

# PLAYBOY INTERVIEW: DUSTIN HOFFMAN

*a candid conversation with benjamin braddock, ratso rizzo, little big man and lenny bruce—all rolled into one*

He's not your stereotypical movie star, this unprepossessing, almost runty fellow with the mournful hound-dog eyes and the oversized nose. Producer Joseph Levine, on first encounter with him, mistook the man who was to become the star of one of his most popular films, "The Graduate," for a window washer—and, with the impish streak that's been his hallmark since his childhood as the classroom show-off, Dustin Hoffman took out his handkerchief and started to clean the window.

Hoffman's big break, in "The Graduate," had been a long time coming. He'd been hoping for it for nine years—ever since arriving in New York in 1958 and, in his words, "plummeting to stardom." He had grown up in Hollywood, where his father was at one time a set decorator and his mother—though she hoped he'd become a concert pianist—was sufficiently star-struck to name him for silent-screen cowboy Dustin Farnum (and her other son for Ronald Colman). Hoffman, however, wasn't bitten by the acting bug until his college days, when he enrolled in the Pasadena Playhouse. Among his classmates was Gene Hackman, who remains one of his closest friends. The two deserted Pasadena for

New York at roughly the same time and scrounged around through various odd jobs, waiting for lightning to strike. Which it did for Hoffman in 1967 with "The Graduate."

After that film, nobody was likely to mistake Dustin Hoffman for a window washer. Yet, with a daring some called recklessness, he went on to insist on challenging roles playing eccentric characters. Today, at the age of 37, he occupies a premier position in a rare company, that of the character actor as superstar. More than any other major performer today, Hoffman has built his career on what he lovingly calls "uglies." On stage and in films, he has played a hunchbacked homosexual ("Harry, Noon and Night"), a spinsterish Russian editor ("The Journey of the Fifth Horse"), a Keatonesque boiler watcher ("Eh?"), a grungy piece of Manhattan flotsam ("Midnight Cowboy"), a slightly mad, would-be painter ("Jimmy Shine"), a partner in a one-day romance born in a singles bar ("John and Mary"), a dissident rock star at the ages of 17, 25 and 40 ("Who Is Harry Kellerman and Why Is He Saying Those Terrible Things About Me?"), a protean Western hero who, while aging from childhood to a

feisty 121, acts out every frontier cliché: boy adopted by Indians, gunslinger, cavalry scout, snake-oil salesman ("Little Big Man"), a passive mathematics teacher who erupts into violence ("Straw Dogs"), a bourgeois Italian bank clerk with Romeo delusions ("Alfredo, Alfredo"), a myopic inmate of a penal colony ("Papillon") and, late last year, the reincarnation of controversial comedian Lenny Bruce ("Lenny"). All this has boosted his price per picture from the \$20,000 he received for "The Graduate" into the \$1,000,000 ball park, counting a piece of the box-office action. The money, in turn, allows him to hold out for the roles that genuinely intrigue him—next of which will cast him as Carl Bernstein, half of the reporter team that broke the Watergate scandal, in "All the President's Men." (The other member of the duo, Bob Woodward, will be played by Robert Redford.)

Never a big spender, Hoffman has allowed himself one extravagance: the purchase of an East Side New York brownstone furnished with his main indulgence, antique furniture. There he lives with his ballerina wife, Anne—she's a guest dancer with the André Eglesky Ballet Company and teaches at both the



"Lenny was a tester, a heavyweight tester. I've never done anything as extreme as he did, but I'm something of a tester, too. He was also a provocateur, and I love to provoke."



"As an actor, you have to examine your motives. I've got to admit that some of me worked for McCarthy, McGovern and others because all of that free exposure kept me in the public eye."



J. BARRY O'ROURKE

"In high school, I remember dialing the phone and not being able to get to the last digit, I was so afraid of rejection. And I was extremely horny. There was nothing else on my mind."

became cute—because I was the shortest kid in school. I got the part of Tiny Tim in my school Christmas play, because when they lined us all up, I was the shortest. Once a week, instead of gym, we had dance class. That was in the seventh, eighth grade. I felt uncomfortable because I was so short. So I'd just sit and watch while everybody picked partners, and then I'd go over to the one girl nobody had asked to dance, the most unattractive girl, the heaviest one or the gawkiest one, and ask her. I would really enjoy that.

**PLAYBOY:** Because you were making her feel good?

**HOFFMAN:** That and the fact that we were being laughed at. I kinda liked that. I much preferred it to being ignored.

**PLAYBOY:** Did anything begin to happen for you in high school?

**HOFFMAN:** No. I was never able to make the bridge from "He's cute" to "He's sexy." I tried. I tried. I was very selective. It had to be a girl.

I remember dialing the phone and not being able to get to the last digit, I was so afraid of rejection. And I was extremely horny. There was nothing else on my mind. I could not get through a conversation with a girl, because I was just all X-ray eyes—you know, trying to see through her clothing.

**PLAYBOY:** What did you look like?

**HOFFMAN:** I was short, as I said. I had braces. And I was all nose. My nose seemed to be all over my face. If people think it's big now, it was the same size when I was a kid, and the rest of my face was *half* the size it is now. It's filled out since. I can remember being so self-conscious about my nose that if I was talking to a girl in the schoolyard at lunch or something, I made sure I was talking to her full on. And I'd never walk away in profile.

