

= Back Up , Dancer =

" Back Up , Dancer " is the second episode of the seventh season of the American television series Will & Grace . It was written by Tracy Poust and Jon Kinnally and directed by series producer James Burrows . The episode originally aired on the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) in the United States on September 23 , 2004 . Guest stars in " Back Up , Dancer " include Will Arnett , Bobby Cannavale , and Janet Jackson .

In the episode , Jack (Sean Hayes) auditions to be a backup dancer for singer Janet Jackson , but in order to get the job , he must compete in a dance @-@ off with a fellow named Artemus (Arnett) . Meanwhile , Will (Eric McCormack) is torn between going out with his boyfriend Vince (Cannavale) and staying in to console Grace (Debra Messing) following her failed marriage .

" Back Up , Dancer " received generally mixed reviews from television critics , who all disliked Jackson 's appearance on the show . According to Nielsen , the episode was watched by 15 @.@ 32 million households during its original broadcast , and received a 7 @.@ 1 rating / 19 share among viewers in the 18 ? 49 demographic .

= = Plot = =

At the beginning of the episode Jack (Sean Hayes) learns he will have an audition to be a backup dancer for singer Janet Jackson . The audition was set up by singer Jennifer Lopez , whom Jack worked for in the same position after Lopez let him go . At the audition , Jackson decides that she would like five dancers instead of the six originally planned . Jack , " the newbie , " and Artemus (Will Arnett) , " the guy who 's been here the longest , " compete in a dance @-@ off to determine the fifth dancer . Before the dance @-@ off , Karen (Megan Mullally) ? Jack 's friend ? visits to support her friend . She sees Artemus and reveals to Jack the two are former lovers . The two get back together which outrages Jack . Karen reassures Jack that their reconciliation will not affect him in any way , only for her to tell Jack to lose the dance @-@ off . Jack tells Karen he will not throw the competition . During the dance @-@ off , Karen pleads with Jack to lose which Jack ultimately does . Believing he won , Artemus tells Karen he used her to win . After deciding that she only needs four dancers , Jackson fires both Jack and Artemus . At the end , Karen apologizes to Jack for getting him fired .

Meanwhile , Grace (Debra Messing) copes with her failed marriage to Leo (Harry Connick , Jr .) . She tries to move on , but mementos of the past do not let her . Her best friend Will (Eric McCormack) tries to help her but to no avail . While at dinner with his boyfriend Vince (Bobby Cannavale) , and Vince 's superior officer , Grace calls him , displeasing Vince . Believing that Grace might be suicidal , Will leaves to attend to her . Vince shows up at Will and Grace 's apartment to confront her , telling her that she is affecting his relationship with Will because she is too needy . This prompts Grace and Vince to bicker , with the two asking Will to choose between them . He cannot choose between them as Grace is his long @-@ time friend , but he also cares for Vince . The episode concludes with him telling Vince that he wants to work things out , but before they can discuss it , Vince sees Grace 's wedding album , resulting in him being more focused on the album than the relationship .

= = Production = =

" Back Up , Dancer " was written by Tracy Poust and Jon Kinnally and directed by series producer James Burrows . It originally aired on NBC in the United States on September 23 , 2004 . It was confirmed in mid @-@ 2004 that singer Janet Jackson would guest star as herself on the television series Will & Grace . She recorded her lines in front of a live audience on August 17 . Jackson 's role in the show had been her first television acting role in nearly two decades . Jackson 's last prime @-@ time role was on NBC 's Fame . She also appeared in the television shows Diff 'rent Strokes and Good Times . In addition , Jackson 's appearance came nine months after the Super Bowl XXXVIII halftime show controversy . She told the entertainment news program Access Hollywood

that she was a " big fan " of the show , and that she could not wait to join the cast for her stint . Also in this interview , she believed that Sean Hayes , who plays Jack , was a decent dancer . " I thought he studied dance . I really did , It 's so funny . I have to catch myself because I 'm cracking up in rehearsals . It 's just funny to watch [the actors] . " Jackson " had a tough time " on the set because she constantly messed up her lines . She admitted that it was not as easy as she had hoped it would be . " I flubbed my lines and got so frustrated when I made those mistakes . I haven 't done TV since Different Strokes , and it 's not like Saturday Night Live where you can read cue cards . On Will & Grace , they 're always rewriting , so you 're always memorising . " Jackson , however , said that the dancing was the " easy part of playing myself " .

It was also announced that actor Will Arnett would guest star , as Jack 's dance rival . Alex Herschlag , executive producer of Will & Grace , revealed Arnett 's subplot in the episode , saying that Hayes and Arnett are " vying for a job as Janet Jackson 's backup dancer . " In an online chat session with the Los Angeles Times , Arnett revealed that the reason for his guest spot was due to knowing one of the writers of the show , and Arnett being friends with Hayes . In an April 2007 interview with The Advocate , Arnett said that he enjoyed doing his guest spot on the show .

= = Reception = =

According to the Nielsen system , " Back Up , Dancer " was watched by 15 @. @ 32 million households in its original American broadcast . The episode received a 7 @. @ 1 rating / 19 share among viewers in the 18 ? 49 demographic , and was the eighth highest @- @ rated show on the NBC network that week . " Back Up , Dancer " finished in 13th place in the weekly ratings for the week of September 20 ? 26 , 2004 . Since airing the episode has received mixed reviews from television critics .

In preview of the episode , Phil Rosenthal of the Chicago Sun @- @ Times said : " If you 're going to book a former cast member from Good Times as a guest for your sitcom , do yourself a favor and try getting Jimmie Walker , John Amos or Ja 'net Dubois before settling for Janet Jackson . " Scott D. Pierce of Deseret News reported that Jackson 's appearance " takes the focus off the regular characters " while Mark Harris of Entertainment Weekly commented that Jackson 's guest spot " was an all @- @ time low " .

Gary Susman of Entertainment Weekly was complimentary towards Jackson , concluding that she was " all business , playing it straight " in the episode . He reported that " she makes a fabulous entrance and departs with her dignity intact " . Charleston Daily Mail contributor Kevin McDonough wrote that in the season premiere episode " FYI : I Hurt , Too " of season seven , singer Jennifer Lopez appeared " in a farfetched and laugh @- @ free guest appearance . Tonight [' Back Up , Dancer '] , it 's Janet Jackson 's turn . At least she has sitcom experience . " In her annual countdown of the best quotes of 2004 , Amy Amatangelo of Knight Ridder included Will Arnett 's line " Like a Sicilian woman 's eyebrows , we could not be kept apart " . In March 2006 , Entertainment Weekly named Jackson 's guest spot as their number nine most memorable guest appearance on Will & Grace .