

## Computers and Puccini: why not?

**Richard Tannenbaum**

Richard Tannenbaum had a good job in Paris. He programmed computers for American embassies and consulates in Europe and Africa. But seven years ago, when a German colleague in Paris suggested starting a Computer business together in Germany, Richard's answer was, why not? 'My philosophy of life has always been *Why not?*' he says.

Richard and his partner now have a business where they sell a Computer program that can make other programs. 'When you buy our product, you can fulfill most of your computer wishes at the same time,' he tells his customers. He makes special

programs for what the product cannot do.

'I spend far too much time programming Computers,' says Richard. He usually works from about eight in the morning until eight in the evening and often on Saturdays. But he also finds time for his family and his hobbies. Richard is married to Kate Waring, an American composer and music teacher from Louisiana. They have two children, Laura four and a half and Samuel four months. (Richard's wife said they had thought about naming their children Olivia and Oliver so that they could sign their names "O. Tannenbaum".)

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**embassy** Botschaft – **fulfill** erfüllen - **composer** Komponist - **sign** unterschreiben

### **Opera houses and synagogues**

One of Richard's hobbies is singing. He's in an "extra choir" that sings for large opera productions. 'It makes a wonderful change from sitting in front of a Computer all day. Going onto the stage with a costume and make-up and singing Puccini is the best holiday you could think of. You can't think about Computers then.'

Singing has always been a part of Richard's life. 'I've always been in a choir - in England, in France and in Germany,' he says. I've found this the best method of integrating into a new environment.'

When he was a student, he earned money by

singing in a synagogue choir. 'Singing in the synagogue for two hours on Saturday was much better than working in a shoe shop all day,' he says. And he was paid more, too.

There are 250,000 Jews in London. Richard was one of them. His family came to England from Russia about a hundred years ago during the time of the pogroms. 'I did my thing - I did **my bar mitzvah** and learned enough I lebrew to satisfy my grandfather.' But Richard says he doesn't feel very Jewish. He's .in exception in his family because he didn't marry a Jewish girl.

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**Opera production** Opernaufführung – **onto** auf – **stage** Bühne – **environmental** Umgebung – **synagogue** Synagoge – **Jew** Jude

### **What does that mean?**

*Pogrom* (Russian "devastation") - a sudden attack on a minority group with killings, destruction of houses and shops. and looting. The word usually refers to the acts of terror against Jews in Russia and Eastern Europe from 1881-1914. Over a million of these Yiddish-speaking Jews left their homes at that time. Most of them went to America, but some also went to Australia, New Zealand,

South Africa, South America and to Western European cities. The largest group in Europe was in Britain where thousands worked in the clothing industry in London, Manchester and Leeds. Today Britain has about 450.000 Jews, the largest number in Europe. (There are over seven million in North America.)

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**devastation** Verwüstung – **sudden** plötzlich – **attack** Angriff – **minority** Minderheit – **destruction** Zerstörung – **looting** plündern – **refer to** beziehen auf – **act** Tat – **Yiddish** Jiddisch (altdeutsche Sprache mit hebräischen und slawischen Elementen) – **clothing** Bekleidung

*Synagogue* (Greek "meeting") - Jewish place of worship and learning. The most important thing in the synagogue is the Torah (Hebrew "Law"). It is a richly decorated parchment scroll on which the first five books of the Bible, the Books of Moses, have been hand-written in Hebrew. The Torah scrolls are

always on the east side of the synagogue, so that the people look toward the east. toward Jerusalem, when they look at the Torah and when they pray. Reading the weekly portion of the Torah is the central part of the worship service.

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**worship** Anbetung, Gottesdienst – **parchment** Pergament – **scroll** Schriftrolle – **pray** beten

*Bar Mitzvah* (Hebrew "son of the commandment") - When a boy is thirteen years old, he becomes a full member of the Jewish community. He is called to the Torah and reads in Hebrew a part of the weekly Torah reading. The rabbi tells the boy of his duties as a Jewish man and the boy usually gives a speech.

After the service there is a big celebration and the boy receives many presents. In many communities there is a similar celebration for twelve-year-old girls, *bat mitzvah* ("daughter of the commandment").

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**commandment** Gebot – **member** Mitglied – **community** Gemeinde – **rabbi** Rabbiner (jüd. Geistlicher) – **duty** Pflicht – **speech** Rede – **celebration** Feier

Many of his more distant relatives also think he's a sort of black sheep because he lives in Germany. 'When I'm at a wedding in London and talk to distant relatives, we can have a good conversation together and everything is fine until they ask me where I'm living. When I say *Germany*, the conversation stops.'

Richard never tried to analyse why he shouldn't come to Germany. 'Why not?' is his answer. 'There's a very, very dark side in the history of Germany, but I can't blame all the German people now for it. The country was in a very difficult

situation and the people were the victims of a strong leader.'

People in France and England had told him that he wouldn't like it in Germany. That the people were terrible. 'But on the contrary, I've found the people fantastically friendly. I haven't felt any anti-Semitism at all. People have welcomed me here. They've been patient and generous and very nice. In Paris when you ask the directions to places, you'll get a very short answer. Here we've asked the way to places in bad German and people have said, "Oh, I'll take you there!"

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**distant** entfernen – **relative** Verwandte – **sheep** Schaf – **wedding** Hochzeit – **history** Geschichte – **blame** beschuldigen – **victim** Opfer – **on the contrary** – im Gegenteil – **patient** geduldig – **generous** großzügig – **direction** Weg, Richtung

### **Herr Doktor**

Richard has a doctorate in physics from Cambridge University. 'But I really don't enjoy it when people here call me *Herr Doktor*,' he says. In England everyone calls him only Richard.

'Germans have so much respect for titles and institutions and rules.' His German neighbours don't like the Greens because they don't wear suits and ties to Parliament. People do what they're told to do. When the programme says not to clap at the end of a Mozart Requiem, nobody does.

Germans like to be organized, but Richard thinks that German efficiency is a "myth". I'm rather shocked that when workers come to your house, it's as bad as England. They do bad jobs. They are not efficient. I thought I was going to find the efficiency that you can find in German machines. That balloon has been burst.'

He was also surprised about the lack of job mobility

in Germany. People are quite happy to stay in one job all their lives. In England and in America, people try to move up by going from job to job and getting different work experience.' Richard has worked and lived outside of England for sixteen years. Sometimes he thinks he has lost his English identity. 'But I go wild when I meet people with an English background. I realize how much I do miss my roots.'

And when he sees English TV, he realizes how much he misses English humour and culture. He gave his mother and sister video-recorders so they could send him some English TV culture. Sports and comedy are his favourites. I wish there were more Sports programmes on in Germany, but then I would waste far too much time watching them.'

Richard likes to go home to London quite often. 'Even just a week or two recharges my batteries.'

For now, he is quite satisfied with life in Germany. Perhaps someday he'll move back to England or go to America where his wife could teach music at a university. I still would like to do different things

with my life. I am now forty-four, going on forty-five. There's still some room for doing some nice new adventurous things.' Why not?

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**doctorate** Dokortitel – **physics** Physik – **rule** Regel – **tie** Krawatte – **clap** klatschen – **efficiency** Tüchtigkeit – **myth** Mythos - **efficient** tüchtig – **burst** geplatzt – **surprise** überraschen – **lack** Mangel – **mobility** Mobilität, Bewegung – **experience** Erfahrung – **identity** Identität – **go wild** „verrückt“ werden – **background** Hintergrund – **realize** merken – **root** Wurzel – **comedy** Unterhaltungssendung – **waste** verschwenden – **recharge** wiederaufladen – **adventurous** abenteuerlich