Natalie puts a Springer in his step

Does Jerry Springer nurse a forbidden lust for Natalie Portman?

At Wednesday night’s party for his new weekday Air America show, “Springer on the Radio,” the 61-year-old trash-television host sounded positively gaga over the 23-year-old “Star Wars” starlet.

“Natalie Portman is really bright, and if I was allowed to have one crush, it would be her,” Springer told Lowdown.

Portman’s PR rep responded: “I am not going anywhere near this whoole thing.”

Springer added that the actress could be his co-host, despite her apparent lack of talk-radio chops. “You know what? We’d work it out.”

And who could serve as the new host of the “Jerry Springer Show,” which is now enjoying its 15th season of in Geneva Convention-flouting torture and humiliation?

“Natalie Portman”: Springer answered — not that he has any intention of giving up the gig that has made him a millionaire many times over.

“Or Woody Allen,” Springer added. “Anyone could do it. Anyone. All I do is, you. You did WHAT? ‘Come on out!’ ‘We’ll be right back.’ A dolt could do what I do.”

Meanwhile, Springer — a die-hard Democrat, an oft-mentioned Senate prospect in Ohio and the former mayor of Cincinnati — likes Hillary Clinton for President in 2008.

“For right now, yeah,” he said. “I think she can have a conversation with anybody and wouldn’t feel like she’s got to prove herself, wouldn’t feel threatened. I really think she’s got a phenomenal sense of self. And our best Presidents, at least in my lifetime, have been those who are most comfortable with themselves.”

And remembered to take care of themselves, and each other.

Big-time players, but few seats for this matinee

What was all that commotion at the American Airlines Theater on W. 42nd St. yesterday afternoon?

Those black SUVs disgorging important-looking passengers. The machine-gun-toting SWAT team standing guard across the street. And even recognizable celebrities — notably Naomi Judd, Sally Field and Denzel Washington — braving the crush of tourists on the sidewalk to pass through heavy security and scamper into the theater.

Well, I can reveal that the publicity-shy Academy of Achievement — the project of world-class Washington philanthropists and celebrity-wranglers Wayne and Catherine Reynolds — is in town through tomorrow.

Among the worthies who have actually shown up to receive their awards are Her Majesty Queen Rania Al-Abdullah of Jordan, President Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal, playwright Edward Albee, NBC’s Katie Couric and Tim Russert, actors Field, Washington and Michael J. Fox, fashionista Carolina Herrera, Harvard President Larry Summers, Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy and U.S. Attorney General Alberto R. Gonzales, novelists John Irving and Toni Morrison, composer Stephen Sondheim and an amazing assortment of Nobel laureates, including Toni Morrison.

They — along with a few hundred invited students and a diverse array of past honorees including Bill and Hillary Clinton, Mayor Bloomberg, Dominick Dunne and Sam Donaldson — were dipping in and out of heady policy breakfasts, power lunches and black-tie dinners.

Yesterday’s event at the theater was a sensitive symposium on “Passion, Creativity and the Arts.”

No wonder Lowdown was stopped at the door.