



'People think I'm confident because I'm a director, but I was a chronically shy child and that's still there'

The DEFINITE ARTICLE

We ask a celebrity a set of devilishly probing questions – and only accept THE definitive answer. This week: film and theatre director Richard Eyre

The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity... Steeplechasing. My father was an amateur jockey, and to watch beautiful animals ridden by brilliant and brave men is magical.

The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again... A journal I'd kept for four years. It was like a second brain but I left it on a plane in 2009.

The unending quest that drives you on... To do a piece of work that I'm entirely satisfied with.

The poem that touches your soul... Vacillation by WB Yeats. It expresses exactly what I believe is right in life – that you should always act in good faith and do things for the right reasons.

The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase... That, because I am a director, I am socially confident. I was a chronically shy child. That kernel of my younger self is still there, but I've developed mechanisms to deal with it.

The event that altered the course of your life and character... Becoming artistic director of the Nottingham Playhouse Theatre in 1972, aged 29. To suddenly be responsible for a little world with 120 people working for you made me grow up and transformed my career.

The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it... I'd steal Henri Matisse's *The Snail* from Tate Modern. It is full of energy and joy – but I'd need a very big wall to put it on!

The song that means most to you... *Que Reste-t-il de Nos Amours?* [What Remains Of Our Love?] by Charles Trénet, from the 1940s. A French girlfriend played it to me in my early 20s, so it's very tied up with young love.

The happiest moment you will cherish forever... The three weeks I spent with Sue in Gloucestershire after she nearly died from peritonitis in 1996. I so appreciated having her in my life and realised how lucky we were.

The saddest time that shook your world... My mother Minna being diagnosed with Alzheimer's when she was 55. I remember four years later opening a door for her and her simply not knowing she was meant to walk through. I wrote that scene into *Iris* [the 2001 film he directed based on author Iris Murdoch's descent into Alzheimer's] and Judi Dench re-enacted that moment.

The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you... To be able to speak perfect French.

The philosophy that underpins your life... Every action has a consequence, so always try to be good.

The order of service at your funeral... I would like my ashes to be scattered under a tree in our garden in Gloucestershire and for people to drink great champagne and wine – and lots of it!

The way you want to be remembered... Simply with love.

The Plug... Richard Eyre directs Nick Dear's *The Dark Earth And The Light Sky* at the Almeida Theatre until 12 January. For tickets call 020 7359 4404 or visit www.almeida.co.uk. ■

As told to Rob McGibbon

The prized possession you value above all others... An upright piano from Discovery, the ship Captain Scott sailed to the Antarctic for his 1901-04 expedition. It's a legacy from my grandfather Charles Royds, Scott's First Lieutenant and the ship's main piano player.

The unqualified regret you wish you could amend... That I can't play piano! I had a few lessons as a boy, but in a futile act of defiance I refused to carry on.

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

I'd have boiled egg and toasted soldiers at Balthazar in New York, then head to a country villa near Saignon in Provence with my wife Sue, our daughter Lucy and her two children [Evie, three, and Beatrix, four months]. I'd go for a long walk, then swim in the pool. Sue and I would have fantastic fish for lunch at Corte Sconta in Venice, then I'd visit the Angkor Wat temple in Cambodia. I'd enjoy the sunset over the Avening Valley from the garden of our country home in Gloucestershire, then have dinner with lots of friends at London's River Café, before flopping into bed with the latest Ian McEwan novel.

The temptation you wish you could resist... Smoking a Cohiba Panetela cigar accompanied by a large vodka and tonic. I'm 69, so neither is wise.

The book that holds an everlasting resonance... *The Faber Book Of Modern Verse*. I came across it when I was 15 and it gave me a lasting love of poetry.

The priority activity if you were the Invisible Man for a day... I'd tickle every officiating religious minister so they looked ridiculous and couldn't scare people. I resent all organised religions.

The pet hate that always gets your back up... I find the Today programme's Thought For The Day sanctimonious.

The film you can watch time and time again... *Singin' In The Rain* with Gene Kelly. It never ceases to make me happy.

The person who has influenced you most... The theatre director Peter Brook. He gave me lots of encouragement when I started directing, and at 87 he's still a dear friend and inspiration.

The figure from history for whom you'd most like to buy a pie and a pint... Shakespeare. Many of his great characters are soldiers, so I'd love to know how he got his military insight.

The piece of wisdom you would pass on to a child... Don't ever be afraid to ask any question.

From top: Angkor Wat in Cambodia, Cohiba cigars, Gene Kelly and Debbie Reynolds in *Singin' In The Rain*, Judi Dench and Jim Broadbent in *Iris*, steeplechasing, vodka and tonic, Matisse's *The Snail*, and William Shakespeare

PS...

Helena Bonham Carter gives us her Miss Havisham in Great Expectations – in cinemas from Friday. Janie Dee opens in Hello Dolly at Leicester's Curve Theatre. And Girls Aloud mark their tenth anniversary with greatest hits collection Ten, out Monday

NEXT WEEK

● She's known as the queen of baking, now Mary Berry presents her complete, step-by-step guide to delicious festive entertaining ● PLUS The first of seven Mary Berry Christmas Collection recipe cards – FREE inside Weekend next Saturday