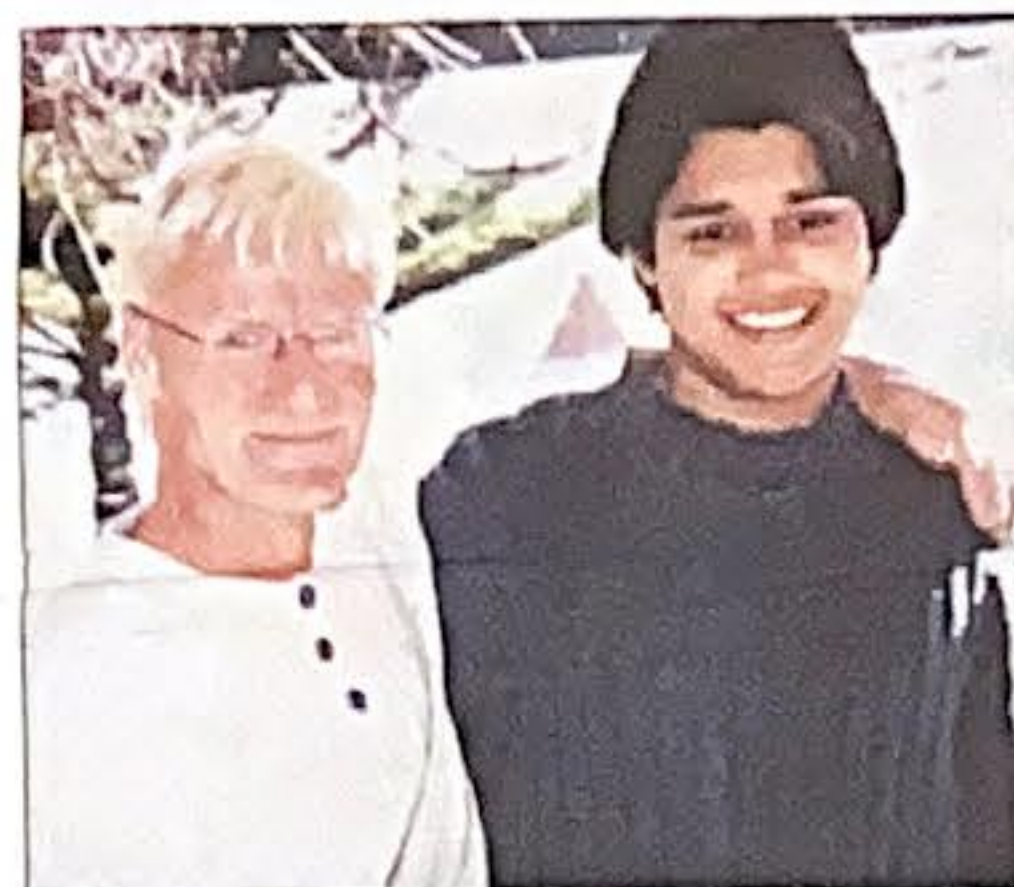


The boy who beguiled



He was a British diplomat's lover who tired of being an ambassadorial consort. What formidable networker Pablo Ganguli did next is almost stranger than fiction

Long-distance love: Ganguli joined Simon Scaddan in Papua New Guinea

WHICHEVER way you look at him, Pablo Ganguli is an exotic figure. His age is put at anything between 22 and 29. He looks and dresses more like a woman than a man. And he has made the remarkable journey from student studying French in Calcutta to, seemingly, one of the world's leading literary salonists in just three years.

CAROLINE PHILLIPS

Some of the biggest names in the arts world say they believe in him. He has attracted Vikram Seth, Hanif Kureishi, Martin Amis, Annie Lennox, Germaine Greer, Benjamin Zephaniah, Sir V S Naipaul and Esther Freud to his festivals in India and Morocco and his forthcoming one in Petra, Jordan. This week he is pressing the literary flesh at the Edinburgh Book Festival, and it appears to be working.