One time in English we had to give book reports and I picked Gene Fowler's biography of Jimmy Durante, *Schnozzola*. I loved that book; it was so moving. Presenting my book report, I started to talk to the class about Durante's nose and how it was so painful for him in his early years—and suddenly I broke down, right in front of the class. Could not go on. I started to sweat all over and tears were streaming down my face. I remember hearing some of the kids laugh. And I ran out of class; I didn't go back to school the rest of the day. I guess that was one time I got more attention than I'd bargained for.

**PLAYBOY:** You've told us several stories about your need for attention. Do you relate that need entirely to the fact that you were the youngest in your family? Was your family situation unusually competitive?

**HOFFMAN:** Well, my father has always been a very competitive person and I would say my mother is, too. My father and mother and brother and grandmother went out from Chicago to Los Angeles

before I was born. My father got a job digging ditches along the Hollywood Freeway. And he worked as a prop man for Columbia Pictures. He got my brother into pictures—he was an extra in *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* when he was three or four. Dad was a great hustler, and I mean it in the best sense. He was not a dishonest man; I mean, he hustled in terms of trying to get ahead, working his way through night school to become an accountant, and so forth. His father had died going back to Russia, trying to get his parents out; he was killed by the Bolsheviks. My father, who was, I think, the oldest of three or four children, became the head of the family at 13. He went to work then, tending bar. He was very ambitious, a very hard worker. He brought us up to get our work done first; then we'd have time to play. He's still competitive. I can't beat him in tennis yet. He's five feet, two, a hell of a tennis player. Plays with Pancho Segura.

**PLAYBOY:** Both of your parents are alive?

**HOFFMAN:** Yes; they just bought a home at La Costa, which is a big tennis community. He's very health-oriented. Likes to drink his beer, though. When he comes to New York, he always wants to go with me to McSorley's, and we'll sit by the potbellied stove and drink beer and eat cheese. Last time, a couple of years ago, we were tying it on a little bit at McSorley's and I said, "I got your number, Dad. I know what you really want. I know what your ambition is." And he said, "What?" And I said, "You just want to outlive Ronny and me." And he got all red. I think I nailed him. Not that he wants my brother and me to die young. He'd love us to go to 80, 90. He just wants to be around himself.

**PLAYBOY:** You've started your own family now. Do you see yourself operating in any of the same ways your own father did?

**HOFFMAN:** Not really. I'm not saying that I didn't have some of the old Victorian attitude, that your wife takes over from your mother and cooks for you and takes care of you and raises your kids and lets you go out and beat your chest and make your mark in the world. When we were first married, Anne moved around with me wherever I went. Lately, she's been working herself, dancing, and I love the fact that she has her own life. When she goes away and dances, I'm home with the kids. I like trading that responsibility. But I know, if *she* had not demanded an equal artistic life, it would not have happened for her. I hope our children feel that there is an equality between Anne and myself.

**PLAYBOY:** How did you meet Anne?

**HOFFMAN:** I was rooming with Maurice Stern, who is a very fine opera singer, and playing the piano—for fun, not pay—at the Improvisation, over on 44th Street. People in music, in show business go over there to try out their new routines. Maurice used to take classes in sculpture at Carnegie Hall. He was a sculptor, too.

And he'd go across the street from Carnegie Hall to do his laundry. Maurice could always seek out the good-looking girls and he told me, "Dustbone," he said, "this laundromat has beautiful girls."

**PLAYBOY:** Dustbone?

**HOFFMAN:** Oh, people used to call me Dustbone. I think Duvall initiated it. Anyway, it turned out the girls at this laundromat were ballet dancers out of work. Anne worked there. And Maurice met her and he came home and told me, "There's this beautiful girl and I tested her." He always tested them. He would empty out his laundry and ask the girl if she would put it in the machine, and if she touched his dirty underwear, he figured she liked him. Then he'd take her out. But if Maurice couldn't score with a girl within a week, he'd drop her. And here he was on his first week with my future wife! He really liked her. She was about 19 then, in New York to study ballet. She had been dancing since she was 16, first with the Grand Canadian Ballet and then as a principal dancer with the Pennsylvania Ballet.

So this particular night, I had a date with a girl named Phyllis, who, ironically enough, later became a girlfriend of Wilt Chamberlain's. I consider that one of my special achievements, the fact that Wilt and I would satisfy the same girl.

**PLAYBOY:** That's the long and the short of it?

**HOFFMAN:** Someday we'll meet in stud heaven. Anyway, I was with Phyllis at the Improvisation, and Maurice comes in with Anne. And there she was, my fantasy girl. Maybe the unattainable. Who the hell knows what it was? My heart was pounding. Phyllis had to go to the bathroom and Maurice went to make a phone call, and there we were, alone together, for about five minutes. There was this long pause, and she tells me I said to her, "So you're a dancer?" There was another pause and she nodded and said, "So you're an actor?" And I nodded. That was the end of the conversation. But before she left, I did my Jimmy Dean number. I had written one song, a ballad—it's a good song—and I went over to the piano and played it, with this sensitive look on my face. Maurice always hated it when I did that. "Don't pull that sensitive shit," he'd say. But Anne fell right into the trap. Maurice told me later that she said to him, "That's the most sensitive boy I've ever seen in my life."

**PLAYBOY:** So you started dating her?

**HOFFMAN:** I had to wait two days until Maurice's week was up. Luckily, unless they're both keeping something from me, he had to move on to greener pastures. Anne and I dated for a while, and then we broke up because she had to go back to Philadelphia. But I told Duvall within the first week: "I'm going to marry that girl." We bet \$100. He's never paid me, come to think of it.

**PLAYBOY:** You may have known you'd  
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