

Cassidy happy about Partridge years

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NEW YORK — For 20 years, he has moaned about how he's a misunderstood artist — how he's much more than Keith Partridge, that pabulum-voiced '70s teen sex idol who inspired a trizillion adolescent pants.

"The Partridge Family" was an albatross," says David Cassidy, still dimpled, thin-hipped, virtually wrinkle-free at 43 and still worthy of at least a zillion pants. "After the show, no one would consider me for serious parts."

So why has Cassidy agreed to play advance man for the deluge of publicity heralding Nick at Nite's acquisition of the vintage sitcom, which starts reuniting on the cable channel next Monday night? And why in the name of crushed velvet bell-bottoms is he penning a confessional about his "reckless youth" for Warner Books titled "Come on Get Happy: Fear & Loathing in the Partridge Family Bus"? Also, why, pray tell, is he working on a campy satirical play with other unnamed '70s icons?

"I'm really not bitter anymore," explains Cassidy, toggled in black jeans, a black shirt and black cowboy boots in the baroque environs of the New York Palace. "In fact, if I complain again, slap me. The show made me a somebody."

Along with Cassidy's reappraisal of his life (thanks to "\$100,000 worth of analysis"), comes a revisionist look at the treacly ABC sitcom, which aired 1970-74. "It ain't Shakespeare," he says. But "The Partridge Family" exemplified youthful abandon in a decade that marked the country's last gasp of personal freedom, says Cassidy.

"Here was a family who got up in the morning and said let's go entertain and off they went. The '80s and '90s have been about a lack of personal freedom. People can't walk down the street without fear, can't have sex, can't pay their bills."

Shirley Jones, Cassidy's TV mother and real-life stepmom (she was married to actor Jack Cassidy, who died in 1976), concurs. "Everywhere I go, people are looking for wholesome entertain-

ment," she says. "They see enough of the bad things in real life; they don't want to see that when they turn on the TV."

Jones, now wed to manic comic/ad exec Marty Ingels, keeps busy with concert tours in largely small venues.

And other cast members? Danny Bonaduce (Danny Partridge), pilloried for his criminal record (most notably, a 1991 assault of a transvestite prostitute), spins records at Chicago's WLUP.

Suzanne Crough (Tracey), the show's tambourine-playing pixie, owns a bookstore in Southern California. The other pint-sized Partridge, Brian Forster (Chris), races cars in Northern California. David Madden (the clan's hapless manager, Reuben Kinkaid) does voice-over work. And, Susan Dey (Laurie), of course, experienced a prime-time rebirth with "L.A. Law" and "Love & War."

Bonaduce and Jones are doing some public-relations work for Nick's "Partridge" bonanza, which kicks off next Monday-Friday, 8-10 p.m., with specially themed episodes, but Cassidy is

doing the lion's share, including an eight-city tour in a replica of the family's groovy psychedelic school bus (which'll be in Times Square on Monday at noon).

He also hosts Nick's "Very, Very David Cassidy" (July 17, 8 p.m.), a two-hour festival of his favorite episodes. The next day, he hosts an eight-hour "Dusted!" bacchanal on MTV, Nick's sister channel (9 a.m.-1 p.m., 4-8 p.m.).

Which leads us to ponder: Does Cassidy have a post-Partridge life? Perhaps. Married for the third time and the father of a 2-year-old son, he still tours with his band, though his last album, released in 1990, was not a smash. He has written a starring role for himself in a TV series under consideration at Madonna's production company. And the ink is drying on a deal that would bring him to Broadway in "Blood Brothers" this summer.

But with middle-age pragmatism, Cassidy acknowledges his best years are past. "Will I ever again have the largest fan club in history? No."



David Cassidy, as he looked in 1971, when he was playing Keith Partridge on "The Partridge Family."