

The DEFINITE ARTICLE

We ask a celebrity a set of devilishly probing questions – and only accept **THE** definitive answer. This week it's musical theatre star Michael Ball's turn

The prized possession you value above all others...

An oil painting of our Tibetan terriers, Ollie and Freddie, which was a Christmas present from my partner Cathy McGowan in 2014. She commissioned the artist Kim Sears – Andy Murray's wife – to photograph and paint the dogs in secret.

The temptation you wish you could resist...

Second helpings of cheese, wine and bread and butter pudding.

The book that holds an everlasting resonance...

Watership Down by Richard Adams, which I first read when I was 15. It's not just about rabbits – it's about friendship and finding a community in the face of injustice.

The biggest regret you wish you could amend...

Not learning to tap dance like Fred Astaire. At drama school I made up a back problem and a heart condition to avoid lessons because they began at 9am.

The priority activity if you were the invisible man for a day...

I've been buying Range Rover cars for 18 years, so I'd sneak into their offices to peek at their secret prototypes.

The happiest moment you will cherish forever...

Waking up on Christmas morning when I was eight. Our garden on Dartmoor was covered in snow and Santa had given me the toy I wanted, Lady Penelope's Fab 1 Rolls-Royce from Thunderbirds. It was magical.

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

Woody Allen's *Bullets Over Broadway*, in which a struggling writer gets a gangster to finance his play. It's stunningly funny and accurate.

The pet hate that makes your hackles rise...

Bad audience etiquette in the theatre, especially mobile phones.

The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase...

That I'm always happy. In a professional setting I make every effort to spread happiness, but I have really black periods too and I can be a miserable sod.

The piece of wisdom you would pass on to a child...

This too shall pass. Some events in life can feel overwhelming, but don't worry, you'll deal with it.



'At drama school I made up a back problem and a heart condition to avoid tap dancing lessons at 9am!'



The person who has influenced you most...

Cathy. We've been together since 1991 and she's my soulmate.

The saddest time that shook your world...

I was really shaken when the Twin Towers were attacked. It brought home to me how fragile the world is.

The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it...

I'd create a computer program that would rebate tax to people like me who pay up in full – then really hit tax evaders.

The event that altered the course of your life and character...

Having a No 2 hit in 1989 with *Love Changes Everything* from the show *Aspects Of Love*. It opened up opportunities that I never thought could happen to me.

The poem that touches your soul...

Joni Mitchell's song *Both Sides Now* is as beautiful as any poem. It's like an articulate essay on life and love.

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

I'd sail into Cape Town at sunrise with Cathy on a yacht. We'd step off it and into a

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

Cicero, the Roman philosopher and politician. I'd love to hear about the excesses of ancient Rome and his take on modern politics.

The unending quest that drives you on...

To perform the perfect show. It probably doesn't exist, but sometimes you get close when everything clicks.

The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again...

My grandmother Lil's wedding ring, which she left to me when she died in 1985. I usually kept it on a chain around my neck, but four years ago I left it in my hotel room in the Grenadines when I went for a swim and it was stolen.

The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity...

Superheroes. I've loved comics since I was eight and I never miss a new superhero film.

The song that means most to you...

Little Pal by Al Jolson. My mum Ruth, who's 82 now, and my gran sang it to me as a lullaby.



Right: Fred Astaire. Above right: Lady Penelope and her manservant Parker with the Fab 1 Rolls-Royce in *Thunderbirds*. Far right: the Vatican



As told to Rob McGibbon

PS...

Scarlett Johansson's a human-cyborg hybrid in sci-fi drama *Ghost In The Shell* – in cinemas from Friday. Tinie Tempah's new album *Youth is out on the same day*. And David Tennant opens in *Don Juan In Soho* at London's Wyndham's Theatre on Tuesday



NEXT WEEK

- Meet the winners in our annual wildlife photography competition
- The most delicious Easter bakes from Royal Wedding cake maker Fiona Cairns
- Britain's best TV guide

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