

The evolution of an American teen idol ... into a TV producer

ASSOCIATED PRESS

BURBANK, Calif. — Producers are lunching. John Wells ("ER") holds court at a table of five and Chuck Lorre ("Two and a Half Men") sits nearby when Shaun Cassidy enters the Warner Bros. studio dining room.

Amid the predominance of over-40 white men, I'm conspicuously out of place. For less obvious reasons, I'm likely the only one in the room wishing Cassidy would break into "Da Doo Ron Ron."

A smile blushes over Cassidy's face as he's regaled by the story of a then 10-year-old fan regularly performing his tunes in front of a mirror singing into a hairbrush.

"That's how I started, too — with my hairbrush in the mirror," the 47-year-old Cassidy says, laughing, his boyish smile reminiscent of the former pop heartthrob — though now fuller in the face than that long-ago Tiger Beat pinup.

These days, Cassidy keeps behind the scenes producing "Invasion," the sci-fi mystery thriller he created that premiered this fall on ABC (10 p.m. Wednesdays). But once upon a time, he seemed seldom out of sight.

"Like a zillion kids, being a pop star seemed like a great job out of high school," he says. "Unlike most kids, I had access to people that might give me a record contract, if I was half-good — and I was only half-good, by the way. The idea of being a pop star was not unprecedented in my family."

Son of actor Jack Cassidy and actress Shirley Jones ("The Partridge Family") and half brother of teen idol David Cassidy, he spent his childhood around the stage and later performed with his band, Every Mother's Dream.

At 16, the Beverly Hills High School senior was recording in Europe, hitting the German music charts in 1976 with "Morning Girl."

His singing career exploded the following year when the record company released his music Stateside, coinciding with his debut as junior sleuth Joe Hardy on ABC's "The Hardy Boys Mysteries."

"Da Doo Ron Ron" became a No. 1 hit and over the next few years he released more than a half-dozen albums.

"Suddenly I'm doing concerts every weekend and on this TV show," Cassidy says, "but it wasn't, 'Oh my dream has come true — I've become a pop star!' I want-

“SO I STARTED TRYING TO WRITE. I'D WRITE LITTLE ONE-ACT PLAYS. I READ A LOT OF SCRIPTS AND WATCHED A LOT OF MOVIES, BREAKING THEM DOWN SCENE-BY-SCENE TO SEE WHAT THE STRUCTURE WAS, AND FOUND THAT I COULD DO IT.”

SHAUN CASSIDY, PRODUCER

ed to be a pop star when I was 13. By the time I was 20, it (was) not a life I wanted to be living."

It's certainly not what Jones wanted for him. "I felt he was going at it too young," she said. "He saw David's giant success and saw all that money rolling in the door and thought: 'I don't need a college education. I can go out and make a million dollars.' And that's what he did."

But he always knew he wanted something else. And he knew he liked to write.

"I was rewriting 'Hardy Boys' episodes — at least my own dialogue — which initially tortured some of the producers and writers."

A year after "Hardy Boys" bowed, Cassidy put down the mic. He worked as an actor to support a wife and two kids, but spent much of the '80s "hiding in my house," he says. "I can't go out because I'm still this weird teen idol thing."

"So I started trying to write. I'd write little one-act plays. I read a lot of scripts and watched a lot of movies, breaking them down scene-by-scene to see what the structure was, and found that I could do it."

USA Network bought his first screenplay in 1990, the creepy

thriller, "Strays," about feral cats. "It was the biggest movie of the year, and after that I really didn't want to act anymore." (His final performance came on Broadway with David Cassidy in 1993's "Blood Brothers.")

As a TV writer-producer, Cassidy has run a number of shows and created the acclaimed 1995 Southern horror drama "American Gothic" — which, like "Invasion," mingled stories of family into a fantastical thriller.

"Shaun's gift is examining and heightening seemingly ordinary aspects of family that we might take for granted," says David Eick, a producer and former USA Network executive who has worked with him on several projects. "On many levels 'Invasion' is about a divided family in which children are given more autonomy and behave more like adults than they're probably ready for. In many respects, it's an allegory for Shaun's own life."

Even though much has changed for Cassidy in 15 years, perception of him hasn't — not completely, anyway.

"Shaun jokes about how, to this day, when he reads articles about himself, the reporter will always preface by saying: Shaun Cassidy's work is unexpectedly good," says associate producer Nne Ebong, who has a sign in her office reading: "Shaun Cassidy Development — We Make Idols So You Don't Have To."

"This is probably something that's going to dog him the rest of his career," she adds.

"Really the anomaly in my career is the early part," says Cassidy. "I knew this was what I wanted to do. I just ended up doing some other things first."

And, for that, a grateful Tiger Beat nation thanks him.



Former teen heartthrob Shaun Cassidy is now behind the scenes producing "Invasion," the sci-fi mystery thriller he created that premiered this fall on ABC.

THE QUIZ

Observer-Reporter

THE QUIZ IS PART OF THIS NEWSPAPER'S NEWSPAPER IN EDUCATION PROGRAM

NEWSPLACE

(10 points for correct answer)

For the first time in 30 years, a new parliament sits in this Asian country. After years of bloody fighting against the

