



The DEFINITE ARTICLE

We ask a celebrity a set of devilishly probing questions – and only accept THE definitive answer. This week it's TV producer Nigel Lythgoe's turn

The piece of wisdom you would pass on to a child... Keep your common sense.

All too often people panic under pressure. Just stop, stay calm and think.

The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity... I'm absorbed with education, particularly in America. The arts are being cut out of teaching yet it's proven that children learn better when you involve passion and emotion. I've spoken to Congress about how you can teach through dance.

The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again... My youth!

Dance has been a huge part of my life and it would be nice to still be capable of the moves I made when I was younger. I fear they're lost forever.

The unending quest that drives you on... I'm driven by creating great TV shows and giving talent the opportunity to flourish. When you can't do it yourself any more, you get pleasure from making it happen for others.

The prized possession you value above all others... My life! I nearly lost it

twice in 2003. First I had a heart attack, then peritonitis [inflammation of the abdomen] after my appendix exploded. I was in hospital for three months and they removed 15ft of my intestine. I blame the heart attack on Simon Cowell. We were on holiday in Barbados and he made me drink and smoke too much. Then one night he got me dancing with some transvestites. Back in America a few days later I collapsed!

The unqualified regret you wish you could amend... The loss of my 34-year marriage. Bonnie and I drifted apart and she divorced me in 2009. I tried to woo her back but it didn't work. I have a huge sense of sadness about it ending.

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

I love yachting and playing golf but am too busy [Nigel produces American Idol and So You Think You Can Dance in the US]. So I'd get a yacht with my sons [Simon, 36, and Kris, 32] and my mate John and sail around the Florida coast playing the best courses. I'm a hopeless hacker, though, and play off 23, so the golf wouldn't be pretty.

The temptation you wish you could resist... A traditional British fry-up at the King's Head pub in Santa Monica.

The book that holds an everlasting resonance... The Hobbit by JRR Tolkien was the first book I enjoyed. I was 14 and when I finished I started it again.

The priority activity if you were the Invisible Man for a day... I'd simply have fun messing with people's things. I'm sure someone invisible does it to me because I'm always losing stuff!

The pet hate that makes your hackles rise... When people don't listen properly at work and then make mistakes.

The film you can watch time and time again... I saw The Godfather in London when it came out in 1972 and loved it. I've seen it probably 20 times – I always find something new.

The person who has influenced you most... Jon Scofield was an incredible director and producer at ATV. I met him when I was 30 and he made great things happen in my career. He's still alive, but we're no longer in touch.

The figure from history for whom you'd most like to buy a pie and a pint... Fred Astaire was a huge idol for me. He had such style and I'd love to hear all his stories about making it in showbiz.

From top: A Florida golf course, Nigel and ex-wife Bonnie, Marlon Brando in The Godfather, The Hobbit, You've Lost That Lovin' Feelin, Rudyard Kipling, Fred Astaire and the King's Head in Santa Monica

'I'm really not nasty! The Nasty Nigel persona stuck in the UK, but in America I'm Nurturing Nigel'

The poem that touches your soul...

Rudyard Kipling's If. As far as I'm concerned, it's about common sense.

The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase... That I'm nasty! That persona came out of Popstars and has stuck in the UK, although no one thinks of me like that in America. Here, I'm Nurturing Nigel.

The event that altered the course of your life and character... The success of American Idol. It took me to America in 2002 and made me wealthy.

The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it... I'd be an expert computer hacker and break into FBI files to find out who killed JFK.

The song that means most to you... You've Lost That Lovin' Feelin by The Righteous Brothers. When I was 15 in Liverpool I'd sit in a cafe with my mates playing it on the jukebox and we'd all try to hit that low note. Great times.

The happiest moment you will cherish forever... The birth of my son, Simon. He was yellow with a pointy head and the nurse said, 'He looks like his dad!'

The saddest time that shook your world... Receiving divorce papers in 2005 broke my heart. They arrived just before Christmas and I was distraught.

The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you... It doesn't haunt me, but I'd like to direct a feature film – a romantic comedy, a musical or a sci-fi.

The philosophy that underpins your life... Never be horrible to anyone – unless they're horrible to you.

The order of service at your funeral...

Having faced death before, it doesn't scare me. My only worry is how it'll affect my kids and the people who love me. I'd like my ashes scattered in the Pacific somewhere off the coast of LA.

The way you want to be remembered...

As someone who was always passionate in everything he did and said. He wasn't always right, but he tried.

The Plug... I set up the Dizzy Feet Foundation in 2009 to help young people become dancers. Visit www.dizzyfeetfoundation.org

As told to Rob McGibbon

PS...

Relive the magic of James Cameron's Titanic with Kate Winslet and Leo DiCaprio in 3D. It's in cinemas now. Penelope Keith stars in The Way Of The World at Chichester Festival Theatre. Or catch BGT 2009 winners Diversity, on tour until Wednesday



NEXT WEEK

- Emilia Fox reveals what really happens on the Silent Witness set
- Italian recipes from Antonio Carluccio and Gennaro Contaldo
- Jamie Oliver's cracking egg dishes
- PLUS Britain's best TV listings

PHOTOGRAPHS: ALL STAR; ALAMY; GETTY; GUARDIAN