

Special examines + rise and burst of bubblegum stars

By Larry Rodgers
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As Britney Spears and 'N Sync remain on hiatus and Christina Aguilera abandons any trace of innocence, who will become the next superstar of bubblegum pop, the sugary sound that has catered to millions of young listeners for four decades?

Television viewers can get a fascinating behind-the-scenes look at the molding of a singer who would be the next Britney, as well as a well-researched retrospective of bubblegum's checkered past, in *Bubblegum Babylon*, premiering tonight on VH1.

Bubblegum Babylon revisits the extraordinary highs of such artists as the Monkees and David Cassidy, as well as the post-stardom lows that drove a member of the Cowsills to attempt suicide and Leif Garrett to use heroin.

The most intriguing segments come when cameras follow Katie Cassidy, 15-year-old daughter of David Cassidy, as

she tries to become an all-American successor to Spears and Aguilera:

As her manager sets up record-store and Radio Disney appearances and weighs mer-

ON TV 'Bubblegum Babylon'

10 tonight on
VH1.

singer and her family might consider themselves, the seven-day workweeks and media glare that accompany bubblegum stardom can be overwhelming.

"I don't think you can prepare yourself for fame — the rush, rush, rush and the demands," says Tiffany, who topped the charts with *Could've Been* and *I Think We're Alone Now* in 1987 before flaming out a year later.

"Your mind goes into shock," adds Taylor Hanson, who is trying to transition his family's self-titled trio to a more mature audience.

It initially comes as a surprise to hear that David Cassidy, who was a global star in the '70s as part of television's *The Partridge Family*, is opposed to his daughter's plan.

But as Cassidy, now 52, explains how he lost his identity and was ultimately happy with "walking away with my sanity," it becomes clear that he wants to protect Katie.

"I had no idea what David's take would be on that," says George Moll, co-executive producer of the show and co-creator of VH1's *Behind the Music*.

"I know he has been

Christina Aguilera has abandoned her innocent image as a bubblegum princess.

chancing deals, Katie says, "I'm ready for it — whatever comes."

But no matter how well-prepared the



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As she pursues stardom, Katie Cassidy, 15, says, "I'm ready for ... whatever comes." Her father, David, opposes her plans.

very outspoken about how he was taken advantage of ... so, in retrospect, I should have expected his reaction."

The young singer, who was born after Cassidy had a brief relationship with Sherri Benedon, tries to keep a stiff upper lip when talking about her dad.

She discusses with her mother and Luanne Nast, her manager, how they will handle

But Svengali types such as Pearlman and Starr demand complete control over their young stars' lives.

Backstreet's Kevin Richardson recalls being prohibited from growing facial hair, and 'N Sync's J.C. Chasez remarks, "You had to sign your life away."

'N Sync eventually split with Pearlman and released a suc-



Chris Pizzello/Associated Press

'N Sync split with impresario Lou Pearlman and his dictatorial ways.

cessful album with a pointed title, *No Strings Attached*.

The next day, mother and daughter stretch the truth about David's support when talking with *People*.

Nast is following in the footsteps of such bubblegum impresarios as Lou Pearlman (Backstreet Boys and 'N Sync) and Maurice Starr (New Edition and New Kids on the Block).

Pearlman, a former airline executive, says he changed careers after seeing the profit margin of some bubblegum acts.

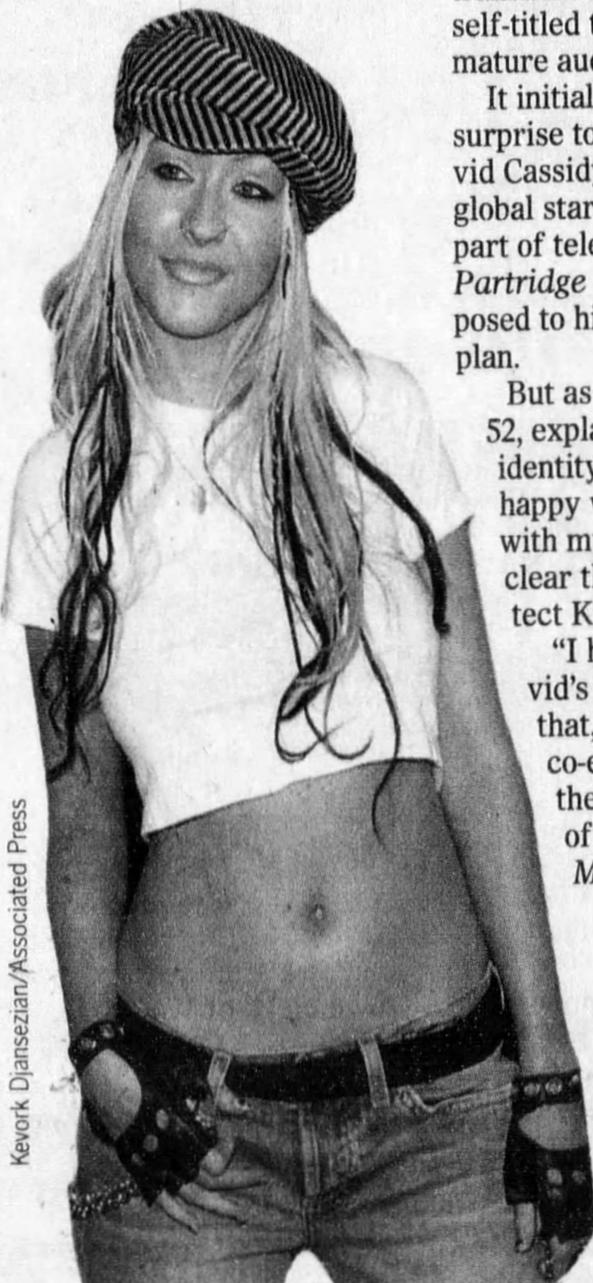
Starr jokes about putting out so much New Kids merchandise that "I was ready to put dirt in a bag and sell it."

As viewers hear similar sad stories from members of the Monkees and Cowsills, they may wonder how the bubblegum machine survives.

"It's the same old cycle; especially now, anybody should learn from the past mistakes," says Becky Ebenkamp, co-author of *Bubblegum Music Is the Naked Truth*.

But, she adds, reality shows such as *American Idol* are encouraging a new crop of kids to say, "Put me in the machine and spit me out as whatever flavor of the month."

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