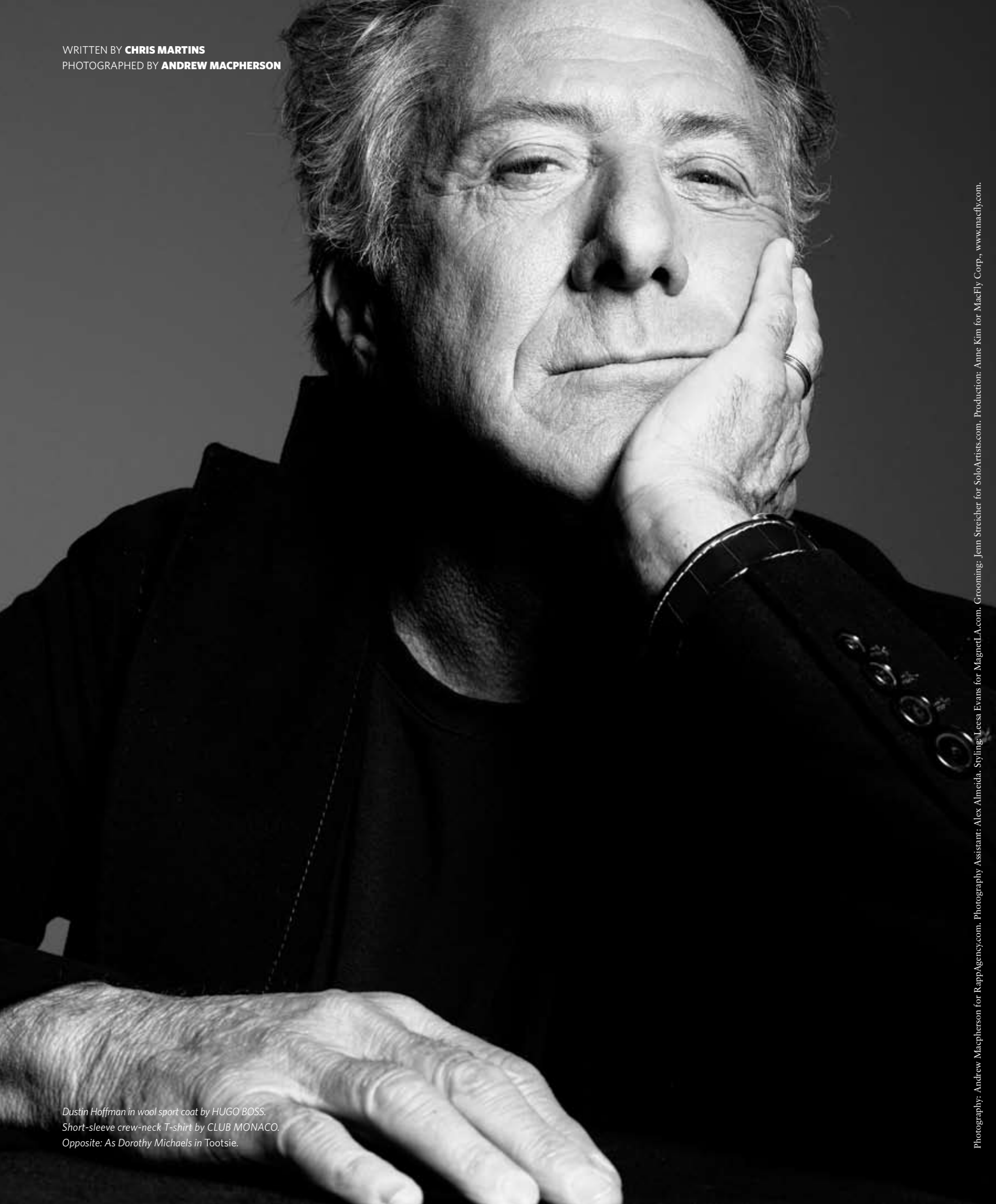


WRITTEN BY **CHRIS MARTINS**
PHOTOGRAPHED BY **ANDREW MACPHERSON**



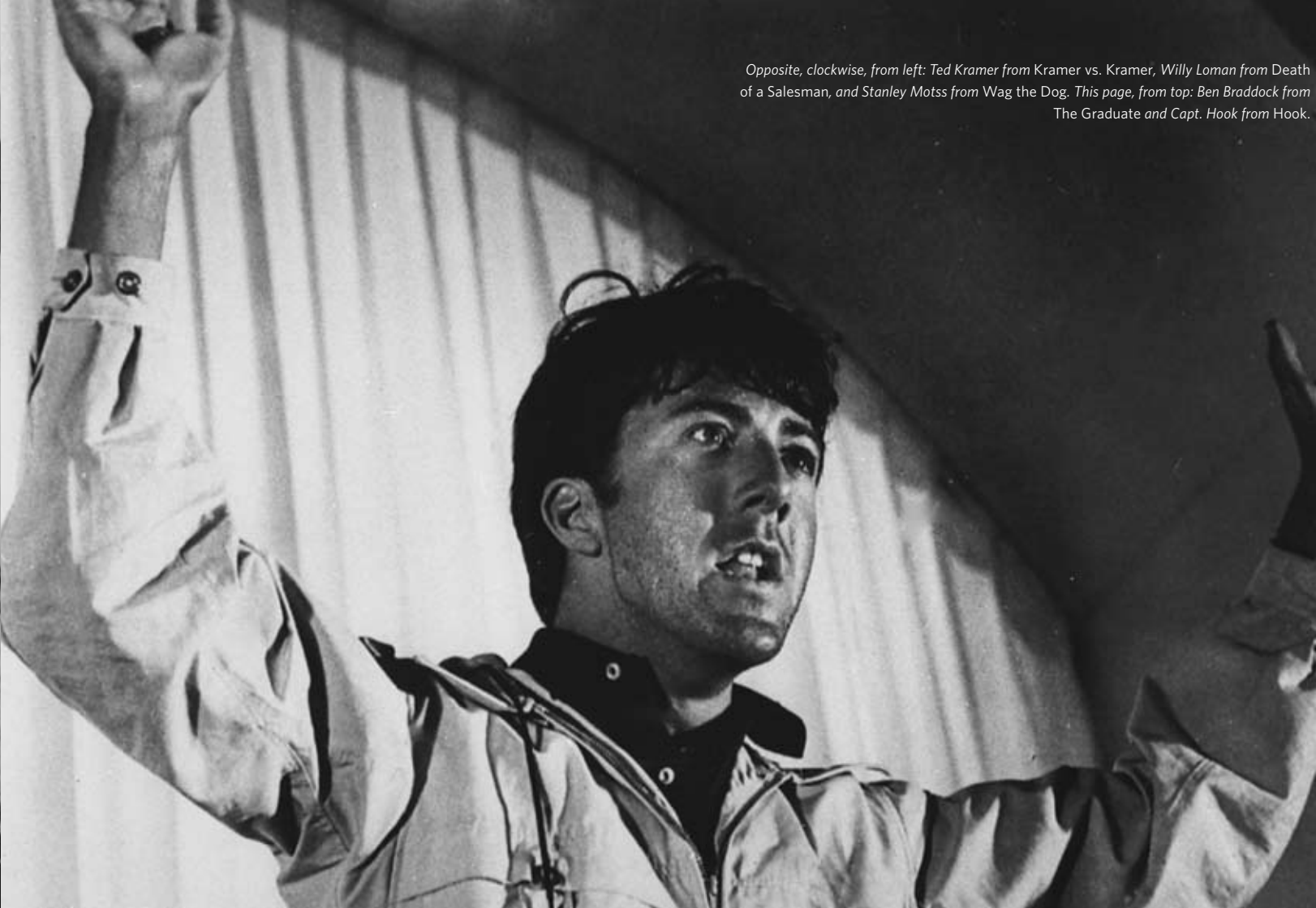
*Dustin Hoffman in wool sport coat by HUGO BOSS.
Short-sleeve crew-neck T-shirt by CLUB MONACO.
Opposite: As Dorothy Michaels in Tootsie.*

Photography: Andrew Macpherson for RappAgency.com. Photography Assistant: Alex Almeida. Styling: Leesa Evans for MagnetLA.com. Grooming: Jenn Streicher for SoloArtists.com. Production: Anne Kim for MacFly Corp., www.macfly.com.

Digital Capture: IndustrialColor.com. Digital Tech: Andrei Lucien. Catering: Jonathan Durr for LoveCateringInc.com. Location: SmashboxStudios.com, West Hollywood, CA.



