

Legendary actress Shirley Jones to be honored in Pittsburgh show

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Shirley Jones as Shirley Partridge in "The Partridge Family."

Shirley Jones takes a lot of pride in her Western Pennsylvania roots so it is only fitting that a celebration in her honor will take place in Pittsburgh.

"We thought it was the perfect place to do it," said Patrick Cassidy, one of Jones's three sons to actor Jack Cassidy. "(Western Pennsylvania) means everything to her. It gave her her strength. It defined who she is. That Pittsburgh, blue collar honesty, she got all of that."

Patrick and his brothers, Shaun and Ryan will host, "Shirley Jones, A Gala Celebration of Her Life, Career and Legacy" at 4 p.m. Saturday at the Byham Theater in Pittsburgh.

Jones, born in Charleroi and raised in Smithton, had a prolific career that included starring roles in musicals such as “Oklahoma” and “The Music Man,” before heading on to play the matriarch in the television show “The Partridge Family.”



Shirley Jones in “The Music Man” with Robert Preston

While those roles cast Jones as wholesome and kind, she won an Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress for playing a vengeful prostitute in the 1960 movie “Elmer Gantry.”

During the gala honoring Jones, who turned 90 in March, acting and singing luminaries Sierra Boggess, Norm Lewis, Jessie Mueller, Kelli O’Hara and Adam Pascal will take the stage.

“They were all honored to be asked and are so excited to be on it,” Cassidy said. “What will make the evening so special are the stories each one of them is going to tell that are very personal about the effect my mother had on them.”

There will be musical performances and a nod to Rodgers and Hammerstein, the successful theater-writing team in whose movies Jones often starred.

“When I look at my mother’s career, I try to be objective as her son, but it’s amazing,” Cassidy said. “She is one of the foremost musical movie ingenues in history, one of the most iconic moms in television with ‘The Partridge Family’ and she’s an Academy Award winner.”

Cassidy said it wasn't until he was 40 and watched an episode of "Biography" about his mother that he really grasped her stardom.

"That was the first time that I saw my mother as the star that Rodgers and Hammerstein saw, and the public saw," he said. "I got what everybody else saw and why she became a star."



Shirley Jones as Miss Pittsburgh 1952.

But Cassidy said the role that Jones relished the most was that of mother. What you saw on the screen with Jones was pretty much what you got in real life.

"She is what everybody sees," Cassidy said. "What everybody gets from her on screen is what she is, genuine, warm, incredibly normal. She was not a person who ever thought of herself as a star. She was very grounded and had her priorities straight. Her family was number one. Her husbands and

her children were always number one. Her career was the way she made a living. She was the big breadwinner at a time when many women weren't. She prioritized beautifully. That's why she managed to have this incredible career and still be a mom. She created a normal atmosphere in the wake of being in show business."

Cassidy said his mother's influence is why he and his brothers are so family oriented.

In fact, Cassidy explained, his mom took the role on "The Partridge Family" so she could be home with her kids more. In those days, movie stars really didn't take on television roles

He said his mom really enjoyed being on the show, which became a starring vehicle for Patrick's half-brother David Cassidy.



Shirley Jones, far left, starred as the matriarch in the sitcom "The Partridge Family."

Patrick and his brothers each eventually became involved in the entertainment business, something their mother didn't necessarily encourage.

"She did everything she could to keep us out of it," he said with a laugh. "She and my father saw the difficulties of the business. They preached to us to get an education to have something to fall back on. Of course, none of us listened. By the grace of God, we are all successful and able to make a living at it."

Patrick and his mom became the first mother-son duo to star together in a Broadway musical, "42nd Street." He and Shaun eventually developed a biographical musical about their mother, "Have You Met Miss Jones."



Shirley Jones and Gordon MacRae in "Oklahoma."

"I had the wonderful opportunity to work with her in my years as an adult performer," he said.

Due to her advanced age, Jones, whom Cassidy said is in good health, will not be able to make the trip from her home in California to be in town for the show. He did say it will be filmed and PBS has expressed interest in the event.

"It's really for us and for her," Cassidy said. "She is so incredibly appreciative of the performers and that we are doing this to honor her in her hometown of Pittsburgh. I don't think she would have wanted it done anywhere else."