

Moritz “It’d be cool if she became an angel”

Moritz: *“It’d be cool if she became an angel”* was produced by Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen, Mainz, Germany. “Football helps me to deal with my sadness”, says 14 year old Moritz when his younger sister Luca is not feeling well again. Luca is 11 years old and suffers from mucopolysaccharidoses (MPS), a genetic metabolic disorder, which is neither treatable nor curable. It is uncertain how long she will live. “In the past she was able to walk, talk and sing. Now she only sits in her wheelchair and stares into space.” Moritz likes looking after Luca and spends a lot of time with her. Moritz is the type of elder brother that many children would love to have: caring, sensitive and cool. He describes the way he and his family live, but also how they prepare themselves for the difficult time when Luca will no longer be with them. “It is easier than you might think”, he says, “I lead a normal life.”

Moritz: *“It’d be cool if she became an angel”* was one of the PRIX JEUNESSE INTERNATIONALE 2010 finalists in the 12-15 category.

International experts’ opinions

The international experts really appreciated the program *Moritz* for numerous reasons. They liked the way a young boy was shown handling the death of a very close family member. “Moritz was very open to the reporter and spoke about his feelings – what does his sister mean to him. This was despite his behavior toward his friends, where he wouldn’t talk about it at all. I found this to be quite interesting” (female expert, Germany). Many found the program to be very emotional and touching as it demonstrated the deep love between siblings in very trying circumstances. “I thought that Moritz was very moving, and especially it seemed so hard for him to have to watch his sister get worse and worse. That just seemed really heartbreaking to see that he had to watch his sister get so much more ill with every year” (female expert, USA). “It felt to me that this documentary of this boy who was so loving of his sister ... You are watching the dying happen in front of your eyes and yet, for me, it didn’t feel intrusive because of the way that it was shot” (female expert, Canada). However, a female expert from Germany suggested that the music of the program was too heavy and melodramatic. “I felt a little bit pushed too much into that emotional corner. The story was so emotional already, of course. I felt a little bit pressured by the kind of music, which made it even more emotional.”



Figure 1: Moritz.



Figure 2: Luca, Moritz’s sister.



Figure 3: The bond between brother and sister is the highlight of the program.



Figure 4: Moritz with his parents.



Figure 5: Luca in hospital with her family.



Figure 6: Luca celebrating her birthday.

Some appreciated the way that a boy was shown as a vulnerable and emotional character in the program when most programs present a stereotypical male character who is supposed to be tough and strong. “They are always able, always strong, and always fighting, and here it was this great emotional caring boy, which is rather seldom” (female expert, Norway). Some experts called it more a “love story” than a “death story” as it was “about compassion and caring, because it was impended that she would die” (female expert, Australia). There were discussions about the suitability of showing a program with a theme related to death to children. But the experts defended this argument by emphasizing that since death is inevitable, it was a good idea to show death to children at a young age so that they could handle it with courage. “I actually think it is absolutely the right thing to start discussing it at quite an early age, because I don’t think it is something that you should try to keep your children away from, because you actually can’t” (female expert, Germany). Some experts also liked the program because it handled death as a normal part of the human life cycle. “It is very important, because it is a fact. It is real life” (male expert, Chile). Many experts admired the character of the boy. “You don’t often see a boy of that age who has the courage to show such love” (female expert, Netherlands).

Three female experts from the Philippines, Italy and Japan were particularly appreciative of the fact that a program related to death was made for children due to the fact that it was not possible to show such programs in their respective countries due to deep cultural notions about death. “In the Philippines we tried to produce an episode about death, but it took us a long time to even decide whether in the first place we are going to talk about it with children” (female expert, Philippines). “In Japan it is rare for children to talk and express such a feeling, especially about death. So, this kind of education – how to deal with mourning – is a big issue” (female expert, Japan).

The director of the program was present during the discussion and provided more insight into making of the program. She explained her interactions with Moritz, who was in a children’s hospice organization, which helped her to get to know him better and to be able to better project his emotions on screen. “At the beginning, I was wondering whether he would allow enough insight into his thoughts, in his soul. Well, but then he did, and I was just flushed by what he said” (female expert, Germany who was also the director). She further explained that the audience who comprised mainly of children were very touched to see such a strong bond between brother and sister and sent letters of appreciation to the television channel. “Those who watched it, they were really touched and they reacted in e-mails, letters, or even letters to the big boss of ZDF.

They sent him letters, even though it was not aired on ZDF but KIKA, which is a children's program. They urged him to put it on ZDF" (female expert, Germany).

She further elaborated that the program won a prize in Germany which was given by a children's jury. "The children were really touched by the bonding between brother and sister. They said that if I had a brother like Moritz, I could manage every problem. So, they were able to see not only the sad things in the film but the positive messages too. For us it was nice to have a reaction like this."

