

The DEFINITE ARTICLE

We ask a celebrity a set of devilishly probing questions – and only accept **THE** definitive answer. This week: *Just Good Friends* star Paul Nicholas



'I wish people didn't mistake me for Rod Hull. I got into a taxi once and the driver said to me, "Where's Emu?"'

The prized possession you value above all others... A 1952 Gibson Les Paul Goldtop electric guitar I bought in 1979 to learn to play for a film. It cost £1,200, but I saw one recently for £12,000.

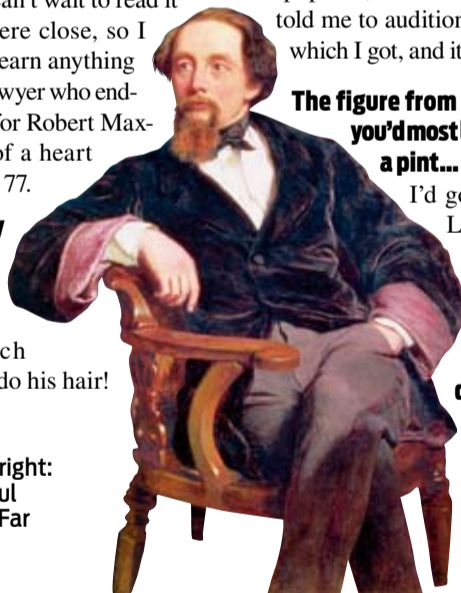
The biggest regret you wish you could amend... Not working with the director Bob Fosse. I auditioned for the second lead when he brought Pippin to the West End in 1973 but he said, 'I think you tried for the wrong part!', and that was that.

The temptation you wish you could resist... Taking a joke too far. I like a laugh, but I can overstep the mark. My wife Linzi tries to restrain me.

The book that holds an everlasting resonance... My dad Oscar's memoir. I recently found it and can't wait to read it – though we were close, so I don't expect to learn anything new. He was a lawyer who ended up working for Robert Maxwell and died of a heart attack in 1997 at 77.

The priority activity if you were the Invisible Man for a day... I'd watch Donald Trump do his hair!

Right: Charles Dickens. Above right: a Gibson Les Paul Goldtop guitar. Far right: space



The pet that makes your hackles rise...

People who put their dogs in the garden at 7.30am. They bark and wake you up.

The film you can watch time and time again...

That's Entertainment!, which has Hollywood's greatest song and dance artists reminiscing. My mum Peggy took me to the pictures when I was little and Hollywood musicals made a big impression. I used to go home and tap dance on the lino.

The person who has influenced you most... The producer Robert Stigwood. I met him at 19 and he tried to make me a pop star, which didn't work. But he told me to audition for Hair in 1968, which I got, and it changed my life.

The figure from history for whom you'd most like to buy a pint... Charles Dickens.

I'd go on a tour of old London with him. He had an eye for the ladies, so it'd be entertaining!

The piece of wisdom you would pass on to a child... Never miss an opportunity, always be kind – and never be late.



The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity... I'm really into politics and spend a lot of time watching political programmes.

The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again... My sex appeal! I'm 70 and you become a bit invisible to women. I've not met many women who are into old men – not that I'm looking!

The unending quest that drives you on... To keep working. I don't have hobbies because work is what I love to do.

The poem that touches your soul... TS Eliot's Old Possum's Book Of Practical Cats. Andrew Lloyd Webber introduced me to it when he was writing Cats and I played Rum Tum Tugger in the first production in 1981.

The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase... That I'm Rod Hull! I got into a taxi once and the driver said to me, 'I know who you are!' I started to preen until he said, 'Where's Emu?' I said I'd left him in the hotel.

The event that altered the course of your life and character... Getting the lead in Hair. Until then I'd been a little bit lost.

The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it... I'd put my name on the list of original investors in Cats. The producer Cameron Mackintosh asked me to invest but I said no. I'd have made it back many times over!

The song that means most to you... I Can Let Go Now by Michael McDonald. It's about letting someone go when an affair is over. It's very moving.

The way you would spend your fantasy 24 hours, with no travel restrictions... I've spent a lifetime travelling, so I'd prefer to do something outrageous, then something homely. I'd begin with an astronaut's course, then blast off to space. I'd float around Earth and land on the Moon, then zoom off to Mars. Later, I'd land in Moscow and hook up with Linzi. I had to cancel a visit there recently and I'm desperate to visit. In the evening, I'd go to my local pub for a few drinks with friends, then settle back at home in north London for a slap-up dinner

with the family – including my six kids [aged 28-49], 12 grandchildren and a great grandchild [aged seven months].

The happiest moment you will cherish forever... When my friend David Ian and I got the rights to the stage show of Grease in 1992. We were allowed to use songs from the film and it was a big success – it's toured the world ever since.

The saddest time that shook your world... The day my first wife Susan died in a car accident in 1977 when she was 28. We were divorced but we were still very close. Telling our children Oscar and Natasha was heartbreaking.

The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you... I'd like to have another successful sitcom like Just Good Friends, but they're hard to find because great writers don't come along often.

The philosophy that underpins your life... Have a laugh and always find enjoyment in work.

The order of service at your funeral... I want 'This Way Up' written on the coffin! I also want Massenet's Méditation for violin, which was played at both my parents' funerals. I'm leaving instructions for me to be cloned, so I can keep winding people up!

The way you want to be remembered... He made people smile, that'll do.

The Plug... Paul plays Scrooge in A Christmas Carol The Musical at the Opera House, Blackpool, from 4 Dec, wintergardensblackpool.co.uk. ■

As told to Rob McGibbon



PHOTOGRAPHS: MIKE LAWRENCE/ALAMY; SHUTTERSTOCK; ALLSTAR

PS...

Tom Hanks stars in Cold War drama *Bridge Of Spies* – in cinemas from Friday. The Corrs' comeback album *White Light* is out the same day. And Harold Pinter's *The Homecoming* with Gary Kemp and Gemma Chan opens at The Trafalgar Studios on Monday



NEXT WEEK

- Sean Bean takes us behind the scenes on *The Frankenstein Chronicles*
- Monty Don on why we should plant a nut tree at Christmas
- PLUS Britain's best TV listings