Shirley Jones' remarkable career has a 'Cinderella' glow to it. She swept to overnight stardom in the film version of Rodgers and Hammerstein's "Oklahoma!" Miss Jones followed "Oklahoma!" with another successful Rodgers and Hammerstein film, "Carousel," and then in 1961 received industry recognition for her startling and dynamic performance in "Elmer Gantry", by winning an Oscar.

Currently, she is starring in Screen Gems' new half-hour family comedy series with music, "The Partridge Family".

Shirley was born in Smithtown, Pennsylvania, population 800. She is the only child of the late Paul Jones (owner of a brewery that has been in the Jones family for generations) and Mrs. Marjorie Williams Jones. As a child Miss Jones showed rare talent for singing, and her parents, as non-show business as parents could be, still recognized their daughter's unusual promise. Mrs. Jones commuted some 30 miles every day to Pittsburgh with her daughter, in order to give her singing lessons.

Miss Jones attended the adjacent public school, South Huntington High, and appeared in many amateur stage presentations. In true American fashion she had a 'crush' on the local football hero.

After graduation she entered the Miss America Beauty Contest and won the title of 'Miss Pittsburgh'. However, in the ensuing competition for 'Miss Pennsylvania', the judges gave the nod to a tall and stately brunette teenager, and blonde Shirley became a runner-up for the state title.

The following year she attended the Pittsburgh Playhouse and sang in the Pittsburgh Civic Light Opera Productions. She then went to New York, intending to enroll in the New Jersey Centenary College for Girls, majoring in music and fine arts. At that time her vocal coach arranged for her to sing for Rodgers and Hammerstein. The esteemed duo were impressed with her voice and beauty and signed her to a contract. Her first Broadway appearance was as one of the nurses in the chorus of "South Pacific".

After "South Pacific", Messrs. Rodgers and Hammerstein gave her a small role in their next musical, "Me And Juliet", and she subsequently played the lead when the show went on a national tour. Again, these gentlemen played "Prince Charming" to Shirley's 'Cinderella' career, when they arranged for her to fly to Hollywood to test for 'Laurie' in their film, "Oklahoma!"

The sought after role was almost as desirable at that time as 'Scarlett' had been in "Gone With The Wind", and the practical Miss Jones had well nigh forgotten her test and was back on the road in "Me And Juliet", when she received a telephone call one day advising her she had been chosen to play the part. This role, as stated, brought her wide acclaim and she received wide press exposure on the covers of national and world-wide magazines and in newspapers.

From this beginning Shirley Jones emerged as a Hollywood film star. Appearing in major films with James Cagney, Gordon MacRae, James Stewart, Richard Widmark and Pat Boone, Miss Jones then reached the next pinnacle of her career with an Oscar winning performance in "Elmer Gantry". In this film she displayed startling versatility in reversing all preconceived 'America's Sweetheart' concepts of herself, and lashed out with a poignant and powerful performance as the lost and touching prostitute 'Lulu Baines'.

In direct contrast to "Elmer Gantry", Miss Jones' next film was Meredith Wilson's beautiful and joyous musical "The Music Man", in which she co-starred with Robert Preston.

Among numerous films which followed "Music Man", Miss Jones starred in two pictures in succession for MGM, "The Courtship Of Eddie's Father", with Glenn Ford, and "Ticklish Affair".

She has proven herself a sparkling light comedienne in Universal's "Bedtime Story", co-starring with Marlon Brando and David Niven. Again, in the comedy vein, she appeared for Universal Pictures in "Fluffy", in which she co-starred with Tony Randall, and for MGM in "The Secret Of My Success".

Miss Jones more recently completed a World Premiere film for Universal, "Silent Night, Lonely Night", and the motion picture, "The Happy Ending", directed by Richard Brooks (who directed her in her Oscar winning film, "Elmer Gantry") for United Artists, and "The Cheyenne Social Club", starring James Stewart and Henry Fonda.

She is well represented on records via numerous Columbia albums. She has made many appearances on television with Perry Como, Danny Thomas, Andy Williams, Dean Martin, Tom Jones, Carol Burnett and The Smothers Brothers. ◻

SHIRLEY JONES

Connie Partridge in Screen Gems' "The Partridge Family"