

The DEFINITE ARTICLE

We ask a celebrity a set of devilishly probing questions – and only accept THE definitive answer. This week it's acting legend Sylvia Syms's turn

The prized possession you value above all others...

My Edwardian home in west London. I bought it a few years ago after being in my previous house for 35 years and it feels like I've finally landed in the place where I belong. I have a lovely garden and even a drive, so I can park outside my door!

The temptation you wish you could resist...

Saying 'yes' to too many things, like work and charity events.

The book that holds an everlasting resonance...

Cry, The Beloved Country by Alan Paton. It opened my eyes to the political history of South Africa and I became active in the anti-Apartheid movement in the 1970s and 80s.



The biggest regret you wish you could amend...

Not having more money to help my mum, Daisy, have a more pleasant life. She committed suicide aged 40, by gassing herself in the oven. I was only 12 so I couldn't help her financially. I think of her all the time and have a picture of her on the wall by my bed.

The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity...

Growing plants and trees from cuttings. You'll often see me in a park craftily snipping.

The priority activity if you were the Invisible Man for a day...

I would go to a beauty spa and get myself totally renovated without anyone knowing. I'm useless at taking care of my looks.

The pet hate that makes your hackles rise...

People using rude or offensive language, especially when it's racist.

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

Citizen Kane. I admire it on so many levels. Orson Welles was a dear friend and an extraordinary companion. We made an awful film together, Ferry To Hong Kong, in 1959.

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

Be kind – even to people who are boring!

Left: Orson Welles in Citizen Kane. Above: gardening kit. Right: Barbra Streisand and Anne Francis in Funny Girl



'You'll often find me in the park, craftily snipping cuttings from plants and trees for my garden'

The person who has influenced you most...

Lorna Davies, my drama teacher when I was 16, before I went to RADa. She told me to believe in myself.

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

Nelson Mandela. I'd like to know how he kept his sense of humour despite all those years of hardship.

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

A gold signet ring my future husband Alan gave me soon after we started courting when I was 15. It became part of my hand, but I lost it after we divorced in 1989.

The unending quest that drives you on...

I'm 84 now and I want to keep acting. I'm not penniless, so I work because I still enjoy it.

The poem that touches your soul...

When You Are Old by WB Yeats is about a love that cannot last.

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

That I'm bossy and super confident. I'm actually very insecure and naturally shy.

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

Marrying Alan when I was 22. The marriage was awful most of the time, but he got me reading and listening to music. And he believed in me, which really helped.

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

I'd get rid of Donald Trump. He's ignorant, arrogant, uneducated and appalling.

The song that means most to you...

Puccini's opera La Bohème is extraordinary. Alan took me to see it at the Royal Opera House when I was 17. I said, 'It's so beautiful my heart hurts'.

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

I'd begin with a swim in the sea at Nielsen Park in Sydney. As this is a fantasy, my back won't ache as much as normal, so I'd drift around all morning. I'd have fresh fish for lunch at La Colombe d'Or in Saint-Paul de Vence, southern France, with my children Ben and Beatie. Then I'd

take my Jack Russell for a walk in a park in London, before going home to bed. I adore audiobooks, so I'd fall asleep to the sound of a great book.

The saddest time that shook your world...

Losing two babies in my early 20s. One baby was stillborn and I lost our daughter Jessica when she was two days old due to placenta previa. They were difficult times, but you just had to get on with it. Later we adopted Ben.

The happiest moment you will cherish forever...

The birth of my daughter, Beatie (Edney, actress). To be pregnant again was very risky, but I wanted a child so desperately, it felt miraculous.

The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you...

I'd have loved to play Juliet in Romeo And Juliet at the National Theatre, but I never thought I was right so I didn't push for it.

The philosophy that underpins your life...

Don't sit around moaning.

The order of service at your funeral...

I work with Intermission Theatre, so I'd like them to perform and for my children to speak. I want Barbra Streisand's song Don't Rain On My Parade from Funny Girl, and maybe my ashes can be scattered in my garden too.

The way you want to be remembered...

She wasn't a bad old stick.

The Plug...

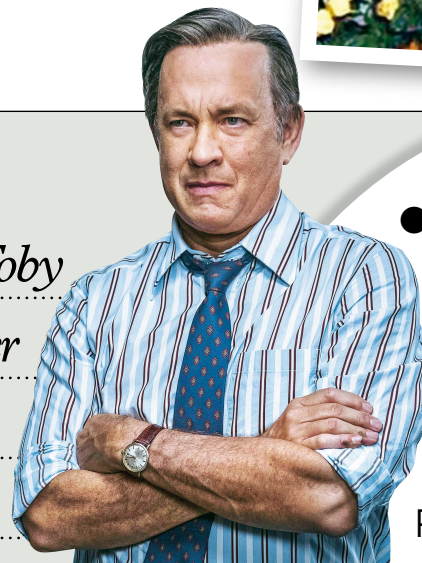
Together, a new film starring Sylvia Syms and Peter Bowles, is released on 26 January. Watch the trailer at together.movie

As told to Rob McGibbon



PS...

Tom Hanks stars in thriller *The Post*, in cinemas Friday. Toby Jones opens in *The Birthday Party* at London's Harold Pinter Theatre on Thursday. And a host of David Bowie's musical collaborators play at the O2 Ritz Manchester this evening



NEXT WEEK

- We join Joe, Debbie and the Strictly gang on their live tour
- Try our tasty one-pot meals
- Monty Don's guide to beating the cold in your garden
- PLUS Britain's best TV guide