

Dustin Hoffman: Scorsese didn't need me because he had De Niro...

So, kicking off with *Stranger Than Fiction*...

Man, you are tall! [Motions to his PR, who's just walked in the room] Look at this – this is Matt. When he came in to meet me, he could barely fit through the door! That reminds me of a true story. Are you ready? I'm the tallest person in my family! My older brother, he's, like, 5'5" and he hated being short, so when he was about 14 or 15 he used to literally do this when he went through a door [Hoffman stands on his tiptoes]. He would convince himself that he was taller. Isn't that wonderful? I wish I could be someone as tall as you who has to duck coming through doors. In your life, how many times have you banged your head coming through a door?

I've lost count...

Especially in these environments, with these low doors. And all us shorties around. You're 6'4", 6'5"?

Same height as Will Ferrell: 6' 3½"

I was enchanted by Will Ferrell. I suppose I was expecting somebody with the same qualities that the public has fallen in love with, but I found him kind of shy and introverted. He's great for this role, though, because Harold Crick seems to be guileless and, in the short time I've known Will, he seems guileless to me. He's the only person I've met in recent years, over the age of 10 anyways, who still says, "Gosh!" a lot.

You seem much more laid-back and relaxed these days.

Well, the truth is I had to work on myself for more than a few years, because there was an aspect of success that was very painful to me that I had to get past. "Do I deserve it?" That kind of thing. But now I'm enjoying it more than I've ever enjoyed it. I don't feel I have to apologise for myself any more. "Uh, I'm sorry I'm successful." I spent a long time feeling that way.

Did you try not to be a star when you first started out?

Yeah. It's demonstrable. I did *The Graduate*, which was like a freak accident, and after that I turned everything down until *Midnight Cowboy*, which I took a year later.

Everyone was telling me, "You can't take that part, it's not the lead! You're a star now!" I said, "I don't want to be a star, I want to act." But I think there was a part of myself that was trying to disassemble good fortune.

You were one of the leading actors of the '70s, yet you never worked with Scorsese, Spielberg or Coppola. Did you ever come close?

Scorsese didn't need me because he had De Niro. I could have worked with Spielberg a few times, and I'm very embarrassed to name the films he offered me that I turned down. I made big mistakes. But no matter what your stature is, you have to be asked to the dance. You don't call up and say, "I wanna be in your movie." I've never been able to do that. You wait for the call, and I never got the call from those guys – except Spielberg.

Have you ever wanted to revisit any of your film characters?

I'd love to have done a sequel to every one of 'em. They just never happened for whatever reason. Mike Nichols and I would talk about a sequel to *The Graduate*. What would Benjamin wind up doing? He probably would have stayed in LA and wound up directing commercials. And *Tootsie* – she'd been exposed in America so I wanted to have her move to England and become a talkshow host covering women's issues. There was a great scene which didn't make the first movie where Jessica Lange says to me, as Dorothy, "Oh my God, my period... I'm having such a flow! I've never had anything like this. Has that happened to you?" And I say [adopts Dorothy's voice], "Well, yes..." "How long does it last?" "Oh... months!" [Laughs] To have a man become an authority on women's issues... I thought was a great comic premise.

Where do you keep your two Oscars these days?

I used to keep them in the closet. But now I've actually put them on the mantle. Like I say, I'm evolving. 

Stranger Than Fiction opens on 1 December and is reviewed on page 32. *Perfume: The Story Of A Murderer* opens on 26 December and is reviewed on page 38.

Here & Now

Scene-stealing support roles are Dustin Hoffman's late-career stock in trade – and he's back working with *Finding Neverland* director Marc Forster on *Stranger Than Fiction*, as a literature professor giving counsel to Will Ferrell's voice-plagued IRS agent. Next up, the title character in *Fiction* screenwriter Zach Helm's directorial debut, *Mr Magorium's Wonder Emporium*.

WORDS MATT MUELLER
PORTRAIT JEFF RIEDEL