Peter Florence, director of the Hay Literary Festival, says: "Pablo is inspirational. He's screamingly bonkers and outrageous fun." Alexandra Pringle, editor-in-chief of publisher Bloomsbury, says: "I'd always go to one of Pablo's events." Condé Nast boss Nicholas Coleridge describes him as "a fearsome networker".

But, behind the self-generated hype, is Ganguli really all that he appears? On the telephone he sounds like a 60-year-old executive. Yet in person he looks like Keira Knightley sashays like a belly dancer and is more likely to wear a sequinned gown or silk tunic, violet lenses, bennet hair, foundation and mascara than a suit.

The extraordinary figure that greets me looks vaguely familiar — because he is. He achieved notoriety three years ago by becoming Britain's first gay ambassadorial consort.

His face appeared in a Sunday newspaper when it was revealed that he had become the public partner of Simon Scaddan, who was deputy high commissioner to East India before becoming Her Majesty's representative in Papua New Guinea.

At the time Pablo was dismissed as a "pretty boy". Scaddan was 54 when they met and Ganguli was 17. But since his dramatic "outing" he has split with Scaddan and gone on to create an international literary empire. They remain friends and he is currently living in Scaddan's Edinburgh apartment.

He has hosted literary and arts festivals in Delhi and Morocco and has helped to set up Kssour Agafay Marrakech's answer to the Groucho Club. He promises that his Petra festival will feature Arab-British discussions, opera and Bedouin musical evenings. Greer, Naipaul, Amis, Seth as well as Michael Portillo have all agreed to attend. "At a forlorn moment in Middle East politics, it'll be particularly welcome," says Portillo.

After the glad handing has stopped, what some in Edinburgh are wondering is how, in just a few years, an unknown teenager from Calcutta has become the man who has charmed some of the world's A-list writers. And how has he done it all on a shoestring? Ganguli sits in a red leather chair surrounded by books, abstract paintings and mounds of paper.

"There's no trick, no smoke and mirrors," he insists. "It's just hard work. I'm always madly busy with work. Sometimes I work

from 7am to 2am. I convince people with my passion and energy." Hideous Kinky author Esther Freud agrees: "When he has an idea — usually big — he doesn't rest until he's made it happen."

Ganguli first came to public notoriety after he met Scaddan at a musical soiree in the French Consulate in Calcutta. The teenager was learning French and, thanks to his family connections in Indian society, socialising in cultural and diplomatic circles. "I saw this smart, striking man," says Ganguli, who knew himself to be gay. "He was debonaire, had verve and wore a beautiful silver necklace."

Scaddan was deputy high commissioner to East India and had been with the Foreign Office for 40 years. He was by then separated from Frances, his wife of 32 years. The attraction was one-sided to start with, admits Ganguli. "He didn't even give me his number. But I got it and kept calling him. 'Hello, Mr Scaddan, I'm Pablo Ganguli, the student who sat next to you. Do you remember me?'" They met regularly over a year and fell in love. Ganguli joined Scaddan in his new ambassadorial post in the grand diplomatic residence in Papua New Guinea.

'Maybe because I wasn't a Caucasian wife wearing pearls, I wasn't taken seriously. So I began creating my own empire'

