Titbits

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The pain of being a woman—by Dustin Hoffman

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INTERVIEW BY CHARLIE REED

THE PAIN OF BEING A WOMAN

BY DUSTIN HOFFMAN

PLAYING a woman has made Dustin Hoffman a better man. The 45-year-old star is tipped for an Oscar for his role of Dorothy Michaels in the sensitive comedy *Tootsie*—and he believes the part has helped change his life.

"I now realise that men are nasty," says Hoffman.

In *Tootsie* he plays a struggling actor who auditions for a part in a television advert, dressed as a woman. He is so successful that he is offered a leading role in a soap opera, and is forced to continue playing the part of a woman.

Hoffman rethought his attitude to women after insisting on wearing his costume off set He played jokes on friends and went out in public dressed as a woman to help him get into the part.

But there were occasions when it was no laughing matter—like the time he fooled Jon Voight.

"Voight just looked through me, he wasn't interested", says Hoffman. "Now I know how a woman feels. It happened a lot, with men looking over my shoulder to find a prettier woman."

He is convinced pretty women have an easy time finding a man, while plainer ones lose out. "It hit home when I realised I would not take myself out or go to bed with me.

"Years ago I chased the cover girls and ignored the Dorothys, who are brighter and funnier because they didn't fulfil a physical requirement. What a waste."

As well as lowering Hoffman's estimation of his own sex, Dorothy made him realise something about women.

He turned up as a woman at the school of his 12-year-old daughter Jenna. Jenna, the child of his first marriage to actress Anne Byrne, begged him to leave, but Hoffman insisted on being taken to see the headmistress, and was introduced as an aunt.

"The teacher treated me completely different from the way she had when she had known me as I really am. There is a kind of sisterhood among women. I never got that before. Women are wary with men."

Hoffman's wife, Lisa, who has known him since she was a child, also believes that the role has made her husband a better man.

"Lisa says that now when I take the wrong turn on the motorway or spill something at home, I just shrug it off like Dorothy instead of cursing like I usually do," says Hoffman.

"She says that Dorothy has made me more tolerant."

Hoffman modelled Dorothy on his mother, who tragically died of a brain haemorrhage while *Tootsie* was being made. The fact that she knew she had inspired the role consoled Hoffman after her death.

"She is the heart of *Tootsie*," he says. "Dorothy has the strength of my mother, her vulnerability, her vitality and her sexual humour.

"My mother had the spirit of a chorus girl. At 72 she was still playing two sets of tennis a day and had the legs of Ann Miller.

"Even in *Midnight Cowboy*, when I played Ratso, I was partly my mother. The way he took care of Joe Buck was the way my mother would have taken care of me."

Playing Dorothy affected Hoffman so much he even regrets that he will never be able to experience giving birth. "I feel cheated never knowing what it's like to get pregnant, carry a child and breast feed," he says.

He admits that when Lisa, 28, gave birth to their son, Jake, two years ago, he felt "just like a stagehand."

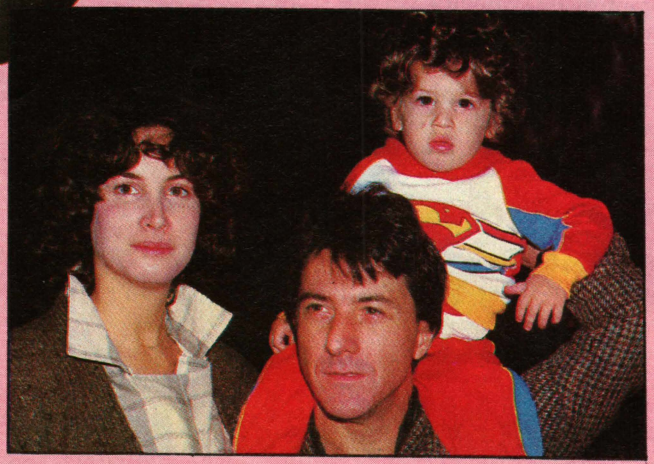
And actress Meryl Streep, who starred with Hoffman in the Oscar-winning film *Kramer Versus Kramer*, adds: "Dustin is still glad he has got his manhood. But what he really wants to do is give birth."

Hoffman, whose string of successes also includes *The Graduate*, *Little Big Man* and *Papillon*, sees the role of Dorothy as an extension of *Kramer Versus Kramer*. "There, I was a bad father trying to be a good mother."

Hoffman admits that Dorothy has affected him more than any other part he has played, but insists that he is no less red-blooded than before. "I am still a flirt. I have a lot of womanising in my past," he says.

Hoffman remains an inveterate tease who, when he phones his wife's 75-year-old grandmother, asks: "Do you still have the fourth best body in your jogging class."

He adds: "The fact that I have played homosexuals in films—and I have played three—would never make me think that anyone else would think I really was one . . ."



Oh boy . . . sad that he'll never experience childbirth, Dustin felt 'just like a stagehand' when Lisa had baby Jake