

COVER STORY

The music woman

Shari Lewis returns to TV with new puppet show for youngsters

BY JOHN KIESEWETTER
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The *Charlie Horse Music Pizza* is a family-run business.

Entertainer Shari Lewis stars in a new PBS children's show set in a California beach-front pizza parlor with her longtime puppet family, Charlie Horse, Lamb Chop and Hush Puppy.

ON THE AIR

► **What:** *Charlie Horse Music Pizza*.

► **When/where:** Premieres 10 a.m. Monday on Channel 16, and 7:30 a.m. Tuesday on Channel 48.

She's producing the daily half-hour series with her daughter, Mallory Tarcher, with whom she shared a daytime Emmy in 1993 for *Lamb Chop's Play-Along*, and her husband, publisher Jeremy Tarcher.

And the inspiration for her music-education series is Ms. Lewis' late mother, Ann Ritz Hurwitz, who gave her the gift of music as a child. Her mother was one of six music coordinators for New York City schools.

"I feel as though I am continuing her life work, stimulating youngsters to make their own music," Ms. Lewis says.

At the end of the premiere, viewers will see the words "For Mama" on the screen before credits roll.

"My mother always knew that music helped kids learn everything better — math and science too — because it gives them discipline.

"Recent research shows that the study of music causes additional connections to be made in the brain," she says. "So music is actually brain food you eat through the ears."

The 12-time Emmy winner also knows that kids' favorite food is pizza, which is why the musical series was set in a pizza parlor.

Helping Ms. Lewis and her puppet pals run the shop are a raccoon named Fingers; a young assistant manager (Wezley Morris); and a skateboarding orangutan named



Alan Zenuk

Shari Lewis and Charlie Horse have entertained kids for years.

Take Out (musician and gymnast Chanz Perry).

Playing fun-loving "Cookie" the cook is Dom DeLuise, who made his TV debut in 1960 with Ms. Lewis on *The Shari Show*. "We have been friends ever since," she says.

Charlie Horse gets top billing because he's "the hands-down favorite of boys," she says. "Lamb Chop had her own show, so this one is for Charlie Horse."

Ms. Lewis has taped 20 episodes, which will repeat through spring. Another 20 shows will roll out in September, she says. She had produced 85 episodes of *Lamb Chop's Play-Along* (1992-96).

"This is a much more complex show than *Lamb Chop*, which was a variety show. This show is a musical comedy every day," she says.

Each program includes several original songs. In the debut, she sings about the difference between quarter notes, half notes and whole notes.

"The real message of this show is that the best part of music is making it," she says.

"Kids have become consumers of music. They think it's something that you buy or listen to. I want the playing of music to be as important as the playing of sports."

Ms. Lewis, who turns 64 on Jan. 17, began playing piano before her third birthday.

She acquired her ventriloquism and puppetry skills from her father, Abraham Hurwitz, a college professor who was also the "official magician of New York City." (The "knock-knock" jokes and physical humor of *Lamb Chop's Play-Along* were a tribute to him.)

At 11, she enrolled in New York's High School of Music and Art (the "Fame" school), where she studied classical music. She also danced at the School of American Ballet and studied acting with Sanford Meisner of the Neighborhood Playhouse.

Her big break came in 1952, when she won the *Arthur Godfrey Talent Scouts* competition. Five years later, she introduced Lamb Chop on the *Captain Kangaroo* show. She starred in her own Saturday morning show on NBC (1960-63) which earned her a prestigious Peabody Award.

Ms. Lewis also starred in many national and summer stock productions of *Funny Girl*, *Damn Yankees* and *Bye Bye Birdie*.

But none of this would have happened without falling in love with music.

"Until I was 11, I played piano because Mom wanted me to play. That's just what you did," she says.

At the "Fame" school, "someone stuck a violin under my chin" in a music class. It became her passion.

"You have to love to play music," she says. "If I had just stuck with the piano, I would have dropped it in my teen-age years."

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