

Top Ten: Teen Idols

UK TV : 2001 : dir. : Chrysalis / Channel 4 : 100 min
 prod: Liam Humphreys : wr: Steve Gowans, Liam Humphreys, David Quantick & John Quinn

Presenter: Cat Deeley

Narrator: Matthew Kelly

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Radio Times listing:

“Presenter Cat Deeley counts down the top ten most successful teen idols. A host of familiar faces tell the tales of adulation, excess, tragedy and failed comebacks that characterise the highs and lows of life at the centre of teen culture. Chesney Hawkes recalls how his hit single was followed by vilification in the music press, while David Soul remembers the hysteria of frenzied fans at Heathrow airport. Plus contributions from Leif Garrett, David

Cassidy, David Essex, Donny Osmond, Nick Hayward, Paul Young, Peter Andre and Jason Donovan. Series editor: Steve Gowans”

John Peel’s **Radio Times** opinion column:

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- 1: **Donny Osmond**
- 2: **David Cassidy**
- 3: **Jason Donovan**
- 4: **David Essex**
- 5: **Paul Young**
- 6: **Peter Andre**
- 7: **David Soul**
- 8: **Nick Hayward**
- 9: **Leif Garrett** - pronounced “Lafe”, in the programme’s view
- 10: **Chesney Hawkes**

An eccentric selection, to say the least. To include David Soul and leave out – say – Marc Bolan? To include David Essex but not ZZZZZZ? Groups from The Beatles to Mud are mentioned along the way, but not The Monkees? Not The Jackson Five? Not the Bay City Rollers? Only the sections on Hawkes, Garrett, Cassidy and Osmond have any direct relevance to this archive, but the programme had a disparaging word here or there for other pubertal flashes in the pan, such as choirboy Aled Jones, or “Tucker Jenkins” of the cast of **“Grange Hill”**. Some PR oik at the BBC hit on the notion it would be great if the school soap cast cut an anti-drugs single – *“Just Say No”* – and before anyone could point out that none of the cast could actually *sing*, they went and did it. But then, the inability to sing hasn’t held other soap celebrities back from dallying with the pop charts, has it?

It’s significant that the producer and four credited writers were all men, when the programme is looking at the phenomenon of pubertal *female* fan followings. The prevailing tone is one of contempt for the fans and contempt for the idols they worshipped. This air of mockery of past decades and their fashions is *de rigeur* in the television set right now. In the last year or two

we've seen whole evenings dedicated to trashing the sixties, seventies and eighties in turn. Hippies were stupid, long hair was stupid, flared trousers were stupid, punk was stupid, etc. The makers of these programmes evidently think their mockery is a kind of affectionate reappraisal – with the wisdom of hindsight – on the fads of yore. But they, and the pundits they produce as expert witnesses, are no Oxford dons or islamic fundamentalists. They are themselves wrapped up (and gainfully employed) in the same trashy, exploitative culture they purport to scorn. The fads, fashions, music, and icons of the 1990s are every bit as fatuous and crass as those of previous decades, and will look just as absurd twenty years hence. To some of us they look absurd right now. There is a sense of enormous arrogance in this posture – our tastes are “cool”, so all the tastes that went before are laughable. But that's the central thesis here.

See also “**BADKONAK-E SEFID**” and “**BASHU**” - both recent Iranian films, and subject index under **ARAB WORLD / MIDDLE EAST**.