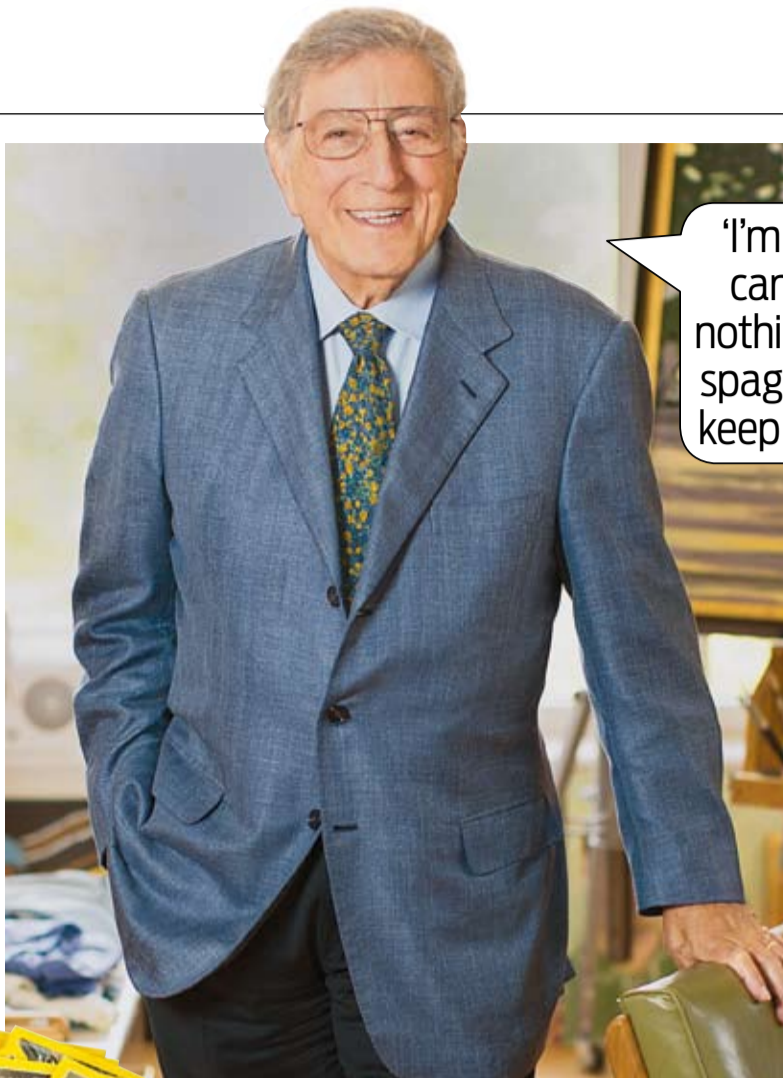


The DEFINITE ARTICLE

We ask a celebrity a set of devilishly probing questions – and only accept THE definitive answer. This week: singer – and artist – Tony Bennett



'I'm Italian-American and I can't resist pasta. There's nothing better than a plate of spaghetti al pomodoro, but I keep the portions small now'

The prized possession you value above all others... My sketchbook and pencil, which I keep on me always. One of my great passions in life is art and I draw and paint under my family name, Benedetto.

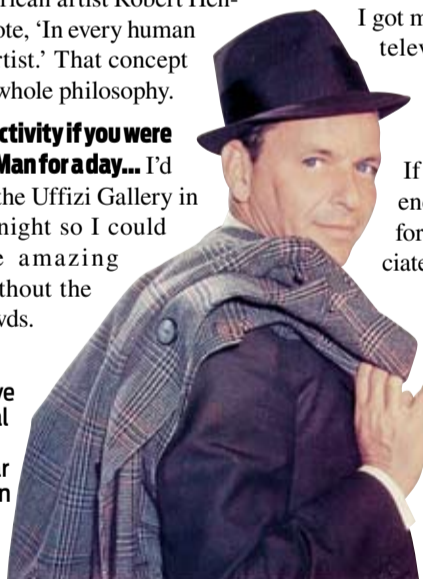
The biggest regret you wish you could amend... That I don't have another 25 years to live! When you get to my age – 89 – you know 25 more is pretty unlikely, but I'm gonna try because I love life.

The temptation you wish you could resist... Pasta. I'm Italian-American and there's nothing better than a plate of spaghetti al pomodoro, but I keep the portions small now.

