A Special Tour

The Canal Encuentro production company from Buenos Aires produced ***A Special Tour*** targeted towards 6 to 9 year old children. *A Special Tour* shows the problems of disabled children by using art and culture. In this episode we meet Maxi Lemos, a singer who suffers from spastic tetraplegia. Maxi's skill lies in his being able to understand what he sings. He is moved by the music he produces. Together with the impaired citizens division of the INADI (National Institute Against Discrimination, Xenophobia and Racism) and his family, he works to set up the Maxi Lemos' Foundation to provide assistance and job opportunities for handicapped teenagers finishing their schooling. The objective is to provide assistance in leading them to social integration. He belongs to a group of artists called "Mundo Alas" National Tour. The series tells the stories of a group of talented disabled artists during their 2008's tour around Argentina, organized by the recognised Argentinean musician León Gieco. In every episode we discover the story of another artist while the tour keeps going.

A Special Tour was one of the PRIX JEUNESSE INTERNATIONAL 2010 finalists in the 12-15 category.

International experts' opinions

International scholars were in over their opinions about the relevance of the program *A Special Tour* for children. Many scholars felt that the program would be very successful with children and specified a variety of reasons: "I am pretty sure that *A Special Tour* will work with kids, because the main emphasis – and that is something I really like about this program – the music, and not the disability of the boy. Music is very important with kids" (female expert, Germany). "I think children are recognizing and becoming more accepting of people who are different from them – within schools themselves. And seeing more of these stories, I think, helps. And it is getting more and more normal – we are a normal part of society" (female expert, Jamaica). Yet another expert thought that "it was a unique program, because we can see how happy he is without him talking about it himself. We can see his face and his voice. I think that is enough" (female expert, Japan).

Figure 1: **Members of a „Special Tour".**

Figure 2: **Maxi and his teacher learning music.**

However, some experts felt that the program was not made for children of this age group. Some experts even questioned if Maxi belonged to the target group. "I think he is like 17 or 18 years old. He says in one moment – I don't know if I read it, or the producers told me, but he is not even a teenager" (male expert, Columbia). Since the boy was not shown talking, many experts felt that this program was not meant for kids as the program concentrated more on the voice

Figure 3: **Maxi practicing music.**

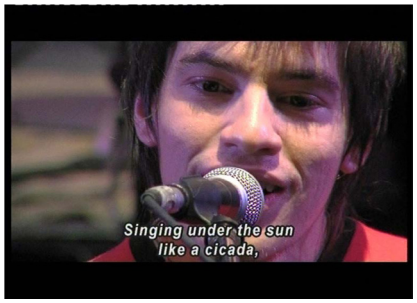

Figure 4: **Maxi singing in a concert**

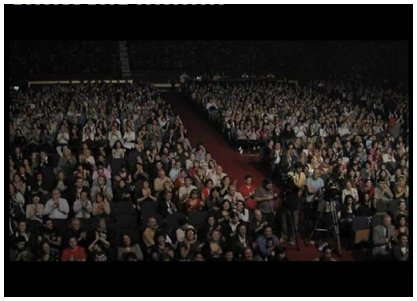

Figure 5: **Spectators applauding Maxi's music.**

of the adults who were involved in Maxi's life. Therefore, many experts sensed that the story failed to reach the "target audience." "It is the adults that have helped him coming through. It is his parents talking and the teacher talking about him. Maybe there are some kids that we like to get involved in this story, if his voice had been more in the story, it would have gotten to the kids" (female expert, Sweden).

Many experts liked the overall concept of the series, yet they argued that it did not provide enough occasions for the main character, Maxi, to indulge in any kind of conversation as he was busy singing. "I thought we are very close to his teacher, and we are very close also to the musician, but not very close to him and I thought it would be good to have him closer and talking more often and not just let him sing" (male expert, Germany). Another expert from USA found the story beautiful but would have preferred Maxi to talk more than what was shown. "Sometimes filmmakers protect – they could have been subconsciously protecting him, which is kind of a shame in a way" (male expert, USA).

The music of the program was praised by the scholars and they believed that there were many messages in the songs. "It is so sensitive; it brings so much to me, and it also so well done, and you have this direction aesthetic quite clear. The story is so true" (female expert, Brazil). However some experts thought that "the songs were very mature for the kids to relate to" (female expert, Jamaica). Some experts questioned the way Maxi's music teacher was using him for his own success. "His music teacher was somewhat like a manager – keeping a lid on all the time" (male expert, Germany).

