Shirley Jones Readies For Her Premiere Show

By GRACIA CAINES

"We're just an ordinary family from a small town in unordinary circumstances."

That's what Shirley Jones, star of "The Partridge Family" on ABC-TV, said about the show which debuts tonight at 8:30.

Shirley knows a little town and its environment, having spent the first 18 years of her life with about 800 other people in Smithton, Pa. She was the only child of Paul Jones, who owned a brewery, and Marjorie Williams Jones. (Shirley hates beer, even though the brewery is still in the family.)

AFTER winning a beauty contest and becoming Miss Pittsburgh, Shirley's voice teacher convinced the Joneses that their daughter had an unusually good voice. They decided that for her it was Broadway or bust.

They took her off to the big city and registered her in the Barbizon Hotel for Women. From then on, she was on her own.

"It was like teaching someone to swim. You just throw him in and see if he sinks."

Shirley's "sense of direction" is a noticeable characteristic. When a gal knows where she is, who she is and where she's headed, she generally gets there and she has.

Many times in her career she has been referred to as a "Cinderella." Her star seems to have risen quickly into the firmament, but she realizes that it takes dedication and hard work.

THINGS started happening when her vocal coach arranged an audition for Shirley with Rodgers and Hammerstein. They signed her to a contract and she made her first Broadway appearance as one of the nurses in South Pacific. The next step was a small role in "Me and Juliet," and she played the lead when the show went on tour.

Then came the "big" break. A flight to Hollywood, and a screen test for Laurie in "Oklahoma," at that time, possibly the most popular and important musical in the United States.

"It was almost as important is Scarlett in Gone With the Wind."

This was the plum many experienced singers and actresses were coveting.

ONE role followed another with such leading men as James Cagney, Gordon MacRae, James Stewart, Richard Widmark and Pat Boone.

Switching completely from the image she had created as a musical comedy star in "Carousel," "Music Man" and "South Pacific," she accepted the role of Lulu Baines in "Elmer Gantry" opposite Burt Lancaster. She played the part of the pathetic prostitute with startling versatility and understanding and won an Oscar as supporting actress.

She has recently completed a Universal film, "Silent Night, Lonely Night" United Artists' "The Happy Ending," and "The Cheyenne Social Club," with James Stewart and Henry Fonda.

SHIRLEY has made many recordings and has been on TV shows with Perry Como, Danny Thomas, Andy Wililams, Dean Martin, Tom Jones, Carol Burnett and the Smothers Brothers.

Shirley's roles in public and private life are equally successful. She's a happy mother of three boys, 11, 8 and 4, and a stepson, David, who plays her son in the new TV series.

Shirley met her husband, Jack Cassidy, when they toured Europe in "Oklahoma."

"It was an European courtship," she recalled. "By the time we got home I was hopelessly in love and I've been that way ever since."

FOR a while the Cassidys toured the country in a nightclub act, but they go separate ways from necessity.

"We've learned to live with it because it is certainly a part of our profession. It just makes the time together more precious."

When asked what she thought about pornographic films, she said, "It's not artistry and leaves hardly any reason to be an actor. Just take your clothes off and that's it.

"Realism is good, but just nudity for nudity's sake is revolting. There's a fine line between decency and honesty. However, I believe we will return to good writing, good acting and good theater, whether movies, TV or stage. The box-office is beginning to show that the public is getting bored with over-emphasis on sex."

The up-grade, she believes, has already begun.

Shirley and her real life stepson, David Cassidy, play mother and son in the TV series.

"The Partridge Family" is a new TV series starring Shirley Jones. (Front, left) Danny Bonaduce, Suzanne Crough, Shirley. (Rear, left) Susan Dey, David Cassidy, Jeremy Gelbwaks.