

Hi everyone,

In one of the more quiet evenings that I had here, the phone rang. The woman on the other side identified herself as a representative of the LA-Philharmonic Orchestra (LAPO) and wanted to ask me some questions about my opinion of them. They had my number since once, last year, I purchased tickets through the phone with my MasterCard. Once you have used your credit card, half the world knows you and what is the color of your favorite underwear. Anyway, polite as always, I answered all of her questions. The next evening, the woman called again. During "The Simpsons"!!! You can imagine that I wasn't as welcoming and nice as I was the day before. She asked me whether I would like to come the next evening to a LAPO-consumer meeting in Beverly Hills and express my deep thoughts on the orchestra. Since this wasn't exactly my idea of how to spend an evening, I just said "I don't know whether my ideas are so important". "On the contrary", she said, "we want to hear our AVERAGE consumer". Here I really lost it: she calls me "AVERAGE" and still expects me to come?! Before I had the chance to respond, she added quickly that "we will of-course pay you \$75 cash as our way of saying 'Thank you'". Since I could never refuse to a lovely person who says 'Thank you' in such a charming way, I promised to come. Besides - at this point she found out that I'm from Israel ("I detect a hint of a foreign accent; are you French? ") and the next 20 minutes were dedicated, in Hebrew and English, to a search for common friends.

The evening of average consumers was fantastic. We were treated like kings and had a chance to say whatever we want for more than an hour. Three of us were the main speakers: two LAPO-subscribers in the last 20 years and myself. There were other two active speakers (one of them an ex-student of mine, the other ex-Israeli) but as for the rest - they just seemed to be waiting for the cash envelopes. I came prepared with this year's programs of both the LAPO and the Israel PO and shocked the others: The list of guest performers and conductors in LA looked so very poor and pale with comparison to the impressive list of this year's guests in Israel. We spent our time discussing all possible aspects of the LAPO and exchanging precious tips regarding free parking and good hang-out places near the concert hall (there are very few). And criticizing Zubin Mehta, the previous musical director of the LAPO and the eternal one of the Israel PO.

In another quiet evening I went to have pizza and see the new Woody Allan movie. To my astonishment, my beloved neighborhood looked as though aliens from outer space have just landed. Hundreds of cops (in cars, on motorbikes or horses) were trying to control hundreds of people, numerous huge projectors sent powerful light beams into the sky, red carpets covered the streets and a sense of divine presence filled the air. I asked a young girl, who was obviously in great anticipation for something, what's going on. She gave me the look of "welcome to planet earth" and explained, with great patience, that as we speak, the honorable Tom Cruise, Brad Pitt, Nicol Kidman and many other superior beings are watching the world premier of the movie "Interview with a Vampire"! It's amazing to see how Hollywood, which has definitely sunk down in the last years, still has that magical power. When I went on to the pizza place, I have noticed that an entire parking lot was transformed into a huge 18th-century-style palace in order to host the after-movie party. The next morning TV news had reports on that event that was described as the biggest premier in years. Somehow, I don't recall hearing the word "pathetic" in those reports.

Woody Allan's movie is, as always, recommended. So is the new play written by Steve Martin, called "Picasso at the Lapin Agile". This most clever, funny, witty and fascinating play describes an imaginary encounter between Picasso, the abstract artist, and Einstein, the abstract scientist, in Paris in 1903, just before their breakthroughs in art and science. Later on, Elvis Presley joins the party as well. This play, that was a great hit in Broadway and earned the highest acclaims, will be probably shown also in Israel, so don't miss.

It would be interesting to share with you some other aspects of life in this country. For instance - the exposure to the brutal marketing policies of companies here. I could give you more than a dozen examples from the last months but the following one is sufficient in order to convey the idea: one evening I found on my machine a message in a very solemn voice that said "Mr. Tamir Tassa, you have just won the 16 million dollar prize in the California state lottery. In order to claim this prize, please call ...". Since I never purchased any lottery ticket, I didn't faint. It was just a cheap trick to make me call that number (and I did, of-course). I heard from others here similar stories. Those damn companies took over our mail and phone. I wonder if the email is next (the number of email users increases exponentially here and it is no longer confined to universities or other large institutes).

I hear horrible stories on the weather in Israel. Southern-California is, most of the time, sunny and nice, although the last two days were overcast. Just to be on the safe side, I'm leaving next Thursday to Mexico for a three week trip and won't be back until January the 7th. Hope to return safe for some stories with Latin scents. Until then,

Bye,
Tamir