

Howie *does* it

Live standup still Howie Mandel's 'primal scream'

BY ALEZA FREEMAN
Vegas.com

When Howie Mandel was first asked to host a new game show for NBC, his decision was "No Deal!" Not only did the comedian have no interest in hosting "Deal or No Deal," but he actually turned down the gig more than once.

"It was so far from anything I was aiming for," says Mandel, in a telephone interview from Los Angeles. "I didn't get it. I didn't want to be a game show host."

It was actually Mandel's wife who convinced him to take the deal in 2005, putting the Canadian-born comedian with the clean shaven head at the helm of the national hit program alongside 26 models.

So does Mandel's wife of almost 30 years, Terry, ever get jealous of her husband's female co-workers?

"You know what, I haven't played the show for her," whispers Mandel (Terry is sitting next to him). "If you can tell me what day this article comes out ... I think had she seen them, if she was aware, she might be, but she is not aware. She doesn't speak a word of English and she doesn't know what's going on."

And to think that experts promote communication as the key to a successful marriage.

But seriously, folks, Mandel's long spanning career is nothing to laugh about. While it's "Deal or No Deal" that has made Mandel a household name around the world, his versatility has landed him hundreds of roles in television, movies and, of course, Vegas, since his debut at an amateur comedy night in 1979.

He spent six years as Dr. Wayne Fiscus on the critically-acclaimed medical drama "St. Elsewhere," and guest starred on several shows including "The Outer Limits," "Lois & Clark," "My Name is Earl," and "Monk."

He's also done extensive voiceover work such as Animal in "Muppet Babies," Gizmo in "Gremlins," and the title character of the animated comedy series, "Bobby's World," which he created and produces.

"Each of these areas of my career has just opened," says Mandel. "They have been little windows of opportunity I've been lucky enough to climb through and garner."

Mandel's most recent project, "Howie Do it" is the comedian's take on the classic prank show airing on NBC. Primarily filmed in Canada, Mandel has also filmed some of the episodes in Las Vegas at the MGM Grand.

"This is everything I've ever been expelled for, punished for, hit for," says Mandel. "I never dreamed it would be a legitimate show."

But of all the turns his career has taken, Mandel's favorite genre is still his first — live stand up. He will return to his roots April 30 for a run at MGM Grand in Las Vegas through July.

"It's the center of everything I do. It's my primal scream," says Mandel. "It's got the least rules and I don't have to hit a mark, I don't have to go to commercial, I don't have to recite a line that was pre-written. I can do anything, go anywhere. It's just the most freeing of anything I do in entertainment."

Mandel says he approaches his comedy act with an improvisational, no limits attitude. He jokes about life: Anything that is happening or has happened in his own life or anything that is happening in the room at that moment.

"I don't edit," says Mandel. "Anything can happen. Each night provides me with a different set



Courtesy Photo

Comedian Howie Mandel will appear at the Hollywood Theater at MGM Grand on select dates April through July.

of circumstances and a new set of people that can take me in a new direction. That's what makes it fun."

Q&A WITH HOWIE MANDEL

Q: With so many different projects keeping you busy, do you get to see your family a lot?

A lot more than I see other peoples'. I try to. It's been really tough. Actually for the last three months I've been up in Canada — except for the few days in Las Vegas — shooting "Howie Do it!" It's a long time away and there were days when it was 20 degrees below. I got to meet up with my family in Vegas. My son is in the show.

So your son is interested in show business? How do you feel about that?

Yes, he's participating in the show and getting into show business. As long as — with all my kids, I have two daughters also — as long as you find something in life you're passionate about and you want to do, then I'm happy. And that's what makes him happy. He has been asking since he was a tot to be a part of it, but I thought that education and his childhood was much more important than getting a job. So I told him when he was 18 years old if he still wanted to do it I would do whatever I can to help him. I'm ok as long as he's happy. The same goes for my other two who have found or are pursuing things that make them happy.

You were hospitalized after passing out earlier this year. How's your health now?

I take medication and I have atrial trib... atrial tribula... I have something with my heart. Atrial tribulation is what I have, which is pretty common. My heart is strong

and good, I just have an irregular heartbeat, so I take medication and it's under control. But I didn't pass out because of that, I passed out because I hadn't eaten. I passed out like a little girl in the lobby of a hotel.

I had pressed the elevator button and I was going to go up to my room because I didn't feel so good, so had it happened like 10 seconds later I would have been in the elevator going up and down. You know that in the lobby, because there was staff, they went and called 9-1-1. But if you got into an elevator and there's just a guy unconscious, lying on the floor, you would think he was a derelict. I probably, to this day, would be riding up and down in that elevator.

