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 book that holds an everlasting resonance... A Midsummer Night’s Dream has been such a positive influence 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 the 100m Olympics gold. I’d be the Invisible Man for a day…

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 whom you’d most like to have met... Sergei Diaghilev, who founded the Ballets Russes in 1909. He got together the best composers, dancers and artists and changed the face of performance.

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 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 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 parac nietam 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 song that means most to you... A special made gold Cartier necklace given to me for my 20th birthday. It went missing years later.

The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it... I’d steal David Hockney’s painting of me with my ex-partner George Lawson from Tate Britain. David started it in 1972 but only finished it recently.

The temptation you wish you could resist... Doodling in my appointment books. My PA can’t decipher where I’m supposed to be.

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 misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase... That I’m very private. 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.

The song that means most to you... Five Foot Two, Eyes Of Blue. I performed it aged eight at a talent contest I won in Middlesbrough and a judge advised me to take up ballet.

The place of worship you attend... 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.

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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

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