



MY HAVEN – CLAIRE SWEENEY

The actress and singer, 42, recharges in the living room of her Central London home

1 DISCO QUEEN

I've lived in this Victorian house in Pimlico for eight years, and I spend so much time away touring that I love to come back here and just relax. I keep all my memorabilia in the living room, like this photo of my mum Kathy, who's on the left, and my Aunt Maureen at dance school, wearing costumes made by my grandma. It inspired me to start dancing, which got me into Liverpool's Elliott-Clarke Performing Arts School, where I even became the North-West disco dancing champion!

2 FUN AT 40

Most people hide when they hit 40, but I embraced it. My 40th birthday year, 2011, was the most amazing of my life in terms of my career – I did the one-woman show *Tell Me On A Sunday* and BBC comedy *Candy Cabs*. So this painting by Sherree Valentine Daines, commissioned by my best friend Julia Engleman to mark the milestone, is incredibly special – a reminder of how I looked at 40. Below it is a photo montage of my birthday celebrations. I had a party for each decade!

3 ALL BAR ONE

I was at London's Abbey Road studios recording my album *Claire* in 2002 when Michael Aspel ambushed me with the big red *This Is Your Life* book. I was shocked as I had no idea, and it was so emotional as it featured people I'd known from singing on cruise ships to starring as Lindsey Corkhill in *Brookside* to all the friends I've made in the West End. The only person missing was my school music teacher Elsie Kelly, who was the first person to tell me I could sing – they couldn't track her down.

4 WHAT A GUY!

These beautiful period shoes were made for me when I played Miss Adelaide in the West End musical *Guys And Dolls* in 2006. I didn't get the part at first, but I was overjoyed when I was offered it six months later as it meant I got to work with the late Patrick Swayze, the *Dirty Dancing* star. Patrick signed a first night ticket for me with, 'Good luck! Let's have a great time!' And we did. He was gorgeous, fantastic to work with and a lovely man. I was devastated when he died.

5 STORY OF MY LIFE

This sheet music for *Tell Me On A Sunday* was an opening night gift from Don Black, who wrote the lyrics to Andrew Lloyd Webber's score. I'd been offered the lead ten years earlier but I couldn't take it due to TV commitments. So I was thrilled when I was offered it again because by then it told the story of my own life – an ordinary English girl who looks for love in all the wrong places – until I met my fiancé Daniel Riley, who works in digital marketing, 18 months ago.

6 MY HEROINE

Ava Gardner has been my absolute heroine ever since I read her life story – I'm obsessed with her – and this print of a photograph taken by the legendary Terry O'Neill was given to me by a friend. I met the actor Richard Harris, who used to go out with Ava, before he died and he told me the most amazing stories about her. I love her fiery, feisty personality and wicked sense of humour. The playwright Roy Smiles has written a show about Ava's life which I hope to star in one day.

As told to Lisa Sowards. Claire is starring in John Godber's play *September In The Rain* until 30 November. For details contact janice.taylor@thebookingoffice.com, or call 020 8549 8555.