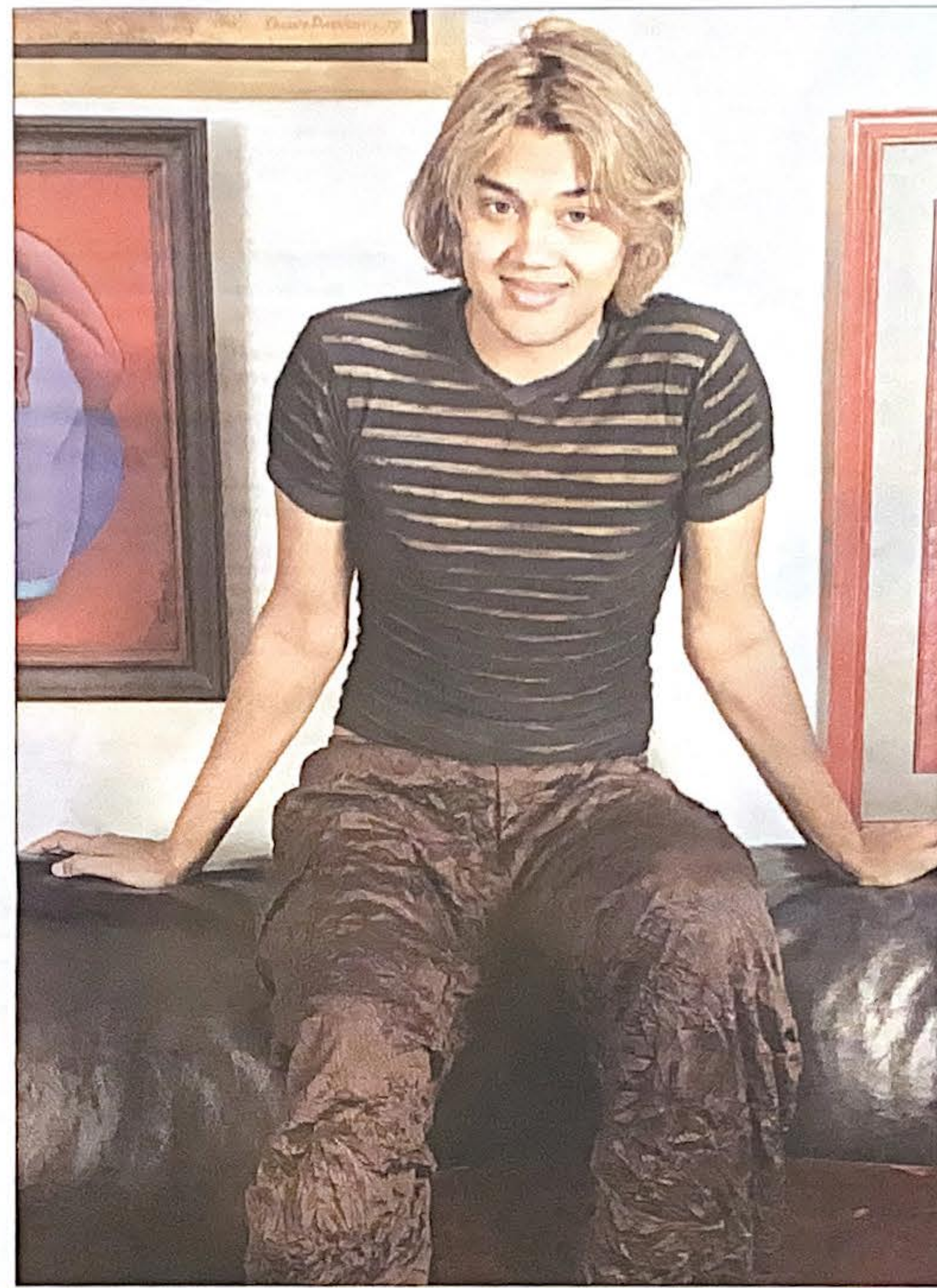
Ganguli met foreign ministers and prime ministers during his three years with Scaddan but he claims that he found his new life "tedious. I was not impressed by anyone. Maybe because I wasn't a Caucasian wife wearing pearls, I wasn't taken seriously. I felt second best to His Excellency. So I began creating my own empire."

He did not waste time. Friends confirm that while he may have claimed not to enjoy the diplomatic circuit, he exploited his connection to the ambassador to build up a network of contacts. "He was ruthless," says one associate. "He used to introduce himself as the ambassadorial consort and managed to get favours from all sorts of people who would not normally have taken his calls."

At 18, one year after meeting Scaddan, he started Connect UK, a Papua New Guinea-based group, to forge cultural ties between the South Pacific and Britain. He claims he got sponsorship from companies such as Texaco and BP.

