

# The DEFINITE ARTICLE

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

**The prized possession you value above all others...** A drawing by David Hockney of a stage curtain he painted for a gala I organised in 1977. It's a beautiful abstract of dancers. We've been friends since the 1960s.

**The biggest regret you wish you could amend...** Not growing taller. I'm only 5ft 2in, which stopped me getting classic leading roles. The upside was that new roles were written for me.

**The temptation you wish you could resist...** Doodling in my appointments book. My PA can't decipher where I'm supposed to be.

**The book that holds an everlasting resonance...** A Midsummer Night's Dream has been such a positive in my life. I've played Puck in the ballet, play and opera around the world.

**The priority activity if you were the invisible man for a day...** I'd float by Usain Bolt as he wins 100m Olympics gold. I'd love to witness winning from his perspective.

**The pet hate that makes our hackles rise...** Snogging in public. Such things should be private.

Right: 1978's *La Cage Aux Folles*. Above right: champagne. Far right: the Great Wall of China

**The person who has influenced you most...** Ninette de Valois, who founded the Royal Ballet. She was my teacher and mentor at the Royal Ballet School.

**The figure from history for whom you'd most like to buy a pie and a pint...**

Serge Diaghilev, who founded the Ballets Russes in 1909. He got together the best composers, dancers and artists and changed the face of performance.

**The piece of wisdom you would pass on to a child...** Don't let negative thoughts take over the positive.

**The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity...** Iaido martial arts, which is Samurai sword-fighting. It's such a precise skill, full of Japanese history. I've been training for a couple of months because I may need it for a show. I can't reveal any more!

**The film you can watch time and time again...** The 1978 French movie *La Cage Aux Folles*. It's so rich in imagination and always makes me laugh, especially when the men do the can-can.

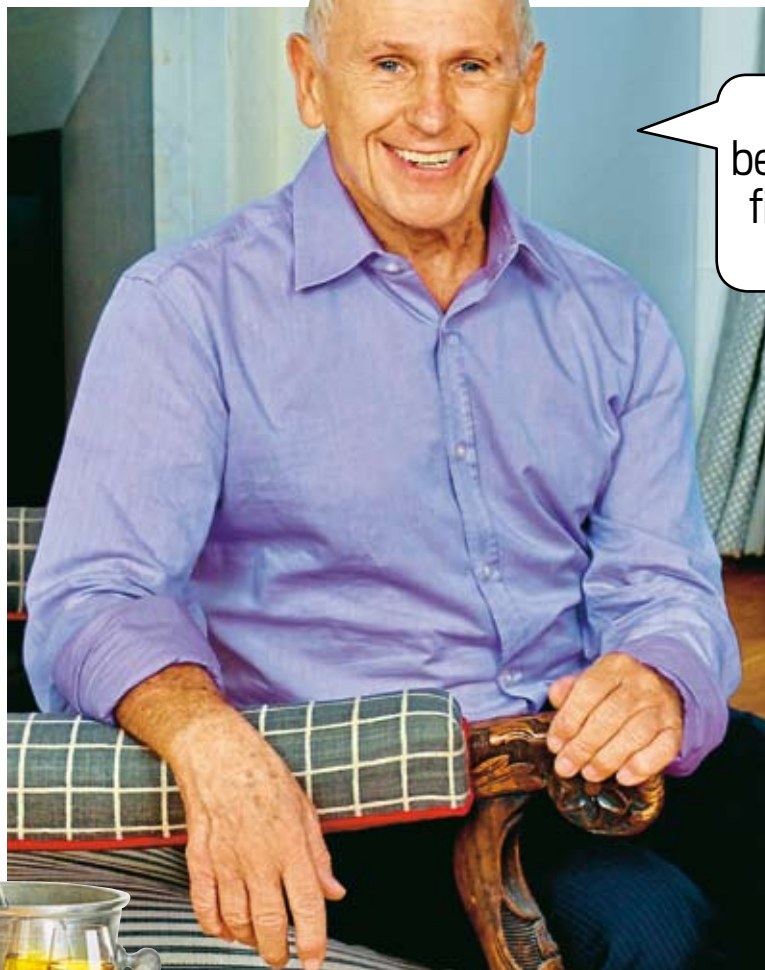
**The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again...** A specially made gold Cartier necklace given to me for my 20th birthday. It went missing years later.