On "Monk" last year you played a cult leader who was trying to heal Adrian Monk of his germ phobia. Was it just a coincidence that you happen to have the same phobia?

Good casting, huh? When they called me and told me what their idea was, I was thrilled to be a part of it. It was a great opportunity, and they were great people and it was a great script. I like the show. I live the show. I hope in the years to come I have more opportunity to do things like that. I enjoy acting.

You tend to be pretty open about your germ phobia and ADHD ...

ADHD and OCD, I've got almost the entire alphabet. If I could buy two more vowels, then ...

Then you would be hosting a different game show.

Exactly!

Did you always talk about the ADHD and OCD?

No, no I didn't. It actually slipped out by accident about a decade ago on a radio interview with Howard

Stern. And I thought that was it. Then lo and behold it didn't really affect my career or my life. In fact, it enhanced it, that people were aware of it and helped remove the stigma or issues that people have and I'm happy I do and open to talking about it.

It seems like you have a good relationship with Las Vegas both personally and professionally. How did that develop?

I love Vegas. It's a great place where you can have a potpourri of whatever you need, from big entertainment to real people from all over the country. If you go to Des Moines you get people from Des Moines. If you go to Los Angeles, you get kind of L.A. people. If you're in the streets of Las Vegas you can talk to everyone. By the same token that's your audience too.

I've been coming to Vegas for a long time. I started out there career wise as Diana Ross's opening act at Caesars [in the Circus Maximus theater].

In fact, as I sit here talk to you right now I am sitting in the center booth from Circus Maximus. When they tore it down, one of the producers on my show called them and said, "What are you doing with all this stuff?" So I'm sitting there now. I'll be honest with you, the drink service is lousy.

What kind of things do you do when you're in Vegas?

I go to the indoor skydiving place, Flyaway. I'm there every time. I float there.

Have you actually ever gone skydiving?

I'm a Jew. It's inside, there's a lot of pads. To me it's a big adventure. Come on! You should be ashamed of yourself asking me that. No, I wouldn't jump out of a plane. I have

Howie-palooza

Where: The Hollywood Theater at the MGM Grand Hotel

When: April 30 - May 6 and July 9 - 15 at 9 p.m.

Cost: \$75

Info: (866) 80-SHOWS.

a hard enough time getting into a plane. I'm not a good flyer.

My wife always thought that Evel Knievel sounded like a Jewish name.

Do you ever gamble?

I eat my wife's cooking.

No. But I think it's good, everyone should come and should gamble a lot so they can keep hiring me.

I'm not a game player. I can't sit and play games and lose money. I'm not good, I don't have a strategy. I don't know how to win.

One time, I was the headliner at a hotel, I can't remember for the life of me which hotel it was, but another couple was visiting us after the show and they [the casino] asked me, would you like to play? I thought, sure why not, I'll sit down, I'll play, it will be a nice social event. They actually cleared a table for me and this other couple and it was Saturday night, I mean it was packed, they cleared a table and they put up those velvet ropes right, so we could have a little privacy and then the guy whispered in my ear, "No limit. You can bet whatever you want," and I proceeded to ask him if he could break a \$20. And I played that until it was gone.

That was the last time the casino asked me.

Would you ever consider doing a permanent gig in a Las Vegas hotel?

I might do a permanent gig there. I was thinking about being a part of the wait staff at the buffet. The hours are just ca-Razy,

Always a comedian.

Sometimes.

What are some of the ways Vegas has changed since you first performed here?

So many of the shows are these huge, built shows like the Cirque du Soleils and revues, whereas when I first came, it was mostly headliners. It's great because there's something there for everyone. One star or one headliner appeals to a specific audience, but these shows appeal to a wider audience.

Speaking of audiences, do you have a typical audience?

In Las Vegas you don't get one. A lot of people will come to your show because they're in Vegas and last night they saw K&A, and now they're going to see you. It's not like they're die-hard Howie Mandel fans, but that's what's great because you get your fans, but you also get people who haven't seen me before. And if I can win over a new audience, I can actually entertain a wider slot of person.

Everything I've done has garnered a different audience, "Deal or No Deal" being the widest variety. Kids knew me from Saturday morning, other people knew me from St. Elsewhere and acting, some knew me from standup. But they weren't the same people. "Deal or No Deal" kind of appealed to everyone, and I hope "Howie Do it" will too.

Considering the surprise twist in the series finale of St. Elsewhere in 1988, are you ever concerned that in the end it will turn out your career was actually just the imagination of an autistic kid?

It's all very possible. I hear everybody's always looking for a good ending. But that's been done. So hopefully mine will be a little more unique.