

FT: Sandra Bernhard, welcome to "So Money." It's such an honor to have you on the show. Congratulations on so much going on with you right now.

Sandra Bernhard: Thank you. I know, it's a very exciting time, and I love to be working out there on great projects. It's good for me, and I'm just excited to be exposed in new venues, so it's really great.

FT: I remember watching you on "Roseanne", a breakthrough role where you played Nancy, the openly gay co-owner of the Lanford Lunch Box. Fast forward to today, you are, as I was reading critics write about "2 Broke Girls", you're really kind of giving that show a facelift, like a makeover, probably well overdue a little bit. Tell us a little bit about that show, you've gotten a multi kind of episode arc there.

SB: Right.

FT: Actually I'm more curious, not only about the new role there, but how television in your experience has changed in terms of the production, like what's the most surprising aspect of making TV today, versus when you're back doing "Roseanne" episodes?

SB: Well, actually, this particular show, "2 Broke Girls", is very similar to "Roseanne". It's shot before a live audience, it's on a contained set, where they build sets according to the character lines and it's very similar. It's sort of funny 'cause I've done other things throughout the years whether it's cable or all those sort of new outlets for TV shows, but this one is very standard and very traditional. It's very comfortable for me 'cause I'm used to it because of "Roseanne", and some of the other sitcoms that I've done over the years.

FT: Your body of work is very diverse, from stand-up comedian, to music, to sitcoms, one-woman show. Is that the key to a long lasting career in show business? It's this ability to adapt and also be coming up with new ideas all the time, not letting the industry kind of pick you?

SB: Well, for myself, personally, that's just how it's done because my work is diverse and I write my own material and I started out in the comedy circuit, and then sort of segued into acting and then into doing my one-woman shows. So it's just kind of kept evolving from the original inspiration, which was to be a creative person and somebody who loves to be out there, performing live, and then getting the opportunity to act as well. So it's just been a natural evolution for me, and I haven't really thought it out. It wasn't these big dramatic proclamations like, "This is my next big move." It's just things just sort of flow, and yes, sometimes there are quiet periods and then sometimes they're super busy, but you just kind of stay in the creative mode and that keeps it all going.

FT: On your website, you described your lifestyle as "Schawazee!" Am I pronouncing that correctly? How do you say that word?

SB: "Schawazee!"

FT: "Schawazee!" [chuckle] okay. I love that. Well. Tell us a little bit about that. You're laughing, so clearly this puts a smile on your face. Really goes...

SB: When I talk about "Schawazee", and I talk about all these sort of interesting continental words to describe sophistication and fun, and I mean I love good food, I love to travel, I love exotic places and interesting people, and I've managed to continue to have all that in my life, and that to me is what makes life worth living. I mean, as an adjunct to my work, which I love, I mean I like to travel and experience things and great cities and outskirts throughout the world because that inspires my work. When I spent time in

Morocco, the three times I was there, that led me to writing several different pieces about Morocco, and the experience of being in a very exotic culture. And I like to be inspired, and you can't always find that in your... You can find it in your backyard, but it's nice to also find it in a backyard across the world. So, I've always loved travel, it's very important to me.

FT: I wanna let listeners know that you're gonna be at the Regency Ballroom in San Francisco, on May 1st, and the Capitol Theater in Olympia, Washington, on May 2nd.

B: Right.

FT: So, live versus taped, although you get to do TV in front of a live audience and there is that rush still, is that what you love most about performing, is that instant gratification of being in front of that live audience?

SB: Well, yeah, that's certainly a big part of it. It's just a different sort of experience. It's putting together a show, it's that intimacy that you have with a live audience, and every show takes on its own character and its own sort of unique experiential thing for you, the artist, and for the audience. So it's just great, and you can control it minute to minute, and you can take it wherever you want, and it's just a great exercise in acting, and connecting. So, that to me is always exciting.

FT: This show, I like to put a spotlight on my guest's financial insights, experiences. I give so much credit to artists. I personally had dreams of becoming an actress when I was young, but I veered off from that. A lot of times, people tell you you're never gonna make a living being an artist, and it's just something you don't even wanna try. And so, when I find and I meet artists who are very successful, not just from a career standpoint, but from a financial standpoint, I always wanna ask them, "What does it take? How did you do it? What's your story?" So I'd love to transition now, if we may, and talk a little bit about, maybe what is your financial philosophy, if you have one, that...

