

Funnyman's live act has an improv attitude

Howie Mandel takes mike for hospital benefit

By **MIKE KERWICK**
STAFF WRITER

I try to tell Howie Mandel the truth, but instead soften the anecdote. I am afraid he might notify the police if I tell him my mom wanted to strangle his contestants.

Most of them seemed to have sipped from an elixir of audacity and stupidity, routinely turning down piles and piles of cash because they were convinced – *convincéd!* – that their briefcase contained \$1 million.

And then Mandel decides to tell me the truth: During his two-season run as host of “Deal or No Deal,” he wanted to strangle his contestants, too.

“They would tell me that they’d never owned a home, they’re in debt, they have three kids,” Mandel said during a recent phone interview. “And we’re offering them whatever amount of cash for absolutely nothing. And they decide to go for it.”

Mandel, fiscally conservative by nature, rarely dissuaded them, fenced in by a need for neutrality. He has a stock answer ready for those reporters who wonder if he wanted to shake those contestants out of the loony tree.

“The hardest thing and the biggest skill that I had to portray as the host of that show,” Mandel said, “was not to scream at somebody, throttle their necks and say, ‘You idiot! Just take the mon-

ey!’ ”

Models will not be prying open briefcases Saturday, when Mandel visits Pier 60 in Manhattan for a fund-raiser for the Englewood Hospital and Medical Center Foundation. Mandel and Chevy Chase will take turns on a microphone for an event that benefits the hospital’s services and programs.

So what should audience members expect at this \$450-a-seat fund-raiser?

“I have absolutely no idea,” Mandel said, “but that’s how I work. Most of my live performances are very improvisational and in the moment and what’s happening in that room at that time.”

He watches television 24-7 (“I very rarely sleep,” he says), but his live material doesn’t come from all those hours flipping around the dial. Mandel will size up the room, then react – the same strategy he uses as he traipses through life. Never in his wildest imagination did a young retail worker living in Toronto imagine he would wind up at the epicenter of one of the biggest game shows on television.

He tries to keep his eyes on doors as they open.

“It’s really easy to not take them,” Mandel said. “And it makes sense not to take those opportunities.”

Case in point: Mandel almost let the game-show door swing shut a few years ago. He loves joking that he turned down “Deal or No Deal” three times before his wife said, “You idiot, take the deal!”

He has a new show now, “Mobbed.” The concept is clever: Each episode, Mandel will enlist the help of a flash mob to help someone deliver a life-changing announcement (the first episode he filmed featured a wedding proposal). It takes a lot of coordination and a lot of people for one moment that could end in disaster.

“Television without a net,” Mandel said.

But to hear Mandel tell it, he does not mind leaping into television’s unknown without one.

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WHO: Howie Mandel, with special guest Chevy Chase.

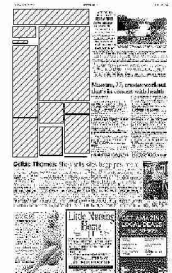
WHAT: 2011 Englewood Hospital Foundation Black Tie Gala.

WHEN: 6:30 p.m. Saturday.

WHERE: Pier 60, Chelsea Piers, 23rd Street and West Side Highway, Manhattan; pier-sixty.com.

HOW MUCH: \$450.

FOR MORE INFORMATION: englewoodhospitalfoundation.org; 201-894-3725.





Howie Mandel's new show, "Mobbed," has a funny concept.