But why did the world's biggest multinationals listen to one so young? "Age is irrelevant. Ability is what matters. I created

London's literary luvvies



This charming man: Ganguli leads a literary gathering in Marrakech



events that had never been done before — the first women's rights conference, the first film festival in the South Pacific region. I just phoned my contacts and then badgered the British Council for sponsorship. When Bill Deedes couldn't come, I got Janet Street-Porter out to Papua New Guinea."

Perhaps. But it is hard to believe that his ambassadorial contacts counted for nothing. He achieved a PR coup when he persuaded Goldie Hawn to his Delhi festival last year. "It was a perfect, surreal gathering in my special world. Informal celebrations bringing together different cultures in dialogue and promoting the best of Britain."

ATROUBLED childhood led to him seeking solace in work and creating "my own surreal, artistic world". The arranged marriage of his father — an art historian who lived in a 12 bedroom house in Calcutta — and his mother broke up after a year. "I've never seen my mother," he says. "I don't think she wanted to know me. So I've never bothered to find her."

What effect did that have on him? "I'm always looking for love in the wrong places, through my work and what I create."

His father did not want to raise his son and gave nine-month-old Ganguli to his 57-year-old grandmother — whose husband, a high court lawyer and politician, soon died. Ganguli had no siblings, just an 18-year-old aunt who lived with them. Eight years later, his father decided he wanted him back again. "It's not natural for a father to leave a son. I'd never do that," says Ganguli. "I saw my father once a month until I was nine."

He found his schooling at a Christian, English-speaking secondary in Calcutta difficult. "I hated it. I always knew I was different and prettier."

But how does he finance his global habit? The events are mostly free, he claims. His participants — bar Goldie Hawn, who charged \$40,000 expenses to go to Delhi last

year — attend in exchange for a bed, albeit a swish suite in a five-star hotel, and a plane seat, usually a reclining, massaging one on Abu Dhabi national carrier, Etihad.

Ganguli insists he persuades everyone to donate their time and services for free. Five months before his Delhi festival, five people helped him in the UK and three in India — with £10,000 covering their salaries and which was only paid after he got sponsorship.

"They're not doing it for the money," says Ganguli, who funds himself with Moroccan public relations projects. He is the representative in Morocco for upmarket London concierge group, Quintessentially.

Just a month before his Delhi festival, with 22 publishers, journalists, editors and authors flying out from the UK, he had raised the £80,000 sponsorship necessary to cover other festival outgoings, from ground transport to paying for the venue, but could not pay Hawn's expenses. But then he persuaded Airtel Telecoms millionaire Sunnil Mittal to write a fat cheque.

Is Ganguli for real? Or just brilliant at spin? One woman who attended his Delhi festival says he is both. "He is very good at putting things together and badgering people to donate stuff but he's not the poor boy made good that he likes to portray."

"When we were in India there was a problem with finding funds to pay for the hotel rooms and I personally saw his aunt reach into her purse to pay the bills. There's more family money behind him than he likes to let on," Ganguli denies the story. "My aunt cannot afford to pay for rooms and all the rooms were sponsored anyway."

He admits that his life might seem odd. "But that's the way I like it. It's about getting the job done. I'm great at doing events that no one else does." As I get up to leave, he implores: "You will come to Petra, won't you? I've got two royals wanting to come."

● **Britain Meets the Middle East:** The Majestic Petra Festival, 1-3 December 2006. www.majesticpetra.com.

richersounds

THE UK'S HI-FI, HOME CINEMA & FLAT PANEL TV SPECIALISTS!

