

By **LAWRENCE LAURENT**
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WASHINGTON — Shirley Jones wasn't always interested in show business. She didn't even start to sing "until I was 3 or 4."

She was a church soloist in her hometown, Smithton, Pa., at the age of 5. The teen years were spent in high school plays and operettas and she never did go to college. Show business intervened.

At 19, when many girls were pressing orchids into books to remember the college prom, Shirley Mae Jones was memorizing her 7-year contract with Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein. She went into the chorus of "South Pacific", into the road company lead of "Me and Juliet" and into "Me and Juliet" on Broadway.

SHE WAS the star of her first motion picture, singing the role of Laurey opposite Gordon MacRae in "Oklahoma!"

Her fifth movie was "Elmer Gantry" and it resulted in an Academy Award as the best supporting actress in 1960. By then, she was a doddering 26 years old.

Ten years and 12 motion pictures later, bone weary from supper club engagements and Summertime tent show tours, Shirley Jones settled down to a television series. Everyone knew that The Partridge Family didn't have a chance. It was scheduled against a new Andy Griffith series on CBS and everyone knew that Andy's shows had always ranked among the top 10 on television.

ANDY NEVER knew what hit him. His Headmaster series was a preachy attempt at "relevance" and worse, for Andy, The Partridge Family unleashed one of those phenomena of the early 1970s. It was David Cassidy, a shooting star among the teeny bopper, prepubescent girls whose tastes change faster than the weather.

The Partridge Family was openly modeled on a mother-and-children musical group, The Cowbells. Shirley was the mother and included among the five children was David Cassidy, Shirley's real-life stepson.

The first 1970 season found the fan magazines

Star Of The Family

— read almost entirely by the very young — switching from Bobby Sherman to David Cassidy. He was quickly a selling point for posters, pictures, magazines and even special stamps for fan mail.

The craze now is running out and David Cassidy — a very rich young man — can start trying to move from bubble gum to beefsteak.

EQUALLY GREAT changes took place for Shirley Jones. She said: "I went from a soloist to a group singer. I went from a pop singer to a rock singer. I even had to learn to drive a bus."

She needed the series; she had worked too long to quit. Besides, she was convinced that a career helped her marriage to Jack Cassidy. (They were married in 1956 and 10 years later she had told an interviewer: "It's good for the marriage . . . Jack and I are never bored with each other. In fact, the marriage is still terribly romantic.")

Shirley has three sons by Cassidy: Shaun Paul, Patrick William and Ryan John. "I have," she said, "an honest relationship with my children."

THAT HONEST relationship may have been troubled this year. In January, Shirley and Jack Cassidy agreed to a trial separation. Each made clear that no formal legal action was planned.

Meanwhile, The Partridge Family rolls merrily into a third season. And this, as almost everyone knows, is the money year for a series. By the third year, all major costs have been amortized and, good heavens how the money does roll in! A third season also means the series will have enough episodes for a mass syndication for reruns.

Shirley, however, has never been desperate for money. Back home in Smithton, Pa., her late father owned the brewery.



THE PARTRIDGES: Shirley, David (right) and the rest of the family