

By EDGAR PENTON

HOLLYWOOD (NEA) — That partridge in a pear tree has a lot of company this Christmas season — "The Partridge Family" — ABC's situation comedy airing Friday evenings 7:30-8 p.m.

The all-the-family show is something different in the way of series, and that's why Shirley Jones agreed to star as the widowed mother of five musically inclined youngsters ranging in age from 16 downward to 5.

"The Partridge Family" is no ordinary family. It's a show business family trying to live as normal a life as possible.

"And furthermore, the mother in this series, Shirley Partridge, is a sensible no-nonsense woman who behaves as a mother should," Shirley Jones says. "The pilot script struck home. The philosophy of how to raise children coincided exactly with mine." (Shirley and her actor-husband Jack Cassidy have three young boys at home.)

THE PARTRIDGES have become an in-demand top vocal-instrumental group after their first recording became a smash hit. Commuting from their home in a small northern California community, they perform throughout the country.

"But mother is the boss," Shirley emphasizes. "Besides, I'm bigger than they are."

Playing members of the family are (left) as Keith, 16; Susan Dey as Laurie, 15; Danny Bonaduce as Danny, 10; Jeremy David Cassidy (Miss Jones' stepson in real life) as Chris, 7, and Suzanne Crough as Tracy, 5. Dave Madden, a "Laugh-In" alumnus, plays Reuben Kincaid, their theatrical agent.

"I was struck at once by the true-to-life quality of the scripts," says Shirley. "There's plenty of humor, but the fun evolves from natural situations. I think

our show is much like the recent Dick Van Dyke series in that respect."

SHIRLEY THINKS of the Partridges as a modern-day Trapp Family ("The Sound of Music").

"Our music is different, of course. I think of it as soft rock. We've been told we sound like the Fifth Dimension — and that's certainly a compliment."

Shirley and David are the only family members who actually sing; the other voices are dubbed in.

(A single recording, "I Think I Love You," and an album, "The Partridge Family Album," are currently in release.)

"It really was a coincidence about David getting the part in the series," Miss Jones says. "He doesn't live with us — he's 20 years old and rents his own home. I didn't know that David had auditioned for the role of Keith."

"Bob Claver the executive producer, liked David, but wanted to be sure that I, his stepmother, would have no objection. I assured Bob I hadn't, and David was signed."

CLAVER SEES the show as "having a warm family feeling, essentially designed to amuse."

"It's a show about a family that happens to be in show business and how show business affects the family — but it's not a show about the business."

Keith Partridge is the leader of the musical group, and it is he who writes the songs. Laurie is quite interested in social causes, while Danny is the "brains" of the operation — a financial whiz. He's aptly described as "10 going on 35." The two youngest members of the family, Chris and Tracy, are intended to be typical of most children their age.

Reuben Kincaid, the family's harassed agent, claims not to be overly fond of children, but he manages to cope. Much

of the show's comedy stems from the by-play between young Danny and Reuben — with Reuben the foil.

"Some comment was made about Shirley Partridge being a widow," Claver says. "But that really fits our show better — and it gives us more openings for different story situations. She has romantic interests occasionally."

AT LEAST one new song is introduced each week by the Partridges on the TV show.

"Basically, the music is used only when it advances the story line or when it provides background for meaningful action," Claver explained.

Another integral part of the show is the "psychedelic" bus — painted all colors of the rainbow — used when the family travels. And, of course, mom gets the privilege of driving it.

"It's really a chore to drive that thing," says Shirley. "I'd never driven a bus before, much less anything that wasn't automatic."

Shirley feels she's back in the chorus as a member of the singing Partridges. She started her career as a nurse in the Broadway production of "South Pacific" and then was signed by Rodgers and Hammerstein for the role of Laurie in "Oklahoma!"

DAVID CASSIDY, primarily a singer, sees "The Partridge Family" as a great opportunity to further his acting career.

"I relish the chance to combine the two talents," David explained. "But, I must admit, I really come alive when I sing."

Born in New York City, David Cassidy made his Broadway stage debut as the teen-age lead in the Allan Sherman musical, "The Fig Leaves Are Falling." Since then he's had numerous guest-starring roles on television.

Susan Dey, with her natural beauty,

was one of the top-10 junior models in the country when selected to play the older daughter in "The Partridge Family."

"It's like a dream come true," says Susan. "Acting has always been my ultimate goal, and now, I'm inspired to learn to sing as well."

Born in Pekin, Ill., Susan has two sisters and a brother. Her older sister is also a model. Susan's face and figure have graced the covers of Seventeen, American Girl and Simplicity.

DANNY BONADUCE is the youngest of four children of Joseph and Betty Bonaduce. His father is story editor for "Arnie," and his mother is a TV writer. His 17-year-old brother John recently sold his first script to "The Bill Cosby Show."

Jeremy Gelbwaks (pronounced gib-wax) is a relative newcomer to show business after doing two commercials and appearing in a skit as a miniature Pat Paulsen on the "Pat Paulsen Half A Comedy Hour."

The son of an electronics engineer, Jeremy is very much interested in writing.

Suzanne Crough (pronounced crow), the youngest of eight children, made her acting debut in "The Partridge Family." She's a first-grader, loves school, is somewhat of a tomboy. She lives with her family in Anaheim, where her father owns a scooter shop.

DAVE MADDEN, the former confetti-throwing comedian of "Laugh-In," is enthused about his role of a comedy foil in "The Partridge Family."

"It's something a little different for me," Madden says, "but rewarding. When you're the foil you not only get laughs, but genuine sympathy as well — provided you play it right."

Put them all together, and you have a "Partridge Family" that could grace the video yule tree for many a season.