

# The DEFINITE ARTICLE

We ask a celebrity a set of probing questions – and only accept **THE** definitive answer. This week it's singer Neil Sedaka



'People seem to think of me as a goody-goody who never curses, but I can be very nasty if I'm pushed'

**The prized possession you value above all others...** My three pianos. I have a Baldwin in my LA apartment, a Steinway in my New York apartment, and a Kawai plexiglass grand piano in storage for shows. I still play for two or three hours every day.

**The biggest regret you wish you could amend...** Having an inadequate manager at the beginning of my career in 1958. I lost a lot of potential money and exposure. My wife Leba later took over and does an excellent job.

**The book that holds an everlasting resonance...** James Kaplan's Sinatra: The Chairman. Sinatra was one of my great idols and this insightful biography puts you right next to him at his peak.

**The film you can watch time and time again...** Cinema Paradiso. I've seen it 20 times and Ennio Morricone's score makes me cry.

Right: Philippe Noiret and Salvatore Cascio in Cinema Paradiso. Above right: Rolls-Royces. Far right: the Halekulani Hotel in Hawaii



**The priority activity if you were the Invisible Man for a day...** I'd watch Elton John composing melodies as he's reading Bernie Taupin's lyrics. Elton resurrected my career when he signed me to his Rocket Records label in 1974.

**The pet hate that makes your hackles rise...** Traffic, slow elevators and off-key singers.

**The person who has influenced you most...** My old friend Barbara Schreiber, who told me in 1972 that I hadn't yet written *the* great song. I raised the bar and soon wrote Solitaire. When I played it to her she said, 'Now you've written the great one!'

**The figure from history for whom you'd most like to buy a pie and a pint...** The composer George Gershwin. I'd ask how long it took him to write the opera Porgy And Bess.

**The piece of wisdom you would pass on to a child...** If you have a passion for something, never be discouraged by anyone.

**The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity...** Tightrope walkers. I'd be too scared to do it, but I'm fascinated by their focus.



**The temptation you wish you could resist...** Buying Rolls-Royces and Bentleys. To me they show class and are a symbol of success.

**The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again...** The pain-free days of my youth. I'm 78 now and have backache, arthritis in my fingers and muscle pain. I think young, though.

**The unending quest that drives you on...** Topping my last song and always reinventing myself.

**The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase...** People seem to think of me as a goody-goody who never curses, but I can be very nasty if I'm pushed. Cross me too many times and I'll never talk to you again.

**The event that altered the course of your life and character...** Meeting my songwriting partner Howard Greenfield in 1952 when we were living in the same block of flats in Brooklyn. We wrote so many great songs together until he passed away from complications related to Aids in 1986.

**The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it...** I'd overthrow the Venezuelan dictator Nicolas Maduro, whose people are starving.

**The poem that touches your soul...** The hymn Amazing Grace is so inspirational – I wish I'd written it.

**The song that means most to you...** My 1975 song Laughter In The Rain – it revived my career for a bunch of people who had never heard of me.

**The way you would spend your fantasy 24 hours, with no travel restrictions...** I'd spend all day with Leba, our children Dara, 54, and Marc, 50, and our grandchildren – Michael, 11, and twins Amanda and Charlotte, who are 14.

We'd ski in the morning at Valle Nevado in Chile and then watch Roger Federer win Wimbledon. After that, we'd have spare ribs and spring rolls at Mr Chow in London's Knightsbridge before going to St Petersburg to visit the Hermitage Museum. Then we'd hear the soprano Anna Netrebko in Tchaikovsky's opera Eugene Onegin, before watching hula dancers at

the Halekulani Hotel in Hawaii at sunset. We'd watch fireworks over Brooklyn, then Leba and I would dance until dawn at the Rio Carnival.

**The happiest moment you will cherish forever...** When Oh! Carol became a hit in 1959 and saved me from being fired from my record company.

**The saddest time that shook your world...** Losing my sister Ronnie to cancer in 1996. She was 18 months older than me and was my idol.

**The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you...** Not having a West End or Broadway musical about my life. Bill Kenwright's show Breaking Up Is Hard To Do, which features my songs, has toured regional theatres in Britain, but didn't reach the West End.

**The philosophy that underpins your life...** Hope for the best, prepare for the worst, and take whatever comes your way. Also, a shot of Smirnoff before I take to the stage always helps.

**The order of service at your funeral...** I want some great performers to sing my songs You Mean Everything To Me, The Music Of My Life and I Do It For Applause, and a top pianist to play my concerto Manhattan Intermezzo.

**The way you want to be remembered...** A kind person who made a great contribution to music and gave people joy.

**The Plug...** Neil's UK tour runs from 10-20 September and his new album I Do It For Applause will be released on 8 September. Visit neilsedaka.com. ■

As told to Rob McGibbon



## PS...

Charlize Theron stars in spy thriller *Atomic Blonde* – in cinemas from Wednesday. A new production of hit 70s musical *Jesus Christ Superstar* opens at Regent's Park Open Air Theatre on Friday. And UB40's UK tour starts at Falls Park in Belfast the same day



## NEXT WEEK

- The full scale of the rivalry between Diana and Camilla is revealed in part three of our unmissable series
- The tastiest tomato recipes
- PLUS Britain's best TV listings guide