

Next Stop ... God

Next Stop ... God was produced by KI.KA – Der Kinderkanal von ARD und ZDF, Germany. *Next stop ... God* is a philosophic programme for kids and a genre-mix of magazine, documentary and animation. It combines cultural, historical and philosophical facts and therefore gives a wide and open view on the subject of each episode. Two young hosts, assisted by the well-known German journalist Gert Scobel, go on a quest for answers to difficult questions such as “Why do people die?” or “Why do I have fear?” They travel around in a bus to meet experts, make experiences and come closer to possible answers. In small documentaries, kids share their experiences and thoughts on the topic with the viewers. There are 7 new episodes featuring the following subjects: “Happiness”, “God”, “Guilt”, “Conflict”, “Truth”, “Justice” and “I” (identity). In this documentary, Aishat tells us about her faith which helps her deal with life and especially with her experiences in the war in Grozny (Chechnya). In the bus, Sabrina and Torsten discuss their own differing beliefs with Gert Scobel. And the philosophers are just as divided on this topic. Aristotle was the first one to try and prove God’s existence. Kant, on the other hand, claims that His existence cannot be proven.

Next Stop... God was one of the PRIX JEUNESSE INTERNATIONALE 2010 finalists in the 7-11 Non-Fiction category.

International experts’ opinions

This program evoked a lot of discussions amongst the international experts. Though most of them seemed to like the theme, there were objections regarding the target group of kids and the general script of the program.

Many international experts just loved the program for its interesting and fascinating topic of religion as kids have a lot of questions about God. “I liked this. I think philosophy is a very hard thing to present to children. But, when they are little, they actually think like that. They do think: why is the sky blue? What is this big distance? I thought it was making a big contribution, and I thought that there would be an enormous amount of discussion if you were to show it in a classroom – just the whole thing about faith. Here we have one little girl with an extraordinary experience, where she just is going to believe in God, because she has been through a war situation. Then, there it was tested up by a much cooler dude, who is just going to walk across burning embers. But, I found this a very good program” (female expert, New Zealand).

Some also liked the program because it was able to focus on a lot of philosophical topics. “I think that this program is very special, because it was made intentionally in a movie, and being in a movie it



Figure 1: A girl from Chechnya with tremendous faith in God.



Figure 2: A journey to discover God.



Figure 3: The two hosts: Sabrina and Torsten.

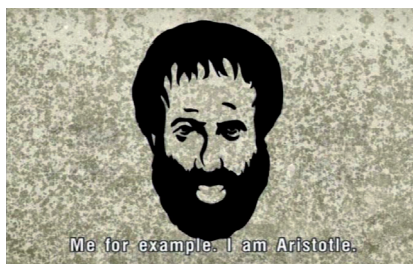


Figure 4: The program cited a lot of philosophers like Aristotle.



Figure 5: They went in a bus to find out about the existence of God.

is easier to prove this very difficult or philosophical problem. So, I think that the move itself helped a lot to catch the idea and to bring it over to the live audience. The aim of this program was not to give answers, but to bring the young person into the middle of the process. This enabled the visual form, which is very active. I think it is just innovative in the form and in the way that it approached the problems. I liked it very much. I am from Central Europe, where these kinds of programs haven't been discussed for many, many years. We are trying to do it again, and this was very inspiring for us. I was very glad to see it" (female expert, Slovakia).

A female expert from Germany provided more information about the program. "It is part of a series that dealing with several philosophical terms like: God, Love. We always have the bus taking us to the different scientific viewpoints of the topic. Our wish was to have all kinds of different perspectives, so you have the natural sciences, the cultural sciences, and you have the religious points. So, we have the bus that is taking us from one stop to another and one topic to another. It is quite fully packed with information, I agree, but we tried to have some kind of relief by always having also children that are telling their personal experiences with that kind of life-threatening or existentially moving experiences." The international experts appreciated the attempt by the producers of the program to bring forth such intense topics in creative ways. "These are huge themes that you could talk about for two hours – just trying to make an answer for that and put out different examples: war, belief – why people believe different images, so how can we understand it is to believe in something? What I really loved was at the end – the more modern thoughts about belief inside of us. That, for me, was a very nice way to try to end the whole thing" (male expert, Colombia).

