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'Partridge Family' Offers Different Kind of Comedy

By EDGAR PENTON

HOLLYWOOD — That partridge in a pear tree has a lot of company this Christmas season—"The Partridge Family"—ABC's situation comedy airing Saturday evenings at 5.

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 philosophy of how to raise children coincided exactly with mine." (Shirley Cassidy have three young boys at home.)

TOP GROUP

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 David Cassidy (Miss Jones' stepson in real life) as Keith, 16; Susan Dey as Laurie, 15; Danny Bonaduce as Danny, 10; Jeremy Gelbwaks as Chris, 7, and Suzanne Crough as "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").

TWO SING

"Our music is different, of course. I think of it a 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 5." The two youngest members of the family, Chris and Tracy, are intended to be typical of most children their age.

COMEDY BY-PLAY

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 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.

TWO TALENTS

"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.



THE PARTRIDGE in a pear tree has a lot of company this Christmas — The Partridge Family — with Shirley Jones and Dave Madden monitoring their charges in the bus. From left: Jeremy Gelbwaks, Suzanne Crough, Susan Dey, Danny Bonaduce, David Cassidy. Saturday night on Channel 4.



MAKING WITH THE ROCK, the Partridge Family gives out with the sound for their weekly outing on ABC, Channel 4, at 5 p.m. Saturday. Shirley Jones plays the mother of the singing Partridges. Four of the five children, from left: Susan Dey, Suzanne Crough, David Cassidy, Danny Bonaduce. Not shown: Jeremy Gelbwaks.