SB: Well, everybody knows what mine is, it's living below my means. That was actually the name of one of my series that I wrote, which was about an actress, and somebody similar to me, living below your means, because something about, the world we're living in, and getting caught up in trying to impress people, and also being in this business, it's very easy to fall prey to that. "I've gotta have the car, and I've gotta have this certain kind of home, and be out every night," and you blow through your money in two minutes. And that's for people who make a lot more than I do. So, right from the get-go, when I moved to LA when I was 19, everybody knows, this is the classic story, I became a manicurist and I worked in Beverly Hills for five years, supporting myself, while I broke into the comedy scene, which paid absolutely nothing when you started off. And one of my friends, Jhoni Marchinko, is a big writer in Hollywood, said, "Honey, Sandy has her first \$5 she ever made as a manicurist," which is probably true.

SB: I've just been very frugal, and very careful about my money over the years, and I make certain decisions about how I wanna spend my money, and I draw the line. I'm just not a person of extremes. So I keep a very, very tight ship, and I have a daughter too, 16, she's in a private school in New York, which is not cheap, and I still manage to save money every year, and I have a great investment business manager out in LA, who I've been with since 1984. I trust him implicitly. I sign all my own checks. I go over everything with him, nothing gets sent out without my strict oversight, and I've been incorporated since about 1983 or '84. And I've just been very smart about my money. That's all. It's just a decision that you make in your life about what it means to be secure, what it means to have fun, and where you draw the line.

FT: Did you learn this? Do you think it's in your DNA, or were you influenced growing up? Did you have good role models? I like to ask my guests about a money memory they had growing up that was pivotal.

SB: Well, first, as I was born in Flint, Michigan, and in the '60s, it was a very thriving... The Midwest was thriving because of the automobile industry. My father was a doctor, my mother was an artist, and people had a lot of money in Flint, particularly the Jewish community. And I was exposed to a lot of people that spend their money, who were very snobby, and I didn't like that. And my mother, being an abstract artist, was kind of the antithesis of that, and I just always worked around that, it's great to have money, it's great to look great and be sophisticated, but to use it as a cogent or a cajole and a tool to hurt other people, I always found it very obnoxious. So, money for me was always like, kind of tinged a little bit of like, I don't really like what it does to people, per se. So, I'm anti-snob, and I'm proactive, in terms of being quiet about my money, and playing it down, 'cause I just really... It's nobody's business, and also, I don't like to use it to make people uncomfortable.

FT: Did you ever have a moment of failure with your money? It could have been a small failure, but it was something that you still reflect upon with, like "That was a big moment for me. I learned a lot from that."

SB: Well, there's a couple of investments that my business manager made that, one in particular that went south, but amongst... The same guy who invested in other things in Vegas that did very well. One didn't do well, and there was... I kind of bucked up and you're gonna take the... Sometimes you have to ride it out 'cause not every single thing, as you know, in the investment world, pans out. But other than that, me personally, I mean, I guess sometimes I've been taken taking some trips and taking a lot of people along with me, and maybe if I look back I would have tightened up the ship a little bit, but we had such a good time, and they're such great memories, that you go, "Ehh," you make the money back. It wasn't like, it wasn't so... I didn't hire a private jet. So, there's nothing I really look back on in terms of how I spent my money and go, "Ooh, I wish I'd done that." So no, I'd have to say, I feel very, very good about how I've lived my life financially.

FT: You don't sound very easily influenced, and I mean that in the highest regard. I think people who are in your industry, oftentimes, they allow others to manage their money, or they follow the herd, and it sounds like you knew, at least enough of that from early on, that this was not something you wanted to do, and it kept you out of trouble.

SB: I kind of minded my own money when I was young. Like I said, I always lived in situations that were very affordable for me, and then as I started to make more, and things got more secure, and I found my business manager, and we developed our trust together, and he never imposed some sort of, this higher power of his influence, and his knowledge on me. He said, "What's the most comfortable way for you to work with me?" And I expressed it, I said, "I don't... I always want to sign my own checks, I always wanna know where my money is." And he's not an egomaniac, and he's also not a thief, thank God. So it's been a very equitable and profitable relationship throughout the years.

FT: I imagine in your industry there's a lot of negotiating that goes on. Being firm about your self worth and your value is important. How would you describe your biggest financial success now? Let's flip it and talk about maybe a time where you either negotiated something very successfully, or you did something really wise with your money that you're really proud of.

SB: I can't say there's one particular thing. I think it's truly... The business is funny because, 15, 20 years ago, they'd paid a lot more, and now it's... I'm kinda working my way back up, and it's kind of the way a lot of actors, just in general, they don't pay the way they paid...

FT: Why do you think that is?

SB: Because they could get away with it... Because of the advent of cable and... These streaming out less...

They just pay less. People wanna work, and there's a lot more actors and a lot more people out there, vying for the same job than there was when I started. So, the producers and the networks, now they've kinda got the stranglehold on people. So, it's not as rosy and pretty as it was. And obviously, the whole kind of landscape of finances internationally are in bad shape. There's too many people in the world. There is not enough resources. I mean, it's not... It's a trickle down effect from where we're at environmentally and politically, geopolitically. There's so many parts of the world that are in turmoil, in the middle of these strangleholds of war and terrorism. I mean, it affects everything. So that's just the way it is.

