



*W Magazine July 14th 2008*

## **On With the Show**

**Dustin Hoffman's latest role: cheerleader and fundraiser for a new theater in Santa Monica.**

**By Kevin West**

**Photograph by Joao Canziani**



For decades to come, Dustin Hoffman will be paid tribute at the Broad Stage, a dazzlingly modern new theater at Santa Monica College that he spent much of the past nine years raising money to build. "They wanted to name the theater after me," says Hoffman, an SMC alumnus whose career spans 50 years, two Oscars, a host of iconic screen performances and notable appearances on the boards as Willy Loman and Shylock. "I said, 'No way. I want a toilet.'" And so the actor will have his efforts commemorated with a namesake bathroom backstage.."

During a hard-hat tour in June, Hoffman explains his preference: Once, during a performance of *The Merchant of Venice* in London, he found himself without the time to answer nature's call between scenes. "I know what it's like [to] have to go when you

have to go on,” says the actor, who still sounds like the Graduate and who, at 70, moves with the high-strung energy of Michael Dorsey, aka Tootsie. So he advised architect Renzo Zecchetto to equip the Broad with the necessary facilities just off stage right. (The toilet will be co-dedicated to the Broad’s director, Dale Franzen, a former lyric soprano whom Hoffman describes as an “aesthetic pneumatic jackhammer” who originated the idea for the theater and has overseen its construction from day one.)

Hoffman clearly loves the off-kilter tribute of having a toilet named after him, but still one wonders why the star wouldn’t accept the honor of having his name emblazoned on the side of the building. Hoffman answers the question in a way that is, well, theatrical. He sticks out his tongue and screams, “Bleah!” like a two-year-old at his most terrible. Then he does it again. And again, louder still: “Bleaaah!” Just as one begins to suspect that he’s lurched into senility, Hoffman composes himself and explains that he didn’t want the Broad Stage to be his funerary monument, “like the pyramids.” The theater—which in the end was named for mega-philanthropist Eli Broad, who gave \$10 million to the project—is in Hoffman’s mind very much a living place, an artists’ playhouse where he and friends can “work out” between jobs.

“The worst thing about being an actor is not being able to practice your craft,” explains Hoffman, who’s dressed like the existential detective he played in *I Love Huckabees*, in running shoes and a navy pinstriped suit smudged with construction dust. “If we’re between jobs, where are we gonna practice? We need company. We can’t bear being alone.”

Hoffman got involved with the project in 1999, when Franzen called to ask for his support. He was immediately excited by the idea of a theater in Santa Monica and threw his weight behind the project. “She wanted to bed me,” Hoffman jokes when asked about his initial conversations with Franzen. “But we thought it’s better to build something like this.”