



From top: West Side Story, a piano, a fruit cocktail, the Hotel Cipriani, The Bolshoi's Swan Lake, Little Women, a child's sewing machine, Duran Duran, birthday cake ice cream from the Marble Slab Creamery, and Elton John

**The prized possession you value above all others...** A bottle of 1950s perfume that belonged to my mother, Rita. She died from leukaemia when she was only 43 and I was 15. It was devastating – I doubt I'll ever truly get over it.

**The unqualified regret you wish you could amend...** Being so strict with my daughter Alana [now 33]. I was too demanding about homework, extra lessons – everything. Children need freedom to grow and not have such a firm hand restricting their development.

**The way you would spend your fantasy 24 hours, with no travel restrictions...**

Breakfast with my husband Angus at the Hotel Cipriani in Venice, then off to New York for a shopping spree at Bloomingdale's – with no spending limit! After lunch at a fish restaurant at Double Bay in Sydney with Alana and my other daughter Abi, 22, I'd begin the evening with a fabulous fruit cocktail at the Savoy hotel in Moscow, then have sushi before watching the Bolshoi Ballet do Swan Lake. I'd end the day with Angus at the George V hotel in Paris.

**The temptation you wish you could resist...** Ice cream from the Marble Slab Creamery in Toronto. They have the most amazing varieties – I like birthday cake flavour with rainbow sprinkles.

**The book that holds an everlasting resonance...** Little Women by Louisa May Alcott. I've read it 100 times and it's taught me so much about families and relationships.

**The priority activity if you were the Invisible Woman for a day...** I'd visit hospitals to check the elderly are being cared for properly. I get so upset when old people are mistreated.

**The pet hate that makes your hackles rise...** Rudeness in all its forms.

**The film you can watch time and time again...** West Side Story has everything – laughter, love, passion, sorrow, tragedy. It makes me cry every time.

**The person who has influenced you most...** My mother, who was so generous, kind and gentle. I've always wanted to be like her, but I think I fall short.

**The figure from history for whom you'd most like to buy a pie and a pint...** Fred Astaire. I'd ask him where the inspiration for his dancing came from. No one has ever come close to his brilliance. Maybe we could have a dance.

**The piece of wisdom you would pass on to a child...** Only behave the way you expect others to behave towards you.



'I've been collecting children's antique sewing machines for 25 years – I've got about 70 now'

# The DEFINITE ARTICLE

*We ask a celebrity a set of devilishly probing questions – and only accept THE definitive answer. This week it's choreographer Arlene Phillips*

**The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity...** I've been collecting children's antique sewing machines for 25 years and I have about 70 now.

**The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again...** A Tiffany pen given to me by the Australian film director Russell Mulcahy in the 1980s as a thank-you for all the videos we worked on together, including Duran Duran's Wild Boys. It reminded me of those wonderful, crazy days.

**The unending quest that drives you on...** To leave a financial legacy to my kids and my extended family. I had a tough childhood and came from nothing, so I know how hard it is to work your way up. I'd be so proud if I could leave them a little something to help.

**The poem that touches your soul...** Daffodils by William Wordsworth has resonated with me ever since I was very young. These days it always gives me a sense of peace.

**The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase...** That I'm the super tough Queen of Mean. It began from the Hot Gossip days in the 1970s because I was such a hard taskmaster and it carried on with Strictly. People meet me and say, 'I never thought you'd be so nice.'

**The event that altered the course of your life and character...** Watching a jazz dance class by a teacher called Molly Molloy in Covent Garden in 1966 when I was 23. I was down from Manchester for a week of lessons but I phoned my father to say I wasn't coming back. My life was changed forever.

**The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it...** I'd break into Selfridges at night and raid the clothes, shoes and bags departments.

**The song that means most to you...** I'm Still Standing by Elton John from 1983. I choreographed the video in Cannes and we had the most magical four days of fun filming. But the lyrics also strike a chord with me. Despite all the knocks I've had, I'm still standing.

**The happiest moment you will cherish forever...** My 40th birthday party. It was a wild night that ended with Andrew Lloyd Webber playing The Everly Brothers on the piano.

**The saddest time that shook your world...** Losing my mum so young was awful, but my world was shaken when my manager Michael Summerton died from cancer in 2009. He was lovely.

**The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you...** To play the piano.

**The philosophy that underpins your life...** Wake up and get on with it.

**The order of service at your funeral...** There won't be much of me left, as I'm leaving my body to science. The rest will be cremated. I want a fast ceremony with as little fuss as possible.

**The way you want to be remembered...** As a loving mum.

**The Plug...** For tickets for the new production of Starlight Express visit [www.starlightexpressmusical.com](http://www.starlightexpressmusical.com). Follow me on Twitter at @arlenephillips. ■

*As told Rob McGibbon*

PS...

*Rufus Sewell and Kristin Scott Thomas star in Old Times at London's Harold Pinter Theatre. See the Royal Opera's La Bohème live on 200 screens around the country – [www.roh.org.uk/cinema](http://www.roh.org.uk/cinema). And the soundtrack to the new Les Misérables movie is out Monday*



**NEXT WEEK**

- Fast Show star Mark Williams on his new crime-fighting cleric Father Brown
- How Weight Watchers changed BBC business reporter Penny Haslam's life
- Jamie Oliver does Burns Night
- Plus Britain's best TV listings