

woman

April 16 1983 24p

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OF BEAUTY
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DUSTIN HOFFMAN

on being a woman

(and why every man should try it once)

He first tried it out for his sex swap in *Tootsie*, now Dustin Hoffman claims he'd climb into a dress every day if he could. Some of his motives, as Mike Cable discovered, might be a little suspect. But how can we feel anything but fond of a man who admits he learnt a lot from acting the lady?

Nine o'clock on a crisp Sunday morning and Dustin Hoffman — all pink and perky after a pre-breakfast jogging session through Hyde Park — is in a mischievous mood. He ogles passing girls from the third-floor balcony of his Knightsbridge hotel suite while posing for photographs, cracks a Jewish sex joke and philosophises outrageously about the problems of being a woman.

The latter subject is one on which he can talk with more authority than most males having masqueraded for months as the character Dorothy Michaels both on and off the set of his latest much-acclaimed film *Tootsie*.

Dustin frankly admits that he enjoyed being a girl. In fact, were it not for the four hours of painstaking make-up and dressing-up required to perfect the transformation he insists that he would probably slip regularly into the disguise.

"If I could go into the bathroom and come out ten minutes later as Dorothy I would do it all the time," he confesses.

"I mean I could have so much fun. I could go to a woman's spa and look in at the sauna and steam room! I'd go to Harrods and sneak into the ladies' changing rooms. God, I'd probably spend all day in there!"

He pauses, eyes glinting lecherously, and then adds: "You see—I really *am* a voyeur. It's the truth. I only became an actor in the first place so that I could meet girls!"

But behind all this locker-room banter there lies a much more serious attitude to what has been the most demanding role of his career so far and the effect it had on him.

It took 18 months of intense research and experimentation with make-up, clothes, voice techniques, mannerisms and movement before he satisfied himself that he could convincingly portray a woman on screen.

"I had a clause in my contract confirming that we would abandon the film altogether if I felt that I could not get myself to look and sound right," he says.

"To have looked camp or drag would have defeated the whole thing. I didn't want a cliché or a parody. I wanted to play the woman who I felt was inside me."

The realisation that there was a female aspect buried deep in his personality struck this self-proclaimed/please turn to next page



Voyeur? Or a man who understands about being a woman? Dustin Hoffman acts the lady, left, and the fool, right, with wife Lisa and their son Jake

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chauvinist when he was filming *Kramer v Kramer*—the tear jerking story of a divorce and its aftermath, for which he won an Oscar.

It was while shooting the emotional courtroom scene where the husband seeks custody of his son that Dustin—who had just gone through a real-life divorce from his first wife Anne—found himself breaking down.

"It was one of those films where the director allowed me the freedom to improvise and at one point I got carried away and without knowing it I was genuinely crying.

"It wasn't until later that I realised I had made a Freudian slip when the lawyer pressed me about my reasons for wanting custody of the boy. I had blurted out: 'Because I'm his *mother*.'

"That started me off thinking about the way we men sit on this feminine aspect of ourselves, the nurturing part, the mothering part.

"In a way I had always felt deprived that I couldn't give birth, that I couldn't breast-feed, that I couldn't carry a baby.

"Not all men feel that way, of course, and when I talk about it they look at me and think I'm crazy. Some women don't understand it, even *they* don't want to experience those things. But I've always wanted to.

"And I've often wondered, if I were a woman what kind of woman would I have turned out to be?

"Would I be in the same profession, would I have the same kind of aggression, the same kind of humour? That was the beginning of *Tootsie*."

The title is the nickname which Dustin's mother gave him when he was a baby and there is indeed a strong autobiographical element in the film.

It tells the story of a struggling New York actor—Michael Dorsey—who, in a desperate attempt to get work, disguises himself as a woman and auditions for a female role in a soap opera only to find himself trapped in a strange double life when he lands the part and becomes the star of the show.

"Any star is, by definition, difficult"

Not that Dustin himself ever contemplated quite such a drastic last resort in his poverty-stricken days of unemployment before *The Graduate* turned him into a star at 31.

But the Michael Dorsey of the early scenes—a very serious young actor at odds with the show business establishment largely because of his determination to do things his way—is very much a self portrait.

As scriptwriter Murray Schisgal told Hoffman: why bother to make it up when you can just be yourself?

Like Michael Dorsey, Dustin has long had a reputation for being "difficult" and *Tootsie* was so beset by delays and arguments between Dustin and producer/director Sydney Pollack that there was speculation as to whether it would ever be completed.

The fiery relationship between actor and director was exploited

brilliantly in the end by casting Pollack as the agent with whom Michael Dorsey is always fighting.

"Any star is, by definition, 'difficult'," maintains Dustin.

"An actor needs work and he'll do anything to hold his job, even when he knows that it's not right.

"But once an actor becomes a star he doesn't care anymore if he's fired and then he becomes a creative entity and he wants to do things properly and so he becomes 'difficult'."

The key to the brilliant characterisation of Dorothy Michaels is to be found in her looks and Dustin is the first to admit that he has always had hang-ups about his own appearance. He is dissatisfied with his small five-foot-five-inch stature and self-conscious about the size of his nose and other features, and he is fascinated by the extent to which people's lives are affected by the way they look.

"For a woman, looks must be very important"

"If at High School I'd been the kind of tall, rugged-looking guy who becomes a football hero and is a whizz with the girls I would never have turned out the way I am today," says the man who, at the start of his acting career, looked in the mirror and wished he looked more like Marlon Brando or James Dean.

"Everything I am is a compensation for the very ordinariness of what I feel about myself.

"And I imagine that for a woman looks are even more important in governing personality.

