

'Charlie Horse Music Pizza': A new enterprise for Shari Lewis

By JOHN KIESEWETTER
CINCINNATI ENQUIRER

The "Charlie Horse Music Pizza" is a family-run business.

Entertainer Shari Lewis stars in a new PBS children's show, airing 7 a.m. weekdays beginning Tuesday, set in a California beachfront pizza parlor with her long-time puppet family, Charlie Horse, Lamb Chop and Hush Puppy.

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

The inspiration for her music-education series is 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," Lewis says. At the end of the premiere, viewers will see the words "For Mana" on the screen before credits roll.

"My mother always knew 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 knows that kids' favorite food is pizza, which is why the musical series was set in a pizza parlor.

Helping Lewis and her puppet pals run the shop are a raccoon named Fingers, a young assistant manager (Wesley Morris), and a skateboarding orangutan named Take Out (musician



Shari Lewis and her sidekick Charlie Horse star in the new PBS series "The Charlie Horse Music Pizza" on PBS.

and gymnast Chancé Perry). Playing fun-loving "Cookie" the cook is veteran actor Dom DeLuise, who made his TV debut in 1960 with 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."

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

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.

Lewis, who turns 64 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 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 danced at the School of American Ballet and studied acting with Sanford Meisner of the Neighborhood Playhouse.

Her big break came in 1962, 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 NBC show (1960-63) which earned her a prestigious Peabody Award.

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

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."

Kids say more of those darndest things to Linkletter and Cosby

By BOB THOMAS
ASSOCIATED PRESS

The two men sit on a stage with a TV monitor between them — appropriately so, since their combined careers span most of the history of television.

Art Linkletter brought his radio hit "People Are Funny" to TV in 1955 and enjoyed a 10-year run. In addition, his daytime "House Party" show appeared on CBS for 26 years. The show is best remembered for the feature "Kids Say the Darndest Things," in which small fry did just that.

Bill Cosby in 1965 became the first black actor to star in a network dramatic series with "I Spy." Then "The Cosby Show" was the biggest hit of the mid-1980s, and now "Bill Cosby" appears on CBS.

The two men joined at the KTLA studios in Hollywood for a taping of the 1998 version of "Kids Say the Darndest Things." Following Friday's premiere, the show will appear weekly on CBS.

After exchanging banter, Cosby and Linkletter introduced clips from the old "House Party" show. Adroitly interviewed by Linkletter, the kids made comments that convulsed the studio audience.

Following a break, Cosby returned to interview two boys and a girl, ages approximately 8. They proved as funny as their counterparts on the vintage tape.

After completing a "Bill Cosby" episode in New York, Cosby had flown the red-eye for a weekend of taping "Kids Say the Darndest Things."

The show's staff interviews kids for areas of conversation, and key words are written on cue cards. But Cosby insists on not talking to the kids beforehand, so their interchange becomes virtually impromptu.

"What I want from them is that honesty," he explained in his dressing room during a break. "And we have to be honest with them. We can't lead them or set traps for them so that they look terrible."

The comedian admitted that juggling two shows on opposite sides of the continent can be wearing "now that I'm 60, not 33."

"With the other show, we have writers. We have to rewrite. We have to write and make funny. With this one, you just talk to the kids. You prod them in one direction, you move them in another direction, you play with them. Sometimes you already have the answers, sometimes you don't," Cosby added.

"The fellows will write that stuff on the cards. I say, 'Unless you have a special performance in this kid, don't

tell me what the kid is going to say or do. Just give me the questions. I will go with it.'

"With some kids, you can see that they're going to cry. You want to veer away from that. You have to save some of them from themselves."

Linkletter at 80 seems just as energetic as when he was television's most proficient interviewer. At one time he appeared on all three networks every week: "House Party" five days weekly, the nighttime "People Are Funny" and "Life with Linkletter."

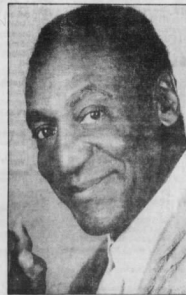
"I'm always working," said Linkletter, newly returned from speeches in the East. "I'm president of the seniors' studies at UCLA. I go out there and listen to lectures and see what's happening to this huge, burgeoning population. You know, by 2050, one out of every four adults in this country will be over 65. One out of every four"

For some time, he said, he had been looking for someone who could carry on "Kids Say the Darndest Things."

"I didn't want to work that hard," he explained. "And we needed someone who was 'now' in order to get the ratings. I'm a realist. When I sold the show to CBS, I said we needed a star. "When they suggested Bill, I said, 'We can't get him; he's too busy.' But he's a family man, he's likable, he has a different pace and tempo than I had. People think of him kindly."

Linkletter said he and Cosby formed an immediate bond because of their mutual tragedies. Linkletter's youngest child, Diane, 20, died in a 1970 fall from her sixth-floor apartment while under the influence of LSD. Cosby's only son, Ennis, 27, was shot to death while changing a tire last January.

Said Linkletter: "We shared our philosophy about the importance of going on. You owe it to your other kids and your family not to be a cynic, angry with God and the world. He agreed 100 percent."



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Series regular Dom DeLuise, Lewis, a skateboarding orangutan named Take Out, and Junior, the pizza parlor's assistant manager, strike up the band.

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