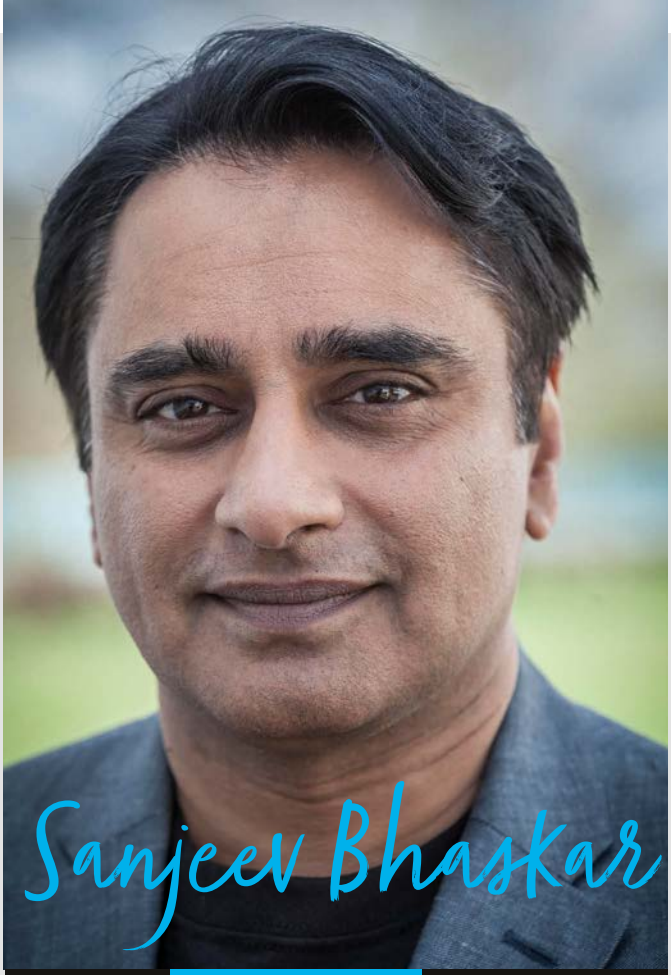

Sanjeev Bhaskar

MY POP LIFE

THE *UNFORGOTTEN* AND *GOODNESS GRACIOUS ME* STAR REVEALS HIS MUSIC OBSESSIONS

STEVE O'BRIEN

Tell us how you first got into music...
I was steeped in Elvis and The Beatles from as early an age as I can remember. There's a photograph of me that my mum has, and I'm maybe two-and-a-half, three years old and someone obviously had a guitar but it was too big for me, so I'm holding it like a double bass. She said I was singing *She Loves You* by that point.

What's your all-time favourite album?
Well, I once got the opportunity to listen to *Sgt Pepper* and *Abbey Road* in Dolby Atmos at a playback, and that was a religious experience – I've been a Beatles fan for as long as I can remember. With *Abbey Road*, it was only a few of us – myself, Richard Curtis, Danny Boyle and Himesh Patel, because we'd done the *Yesterday* film.

What's your favourite 80s album?
Graceland by Paul Simon. I'd always admired Simon & Garfunkel and associated them with slightly folksy, acoustic and gently reassuring pop. So I didn't expect Paul Simon's *Graceland* album to be any different. But it *so* was. Aside from the Elvis reference that probably drew me in, I found what felt like a mystical world of fusion music the likes of which I hadn't encountered before. American country and pop styles with South African rhythms and orchestration. It felt immediately timeless yet contemporary. And in the 80s, the optimistic suggestion that there was a musical world beyond apartheid.

And what's your favourite 80s single?
Ashes To Ashes. I bought Bowie's *Scary Monsters* album on cassette and played it on a loop when I went to university. When I first got there I was homeless for a couple of months, sleeping on people's floors and even in a car for a few days. This album was my constant companion and *Ashes To Ashes* was the song that seemed a bespoke fit to my mood. The storytelling, the callback to Major Tom and the lonely melancholy all acted like a counterintuitive balm. "Ah," I thought, "David understands" and suddenly I felt a little less alone.

What's your go-to David Bowie era?
My Bowie era's really the 80s, so it was the *Let's Dance* album and Serious Moonlight and Glass Spider tours. I went to both of those. But as I got more immersed in Bowie, then I was attracted to that slightly earlier period of *Hunky Dory. Life On Mars?* is one of my favourite songs. I chose it when I was on *Desert Island Discs* as I could only pick one Bowie track and it's one that I get more out of every time I listen to it. There's something incredibly vulnerable and gentle about it. There's a yearning in it, and there's hope as well. Bowie was such a complete artist. It wasn't just the songs, it was the look, the attitude. Everything that went into creating those songs had an artistic element.

Have you ever met any of your musical heroes?
I never met Bowie, but I have met three of The Beatles.

Three? Tell us more...
Before I started acting I was working for a touring company and they were touring artists from South Asia. One of the gigs was at the Royal Festival Hall and George Harrison came to it. He was walking towards me and I was thinking. "Do I call him George? Do I call him Mr Harrison? He's a Beatle!" And so I was thinking, "Harrison, George, Beatle, Beatle, George, Beatle" and as he approached I said, "Hello, Borge!" He just laughed and said hello and walked off. I thought, oh gosh, that's a moment gone. I've met Paul a few times and Ringo I met at someone's party once. My son was very small then, so I went up to Ringo and told him my kid was obsessed with *Thomas The Tank Engine*. I just wanted to say thanks for that… and the other stuff. And he just said, "Tell him I've moved on to a new station." "Yeah, I'll pass it on."

What's your favourite gig?
One was Paul McCartney, because nobody has a back catalogue like him. I saw him at the O2 and Ringo came up and played. And I thought, 'Well that's as close as I'm going to get to seeing The Beatles'. Another is someone I wasn't necessarily a big fan of beforehand… but Bruce Springsteen. As a live gig, it was amazing. I remember thinking, gosh, that's what it looks like to have a guy on stage, just singing the songs like he means them. He was extraordinary.

© Getty