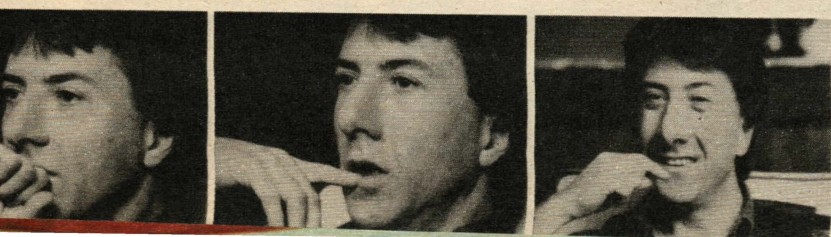
"So the character of Dorothy Michaels wasn't planned in advance. I simply set out to make myself look as attractive as possible and let the character develop from there. Dorothy as you see her on screen is as good as I could get to look. Believe me, if I could have made myself up to look like Marilyn Monroe I would have done!"

In the end he totally identified with the character. "I was Dorothy," he promises. "And it was a wonderful feeling, very comfortable, as if the character was at home with herself."

He adds: "There's a lot of my mother in Dorothy: her warmth, her vulnerability, her spunk and, most of all, her outrageous sexual humour. She died just before we started shooting and in playing Dorothy I felt I was honouring my mother's spirit."

As part of his preparation for the role he went to a speech day at his daughter's school dressed as Dorothy and chatted with her teachers without ever being suspected. And to test the credibility of his voice he took part in a phone-in on a live TV chat show.

His wicked sense of humour got the better of him when he found himself dressed for the part in a lift with Jose Ferrer. Introduced as Dorothy Michaels he expressed his great admiration for Mr. Ferrer and proceeded to make a highly indecent proposition of a sexual nature/please turn to page 18



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that left the veteran actor not knowing where to look.

He chuckles at the recollection of Ferrer's embarrassment, "He muttered something like: 'No thank you, not right now,' and stared pointedly at the wall of the elevator."

grapevine that he was famous. He went around asking people: 'Who was that woman, who was that scumbag.'

"When he was told it was me he wouldn't believe it. I took that as proof that the disguise was convincing."

Sydney Pollack sums up the film as "the story of a guy who puts on a dress and by doing so becomes a better man."

Dustin agrees that up to a point the experience helped to improve his understanding of the opposite sex.

"Men can't imagine what life is like for women"

"I would recommend it to every man in the world," he insists.

"To be taken for the opposite sex on the street, to see what life is like from their point of view and to become aware of what a totally different experience it is in ways you never guessed at, that's got to be good."

"Men cannot imagine how many subtle differences there are."

He says that his wife Lisa, 25, has noticed changes in his behaviour since he made the film.

But at the same time he confesses almost proudly that he remains positively chauvinistic in his basic sexual attitudes.

"I can't help it," he says. "In the privacy of my own mind I still want to go to bed with every girl I meet and that affects my relationship with them."

"I keep thinking I'll reach an age eventually when I'm no longer obsessed but I'm 45 and the centrefold of *Playboy* still affects me the same way it did when I was 15."

"Men are different in that way. As part of my research for *Tootsie* I talked to women about their secret fantasies and they are quite different."

"I know that the nude centrefold of *Playgirl* means nothing to them."

"Men don't need a strong commitment in order to have a good time in bed and I don't think women will ever really understand that."

Lisa, he says, is very understanding about his wandering eye.

"I'm allowed to look as long as I don't touch," he says sheepishly.

"And she knows me too well for me to be able to get away with anything. She says I'm such a bad liar. She can't understand how I got to be an actor!"

"These days she usually spots the women who will catch my eye before I do and she just leans across and turns my head the other way."

He and Lisa have been married nearly three years now but he says there is no truth in the oft-repeated story that they met for the first time when she was three years old and he

went baby-sitting for her parents. "Actually, she was 10," he grins. "My mother and her grandmother were neighbours and the two families were friends. When I was 27 I went home for a vacation — a holiday from unemployment!"

ing Lisa and her young brother. My party trick at that time was to play Rachmaninov's Prelude in C Sharp

Minor to the accompaniment of my own burps and raspberries and this went down very well, I remember.

"It was more than 10 years before we met again, shortly after I had separated from my first wife. From then on we saw a lot of each other and the rest is history."

"After we were married her mother Blanche told me that on the day I went and played the piano for her Lisa had said when I left: 'I hope he waits for me because I'm going to marry him when I grow up.' Blanche said that she hadn't mentioned it before because she didn't want to jinx things."

The couple have a two-year-old son called Jake and Lisa is expecting her second child at any moment. They divide their time between homes in New York and Los Angeles but their lifestyle certainly doesn't reflect Dustin's box office status as one of the world's highest paid stars.

He won't confirm or deny his £2 million-per-film price tag but admits: "I do earn ludicrous amounts of money."

"It has never gone to my head because I never earned more than £1,500 a year until I was 31 years old and I have firm memories of what it's like to live off social security. That helped me stay in touch with reality."

He has an ambitious plan to invest some of his money in a New York equivalent of the National Theatre, which would be an ideal setting for the production of *Hamlet* which he has been quietly working on for two years.

"In my own mind I still want to go to bed with every girl"

On a more commercial level he is working on a screen project about stars' stand-ins and a story called "The Glory Boys" which centres on a group of middle-aged men who give up everything to play softball.

He also hankers after doing sequels to both *The Graduate* and *Kramer v Kramer*.

His idea for a follow-up to *The Graduate* is ingenious. "My thought is to have the same actors, who would all naturally be 15 years older and by having an affair with my teenager daughter's best friend I would effectively become Mrs. Robinson!"

But surely there are risks involved in trying to repeat old triumphs?

"Oh, sure," he agrees enthusiastically. "But that's one of the attractions. I love a challenge — that's what I liked about *Tootsie*. I always want to climb Mount Everest!"

