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 president... 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 perfect souvenir you wish you could take back... A gold signet ring my future husband Alan gave me 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 liberated item you lost and wish you could have again... My Edwardian home. I was only 15. It became part of my hand, but I lost it after we started courting when I 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 treasured item you lost and wish you could have again... My ring. 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 Barbora 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

The man and woman 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 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

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

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

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