

DAVID'S GOLIATH

David Cassidy takes on Keith Partridge

EDITOR'S NOTE: Consider the following evidence that we're in the midst of a "Partridge Family" renaissance: Nickelodeon now airs the sitcom every weeknight at 8 p.m.; MTV ran a Partridge marathon last month, for which David Cassidy filmed fresh commercials; Arsenio Hall recently hosted the first joint appearance of Cassidy, Shirley Jones and Danny Bonaduce in 19 years, and; Cassidy's memoirs are forthcoming.

SECTION X now presents an interview with Cassidy, the first installment of PARTRIDGE FAMILY TREE. In future installments, we'll also hear from Jones and Bonaduce.

By MARK VOGEL
PRESS STAFF WRITER

He's totally the antithesis of who I was." That's former teen idol David Cassidy on fictional teen idol Keith Partridge.

For more than two decades, Cassidy has had a love-hate relationship with Partridge, his onetime small-screen alter ego. Shortly after Cassidy first appeared on ABC-TV's sitcom "The Partridge Family" (1970-74), life imitated art and Cassidy himself became the object of desire for screaming throngs of teen and preteen girls.

In recent years, Cassidy has returned to recording and performing, and is not above belting out the occasional Partridge number (just last month, Cassidy ran through "I Think I Love You" on "The Arsenio Hall Show").

"I started playing music in the beginning because I really loved it," Cassidy says. "I have a musical present, but I can do the past as well."

Cassidy's past began on April 12, 1950 in New York City when he was born to the late actor Jack Cassidy and his then-wife, Evelyn. David spent most of his childhood in New Jersey; Jack and Evelyn divorced when David was 5. David spent his teen years in Southern California.

"I went to three different high schools," Cassidy says. "I was kicked out of two of them. I was pretty wild during my teen-age years."

Even before his "Partridge" fame, Cassidy had a way with

the ladies. "I was a very adventurous guy," he says. "I was not a very naive guy. I was somebody who was pretty active when I was young. And it was a time, fortunately, that you didn't have to worry about what people have to worry about now."



There were drugs, too, in those days. "But it was a different thing," Cassidy says. "It's not like it is now. It was fun. Turn on, tune in,

drop out - that kind of thing. It was still very innocent, and kind of about a love thing.

"It had nothing to do with machine guns, South America and billions of dollars and murder. It was a totally different concept and a different time. People's attitudes about it were much different."

In 1970, Cassidy signed with ABC-TV to play the eldest sibling of a Cowsills-esque singing family opposite his real-life stepmom, Oscar-winner Shirley Jones. "The Partridge Family" traveled along in a psychedelic bus for three seasons, often to the chagrin of Cassidy.

For one thing, Cassidy felt totally uncool appearing alongside younger actors. "I mean, when you're 19, you want your other friends who are 19 and 20 to think that you're cool," he says. "You don't want to be with 12- and 13-year-olds. Imagine! It was hard for me."

"Don't get me wrong - I liked the people I was with. I believed in what I was doing. I knew that I was good. And I knew that the music we were playing was good. But the music was pretty much focused on an audience that was younger than me. And I wanted to make records for people my age."

Still, Cassidy received quite an education at the hands of the hit-makers who engineered four top-selling "Partridge Family" albums. "I worked with some of the greatest songwriters of all time," Cassidy says. "When you work with Gerry Goffin, Wes Farrell, Tony Romeo, Barry Mann, you're talking about the greatest of the greats, in my opinion."

"I learned. It changed me. I developed my own style as a writer. I learned the craft of songwriting from them. So, it was an exciting time for me and it

opened me up musically. As opposed to just listening to hard rock and blues, I became a pop fan and a pop singer."

And as a pop singer, Cassidy was frequently used as pinup fodder for teen magazines - the likes of Tiger Beat, 16 and 16 Spec - aimed at pre-pubescent girls. These magazines, the singer charges, fabricated interviews with him outright.

"It was completely and totally contrived and made

● **Cassidy as Keith Partridge** in the early '70s (left). The cover of a 1972 Partridge Family comic book (above left).

"I could tell (the teen magazines) that I was into bondage, and they would have written, 'David loves to go to sleep with his puppy at night.'"

● The many moods of David Cassidy performing onstage (above and below). "I have a musical present," says Cassidy.

up to promote an image that was selling a lot of magazines for them," Cassidy says. "It was very frustrating. I would sit down and have an interview with them, and say, 'Really and truly, my favorite music is (Jimi) Hendrix or (Eric) Clapton.' They'd write, 'David loves the Monkees.'"

"I could tell them that I was into bondage, and they would have written, 'David loves to go to sleep with his puppy at night.'"

The network, too, used Cassidy as their cash cow. "When you have a company that owns your name and likeness," Cassidy says, "they can make a David Cassidy doll - which they did - they can make David Cassidy lunch boxes, comic books and all of that."

After "The Partridge Family," Cassidy put out several solo albums, including the respected "The Higher They Rise, the Harder They Fall." In the mid-'70s, he shaved off his hair and struck up a friendship with John Lennon. "I wouldn't say I was best friends with him," Cassidy says, "but I had dinner with he and Yoko a number of times. I jammed with him. He came over my house on New Year's Eve. I think it was 1975."

"We got drunk together in my bedroom and played songs all night. I got to sing all of Paul's parts. That was the greatest musical night of my life. Because, those guys are the reason that I picked up a guitar in the first place."