**The unending quest that drives you on...** Doing workshops to inspire children to dance.

**The poem that touches your soul...** The passage from Shakespeare's play *Cymbeline* that begins 'Fear no more the heat o' the sun'. It reminds me that we all face the same fate – death.

**The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase...** That I'm the eternal clown. For years I was expected to perform for people and I played along, but I won't do it any more. There's a quiet, serious side to me. I'm also very private.

**The event that altered the course of your life and character...** Getting into the Royal Ballet School. I was up against 250 kids for two scholarships and came from a working-class upbringing in Hartlepool. The screenwriter Lee Hall told me that my autobiography was his inspiration for the film *Billy Elliot*.



'I've been training to become a Samurai sword fighter for months – it's such a precise skill'

**The happiest moment you will cherish forever...** Dancing to Uptown Girl with Princess Diana at the Royal Opera House in 1985. She came on stage and I heard an intake of breath by 2,500 people! We got eight curtain calls and as we walked off she said, 'This doesn't mean you'll get an OBE!'

**The saddest time that shook your world...** The death of my mother Joan in 1994, aged 72. She died from paracetamol poisoning – she'd been taking it for arthritis. She was very talented and could have had a singing career, but sacrificed everything for me.

**The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you...** To be a graphic designer and create posters for shows. I still have some I drew when I was at school and they're not bad.

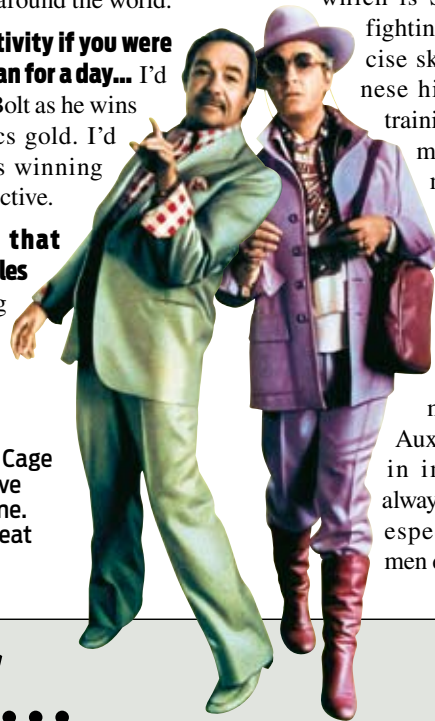
**The philosophy that underpins your life...** Work hard, play hard and remember to laugh. Keeping your sense of humour is very important.

**The order of service at your funeral...** I'd have lots of Christmas carols, especially Silent Night, and Country Gardens by Percy Grainger. And I want everyone to make a donation to my charity, so it'll carry on long after I'm gone.

**The way you want to be remembered...** As someone who opened doors to all forms of dance.

**The Plug...** The Wayne Sleep Foundation raises money to help talented youngsters train for the theatre and dance. Visit [waynesleep.org](http://waynesleep.org).

As told to Rob McGibbon



PS...

*Kristen Wiig leads an all-female team in the new Ghostbusters film – in cinemas from Monday. David Bowie Is, a documentary about the V&A's blockbuster 2013 show, is in Vue cinemas on Thursday only. And Take That play London's Hyde Park tonight*



**NEXT WEEK**

- June Whitfield, starring in *Ab Fab: The Movie* at 90, invites us into her home
- A taste of the Med in part two of our Elizabeth David recipe series
- PLUS Britain's best TV listings