

Shirley Jones Drives School Bus In TV Show

NEW YORK (AP) — Shirley Jones has always had the knack for digging into a role, but in her first television series she's having a little trouble with the clutch.

The clutch is attached to an old, psychedelic-hued school bus that Shirley drives in her upcoming ABC series, "The Partridge Family."

"It's got a stickshift and I learned to drive on automatic," she said. "It's the clutch problem."

The bus is used to transport her TV family to singing engagements, where Shirley, as the mother, joins in. "It's me and the five children," she said. "If you think that sounds like the Cowsills you're absolutely right."

The singing role brings Shirley full circle back to the time she arrived in New York with \$250 in her pocket after a stint at the Pittsburgh Playhouse. "I started in musical comedy," she said. "I was a nurse in 'South Pacific,' then I was in 'Me and Juliet' and after that the movie version of 'Oklahoma!'"

"Carousel" came after that and Shirley was beginning to worry that people thought of her whenever they saw gingham. The role that changed that was that of the prostitute in "Elmer Gantry," which won her an Oscar.

In "Music Man" she was back to prim librarian, but in "Happy Ending" she was a mistress to three men and in the forthcoming "Cheyenne Social Club" she's a madam. Shirley, dressed in a beige suit and wearing a knit tam on hair the color of ripe Oklahoma wheat, laughed and said, "Before 'Gantry' no one ever thought of me for anything else but musicals."

"Now people forget I was a singer and I've had people ask me who sang for me in 'Oklahoma!' That's a compliment because it means I've established myself as an actress."

It was on a good-will tour abroad with "Oklahoma!" that she met her husband, musical comedy star Jack Cassidy. "We had our courtship in Paris and Rome. We were married at the Cambridge Drama Festival while we were doing 'The Beggar's Opera.'"

"I have three boys of my own and a stepson"—she smiled and displayed her dimples—"so playing a mother isn't anything new for me."

In "The Partridge Family" her stepson, 16-year-old David Cassidy, plays the oldest son. David, Shirley and the other girl are the only ones in the group actually singing. The others, plus the instruments, are dubbed.