Some experts noted that they felt that Moritz only expressed a uniform side of his feelings in all situations. "What bothers me is that it has no contradiction. It is just one side of the feeling. One side: No anger, or he never gets upset of having that situation in the family and everything" (female expert, Argentina). Some also thought that such a character does not really exist in real life. "It may be a little away from reality, because a young boy at that age would not sacrifice that much of his liberty, his playing with the friends, etc. But, it was quite intelligently dealt with, and there is a strong message in it. Was it really like this? He was always there for his sister, never angry, never, 'I have had enough of you!' You know like a kid! It is too perfect" (male expert, Pakistan). But a male expert from Poland emphasized, "I am sure that in all our countries we can find a Moritz, because in all countries there is a brother who tries to help his sister, and a sister who tries to help her brother in an illness like this."



Figure 7: Luca getting treatment.



Figure 8: Moritz playing football to distract himself.

Screenshots from *Moritz: "It'd be cool if she became an angel"* © ZDF

International Youth Jury opinions

In 2010, the PRIX JEUNESSE INTERNATIONALE included the votes of an international youth jury, organized in co-operation with broadcasters worldwide. Teens between 12-15 years of age in seven countries discussed and judged 16 programs in the 12-15 years-old-category. Here is a summary of their discussions on the program *Moritz: "It'd be cool if she became an angel"*.

The international youth jury from **Canada** had mixed reviews of the program. They liked the program as it exposed them to the numerous emotions that people show when facing death. "I thought it was really eye opening to us because we don't really know how people are reacting and how they cope with diseases and disorders in their family, so it was another point of view for us" (female). Few admired Moritz for living his life in spite of the calamities taking place in it. "I liked that the boy was able to appreciate his life even though his sister is dying, so I liked the hope that was presented" (male). Few, however, thought that the program could be presented in a more realistic manner. "I really didn't like the transitions ... like everybody is sad because his sister is dying and then all of a sudden, he is going shopping with his friends" (male).

The international youth jury from **Georgia** liked the program as it showed a strong bonding between siblings. "Great example of a relationship between a brother and a sister" (female). Many of them said

they “can relate” to the program and felt “very sad” to witness the death of the sister. Few found the “editing confusing” and thought that it was “not necessary to film in the hospital.”

The international youth jury from **Ghana** liked the program a lot for numerous reasons. They appreciated the strong bond between a brother and a sister. “I like the way the boy treated his sister. It serves as a lesson for all children. If you go to some homes, some children do not speak to each other. It helps us to treat our younger siblings well. I think it’s for all ages because parents can even learn from this movie” (female). They thought that the program was “wonderful.” Many appreciated the deep feelings that the program was able to invoke among the audience and admired the strong family support. “The family was supportive, compassionate and they were helping her through every stage of the disease. They were also encouraging her to feel better. They were helping her to live her life to the fullest before she departs” (female).

The international youth jury from **Italy** liked the program mainly because of its theme of death. They appreciated that a sensitive topic like death was shown through the medium of television which could prepare children to deal with such issues later in their life in a mature way. “The film about the death of the sister, I am sure people are used to that subject, so that is a limited case of disease and pain. Television helps us to get used to these kinds of subjects” (male).

The international youth jury from **Lebanon** really liked the program very much for its display of emotions and found it very “touching” and “moving.” They admired the strong bond that was shown between the siblings. “The relationship between brother and sister is very strong, I felt I was related to it and it moved me the same to be more protective of my own little sister” (male). They admired the fearless manner in which Moritz handled the death of his sister, Luca. “I liked the fact that Moritz doesn’t want to think about her death, loved his courage, was moved by the story overall” (male). Some also praised the direction of the movie. “I adored the direction of the movie by showing his face close up and Luca touched us. Simply amazing” (female).

The international youth jury from **Nepal** liked the program for its message of facing life in its adversities. “The best part of the film is, that it shows we have to cope with all kind of difficulties that comes in our life, no matter what – life has to go on” (female). They found the program “touching” and appreciated the bonding between brother and sister. “The love for the sister is shown very nicely which is good” (female). Moritz’s association with football to distract himself was also taken positively by the international youth jury. “Sport helped the boy to divert the mind and not get depressed all the time, showing this film in our country is a good idea because there are so many people who are depressed” (male).

The international youth jury from **Venezuela** liked the program mainly because of the way it presented the relation and strong bonding between brother and sister. “What I see is that most people who have brothers are badly treated, waste that relationship most times, but without siblings we would miss having more company” (male). They appreciated the love shown between the siblings. “That is very sentimental. I was very touched by the love of a brother for his sister. Protection, love, affection, much care. He is acutely aware of the child. That is very good” (female).

Target Audience 7,7

Idea 7,6

Script 7,6

Realization 8,1

Average Score per Category by experts' voters at PRIX JEUNESSE INTERNATIONALE 2010

Winner of PRIX JEUNESSE INTERNATIONALE 2010 Heart Prize