WHAT'S DUSTIN HOFFMAN WORTH?
...A N D O T H E R I N Q U I R I E S O F A N A S P I R I N G J A Z Z P I A N I S T



Opposite, clockwise, from left: Ted Kramer from *Kramer vs. Kramer*, Willy Loman from *Death of a Salesman*, and Stanley Motss from *Wag the Dog*. This page, from top: Ben Braddock from *The Graduate* and Capt. Hook from *Hook*.

Dustin Hoffman is ravenous. The *edamame* is already a fading memory. The salad and spinach dish are long gone, just a paltry opening act to the two full orders of yellowfin *sashimi* that followed them down the same hatch. He's attacking a second bowl of sweet rice with bare hands—the first having been ceded by the interviewing journalist—and evidence of the carnage is all around. It's smeared across the tablecloth in small swaths of brown and green, and it's on the actor's face, in the sticky little white kernel that clings to his freshly shaved upper lip.

"I just started taking piano lessons again," Hoffman says, grinning. "I promised myself that before I kick the bucket I'd become a decent jazz player. I've often said that if God tapped me on the shoulder and offered me an ultimatum—acting or jazz piano—I'd make the decision in a New York minute." He pauses. "You want some dessert?"

He couldn't possibly eat like this all the time. Hoffman wears his age extremely well. When he walked into the Brentwood sushi house that faces his office on San Vicente Boulevard, the 71-year-old appeared as he always has on the screen: honest, the slightest bit physically disheveled, but emotionally kempt and unconventionally attractive. His latest film, *Last Chance Harvey*, finds Hoffman wooing the considerably younger Emma Thompson, 49, and it isn't a stretch. He's fit—a man of routine who begins each day with exercise, sauna, and a cold shower—and truthfully, he doesn't look a day over 56. He doesn't particularly look, or act, like a star either (he cops to being nervous—hence, the appetite), but then, he never really did.

"It was the late '50s, early '60s, Bob Dylan and *On the Road*," Hoffman says. "The conceit of the culture at that time was that if you were successful, you'd sold out: Success means pleasing everybody, and if you're pleasing everybody, there's no balls in what you're doing. That was our set as actors—Gene Hackman, Robert Duvall, and myself, we were the New York tribe, part of a new political party led by Brando. We all wanted to break from Old Hollywood, and the studios [because of a landmark antitrust lawsuit] weren't allowed to hold actors to exclusive contracts anymore. We were free agents and we couldn't be bought."

Tighten up the flesh and flip back through the fifty-odd roles that defined and redefined Dustin Hoffman for multiple generations, and you see him looking out at you: Benjamin Braddock, *The Graduate*'s titular disaffected youth who shucked the pageantry of success in favor of self-discovery. For Hoffman's younger fans—certainly the *Kung Fu Panda* set, but also those of us who grew up with *Hook*—it's difficult to imagine such an unaffected actor as a provocateur, but that was the point. Hoffman was a short Jew with a quiet humor, enlisted to play a young man who, in the original story, was a 6-foot-tall Anglo Adonis. He was the perfect leading man for an audience bored by the saves-the-day alpha male prototype.



Hoffman's always played himself—it's what made him the face of Hollywood's burgeoning renaissance, and it's why that same face was photographed in the unemployment line following *The Graduate*'s release. He'd accepted docked pay in order to stay out of a multi-picture contract. Hoffman was unimpressed with his own stardom, and fine being poor. At 30, he'd done it long enough to adapt. He'd worked day jobs in character ("Lying in public was the only way you could get work.") and slept on Hackman's floor, later sharing a Spanish Harlem railroad flat with Duvall and two opera singers. Hoffman was a Method actor with a fierce principal that he applied to each role, and the best of them fit well with his own storyline.



On playing Ratso Rizzo, *Midnight Cowboy*'s crippled two-bit con: "In him, I saw my adolescence. Some people have an easy time of it; I'm in that group that never wants to repeat it. I felt like Ratso, always standing on the periphery."

On making *Kramer vs. Kramer* while going through a divorce: "People say, 'That must have been so hard,' but it was extremely freeing. With acting, you're usually interpreting; here I could create. The facts were different from my divorce, but the truth of it was there."

