

COMEDY

By Iris Wiener

Howie Mandel Making Stand-Up Memorable

It's hard for Howie Mandel to categorize his audience. Between his various stand-up gigs across the country, the

hit cartoon *Bobby's World*, and his dramatic flair on *St. Elsewhere*, Mandel's fans occupy every known demographic. On November 13 the critically acclaimed comic comes to Westbury Music Fair, bringing with him an act that stays true to his humble background through an interactive show full of surprises and laughs— with almost none of it having been practiced before hand.

"It kind of takes on a life of its own," Mandel says of his show. "I used to put together the act, and I realized that doing the same act every night wasn't as thrilling, to say the least. I soon found that things happen throughout the course of an evening; whether it's a microphone going out or somebody doing something, or someone in the front row vomiting, it's usually considered very professional to continue with your show. The show must go on," he laughs at memories of mishaps from various shows. "I've learned that it's always more fun to just kind of react to whatever is happening and whatever somebody is saying. The audience has learned that it's an opportunity to come and be a part of the show as much as it is to sit back and watch the show. So the audience has *become* part of the show!"

Mandel has always been able to get the audience involved, as was proven one night when his buddies dared him to get on stage during amateur night at L.A.'s Comedy Store. "The dare specifically was, 'I bet you can't do something that will eventually get you into *Good Times Magazine* thirty years from now!'" he gloats. A producer from the game

show *Make Me Laugh* happened to be in the audience, and hired him right then and there. "The dare obviously worked, and now I can call them after this interview is printed, and go ha! If you persevere, or as Nike always says, 'Just do it!' it will happen for you."

But life was quite different for Mandel before he was noticed for his humor. "I got asked to leave school prematurely and immaturity. I left school and began selling carpets and then did this, and I would never have dreamed, even after that night at the Comedy Store that I would've made a career out of comedy," he says. "I went back to Canada and continued the carpet business, and then I'd get a call and went back and forth and commute and come out and do a talk show and then go back and always had a day job. I didn't think three steps ahead," says the man who admits that, for many years, his ultimate goal in life was to be taller. Now that he's achieved his objective of great heights, he enthusiastically recalls other career toppers that fell into place. "The sitcom was a natural progression for anybody that does stand-up, and I got a part on *St. Elsewhere*, a one hour drama. I never dreamed I was going to be acting, and from that I was doing movies, and I never thought I'd be doing that, and I never thought these voices in my act would lead to a Saturday morning cartoon which was fairly successful for nine years on FOX... and now available on DVD at Walmart," Mandel winks.

All about being real, Mandel very much enjoys poking fun at people in their natural state, as is seen with his hidden camera seg-



ments on *The Tonight Show*. With an uncanny ability to stay true to his inner laugh, he has managed to explore very different areas with his performing abilities. "I don't really have a path. Whatever happens, I just kind of go with the flow," he says as he thinks about what has been happening lately in the business of entertainment. "I think that anybody in this business that's doing anything has to be true to themselves. I'm a huge Howard Stern fan because I think he's true to himself, and not true to what he thinks will appease others. And I'm true to myself and I don't do anything that doesn't entertain me and doesn't make me laugh. Good comedy has always been good comedy, you can still go back and look at the classics and laugh really hard, like with Charlie Chaplin, and great stand-up comics from years and years ago; Richard Pryor will always hold up. And I'm a huge fan of Steve Martin, and even back in his first album, you can still play it today and it works. If somebody is really good and it's classic comedy

and tickles the funny bone, it will work."

But Mandel admits to the differences between comedy of today and the past. "The change I've heard about more than any thing is the advent of putting up the profanity as being part of the act, and I should mention that mine is not a family show," Mandel warns with a mean giggle. "You shouldn't bring the kids to the show, because I don't edit myself. But I don't think that's why I get the laugh, and I would hope that's not why you would laugh. It's just loose and free, and our boundaries have widened and it takes a lot more to shock the people of today. And that's in drama, that's in comedy, in music and every form of art there is."

Next up is a series for Bravo called *Hidden Howie*, which is based on hidden camera pranks and the effect they have on Mandel's life, as well as "my life's effect on these hidden camera pranks," he says excitedly. "On *The Tonight Show* you just get to see all the funny things, and you never get to see any of the anger, or how it affects the people around me. So that's what the show is going to be, it's kind of a hybrid of hidden camera and reality. Sometimes it's from my own wife, because there are places she would like to go where we are not allowed to go anymore," Mandel says as he bites his tongue.