Though experts were pleased with the theme of a disabled child pursuing his passion for music, they were not happy with some of the production elements of the program. They found the context of the story "unclear and sometimes ambiguous" (male expert, Germany). "I think it is also many different stories. It is about his parents, and about this boy, and about this teacher. It is many different stories in one" (female expert, Sweden). "Even if the boy was brilliant, and a very attractive singer – the documentary was not strong enough in terms of production" (female expert, Korea). However, an expert from Brazil explained the uniqueness of the cultural context of producing this program: "The way we produce, the resources we have, and everything we have to produce in South America – we have a specific way of working. I really like the way that they have made it and how they got it" (female expert, Brazil).

International Youth Jury' Opinions

In 2010 the PRIX JEUNESSE INTERNATIONAL 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 year old category. Here is a summary of their discussions on the program *A Special Tour*.

Figure 6: **Maxi's parents.**

The youth jury members from **Canada** found the program very motivating and positive. "It kept me going, it was motivating because of the message that it is possible to reverse the odds, it's not because you are disabled that you are going to die and you can do the things you really want to do" (female). Some really appreciated the fact that the "the story was well filmed and it was a real message of hope for all the disabled people." "I think it was really complete as we could see many points of view from his parents, musicians, friends and also the concerts" (female). "It is a great teenage story about someone who wants to live up to his dreams and so he did" (female). Some also appreciated the technical aspect of the program that "smooth transitions between the scenes and the music was well picked" (female). However, there were criticisms also as some thought that it was "boring" and "I don't think he was such a great singer. I think that they all made a big fuss around this guy because he was disabled" (female).

Figure 7: **Bus for a „special tour"**

The **Georgian** youth jury members thought that the fact that Maxi could go on a tour despite his disabilities was very interesting. Some also liked the fact that "Maxi can remember all the lyrics" (female). They however thought that it was "too long."

The youth jury members from **Ghana** also found the program motivational and inspirational: "It shows that your disability should not bring you down and that even if you are disabled, you should still have the courage to be able to explore your talents and develop them" (female). "It was interesting. It shows that even if you are disabled, there are some hidden talents in you that you can use to help society" (female). Some youth pointed out that the story revolved around their age group "he tells his story in a form of music and it is very suitable for my age group" (male). At the same time, some found that it was "very boring." One even went on to say that "there was nothing nice about his voice but because he is disabled, I have to give him credit because he is trying to use his God-given talent" (female).

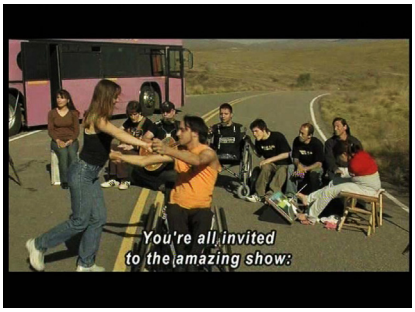

Figure 8: **Maxi and his friends enjoying the special tour.**

Screenshots from *A Special Tour* © Canal Encuentro

The **Italian** youth jury members liked the story a lot and thought it was "beautiful." They appreciated the fact that in spite of his disabilities, Maxi had a passion for singing. Some found the story inspiring as "he wants to make money and become rich to help people like him and not just for the sake of it" (male). Many youth were introduced to a new concept about disability that they did not have before. "Maybe some people think that disabled people are no good, but here we see they can succeed in things they believe in"(female). "The movie was important for me to understand that disabled people understand the feeling of love – and this opinion I didn't have before" (male). "The characters were very nice. And it's clear there's

an idea behind it." They thought that Maxi was very positive in spite of so many hurdles and "he can remember every single word of a song he has listened to" (female). Though one male youth thought that "the storyline is a little crazy: you see it's too fragmented; it's not linear at all."

The youth jury members from **Lebanon** found the story captivating and inspirational. "With or without a strong body we can succeed and do good things in life especially with our passions and love of life" (male). Almost all of them appreciated the songs and the program's excellent music. Some, however, found the movie very long and boring, as one of them expressed: "It is an ok movie for me, nice overall but mostly boring at times" (male).

The youth jury of **Nepal** thought that the "overall story was good and inspiring" though "the film is very lengthy" (female). They also appreciated the fact that all the people were encouraging Maxi. "One girl learned that handicapped people are blessed with a special gift that we have to identify" (female). Some complained that the "the tour was not shown properly" (female).

The **Venezuelan** youth jury members appreciated the idea promoted in the series that disability should not be a hindrance to follow and achieve one's dream. "I think that the message you want to tell everyone is that being disabled does not mean that they cannot do anything" (male). They liked his love for music. Some also thought that the series taught them an important lesson that it was not a good idea to complain when there are disabled people who know "how to take the good things in life" (female). It also taught them "to follow their dreams no matter what." Some, however, complained that "it became a bit boring and tiring" (female).

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