

lecture circuit discussing his old movies to sellout crowds. "If they can meet my price, I'll give 'em a spiel," he said. Last year Kelly lectured in Atlantic City and was surprised when his old friend and other *Brigadoon* dancing partner, Van Johnson, showed up in the audience.

Future plans include finishing an autobiography for publication in 1995 and quashing the curious notion that he had died.

"The mix-up started with those GAP print ads, 'Gene Kelly Wore Khakis,'" he said. "Besides myself, the first group of ads included Arthur Miller, Marilyn Monroe, Humphrey Bogart and a few others. Along with the phrase being in the past tense, all the other personalities were famously dead, except Arthur and me. People leapt to the natural conclusion. You wouldn't believe the number of phone calls I got from friends trying to figure out whether I was still here or not," Kelly said.

Now that's setting the record straight!

## SHIRLEY'S MANY GUISES

Shirley Jones

April 1995

The name Shirley Jones conjures up different images for different people. To a generation now in their "golden years," she was the fresh-faced young songstress in such musical films as *Oklahoma!*, *Carousel* and *The Music Man*. To baby boomers, she was Shirley Partridge, the ever-smiling matriarch of TV's singing Partridge Family in the early '70s. And to film buffs, she was a dramatic movie star who won a Best Supporting Actress Academy Award in 1960 for her role as the hustling prostitute in *Elmer Gantry*.

Making it big in show business has been likened to winning the lottery, and Jones is the first to admit that her meteoric rise to superstardom was more of an accident than a

carefully charted career plan. Now, 43 years after she burst onto the scene as Laurey in *Oklahoma!*, Jones, 64, in a recent interview in her Beverly Hills home, which she shares with husband Marty Ingels, told us she attributes her success largely to happenstance.

"I never really set out to make anything happen," she said. "I was always able to sing — that was a God-given gift, but the pieces of my career just sort of fell into place."

A native of Smithton, Pennsylvania (population 800), Jones appeared in amateur theatrics, but really aspired to become a veterinarian. On a family trip to New York City, she met a pianist who insisted she sing for an agent friend of his. Within a matter of days after that chance meeting she was auditioning for Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein and was immediately cast in a chorus role in *South Pacific*. A part in another Rodgers and Hammerstein show, *Me and Juliet*, led to her being cast in the 1955 film *Oklahoma!*

During location filming in Arizona, the 21-year-old film novice was surrounded by screen veterans, including Gordon MacRae, Rod Steiger, Eddie Albert, Gloria Grahame and director Fred Zinnemann (who also directed such classics as *High Noon* and *From Here to Eternity*).

"I was very lucky," she said. "Fred was very patient, to the point where he was really Svengali. He asked me if I had ever performed before a camera. I said 'Never,' to which he replied: 'You're an absolute natural.' I was really like a sponge and quite malleable. I had not done enough work on the stage to form any bad habits. I was very open to being directed, and Fred loved that. I was also so naive, the camera didn't scare me."

Neither did Rod Steiger. Ingels, dressed in a ratty bathrobe that fit his image as a former comedian who'd do anything for a laugh, had been kibbutzing the interview from a nearby chair. He leapt up, left the room and returned momentarily with a large black-and-white picture (one that had been blown up into huge dimensions from a still photograph)

of the *Oklahoma!* cast. In it, Steiger, with a grin a Cheshire cat would envy, is posed clinching Jones's shapely waist in a kind of backwards bear hug.

"Funny story about that," Ingels chimed, "Rod had the hots for Shirley during filming and could barely contain himself."

"That's true," Jones said. "I was young and kind of naïve about the ways of the world. But Rod's ardor kind of cooled quickly. Later I found out that Fred Zinnemann had extracted a promise from him that he would keep his paws off me for the sake of the picture. In fact, he blackmailed Rod into becoming my protector on the set! 'Judd Fry' ... my hero ... how do you like them apples?"

Just as quickly as her star had risen, the imminent death of the musical film by the late '50s almost counted Jones among its many casualties.

