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THE MORNING CALL

Bucks Playhouse a family affair for Shirley Jones, Patrick Cassidy



Actress Shirley Jones and her son, Patrick Cassidy, who will be at Bucks County Playhouse Saturday on behalf of Jones when she is inducted into the Playhouse Hall of Fame.
(PATRICK CASSIDY/CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)



John J. Moser Contact Reporter Of The Morning Call

By the time Patrick Cassidy was graduating from high school at the dawn of the 1980s, he says, he had every major record label wanting to sign him.

As the half-brother of early 1970s mega-teen idol David Cassidy and brother of late 1970s teen idol Shaun Cassidy, Patrick Cassidy figures those labels were hoping lightning would strike a third time with him.

Progress: 0%

"They didn't even know if I could sing," Cassidy says. "I could sing, but they didn't know it. I just fit: not just my last name — I was tall and thin. I looked, I guess, good in a pair of Spandex pants, who knows? They wanted to sign me."

But Cassidy says he decided not to take the offers, and instead chose to follow the path of his also-famous parents, actors Jack Cassidy and [Shirley Jones](#), by pursuing the stage and serious acting instead.

"It was a conscious decision at the time," Cassidy says in a phone call from Los Angeles, where he lives. "Seeing for myself what both [David and Shaun] had experienced to say, 'I'm not gonna do this.'"

"I wanted some longevity and, more importantly I think, I wanted some credibility. And I thought if I started in the theater, and if I worked myself in the theater and I learned, I would get that."

That choice, Cassidy says, is why, nearly 40 years later, he's still a respected working actor who has had leading roles in a half-dozen Broadway plays, roles in hundreds of productions across the country, been on TV series and movies, and more.

And why he's a perfect choice to represent his mother when she's inducted into the Bucks County Playhouse Hall of Fame at "Hammerstein in Hollywood," a fundraising concert Saturday during the playhouse's third Oscar Hammerstein Festival.

Cassidy will be one of the concert performers, who also include Tony nominee and "Annie" star Andrea McArdle; Ashley Brown, who originated the Broadway role of Mary Poppins; and Tony nominees Max von Essen and Carmen Cusack.

Jones, 83, who is rehabilitating from a recent hip fracture, will not attend.

In a career that spans more than six decades, Jones starred in more than 30 movies, including three of the most beloved musicals ever: "Oklahoma," "Carousel" and "The Music Man."

She won the Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress for "Elmer Gantry" in 1960, and in the 1970s gained fame with a new generation as the star of hit musical TV sitcom "The Partridge Family." She was twice nominated for [Emmy Awards](#) for later TV work

She also spent significant time in Bucks County working with Hammerstein at his Highland Farm, and with husband Jack Cassidy when he performed at the Bucks County Playhouse for a summer in 1957.

"Those are very good memories for her," Patrick Cassidy says. "She remembers being there very vividly, and remembers being at Mr. Hammerstein's house very vividly over the summer."

"She is an exceptional connection to Oscar Hammerstein and his extraordinary musical legacy," says Playhouse Producing Director Alexander Fraser.

Patrick Cassidy had just left a visit with his mother before the phone call ("She's doing great ... going through leaps and bounds in terms of getting better," he says) and even called her to clarify some details.

Jack Cassidy also was a successful musical performer on Broadway in shows such as "Maggie Flynn," "Fade Out – Fade In," "It's a Bird ...It's a Plane ... Its Superman" and "She Loves Me," for which he won a Tony. He also was nominated for two Emmys, and later became a frequent guest star on top 1970s TV shows.

Patrick Cassidy says growing up in a household in California with famous parents and siblings — he was an adolescent when David Cassidy and his mother were on "The Partridge Family" and in his late teens when Shaun was on TV and making hit records — seemed normal.

He even wrote a cabaret show called "Just Act Normal" several years ago that was the story of his life — "growing up in a family where every single person around the dinner worked in show business, but we were still a family. I just assumed everybody's parents and brothers were on television and in the theater. I had a very — to me, to my way of thinking — normal upbringing, with showbiz as the backdrop of our life."

Cassidy says that in high school, he was more interested in sports than show business. He was his high school's quarterback and two games into his senior season was leading the nation in passing when he broke his collarbone.

While healing from the injury, Cassidy found out his school play was "The Music Man" and decided to try out.

"I thought, 'Heck, my mom played Marian the Librarian'" in the film. "I was conceived on the set of 'The Music Man.' It's a staple of my life. I'm a shoo-in to play Harold Hill," the lead role, he says.

He says his mother called actor Dick Van Dyke, who was playing Harold Hill in the national tour of "The Music Man" at the time, and Cassidy went to Van Dyke's house to learn the play's pivotal song 'Ya Got Trouble.'

