documentary in the hopped-up '90s. Images from the past and present whir by, usually fitting one of three categories. There are handsome and inarticulate male stars, gorgeous and perceptive female stars and blithering fans.

An exception to all of this is Cassidy, who gives the hour a tiny but notable core.

"When I heard the word 'idol,' I thought of all the pretty kids with no talent," he says in the hour. "I didn't want that . . . It scared the



David Cassidy

hell out of me."

Still, he admits, there was something tugging on the other side. "It feels real good and it's euphoric . . . The dilemma is, I knew I was a joke to a lot of people."

So Cassidy semi-submitted to his fate. He harvested the cheers, then dropped out for years.

There were plenty of others, before and after him. This special takes a blitzkrieg march, starting in the days of James Dean.

In one moment, Cassidy recalls his sheepishness at seeing his

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**David Cassidy**  
former teen idol

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name on bubblegum cards, beads, lunchboxes and pillowcases; "it's almost like I was committing a crime." In another, superproducer Maurice Starr gloats about all the New Kids on the Block products; "everything was selling, everything."

Even the New Kids are now yesterday's news, though. There is Marky Mark, the younger and beefier brother of that group's renegade, Donnie Wahlberg; envision a New Kid with pectorals.

Then there are all those pretty guys from "Beverly Hills, 90210," which this special happens to replace for the night.

And there are experts who try to figure out why these things happen. Luke Perry and Jason

Priestley were just as cute on "All My Children" and "Sister Kate"; only when they reached "90210" did they become teen idols.

The good news is that some of the screaming teens actually seem to grow into reasonable adults. We see three middle-aged women, joyously recalling the day they met the Beatles. "It's one of the high points of my life," one says, "alongside my wedding and the birth of my three children."

Yes, even the idols themselves grow up.

After David Cassidy's fame faded, it was time for his half-brother to be an idol. "I always felt like I was part of the event, not the focus," Shaun Cassidy said later. "It was kids trying to share the experience together."

Shirley Jones — Shaun's mom, David's stepmom — later recalled those moments vividly. "It was almost frightening," she said of Shaun's crowds. "It was like he didn't have anything to do with what was really going on."

He had a little to do with it, anyway. Shaun (former teen idol) Cassidy was filling the world's persistent need for a teen idol.

Mike Hughes writes about television for the Lansing State Journal and Gannett News Service.