

# “Here is the incredible story of what is really turning on the youth of today.”

George dePue

1969

The interview originated with a long-distance telephone call from Los Angeles to the office of the Fifth Estate the day of the Oct. 15 Moratorium. The operator wanted “whoever writes about movies.” There wasn’t anybody else in the office, so I took the call.

“This is Casey Kasem.” A good professional voice and manner. “I’m from Detroit and I’m starring in my first movie, ‘Free Grass,’ which is premiering there next week. I’d like to talk to you about it, if you’re interested.” Poised, easy. Right on. Free passes.

The following Monday, Casey paced his corner room in the Pontchartraine Hotel, unself-consciously clearing up the coffee cups and emptying the ashtrays from his previous interview with somebody from the *WSU South End*. The room had a wide-angle view of the Ambassador Bridge. It was raining. He hadn’t stopped talking since the reflexively correct, “Hello, George” at the door.

His “bio,” a two-page resume of professional credits, says Casey is 5 feet, 8-1/2 inches tall, weighs 140 pounds. He’s more like 5’ 7”, but the weight is about right. He was wearing a wide collared, pale pink silk shirt and ass-hugging gray-stripe bells. His skin is dark, his hair is Hollywood cut and graying in the sideburns, he wears a small diamond set in silver on his right ring finger.

“Free Grass” tells it the way it is, doesn’t pull any punches, the ending doesn’t compromise. Had we seen “Easy Rider?” Had we liked it? Well, Bruce Dern, the guy who played the farmer, was with him in “Wild Wheels,” had we seen that? He had been in town since last night. The first thing he had done was go to see “Free Grass” at the Fenton Drive-In with his grandmother, mother and brother.

“There were some scenes where I really over-acted. Why didn’t someone tell me, even at the risk of destroying me? There was no coverage, the budget was too small. All the scenes were shot only once. No chance for changes. There is a rape scene. There was supposed to be another, where I raped the same girl, but we didn’t have enough film.

“The last scene was incredible. People are going to wonder why we didn’t go out the back, because there are all these cops out front. But there was a scene that explained that, where we tried to get out the back, and had a short shoot-out with cops back there, too. But the makeup man put on too much blood. One bullet couldn’t have done it unless it was an .88. They cut that scene, so we go out the front for no reason.

“The cops are all lined up on our side of the cars. In reality, they would have been slaughtered that way, but instead we get killed and fall over flat all at once. It was unbelievable. The film was really low-budget, a couple of hundred thousand. I wanted to do that scene over again. I asked the director if he didn’t want a little coverage on it. But he said, ‘Wrap it!’”

During the 12 years before his first starring role, Casey did a lot of DJ work on radio stations here, in Cleveland, in Buffalo, N.Y., in San Francisco, then Los Angeles. He had a syndicated teen music show, produced by Dick Clark, on an LA station.

Lately he's been doing a lot of commercials. "If I wanted to, I could just go down to some island in the Caribbean, and just come back for three or four months a year to do commercial work. But I want to act. That's why I left Detroit 12 years ago."

He learned radio here, worked as a DJ on WJBK while studying English and speech at Wayne State. Currently, he's doing what he insistently described as an "underground" music-and-interview show on the worldwide Armed Forces Radio network "So our guys in Vietnam and around the world are listening to the same music as we are!"

The interview went badly. It was hard to get questions into his running spiel and his answers were minimal. "Why did you want to become an actor?" "I always wanted to, that's the only reason I left Detroit." "How do you like acting?" "It's terrific, no end to creativity."

The planned hour ran over, and Casey was scheduled to do an interview on Mark Beltaire's afternoon show on WABX. We went along.

Despite the fact that he plays a hip dealer in a film that tells it the way it is, Casey says he has no drug experience. "If I produce my own movie, like Hopper and Fonda did 'Easy Rider,' I might try a little then, just for the authentic experience."

Riding over in the cab, the girl with me was slightly freaking on the consistently plastic conversation. Casey seemed a bit perturbed with her mildly hysteric flippancy, tried some earnest eye-games and playful hugging, glancing beyond her to me to check for possible resentments.

He did the entire ABX number in less than a half-hour: two brief meetings with station manager John Detz, selecting a number of records, meeting Mark and arranging the pattern of the interview.

In between all this, he bounced around the tiny studio, compulsively rapping: B.B. King—"I had him on the Armed Forces underground for an hour. It's all happened for him so fast, but he's completely unaffected. He's right there. It's all there in the song." The one playing was "Paying the Cost to Be the Boss."

He played some plastic Moog, and something else, then asked us for our favorites. I suggested Dylan's "It's All Over, Baby Blue."

Casey was much more uptight wheeling around the studio than he had been in the hotel room. Occasionally he would stop sideways to Mark and glance anxiously at the back of his head, worrying about something. "I've done 20 national commercials—this is a heavy cat you got in the studio," he exclaimed at one point. It seemed bad.

Then Mark began the *Fifth Estate* news. There had been a mass police raid in Italy on thousands of squatters shacks, but the Italian government promised "billions" for new housing. The assistant director of the FBI was building a publicity case against SDS as a subversive organization dedicated to the violent overthrow of our constitutional government. The local pigs have a 1,500-man civilian reserve squad, "trained in the use of firearms," on call for "civil disturbances."

Casey ain't too bad. it may be true that he's lost the power to tell his occasional flashes of humanity from the bullshit hype. His films may be worthless at best. His "underground" show for the Armed Forces may just be another tiny cog in the machine of U.S. military domination of the Free World. But what the hell, he don't know no better, and everybody's gotta make a living, right?

Personally Casey may be, as Leslie remarked, "depressingly predictable." But he's a local boy that made good, and that's always news. And he was home for three days at the Pontchartraine.

# fifth Estate

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