"And he said I was terrific. So I go into the high school audition, I've got my hat and my cane, and I sing my heart out and I get the part — of Salesman No. 5," Cassidy says with a laugh. "But I got bit by the theater bug. I knew that my career as a football player was over, and that's when I decided that this was gonna be my life."

Before he was out of his teens, Cassidy had starred in the TV movies "Angel Dusted," a drug-awareness drama, and a horror drama "Midnight Offerings."

"And I was off," he says. But his biggest break was getting cast in the Broadway show "The Pirates of Penzance." He celebrated his 19th birthday during rehearsals in New York.

"I got cast to be opposite [Kevin Kline](#), and then Treat Williams, who took over for him. And I did it with Kaye Ballard and Estelle Parsons and the great George Rose — all these incredible theater icons," he says. Later he starred in "Annie Get Your Gun," and was in Stephen Sondheim's original "Assassins" and "Leader of the Pack."

"I've been so fortunate in that I've been able to do television and film, I've played Las Vegas, I flew all over the country. I've done tours, I've done Broadway. I've been this sort of journeyman as an actor, and it's allowed me to continue to work," he says.

Cassidy later had the opportunity to work with both of his former teen-idol brothers. He co-starred in the short-lived 2009 ABC Family TV series "Ruby and The Rockets," playing former teen idols with David. Shaun Cassidy wrote the show and was its executive producer.

"It was, like, it was the greatest job I could have ever asked for," Cassidy says. "I was doing a sitcom, which means you laugh all day. And then on Fridays, you'd have a live audience, so you sort of get your theater that way. It was truly a joy. I mean I wished the show had been more successful and we'd gone on."

Asked about David Cassidy's recent revelation that he has [dementia](#) and will stop performing after this year, Cassidy says neither he nor his family has had contact with his half-brother in five years.

"None of us was aware of that. I pray for him, he's in my thoughts, but that's all I can say about that," he says.

Cassidy has even reprised roles that his father, who died in 1976, made famous. He re-created Jack Cassidy's role in a revival of "It's a Bird ... It's a Plane ... It's Superman" at Dallas Theater Center that he said seemed bound for Broadway, but never got there because Warner Brothers had the movie "Man of Steel" coming out.

Told that his resemblance to his later father is striking, Cassidy laughs, "I've made use of that. It wasn't a plan to follow in his footsteps in regard to the theater, but my career has completely paralleled his.

"I've gotten to do a lot of his roles and I've gotten that thing on the stage where I've played parts and everybody said, 'Oh my God, you're so much like him.' In life I'm not really like him, but on stage I can do him.

"I can turn on the Jack Cassidy persona while I perform sometimes, and it's been fun. In some shows I got to *do him*. I was being him in a song in 'Fade Out, Fade In' called 'My Fortune is My Face,' and people who knew him said it was like it was scary to watch because it was like he was reincarnated."

But Patrick Cassidy has worked most extensively with his mother. "I'm really close with my mom," he says.

They've shared the stage frequently in the past 15 years, even in London, and in 2004 were together in a revival of "42nd Street" that marked Jones' first Broadway performance since doing "Maggie Flynn" with Jack Cassidy in 1967. It also was one of the first times a mother and son shared the Broadway stage.

Cassidy also developed a show for his mother, a tribute to her life called "Have You Met Miss Jones" for which Shaun Cassidy wrote the script. It premiered in Kansas City last fall and plans are to present it in places across the country, "depending on my mom's availability," Cassidy says.

Much in the same way Cassidy says he was driven to follow his parents, his younger son, Jack, is a singer who was a contestant on NBC's "The Voice" before being eliminated last week.

Cassidy says his son has "a real strong sense of spirituality," leads worship in church and has done missionary work in Uganda and in the Dominican Republic. He was drawn to celebrity mentor Alicia Keys because they "bonded on a spiritual level" in an interaction not shown on TV.

"I can't tell you how proud I am," he says.

Just as he grew up feeling a show business family was natural, Cassidy says he now sees it through his sons' eyes.

"When they were watching television or watching their dad on the stage, or watching their grandmother on the stage, for them it's very normal, too," he says. "It's very normal to sing all the time. It's very normal to, you know, see your relatives or your parents — your uncles, your dad, whoever, in the theater. It's just a very normal thing.

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DETAILS

Bucks County Playhouse

Hall of Fame events

What: Actress Shirley Jones is inducted into the Bucks County Playhouse Hall and Fame at a fundraising concert called "Hammerstein in Hollywood" that is part of the annual Oscar Hammerstein Festival.

When: 8 p.m. Saturday

Where: Bucks County Playhouse, 70 S. Main St., New Hope

How much: \$45-\$150

Concert performers: Andrea McArdle, Ashley Brown, Carmen Cusack, Malcolm Gets and Max Von Essen

What else: The Hammerstein Festival features events all devoted to musical theater, including workshops and talks. Weekend pass is \$350.

Info: www.buckscountyplayhouse.org, 215-862-2121