

The DEFINITE ARTICLE

We ask a celebrity a set of devilishly probing questions – and only accept THE definitive answer. This week it's soul singer Beverley Knight's turn

The prized possession you value above all others... I treasure my voice. I knew from the age of eight that it was a special gift that made me stand out.

The biggest regret you wish you could amend... I was gutted I wasn't available to sing on Calvin Harris's song Ready For The Weekend in 2009. He asked me to do it, but I had flu. Mary Pearce stood in and it became a massive hit.

The temptation you wish you could resist... Haribo Tangfastics sweets. They're full of goodness knows what – but my tongue says they're delicious.

The priority activity if you were the Invisible Woman for a day... I'd be spiteful and trash Donald Trump's tanning and hair products.

The film you can watch time and time again... If The Shawshank Redemption is on, I have to watch it.

The pet hate that makes your hackles rise... I hate mean-spirited people.

Right: an 1859 portrait of Charles Dickens. Above right: Christian Louboutin shoes. Far right: GoldenEye, Ian Fleming's villa in Jamaica.

The book that holds an everlasting resonance... Nelson Mandela's autobiography Long Walk To Freedom. He had such a huge capacity to forgive. I was lucky to meet him twice.

The person who has influenced you most... My dad, Eddie. He died in 2010 at 71 and since then I've realised how much his character has defined me. My drive, my love of work, my determination are dad all over.

The piece of wisdom you would pass on to a child... There's nothing bigger than the hope in your heart.

The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity... I'm really into mixed martial arts. I've always enjoyed boxing, but MMA is even better and so exciting.

The figure from history for whom you'd most like to buy a pie and a pint... Charles Dickens. I'm fascinated by the Victorian era.

The unending quest that drives you on... To stay fit. I'm 44 now and it can be a real fight, but in the entertainment industry you can't let yourself go.

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

My MBE, which was awarded to me by the Queen in 2007. It was stolen from my home in north London in a burglary last year. It would be awesome if I could get a replacement.

The poem that touches your soul... Invictus by William Ernest Henley always inspires me because I connect with the sentiment that you can control the way your life goes.

The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase... That I'm religious. I was brought up as a Pentecostal, so some people have me down as a 'holy roller'. I respect all religions, but I don't follow one.

The event that altered the course of your life and character... Having a hysterectomy in June. Such a major operation has made me value myself more. It has made me realise that I'm fallible and that I'm not Superwoman.

The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it... I love speeding, so I'd put my foot to the floor in my Audi RS7.



The song that means most to you... Sam Cooke's A Change Is Gonna Come from 1964 is a powerful song about the struggles of African-Americans. His voice makes me tingle.

The way you would spend your fantasy 24 hours, with no travel restrictions... The day would begin on the Turks and Caicos island of Providenciales. I'd do stretches on the beach, then have a breakfast of fruit. I'd hang out with my husband James, all my family and friends. I'd do a workout – weights and sprints – with music blaring through my headphones. I'd then hit the shops in LA – Fred Segal for jeans and Christian Louboutin for shoes. Lunch would be alfresco somewhere fun and then

I'd go to Malawi for a jam session with some wonderful children I know there – making music with them makes you feel so good. After that I'd go to Salvador in Brazil and dance in the street. Dinner would be at Saint Ann's Bay, Jamaica, with my grandma Victoria, who lives there. We'd have saltfish with rice and peas. Still in

Jamaica, I'd watch the sunset from the beach in Oracabessa, then James and I would spend the night at Ian Fleming's former home GoldenEye.

The happiest moment you will cherish forever... When my mum Deloris called me at university to tell me my sister, Cynthia, had given birth to my first niece – Abi, who's now 22. I burst into tears then drove home to see her.

The saddest time that shook your world... When my dad died from a pulmonary embolism following surgery to remove a tumour on his spine. I was devastated.

The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you... To sing with James Brown. I was set to perform with him, but then he died in December 2006.

The philosophy that underpins your life... Keep dreaming, keep pushing, keep hoping. That's me.

The order of service at your funeral... It'll be a happy occasion on a beach. I want my family to sing A Change Is Gonna Come. I was born in Wolverhampton, so I'd like my ashes to be scattered at Molineux stadium, home of Wolverhampton Wanderers.

The way you want to be remembered... As a happy soul who sang her face off.

The Plug... BBC Proms Stax Records: 50 Years Of Soul is available for 30 days at bbc.co.uk/iplayer. Beverley's UK tour begins on 1 October. For tickets visit gigsandtours.com/tour/beverley-knight. ■

As told to Rob McGibbon



PS...

James Franco stars as a bank manager in heist thriller *The Vault*, in cinemas Friday. Robert Lindsay opens in *Prism* at London's Hampstead Theatre from Wednesday. And John Legend kicks off the British leg of his world tour in Glasgow on Friday



NEXT WEEK

- Newsreader Julie Etchingham on the temptation she can't resist
- Monty Don shows how to create a dazzling display of orange for autumn
- PLUS Britain's best TV guide