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Emmy Award winner Shari Lewis and sidekick Charlie Horse star in the new PBS series *The Charlie Horse Music Pizza*.

Dough-ray-me

Shari's 'Music Pizza' serves up education

By Scott Moore
Washington Post

When Shari Lewis talks, people listen — even if they can't see her lips move.

For 40 years, Shari Lewis has led the way for children's education and entertainment. And, gosh darn it, countless thousands of socks have been fashioned into puppets in tribute to her lovable Hush Puppy, Lamb Chop and Charlie Horse.

So if Shari is willing to take the bit on and lead the band down Main Street USA in support of musical education, of course the 2- to 8-year-olds (and their parents) are going to sing and play along.

And that's the point of her new daily series, *The Charlie Horse Music Pizza*, premiering today on Channel 8 (KAET).

"This show provides the very basic music education that is missing in the lives of our children," said Lewis, quoting studies about the benefits music training has on learning ability, abstract reasoning, self-esteem, teamwork and achievement.

Lewis also has personal anecdotal evidence, attributing her own success — which includes 12 Emmy Awards, seven Parents' Choice Awards and a Peabody — to her musical training.

It wasn't an easy start. Ann Ritz Hurwitz, a parent and music teacher, pushed her daughter to the piano — with a potty seat propped on the bench so she could reach the keys. But over the years, young Shari resisted practicing, in part overwhelmed by her mother's skill level.

It wasn't until she became a teenager, and tried the violin, that she fell in love with music.

"I was given the wrong instrument," Lewis said. "Parents who are willing for their child to try any number of sports should be willing to let them try any number of instruments."

With that in mind, *The Charlie Horse Music Pizza* provides samples of many instruments, plus introduction to various musical styles and basic concepts such as notes, pitch, harmony, composing and rhythm.

It's not just a music-appreciation class. *Music Pizza* encourages the music-making that once took place in households and schools. Now, Lewis said, family singing usually takes place only in the car, and more than 35 percent of the music programs in elementary schools have been cut.

"You just don't get a good sense of self-esteem from watching someone else play music. You've got to do it yourself," Lewis added. "Little kids, between 2 and 8, are perfect and ready for music, because kids' ears are unblocked. And it's the perfect time to inherit any kind of musical style, as long as it has a good energy. Kids are unprejudiced. You don't have to tell them it's Classical music. You put on the Overture to *The Marriage of Figaro* and Mozart will get them up on their feet and dancing."

To facilitate the process, producing station KCET in Hollywood and the Music Educator National Conference are distributing training manuals to 30,000 teachers and day-care providers, and underwriter NAMM: The International Music Products Association is ensuring that 500 retailers provide thousands of children with hands-on introduction to musical instruments.

The show itself, "from beginning to end is a handmade production," Lewis said, no pun intended.

It's also homemade. Lewis created the series with husband Jeremy Tarcher, and daughter Mallory Tarcher is co-head writer and creative supervisor. Further, *Music Pizza* is dedicated to Lewis' late mother, just as *Lamb Chop's Play-Along*, now in syndication after a six-year PBS run, honored her late father, college professor Abraham Hurwitz, "the off-duty magician of New York City."

Lewis also is involved in editing and providing an array of puppeteering and voice duties — and wants to do more.

"I am not the Indian goddess with six arms," she said. "I always wished that I were that Indian goddess. If I had six arms, boy, could I sing harmony. Actually, the hardest thing about doing musical comedy with puppets is trying to sing four-part harmony with yourself."

And now, in addition to longtime puppet pals Charlie Horse, Lamb Chop and Hush Puppy, Lewis has two more cuddly co-stars: Fingers the stringplaying raccoon and Dom DeLuise, who portrays Cookie the pizzeria chef. The cast also includes singing and dancing assistant manager Junior (played by Wesley Morris) and an oversized, skateboarding orangutan delivery boy named Take Out (Chance Perry) — inspired by the creatures at the National Zoo, "where the orangutans work the computer better than I do," Lewis said.

As expected, DeLuise, a renowned chef and cookbook author, spices up the *Music Pizza* set, using his off-camera time to make fettuccine and soups. ("When Dom is in the studio, the entire audience reeks of garlic. He cooks endlessly," Lewis confirmed.)

DeLuise also is among the many adult-friendly elements of the alternately silly and serious show. Such touches follow a long-established Shari Lewis pattern of entertaining beyond the core target audience. Thus, viewers should watch for the ponytail added to Lewis' curly locks — "that's a joke for the parents who remember the ponytail from 1960, so I grew it just to amuse them" — and guests such as quiz-show hosts Alex Trebek and Monty Hall and *Home Improvement*'s Taran Noah Smith.

"She's an amazing woman. One of the things about Shari is that she is not afraid to share. She even invented a puppet for me — a snake puppet that I still have," DeLuise offered during an entertaining, rambling musing that encompassed four decades, two countries and more than a few food references.

ON TV

The Charlie Horse Music Pizza
7:30 a.m. Monday-Friday on Channel 8 (KAET).

TALK SHOW HIGHLIGHTS

TODAY

7 a.m. (R) Arizona Morning: Wildfire season tips. (R) Today: Robert Del Naro; hair loss; Willard Scott. (R) Good Morning America: Overcoming shyness; online consumer bargains; plus-size fashions for teens.

8 a.m. (R) This Morning: Dr. Emily Senay; breast-feeding; exercise videos; managing careers and family.

9 a.m. (R) Sally Jessy Raphael: Overcoming adversity. (R) Jenny Jones: DNA testing. (R) Regis & Kathie Lee: Howie Long; Brendan Ryan Barrett.

10 a.m. (R) Maury Povich: Brazen burglars. (R) Martha Stewart Living: Pizza bianca. (R) The View: Actor David Canary; Dr. Andrew Weil; editor Lesley Jane Seymour. (R) Montel Williams: Psychic Sylvia Browne.

10:30 a.m. (R) Gayle King: Diets.

11 a.m. (R) Geraldo Rivera: Children who kill.

Noon (R) Montel Williams: AIDS.

1 p.m. (R) Sally Jessy Raphael: Suspicious wives. (R) Charlie Rose: Defense Secretary William Cohen. (R) Laura Ingraham: Spying.

2 p.m. (R) Jerry Springer: Cheating girlfriends.

3 p.m. (R) Jenny Jones: Apologies.

4 p.m. (R) Ricki Lake: Gay parenting. (R) Rosie O'Donnell: Peter Fonda; Kathy Najimy; Oksana Baiul; 5-year-old paleontologist Justin Hoffman.

10:55 p.m. (R) Late Show/Letterman: Martin Sheen; actor Tobey Maguire; Clint Black. (R) Tonight Show/Leno: Kim Basinger; Greg Kinnear.

11:05 p.m. (R) Keenan Ivory Wayans: Kim Coles; Joe Rogan; Chico DeBarge. (R) Politically Incorrect/Maher: Harry Anderson; Dr. Joyce Brothers; Susannah Breslin; Melissa Joan Hart.

12:05 a.m. (R) Late Late Show/Snyder: Tony Curtis; highlights of the first three years. (R) Late Night/O'Brien: Willard Scott; Michael Rapaport.

1:05 a.m. (R) Late/Ignot host Richard Jeni; Maureen O'Boyle.

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