

# Messy boomer nostalgia: David Cassidy biopic

THE WASHINGTON POST

TOM SHALES

Only in a spirit of excess cruelty would one refer to NBC's movie *The David Cassidy Story* as

## TELEVISION

REVIEW

a big nothing about a big nobody. What we have here

is just another formulaic and somewhat vindictive show-biz biography, flattering to Cassidy perhaps partly because he is one of the executive producers.

Most of the time he comes off like the sweetest doe-eyed dearie you'd ever want to meet, a young man perpetually poised to help old ladies cross streets or munificently present his puka-shell necklace to the president of the David Cassidy fan club — a worldwide organization that in its heyday would apparently have dwarfed, say, the population of China.

*The David Cassidy Story*, tonight at 9 (on WHEC-TV, Channel 10), tries like so many other films to tap into the nostalgia veins of baby boomers and their offspring. Back in the 1970s, that high point of the century for American Bad Taste, young Cassidy was a major mega-throb who could make girls scream, swoon, pant, and even, in one case documented in the movie, keel over with a heart attack.

Structurally and "artistically," the film is a mess — sloppily scripted, shot and slapped together — but that's barely relevant. The key component is voyeurism, a chance to get a supposedly authentic peek backstage at the life of a one-time pop idol. We love to see 'em rise, we love to see 'em fall and we love to see 'em crawl out of the sewer again.

Americans love success stories, but in the past few years it's begun to seem that they love re-success stories more. Popular cable shows like VH-1's super-campy *Behind the Music* chronicle case after case of individuals or groups who soared to the top of the charts, slid back off them again — usually with the help of drugs and booze — and then



The Associated Press

**Real or Memorex?** *David Cassidy poses with Andy Kavovit, who portrays the ex-heartthrob.*

staged miraculous recoveries. Or at least survived.

Unfortunately, David Cassidy's life hasn't been particularly traumatic or dramatic. His major problem appears to have been that his daddy — actor-singer Jack Cassidy — was a louse, and a louse who didn't love him. The elder Cassidy is played with vulgar gusto by Malcolm McDowell, and is depicted as being selfishly jealous of his own son's fame. He tells him, "You're just the flavor of the month. You know that."

After Papa Cassidy dies in a fire, son David goes into a lengthy pout that takes up the final third of the film. Even though papa was a meanie, David needed his approval.

David Cassidy's career is treated with much reverence. The film opens with this caption on the screen: "London 1974 — The Farewell Concert." Oh, "the" farewell concert! Soon it flashes back to 1968, when David auditioned for a role in *The Partridge Family*, a simpering sitcom about a family pop group that tours the land in a too-cute bus.

Shirley Jones, Cassidy's real-life stepmother, played his Mama Partridge on the show. Throughout the movie, people are mistakenly referring to Jones as Cassidy's

"mother" and being crankily corrected by David himself or his agent. Oh, the travails and tortures that fame can bring! No wonder David finally tells a pal, "It's too much pressure. I gotta get out!"

At that farewell concert in London, meanwhile, a young woman with a heart problem dies while screaming orgasmically. Cassidy goes into a depression and takes Valium. Ominously he announces to a friend, "The spotlight has left the building." And yet one can't help suspecting that somehow, by some miracle, David Cassidy will sing again.

Andrew Kavovit does a good job playing Cassidy, though he sometimes looks more like a young Regis Philbin. Dey Young is not pretty enough to be convincing in the role of Shirley Jones. Cassidy's real-life brother Shaun, arguably more of a cutie-pie than David, is neither mentioned nor portrayed. That seems odd. Another actor sibling, Patrick Cassidy, is listed in the credits as having been played by an actor (Alex Black) but your normally attentive critic seems to have missed him altogether.

Sorry, but it's hard remaining attentive during *The David Cassidy Story*. It's not that easy staying awake. □