But if anyone gets angry enough, Mandel can always go back to carpets. "Carpet to comedy is not a big stretch if you're looking in the Rolodex. It's alphabetical. It was the next thing after carpet— you flip the next card and it's comedy. If it wasn't for comedy, I'd probably be talking to you about shag," he says, questioning whether or not *Good Times* would speak to him if things were different. "There are 'good times' on carpets," Mandel pleads his case. "Rug burn is always fun!"

Mandel promises Long Island a great show, in which certain secrets will be revealed. "I'm actually Karen Feldman, it sounds like a Jewish girl, but I'm actually a very tall Asian woman." Ms. Feldman doesn't think anyone should miss this opportunity for laughing with her, especially Long Islanders. "You should come out. When I'm playing Illinois, there will be a lot more gas money involved." ■

Howie Knows

By Iris Wiener

A Deal From No Deal

Howie Mandel, host of the recent hit game show “Deal or No Deal,” considers his current gig another notch in his long-standing, successful career. Through his various projects in film, television, and stage, Mandel has attracted a wide range of audiences (the younger of which he recommends *not* attending his stand-up performances). From his work on the Emmy-Award winning “St. Elsewhere,” to the international (and also Emmy nominated) “Bobby’s World,” Mandel has become a mainstay of American comedy. His latest “deal” has him back in the limelight, but shiny suitcases and gorgeous models just can’t keep him away from comedy. Mandel spoke with *The Improper* about everything from his current hit to his newly shaved head.

Improper Magazine: Five years ago, would you have ever imagined being surrounded by models and suitcases?

Mandel: I’ve always imagined myself to be around models with suitcases. My entire career has been like that! I’ve never imagined my future and I’d rather walk the trail and follow this path, and whatever happens, happens. From the moment I started my career and came out on amateur night as a stand-up comic, I never thought it would turn into a career, but it did. Then they were trying to start a sitcom and then they fired somebody and replaced someone and I ended up on a drama “St. Elsewhere” for six years. Then I never thought that I would write and produce a Saturday morning cartoon, “Bobby’s World,” which went on in syndication for nine years and was No.1. So if you ever asked me if I would be hosting a game show, I would’ve said no. I never envision where I’ll be next, and I don’t know where I’ll be next year.

IM: How has your stand-up career changed since “Deal or No Deal” began to air?

Mandel: “Deal or No Deal” works around my schedule. I hope it doesn’t change my career. I know that “Deal or No Deal” is a huge hit and one of the beauties of it is its simplicity. You can sit down and watch it with the whole family. I hope that people see that I’m still coming out and playing live, and that they don’t bring the whole family, because my live show isn’t a family show.

IM: How will you incorporate “Deal or No Deal” into your live stand-up act?

Mandel: It’s pretty improvisational, and the audience is involved. The audience has a tendency to talk to me; I don’t write material specifically for it. Obviously, I have some material for it and things just happen that night. People yell things, they bring things to me, things happen. And comedy is just about that. I always look to get off the beaten path and do something that’s never been done before, something new and different, probably something that’ll never happen again.

IM: Is that your mantra, seeing as how you spontaneously shaved your head?

Mandel: Actually, somebody offered me a part in a film, and I said I would just go for it; it’ll be kind of funny and personally adventurous. And I didn’t tell my wife when I walked in that day, and I thought she’d be shocked. But her first reaction was that she thought it was kind of sexy, which it was for a moment, really. Then I got neurotic and thought, ‘What have I been until this point.’

IM: You said that you improvise and feed off of the audience. It must be difficult to stand by when people on “Deal or No Deal” are making horrible decisions.

Mandel: Absolutely. It’s my job to not talk and not sway anyone. When you’re sitting in the audience, or sitting on the couch, you’re allowed to scream whether the person on the stage can hear you or not, you get to get it off your chest. I don’t. You have to make the decision yourself that can ultimately change your life — hopefully for the better. But sometimes your decisions obviously can lead to the worst. I can’t do anything about it. So I would love to give everyone a million dollars! ■