FT: If you had to get still your biggest financial habit, a habit that keeps your financial mind healthy, your decision-making appropriate, what would you say? It could be daily or not, but it is conscious.

SB: I mean I live within a sort of a budget because I know month to month basically what I'm gonna spend. And so that does help in terms of the long range view of my finances. And if I feel like I'm on a roll, and I'm making a little bit more, then I might do something that's a little more indulgent. I wanted to redo my kitchen for the past five or six years, but it's just, in New York, anything you do, any kind of sprucing up is just ridiculously expensive. So, we just put that on the backburner, literally. And there's some sacrifices that you make, sometimes you'll say, "I'd rather have that cash spending there than in my kitchen."

FT: For your daughter, growing up in New York city, I have a nine-month-old, we live in New York city, and I kind of worry about raising him in a city where there's so much access, at the same time where there's like a huge gap. There's like extremely poor, then there is extremely wealthy, and I worry about teaching appreciation and really value. So, how do you... I'm curious now, this is not a question I ask all my guests, but you mentioned you do have a 16-year-old going to school in New York, a very influential time in one's life, how do you kinda keep her appreciating?

SB: Well, first of all, like I said, I mean we live in a very nice condo, and it's a beautiful place, but it's not over the top. A lot of our friends have places in The Hamptons, or... Not a lot of them. Actually, a lot of her friends at school, although it's a private school, have, are running on a lot less than we are. Lot of them there are on financial aid, or... She has the diverse kind of range of friends and she just knows. She really doesn't ask for that much. I mean, she just knows. She knows what the bottom line is. And sometimes I'll go, "You know, honey," then she might ask for some make-up, "That's a little... I mean, we might wanna pull back on that. That's a little too much." And she goes, "Oh okay. I'm sorry. I didn't..." But she gets it, and you just... And without getting very dramatic about it, it's just like, "Hey sweetie, I think we're gonna pull back on that one. We're not gonna take that trip, we're not gonna buy those particular pair of jeans for \$250, and [laughter] you're gonna have to live with that. In the meantime, you're not suffering. Thank God." But it's just, you just gotta set the tone.

FT: Live by example, exactly.

SB: Yeah.

FT: Okay. Sandra, this has been a lot of fun. I know you're on a time crunch, so I'm gonna wrap this up with my "So Money Fill in the Blanks". This is where you just finish the sentence.

SB: Okay.

FT: Don't over-think it. "If I won the lottery tomorrow, \$100 million, the first thing I would do is"?

SB: Set up a non-profit, some sort of educational, or just an outreach program.

FT: Any particular cause or focus?

SB: Well, there's so many. Whether it's for inner city kids, or whether it's for women's reproductive rights, or something environmental, there's just... You walk around the city, as you know, and there's just so many people that are in need. For the people you just... The homeless people you see on the street, to the people that are living in these funded housing situations. You'd really just take sitting down with somebody who really knew the best way to spend the money and make that decision.

FT: "The one thing that I spent my money on that makes my life easier or better is... "

SB: My training sessions at the gym, working out.

FT: Yes, yes. Biggest guilty pleasure that you spent a lot of money on? You mentioned earlier that you do splurge from time to time. What's the one kinda exciting thing that you spend on that's a reasonable amount of money, but you wouldn't wanna do without it?

SB: I can't say that... I can't really tell any one thing that I do other than working out, or going... I'd have to say going out to nice restaurants. That's definitely our... That's our big thing. We really do splurge on good restaurants. And not just restaurants to be seen, but restaurants that have great ethical, farm-to-table, delicious, high quality food, and creative people cooking it. That's really important to us.

FT: Spoken like a true New Yorker.

SB: Yeah.

FT: "When I donate money", you just mentioned what you would do with the \$100 million, which is to be very charitable. When you do donate money, "I like to give to blank because... "

SB: Well, I love to give to Planned Parenthood, because it helps women across the country, access healthcare and reproductive rights that are becoming harder and harder to access. It's just outrageous what's happened to women's health in the past 15, 20 years.

FT: Absolutely, yeah, access is right. It's a phenomenal organization. I love supporting them. And last but not least, "I'm Sandra Bernhard, I'm So Money because... "

SB: [chuckle] I'm So Money because it doesn't rule my life.

FT: And you can focus on your art. Thank you so much, Sandra. Congratulations on all that is unfolding for you.

SB: Thank you. Great interview, wonderful, wonderful.

FT: And we look forward to seeing you on "2 Broke Girls".

SB: Thanks a million. All the best.