



The prized possession you value above all others... My Yamaha grand piano. I bought it in 1980 for £6,000, a fortune then. I started playing when I was four and play, badly, whenever I can.

The unqualified regret you wish you could amend... That I didn't become an orchestra conductor. Music was my first love, but then I joined drama school.

The way you would spend your fantasy 24 hours, with no travel restrictions...

I'd begin with a full monty breakfast in our garden in Hampstead, then I'd captain a 737 jet in the latest hi-tech flight simulator at Heathrow Airport – I dreamt of being a pilot when I was a boy. I'd have lunch at the Bauer hotel in Venice with my wife Kara and our daughter Nina [the ventriloquist] and her sons – Arthur, nine, and Drummond, two. After lunch, I'd listen to a rehearsal of Beethoven's 9th Symphony by the Berlin Philharmonic in Berlin, then head to Paris for a concert at Salle Pleyel. Kara and I would have dinner at La Coupole, then check in to the best room at Hotel de Crillon. I'd end the day on the terrace overlooking Paris with an espresso, a Montecristo No.4 cigar and a glass of Rémy Martin brandy.

The temptation you wish you could resist... The four things that make up my dream combination: chocolate, coffee, brandy and cigars.

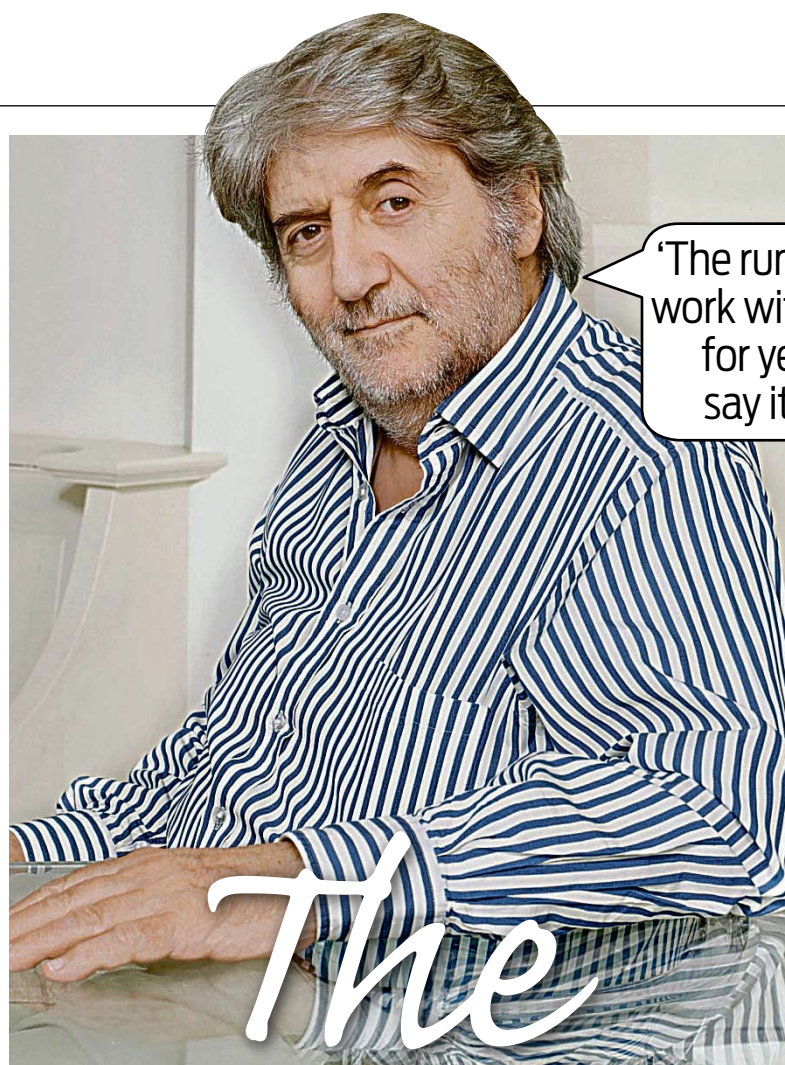
The book that holds an everlasting resonance... Summerhill School by Alexander Neill from 1960. It's a remarkable book about educating children and it teaches you that you cannot win with discipline.