Open Bank Holiday Monday 28th August 12-4pm

CAMBRIDGE AUDIO & MORDAUNT-SHORT SYSTEM MEGA-DEAL



CD PLAYER
Cambridge Audio Azur 640c V2
"Detail levels are exceptional for the money."
- WHF? S&V Magazine
Available in silver & black
Usual Price £249.95

AMPLIFIER
Cambridge Audio Azur 640a
"Offering finesse and clout in equal measure."
- WHF? S&V Magazine
Available in silver & black
Usual Price £249.95

SYSTEM USUALLY £649.85

BUY THIS CD & AMP TOGETHER AND GET THESE MORDAUNT-SHORT 902i SPEAKERS WORTH £150 FREE

SAVE £150
£499.95

SONY AV SEPARATES



MULTI-REGION DVD PLAYER
Sony DVPNS29
TSP £69.95

AV RECEIVER
Sony STRDE400
TSP £169.95

SAVE £40
£29.95

SAVE £30
£139.95

HITACHI 42" PLASMA TV



Factor in Richer Sounds' unbeatable price, and this is one HD ready plasma deal that's too good to miss.
TSP £1499.95

SAVE £500
£999.95

WE'LL BEAT ANY PRICE 'TIL IT HURTS... & GIVE YOU UP TO £100

SEE INSTORE FOR DETAILS

LONDON	020 8486 6565	SWISS COTTAGE	020 7722 3359	NORWICH	01603 620 860
BROMLEY	020 7352 8496	WEST END	020 7831 2888	OXFORD	01865 243 444
CHELSEA	020 7626 8006	THE SOUTH EAST		READING	0118 959 1111
CITY	020 8667 1100	BRIGHTON	01273 673 333	ROMFORD	01708 747 727
CROYDON	020 8566 4422	CAMBRIDGE	01223 304 848	WATFORD	01923 218 888
EALING	020 8549 9999	GUILDFORD	01483 449 222		
KINGSTON	020 7403 1201	MAIDSTONE	01622 677 067	FOR MORE STORE INFO	
LONDON BRIDGE		MILTON KEYNES	01908 608 908	CALL 0845 900 1230	

BECOME A MEMBER OF OUR VIP CLUB FOR FREE & TAKE ADVANTAGE OF A SELECTION OF EXCLUSIVE WEEKLY BARGAINS

www.richersounds.com

TSP = TYPICAL SELLING PRICE (TSP) ARE BASED ON INFORMATION SUPPLIED BY WHF? S&V MAGAZINE. MANUFACTURERS' HI-FI CHOICE. HOME CINEMA CHOICE, TV, WHAT VIDEO, WHAT DVD, DIGITAL HOME. TOTAL DVD AND DVD BUYER. FURTHER INFORMATION AVAILABLE, ON REQUEST.



The new literati: Ganguli's festivals attract the likes of Goldie Hawn, Annie Lennox, Mariella Frostrup and Michael Portillo

£0 DEPOSIT £0 INSURANCE £0 INTEREST



- CORSA SXi+ with
- Free fully comp. insurance 19+
 - Sports front seats
 - Alloys
 - CD player
 - Rear spoiler
 - White sports instruments
 - Sports suspension
 - Tinted windows

0% APR TYPICAL

VAUXHALL

For a brochure text 'offers' to 82882, visit your local retailer, call 0845 11 11 122 or visit www.offers.vauxhall.co.uk

Official Government Fuel Consumption Figures mpg (litres/100km) and CO₂ Emissions (g/km): Corsa SXi+ 1.2i 16v 3dr: urban 36.2 (7.8), extra-urban 61.4 (4.6), combined 48.7 (5.8), CO₂ 139. £0 deposit offer is only available with the Vauxhall Choices credit finance scheme. Final payment required. Please contact your local Vauxhall retailer for more details. Finance applicants must be 18 or over. Finance applicants must be 19 or over. Finance applicants must be 19-80 (19-20 when purchased on Vauxhall Choices credit finance, 3-door model only and excludes N.Ireland). Excess applies of between £250 and £500 dependent of age and residence. Insurance subject to eligibility, status, terms and conditions. Offers are available for orders placed between 05.07.06 and 03.10.06, subject to availability, and are available to private individuals and small businesses 1-24 (purchase only) except free insurance which applies to private individuals only. All other sales categories are excluded. Participating retailers only. UK-supplied vehicles only.