



From top: The 1950 film *Cyrano De Bergerac*, street entertainers at Jamaa el Fna in Marrakech, *The Last Of The Just*, Edmund Kean, a margarita, Johnnie Ray, St Wulfran's in Ovingdean and an elephant

The prized possession you value above all others... A painting of Victorian actor Henry Irving – a giant of theatre who was the first actor to be knighted – by the portraitist Edwin Long.

The unqualified regret you wish you could amend... That I never played Othello. I'm 75 and probably too old now. The part has always fascinated me because it stretches you to your limits.

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

I'd have breakfast at Les Deux Magots brasserie in Paris, then do a tour of famous graves: Oscar Wilde's in the French capital, then Franz Kafka's in Prague and war poet Rupert Brooke's on the Greek island of Skyros. After lunch watching the street entertainment at Jamaa el Fna market in Marrakech, I'd pray at Jerusalem's Wailing Wall for reconciliation between Israel and Palestine, and finally return to my home in London's East End to be with my partner Clara Fischer and our beloved Bengal cat Apu (right). I'd mix margaritas while Clara prepared sushi for supper. We'd spend the evening reading and listening to music and I'd finish by typing up my journal, which I keep most days.

The temptation you wish you could resist... I love exotic jewellery, probably because such baubles were denied to me when I was a child because we were poor. But as Oscar Wilde said, 'The only way to get rid of a temptation is to yield to it.'

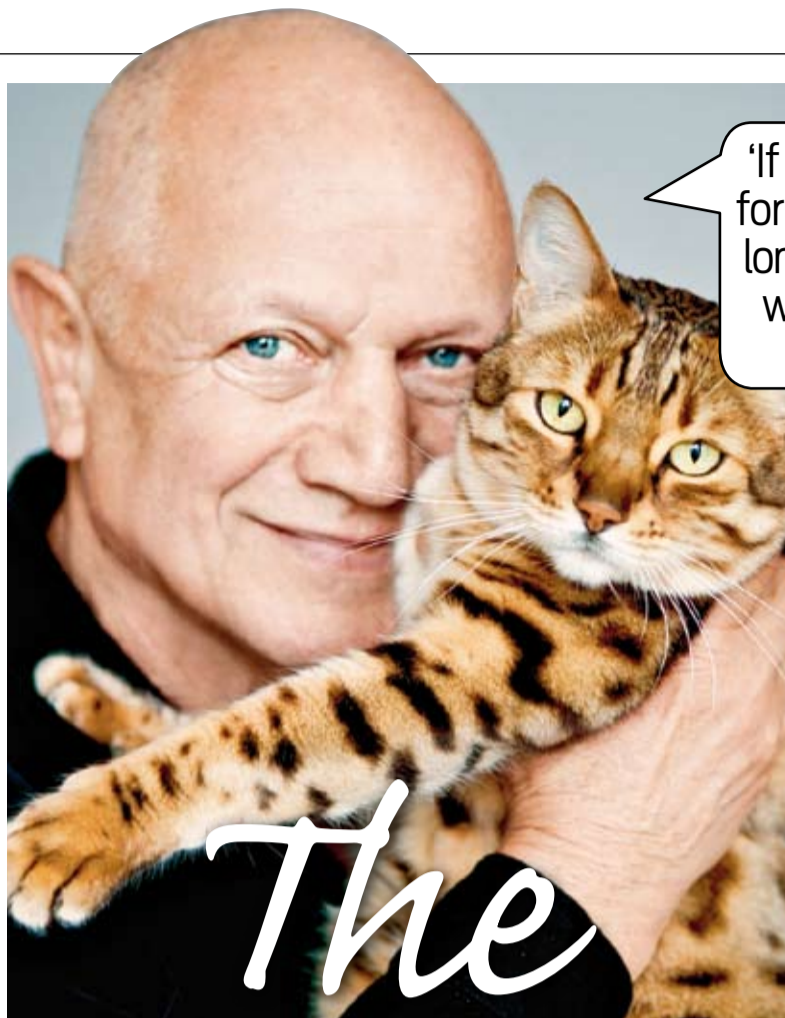
The book that holds an everlasting resonance... *The Last Of The Just* – a novel by French writer André Schwarz-Bart, about the journey of 36 men, from biblical times to Auschwitz, who suffer for the sins of the world. It presents the belief that God *is* there, even in the most horrific situations.