The priority activity if you were the Invisible Man for a day... I'd follow Vladimir Putin around the Kremlin to see what he gets up to.

The pet hate that makes your hackles rise... Camden Council's planning department. I hate the way they kowtow to developers and let them do things to the terrible detriment of residents.

The film you can watch time and time again... The Graduate from 1967. The director Mike Nichols created such a ground-breaking film. And, of course, it was the first time we saw the incredible Dustin Hoffman.

The person who has influenced you most... Kara. We've been married for 47 years and she's made me a much freer spirit. I was an ordinary thinker before I met her, but she made me think differently about the world.



The DEFINITE ARTICLE

We ask a celebrity a set of devilishly probing questions – and only accept THE definitive answer. This week it's the turn of actor Tom Conti

The figure from history for whom you'd most like to buy a pie and a pint... St Paul. He started Christianity by creating the myth of Jesus. I don't believe any of it, so I'd ask him why he made it up.

The piece of wisdom you would pass on to a child... 'I want' doesn't get!

The unlikely interest that engages your curiosity... Quantum physics. I'm deeply fascinated by how things work on a microscopic level – these things will lead us to extraordinary revelations.

The treasured item you lost and wish you could have again... The dexterity in my fingers. I'm 71 now and about two years ago arthritis began to set in.

The unending quest that drives you on... Like every other person, I'm driven by the need to keep paying the energy companies and the tax man!

The poem that touches your soul... For Johnny by John Pudney. It's about the death of wartime pilots and the need for others to look after their children.

The misapprehension about yourself you wish you could erase... That I'm difficult to work with. I was astounded to hear from fellow actors that this rumour has been going round for years. They all say it's rubbish – and it is!

The event that altered the course of your life and character... Getting the part of Adam Morris in the BBC mini-series The Glittering Prizes in 1976. It thrust me into the public's awareness.

The crime you would commit knowing you could get away with it... I'd turn off all the traffic lights in London. They're a massive waste of energy.

The song that means most to you... Caro Mio Ben (My Dear Beloved) sung by the Italian tenor Beniamino Gigli. It reminds me of my father, who used to play it on his gramophone in the 1940s.

The happiest moment you will cherish forever... Hearing we had great reviews for Whose Life Is It Anyway? after we opened on Broadway in 1979. I ended up getting a Tony award for Best Actor.

The saddest time that shook your world... The sudden death from a heart attack of my brother-in-law Gordon McBain ten years ago when he was 68. He was a lovely, colourful man.

The unfulfilled ambition that continues to haunt you... To play Bach's 48 preludes and fugues, probably the greatest things ever written for the keyboard. It's a distant dream.

The philosophy that underpins your life... Be kind and always try to understand the other person.

The order of service at your funeral... I'm not religious so I'd have a service in my garden, with a couple of Brahms waltzes and a reading from the works of [renowned atheist] Richard Dawkins to get everyone's attention!

The way you want to be remembered... For not being an eejit *all* of the time!

The Plug... Tom stars in romantic comedy City Slacker, which premieres on Sky Movies on 13 September. Visit www.scoopfilms.com. He's also touring in the play Rough Justice until 26 October. For details visit www.tomconti.co.uk ■

As told to Rob McGibbon

PS...

A Midsummer Night's Dream starring Sheridan Smith previews today at the Noël Coward Theatre. Fasten your seatbelts for Rush, about F1 aces James Hunt and Niki Lauda, in cinemas Friday. And AM, the new album from Arctic Monkeys, is out Monday.



NEXT WEEK

- More exclusive pictures and stories from Downton Abbey
- Monty Don's guide to the best bulbs to plant for spring
- Eat well for less... delicious recipes from Jamie Oliver's new book
- Plus Britain's best TV listings