On playing a choosy, cross-dressing actor in *Tootsie*: "It was very autobiographical. If you're an actor who has trouble getting work, you'll eventually take anything. If you're hired to play a tomato, you jump at it. If you're asked to be a woman, there's nothing you won't do."

On playing an autistic savant in *Rain Man*: "I'd worked in a mental hospital, and seeing that kind of human behavior always made me think that we have every mental illness in us—either lying dormant, or, in a miniscule way—and these people just have it exaggerated."

In recent years, Hoffman's played many memorable supporting parts, but *Last Chance Harvey* represents a return to form. Not only is this his first top-billed performance in a decade, but lead character Harvey Shine *is* Hoffman. Take away the day job—Shine is a jingle writer—and you're left with a man who has lifelong aspirations of becoming a jazz pianist and a real problem realizing his self-worth. Oddly, Hoffman's legendary career is predicated on failure. The Los Angeles native had been an abysmal student all his life and only enrolled in acting classes when he needed some easy credits to avoid flunking junior college. He liked drama as a subject, but even more as a profession, the lasting attraction being that failure was the expected outcome.

Just last year, Hoffman told a gossip reporter that he fears each job might be his last. This, despite the fact that he's the only actor whose credits include the starring roles in three Academy Award Best Picture winners—two of which he won Best Actor for, alongside his five other nominations. But for all of that, and for all of the poise he exudes in person, Hoffman wrestles with his success.

"I was watching college football yesterday and they showed a close-up of the quarterback," he says, "and I realize he's from a different planet than me. He's

From top: Carl Bernstein from All the President's Men and Raymond Babbitt from Rain Man. Opposite: Dustin Hoffman in cotton dress shirt by HUGO BOSS.

Styling: LEESA EVANS
Grooming: JENN STREICHER
Photographed at Smashbox Studios in West Hollywood.



heroic, just completely at home in his skin, and I'm in awe because I'm still struggling to be halfway to where this person is. I think about it almost on a daily basis. I saw Michael Phelps on *60 Minutes* recently and, though he's just a kid, he can wear that mantle—or, eight of them." He laughs. **"I THINK IT'S PERPLEXING FOR MANY OF**

US TO UNDERSTAND THAT THERE ARE PEOPLE AROUND FOR
WHOM FEELING DESERVING IS NOT A MAJOR BATTLE."

In 1999, while receiving AFI's Life Achievement Award, Hoffman experienced a panic attack that drove him away from the screen and into the arms of a good therapist. The title of the honor sounded dooming, and in the faces of his many characters blown up and hung around the room, he saw not reassurance, but proof that all of that effort amounted to something less than he would have hoped. Hoffman retired for three years before his wife encouraged him to return with new criteria: he'd accept his changing role in cinema (that of a mature supporting actor), and eschew the perfectionism that helped define his career as much as it hurt his ability to enjoy it.

Today, all signs point to Hoffman being happy. He has a marriage of twenty-eight years, six grown children, two grandkids, and a recent run of playful roles. He's appeared in the literate comedies *I Heart Huckabees* and *Stranger Than Fiction*, lent his voice to animated features (*The Tale of Despereaux* also debuted in December), and moonlit next to 50 Cent in the rapper's "Follow My Lead" video. Hoffman's ruminations on his own worth are less the warning signs of some sort of private gloom than they are evidence of a guileless interest in answering a few existential stumbers. Like his first character and his latest, the actor looms ever closer to the act of self-discovery. And, of course, there are the piano lessons.

"The guy I'm practicing with says he'll have me playing in a year. I told him I've only been wanting this for about fifty," says Hoffman. He's beaming now. "The other day, he said a great thing: 'I'll tell you right now what you're going to do. When you get frustrated, you're going to go into your comfort zone and play the shit you already know.' And then he says a great sentence for almost any line of work: 'You have to be able to get out of your comfort zone.'"



It's hard to believe that a man who can readily quote Kierkegaard would find this such a revelation, but Hoffman hasn't had much use for comfort zones over the years. He probably didn't even know what one was. For many, being unhealthy and unhappy is easier than the alternative, and that trap is only compounded by age. Too often, people stick with the small miseries they already know because they're certain they can weather them. To this point, Hoffman adds a salient conclusion: "We're not sure that we can survive happiness." Suddenly, the idea of staying hungry, at any age, seems quite important. And Dustin Hoffman is ravenous.☒