"My movie career was over when musicals weren't being made anymore because I was typecast for those roles," she said. "I was forced to take television parts at a time when it was considered beneath a 'movie star' to do television."

It was Jones' Emmy-nominated performance opposite Red Skelton in a Playhouse 90 production of *The Big Slide* that caught the attention of Burt Lancaster, who was about to star in the film *Elmer Gantry*, based on Sinclair Lewis' satirical novel about a phony evangelist. After convincing director Richard Brooks that she was right for the part (he preferred Piper Laurie), she was cast in the role of the prostitute who blackmails the hustling preacher played by Lancaster.

Jones' first day on the set was particularly difficult, as Brooks — still brooding from not casting Laurie — offered her no direction. "I went home that night in tears thinking he really hates me," she recalled. "The next day, Brooks took me aside and said, 'Shirley, I want to apologize to you. I left you alone because I wanted to see if you'd fall on your face. You didn't, and, as a matter of fact, I think you're going to win an Academy Award.'"

Although Brooks' prophecy came true, Jones herself didn't hold much hope for winning. "I really had no clue that I would win," she said. "Janet Leigh was taking home all the awards for *Psycho*. When they announced my name I was in shock."

"I would not have had a career if it wasn't for *Gantry*," she added. "That film and winning the Oscar gave me a chance to star in movies throughout the '60s."

With feature parts now assured, Jones starred in a string of mostly romantic comedies opposite such stars as Marlon Brando, Glenn Ford, David Niven and Tony Curtis. By the end of the decade, she felt she needed a change. When an offer came along to star in a weekly television series about a single mother and her brood of aspiring pop singers, called *The Partridge Family*, Jones eagerly accepted it. Whereas *Elmer Gantry* saved her movie career, *The Partridge Family* effectively ended it.

"The show killed my movie career," she said. "Do I regret doing it? Absolutely not! I had traveled the world making movies and I needed a change. I had three young children to raise and my marriage was teetering. I needed to stay near home with as close to a nine-to-five job as possible. *The Partridge Family* gave me normalcy. It also paid me a lot of money."

During the five-year run of the show, Jones' co-star and real-life stepson, David Cassidy, became a teen idol. "The experience was really tough on David," she said. "He nearly had a nervous breakdown. After the show he left the business for a year, went to Hawaii, sat in a field and played guitar. That kind of overwhelming adulation is tough on a young kid."

In light of the success a few years ago of *The Brady Bunch Movie* — a pastiche of another California "family" of the period, there has been talk of transferring the Partridge brood to the big screen.

"We've been approached about a sequel or some type of

remake," she said. "But we never could get it together because David didn't want to get involved again. With the success of *The Brady Bunch Movie*, I wouldn't be surprised if somebody remade our show with a new cast. The adults of today grew up with our show and they're the ones going to movies today."

In 1980, Jones found another outlet for her considerable talents when she performed for the first time with the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra. She now regularly appears with orchestras throughout the country.

Concerts and summer stock consume most of her performing these days. She's also a regular host on cable's American Movie Classics channel.

"I'm very choosy when it comes to the projects I select," she said. "I don't want to do something for the sake of being back on television or in a movie. I don't need the money and the roles are just not there for women in my age bracket."

## ENTERING THE LION'S DEN

Ann Miller

April 1998

Tap dancer Ann Miller was, perhaps, the quintessential female MGM musical star of the early 1950s. Whirling like a dervish around prehistoric bones in a natural history museum (*On the Town*), the disembodied arms and instruments of a hot swing band (*Small Town Girl*), or kicking out a staccato rhythm on a coffee table (*Kiss Me Kate*), Miller was tops in taps for a studio famed for its musicals.

Miller's MGM movies were pure confection; cookie-cutter, cotton-candy escapism spun from a studio system geared to making audiences forget their troubles. As Frank Sinatra, another alumnus of MGM's Golden Era, has said: "Musicals were fantasy trips; boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy sings a song and gets girl. The plots were that simple."