

Partridge Family gets new home

By MARK WYCKOFF
Gannett News Service

C'mon get happy, America. The magic bus is back and the Partridge Family is on board, ready to roar back into the forefront of pop culture.

Don't believe it? Convinced that those rockin' Partridges have no place in the '90s, except perhaps in a polyester pear tree? Well, oh cynical one, just look around you this summer and be proved wrong.

Whether you flip on the TV or pop into your local record store, the Partridges — in all their maroon crushed velvet glory — will be everywhere.

Beginning Monday at 8 p.m., "The Partridge Family" will burst back into primetime when it joins the "Nick at Nite" line-up on cable's Nickelodeon channel.

And right now, in record racks everywhere, are copies of the group's first two platinum albums, "The Partridge Family Album" and "Up To Date," newly remastered and reissued on compact disc by New York City-based Razor and Tie Music. Two more remastered Partridge Family discs, "Sound Magazine" and "Shopping Bag," are due Sept. 9 from the label.

"Nick at Nite" isn't just another run-of-the-mill syndication deal for the show, a 1970-74 ABC-TV sitcom about a singing family that starred Oscar winner Shirley Jones and transformed actor David Cassidy into a worldwide singing sensation. The folks at Nickelodeon have big things in mind.

"I think we're going to be in the middle of a 'Partridge Family' phenomenon soon," said Larry Jones, "Nick at Nite's" marketing director. "There are so few shows that have such a major icon, like the bus, and somebody as big of a star as David Cassidy. It made sense to bring the show back."

And to promote it, Jones laughs gleefully, Nickelodeon is bringing back the Mondrian-esque school bus the family used on the show for a cross-country promotion junket. Even better, Cassidy — who used to joke about wanting to blow up the bus — will be behind the wheel. The tour swings Times Square at noon on Monday.

For years, Cassidy — who will open Aug. 4 on Broadway in the musical "Blood Brothers" at the Music Box Theater — tried desperately to

distance himself from the Keith Partridge character. Now, 23 years later, Cassidy seems to finally be at peace with his past.

"I've become more and more protective about the show," he says, talking on the radio with fellow Partridge sibling Danny Bonaduce, now a disc jockey for WLUP-AM in Chicago. "I'm really happy to be going back and talking about it as something that we did and about the time when it was the deal. And it's seeming like it's becoming the deal again."

A successful concept

Back in the early 1970s, "The Partridge Family" and Cassidy were most certainly the deal. The show was a huge Nielsen hit and the group's records sold in the millions. Cassidy and Jones were the only cast members who performed on the albums; the rest of the vocals and instruments were dubbed by well-known studio musicians such as guitarist Larry Carlton and drummer Hal Blaine.

From October 1970 to February 1973, Cassidy — both solo and with the Partridges — amassed 11 Top 40 singles and six gold albums in America. The biggest hit: "I Think I Love You," which soared to No. 1 in the United States and sold more than five million copies worldwide.

Shirley Jones says the show has held up remarkably well.

"Everywhere I go, I have people saying, 'Oh, why can't we have more shows like 'The Partridge Family?'" So obviously there's a real big void out there for a show like this."

Like Cassidy, Jones felt the sting of typecasting when the show ended in '74 after 96 episodes.

"It put an end to my movie career, that's for sure," says Jones, who shot to fame in musicals like "Oklahoma," "Carousel" and "The Music Man." "But on the other hand, nobody knew me until 'Partridge,' and I'd done 25 motion pictures. As a matter of fact, after five years on the show, I resumed my singing career, doing concerts and what not, and people would say to me, 'I didn't know you could sing.' From that standpoint, it was a detriment. But, would I do it again? I would have to say yes."

Whither Susan Dey?

Jones, too, is helping Nickelodeon hype the show. She took a break from



File photo

Bobby Sherman, left, guest stars with David Cassidy on "The Partridge Family" in episode No. 24, titled "A Knight in Shining Armor," which will air at 11:30 a.m. next Sunday on MTV.

Partridge sightings this week

■ "The Partridge Family" premieres on the Nickelodeon cable channel with a week of themed episodes, airing Monday through Friday, from 8-10 p.m.

■ Monday, David Cassidy drives the Partridge Family bus into Times Square at noon.

■ Tuesday, Shirley Jones, David Cassidy and Danny Bonaduce will guest on "The Arsenio Hall Show."

■ On Saturday from 10 p.m.-midnight, David Cassidy will host "Very Very Nick at Nite" and show his four favorite episodes. The show will assume its regular weekday time slot at 8 p.m. on July 19.

■ Also, next Sunday, Cassidy will host a 16-episode marathon of "Partridge Family" episodes on MTV, Nickelodeon's sister channel. The shows will air back-to-back from 9 a.m.-1 p.m. and from 4-8 p.m.

her busy schedule of symphony concerts to pose with Cassidy and Bonaduce for an upcoming People Magazine cover story. And Arsenio Hall has booked the trio for Tuesday on his late-night talk show.

Conspicuously absent from all this hoopla has been Susan Dey, who finally erased her cutesy Laurie Partridge image with starring roles in "L.A. Law" and "Love and War."

"I don't think Susan's going to be doing too much," Jones says. "She's got her own agenda at the moment

and she doesn't want to backtrack."

While he was on Bonaduce's radio show, Cassidy noted that his 2-year-old son, Beau, has gotten hooked watching his daddy in "Partridge" reruns.

"He loves the Christmas episode we did," says Cassidy. "He's probably going to ask me one of these days when he gets older, 'How come everybody's talking about this show?' I can't think of a better place for it to be framed (for posterity) than 'Nick at Nite.'"