In 1978, Cassidy starred for one season in NBC-TV's "David Cassidy: Man

Undercover." He moved to England in '84 for three years, scoring a gold album.

America hadn't heard much about David Cassidy until 1990, when the singer released a self-titled comeback disc through a label that - he would find out later - was about to go Chapter 11.

"Three weeks before my record came out," Cassidy says with an ironic chuckle, "they fired all of their regional sales and promotion

people. So I had a choice at that moment to either accept failure, or put the records under my arm and single-handedly go to half the radio stations in America to

talk about it on the air. I did basically the whole deal with the (only) promotion man that was left."

"The record business today is a marketing business. And it takes a lot of money to market a product. And I was with a company that had none. So it's kind of like

going into a war, when the other side's got Uzis and you've got a peashooter."

In 1992, Cassidy released the drollily titled CD, "Didn't You Used to Be..."

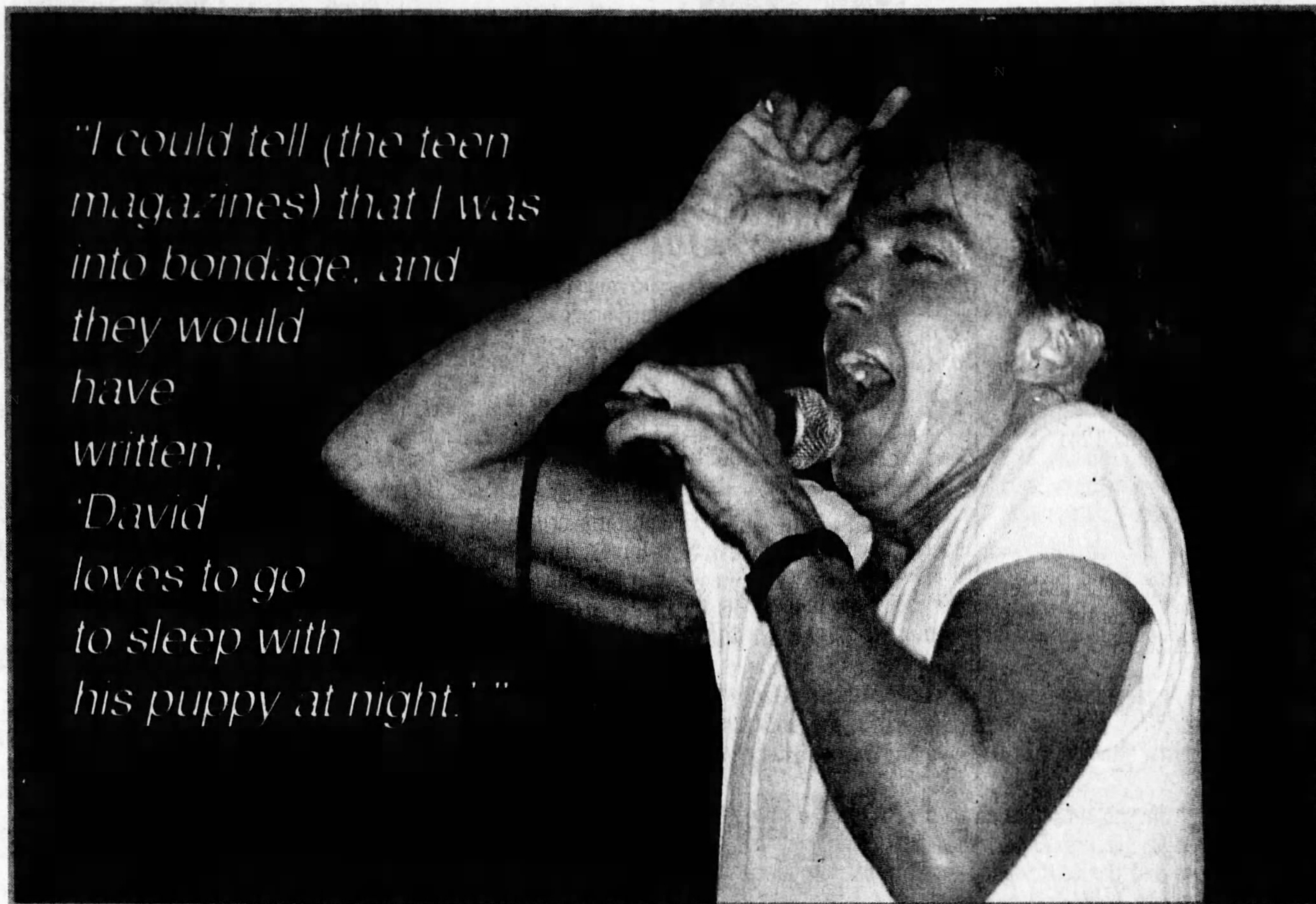
Cassidy has stayed in touch with his onetime TV little brother, Danny Bonaduce, 34. "I think that he's extremely gifted," Cassidy says of Bonaduce, who has been clean and sober for more than two years. "I think

he's one of the funniest people I've ever known."

But Cassidy vows never to participate in a Partridge TV movie reunion.

"I do have a sense of humor about the past," Cassidy says. "And I don't take myself too seriously. But I know ('The Partridge Family') was a great time for all the people who saw it, dug it, loved me and loved the show."

"In its time." X



Photos: KATHY VOGLESONG