The book that holds an everlasting resonance... The Art Spirit by the 19th-century American artist Robert Henri. In it he wrote, 'In every human there is an artist.' That concept inspired my whole philosophy.

The priority activity if you were the Invisible Man for a day... I'd be locked in the Uffizi Gallery in Florence at night so I could look at the amazing paintings without the hassle of crowds.

Right: Frank Sinatra. Above right: National Geographic magazine. Far right: a garden in Kyoto, Japan



The pet hate that makes your hackles rise... Racial prejudice. I've travelled the world and seen that people are the same, no matter where they're from.

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

The Best Years Of Our Lives from 1946, about World War II veterans coming back to smalltown America. It's very moving – I was drafted into the Army in 1944 and served in France and Germany, so I can relate to the sense of homecoming.

The person who has influenced you most... Frank Sinatra was a dear friend and an enormous influence. When I got my first shot at singing on television in the 50s I told Frank how nervous I was. He said, 'Don't be afraid of the butterflies. If you're nervous, the audience will sense it and root for you because they appreciate that you care so much.'

The poem that touches your soul... I'm not crazy for poetry but I love the Duke Ellington quote, 'There are two rules in life: number 1, never quit, and number 2, never forget rule number 1.'



The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity... Nature. I've been a huge fan of National Geographic magazine for 50 years – I know everyone's a photographer these

days, but the mastery of the images in that magazine is astounding.

The figure from history for whom you'd most like to buy a pie and a pint... Charlie Chaplin, my favourite movie star. For my birthday in August I invited family and friends to a screening of his film Modern Times from 1936, which made me laugh out loud as a kid.

The piece of wisdom you would pass on to a child... Try not to change, no matter what grown-ups tell you. Children have innate wisdom and are so positive about life, but then adults mess it up by telling them this and that.

The event that altered the course of your life and character... When Sinatra told Life magazine in 1965 that I was the best singer he'd heard. I'd been popular before, but that changed my life. My shows have sold out ever since.

The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again... The ability to fall in love every week! When I was younger, I was always falling in love.

The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase... That I was part of the Rat Pack in Las Vegas with Sinatra, Dean Martin and Sammy Davis Jr. I get asked about it all the time, but I was never part of that scene.

The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it... I'd steal all the weaponry in the world and melt it down. Anyone who thinks war is romantic clearly hasn't been through one.

The way you would spend your fantasy 24 hours, with no travel restrictions... The day would begin in Florence with my wife Susan. I'd spend several hours painting, then we would be joined by my four kids and six grandchildren for a big Italian lunch with plenty of pasta and wine. Later, Susan and I would walk our dog Happy through one of the many gardens in Kyoto, Japan – they're among the most magnificent places on earth. I love tennis, so I'd spend the rest of the afternoon

watching Roger Federer play the best tennis ever seen at Wimbledon. Then I'd go for dinner in my home city of New York. It's a fantastic place in the evening for the people watching alone!

The song that means most to you... I Left My Heart In San Francisco, released in 1962, is my signature song and very dear to my heart. It made me recognised the world over and I will never tire of singing it.

The happiest moment you will cherish forever... My wedding day in 2007. Susan is a wonderful woman who has helped me balance my life. We've known each other 30 years and I don't remember us ever falling out.

The saddest time that shook your world... The deaths of loved ones have always hit me bad. I've lost my mother, father, sister and brother, but I'm inspired by memories of the great moments we shared.

The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you... That I never got to sing with my friend Louis Armstrong. He taught us all how to sing.

The philosophy that underpins your life... Respect one another.

The order of service at your funeral... I'll leave it to my family, who'll make it a positive celebration of my life.

The way you want to be remembered... As a good person – it's all that matters.

The Plug... The Silver Lining: The Songs Of Jerome Kern by Tony Bennett and Bill Charlap is out on Sony Music. ■

As told to Rob McGibbon



PS...

Daniel Craig returns as James Bond in the eagerly awaited Spectre – in cinemas Monday. Dervla Kirwan stars in Mr Foote's Other Leg at the Theatre Royal Haymarket from Wednesday. And Rod Stewart's new album Another Country is released on Friday



NEXT WEEK

- Maureen Lipman on Bull, her new comedy with Robert Lindsay
- Tom Kerridge's Bonfire Night party food
- Monty Don on how to grow your own pumpkins
- PLUS Britain's best TV guide