The priority activity if you were the Invisible Man for a day... I'd visit a woman called Shirley, my long-lost love from when I was ten. I've always wondered what became of her.

The pet hate that makes your hackles rise... The brutal murder of rhinos and elephants to make silly ivory things.

The film you can watch time and time again... *Cyrano De Bergerac* from 1950 starring José Ferrer – his acting technique is absolutely dazzling.

The person who has influenced you most... Franz Kafka. I read his novel *The Metamorphosis* – about a man who turns into a huge beetle – when I was 19 and it opened my imagination.



The DEFINITE ARTICLE

We ask a celebrity a set of devilishly probing questions – and only accept THE definitive answer. This week it's theatre legend Steven Berkoff

The figure from history for whom you'd most like to buy a pie and a pint... The great 19th-century Shakespearean actor Edmund Kean. He was only 5ft 5in, but he almost terrified audiences with his trailblazing style, which once apparently reduced Lord Byron to tears.

The piece of wisdom you would pass on to a child... Learn how to play a musical instrument – because then you'll have a language that the whole world can understand.

The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity... I adore over-elaborate track-suits pimped up with velvet. I have about ten from designer shops in Hollywood.

The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again... My love letters to Shirley. We kept in touch for three years. I'd love to read those letters now.

The unending quest that drives you on... To continue to challenge myself. I feel it's everyone's duty to fulfil the extraordinary potential God's given us.

The poem that touches your soul... Walt Whitman's *I Sing The Body Electric* is a deeply moving declaration of the efforts of the common working man.

The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase... That I'm a self-centred, egotistical maniac! I'm actually a thoughtful, caring soul.

The event that altered the course of your life and character... Putting on my first play that I'd adapted and directed, Kafka's *In The Penal Colony*, in 1968. From that moment I knew I was capable of creating my own work.

The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it... I'd round up a bunch of big-game hunters – and then hunt *them* with an AK-47.

The song that means most to you... *The Little White Cloud That Cried* by Johnnie Ray from 1951. It spoke to all heartbroken romantic teenage boys.

The happiest moment you will cherish forever... When my first book was published in 1977. It was a collection of short stories called *Gross Intrusion* and to hold that book was fantastic.

The saddest time that shook your world... My mother Polly's death in 1980 from stomach cancer. She was a typically over-caring, worrying Yiddish mama, but I always felt safe with her.

The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you... To own a theatre, so I'd never again have to go around with the begging bowl to put on a play.

The philosophy that underpins your life... Pay attention to *every* action, no matter how small, because it will always have a big effect on someone.

The order of service at your funeral... I'll leave the details to Clara, but I wouldn't mind being buried in the graveyard of St Wulfran's, the beautiful Norman church in Ovingdean, Sussex, but being Jewish I would have to be a 'special guest'!

The way you want to be remembered... As a man who swam against the tide.

The Plug... My new play, *An Actor's Lament*, is on at Edinburgh's Assembly Hall from 1-20 August. Tickets: www.assemblyfestival.com; 0131 623 3030. ■

As told to Rob McGibbon

PS...

*The first family blockbuster of the summer, **Despicable Me 2**, hits cinemas on Friday. Anna Chancellor and Toby Stephens star in **Private Lives** at London's Gielgud Theatre. And Brit winner Tom Odell's first album, **Long Way Down**, is out on Monday*



NEXT WEEK

- Holly Willoughby on the chance encounter that changed her life
- Behind the scenes on epic new drama *The White Queen*
- Jamie Oliver's American desserts for Independence Day
- PLUS Britain's best TV listings guide