Some international experts appreciated the combination of personal and philosophical aspects of life. "I liked the idea of having on one hand a personal story of a child, and then on the other hand the very theoretical discussion about it" (female expert, Germany). But others, however, did not like this way of presentation. "I didn't feel like the Chechnya girl is related to the other part of the program – not really combined well together as they are two different stories. One is the personal story, and the other story, is not really moulded together well" (female expert, Israel). There were few more who did not like the way program parts were incorporated. "I agree that it was not well integrated. It was like two separate ways of making a program, I think. If the form had been more similar, maybe we wouldn't have that feeling" (female expert, Sweden).

There were intense discussions about the fire-walking scene that was shown in the program. "The other thing that was the fire-walk: if I believe in God; so, should I go on fire? It was very interesting – this fire walking in Pakistan. I think there, if you commit a big social crime like rape, and maybe you are not speaking the truth – the test is that you have to walk through the fire. The man who crosses it and

his feet are not burned, then that means that he is telling the truth. We, the civil societies in Pakistan, are opposing it and even the Pakistan courts are strongly against that tradition. It is inhuman to put a man on fire. It struck me when I saw that” (male expert, Pakistan). Some tried to justify it in spite of the program being very cluttered. “This philosophical approach to the whole complex thing of believing was a problem, because there are two different levels of believing in God and to believe in one’s self. That is why the fire walk was included. It was with all these management courses to build up the personality that was brought into this. From my opinion it is not related to believing in God, or to a religious belief. I was a bit confused by this. It is too complex, I think, still for this younger age group” (female expert, Austria).

Many international experts felt that the program was too scripted as the dialogues seemed unnatural. “I had a bit of a problem with the way it was scripted, because it was scripted all the way, all the dialogues between the kids, and you could feel it was scripted and not coming from their heart, which gave me a feeling that it is too constructed. This made it hard to get into a feeling of faith and believing and what it meant to them. I wish there would have been more spontaneous moments within the discussion between the kids and maybe the people they were talking to” (female expert, Netherlands).

Many international experts did not find the program appropriate for children of 7-11 category and thought that it was for older ones. “I think it is very interesting to hear all the comments, because I come from Norway. I think that the audience in Norway would not receive this very well, because it is too complicated and too many talking heads, too little action. I would say it is a very good program for older children, maybe 13-17, and within a school context. It is just too complicated and slow for Norwegian children” (female expert, Norway). They also thought that the program was overloaded with information for kids of 7-11 category. “I thought it was a bit more mature for 7 to 11 children. I thought 12 to 15 years” (female expert, Ghana). “I agree that it was actually for the 12 and up. It had so much information, and there was so much put into 25 minutes. I think they should have picked a little less” (female expert, Norway). “I had a problem with the age group, because I felt like it should be at the 12 to 15 section” (female expert, Israel). However, a female expert from Germany tried to explain the rationality behind including this program for 7-11 kids. “But this was the starting point of the idea – that we were thinking: children do have such a need for answers to existential questions that are part of our life. There is so little time to think about it. It is so hard to find answers. This was really very challenging for us.”

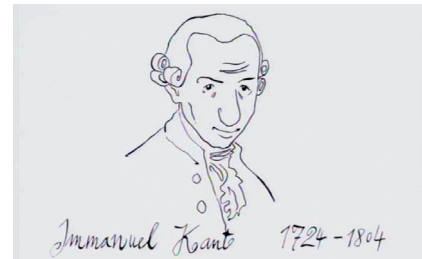


Figure 6: Another philosopher, Kant.



Figure 7: With faith, the boy walked on the embers.



Figure 8: Road trip to discover God.

Screenshots from Next Stop ... God © ARD and ZDF

Target Audience 5,8	Idea 7,7	Script 6,5	Realization 6,7
Average Score per Category by experts' voters at PRIX JEUNESSE INTERNATIONALE 2010			