## The

We ask a celebrity a set of devilishly probing questions – and only accept THE definitive answer. This week it's the turn of actress Sian Phillips

The prized possession you value above The pet hate that makes **all others...** A quick charcoal sketch of my late Burmese cat Barnaby by the artist Stephen B. Whatley. He was painting my portrait at home and when I left the room he drew Barnaby. I love it.

The biggest regret you wish you could **amend...** Not asking my mother, Sally, about her life. I only know the bare bones of her story and would give anything to know more. She died in 1985 from lung cancer when she was 85.

The temptation you wish you could resist... Saying 'Yes' to challenging projects. I can't stop myself, but I put myself under so much pressure. I'm 81, so I should know better.

The book that holds an ever lasting resonance... The Goshawk by TH White. It's his own story about training a goshawk while he was living in the country and having a breakdown. It's about a man right on the edge.

The priority activity if you were the Invisible Woman for a day... I'd shadow Mark Carney, the Governor of the Bank of England. I find his breezy Canadian charm intriguing.

Right: A Samurai warrior. Above right: The Lottery. Far right: The Black Mountains

your hackles rise... Loud voices in public, particularly from girls. They're not taught to cultivate the lower register as we were 50 years ago.

The film you can watch time and time again... The 1954 Japanese film Seven Samurai. It's a wonderful adventure story about a group of Samurai trying to defend a village from bandits.

The person who has influenced you most... My mother for her work ethic and strength.

> The figure from history for whom you'd most like to buy a pie and a pint... Sydney Smith, who was an English cleric and writer in the 18th century. He was one of the great wits of his time.

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

The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity...

The Samurai fascinate me I buy books to immerse myself in their fighting techniques, weaponry and rituals. They devoted their lives to an immense code I find them so exciting.

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

Louis XIV desk I bought in the early 60s for £700, which was a lot

of money then. I took nothing with me when I left Peter [ex-husband, actor Peter O'Toole] in 1976. After that, the desk just got lost in the mix.

The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it... I'd fix the Lottery, so I could help people I care about – and keep plenty for myself!

The unending quest that drives you **on...** To deliver a performance that turns out exactly as I meant it to.

The poem that touches your soul... The Prelude by Wordsworth. It's about

being alone in the countryside and I identified with it because I grew up as an only child in a remote part of Wales.

The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase... That I'm Sheila Hancock! I've known Sheila for 50 years and it's happened many times. We laugh about it.

The event that altered the course of your life and character... Getting into RADA in 1955 when I was 22. I'd always wanted to be an actress.

The song that means most to you...  ${f I}$ love old Welsh songs about homesickness. They're full of melancholy.

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

I'd wake up in Connemara in Ireland and have a full Irish breakfast - black pudding, fried eggs, soda bread - followed by tea. Then I'd go for a walk in the rain by the Fan Lakes in the Black Mountains in Wales. I'd join a friend of mine in Venice for lunch at Trattoria alla Madonna, where I'd have squid in black ink with polenta. I'd spend the afternoon in London and have the best seats at a matinee at the Royal Opera

House. After that I'd check into a quiet hotel I know on the East Side of Manhattan with my daughters Kate and Pat, and her daughter Jessica, who's 15. I'd take my granddaughter to a cabaret at The Carlyle Hotel. If I could go back in time, we'd watch the great English singer Mabel Mercer perform. She was a sensation in the 1930s. I'd end the day at home watching The Big Bang Theory.

'The Samurai fascinate me – I buy books to immerse myself in their fighting techniques, weaponry and rituals'

> The happiest moment you will cherish forever... Finding my cat Barnaby after he'd been missing for three weeks in the early 1980s.

The saddest time that shook your world... The death from cancer in 2005 of my friend, the writer William Corlett. He was a wonderful, talented man who was funny and loyal.

The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you... To get a degree in science – but it's quite unlikely now!

The philosophy that underpins your **life...** Choose happiness.

The order of service at your funeral...

I'd like a simple service at the Actors' Church St Paul's in Covent Garden, then to be buried alongside my mother and grandmother in South West Wales.

The way you want to be remembered...

I have no interest in being remembered. I want people to get on with living!

**The Plug...** Siân plays Fania Fénelon, the French musician who survived Auschwitz, in Arthur Miller's Playing For Time at Sheffield Theatres, 12 March-4 April. sheffieldtheatres.co.uk. ■

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Liam Neeson plays an ageing hitman in Run All Night, in cinemas Friday. John Ford's tragedy The Broken Heart is at Shakespeare's Globe theatre from Thursday. And Rebel Heart, the new album from Madonna, is out on Monday

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