

The DEFINITE ARTICLE

We ask a celebrity a set of probing questions – and only accept **THE** definitive answer. This week: BGT's first winner, opera singer Paul Potts

The prized possession you value above all others... The ability to drive! I only passed my test in 2013, aged 42. It was my first attempt – I never got around to learning because I'm so disorganised.

The biggest regret you wish you could amend... Not attending an opera school in Italy in 2000 when I was offered a place. I lacked the confidence. But if I'd gone I may never have done Britain's Got Talent [Paul won the first series in 2007].

The temptation you wish you could resist... Eating red meat. I used to eat out once every few months, but now when I'm touring I'm in restaurants every night and it's hard not to order great meat.

The book that holds an everlasting resonance... The Lord Of The Rings. I've read it nine times and I see something new each time.

Below: Simon Cowell with one of his cars. Above right: Bacardi, orange and cranberry. Far right: a camera and Lake Windermere



PS...

Meryl Streep is the world's worst opera singer in *Florence Foster Jenkins* – in cinemas from Friday. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is playing at Shakespeare's Globe Theatre in London. And Cyndi Lauper's new album *Detour* is released on Friday

The priority activity if you were the Invisible Man for a day... I'd take one of Simon Cowell's precious cars for a spin around Hollywood, then drop the keys back in his hands. The look on his face would be worth seeing!

The pet hate that makes your hackles rise... Bullying. I put up with lots of it in my youth and it hurts me to see others go through it.

The film you can watch time and time again... Untouchable, a French comedy about a quadriplegic and his carer. It makes you laugh and cry.

The person who has influenced you most... José Carreras. I heard a record of him singing *La Bohème* when I was 16 and it made me want to sing opera. I've performed for him twice now.

The figure from history for whom you'd most like to buy a pie and a pint... Giacomo Puccini. I'd like to ask how he managed to write such powerful music that creates so much emotion in people.

The piece of wisdom you would pass on to a child... Don't ignore your problems or they'll never go away.

The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity... Photography. I've loved it for years and always did what I could with cheap cameras, but



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now I have great kit. I have 16 cameras, which my wife Julz thinks is a bit much!

The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again... My fitness. No one would ever believe that in my 20s I ran cross-country for my county. I weighed about 10½ stone, but I must be six stone heavier now.

The unending quest that drives you on... To be the best I can at all I do – be it singing, as a husband or a friend.

The poem that touches your soul... If by Rudyard Kipling – you'd be pretty perfect if you managed to live up to it.

The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase... That because I'm fat, I must be ugly. It's not for me to judge what I look like, but there's an assumption that fat people are ugly, which doesn't seem right or fair.

The event that altered the course of your life and character... Getting through that Britain's Got Talent audition in Cardiff in 2007. I thought it would be the last time I'd ever perform because I'd come to the end of the road with my singing. It was my last shot...



The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it... I'd round up Twitter trolls and show them the impact they have on their victims.

The song that means most to you... Nessun Dorma – the song I sang on BGT. I've performed it thousands of times since then but I'll never tire of it.

The way you would spend your fantasy 24 hours, with no travel restrictions... I love being in outstanding landscapes alone and photographing them, so my day would begin at 4am by Lake Windermere so I could capture the sunrise. I'd have a campfire and cook eggs Benedict and make a proper cappuccino. After that I'd visit Loch Linnhe on the west coast of Scotland, then stare in wonder at Buachaille Etive Mòr mountain in the Highlands. I'd have Bluff Hill Cove oysters for lunch in Christchurch, New Zealand, then take a boat onto Lake Pukaki. I'd also visit Mount Cook before meeting Julz in Venice. We'd have a walk and a gondola ride before a dinner of seafood pasta by the Grand Canal. I'd drink a

Bacardi with orange and cranberry – an 80s throwback! We'd then take the Orient Express – which would be roofless – through the Alps. We'd stop in Verona where I'd sing something from *La Bohème* in the Arena di Verona, then we'd spend the night in a hotel in Zurich, eating too much Swiss chocolate.

The happiest moment you will cherish forever... Singing at Berlin's Brandenburg Gate on New Year's Eve 2010 in front of 1.5 million people. I remember thinking, 'How did this happen?'

The saddest time that shook your world... My life between the ages of 15-17 was sad and distressing. I was suffering abuse from bullies at school and I was sexually abused by a man at my Sea Cadets. But I survived it all.

The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you... To play *Rodolfo* in *La Bohème*. I think I could do it well.

The philosophy that underpins your life... Never give up and you will get to where you need to go.

The order of service at your funeral... I want it to be happy – but some opera might get the tears going. I want my ashes scattered on Lake Windermere.

The way you want to be remembered... As somebody who just kept going.

The Plug... Paul Potts plays Cavardossi in Puccini's *Tosca* at Chiswick House and Gardens on 15-16 June. For tickets visit summersessions.co.uk. ■

As told to Rob McGibbon



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