



Top: Maurice Stern as Otello. **Above:** Stern in real life. **Left:** Stern's sculpture of Dustin Hoffman.

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niche in worlds
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Tenor Maurice Stern, in Louisville for the Kentucky Opera Association's season debut of Verdi's *Otello*, is now a singer who sculpts. But he was once a sculptor who sang.

Earlier in his career, when he was studying at the Eastman School of Music and doing non-singing jobs to support himself, Stern made the acquaintance of two actors in New York and eventually made sculptures of them. They were Dustin Hoffman and Robert Duvall.

"Dusty got me a job as an attendant at the psychiatric institute of the Presbyterian Medical Center because he had worked there a few years before," Stern said.

"I served meals and generally attended to patients. But from that experience of working with some very interesting psychiatric types, Dusty developed the character he eventually did in *Rain Man* because there were a lot of those kinds of people there."

Stern met Duvall through Bruce Beresford, who directed Stern in the opera *Girl of the Golden West* at the Spoleto Festival in Charleston, S.C., and directed Duvall in the film *Tender Mercies*. The film won Duvall an Academy Award.

"Bob has a nice, sweet tenor voice for folk songs," Stern said. "His brothers, Bill and Jack, are singers. Good voice runs in their family."

Stern was brought in two weeks ago to take over the lead in *Otello* when the original cast member, James King, had to withdraw because of a throat infection. *Otello* is one of the most demanding roles in the opera repertoire. Stern gets a two-day rest between shows.

King, a former member of the music faculty at the University of Kentucky who is now at Indiana University, seems to be jinxed when it comes to engagements with the Kentucky Opera.

In the early 1960s while he was still at UK, King had to withdraw from a production when he was stricken with appendicitis.

Stern has found his first Louisville visit to be a pleasant one.

"At the remodeled Seelbach

Tom Carter
Herald-Leader
arts columnist



Hotel, it's like living at the turn of the century. I expected to wake up some morning and encounter the staff wearing handlebar mustaches," he said.

"As far as the opera company, it is well prepared musically in every way, and the set is beautiful."

Stern will give his concluding performance in *Otello* at 8 p.m. Tuesday at the Kentucky Center for the Arts. The work will be done in Italian with supertitles. Tickets, \$8 to \$38, can be bought by phone by calling (502) 584 7777.