

This Partridge still clinging to pop-star perch

By TOM ALESIA

STAFF WRITER

Nearly two decades removed from TV's "Partridge Family," sold-out arena concerts and the walls of countless lovestruck girls, it boils down to this:

Former teen idol David Cassidy, age 42. Sitting at WDBR-FM's studios Tuesday morning, Cassidy must confront nostalgia

AT THE STATE FAIR

head-on, as a battered "Partridge Family" lunch box sits on the table in front of him.

Greeted by station employees and fans, he hears the same confessions from adults over and over — "I used to spend my entire allowance on your fan magazines" or "This (autograph) is for my wife. She was your most loyal fan."

During a break from an on-air interview with WDBR's morning duo, a male station worker opens the studio door slightly and quickly admits that, as a teenager, "I always wanted your head of hair."

Cassidy rolls his eyes, as if now he has heard it all.

"Guys," he mumbles to himself, "wanted to come after me and scalp me."

To promote his new album, "Didn't You Used To Be . . .," Cassidy is serving as the Beach Boys' opening act this summer, including at Tuesday night's appearance at the Illinois State Fair Grandstand.

Still boyishly good-looking, Cassidy handles the onslaught of praise affably. Still, there's inner turmoil, as he tries to progress as an entertainer while everyone keeps him permanently etched as heartthrob Keith Partridge.

"I realize the impact I had on a whole generation of people. People like to come and stare at you," he says, nodding toward the studio's window where fans stare in.

"It's fun. And I'm flattered by it. I was always flattered by it. If anything, I was a little embarrassed by it. Or I didn't feel worthy of the attention. You can't live up to something like that."

In 1971 and '72, Cassidy posted nine hit singles with the Partridge Family and as a solo artist. This frothy material, like "I Think I Love You" and "Cherish," remains in Cassidy's concert playlist.

"If I came to see me," he admits, "I would want to hear it."



State Journal-Register/David Spencer

"It's nice to be 'the guy'," says David Cassidy. "I'd like to be that again, but as this guy, not that (teen idol) guy."

Cassidy, who was 21 and 22 years old at the height of his stardom, finds it ironic that he performed lightweight pop.

"That (Partridge Family) music was great, but it was designed for the character I played on television," he says. "I'd go into my dressing room and listen to the antithesis of that. I grew up in the '60s in southern California. I saw Jimi Hendrix five times. I saw Cream; I liked Jeff Beck; I was into the blues — stuff with a lot more weight than the music I became known for."

Two years ago, after working in theater, Cassidy plunged back into music. The

comeback reached its zenith with another hit single, "Lyin' To Myself," despite the fact that his record company went bankrupt two months after the song's release.

Regardless, fans remain fixated on the Partridge Family. (He says he wouldn't do a reunion show, but he talks occasionally with cast members Susan Dey; David Madden, who played Reuben Kinkaid; and Shirley Jones, his step-mother. Danny Bonaduce opened a few shows for Cassidy on his last tour.)

Describing to Cassidy how she clipped his pictures from magazines as a young-

ster, WDBR co-morning disc jockey Lisa Crocker says, "You were the guy."

Cassidy, who is married to songwriter Sue Shifrin and has an 18-month-old son, struggles with that reputation.

"It's nice to be the guy. I'd like to be that again, but as this guy, not that (teen idol) guy."

Later, more than a dozen fans stop Cassidy in the radio station's lobby to get his autograph and picture. One woman has him sign her blank check.

The fans squeal. Cassidy smiles. "It's good to know they still care."